

1 Introduction

This factsheet provides an overview of the quarterly validation process in England undertaken by the Data Manager Contractor (Jacobs).

The validation process involves the data being approved from Level 0 to Level 40, through an authorisation process involving the local authority (LA), the Data Manager Contractor and Defra. The movement of data through these levels is provided in Table 1 below.

The objective of validation is to ensure a consistent and accurate data set both within and between authorities. It is important that the data set is accurate as WasteDataFlow data is used by Defra and the Environment Agency to provide an evidence base to guide government policy and report to Europe on recycling waste from households. The data is also used by local authorities for monitoring and strategic planning purposes and is accessible by public users. The validation process:

- Checks that, where applicable, tonnages balance between what is collected and sent;
- Compares trends from the same quarter in the previous year;
- Ensures that waste tonnages are reported in the correct questions and categories dependent on household, non-household, “waste from households” or “waste not from households” definitions and the biodegradability of material; and
- Reinforces the duty of LAs to report the final destination of their waste and recycling.

All data is reported in the WasteDataFlow website – www.wastedataflow.gov.uk.

Other guidance on the validation process is provided on the WDF website either on the England Guidance page; <https://www.wastedataflow.org/htm/datasets-england.aspx> where relevant guidance notes include:

- **GN65: Resolving validation checks query by query.** This is a guide to the Summary report detailing all the potential formula-based checks raised, where to find the data they’re based on and what actions are required to resolve or address them.
- **GN62a: How to use the Validation spreadsheet.** This shows how to run a Summary report and provides information on the different sections of each tab of the report. or in the WDF System Manual <https://www.wastedataflow.org/htm/datasets.aspx> where relevant sections include:
- **Section 3 – How to enter, authorise and validate data.** This covers the processes local authority users need to go through to enter, check, roll up and submit their data.

Table 1: Validation and authorisation structure (England)

	Levels 0 – 30	Levels 30 – 35	Level 35 – 40
England	LA Data Entry and Authorisation	Data Manager Contractor validation	Defra authorisation and publication of data.

Each local authority enters their data and, after internal checks, rolls it up to Level 20. At Level 20 the local authority will be presented with a “Data approval” page where the Data Administrator user will need to provide a response to each of the validation queries raised before they can approve the return to Level 30, thereby signing it off for the LA.¹ Local authorities can enter their data monthly, however, it should be noted that once the data is

¹ Data is entered at Level 0 then rolled up to Level 10 then Level 20 or directly to Level 20 (depending on whether the Data Entry and Administrator roles are carried out by one or two people). It can be rolled down to Level 0 for amendments and back up again as many times as required before approval to Level 30.

approved to Level 30, it is not possible to view the monthly data, as this is aggregated into a quarterly figure.

The Data Manager Contractor then validates the quarterly data, returning it for amendments to the LA as required, and then authorises the data to Level 35. In the initial stages this will involve the Data Manager Contractor going into each authority's return and checking for completeness, data inconsistencies and conducting a review of the comments made by the LA and comparing the current data with the same quarter of the previous year.

An audit log relating to movement of data through the validation levels can be accessed through the "Data authorisation" page of the WasteDataFlow website. This log records information such as the date data was received or authorised by different users, whether the data had to be rejected back down to the LA and any amendments made to any questions other than Qu100.

2 Timescales

The Data Manager Contractor will notify the LA of any outstanding queries within 5 working days of the return being submitted and will aim to bring a Level 30 return to Level 35 (validation completed and data approved) within 30 days of the submission deadline. Local authorities are requested to co-operate to make this possible, by responding fully and appropriately and as promptly as possible to communications on validation queries.

3 Validation

The key stages of the Data Manager Contractor's validation process are detailed below:

3.1 *Assigning quarterly submissions*

Once a LA's return has reached Level 30 it is considered to have been submitted to the Data Manager Contractor for validation. Each LA has been assigned a validation manager, and it is the intention that each quarter the validators receive the same returns, building up knowledge of their LAs' data returns and establishing an excellent working relationship with the LA contacts. Waste Disposal Authorities and their Waste Collection Authorities will generally be assigned to the same validator.

3.2 *Validation of returns*

The Data Manager Contractor uses an online validation spreadsheet (the "Validation Summary report"), which is the same report available to LAs once their data return is at Level 10 (or higher) and which generates the validation queries seen by LAs before the submission of a quarterly return. This spreadsheet downloads the quarterly data for the current quarter and the same quarter of the previous year and runs a series of formula-based checks. The threshold values associated with each of the data checks have been determined in agreement with Defra and are considered to be appropriate to the expected levels of variances.

Where the data exceeds the expected variances (e.g. 10% increase or decrease from the same quarter of the previous year, or, for example, 100 tonnes were collected but only 90 tonnes sent), the spreadsheet generates a "CHECK". The "CHECK"s are linked to a series of questions ("Points to check"), which are then reviewed by the validator with reference to the responses provided by the LA to the queries automatically raised at the time of submission, to the comments provided in the WasteDataFlow return, and/or to past responses to the data validation process. Any queries which cannot be answered by the

online responses, previous discussions or the comments in WasteDataFlow are emailed to the LA for comment.

All responses to the “Points to Check”, either from the WasteDataFlow comments, the previous quarter’s responses, or as provided by the LA for that quarter, are logged in a “Validation Notes” report. This ensures that responses to previous quarters and queries are available to be referenced for the current quarter’s validation.

3.3 Communication with the local authority

The validation team aims to contact each LA with their initial validation queries within 5 working days of their return being submitted to Level 30. After the initial validation check has been completed, and in the event that further explanation or amendments are required from the LA, the validator will contact the LA directly. Any dialogue, dates etc. will be recorded in a “Validation notes” report (see above). In the event that the submission needs to be rejected to Level 0 to allow the LA to make the required amendments the LA will be informed of this via email. Local authorities will be contacted twice by email and once by telephone, to chase responses to the validation queries. If the LA does not respond and no valid reason has been given, then the Data Manager Contractor may refer the local authority to Defra who will follow up with the authority as required.

3.4 Quality Assurance procedure

Once a validator is happy that all issues with a return have been resolved, it is placed on an internal QA (Quality Assurance) log for a validation quality check by a senior validator before being authorised to Level 35. The QA check is conducted within one week of the return being placed on the log. Any comments regarding the return are recorded on the log and within the validation report.

If the LA return has not met the quality standard required (i.e. not all queries have an appropriate and relevant response) the validator will be asked to carry out further investigations. Validators will email the LA with all further queries raised by the QA checker and ask for changes to the data or more information explaining the data entered. Once the amendments are made, the return will be placed back onto the QA Log for approval. Once the return has been QA-approved the QA checker authorises the data to Level 35.