Ultimate objectives of the programme

• To make the financial reporting process more efficient for the academy sector and the Department

• To develop and deliver additional insight that supports better financial management across the academy sector
User Research

Automation
Current data submission takes too long
DfE asks for the same data in different formats

Chart of Accounts
Is everyone else’s data consistent with mine?
Can we have a consistent layout of account codes?

Added Value / Insights
More could be done with the data we share
Understanding our context within the sector would be really helpful
Who are we working with to shape the programme?

We’re trying very hard to ensure the programme is driven by users:

- We’ve been undertaking interviews with FDs and SBMs at academy trusts to help refine our evidence base for the programme and identify areas of greatest need.

- Working very closely with all the main software suppliers, working particularly closely with two in the ‘alpha’ stage, but keeping all suppliers on board through fortnightly calls and 1-2-1 discussions on the technology development, so that they are able to adopt the process as soon as they are able.

- Ongoing relationship with one of the working groups of academy trusts that support the Department with financial reporting issues.

- Invites about to go out for new BFRP-specific Stakeholder Reference Group which will provide external support and challenge to the programme.
Progress across the programme

Automation
• We have completed the ‘Discovery’ and ‘Alpha’ phases for the automated data collection project. This means that we have a proof of concept, a prototype of the new approach to data collection. We are in the early stages of developing a ‘private beta’, which will be an operational version of the solution for testing with a small group.

Added Value / Insights
• We’re building up a set of requirements from external and internal users for how existing financial data could be better used i.e. additional value that can be extracted around areas like benchmarking and financial management.

Chart of Accounts
• Working with academies and software suppliers to produce a default chart of accounts that trusts can adopt, or map their existing chart of accounts to.

Other priorities
• Continuing to develop a more refined idea of user pain-points and user needs.
• Ramping up our communications with users. . .
What does automation look like?

A lot of the information we ask for is within your finance systems:

• The automation solution will provide a means for sending your trust trial balance to the department electronically.

• Trusts will retain control – you will send the data, the department will not be delving into your systems to get the data.

• The data will be taken and used to pre-populate the relevant fields in the accounts return, BFR and BFRO. Trusts will be able to check the populated forms, adjust if necessary, before approving it. They would add in the non-TB data into those fields on the form.

• For the AR, which requires an auditor review, the signed return will then be available for auditors and submitted in the same way the current form works.
What about the chart of accounts?

• Chart of Accounts has been designed with the help of trusts and software system suppliers to meet the internal reporting needs of trusts and the reporting needs of the Department. Trusts can adopt it, or look at options for mapping their existing codes, where possible, to the CoA.

• Our current systems rely on transforming data at several stages in the process. We want to remove these inefficiencies where we can.

• Trusts told us that it’s not clear from benchmarking that everyone records things in the same way.

• For automation to work, the data must come through in a format we recognise.

• A common set of ledger codes for the sector, mapped to all the financial returns so trusts will know what cells on the forms that the data will go into

• Complete freedom for trusts to use cost centres and/or analysis codes for internal reporting, giving the flexibility to report on year group, subject etc.

• We’re aiming to launch early in summer term so trusts can plan to use it, if they want to, from September 2019.
What are the added value plans?

• We have just finished a series of user research meetings and workshops with trusts to find out what additional data trusts want to receive.

• Still pulling together our findings, but have some clear principles based on feedback from trusts.

• We hope to make comparator groups more sophisticated, e.g. premises and energy related issues could be compared with others in similar buildings, rather than on a pupil number basis.

• Co-ordination with other metrics the Department produces is also key

• Timeliness of additional insights to support budget setting is very important

• Tailor output to the audience, e.g. CFO needs will be different to the accounting officer, or chair of trustees.
How you can help us:-

• Come and have a chat to us at the DfE Village to find out more.

• Tell us the problems you have with the current financial reporting process.

• Give us your ideas of some good KPIs that would help your decision making.

• Offer to help us going forward as we build this solution to make sure it works for everyone.

• Help us raise awareness with colleagues.

And of course you can always contact us at BetterFinancialReporting.COMMS@education.gov.uk