

# Considerations for Data Feed Governance

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## Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Preface</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
2.1	About this guide.....	1
2.2	Why have governance policies?.....	2
<b>3</b>	<b>Considerations for Data Feed Governance</b> .....	<b>2</b>
3.1	Scope, conditions of use, and relationship with institutional policies .....	2
3.2	Record-keeping.....	3
3.3	Feed termination and audit .....	3

## 1 Preface

This document is an output of work conducted by the IDMAPS Project at Newcastle University.<sup>1</sup> It details areas which must be considered when creating a governance structure for institutional data feeds.

It has been made available under a *Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 License* to the wider Higher Education community in the hope that our experiences will prove useful to other institutions undertaking similar activities.<sup>2</sup>

Any references to third-party companies, products or services in this document are purely for informational purposes, and do not constitute any kind of endorsement by the IDMAPS Project or Newcastle University.

## 2 Introduction

### 2.1 About this guide

This document is meant to assist other Higher Education institutions who are developing governance policies for institutional data feeds. This would typically be as part of the introduction of a new, formalised data feed request service or process. However, there may be a need for such policies to be implemented retroactively to provide a governance structure for existing services or processes.

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<sup>1</sup> *Institutional Data Management for Personalisation and Syndication* (IDMAPS) is a JISC-funded Institutional Innovation project which aims to improve the quality and reliability of institutional data flows. For more information, please visit the project website at <http://research.ncl.ac.uk/idmaps>.

<sup>2</sup> <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>.

## 2.2 Why have governance policies?

The purpose of providing feeds of institutional data is to ensure that relevant information is supplied to those systems and applications which need it.

For example, where a Higher Education institution has already obtained the names of all its students before registration and stored them in a student records system, it would make no sense to manually enter such data again in other systems used for other purposes (such as computer accounts, library systems, or course lists of students by module). Instead, data feeds can be supplied from source to subsidiary systems, ideally through a recognised data feed process.

However, although the benefits of sharing such institutional data are apparent, there is also the need to ensure that institutional data is protected from misuse, loss, corruption, or disclosure to inappropriate individuals or systems. Whilst such concerns apply to the collection, storage and use of such data generally, they are magnified when data is passed between different systems and business units within an organisation.

For this reason, governance policies should be developed which address the issues raised by the provision of institutional data feeds. This allows appropriate access to be granted to data feeds, based upon a clear understanding of the responsibilities of both data suppliers and consumers. These policies should form part of the wider information governance strategies of the institution, and where appropriate reference other specific policies (such as those surrounding Data Protection and Freedom of Information legislation). As a general principle, there is little to be gained by duplicating the policy guidelines already set out elsewhere: policies for data feed governance should therefore focus only on the issues directly relevant to such feeds, deferring to institutional guidelines where necessary.

## 3 Considerations for Data Feed Governance

Whilst this document outlines the main areas of to bear in mind in developing data feed governance, it is intended as a general guide and suggestions should not be considered exhaustive. Different Higher Education institutions may have different needs or existing policy frameworks within which to work, and will likely need to adapt data feed governance policies accordingly. Financial data, which the IDMAPS project at Newcastle University did not include, would require additional controls and safeguards.

### 3.1 Scope, conditions of use, and relationship with institutional policies

Areas covered should include:

- The scope of the data feed service: does it explicitly include or exclude particular data (such as financial data), or data from particular business units or faculties?
- The scope of the governance policy: typically, it should apply to all requests made through the data feed service.
- Whether the service is to be the only or primary method of obtaining institutional data.
- Any particular conditions of use of the data feed service. For example, that all data feed requests should be made in a pre-defined manner, perhaps using templates or forms. Another typical condition is that any data provided must not be passed on to third parties.

- The right to refuse or terminate access to data under certain conditions.
- Who should have access: define those individuals or categories of individuals who are permitted to make requests and be supplied with institutional data feeds.
- How the data feed service governance policy relates to wider institutional policies, such as those covering Information Security, Data Protection, Freedom of Information, and Records management. Which of these takes precedence if there is a conflict?

### **3.2 Record-keeping**

Areas covered should include:

- How data feeds will be requested, and how records will be maintained of the request and implementation stages of data feed provision.
- A summary of the information which will be recorded relating to each data feed, such as the technical details, contact details for relevant individuals, and any commitments made.
- The importance of communication between the data feed service and data consumers in order to ensure that requirements are met.

### **3.3 Feed termination and audit**

Areas covered should include

- The circumstances under which a data feed will be terminated on a scheduled basis.
- Any notice given before feeds are terminated.
- The ability to audit data feeds, and to reassess requirements should that be necessary.