UK Data Service

Data in the spotlight: Census and population studies

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What we will cover today

- Census overview
- Census aggregate data
- Census bulk data
- The UK Data Service
- Questions

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Quiz time

In the 2021 Census, which musical fandom “religions” appeared in the detailed classification?



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Answer?

A) Disco Divine & Alien Believers

B) Heavy Metal & Jedi Knights

C) Country & Hogwarts

A) EDM & Pirate Church



Photo by Simone Secci on Unsplash

Quiz time

B) Heavy Metal & Jedi Knights



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Census overview

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Aggregate data

Aggregate data are about **populations**, **groups**, **regions** or **countries**.






Aggregate data illustration



Photo by BEN ELLIOTT on Unsplash

The Census of Population

- Every 10 years.
- First modern census is 1841.
- Data held secure for 100 years.
- Digitised censuses from 1971 (1961 ongoing).

A UK Census?

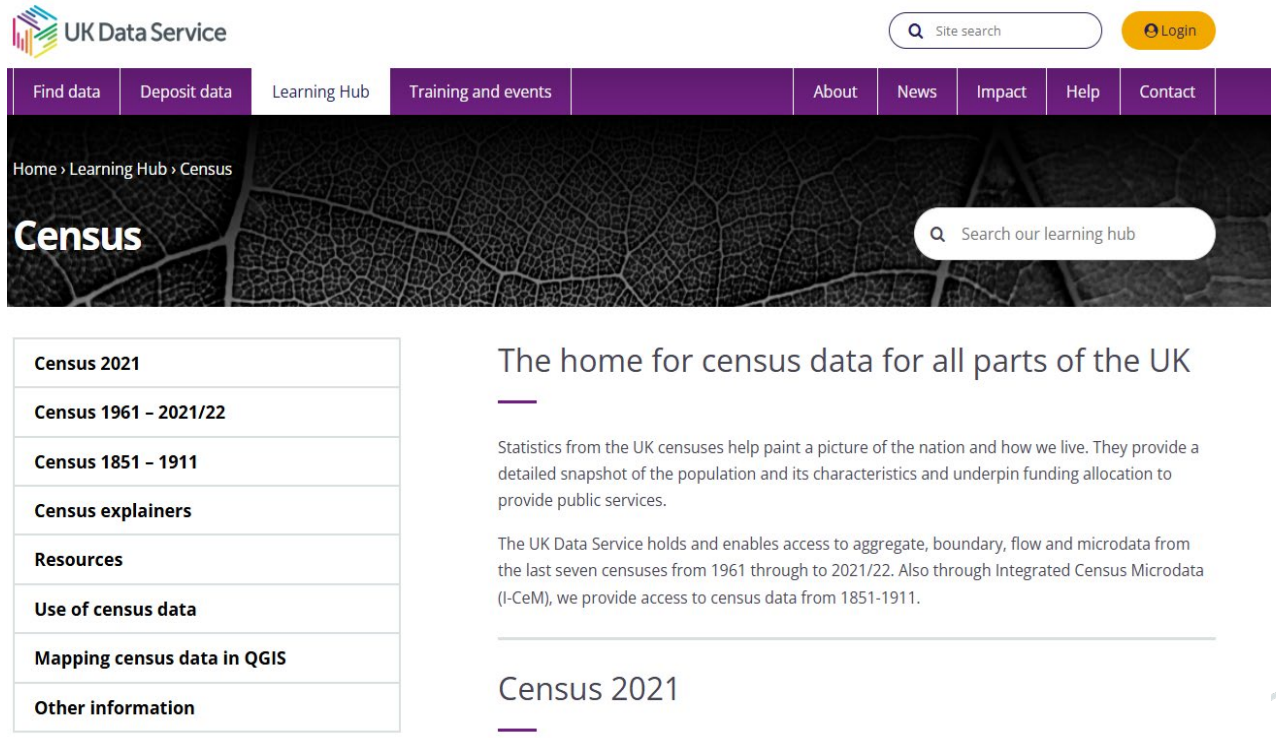
- Different nations.
- Different governments.
- Different outputs.
- Different geographies.
- Different questions.
- Different ideas.



Photo by Maxim Hopman on Unsplash

Census outputs

- Aggregate data.
- Boundary data.
- Microdata.
- Origin-destination data.
- Person level data.



England and Wales Census

- 97% response rate
- 27 minutes
- Census coverage survey
- Census quality survey
- Output consultation

21 March 2021

Northern Ireland Census

- 97% response rate
- Census coverage survey
- Add geographies
- Statistical Disclosure Control
- Quality assurance

21 March 2021

Scotland

89.8% response rate

Coverage survey

1st release: Sept 2023

Flexible Table Builder: Nov 2024

Origin-destination data: Jun 2025

20 March 2022

What can the census aggregate data tell us?

- Population.
- Employment, occupation, socio-economic class, qualifications.
- Ethnicity, religion, national identity, language.
- Housing, tenure, residence type.
- Household and family composition, occupancy.
- Carers and caring.
- Long term health problems or disability.
- Travel to work, migration.

New questions - gender

- Scotland
- Northern Ireland
- England
- Wales



New questions - sexuality

- Scotland
- Northern Ireland
- England
- Wales



New questions – veteran status

- Scotland
- England
- Wales



New questions – health conditions

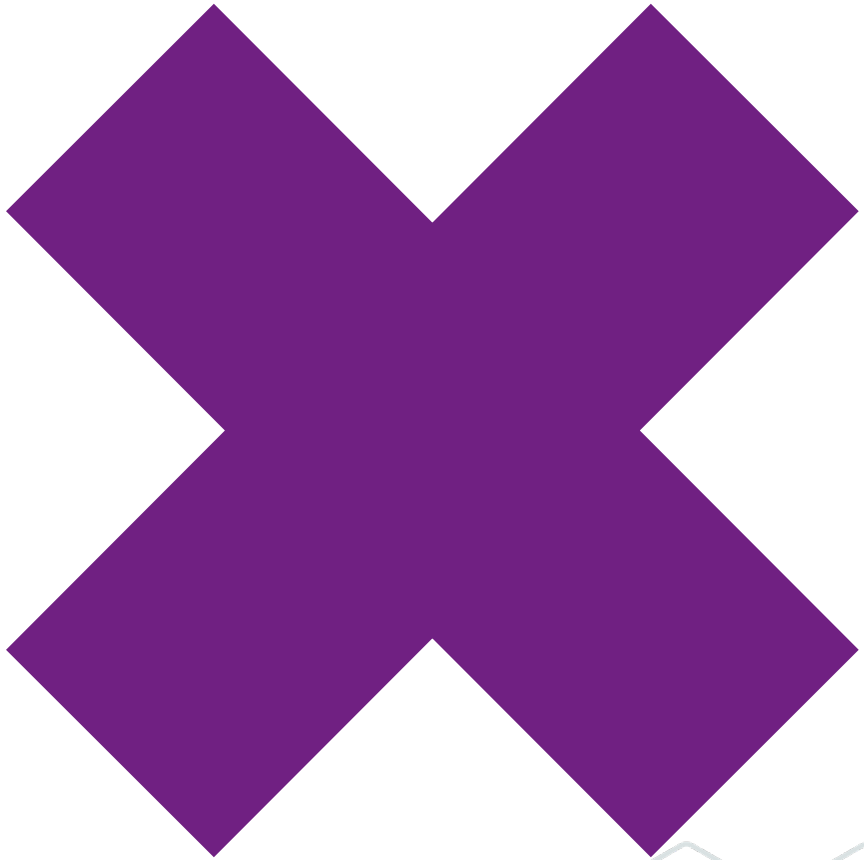
- Scotland
- Northern Ireland



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What the census cannot tell us

- **Wealth and income** derived deprivation data.
- **Personal identification** data blurring and obfuscation.



The tricky issue of census geography

- Output Area (OA)
- Superior Output Areas (SOA)
  - Lower Layer SOA (LSOA) and Middle Layer SOA (MSOA)
  - Scotland – Data Zones (DZ) and Intermediate Geographies (IG)
  - Northern Ireland – Just LSOA

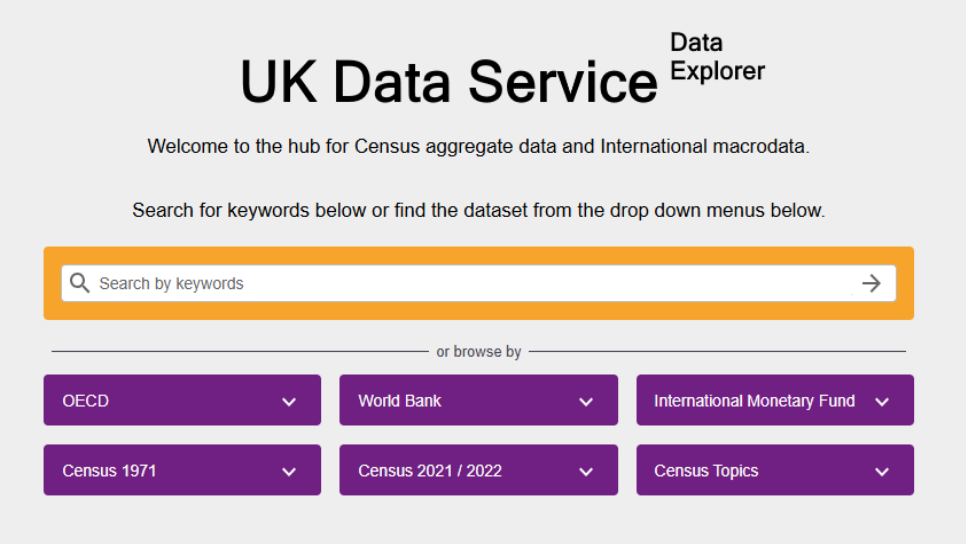
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Accessing census aggregate data

Olajuwon Yakub

Accessing census aggregate data

- Data Explorer - https://dataexplorer.ukdataservice.ac.uk/
- CKAN - https://statistics.ukdataservice.ac.uk/

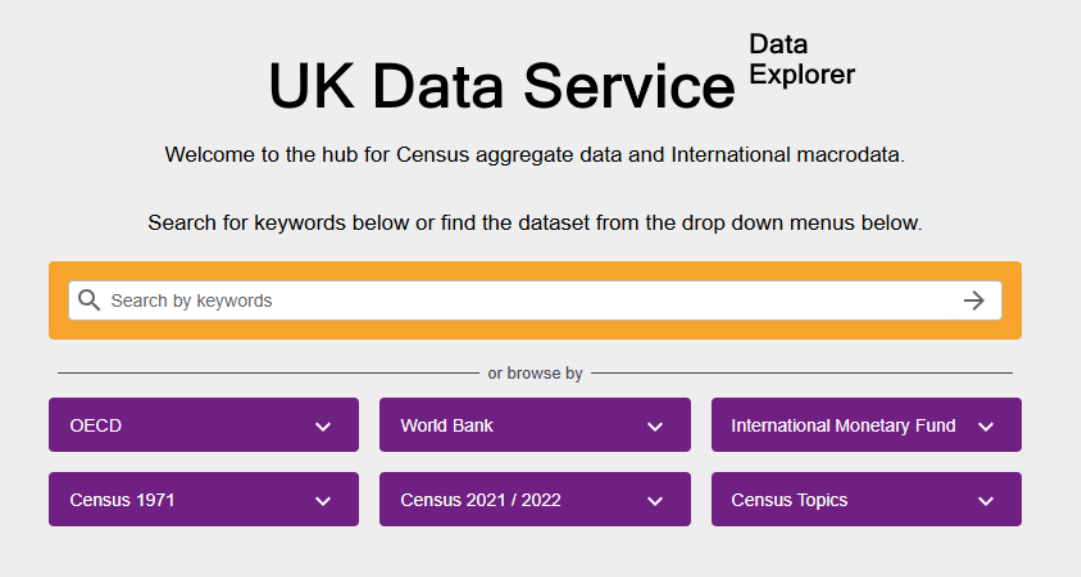




Activity 1

Data Explorer - https://dataexplorer.ukdataservice.ac.uk/

Exploring population density and the data explorer interface



Cont...Accessing census aggregate data

- CKAN - https://statistics.ukdataservice.ac.uk/
- Whole tables for geographical areas.
- Easy to search.
- Metadata.
- Expanding all the time.



Activity 2

CKAN - https://statistics.ukdataservice.ac.uk/

- Find the “Age of arrival in the UK” table for England and Wales.
- Download the data – how many people were born in England.
- How many people arrived in Wales aged 20 to 24 years of age?
- What ‘Units’ are used?

Activity 2.1

CKAN - https://statistics.ukdataservice.ac.uk/

- Find the “National Identity” table for Northern Ireland.
- Download the data – notice any differences.
- How many people identified themselves as Northern Irish only in Fermanagh and Omagh?
- What geographic referencing system was used?

Deprivation data

- Derived from **room occupancy, house ownership / tenancy, car availability, employment status…**

Carstairs

Townsend

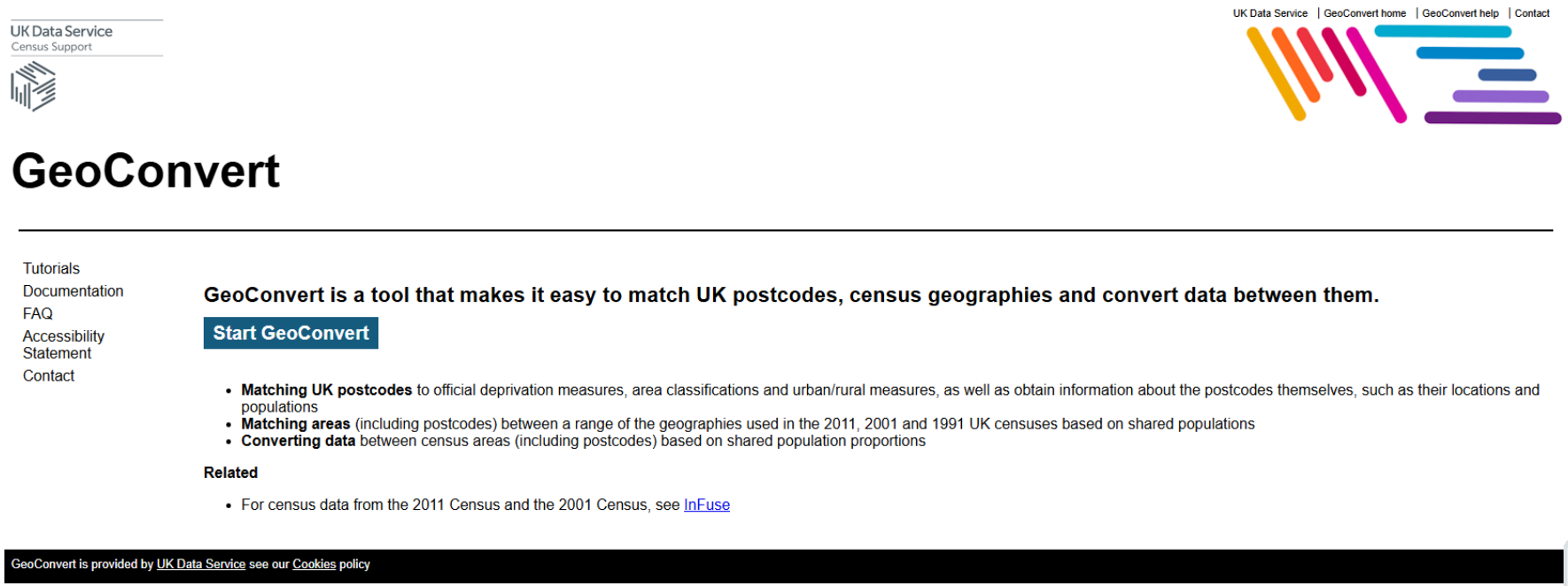
Indices of Deprivation

Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) | CDRC Data

Indices Futures: Updating the English Indices of Deprivation (IoD) - consultation - GOV.UK

Cont…Deprivation data

- Geoconvert - [GeoConvert: UK Data Service]
- Uses address points to calculate an area population





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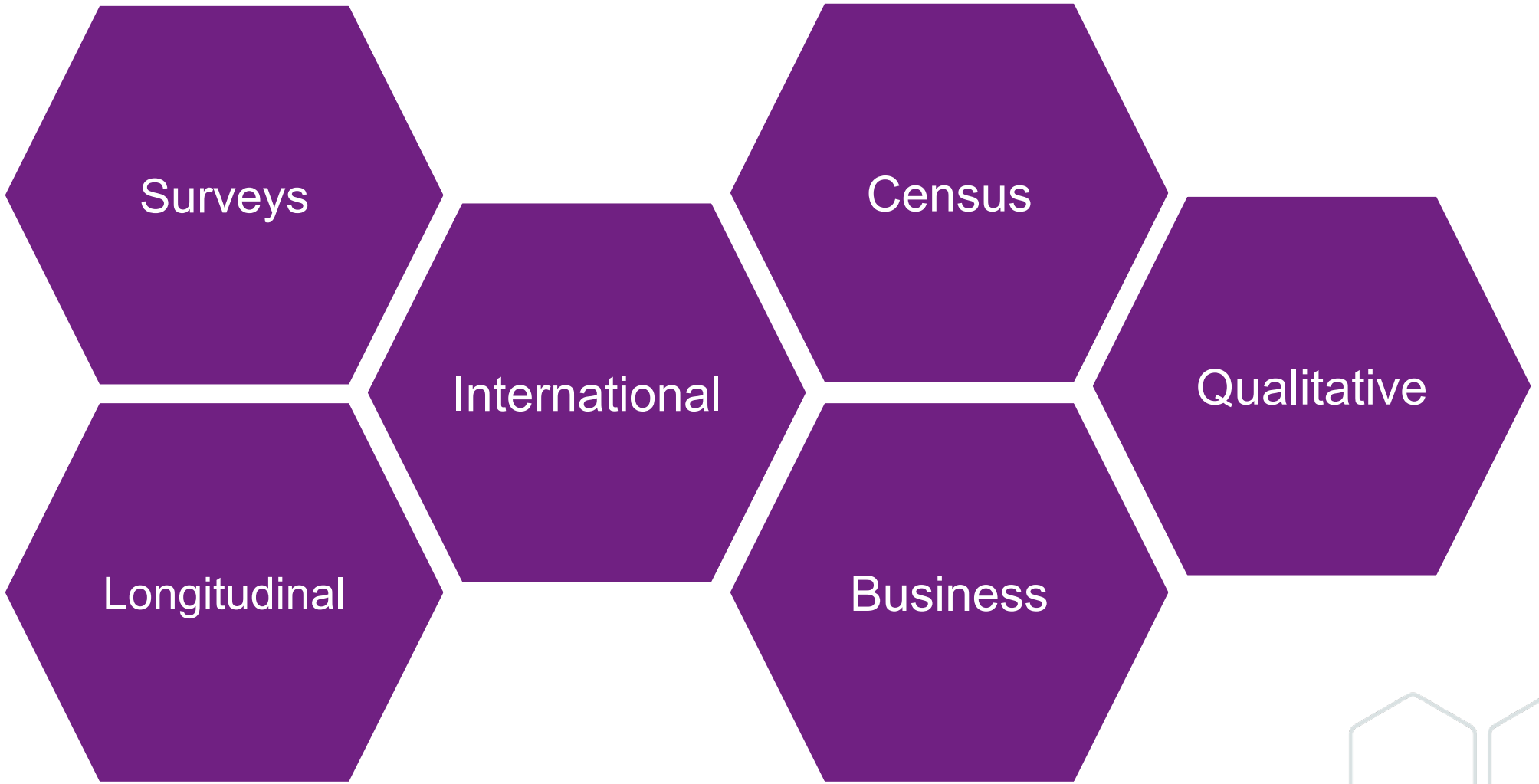
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Who produces the data?

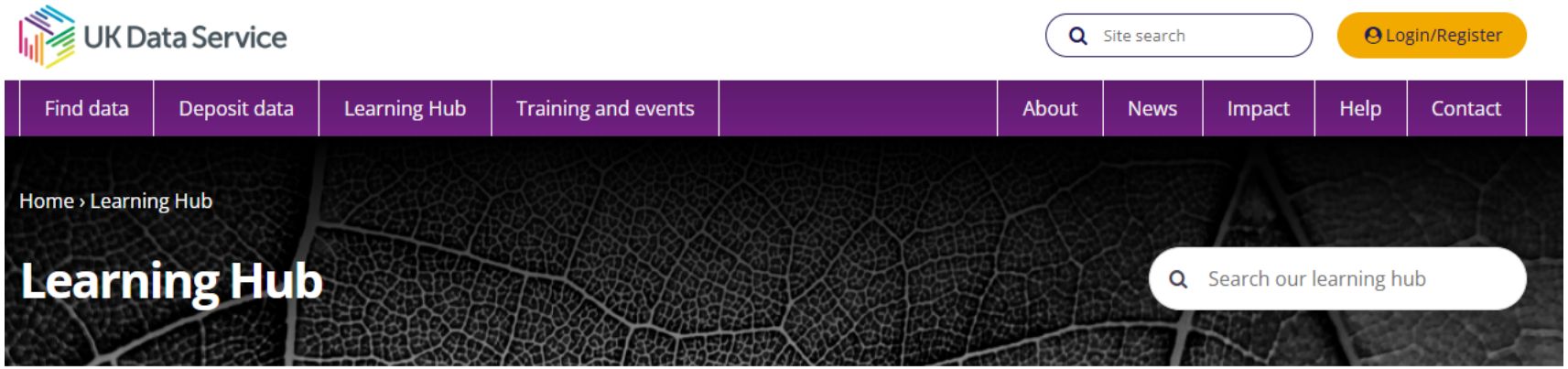


A ‘one stop shop’ for accessing social, economic and population data

What data does the UK Data Service hold?



Learning Hub



Enhance your data skills and teaching

Data producer support

As pioneering research data management experts, this section provides best practice guidance, as well as more resources, to data managers and those looking to learn more about how to manage their research data.

New to using data

Best practice and training for researchers new to accessing and using data in our collection. Includes advice and tools to correctly cite data; student-specific information on our Dissertation Award for undergraduates; and more.

Data skills modules

There is a wealth of data available for reuse in research and reports. These free, interactive tutorials are designed for anyone who wants to start using secondary data. They show you how to get started with finding good quality data, understanding it and starting your analyses.

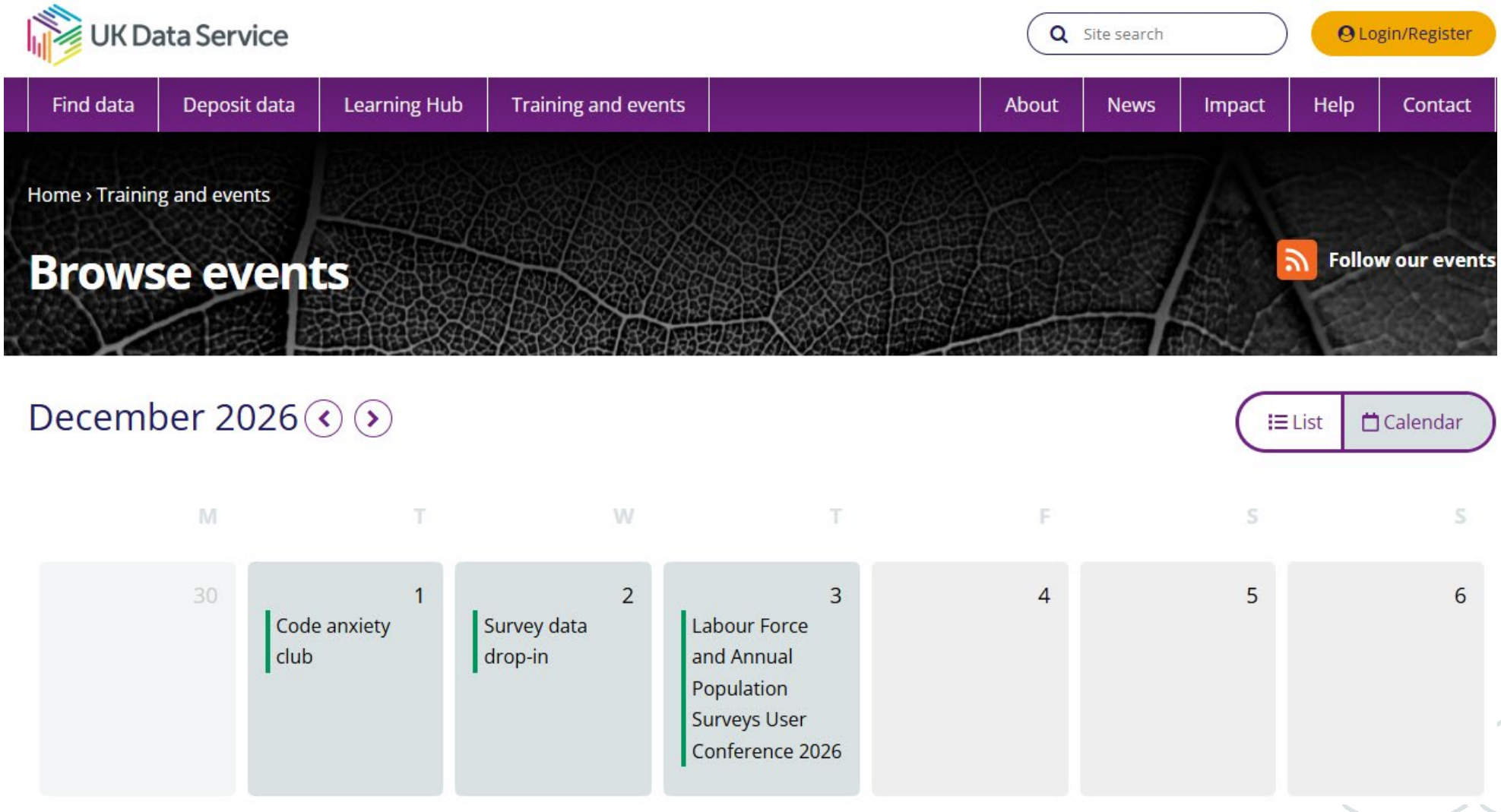
Videos

"Can you show me how to do that?"

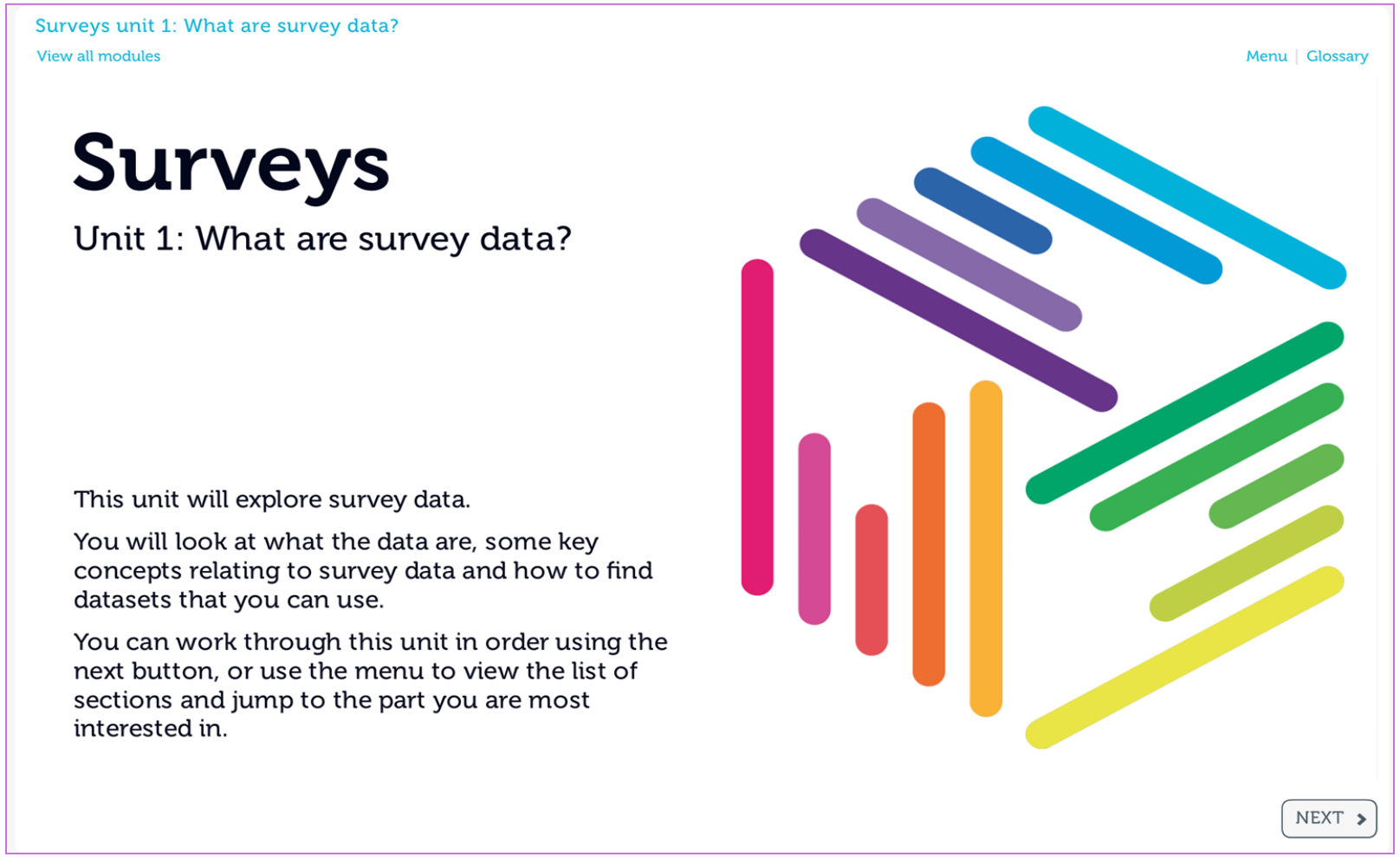


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Data skills modules



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Data Impact Fellows – in conversation with Esmeralda

20 October 2026

Esmeralda Bon became a Data Impact Fellow in 2017. Nine years later, she shares why she joined the scheme, what it enabled her to do and what she took forwards into her career.



Old methods, new grounds: the benefits and challenges of using observational data for target trial emulation

13 October 2026

Roxana Pollack describes applying target trial emulation to research on re-employment and mental health using Understanding Society.



Building skills for sensitive data curation: early insights

9 October 2026

Dr Hollydawn Murray and Dr Susmita Datta share early findings from the Sensitive Data Curation Skills Report, outline the priority skills gaps, and set out recommendations for the TRE community.

Register for the UK Data Service

beta.ukdataservice.ac.uk/myaccount/login

UK Data Service training and events

ukdataservice.ac.uk/training-events/

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Thank you.

help@ukdataservice.ac.uk