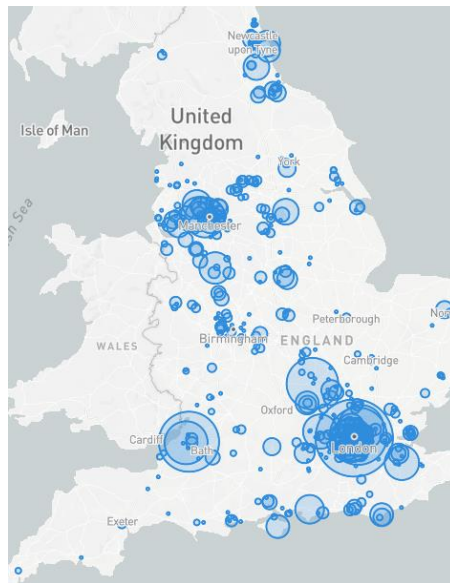![Data to Insight logo] DATA to INSIGHT

Data to Insight: First year retrospective

September 2020 – August 2021

Locations of D2I website users (England only), 2021 to date

What is Data to Insight?

Data to Insight (D2I) is a national project designed by local authorities and supported by the ADCS, DfE, MHCLG and Ofsted, helping local authorities make better use of data. With a primary focus on children's social care and ambition to extend support to other targeted children's services, D2I support a national community of data professionals in designing, developing and maintaining useful data tools, connecting like-minded people, and helping good practice spread across regional boundaries. We want every local authority to have great ways of working with data, because high quality data work is crucial in enabling our services to effectively support children.

D2I, the Children's Services National Performance and Information Management Group (CS-NPIMG) and the regional groups enhance a proven partnership of LAs working together for the sector, which has delivered sector-defining tools like the ChAT, successfully delivered on previously funded projects, and shaped the work of colleagues while growing an enthusiastic and effective community.

Especially in areas with little standard practice, our depth and breadth of expertise and community reach gives data projects the best chance possible of succeeding in producing meaningful insight.

DfE funded D2I in April 2020 to maintain the existing tools (ChAT and Social Care Benchmarking Tool), develop the community, identify and promote new tools developed by the community, and set up an apprenticeship to upskill the CSD analyst community. To date, this work has surpassed expectations among community members.

Progress to date: an overview

The community has developed, and we provided support through the pandemic. A project manager was appointed in Sept 2020 who has set up a new website and other infrastructure to host the tools, grow the community, expand the toolkit, and improve interactions. They attend regional performance and data meetings, maintain the existing toolkit, and provide regular updates to all LAs. They have introduced significant and well-received new functionality to existing tools for benchmarking, data quality, and operational reporting in LAs.

Specifically related to the pandemic we have shared and developed new tools created by single LAs, e.g. for monitoring weekly trends (East Sussex), Vulnerable Children and Young People Survey (VCYP) benchmarking (Wandsworth) and modelling the impact of lockdowns on future demand (Kent). In response to Black Lives Matter we have shared a tool that helps analyse disproportionality (Wandsworth and Brighton & Hove). All have benefited from a collaborative development approach with a group of LAs contributing to design and ongoing enhancement.

The ChAT is now considered essential by Ofsted and LAs for inspection preparation, and by many LAs for their regular performance monitoring.

The apprenticeship was set up with Corndel and a set of children's social care data developed to support the exercises and projects. The first cohort started in March with 39 apprentices, of an expected 20, and a second cohort
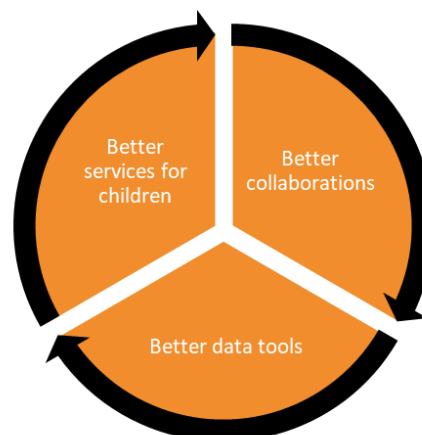
of 30+ is due to start in September. With this level of engagement, it is currently financially self-sustaining. Plans are to develop the curriculum from the social care data to SEND and education to broaden the pool of analysts for whom the apprenticeship is relevant.

The tools we support are aimed at operational managers and data\performance teams for

- Improving data quality
- Providing early sight of statutory returns
- Supporting inspection
- Helping with analysis

Our fundamental ethos is "build once, use 151 times", and we do this as an ongoing collaborative process. Our shared tools begin as ideas or prototypes in local authorities, and we work together to bring them to life nationally.
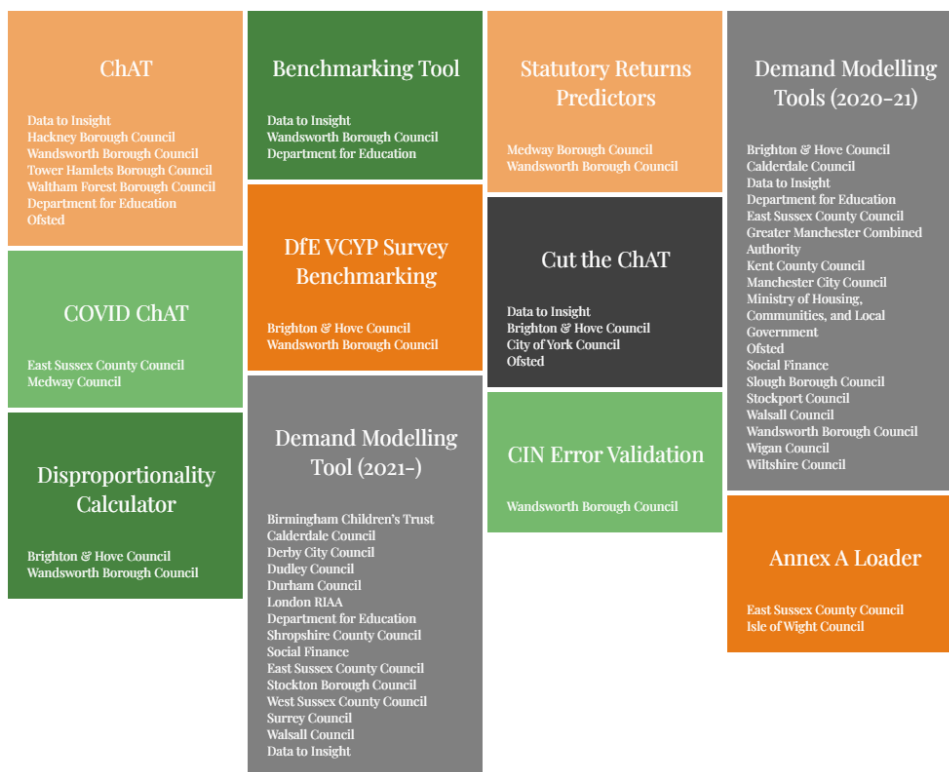
Check-in: how did we do against our goals for the year?

In 2020 we shared our *Current Toolkit and 2021 Deliverables* document outlining our plans for the year. We said we'd focus on the following work streams, looking to maximise the value of our short term funding.

We said we would	We did?	For example…
Continue to maintain the core toolkit	✓	Rapid benchmarking updates, constant ChAT support, and careful attention to user queries
Continue to develop the core toolkit	✓	Disproportionality calculator and other new tools with users; expanded ChAT and benchmarking tool
ChAT community becomes D2I community	✓	New collaboration infrastructure; better ways for LAs to stay involved at all levels; more LAs involved
Deliver the Demand Modelling Tool 2.0	✓	Demand Modelling Tool delivered as 2.0, improved as 3.0, *and* leveraged into new funded CLA project
Deliver a tailored D2I apprenticeship	✓	39 learners enrolled in March 2021, and 34 more looking to start 2nd cohort in September 2021
Help somehow with FOI requests	✗	Supported NPIMG with negotiations around key requests, but didn't yet achieve framework goals
Secure a workable long-term funding model	✗	Secured additional grant funding, but still working to achieve a long-term stable home for the work

Benefits of the work

To local authorities we currently deliver the following benefits:

- Ofsted readiness through use of the ChAT
- A range of specialist data and analysis tools developed to meet specific needs by a community of LA data and performance experts
- A community of practice that responds quickly to emerging needs in LAs, highlighted by the work over the pandemic
- Skills development for data analysts, both through formal apprenticeships and learning-focused co-development projects
- Rapid spread of good ideas between LAs and across regional boundaries, as evidenced by the Disproportionality tool and the Statutory Return data checking tools

To the DfE and Ofsted we currently deliver the following:

- Better quality data for statutory returns and inspections
- LAs better understand their performance by having access to the tools and skills development
- Routes to better data standards through CS-NPIMG and the regional groups, supported by D2I's core technical resource
- The ChAT as a standard data visualisation tool for inspections
- Routes to LA engagement and consultation around proposed regulatory data changes

The below future benefits will come from projects already running but due to end later than September 2021:

- Quality LAC Data: an in-year SSDA903 data quality tool for all LAs to ease reporting and improve local data
- CLA Placement Modelling: new forecasting and segmentation tool exploring CLA placement demand, based on statutory datasets and providing new insight into the makeup of placement demand locally
- ChAT and Benchmarking Tool, widely used nationally by LAs, will continue to be kept up-to-date with new data publications and technical fixes/improvements, and to respond to changes in inspection and statutory guidance
- Apprenticeships second cohort: 30+ more learners ready to start learning modern data analysis techniques to benefit their organisations in the long term

We also envisage the following benefits emerging in future from continuing to develop our work:

- Expanded apprenticeship programme to benefit other children's services analysts beyond social care
- Potential development into supporting similar community resource-pooling and tool-sharing initiatives across other targeted children's services such as SEND, CME, EHE, etc.
- Better data standards across regional boundaries, through RIIA dataset support and possible Early Help data standards project
- Technical "pattern library" project for LAs to share analysis tools in Power BI, Tableau, and other similar
- Long list of technical fixes and improvements to make current data toolkit even better for analysts
- Central point of technical and community support for analysts awaiting data impact of national CSC review

Check-in: what did we do for the pre-existing toolkit this year?

Most of our core tools have a version log embedded in the tool itself. Browsing these, particularly for the ChAT and Benchmarking Tool, will give an idea of the kinds of work we do "behind the scenes", which only the requesting LA will usually know about, but which benefits all LAs as users of the tools and data. Benchmarking updates were rapid.

Besides these, we introduced a new "ChAT Monthly" operational report to supplement the main report's Ofsted focus with a more local view, and introduced Cut the ChAT, a new automation tool which saves analysts time and helps them identify errors and significant changes between ChAT runs. Other tools have seen similar improvements.
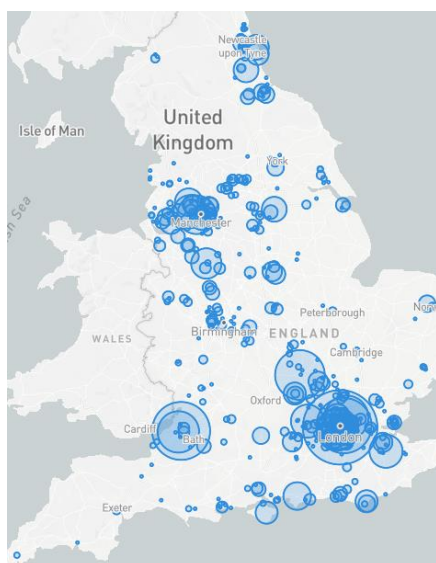
Regional and national engagement

Through continued maintenance of the ChAT, Data to Insight supports every local authority in England with their Ofsted inspection readiness. Other tools support local operational reporting, benchmarking, performance management, forecasting, and thematic analysis.

Part of our mission is to help local excellence diffuse within and across regional boundaries, and our projects tend to pick up collaborators from broadly distributed local authorities. With a small central resource in place, we can help local authorities and regions maximise the value of their own staff – and provide those staff with opportunities to develop skills, share their best work, become better analysts, and help others do the same.

We can see how well that kind of engagement is working in a few different ways. Below we provide some ways of looking at this generally, including region-specific views.

Website user locations during 2021 to date: **Two examples of email feedback from LA colleagues:**

Regional engagement in key workstreams

Almost all the below workstreams are still in progress – many will pick up more collaborators or users as they proceed. However, the below gives a useful presentation of just how much engagement we're getting across regions.

D2I activity / region	East Mids	East	London	North East	North West	South East	South West	West Mids	Y & H
ChAT users (LAs)	9	11	33	12	23	19	15	14	15
Website membership (LAs)	9	11	33	12	23	19	15	14	15
Apprenticeship take-up by region (people, 2 cohorts)	5	9	17	8	5	9	6	3	9
Demand Modelling project collaborations (LAs, 3 tools)	1	0	3	2	5	14	1	7	3
Quality LAC Data collaborators (people)	2	0	2	2	4	8	3	0	3
Newsletter credit for technical engagement (instances)	2	2	25	6	10	29	6	11	7
Unusually positive email feedback (instances)	3	2	8	2	6	8	2	3	5
Slack development community (members)	6	9	26	8	15	19	6	13	6

Check-in: how did we do against our vision?

In *Current Toolkit and 2021 Deliverables* we provided a vision statement outlining the things we wanted to be true of Data to Insight by September 2021. How have we done against that? Is the vision still correct?

> *"Our tools reduce the routine data work performed by individual local authorities"*

> > We produce and maintain data tools which not only add value but free up time at a local level. If something needs to be done by every local authority, we look for and deliver ways of meeting the bulk of that need once, at a national level, for local implementation. Regardless of the funding model at which we eventually arrive, our tools benefit our users.

> *"Our approach starts to add insight which wasn't previously there"*

> > Both through innovative developments of our own, and through working to help share best practice between local authorities, we help service leaders see things about their services which they wouldn't necessarily have seen. We help excellent analysts share their findings beyond the borders of their own base LA, and we help resource-constrained local authorities – and novice analysts – benefit and learn from the work of external colleagues.

> *"Our community is beginning to work together"*

> > Best practice spreads, and the tools improve, and the whole community is involved. We plan our future work as openly as possible. We let stakeholders know what to expect, and when. We have open channels for feedback, feature requests, planning and prioritisation. Our community helps define what we do with our time. We act as an effective convening point for collaborations and funding opportunities to benefit services nationally.

We track our activity so we can demonstrate what we spent time and money on, ensure we delivered on our objectives, and plan improvements. In planning next year's activity, we will work with the regions to develop a comprehensive programme of work, that maintains the current essential core tools and represents a worthwhile investment for stakeholders.

Funding

The greatest challenge for this year has been the impact of the pandemic on our ability to pursue long term funding for this kind of cross-regional work and to ensure ongoing support for the essential tools such as the ChAT. Existing funding streams are very regionally focused, and any development of an LA by LA subscription model will take resources away from our core work or increase costs.

D2I received grant funding from the DfE for staffing costs from September 2020 to August 2021. The programme has developed successfully since September 2020, showing the immense benefits which can be unlocked by a small amount of core funding. D2I now needs to ensure continuity of support beyond this period.

Competing priorities across LAs during the emerging pandemic in 2020 prevented us engaging quickly enough with LAs, the ADCS and RIIAs to explore sustainable funding models in time for September 2021. We estimate we will need approx. £90k/year to keep running at our current service levels, and hope to secure this in the long term from regional subscriptions backed by ADCS and RIIAs, with the South East continuing their role as the host region.

While increased funding could extend the impact of current work or to accelerate the rate of future development plans, we need to retain our key focus, which remains on sustaining the existing work, as per user feedback.

Contact

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