



Australian Government
Department of Education

DATA STRATEGY

2026–2028

Evidence for Policy



MESSAGE FROM THE SECRETARY

Our department plays a vital role in shaping Australia's future by enabling access to quality education and lifelong learning. Data is central to this mission – it underpins the evidence we need to design better policies and programs that create opportunity, support wellbeing, and foster a more inclusive and resilient society.

The **2026–2028 Data Strategy** builds on strong foundations and reflects our commitment to using data as a strategic asset. It supports our vision of a better future for all Australians through education, and aligns with our strategic priorities of equity, cohesion, and responsiveness across the system. The strategy also reinforces our role as national stewards of the education system in line with our Long Term Direction and the Capability Review Action Plan.

The 2026–2028 Data Strategy is focused on:

- **Growing the evidence base:** collaborating across teams, departments, jurisdictions and sectors to use and share data safely and purposefully.
- **Building capability:** equipping our people with the skills, tools, and confidence to use data effectively.
- **Embedding stewardship:** ensuring data is managed ethically, securely, and transparently.

The Data Strategy aligns with the department's Capability Review Action Plan, reinforcing our commitment to foster an evidence-informed culture and strengthening our data governance. We are also deepening our partnerships across the APS, advancing a whole-of-government approach to data that supports innovation, trust, and better outcomes.

The department supports national data sharing priorities by collaborating with our partners and stakeholders across the education sector and beyond. We have been working to safely and ethically improve the evidence base

around all Australians in education, and to deliver real world policy solutions backed by robust evidence.

We also recognise the importance of ethical use and sharing of data relating to First Nations Australians. Through the implementation of the Framework for Governance of Indigenous Data and our contributions to the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, we are building culturally appropriate data practices.

Together, these efforts reflect our broader goal of using data ethically and transparently to support shared decision-making and deliver better outcomes for all Australians.

Every staff member has a role to play. Whether you work in policy, programs, research, or enabling services, data is a powerful asset that can elevate your work. I encourage you to engage with this strategy, explore the opportunities it presents, and contribute to our shared mission of unlocking the full potential of data to improve lives across Australia.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to this strategy and to building a stronger data culture across the department. With curiosity, capability, and collaboration, we are well positioned to turn data into meaningful outcomes.

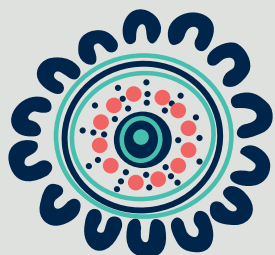
Tony Cook PSM
Secretary,
Australian Government
Department of Education

PURPOSE

The Department of Education's Data Strategy guides how we strengthen our ability to develop and deliver effective policies and programs, underpinned by high-quality, accessible, and secure data. It aims to promote and embed data stewardship, build capability, facilitate data sharing, and foster a culture where data is recognised and valued as a strategic asset for improving education outcomes.

WHAT IS DATA?

Data is any information in a form capable of being communicated, analysed or processed (whether by an individual or by computer or other automated means).



FOCUS ON FIRST NATIONS DATA

The department recognises data plays a significant role in formulating policy and programs that improve educational outcomes for First Nations children and youth. We will work closely with our First Nations partners to ensure implementing First Nations data-related initiatives such as embedding Priority Reform 4 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, the Framework for Governance of Indigenous data and the Data Policy Partnership, meets the data-related aspirations of our First Nations stakeholders.

VISION STATEMENT

Our strong evidence culture is driven by committed leadership, supported by a data-capable workforce and uses analytics to generate insights that inform decision-making. By governing and managing our data effectively, including through safe and responsible data sharing, we grow the education evidence base to shape better policies and programs.



OUR SUCCESS

Since the release of our first data strategy in 2020, the Department of Education has made significant progress in using data for better outcomes. Key achievements over the 2023–2025 Data Strategy include:



Culture and Leadership

- Delivering and embedding the department's inaugural Evaluation Strategy, providing guidance on evaluation for policies and programs.
- Establishing the department's first Indigenous Data Champion to help drive First Nations initiatives.
- Establishing a successful annual Data Week to showcase new data initiatives and success stories.



Capability

- Leveraging departmental expertise to deliver training to uplift our data capability.
- Sharing specialist skills and knowledge to enhance data skills across the department.
- Delivering targeted support to identified areas of need through bespoke training sessions, increasing data engagement across the department.
- Increasing visibility of APS Data Profession activities and supporting the APS Data Graduate program.



Governance

- Commencing implementation of the Framework for Governance of Indigenous Data, to work towards greater agency for First Nations Australians over how their data is governed.
- Improving quality assurance processes and implementing a Data Release Checklist.
- Improving data governance and privacy arrangements across higher education data collections linked to over 1 million domestic students.



Sharing and Trust

- Contributing 6 datasets to the Education, Skills and Employment National Data Asset, which supports 73 analysts across the Departments of Education and Employment and Workplace Relations.
- Progressing the establishment of the National Disability Data Asset, to provide a critical evidence base on people with disability.
- Achieving major time savings in the calculation of key non-government school funding inputs by optimising data management and cross-team collaboration.



Infrastructure and Innovation

- Implementing the department's Data Analytics Platform to boost our analytic capability.
- Delivering real-time access to detailed enrolment data for 1.6 million domestic and international students.
- Redeveloping the forward estimates model for child care payments.
- Creating a first of type analytics environment to ensure more rigorous and efficient reporting to provide earlier and deeper insights into higher education student data.
- Developing a machine learning model to identify fraud and non-compliance in child care programs.



Analytics and Insights

- Providing design and instrument validation advice for the upcoming Preschool Outcomes Measure.
- Analysing the economic benefits of increasing educational attainment, outlined in the Australian University Accord report.
- Delivering key insights on the value of parental engagement and teacher influences on early schooling outcomes.
- Reviewing and implementing improvements to the department's performance measures.
- Modernising student enrolment forecasting to improve school funding projections.
- Modelling household behavioural responses to changes in early childhood education and care policies.

Our work aligns with and supports whole-of-government data initiatives, including the Data and Digital Government Strategy, Intergovernmental Agreement on Data Sharing, Data Availability and Transparency Act, APS Data Profession and the Framework for Governance of Indigenous Data.

The department also participates in ongoing cross-departmental working groups including Deputy Secretaries Data Group and the Chief Data Officers Group. These routine meetings promote cross-departmental collaboration and help us stay up to date with key data issues arising across the APS.

STEWARDSHIP

The department collects and holds a vast array of information that is vital to the education outcomes of all Australians. As stewards of this data, we have a responsibility to manage it with integrity, use it to deliver public value, keep it secure and ensure privacy is protected to the highest standard.

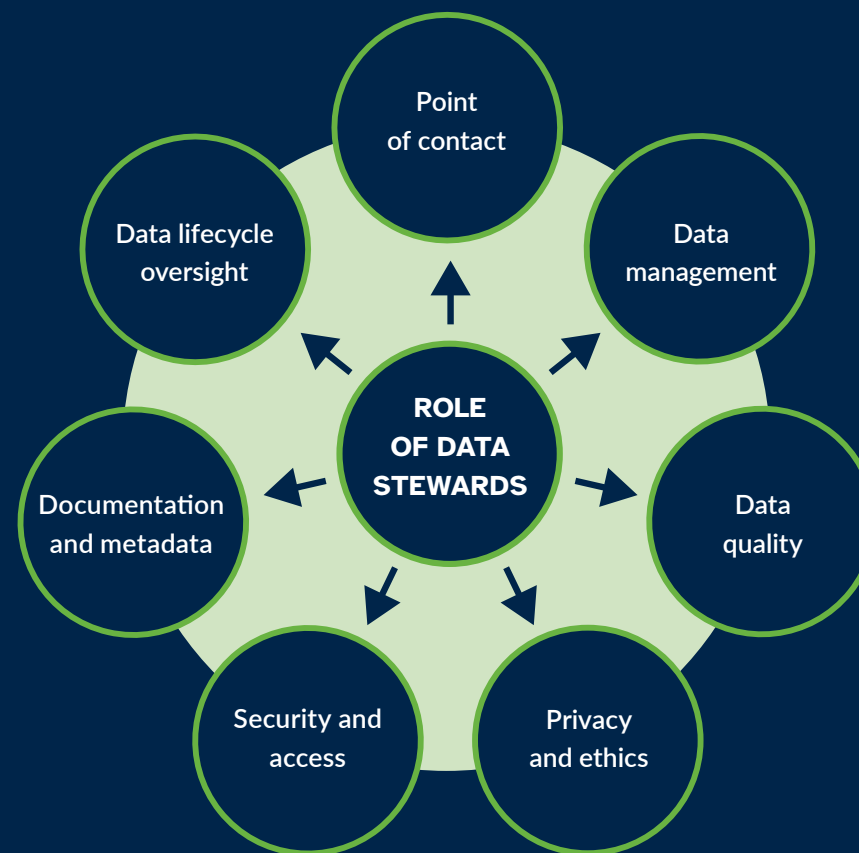
The **Data Strategy 2026–2028** positions the department as a leader in data stewardship, building capability, empowering ownership of data, and embedding robust governance. Ultimately, strong stewardship strengthens program delivery, supports informed decisions, and builds trust. It is a shared responsibility that demands ongoing commitment and leadership.

Rigorous data stewardship ensures data assets are accurate, well-documented, and aligned with strategic goals. It enables transparency, accountability, and evidence-based decision-making, supporting policy development, program delivery, and public trust.

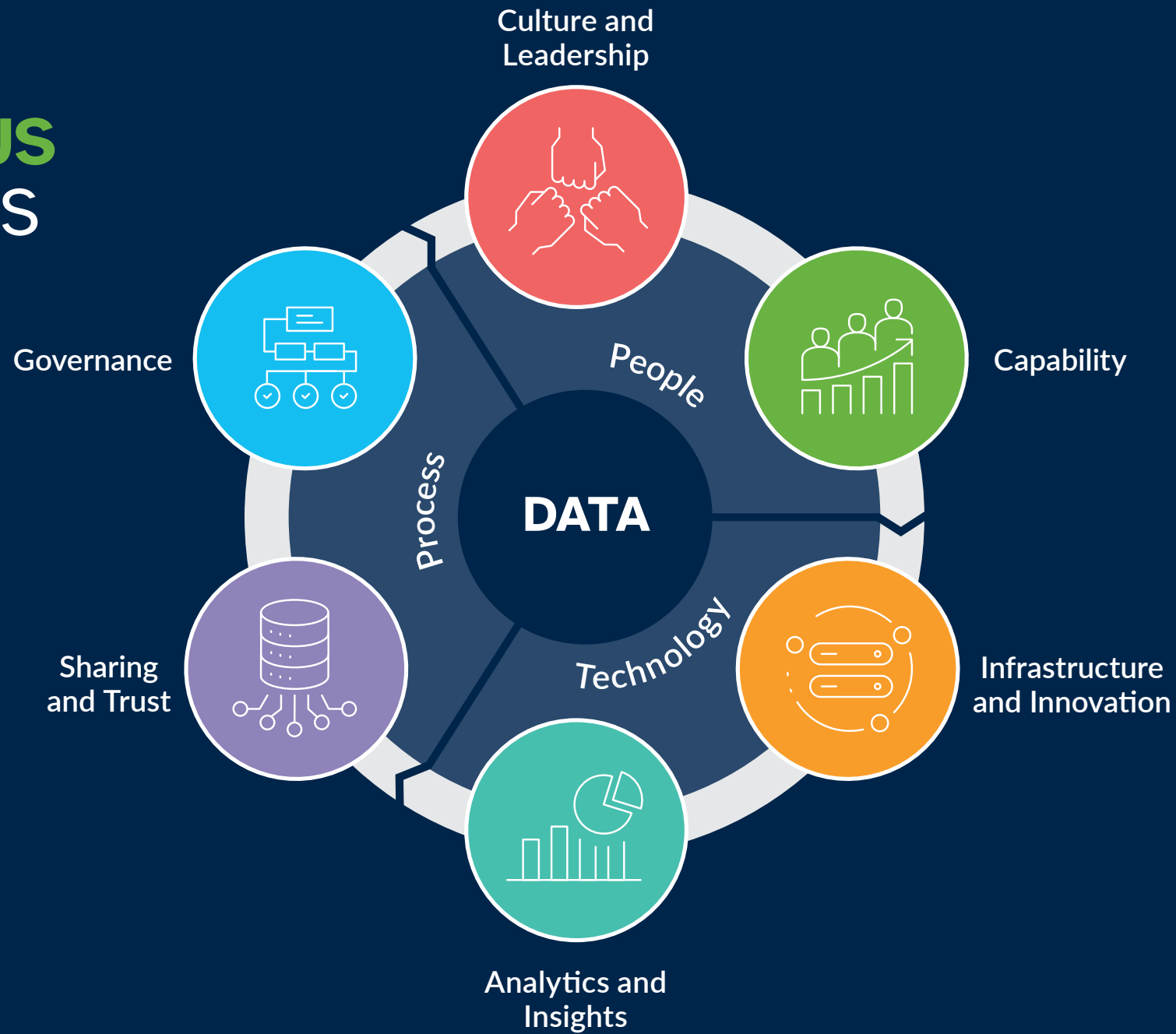
As data volumes grow and systems become more complex, stewardship helps mitigate risks such as poor data quality, misuse, and privacy breaches. It ensures data is not only stored appropriately but also maintained over time, supporting cross-agency collaboration through consistent standards and shared understanding. Additionally, modernising approaches to measuring the same concepts across departmental assets forms part of this data stewardship.

Embedding effective stewardship requires clear governance, defined roles, and support for staff through tools and training. By instilling clear responsibilities and uplifting capability, the department enhances operational efficiency and delivers better outcomes for the community.

We must ensure our data practices are ethical by protecting privacy, promoting transparency in how we use data to inform decisions and by sharing it responsibly. Communication and trust ensure data flows securely, while maintaining the ethical and privacy standards expected in the public sector.



FOCUS AREAS





CULTURE AND LEADERSHIP

Key objective: Our leaders foster a data-driven evidence culture

LONG TERM AIMS

- We have a strong evidence culture and data is used to inform all policies and programs
- Our leaders are accountable for the responsible use and protection of data assets across the organisation and for harnessing their strategic value
- All staff recognise the value of data and engage with evidence to inform their work
- We collaborate to share knowledge and enhance decision making

2026–2028 GOALS

- We identify relevant evidence and counter-evidence and include it in our policy advice
- All SES understand and fulfill their responsibilities in relation to managing and using data
- We improve the way we use data and support staff to identify and generate data-driven evidence
- We collaborate and share knowledge on education data across the department, improving the evidence base used to make key decisions

IMPLEMENTATION ACTIVITIES

- Revise briefing templates to strengthen use of data and evidence
- Incorporate data accountabilities into SES performance agreements
- Analyse how we use data in reporting, decision-making and performance measurement
- Hold an annual Data Week to showcase new data initiatives and success stories
- Promote engagement with the Data Analyst Network for collaboration and knowledge sharing



CAPABILITY

Key objective: We have a data capable workforce

LONG TERM AIMS

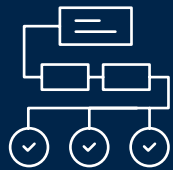
- All staff can understand, interpret, and use data appropriately to drive improvements to policies, programs and processes
- We have highly skilled data specialists capable of conducting advanced analysis, modelling and research
- We have a culture of continuous learning and collaboration

2026–2028 GOALS

- We improve our foundational data capability across the workforce, aligning with objectives of the Capability Review Action Plan
- We engage with emerging technologies to achieve efficiencies in our work and build our data capability
- We upskill our data specialists and draw on external expertise as required
- We improve our internal mobility, collaboration and sharing of data skills across the department, aligning with objectives of the People Strategy and the Enterprise Workforce Plan

IMPLEMENTATION ACTIVITIES

- Deliver targeted data capability sessions to identified areas of need
- Investigate the use of AI and other emerging technologies for data work and capability building
- Contribute to and leverage APS Data Profession activities, the APS Data Graduate program and other whole-of-government initiatives
- Facilitate opportunities for mentoring, skill sharing and communities of practice
- Build and maintain a central resource library to support knowledge sharing across the department



GOVERNANCE

Key objective: We govern and manage our data safely and effectively to maximise its value

LONG TERM AIMS

- All staff understand their data responsibilities and accountabilities
- Our data is high quality and governed appropriately, enabling its use as a strategic asset while ensuring it is handled safely, legally, and ethically
- Our data collections support accurate, consistent measurement of our policies and programs, and their outcomes
- We securely store and manage our data to increase efficiency, improve quality and reduce risks

2026–2028 GOALS

- We have safe access to our data to better support policy development and program delivery
- Our staff use First Nations data appropriately, aligning with the priorities and aspirations of our First Nations stakeholders
- Our data collections are improved to ensure they continue to be fit-for-purpose
- Our key data assets are supported by accurate metadata
- We continue to improve our data maturity through a range of initiatives

IMPLEMENTATION ACTIVITIES

- Develop further guidance on how the department's data can be used and shared in a safe, legal and ethical manner
- Implement the Framework for Governance of Indigenous Data
- Advise on and undertake analyses validating the robustness of our data
- Review of the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD)
- Develop a framework to help streamline and prioritise work by data stewards to create documentation and standardise definitions across our data
- Assess our data maturity to guide the prioritisation of our data initiatives



SHARING AND TRUST

Key objective: We share data to grow the education evidence base

LONG TERM AIMS

- We have access to reliable, relevant and holistic data covering the education journey
- Our data is released and shared externally for public benefit
- The department is trusted to collect, use and share data safely, legally and ethically
- We have strong collaborative relationships with key stakeholders to facilitate ongoing reciprocal data sharing for mutual benefit

2026–2028 GOALS

- We regularly release data for transparency and to inform our stakeholders in a timely manner
- We safely and appropriately share data for public benefit
- We build stronger relationships with key data stakeholders, including state and territory governments, relevant education bodies and First Nations partners
- We have access to key data relevant to our portfolio to inform our policies and programs

IMPLEMENTATION ACTIVITIES

- Release and share high-value departmental data in a safe, legal, ethical, accessible and transparent manner
- Manage and contribute to whole-of-government data sharing projects including the Education, Skills and Employment National Data Asset (ESEENDA)
- Support whole-of-government data sharing priorities
- Work towards reciprocal data sharing with key stakeholders to address critical data gaps, aligning with objectives of the Capability Review Action Plan and Data Sharing Approach
- Engage in the review of the Data Availability and Transparency Act



INFRASTRUCTURE AND INNOVATION

Key objective: We use fit-for-purpose technology to drive efficiency and meet our data needs

LONG TERM AIMS

- We have modern, scalable, secure, and resilient data infrastructure
- Our data infrastructure enables strategic, evidence-based decision-making
- We drive efficiency through innovation and continuous improvement in data practices

2026–2028 GOALS

- We improve our understanding of our current data holdings and infrastructure
- We modernise how we collect data and pay schools and education providers through the new Education Funding System
- We unlock value from our data through improved processes, better access and new analytical tools
- We understand how AI and other emerging technologies can deliver efficiencies
- We improve our capability to work with large datasets using new technology

IMPLEMENTATION ACTIVITIES

- Catalogue the department's data holdings and our current data storage and access arrangements
- Deliver the Education Funding System
- Engage with the department's Data Analytics Platform through pilot use cases to assess how it may assist with data access, storage, processing and governance
- Promote training and awareness on how to use new and emerging technologies, including AI and the Data and Analytics Platform, aligning with objectives of the ICT Strategy
- Leverage whole-of-government infrastructure to provide better access to education data
- Develop a central dashboard portal to improve access to key departmental data
- Revise the NPP process to strengthen planning and consideration for data infrastructure requirements



ANALYTICS AND INSIGHTS

Key objective: We use analytics to add value to our data and gain insights to inform decision-making

LONG TERM AIMS

- Insights derived from data analysis are trusted and embedded in decision-making and core functions
- We use timely, accurate, consistent data and appropriate techniques to measure, evaluate and re-design our policies and programs
- We have a strong in-house data analytics and modelling capability

2026–2028 GOALS

- We undertake analysis to better understand trends and drivers of the outcomes of the providers and receivers of education to design more user-focused policies and programs
- We model and forecast the impacts of policies and programs to help inform decision makers
- We have modern approaches to data analysis with streamlined processes
- We have better evidence about learning and development in the year before full-time school
- We have earlier access to higher education data to generate more timely insights, while balancing risk and accuracy

IMPLEMENTATION ACTIVITIES

- Undertake analysis to answer key policy questions
- Use integrated data to inform policy and support an outcomes-focus by complementing the department's evidence base with data from outside the portfolio
- Conduct unbiased program evaluations, aligning with objectives of the Evaluation Strategy
- Continue to support the design and validation of the Preschool Outcomes Measure
- Increase our use of preliminary data to improve timeliness of insights
- Leverage whole-of-government platforms to gain better insights into the education system

SHARED VISIONS

The Data Strategy and its focus areas are supported by and link to various internal and external strategies, frameworks and plans.

