



Corporate report

# Digital Data and Technology Strategy: 2021 to 2024

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## Purpose and context

Our Digital, Data and Technology (DDaT) strategy sets the direction for Ofqual Information Management (IM) to operate in a way that will enable, underpin and positively influence Ofqual regulation. The key drivers that have shaped this strategy are:

- The government transformation strategy** which sets the ambition for 'transformation of government - in how we work, how we organise ourselves and how we serve our citizens'.
- The national data strategy** which supports better use of data.
- Previous IM and DDaT strategies.** From 2014 to 2016 our IM Transformation Programme modernised our technology, repositioned us as a cloud-native organisation, and established our DDaT platform. Our follow-on strategy, 'Beyond IT', began to focus more on digital and data solutions, and our most recent DDaT strategy placed an emphasis on working openly and transparently with our users.

## Delivery for financial year 2019 to 2020

Our awarding organisation portal (the Portal) is the platform for 10 regulatory processes, including management of qualifications and units, recognition, event notifications and statement of compliance. We have begun to extend our platform to other individuals and organisations outside of our regulated community (e.g. external experts, prospective awarding organisations, and complainants). Over the last year it has managed approximately 12,500 transactions and since its launch has collected 853 million rows of data.

Our infrastructure is predominantly cloud-based with minimal reliance on fixed residency. Our IT analysts provide support to all parts of the business with a much-appreciated high level of professionalism.

Our information security management system (ISMS) has been certified against the ISO27001 international standard. This certification is subject to audit every 6 months and is due for renewal in June 2023. Management of projects within the IM team follows an agile approach. We received substantial assurance of our agile project management approach following audit.

Our DDaT Programme Board and Security Steering Group meet monthly and draw together colleagues from across Ofqual. Our external-facing Data Consultation Group meets quarterly and ensures we understand the needs of those organisations who make use of our data.

The information management team delivers against 5 standing objectives:

- Protect our data and technology.
- Operate our technology in the most cost-effective way.
- Maintain our technology in a good state of repair.
- Build solutions for and with users consistent with Ofqual priorities.
- Make our technology available in and out of office.

## Aims of this strategy

This strategy is about continuing to build on the foundations we've created so that DDaT can carry on enabling regulation. It is about providing a more accessible offering that hangs together and is shaped by user need. If the last strategy was successful in establishing the position of DDaT as an enabler within Ofqual, this one needs to be about bringing greater coherence. The strategy comprises the aims of 5 interconnected areas:

- Culture, People & Skills
- Engagement
- Continuous Improvement
- Technology & Security Foundations
- Data for Decision Making

## Culture, people and skills

Our intent here is two-fold:

- to look inwardly and invest in the in-house team members so they are engaged, satisfied and supported
- to focus outwardly on how the team works with the rest of Ofqual to foster a culture where DDaT is part of our DNA

More specifically we will:

- invest in our in-house capability, aligning roles to the DDaT professional capability framework
- encourage staff to take every opportunity to further their professional development
- make sure that our staff can access the support and training they need to excel in their roles, as detailed in Ofqual's people strategy
- focus on attracting, retaining, developing and engaging a diverse pool of talent across our team, as detailed in Ofqual's diversity and inclusion strategy
- raise awareness of the potential and benefits of DDaT, including through working to improve the cohesion, accessibility and usability of our services
- continue to work with colleagues across Ofqual to embed DDaT into the way we work:
  - when a new project, programme or initiative is established, we want colleagues to instinctively involve us as a matter of course
  - when IM initiates a new project, programme or initiative, we will build multi-disciplinary teams, drawn from across the organisation, to help us successfully deliver

## Engagement

Our aim is one of user-centred design where the users are at the heart of what we do.

When we talk about users, we mean:

- Ofqual staff who need the right equipment, access, data and tools to do their jobs effectively and efficiently
- awarding organisations, who interact with our systems, including to provide us with vital data
- other regulators and government departments and agencies, who consume data from our systems
- members of the public and organisations for whom we develop digital services and for whom their experience of our services can shape their views of us as a regulator

To achieve our aim we will:

- engage with our users routinely and openly so that we understand their needs and design our services accordingly
- involve users every step of the way so they have ownership and can help shape the design and implementation of solutions
- perform equality impact assessments so we are satisfied what we plan on doing will not disadvantage any of our users

## Continuous improvement

We aim to invest and build on the successes of our earlier IM and DDaT strategies. As Ofqual evolves, innovating and evolving its approach, and responding to policy changes, we will ensure DDaT continues to act as an enabler of regulation. Alongside the steps already outlined we will:

- enhance the tools and approach we adopt for our DDaT platform, keeping a close eye on emerging technologies that will support innovation
- seek feedback for new and innovative ways to improve our performance and output
- use our expertise and collaborate with colleagues to encourage the effective adoption, use and evolution of our DDaT platform
- seek and share best practice from other organisations and networks to validate our approach and ensure we are always challenging our own assumptions
- continue our programme to digitise our regulatory processes so that:
  - the Portal becomes the single channel through which we communicate and exchange data and information with the organisations we regulate
  - the Portal platform is extended to manage more interactions with individuals and organisations that aren't awarding organisations
  - Ofqual, awarding organisations other stakeholders benefit from a unified way of working
  - digital processes and transactions capture data that feeds automatically into our warehousing infrastructure

We will take care to ensure that we invest wisely in the processes we choose to digitise and be attentive to the user experience of the Portal. We will use the DDaT programme board to evaluate proposals so that we:

- don't over-invest in an existing solution where it is good enough
- don't under-invest in an existing solution that needs enhancements - we won't always focus on the new, but will ensure what exists is as good as it needs to be
- are conscious of policies that change over time so that digital processes are sustainable and policy neutral

## Technology and security foundations

Our aim is to maintain and evolve our cloud computing platform in a secure and sustainable way. We will:

- ensure our DDaT platform remains in-date, secure, cost-effective, and free from as much legacy and technical debt as possible
- intelligently use our technology and cloud tools to leave us free to respond to user needs in a more effective way
- reduce our on-premise infrastructure so that the organisation can work any time anywhere, and so we are well placed to respond to the [government estate strategy](#)
- design architecture up-front as we create solutions, making sure the right engineering questions are considered before implementation
- create re-usable components and patterns that are easy to maintain and that don't rely on the knowledge and skills of a single team member
- design and build so that adding new systems or functionality is efficient and minimises the risk to the rest of the DDaT platform
- design solutions with accessibility built in line with [accessibility legislation](#)
- build security into solutions as a default and adhere to our security strategy

## Data for decision making

We will support delivery of data as a strategic asset by:

- establishing consistent policies, processes, standards and tools for data management
- applying safeguards to comply with legislation for example, GDPR, and to align with good practice
- using modern data engineering tools and techniques to build the solutions that collect, store and transfer data for use by the organisation and other stakeholders
- working across Ofqual, but with a particular focus to support colleagues in the vocational and technical qualifications directorate as it grows in remit
- delivering improved access to data, including a clearer service offering that allows teams to access the data at different points in the data flow depending on their needs
- seeking opportunities to consume more data to enhance our intelligence base and further our understanding of the qualifications market - in turn improving the information and insights we can share with users of our data
- collaborating with other organisations to increase cohesion of data sets, including exploring opportunities to share and exchange data to reduce duplication, overlap and burden

## Approach

Our approach will be consistent, recognisable and above all collaborative, using agile project delivery to manage all of our work. Within the IM team we will evolve our DevSecOps operating regime so that all of the technical functions within IM – digital, data, technology and security – shape, build and operate solutions together. Where demand for our services exceeds the team's in-house capacity or capability, we will use a strategic partnership approach. We will establish joint teams that draw upon the expertise of both parties to deliver shared outcomes and use this as a further opportunity to gain fresh insight and perspectives from outside.

We will leverage expertise from across the organisation in making this strategy a success. In particular we will work with our regulatory and corporate services colleagues to ensure our strategy and its outcomes are delivered in the right way for Ofqual.

Equality, diversity and inclusion will be at the forefront of our approach. We recognise that our user base is diverse, and that in delivering this strategy our user base will increase as will the unique set of motivators and circumstances they each bring. As we engage with our users we will make no assumptions and will deliver services that support users no matter what their background or circumstances.

Our technologies will continue to be cloud-based. 'As a service' solutions will be used as a preference, either from the Microsoft Azure cloud or other public cloud providers, such as Oracle for our 'Cloud Fusion' suite. We will continue to work with our DDaT Programme Board as our key governance. It will be the channel for agreeing our development priorities and for communicating progress. Where we are working with strategic partners, we will monitor progress through project boards that feed into the this Programme Board.

## Challenges

This is an ambitious strategy with known challenges, not least balancing the aims to continue to develop new solutions and consume more data with the need to ensure that the solutions we provide for our users are accessible, cohesive and navigable. We will be responsive and receptive to the challenges, working with our colleagues to resolve them.

Dealing with increasing demands for solutions is likely to be an ever-present challenge and demonstrates the value of good DDaT services. We will build on the prioritisation principles used at the DDaT programme board to give us clear parameters for making prioritisation decisions.

## Outcomes

At the end of the three-year period, we will have:

- made strong progress in embedding the Ofqual way of doing things: people know where to go, what's available to them and understand how DDaT can support their needs now and as they evolve
- an organisational culture where DDaT and security are designed in to new ways of working
- an IM team that attracts and retains good people
- delivered better value for money for the organisation through a more streamlined and cohesive set of systems that underpins and fosters improved ways of working across the organisation
- a culture of continuous improvement, reducing the likelihood of future transformation programmes being required
- minimised any legacy and technical debt and, where either does exist, we will have a plan for managing it
- a manageable project backlog with significant progress having been made into modernising legacy regulatory processes

## Reviewing progress

At the project and programme level we review progress at different frequencies.

### Every 2 weeks

- sprint reviews and sprint planning
- project boards with strategic partners

### Every month

- corporate health check report to the senior management group
- DDaT Programme Board

### Every quarter

- star chamber financial review
- Ofqual Board update and updates to sub-committees
- corporate plan milestone tracking

### Every year

- critically assess progress against the aims and outcomes set in this strategy

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