



## Data-Enabled Student Success Initiative (DESSI)

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This **Forum Insight** provides a concise overview of the Data-Enabled Student Success Initiative (DESSI), aimed at institutions that may be interested in participating.

### What is DESSI?

The digital footprints that students leave as they engage with online services such as VLEs can be an invaluable source of information for institutions as they aim to increase retention, progression and completion rates, protect students' welfare and enhance their depth of learning.

DESSI is an exciting new national initiative whose purpose is to provide support, through a National Coordinator, to institutions as they develop, or begin to explore, strategies for using data to underpin effective, sustainable student success.

It is being driven by the National Forum in partnership with the HEA, QQI, ISSE, IUA, THEA, HECA, HEAnet and EduCampus.

### What are the benefits to institutions that participate?

The expected benefits of participating include:

- The potential to drive improvements in learning, retention, progression and completion rates
- A means of targeting resources and enhancing their return on investment
- An approach compatible with each institution's strategic aims, individual needs and contexts
- An approach based on a developed understanding of the opportunities, challenges and pitfalls that underlie a successful data-enabled approach
- An increased understanding among staff of the value of using data as a student-support resource
- A focus on maximising the benefits to be gained by using the resources already in use

### Why is DESSI relevant?

The National Forum's recent Learning Analytics project identified a number of risks that may prevent institutions and, in turn, students from realising the full potential benefits of a data-enhanced approach to student success. These include:







- A misperception of analytics as a necessarily complex and resource-heavy specialism.
- An inaccurate sense that the key to the effective use of data to support students is a significant financial investment in a bespoke IT analytics platform.
- The risk of institutions making considerable financial investments in third-party products that may prove, in the long-term, not to be fully compatible with the needs of the institution.
- The potential reputational and financial risk to institutions of using personal data in a manner that is subsequently discovered to be non-compliant with Data Protection legislation.

DESSI addresses these risks by partnering with institutions to support the development of tailored, itemised and sustainable strategies for using data to enhance student success that capitalise on the tools, services and expertise that institutions already possess.

DESSI is extremely timely in its compatibility with themes of maximising the potential value of data that are increasingly emerging in policies and recommendations from key stakeholders such as the EU and the Department of Education and Skills. More information on these policy contexts is available in the more-detailed DESSI Information Booklet, available at <https://www.teachingandlearning.ie/learning-analytics-educational-data-mining-learning-impact/dessi-information-booklet/>

### What is involved in the process?

Through the National Coordinator, DESSI will work with your institution to devise a bespoke strategic plan that is tailored to optimise the value of your institutional data. The process will be supported by a range of resources that will be made available to institutions and will include consideration of the following:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Institutions need to consider what they mean by student success and how data can help.</li> <li>• What supporting questions (such as 'Which of our students need support?') can their data answer?</li> </ul> <p><b>Aims</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Any activity must be undertaken in full compliance with Data Protection legislation</li> <li>• HEIs must ensure that their proposed approach is transparent and compliant <b>PRIOR</b> to taking any action.</li> </ul> <p><b>Data Protection</b></p> 
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HEIs gather data from a wide variety of sources. Effective analysis of this data is required to identify the best source(s) of information</li> <li>• Sharing it in an accurate, timely &amp; user-friendly format is essential</li> </ul> <p><b>Data</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data will provide information but student success is based on <b>ACTION</b>.</li> <li>• Institutions must plan what they will <b>DO</b> with the information once they have it</li> </ul> <p><b>Actions</b></p> 
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transparency, intra-institutional collaboration and an ethical approach are critical for ensuring buy-in from staff and students</li> <li>• Success is only possible if users are engaged with the process</li> </ul> <p><b>Buy-In</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Institutions may need to evolve the culture of data use on their campuses</li> <li>• A pervasive recognition of the value of data and evidence is required to ensure a sustainable approach</li> </ul> <p><b>Culture</b></p> 

### Who can participate?

Institutional participation in the initiative will be invited on a self-selecting basis. All HEIs are invited to participate regardless of type, location or current maturity with regard to data use.

### What commitments must my institution make?

Institutions will self-select for participation in DESSI. The exact plan for the process will be tailored in partnership with each institution so you will determine the specific aims of the collaboration, who is involved, how long it takes and what steps are needed.

Institutions will decide themselves how far-reaching they wish the strategy to be. The National Coordinator will provide as much or as little direct support as you decide you want.

Specifically, the following is requested:

- The nomination of an institutional Senior Champion, of an appropriate grade, that will support the development of the institutional plan for developing the strategy and embody the institution's commitment to the process
- The nomination of a primary institutional contact that will drive the process
- A commitment to undertaking a collaborative approach that is representative of the key constituencies within the institution

While there are no financial resources available to support institutions' engagement with the DESSI process, please note that all services and supports are provided without charge.

Please note also that Data Protection compliance is a key aspect of DESSI. During the first stages of the collaboration, appropriate checks and balances will be identified and assessed. These will be in place before any analysis of student data is undertaken.

### How can I find out more?

Further details, including the process for expressing interested, can be found in the DESSI Information Booklet, which is available at <https://www.teachingandlearning.ie/learning-analytics-educational-data-mining-learning-impact/dessi-information-booklet/> or by contacting [lee.ofarrell@teachingandlearning.ie](mailto:lee.ofarrell@teachingandlearning.ie)