



Supporting Access to Secure Data

A Review of Procedures and Practices

Victims of our own success?

Why the review?

The UK Data Service Secure Lab has been hugely successful since it was founded as the Secure Data Service in the spring of 2011.

The number of Secure Access data collections and the number of Secure Lab users continues to grow. The challenge is to ensure we can still supply access to vital research data while maintaining high standards of support and security.

The Digital Economy Act (DEA) will mean changes to training and accreditation of trainers and users.

Secure Lab data collections and users

Controlled Access data collections: 150

- > Remote access via Secure Lab: 127 data collections
- > On-site access via Safe Room: 23 data collections

The number of researchers trained for Secure Access has increased by 73% between September 2015 and September 2017. The frequency of our training has increased to twice/month. The number of Secure Lab users has doubled since September 2015.

An evolving model

The implementation of the Digital Economy Act in May 2018 will require the adoption of Safe Researcher Training (SRT) and the accreditation of trainers via a 'train the trainers' course.

New SRT course developed by the Office for National Statistics in collaboration with the University of the West of England, with input from 'Expert' and 'Director' groups (members from other Research Data Centres) will be adopted by the UK Data Service in the coming months.

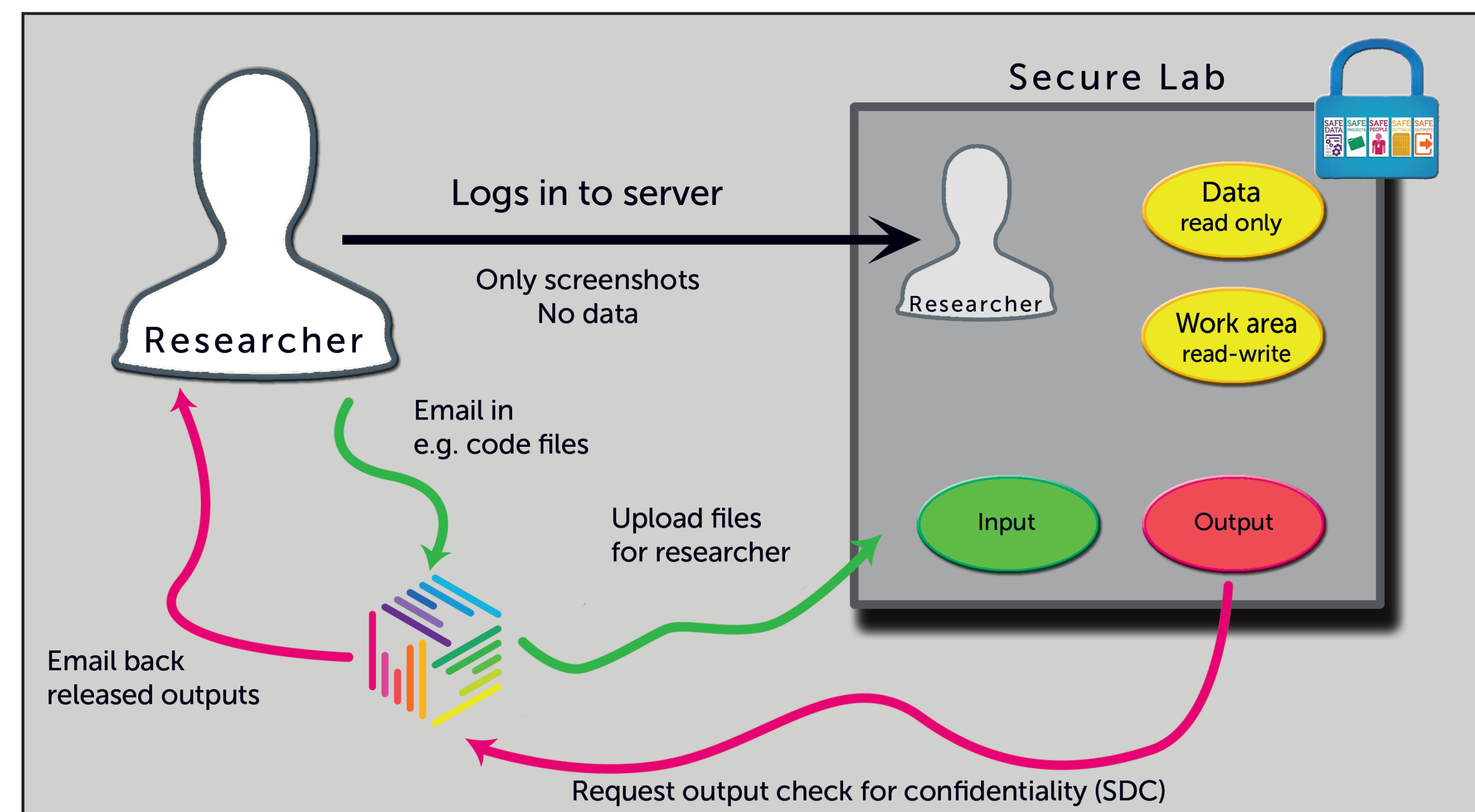
A new SDC Handbook written by the Working Group for Secure Data Access Professionals will be published in June 2018. This will provide clear and easy guidance for users to assess the risk of releasing statistical outputs that are generated from confidential data.

The relationship between data owners, data providers, and data users is never static. The provision of our Secure Lab services involves a large number of stakeholders and we must be responsive to competing needs as new forms of data become available, the legislative landscape changes, and demand threatens to exceed supply. As we continue to reflect on our current procedures, a future aspiration of the UK Data Service is to develop automated systems to facilitate even more efficient and timely access to sensitive data sources.



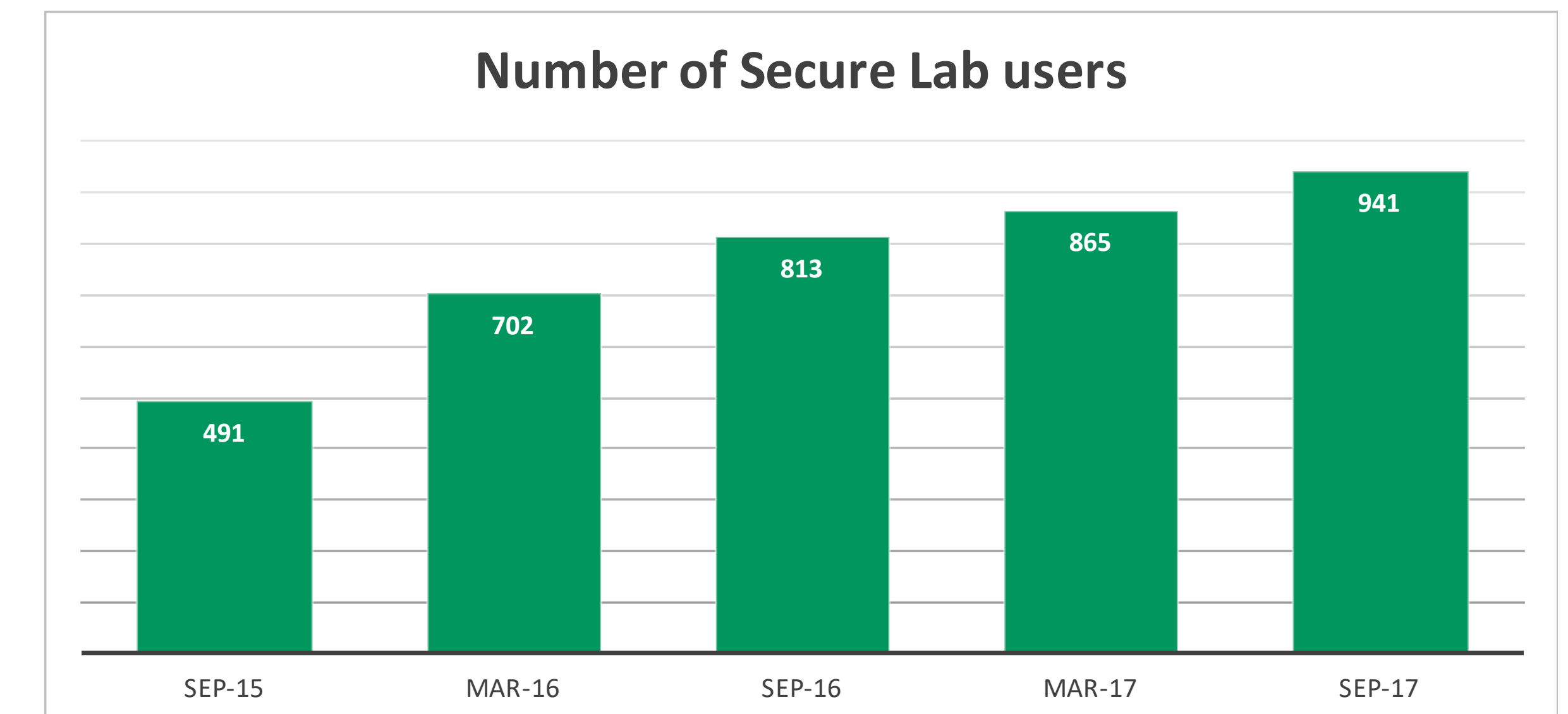
What is the Secure Lab and how does it work?

The UK Data Service Secure Lab facilitates remote access to highly detailed data, allowing researchers to investigate questions they previously could not tackle without travelling to, for example, the Virtual Microdata Laboratory at the Office for National Statistics.



Users have remote access from their office, but cannot download any files.

UK Data Service staff perform manual Statistical Disclosure Control (SDC) checks on any output produced before it is released to the user.



Reviewing our procedures & practices

Secure Lab Support is highly resource-intensive. Every aspect of our work was considered:

- Output requests; (Reduced checks? No checks? Limits on number of requests? More guidance?)
- Import Requests; (Restrictions on types of data? Shifting onus to researchers?)
- Data linkage; (Should we still perform this?)
- Training users; (New content. Increasing class sizes. Prolonging duration of validity)
- Changes to Service Level Agreements.

Implementation

Introducing changes

A communications strategy was devised in Spring 2018 informing users of changes to the way in which output requests would be handled; including

- More responsibility on the user to ensure outputs meet SDC requirements;
- Greater autonomy for UK Data Service staff to decide if import requests are within original project scope;
- Empowering the user to negotiate data linking requests with data owners directly instead of UK Data Service staff acting as go-betweens.

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Find out more on ukdataservice.ac.uk

