UK Data Service

Progressing data for a better future

Annual Report

01 April 2024–31 March 2025

The
country's
most
extensive
and trusted
digital
repository
of economic
and social
science
research
data.

Overview

The UK Data Service is the UK's principal repository for economic, population, and social research data.

Backed by nearly six decades of sustained investment from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), we steward the country's most extensive and trusted digital archive of research data.

Our collection features almost 10,000 nationally and internationally significant datasets, contributed by respected sources including government departments, the Office for National Statistics (ONS), ESRC-funded projects and other major funders and data owners. Key resources such as the Census, Understanding Society, UK Cohort Studies, and the Labour Force and Family Resources Surveys support critical research that shapes policy and practice across the UK and beyond.

Our vision is for economic, population, and social research data to drive an innovative and thriving research and policy-making ecosystem, leading to enhanced knowledge, better decisions, and improved outcomes in society.

Our mission is to catalyse impactful social science research by providing access to high-quality, curated and trustworthy datasets of national strategic importance; fostering data literacy; and contributing to the advancement of knowledge through dynamic data infrastructure and strategic partnerships.

With longstanding expertise in data curation, preservation, and training, we continue to lead in enabling social science research, teaching, and learning. Each year, we support researchers from academia, charities, think tanks, and policymakers in local and national government to access high-quality data and training. Through strategic partnerships and investment in skills and infrastructure, we ensure that research using our data drives real-world impact.

This annual report reflects our progress over the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025, and how we are delivering on our strategic vision to build a stronger, more data-enabled future.

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Steve McEachern

Director,
UK Data Service

Welcome to the UK Data Service Annual Report for 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025

This has been a landmark year for the UK Data Service, as we began the first year of our new award, funded by UKRI through the Economic and Social Research Council.

The £37.5 million award secures our work to 2030 and recognises the importance of what we do — supporting researchers in extracting insight from complex digital data to inform discovery and evidence-based policy for the public good.

Much of this year has been focused on laying the foundations for the work ahead. We launched a new strategy built around five key pillars, which will guide our development over the coming years. This report sets out our progress so far and explores how our strategic framework will shape our direction.

To help deliver on our commitment to a better user experience, we created a new leadership role — Associate Director for Data Operations — and were pleased to welcome Camilla Philpot Thomsen into post. Camilla brings extensive senior leadership experience, working closely with social science researchers and leading academic teams. Her focus on innovation and service design is already helping to improve the way we meet user needs.
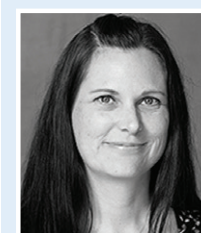
We were also proud to receive accreditation from the UK Statistics Authority for the provision and preparation of data under the Digital Economy Act 2017. This accreditation, valid until March 2030, is an important milestone and confirms our commitment to secure, high-quality data services.

As we look to the future, our first year under the new award has helped set a strong foundation — for improving user experience, evolving our data services, and responding to the changing needs of researchers in the UK and internationally.

My focus is on making our services more efficient, user-centred, and future-ready

" I bring to this role over 18 years of experience in strategic leadership and social science research support. The role offers strategic oversight of data acquisition, processing, publishing, and access — what I call the "engine room" of the Service.

From developing our User Experience Strategy, to directing the development of our new Data Catalogue (due for release in late 2025), to leading my teams to enhance workflows and systems, my focus is on making our services more efficient, user-centred and future-ready. I've learned a great deal about the technical and operational complexity behind our services and the importance of aligning that with the needs of our users, so that we can continue to support innovative and critical research. "

Camilla Philpot Thomsen
Associate Director, Data Operations

54,427
total registered users

910
new datasets

113
training events

4,444
attendees
at training

Downloads of:

open and safeguarded data: **81,498**
international macrodata: **14,712**
census data: **44,529**

229,527
views of the online
Learning Hub

751,475
visits to UK Data Service
website

23,357
page views of our
Data Impact blog

17,479
people engaged with our
news stories and articles
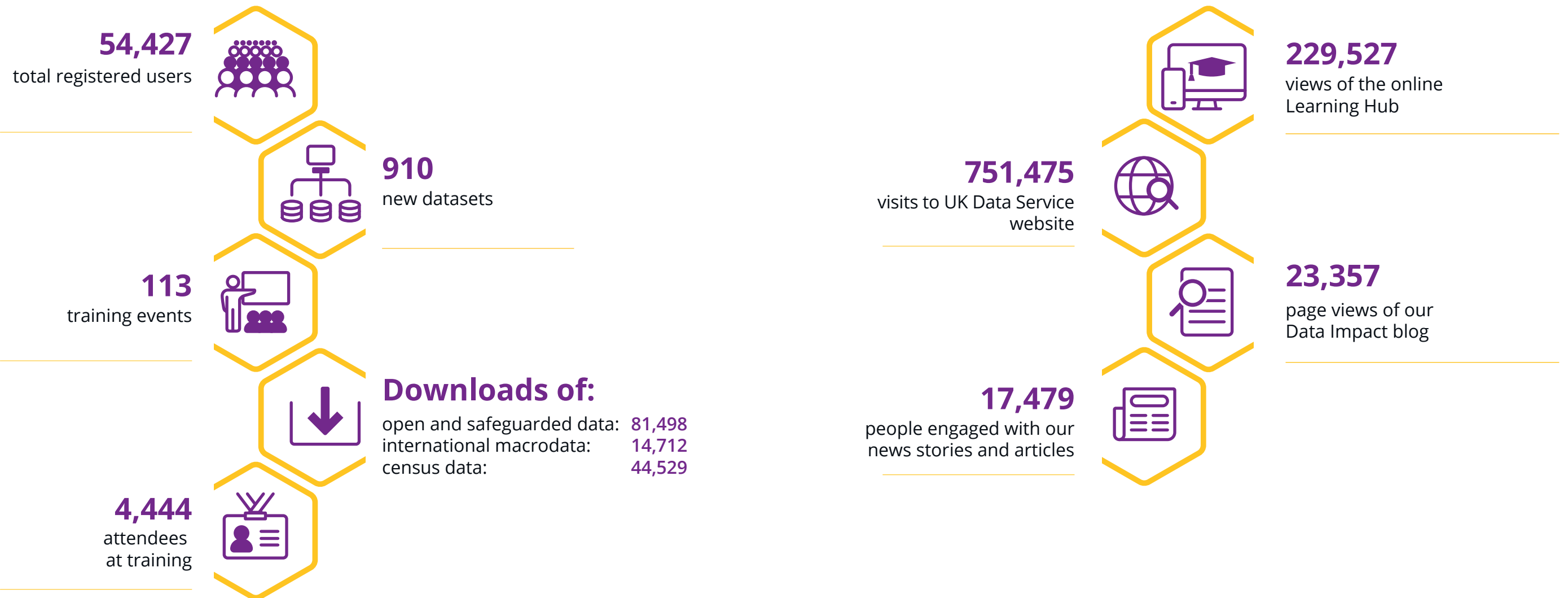
The [UK Data Service's Strategy 2024–2030](#) outlines a transformative vision to advance social science research and policy-making through enhanced data infrastructure, quality, and accessibility.

The new strategy is structured around five strategic pillars:

1. **Data-enabled infrastructure:**
   The Service will revise and update services through technical transformation and development of our workforce. This includes leveraging technology to ensure maximum accessibility and interoperability of data holdings in accordance with FAIR principles.

2. **Data quality and trust:**
   To provide access to high-quality and trustworthy data, the Service will continue to improve the efficiency of data delivery channels, enhance mechanisms for data discovery and analysis, and continually collect user feedback to inform service improvements.

3. **Data curation and active preservation:**
   The Service will work with data producers to ensure data are richly documented, managed, curated, licensed, and actively preserved. Efforts will focus on enriching and future-proofing data and metadata, with an emphasis on linked open data and machine actionability to support next-generation AI tools.

4. **Data literacy and capacity:**
   Positioning itself as a leading destination for high-quality training, the Service will offer foundational support for social scientists working with various data types. This includes developing training services that leverage emerging technologies and forms of data whilst maintaining collaborations across the social sciences to stay at the forefront of a rapidly changing skills landscape.

5. **Advocacy and outreach:**
   The Service will promote the impact of economic, population, and social research data by engaging with key stakeholders nationally and globally. This involves extending data impact communication through diverse media, advocating for increased accessibility and transparency of research data, and contributing to the global open data movement.

The Strategy is implemented through an accompanying delivery plan capturing all the projects and service improvements which will enable us to build our service around the five pillars. This annual report sets out where we have made progress in 2024–25 and a look ahead sets out our plans for the next five years.

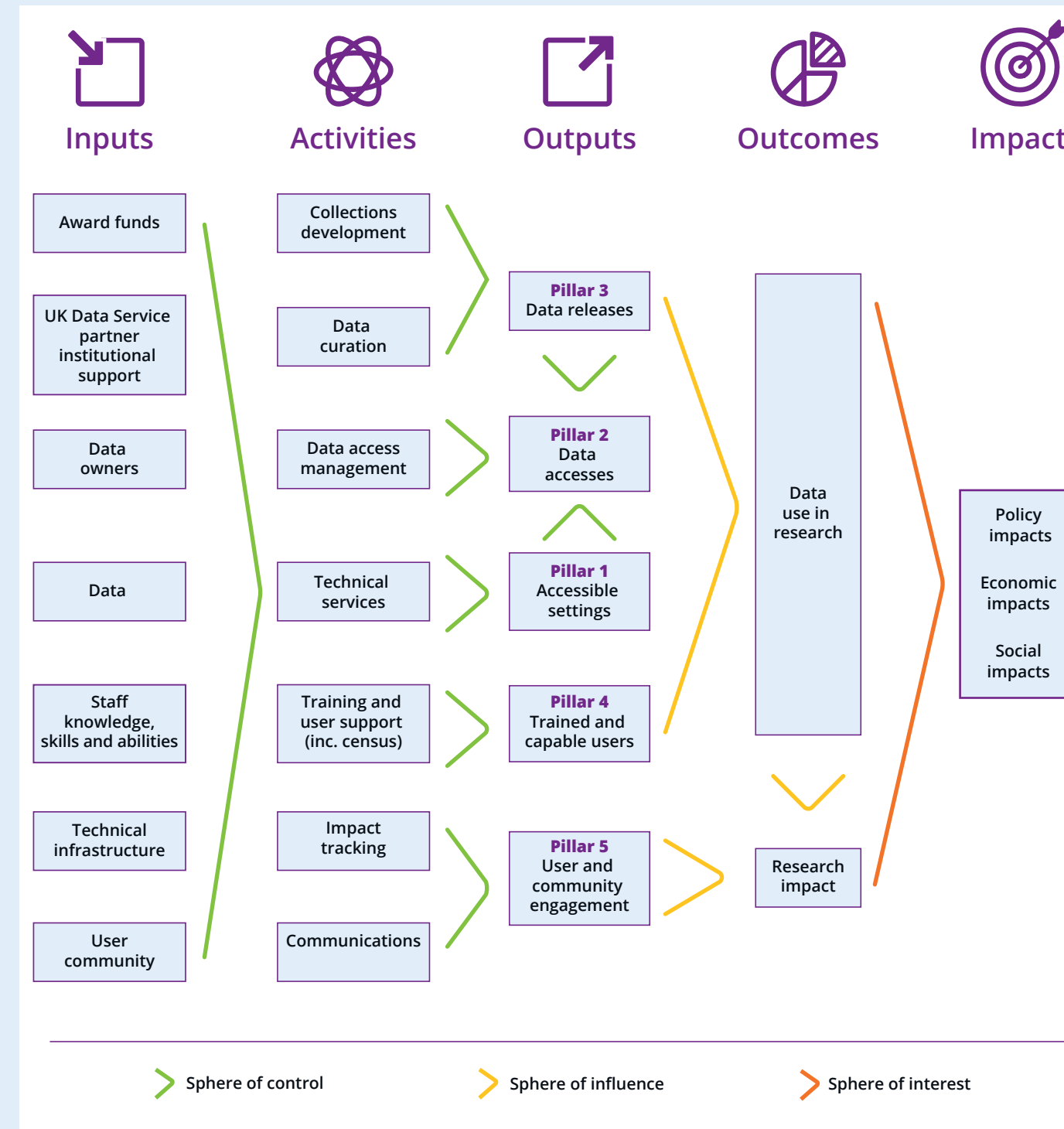**Read the UK Data Service's Strategy 2024–2030**

Theory of change looks at the change we want to achieve in the world and how we can get there.

For the UK Data Service, our ultimate aim is to facilitate impact — whether through policy, economic, or societal change. The theory of change diagram shows how the inputs we receive and the work we do translate into a service that researchers can access and use effectively, enabling research impact and, ultimately, real-world impact.

" Our theory of change is about more than delivering data — it's about creating the environment for research that drives real-world change. By connecting the right resources, skills, and infrastructure, we ensure the data we steward delivers meaningful impact. "

Steve McEachern
Director, UK Data Service

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes	Impact
Award funds	Collections development			
UK Data Service partner institutional support	Data curation	**Pillar 3** Data releases		
Data owners	Data access management	**Pillar 2** Data accesses	Data use in research	Policy impacts
Data	Technical services	**Pillar 1** Accessible settings		Economic impacts
Staff knowledge, skills and abilities	Training and user support (inc. census)	**Pillar 4** Trained and capable users		Social impacts
Technical infrastructure	Impact tracking	**Pillar 5** User and community engagement	Research impact	
User community	Communications			

> Sphere of control   > Sphere of influence   > Sphere of interest

In a rapidly evolving research landscape, robust and accessible infrastructure is essential to support data-driven discovery.

This year, we made significant strides in advancing the technologies and systems that underpin our service — from improving security through Multi-Factor Authentication, to launching new tools for data access and exploration.

Whether reimagining historical datasets or exploring AI-enhanced workflows, our focus remains on building an infrastructure that is responsive, secure, and ready for the next generation of social science research.

14 years of UK Data Service SecureLab

I-CeM launch of new platforms for simpler, smarter census data access

Multi-Factor Authentication

In May 2024, we launched Data Explorer, a new platform which makes it easier to access aggregate data in subset form.

Data Explorer is part of a suite of tools which we use to reformat, manage and disseminate data with the use of SDMX from start to the finish. SDMX is a standard way of describing statistical data and metadata. This allows our data to be better described, to be interchangeable, to have higher quality and therefore be more relevant to our users.

Previously, we had made only international data available in SDMX format, but with the launch of Data Explorer, we started to add census aggregate data. By the end of the year, all univariate and most multivariate data from the 2021 England and Wales census had been made available through Data Explorer. We also piloted access to 1971 census data, releasing it in September 2024 as part of a test phase.

Because both census and international data are now described in SDMX we can search for keywords across data from a range of organisations. For instance, a search for "age" surfaces data from the OECD Economic Outlook, World Bank Development Indicators, three IMF datasets and the UK Census for 1971 and 2021. This adds value for users by offering new opportunities to identify connections between different aggregate datasets.

This year saw the launch of a new, bespoke online platform for accessing Integrated Census Microdata (I-CeM), covering census years from 1851 to 1921. Developed by the UK Data Service Technical Services team, the platform provides a more intuitive and flexible way to explore this rich historical dataset.

I-CeM offers detailed microdata on topics such as age, gender, household structure and composition, occupation, employer, place of work, education, marital status, birthplace, nationality, and more. Now, with the new interface, registered users can search the datasets by year and location, filter variables, and download tailored datasets to suit their specific research needs.

This redesigned platform not only simplifies a complex process but also makes a major historical dataset more accessible to a wider range of users — from demographers and economists to historians and genealogists — supporting deeper and more efficient exploration of how society has changed over time.

" Census data are typically characterised by their volume and detail, and the Data Explorer allows users to find and download the subset of data they want. We are continuing to add to the system, allowing consistent access to data from many decades. "

Oliver Duke-Williams
Service Director,
Census

" Data Explorer is a modern accessible platform for accessing subsetting data, built by partners in the SIS-CC, a collaboration of statistical organisations around the world. We believe making both census and international aggregate data available in a consistent format through the same portal will open up more avenues for data discoverability and interoperability. "
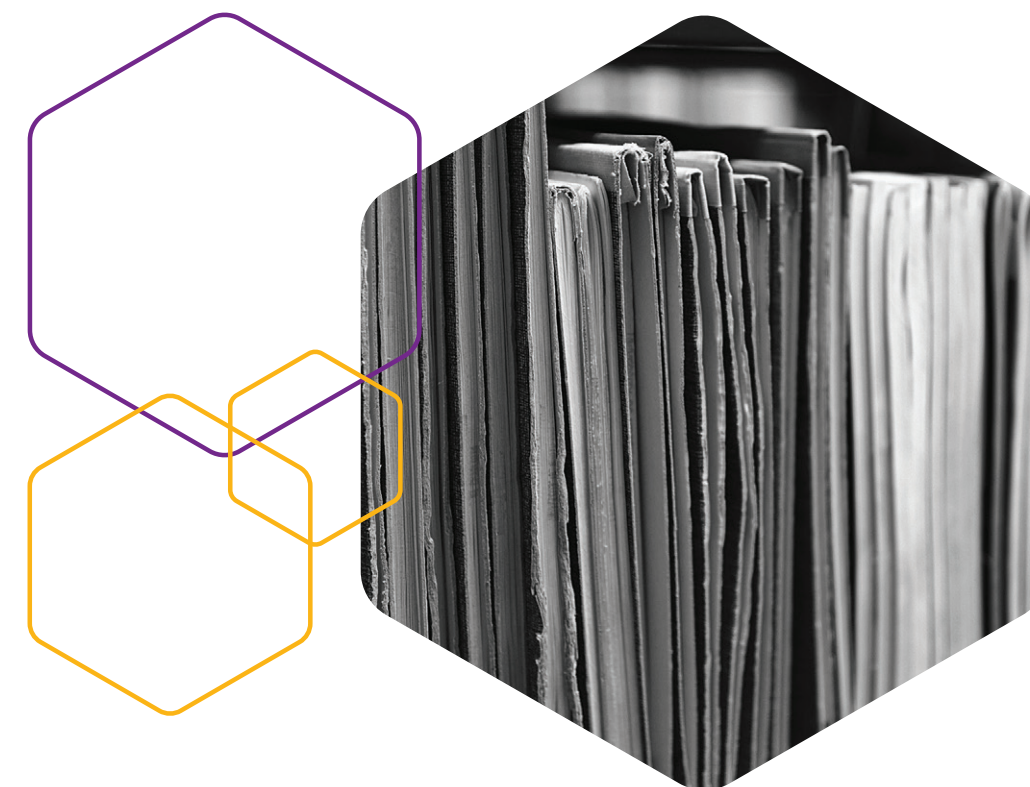
Paul Chau
Data Architect

We continue to invest in smarter, more scalable ways to prepare and deliver data to researchers. One area of active development is the use of AI to automate key parts of the data preparation process — laying the foundation for more dynamic and user-driven access in the future.

A key example of this work is the MetaCurate-ML project. The project is funded by the ESRC Future Data Services program and the EPSRC through the Department of Science Innovation and Technology AI for Science program. It is delivered in collaboration with CLOSER, the Research and Development team of the UK Data Service, the University of Surrey's Computer Science Department, and the Scottish Centre for Social Research (ScotCen).

As part of this project, we also built a new online curation tool that uses Large Language Models (LLMs) to help curators automatically detect sensitive or key variables within datasets. This is a critical step in enabling safer, real-time data subsetting and linking to give researchers greater flexibility and control at the point of access, without compromising on data governance.

In parallel, we are also collaborating with Sikt (Norway's national research data infrastructure) to develop tooling and use cases for DDI-CDI, a standard for describing complex data relationships. The goal is to allow researchers to dynamically link datasets across repository boundaries in real time, while managing disclosure risks effectively.

Together, these innovations reflect our commitment to building a future–ready data infrastructure.

As part of our strategic commitment to data–enabled infrastructure, the UK Data Service continues to invest in the technologies and systems that underpin secure, efficient, and responsible research. This includes upgrading core infrastructure to ensure that data is accessible, interoperable, and protected — especially where it is most sensitive.

One of this year's key priorities under this pillar was strengthening the UK Data Service SecureLab login process. The UKDS SecureLab has provided secure access to highly confidential and detailed research data since 2011. It enables approved researchers to work with datasets that cannot be made available under our End User or Special Licences, with all outputs reviewed by expert staff to maintain strict statistical disclosure controls.

This year, we completed the migration of the majority of UKDS SecureLab users to Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA). MFA adds an extra verification step to the login process, helping to ensure that only authorised individuals can access secure data environments.

By strengthening authentication, MFA reinforces the integrity of SecureLab and supports our wider aim of providing a secure, trusted infrastructure for working with the most sensitive data in our collection.

> " This upgrade was an important step in strengthening the security and reliability of our systems. The migration was implemented smoothly, enhancing protection for researchers and ensuring we can continue to meet the highest standards for secure data access. "
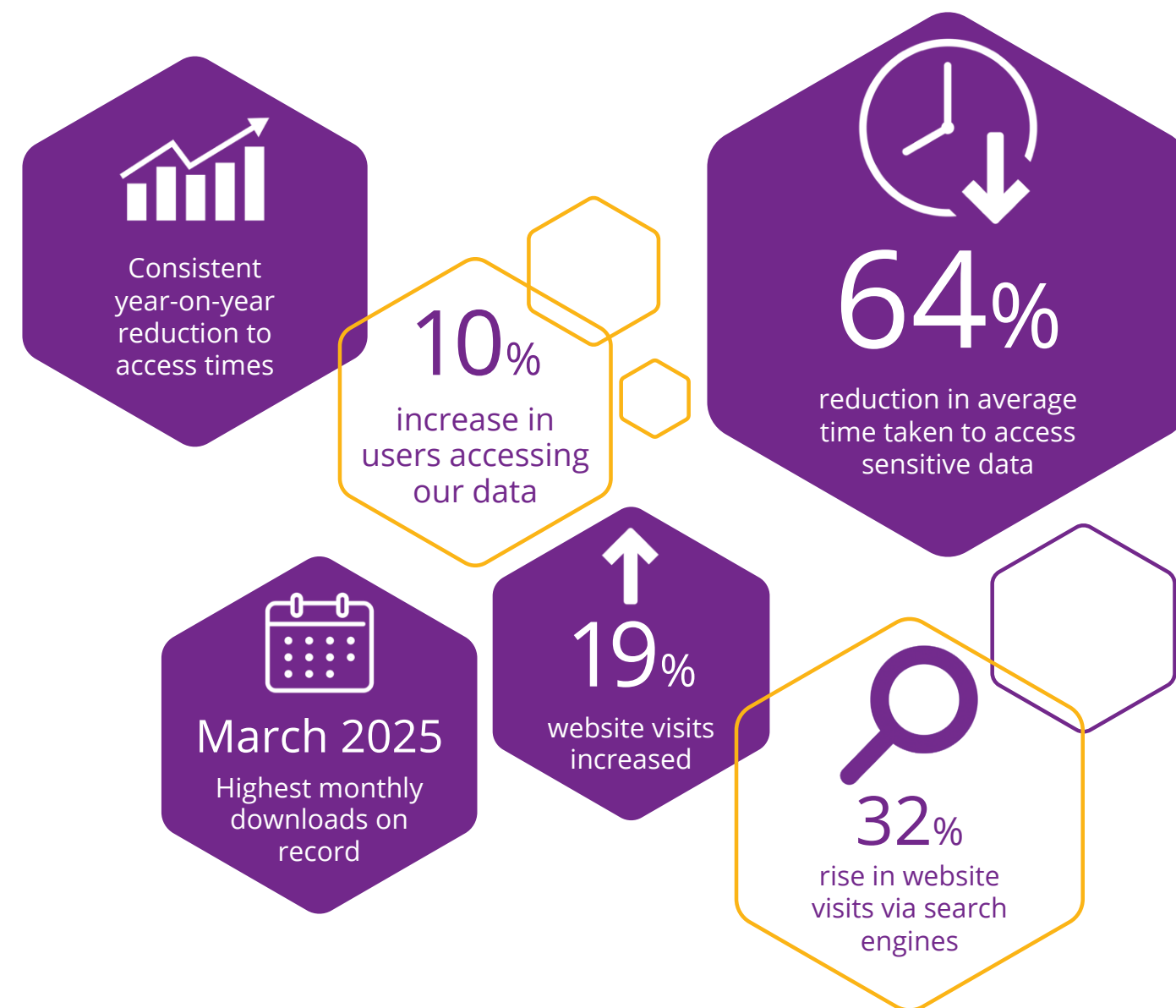>
> **Mike King**
> IT Service Operations Manager

Data quality and trust

A central part of our mission is to ensure researchers have access to high-quality data and a reliable, efficient service experience.

In 2024–25, we made targeted improvements to streamline access, reduce waiting times, and enhance discoverability — delivering meaningful improvements in speed and service. From redesigning access pathways to strengthening our online visibility through Search Engine Optimisation, we've focused on building trust by making high-quality data more accessible, intuitive, and efficient to use.

Consistent year-on-year reduction to access times

10% increase in users accessing our data

64% reduction in average time taken to access sensitive data

March 2025 Highest monthly downloads on record

19% website visits increased

32% rise in website visits via search engines
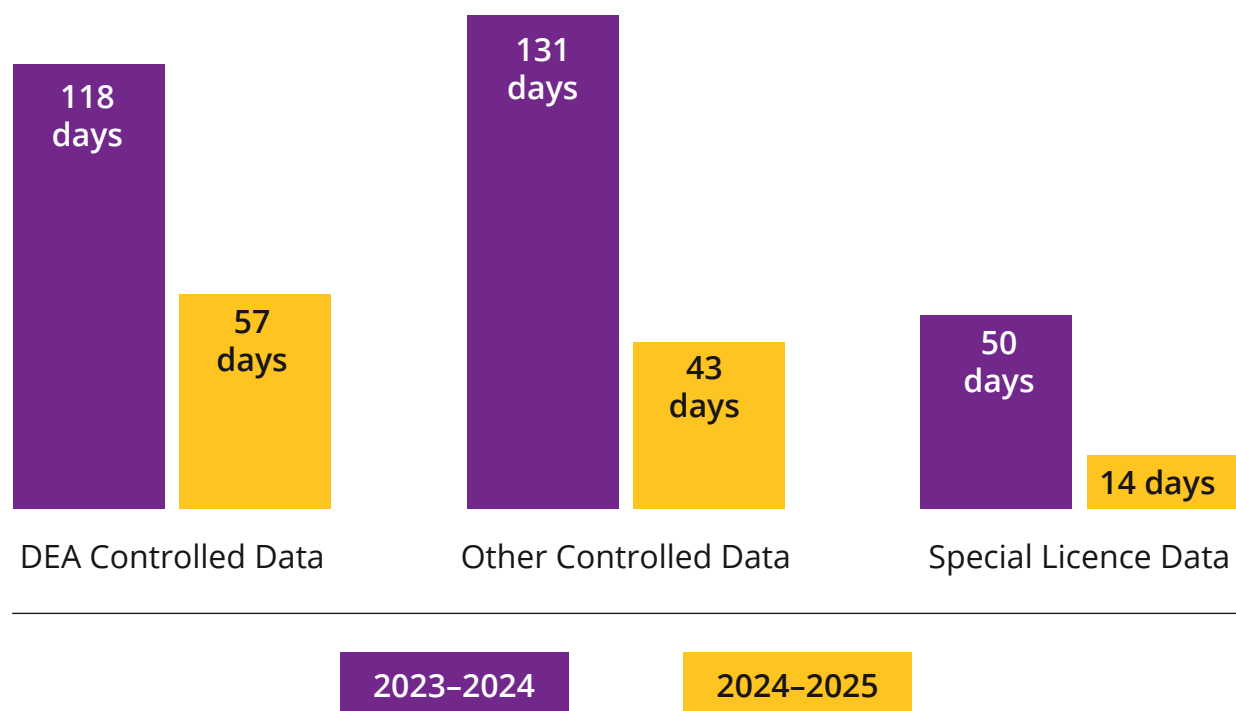
The year marked a significant leap forward in our efforts to make the UK Data Service faster, more efficient, and easier to navigate. As researchers' needs grow more complex and time-sensitive, we continued to streamline data access processes, improve turnaround times, and build a smoother journey from registration to results.

By March 2025, we had reached a five-year high of 54,427 registered users. Data downloads remained steady overall, although March set a record with over 10,000 downloads — the highest monthly total to date. At the same time, the total number of users accessing data rose by around 10% across the year. These trends reflect growing engagement and more targeted data use.

One of our major achievements has been the sustained reduction in the time it takes for users to gain access to our most detailed datasets

|	2023–2024	2024–2025
DEA Controlled Data	118 days	57 days
Other Controlled Data	131 days	43 days
Special Licence Data	50 days	14 days

These improvements are the result of long-term changes to systems and ways of working. We introduced delegated authority, under specific conditions, to process Digital Economy Act project extensions and team additions — cutting wait times to just three working days. UKDS SecureLab's home working application process was also simplified, improving clarity and response times.

In UKDS SecureLab, our remote access environment for our most detailed data, service levels held firm even as demand grew. We processed 145 output releases in the second half of the year — a 16% rise — while keeping the average turnaround time for clean outputs at just two days. A new disclosure control course and updated handbook are now in place to help users avoid common output submission errors that cause delays.

Our commitment to reducing friction for users also led to a detailed mapping of the registration journey. This revealed specific steps for improvement, which are now feeding into the design of a new user management system planned for 2025–26.

" Our vision is to ensure UK Data Service resources are always accessed with ease and efficiency. By working closely with our users, teams, and partners, we've strengthened how we analyse feedback and measure performance, giving us the insight to drive data-informed improvements.

Recent initiatives, from streamlining project change requests to introducing smarter decision tools, are already helping to cut application times. Looking ahead, we're focused on refining user guidance and continuing to remove barriers, ensuring researchers can get to the data they need faster and with greater ease. "
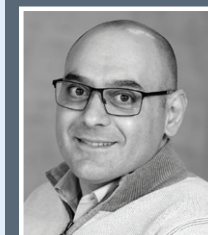
Iraklis Kyritsis
Data Access Team Manager

Service improvements at a glance

Faster project extension approval

UK Data Service now approves eligible DEA project changes directly cutting admin delays.

Simplified home working

Streamlined process for SecureLab users, improving speed and clarity.

Smarter output checks

New training and handbook updates reduce repeated errors and delays.

More flexible SafePods

Researchers can now make notes and benefit from session monitoring — aligning with TRE best practices.

Better onboarding

User journey mapping underway to inform a new, improved registration system.

As the main gateway to our data, training, and support, the UK Data Service website is a vital tool, for our users and for us. Whether searching for data, guidance, or training materials, users rely on being able to find what they need quickly. To improve that experience, the UK Data Service ran a targeted search engine optimisation (SEO) campaign that significantly enhanced both external discoverability and internal search performance.

The results were clear: compared to the same period last year, website visits increased by 19%, page impressions by 12%, and downloads by 6%. Importantly, visits arriving through search engines rose by 32%.

This rise in organic traffic translated into better engagement with our most used resources, including the Find data, Help, Homepage, and Learning Hub pages. It also improved performance of our internal site search, making results more relevant and responsive for users.

By strengthening how people discover content — whether they're visiting us for the first time or returning for something specific — our SEO work has directly contributed to a smoother, faster, and more intuitive user experience.

"This year's targeted search engine optimisation campaign aimed to get things right at the very first step, when people are looking for our service. The campaign has delivered outstanding results, significantly enhancing our digital visibility and engagement. Website visits rose by 19%, and traffic arriving via search engines surged by 32% compared to the same period last year. "

Jo Webb
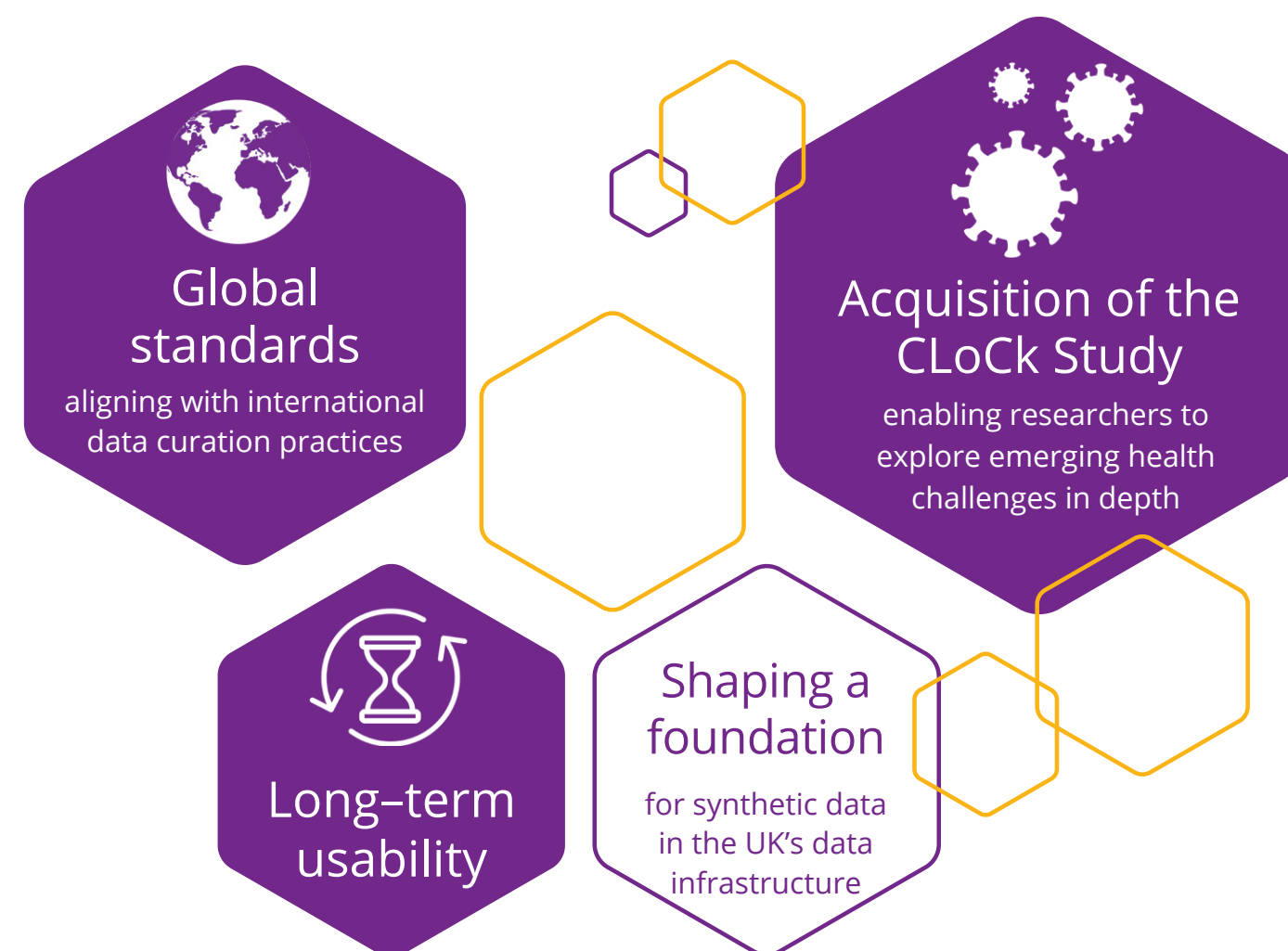Associate Director Business Strategy, Operations and Communications

Data curation and active preservation

Rich, well-curated, and future-ready data are the backbone of impactful research.

This year, we strengthened our commitment to active preservation by working closely with data producers, aligning with global curation standards, enriching documentation, and ensuring the long-term usability of data. Our efforts focused on acquiring high-value studies like CLoCk , adopting international best curation practices and exploring the role of synthetic data. This not only meets today's needs but supports the demands of tomorrow's researchers and technologies.

Global standards
aligning with international data curation practices

Acquisition of the CLoCk Study
enabling researchers to explore emerging health challenges in depth

Long–term usability

Shaping a foundation
for synthetic data in the UK's data infrastructure

We are committed to working closely with data producers to ensure the datasets we hold are well documented, carefully managed, and prepared for long-term use. A key part of this work is aligning our curation practices not only with internal standards, but with internationally recognised approaches.

This year, we continued our work to align the UK Data Service's curation procedures with the CURATE(D) workflow, developed by the Data Curation Network (DCN). CURATE(D) is a widely adopted framework that promotes high standards for making data ethical, reusable, and understandable — principles that underpin open research and the FAIR data agenda.

Using the CURATE(D) workflow as a reference point helps strengthen the consistency of our curation processes and improves interoperability between UK Data Service-curated data and other international repositories. For users, this means more transparent and standardised data preparation, supporting confident reuse across research communities.

Alongside this practical alignment, we remain actively engaged with the Data Curation Network, an international community of data repositories working to build a more open and ethical data ecosystem. Through this engagement, we contribute to the development of shared best practices, take part in professional development activities, and help ensure that our curation work continues to meet the evolving needs of researchers and emerging technologies.
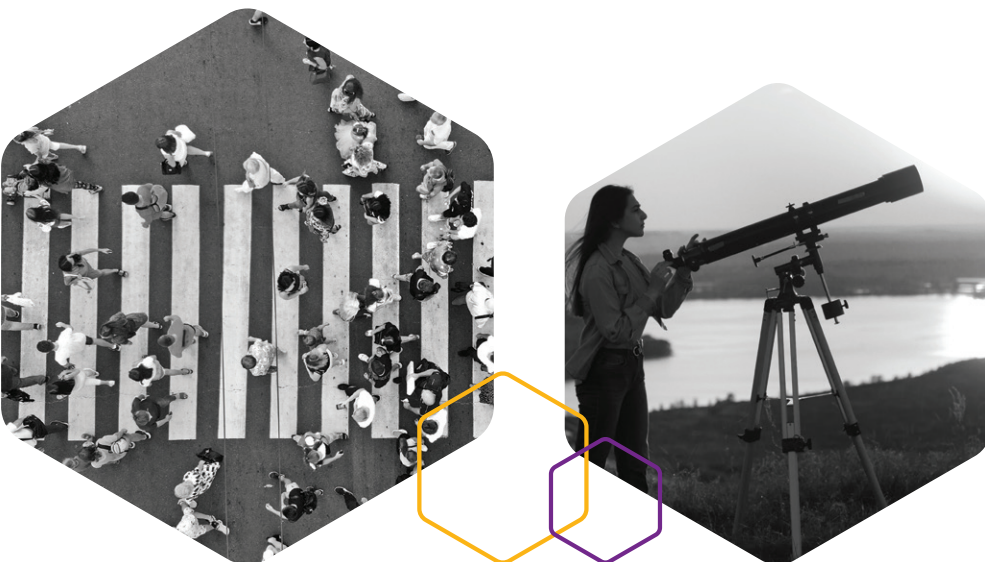
As part of our commitment to enriching and future-proofing the UK's research data, we were pleased to secure the Long COVID in Children and Young People (CLoCk) Study for long-term preservation and access. This national cohort study is the world's largest longitudinal research project on Long COVID in children, offering a critical new resource for understanding the long-term effects of the pandemic.

Funded by National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), the CLoCk study provides one of the first large-scale, detailed datasets focused on how COVID-19 affects children and young people over time. By comparing those who tested positive with test-negative controls, the study helps define the clinical profile and prevalence of Long COVID in this demographic.

The dataset is not only rich in scope and quality, but also timely and highly relevant. Its inclusion in the UK Data Service enables researchers to explore emerging health challenges in depth, and to inform public health policies, treatment strategies, and support services for young people affected by Long COVID.

A critical new resource for understanding the long-term effects of the pandemic

This acquisition also reflects our strategic aim to curate and actively preserve data that can make a lasting contribution to pressing social and health research. The careful management and long-term accessibility of the CLoCk study will ensure that this important research continues to serve the public good for years to come.

Balancing the data scales

ESRC, through the UKRI Digital Research Infrastructure Fund and Administrative Data Research UK (ADR UK), launched a funding initiative to gather insights on synthetic data across three important stakeholder groups. The funding supported three interrelated projects, each tailored to explore synthetic data from distinct viewpoints:

Researchers: Investigating the impact of accessible synthetic data on research methodologies and outcomes.

Data owners and Trusted Research Environments (TREs): Examining the benefits, costs, and logistics involved in providing synthetic data.

The public: Understanding public perceptions and attitudes towards synthetic data usage.

Each of the three funded projects explored a different perspective, together forming a foundation for strategic thinking on how synthetic data might be scaled responsibly.

The UK Data Service successfully secured funding for the second project of the initiative, focusing on data owners and TREs.

Running from April 2024 to April 2025, the UK Data Service-led project, Balancing the data scales, used a mixed-methods approach to assess three core areas:

Costs: What does it take to produce and maintain low-fidelity synthetic data?

Models: How do different sharing and curation models affect efficiency and access?

Efficiencies: Can synthetic data reduce pressure on secure environments and increase researcher uptake?

Led by Principal Investigator Cristina Magder, with Co-Investigators Maureen Haaker, Jools Kasmire, and Hina Zahid, and researcher Melissa Ogwayo, the project built a layered evidence base to support the sustainable integration of synthetic data into the UK's data infrastructure.

Turning evidence into action: Recommendations and tools

One of the most valuable outputs of the project was a set of sequenced recommendations designed to support the responsible and scalable use of synthetic data in research. These emerged from four detailed work packages and were compiled into a publicly available open-access report on Zenodo.

The project also delivered tangible resources for the wider community:

Practical tools and guidance: A minimal documentation standard for synthetic data collections was developed to support consistent minimal documentation for synthetic datasets. This guidance was published openly to inform practice across data owners, data providers and TREs.

Knowledge exchange and training: The team co-organised a hands-on workshop with the Ministry of Justice: From Discovery to Analysis, showcasing the use of synthetic data from the Data First linked criminal justice collection. The project also supported the Population Research UK (PRUK) initiative, "Skills Development for Managing Longitudinal Data for Sharing," by co-organising the Introduction to Synthetic Data for Longitudinal Data Managers event.

Global contribution

Beyond UK-focused research, the project team contributed to international dialogue on synthetic data. As members of a working group on terminology and best practice, they helped produce a community-driven statement on synthetic data principles, published on Zenodo and available for reuse by researchers and institutions worldwide.

Through this work, the UK Data Service is not only exploring the practicalities of synthetic data, but helping to shape the language, standards, and tools that will guide its use in years to come.

A final, open-access report including findings and sequenced recommendations is published via Zenodo.

250+

downloads on Zenodo

The role of synthetic data in research

The growing discourse around synthetic data underscores its potential not only in addressing data challenges in a fast-paced changing landscape but for fostering innovation and accelerating advancements in data analytics and artificial intelligence. From optimising data sharing and utility, to sustaining and promoting reproducibility to mitigating disclosure, synthetic data has emerged as a solution to various complexities of the data ecosystem.

Fostering innovation and accelerating advancements in data analytics and artificial intelligence

The UK Data Service is focused on enriching and future-proofing data and metadata — ensuring they are not only preserved but optimised for future use. This includes exploring technologies that support machine actionability, open access, and ethical reuse, such as synthetic data. As the conversation around synthetic data grows, so too does the need for clear evidence on its practical costs, benefits, and uses.

Synthetic data must serve people

" At the heart of this project, there was a simple idea: synthetic data must serve people. That means making it trustworthy, useful, and responsibly managed through collaboration, clarity, and care.

That's why our project outlined four key recommendations to guide its responsible and scalable use. We are especially grateful to the data owners, TRE professionals, and partner organisations who generously shared their insights, and to our funders for making this work possible. "

Cristina Magder
Data Collections Development Manager

Final report about project [recommendations](#)

To discuss this project, contact us at
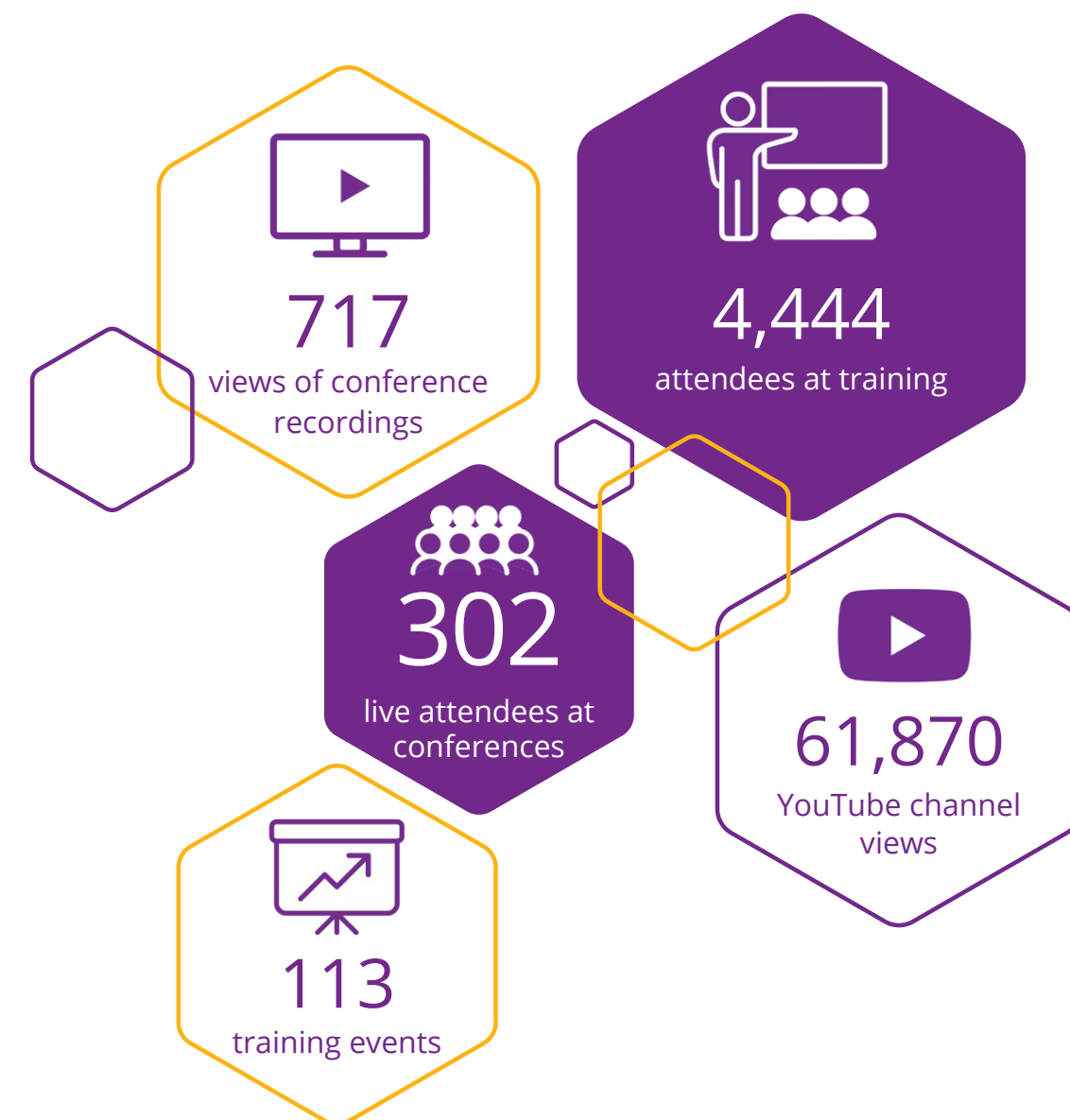datasharing@ukdataservice.ac.uk

Data literacy and capacity

Building confidence, competence, and curiosity around data is essential for a thriving research community.

This year, we continued to invest in developing data skills across the research community, supporting both foundational learning and emerging needs in an evolving data landscape. From launching a sector-wide framework for data skills to delivering practical training in research data management and longitudinal data sharing, our work continues to support both foundational learning and future-focused development.

We also strengthened our partnerships with Doctoral Training Partnerships to help early career researchers build lasting, impactful data practices.

717
views of conference recordings

4,444
attendees at training

302
live attendees at conferences

61,870
YouTube channel views

113
training events

The UK Data Service Data Skills Framework (DSF) is our strategic response to a fast-changing data landscape. Developed through extensive research, consultation, and collaboration, the DSF sets out the essential skills needed to work with the kinds of data at the heart of the UK Data Service collection — large-scale surveys, census data, and macro-level aggregate data.

Behind the framework is 18 months of work led by the UK Data Service Training and User Support Directorate, drawing on the expertise of 16 contributors from across the UK Data Service and its partner institutions. The DSF is designed by Dr Vanessa Higgins, Professor Debora Price, and Dr Sarah King-Hele of the UK Data Service. Their work built on national and international consultations, government policy reviews, employer needs, academic literature, and leading data skills models. The final result is a structured, high-level framework covering 12 broad skill domains, ranging from foundational data literacy and research data management to coding, reproducibility, and using AI for analysis.

The DSF is more than a guide for the UK Data Service's own training offer. It is a flexible and evolving tool designed to support the wider training ecosystem — including academic institutions, government agencies, data services and private sector entities. It helps identify gaps, align training priorities, and build more coherent and collaborative pathways to data expertise.

For researchers, the benefit is clear: a forward-thinking, adaptable blueprint that not only supports their learning today, but anticipates the challenges of tomorrow. Whether developing foundational skills or exploring advanced techniques like machine learning and data linkage, the DSF provides structure, clarity, and direction in an increasingly complex data environment.

Fostering innovation and accelerating advancements in data analytics and artificial intelligence

Our aspiration is that the UK Data Service Data Skills Framework becomes a cornerstone in building a skilled, confident data analytics community — one that drives innovation and deepens understanding across the social sciences. It represents a forward-looking, strategic approach to education and capacity-building, ensuring that data skills training continues to evolve and stay relevant in a rapidly changing, data-driven world.

Bringing clarity to a complex landscape

" The UK Data Service Data Skills Framework is a significant step in strengthening confidence and capability in using quantitative social science data. It brings clarity to a complex landscape and has been widely welcomed across sectors. By supporting both traditional and emerging data skills, it helps individuals and organisations navigate an increasingly diverse data environment. "

Vanessa Higgins
Service Director, Training and User Support

Over the past 18 months, the UK Data Service has led the "Skills Development for Managing Longitudinal Data for Sharing" project, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the Medical Research Council (MRC) under the Population Research UK (PRUK) initiative. This initiative aimed to empower researchers and data managers with the skills necessary to effectively share longitudinal population study (LPS) data.

The project began by assessing existing training materials, anticipating significant adaptations would be needed for biomedical contexts. However, consultations with LPS data managers and stakeholders revealed more similarities than differences across disciplines. This insight guided the co-design of training resources addressing key areas such as data cleaning, formatting, documentation, metadata management, and anonymisation.

To ensure broad accessibility, a comprehensive suite of training materials — including guidance documents, slides, recordings, and a training dataset — was developed and made freely available on Zenodo under a Creative Commons license. The training materials have been downloaded around 500 times. Additionally, "train-the-trainer" versions were created to facilitate consistent delivery across various organisations and have also been downloaded around 500 times.

The project's impact has been significant, with over 300 participants from 6 continents engaging in the training workshops. Feedback highlighted the resources' value, with participants noting their utility for ongoing reference and internal training initiatives.

The approaches developed through this project are set to enhance the UK Data Service's broader efforts in data acquisition, curation, and dissemination, supporting a global community of researchers.

PRUK UKDS: Introductory Research Data Management Course — Enhancing Longitudinal Data Sharing

PRUK UKDS: Introductory Research Data Management Course — Enhancing Longitudinal Data Sharing — Train the Trainer Materials

PRUK UKDS: Introduction to Synthetic Data for Longitudinal Data Managers Workshop

Equipping researchers at the start of their careers with strong data skills is central to our mission of building national capacity in data use. One key initiative is our collaboration with three ESRC Doctoral Training Partnerships (DTPs) — White Rose, Midlands, and the Scottish Graduate School to create an asynchronous online course in data skills for postgraduate students.

This year, the project moved into its next phase. White Rose DTP funded the work to refine the course using feedback from student focus groups. The updated course is now fully embedded into the core training programmes of all three DTPs.

To ensure the training continues to meet students' needs, we are actively tracking usage and engagement and holding regular progress meetings. The feedback-driven approach allows us to make ongoing improvements to content and delivery.

Flexible, relevant training that helps the next generation of researchers manage and use data with confidence

Looking ahead, we will present the course and its development journey at the ESRC DTP network meeting. This marks an exciting step toward expanding access to the training across all ESRC-funded DTPs. Our focus remains on building flexible, relevant training that helps the next generation of researchers manage and use data with confidence.

Each year, the UK Data Service Dissertation Award recognises outstanding undergraduate research that showcases the power and potential of archived data. The winning entries are awarded a prize of £300. In 2024, we were once again inspired by the creativity, rigour, and impact of the submissions — each drawing on datasets accessed through the UK Data Service to explore timely and socially relevant questions.

This year's winners represent a diverse set of topics and institutions, but all share a strong commitment to evidence-based inquiry:

Emma Chaplin, University of Cambridge
Emma's dissertation investigated how household spending changes when households receive free school meals.

Gabriela Mihaylova, University of Leeds
Gabriela's dissertation examined the 15-minute city concept.

James Marris, University of Durham
James's dissertation explored the regressivity of carbon taxes, focusing on the impact of the Carbon Price Floor (CPF) introduced in April 2013.

These students exemplify the next generation of researchers using data to ask important questions and drive meaningful change. Through this annual award, we continue to celebrate emerging talent and reinforce our commitment to supporting data-driven social science at every stage of the research journey.

UK Data Service Dissertation Award 2024

Our annual user conferences are designed to do more than share updates — they bring data users and producers together to exchange knowledge, showcase impactful research, and strengthen the links that drive evidence-based decision-making. These events are a key part of our commitment to supporting an engaged and informed research community.

This year, we hosted four user conferences in collaboration with key partners:

The Labour Force and Annual Population Surveys User Conference (London), held in partnership with the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

The Health Studies User Conference (London), co-organised with UCL and the National Centre for Social Research, featuring major surveys such as Understanding Society, the Health Survey for England, and the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing.

The Family Finance Surveys User Conference (Online), in collaboration with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

Crime Surveys User Conference (London), in collaboration with the Office for National Statistics (ONS), Scottish Government and Home Office.

We saw strong engagement across all four events — both in person and online — highlighting the value of bringing the data community together. We remain committed to continuing these conferences as vital spaces for knowledge exchange, collaboration, and supporting impactful research.

	Event	
48	Labour Force and Annual Population Surveys User Conference **May 23 2024**	179
91	Health Studies User Conference **Jul 1 2024**	368
112	Family Finance Surveys User Conference **Jul 10 2024**	123
51	Crime Surveys User Conference **Mar 5 2025**	47

Total attendees

302 in total

Number of recording views this year

717 in total

Demonstrating the value of research data — and ensuring it reaches those best placed to use it — is central to our mission.

At the UK Data Service, impact is not just a goal — it's at the core of how we define success. Our theory of change starts with the inputs we receive and the services we deliver, but it goes far beyond data access alone. It maps a pathway from what we do — curating, managing, and enabling access to high-quality data — toward a much broader ambition: supporting research that leads to meaningful change.

We see our role as a catalyst, facilitating the use of data in research that influences policy, society, and the economy. By helping researchers use data effectively, we contribute to a chain of value that leads to research impact, and ultimately, to real-world outcomes that improve lives. This long-view approach to impact underpins our strategy and shapes the way we design, deliver, and evaluate our work.

" We want to know that our data makes a difference in the world. We do this by creating narratives which evidence and promote the impact of the UK Data Service and its data. "

Finn Dymond-Green
Service Director, Impact

10

Celebrating 10th anniversary
of our Data Impact blog, **268,000** pageviews in 10 years

Fifth cohort
of Data Impact Fellows welcomed

Over 2000 followers
~85,000 impressions, **~1,500** reactions on LinkedIn

200
participants at our Poverty in Data event

Launched our presence on **Bluesky** to expand engagement

Highlights from our three day impact event, Poverty in Data

In April 2024, we hosted a Data Impact event, "Poverty in Data." The three-day event attracted over 200 participants and provided a space to explore how data underpins research into poverty and deprivation — and how that research can influence policy and practice for those affected by it.

The event opened with a workshop for Early Career Researchers in Manchester, where over 20 participants gathered for a day of exchange and reflection. A keynote by Professor Donald Hirsch set the tone, prompting thoughtful discussion on the challenges and responsibilities of poverty research. Former UK Data Service Impact Fellows joined a panel to share their experiences, followed by roundtables and informal networking.

The second day was titled "Perspectives on Poverty," and consisted of a pre-recorded webinar to broaden participation. Contributors included Christina Adane, a campaigner at the intersection of social justice and youth culture; Professor Nissa Finney, who introduced the Evidence for Equality National Survey (EVENS) dataset exploring inequalities among ethnic and religious minorities; and grassroots collaborators from Social Justice Chester and the West Cheshire Community Inspirers, who presented a powerful co-production project with individuals who have lived experience of poverty.

The final session brought together key people from charities and organisations working in the area of poverty relief for a live webinar and Q&A, hosted by our Deputy Director, Professor Debora Price. The panellists were:

Helen Barnard, The Trussell Trust

Ed Davies, The Centre for Social Justice

Lalitha Try, Resolution Foundation

Peter Matejic, The Joseph Rowntree Foundation

Each shared insights on how data informs their work and what gaps remain in the current landscape. Their reflections reinforced the value of robust evidence and collaborative dialogue in shaping meaningful responses to poverty.

Through events like this, the UK Data Service continues to advocate for the power of data not just to analyse, but to act. The stories, questions, and collaborations sparked during "Poverty in Data" will inform our future work, as we continue to connect people, evidence, and impact.

Poverty in Data: Understanding, engaging, and acting through evidence

At the UK Data Service, we provide access to a wide range of datasets that underpin research into poverty and social disadvantage. From household surveys and census data, to labour market and benefits records, our holdings allow researchers to explore poverty at national, regional, and local levels — and to ask questions that are grounded in evidence.

We also work with research organisations, policymakers, and advocacy groups to ensure that data are not just available but actively used to shape impact. Through our advocacy and outreach work, we champion the use of research data as a driver of meaningful change, ensuring that insights reach those in a position to act and highlighting where data gaps still exist. There is more to be done, and we remain committed to supporting work that both advances understanding and gives voice to those most affected.

Poverty in Data impact theme — As part of our evolving approach to impact, we bring together examples of how our data is driving real-world change.

Key datasets — Find our poverty related datasets.

Data Impact Fellows — Find out more about our Data Impact Fellows working in the area of poverty.

The Data Impact Fellows scheme is a key UK Data Service initiative that supports Early Career Researchers in academia and the charity sector who are exploring how data can create real-world change. Fellows receive a bursary to fund impact-related activities and are given opportunities to connect with peers, develop their ideas, and reflect on the role of data in shaping research, policy, and public understanding.

To support them in developing their voice and approaches to engaging others in their research, they contribute to the Data Impact blog. The scheme has supported a diverse group of researchers across disciplines, all united by their use of UK Data Service datasets and a shared commitment to impactful, data-driven work.

In 2025, we welcomed our fifth cohort of Data Impact Fellows, introducing a thematic focus on data in two areas:

- children and young people
- mental health and wellbeing.

Applicants were asked to show how their research aligned with one or both areas.

Introducing the fifth cohort of Data Impact Fellows:

Alice Varley, PhD student at the University of Liverpool (in partnership with Mersey Care NHS Foundation Trust), is investigating mental health inequalities, focusing on how spatial, demographic, and socioeconomic factors shape disparities and service outcomes.

Anastasia Fadeeva, Research Fellow at City St George's, University of London, explores the mental health consequences of violence and abuse in older populations using health surveys and administrative data.

Kyle Genner, lecturer and researcher at Teesside University, examines the link between deprivation and talent development in sport, challenging narratives around socio-economic status and athletic opportunity.

Michaela Pawley, final-year PhD researcher at the University of Warwick, studies the longitudinal relationship between adolescent sleep and self-harm, drawing on UK and US cohort data to inform practice and policy.

Roxana Pollack, doctoral candidate at the University of Glasgow, researches how job quality affects mental health and wellbeing during transitions from unemployment, using causal epidemiology and microsimulation.

Since selection, the Fellows have come together twice — first at an in-person meeting in Birmingham in January, where they shared their work and engaged in discussions about the meaning of research impact, and again online in March to discuss the features and benefits of the different datasets they use in their work.

Fellows have used their funding to attend conferences and related engagement activities during the year and have contributed to the Data Impact blog.

Data Impact Fellows continue to work with us after their official fellowship period. Several former Data Impact Fellows joined the afternoon panel at the Poverty in Data event, sharing experiences, challenges and opportunities for those earlier in their career.

The Data Impact Fellows scheme continues to be an important part of our advocacy work, building capacity among Early Career Researchers and supporting a growing network of people who are using data to make a difference.

" The Data Impact Fellows scheme is fundamental to the UK Data Service supporting the development of new and innovative approaches to engagement and impact among Early Career Researchers. Across five cohorts, we have seen Fellows move on to a range of positions in academia, charities and the civil service, taking what they've learned about impact into new arenas. "

Finn Dymond-Green
Service Director, Impact

2025 marks 10 years since the launch of the UK Data Service's Data Impact blog, created to highlight how data — along with the infrastructure and services that support it — can drive real change in research, policy, and society.

From the start, the blog's mission has been clear: to demonstrate the impact and benefit of the UK Data Service, showcase the use and significance of use of the data we hold, and act as a platform to promote best practice in data service infrastructure.

Over the past decade, the blog has evolved into a valued space for sharing experience, sparking debate, and connecting the wider data impact community. It features voices from researchers, data professionals, and policy influencers, offering insight into data-driven projects across sectors.

As we look to the next 10 years, the blog remains central to our commitment to advocacy and outreach, helping to ensure that the story of data impact continues to grow and reach new audiences.

Looking forward

As we complete the first year of our new funding cycle and the launch of our 2024–2030 strategy, we reflect with a strong sense of progress and purpose.

This year has laid solid foundations for what we aim to achieve over the next five years — delivering an ambitious and forward-looking agenda to support social science research and evidence-based policy-making.

Over 2024–25, meaningful progress has been made across all five strategic pillars. We are encouraged by the momentum generated in this first year. Our teams, partners, and user community have embraced our new strategy.

From strengthening our infrastructure and enhancing data quality and preservation, to expanding skills, amplifying impact, and fostering greater trust in data use — we have begun turning this vision into reality.

An ambitious and forward-looking agenda to support social science research and evidence-based policy-making.

Looking ahead, we remain committed to strengthening our role as a trusted, responsive, and innovative data service. By embedding user experience thinking and focusing on user journeys, we aim to better serve the evolving needs of our community. We are also investing in our teams — enhancing skills and strengthening training to keep pace with new demands. We continue to evolve as a vital part of national and global research infrastructure, helping to shape a more informed, equitable, and data-enabled future.

Turning strategy into action

" We have developed a clear delivery plan to guide how we turn our strategy into action throughout this funding period. It's been encouraging to see that plan come to life in this first year. We're making real progress against what we set out to achieve, and we remain focused on delivering what we promised — building a service that meets the needs of our users and the ambitions of this award period. "

John Sanderson
Deputy Director, UK Data Service

Host organisations and expertise

UK Data Archive — University of Essex: Lead partner of the UK Data Service. The UK Data Archive is curator of the largest collection of digital social science data in the United Kingdom. Founded in 1967, the Archive is an acknowledged centre of expertise in the areas of acquiring, curating, preserving and providing access to data. In 2010 it became the first academic department in a UK university to earn ISO27001 certification, an international standard of information security. In 2020 it was accredited to continue providing controlled access to secure research data under the Digital Economy Act 2017, and gained international certification from CoreTrustSeal as a trusted digital repository.

Cathie Marsh Institute for Social Research — University of Manchester: The Cathie Marsh Institute for Social Research (CMI) is a centre of research excellence, specialising in the application of advanced quantitative methods in an interdisciplinary social science context. CMI is named after Cathie Marsh who founded the Census Microdata Unit in 1993.

Jisc: Jisc is a registered charity and champions the use of digital technologies in UK education and research. UK Data Service staff at Jisc provide access to aggregate statistics from the 1971 to 2021–2022 UK censuses, as well as international data from intergovernmental organisations such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and OECD. The UK Data Service Impact team is based at Jisc.
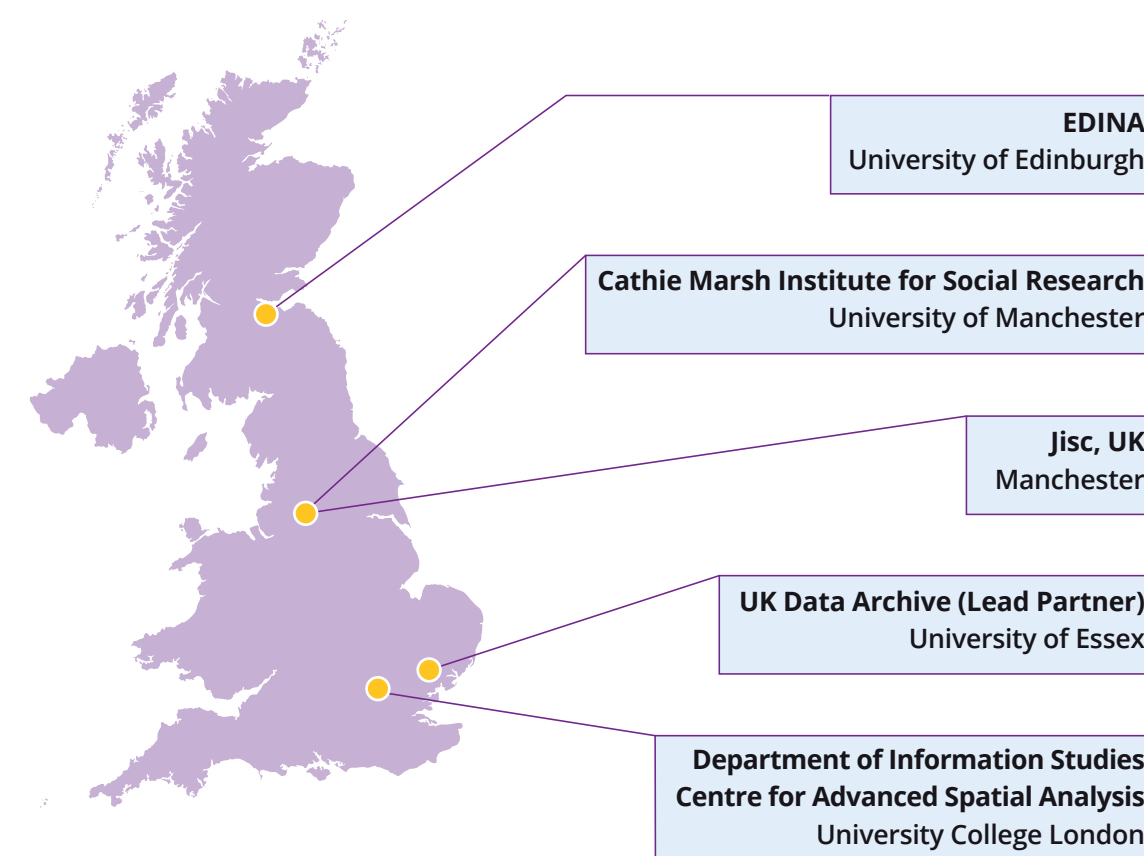
Department of Information Studies — University College London: The UCL Department of Information Studies is an international centre for knowledge creation and transfer in the fields of librarianship, archives and records management, publishing, information science and digital humanities. The department brings together academics and practitioners in these fields, with research aiming to develop the understanding and insights needed to shape the emerging information environment, while elucidating and building on the historical developments that have created this environment.

Centre for Advanced Spatial Analysis — University College London: The UCL Centre for Advanced Spatial Analysis (CASA) is one of the leading forces in the science of cities, generating new knowledge and insights for use in city planning, policy and design, and drawing on the latest geospatial methods and ideas in computer-based visualisation and modelling. CASA is part of The Bartlett, UCL's global faculty of the built environment.

EDINA — University of Edinburgh: EDINA is a national academic data centre operating since 1995. It is designed by Jisc to support the activities of universities, colleges and research institutes across the UK. Its mission is to develop and deliver cost effective shared services and infrastructure for research and education, founded on innovation, research and evidence-based knowledge. EDINA also continues to act as the ESRC specialist geography unit for the census, supporting UK Data Service users in accessing and using the geography outputs of the 2021–2022 and previous censuses.

EDINA
University of Edinburgh

Cathie Marsh Institute for Social Research
University of Manchester

Jisc, UK
Manchester

UK Data Archive (Lead Partner)
University of Essex

Department of Information Studies
Centre for Advanced Spatial Analysis
University College London

UK Data Service

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