

Beyond 10,000: Shaping the future of research data



Annual Report

1 April 2025 – 31 March 2026

The UK Data Service

What we do and why it matters

The UK Data Service is the principal repository for economic, population and social research data in the UK. As hosts of the largest trusted digital archive of its kind, our expertise in the collection, preservation and dissemination of quality data is the culmination of nearly 60 years of sustained investment by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) in the UK's research data infrastructure.

Our work supports researchers, data producers, policymakers and wider organisations that rely on high-quality data to understand society and inform decisions. By making data easier to find, access and use, we turn it into evidence that supports research, public services and real-world impact.

Behind every dataset is careful work to prepare it for long-term use. We work with data producers to improve documentation, enrich metadata, manage appropriate access conditions and support good data management practice. Through curation, active preservation, training and specialist support, we ensure data remains discoverable, understandable, trusted and useful, both now and in the future.





We continue to invest in modern technologies and better systems that improve how researchers access data. From enhanced catalogues and secure access services to new digital tools and platforms, our focus is on creating a smoother and more efficient user experience.

Alongside this, we invest in building data skills and confidence across the research community through training, guidance and specialist support. We support users at every stage of their research journey – from students and Early Career Researchers to experienced analysts working with complex secure data. This helps them develop the knowledge and capability to access, understand and use data effectively, responsibly and with impact.

We work to understand how data is used and the difference it makes, helping to demonstrate the impact of research on policy, public services and people's lives.

By connecting data producers, researchers and decision makers, we turn data into evidence that drives real-world change.

This annual report reflects our progress over the period 1 April 2025 – 31 March 2026 and how we continue to strengthen the systems, partnerships and services that make high-quality data accessible and impactful. It shows how we're delivering on our strategic vision to support research that informs policy and improves lives.



“Our strategy has to encompass ways of connecting data, making data more standardised and interoperable, and allowing us to bring some of these very important sources of information together.”



Debora Price
Co-Investigator
and Deputy Director,
UK Data Service



[Click to read more
about our strategy](#)



[Click to watch the video
about the UK Data Service](#)

Contents

Welcome	5
Annual statistics	7
10,000 datasets: a national resource in action	8
The new data catalogue: building for the next 10,000	17
Strategic pillars	
Pillar 1: Data-enabled infrastructure	21
Pillar 2: Data quality and trust	30
Pillar 3: Data curation and active preservation	37
Pillar 4: Data literacy and capacity	41
Pillar 5: Advocacy and outreach	48
Building partnerships for a stronger data ecosystem	53
Future projects	55
Future Data Services: towards a more connected data landscape	57
Looking ahead	59
Host organisations and expertise	61



Welcome

to the UK Data Service Annual Report
for 1 April 2025 – 31 March 2026

This year marked an important milestone for the UK Data Service. Our collection grew beyond 10,000 datasets, reflecting nearly six decades of stewardship, collaboration and investment in economic, population and social research data. We also launched our new data catalogue, creating a stronger and more user-focused gateway to this nationally important resource.

Together, these achievements represent more than growth in scale. They demonstrate our continued commitment to making data easier to discover, understand, access and reuse. Interoperability underpins this direction, connecting improvements in metadata, technology, standards and services so that data can work more effectively across systems, disciplines and research environments.

Across our [five strategic pillars](#) (PDF), we have continued to strengthen data-enabled infrastructure, trusted access, curation and preservation, data skills and engagement. We improved the researcher journey, expanded and preserved valuable collections, invested in learning and workforce capability, contributed to shared standards and used our convening role to connect data users, producers, policymakers and partners.



Our work remains closely aligned with the ESRC's [Future Data Services programme](#) and its ambition for a more connected, federated and researcher-centred data landscape. The programme's focus on co-design, collaboration, interoperability and investment in people provides an important strategic foundation for how we continue to develop our services.

During the year, we strengthened relationships across government, academia and research infrastructure, alongside the voluntary and community sector. We also secured new international collaborations focused on FAIR data, AI readiness, machine-actionable metadata and cross-domain interoperability, with delivery due to begin in the coming period.

Looking back on the year, I am grateful for the expertise, commitment and collaboration of colleagues across the Service. These achievements were made possible through their hard work, together with the support of our funders, data producers, users and the wider research community.

This report reflects that collective effort. It highlights the major milestones of the year, progress across our five strategic pillars, the partnerships strengthening our work and the projects that will shape the next phase of our development.

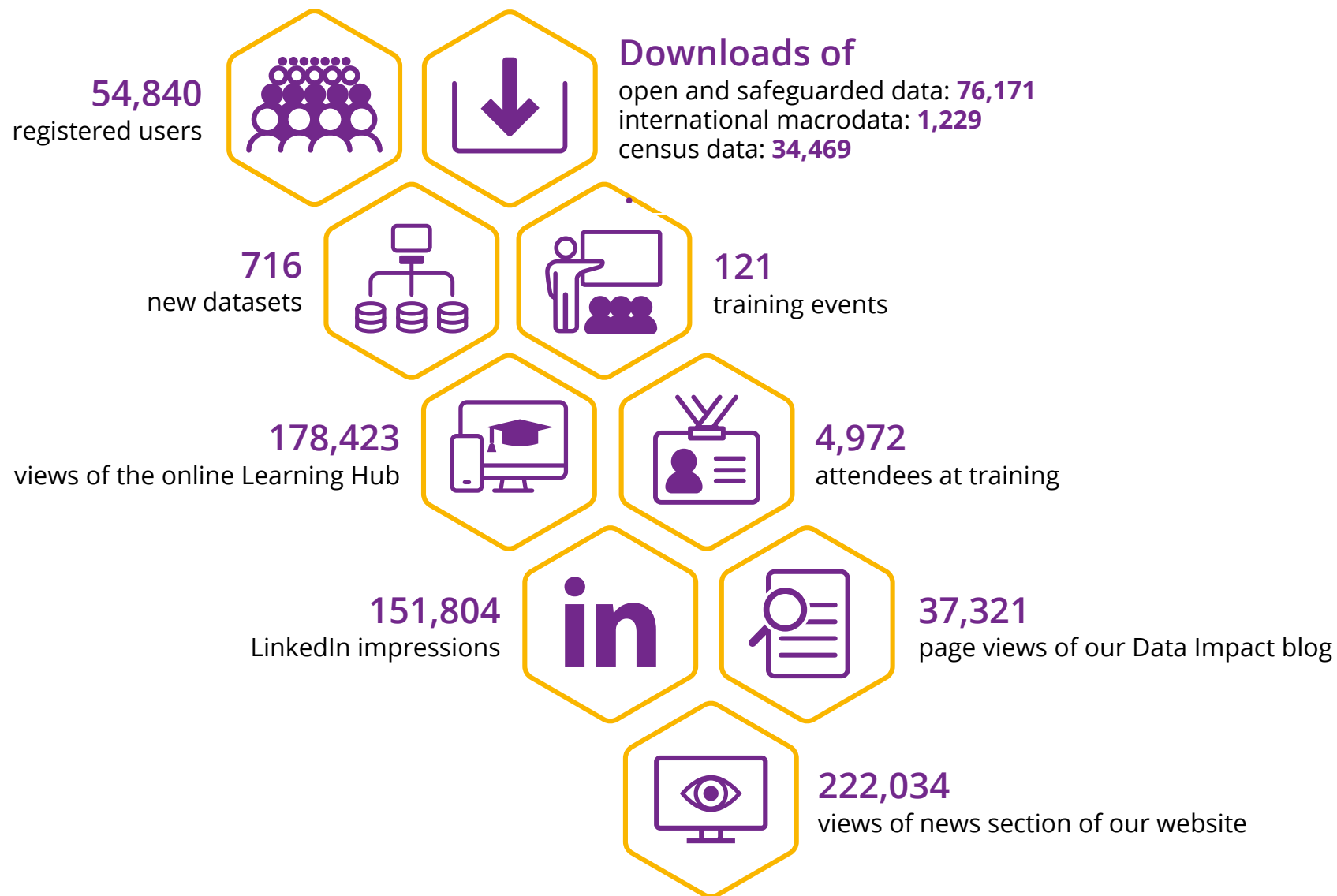
Together, we are building on a strong national resource and preparing it for a more connected, interoperable and data-enabled future.



Steve McEachern
Director, UK Data Service

Annual statistics

April 2025 – March 2026



10,000 datasets:

A national resource in action

The UK Data Service and its predecessor organisations have played a central role in enabling impactful research for nearly six decades. By working with data producers, researchers, funders and partner organisations, the Service has built the UK's largest trusted digital archive of its kind for economic, population and social data.

This year marks an important milestone in that journey. More than 10,000 data collections are now discoverable through the [UK Data Service catalogue](#). Together, these collections represent decades of research, collaboration, stewardship and investment in knowledge that supports society.

This story looks behind that milestone. It explores how the collection has evolved over time, the breadth of data it now contains and the work that takes place behind the scenes to ensure that data remains accessible, secure and meaningful for future generations of research and impact.





“ Making more than 10,000 data collections available highlights the important role the UK Data Service plays within the UK’s research infrastructure. We remain committed to growing this resource and supporting researchers with even richer data in the years ahead. ”



Steve McEachern
Director,
UK Data Service

A journey shaped by data, research and collaboration

The timeline below highlights some of the key moments that have shaped the evolution of the UK Data Service and its predecessor organisations over the years.

1960s to
1970s

Laying the foundations

The early years focused on addressing growing challenges around preserving and sharing social science data, laying the groundwork for a national approach to data stewardship and access.

1970s to
1980s

Expanding access and influence

The collection grew rapidly in both scale and importance, with major government surveys and landmark social datasets becoming part of the archive, alongside growing international collaboration.

1990s to
2000s

Building trusted infrastructure

New services, technical innovation and investment in secure access helped strengthen the UK’s research data infrastructure and improve long-term preservation and reuse.

2010s to
2020s

Integration and innovation

The launch of the UK Data Service brought together data, services and partners through a single trusted platform, supporting wider access, secure research and advances in data governance and technology.

Looking ahead

Today, the journey continues. As research needs evolve and new forms of data emerge, we continue to invest in infrastructure, partnerships and innovation to support the next generation of data-enabled research and impact.



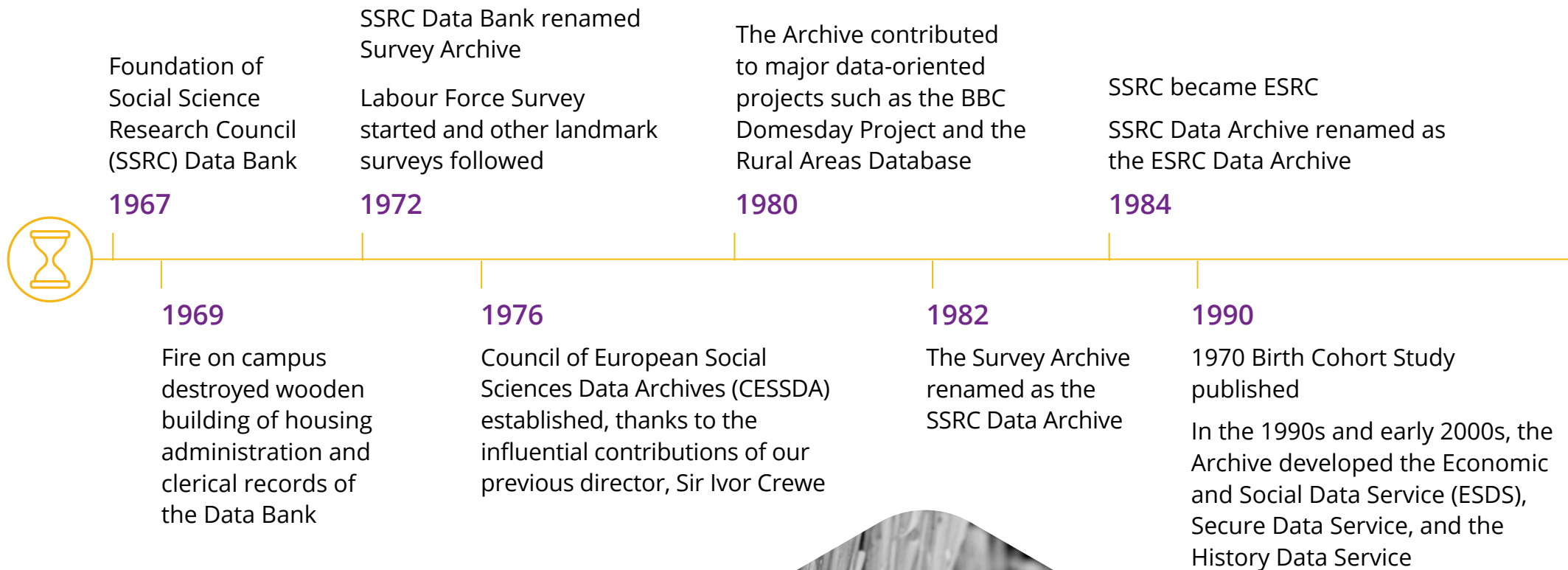
“Reaching 10,000 data collections reflects decades of careful work by our teams and partners to ensure valuable research data is not only preserved but remains usable for the long term. Every dataset added represents an investment in future discovery.”

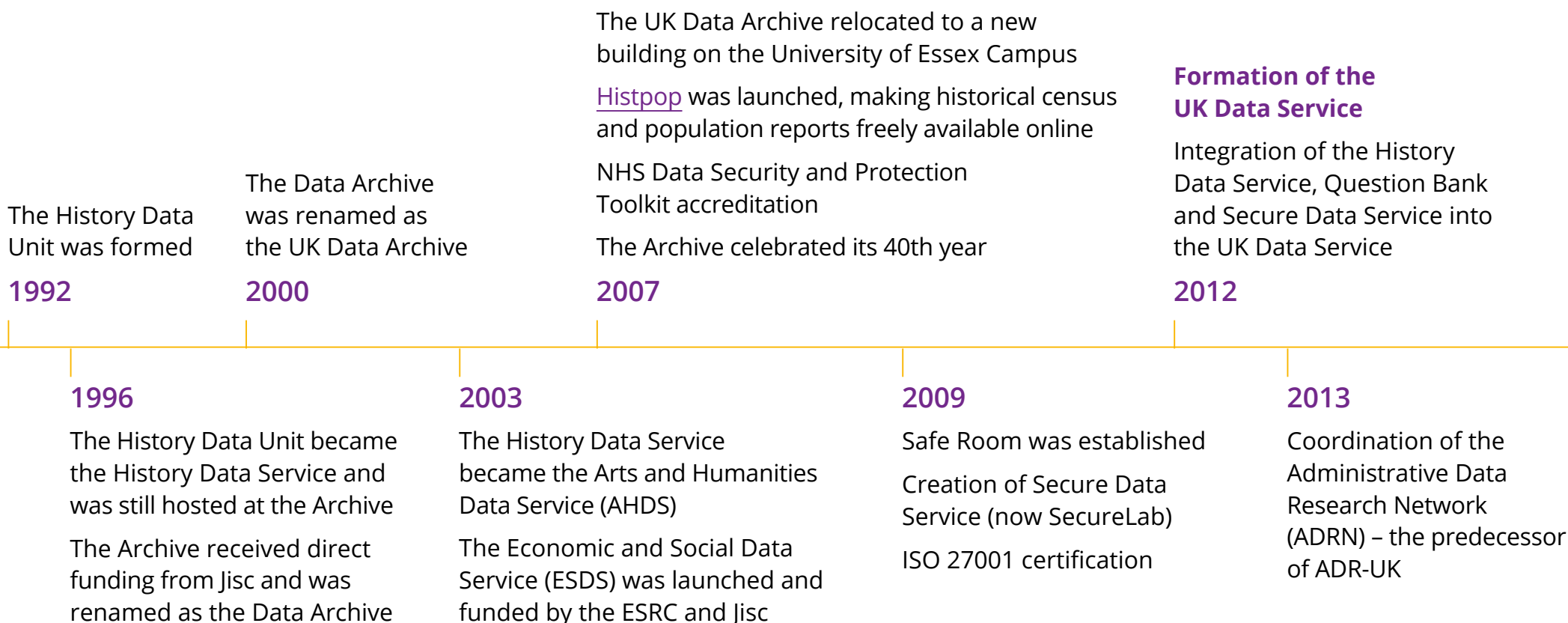


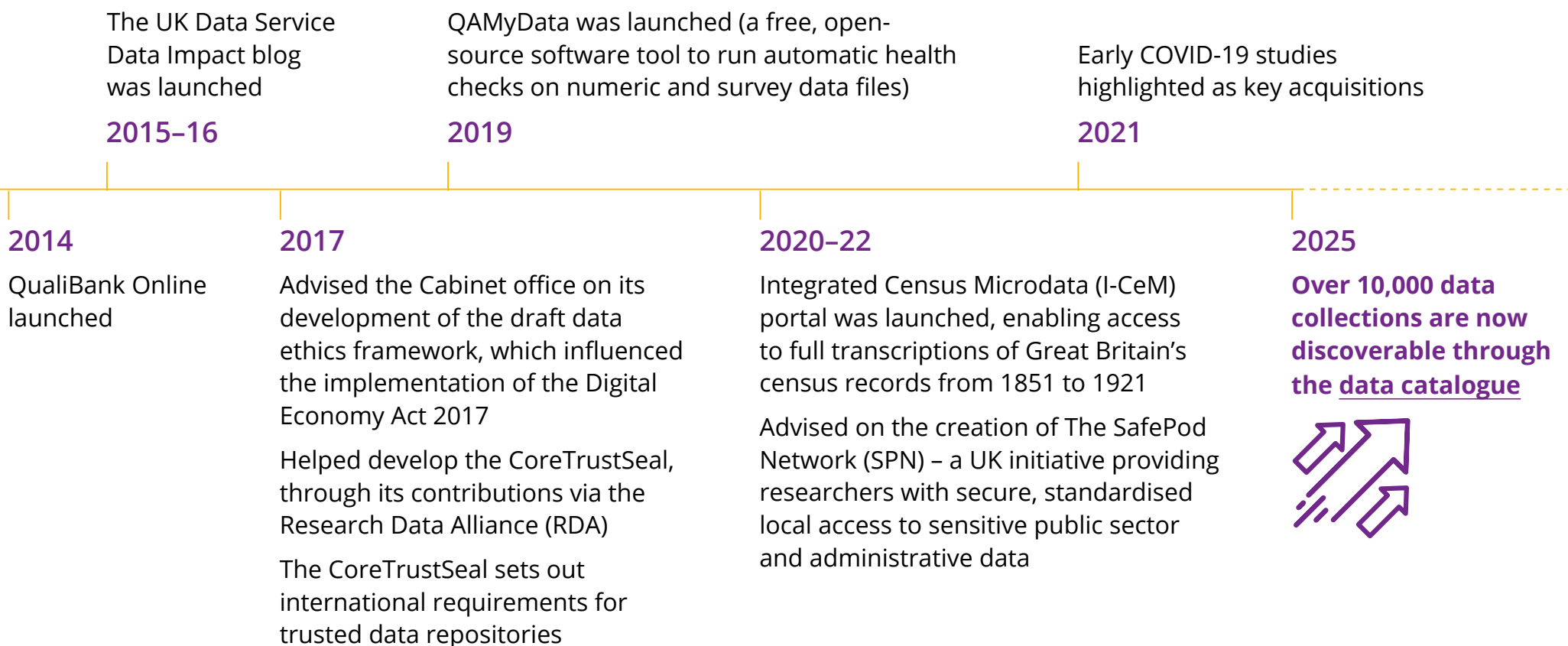
Camilla Philpot Thomsen

Associate Director,
Data Operations,
UK Data Service

A timeline of the UK Data Archive and UK Data Service







A collection that reflects society

The UK Data Service collection reflects the questions researchers, policymakers and society continue to ask about the world around us. More than 10,000 datasets provide insight into how people live, work, learn, age and experience change across communities and generations. From long-established national studies to newer datasets reflecting emerging research priorities, the collection continues to evolve alongside society.

Together, these datasets form more than an archive. They represent a national resource that supports evidence-led research, strengthens public understanding and helps generate insight into some of the most important issues affecting people's lives today.

Key themes across the collection include:

- **Ageing**, understanding later life, wellbeing and demographic change.
- **Crime**, exploring safety, justice and social behaviour.
- **Economics**, examining growth, financial wellbeing and living standards.
- **Health**, supporting research into public health, care and health inequalities.
- **Equality and inequality**, understanding disparities and social outcomes.
- **Food and nutrition**, exploring behaviours, access and public health impacts.
- **Labour and employment**, analysing work, skills, income and changing labour markets.
- **Youth**, capturing the experiences and aspirations of younger generations.



// The breadth of datasets within the UK Data Service makes it a vital resource for social science research and an important record of life in the UK. //

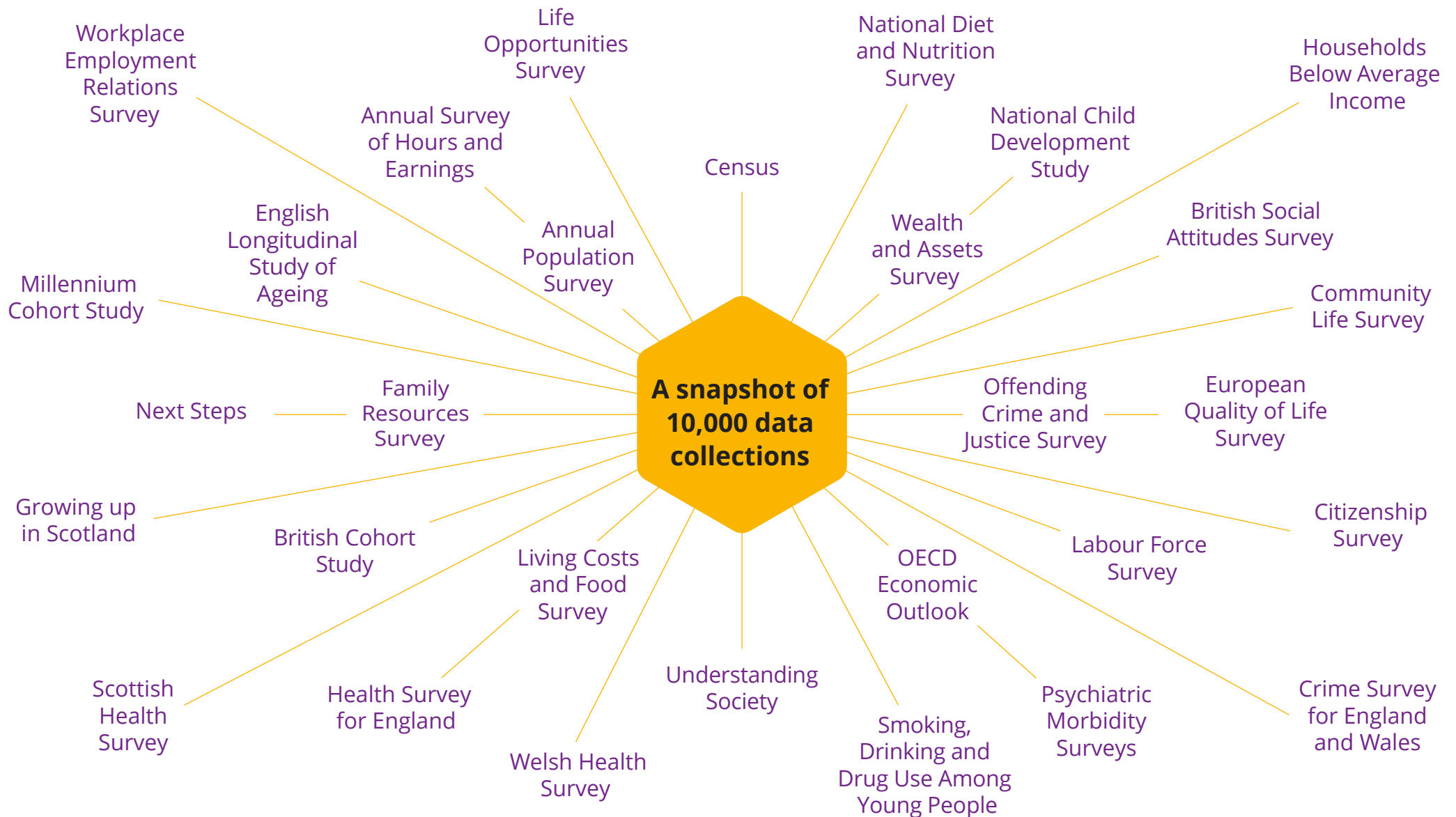


Professor Annette Jäckle

Deputy Director,
Understanding Society



[Click to browse our data catalogue](#)



Towards the next 10,000 datasets and beyond

Reaching 10,000 datasets is an important milestone, but it's not the destination. As research needs evolve and new forms of data continue to emerge, the UK Data Service continues to adapt and grow alongside them.

This includes investing in modern technologies, enhancing user experience and exploring new approaches that support [FAIR data principles](#) and more interoperable research infrastructure.

The collection also continues to grow in response to emerging societal challenges and research priorities, ensuring future generations of researchers have access to the evidence needed to better understand society and improve lives.

Built on decades of collaboration, stewardship and innovation, the journey towards the next 10,000 datasets has already begun.



Read more about how we reached this milestone – and why it's important – on the Data Impact blog:



[10,000 data collections: nearly six decades of data impact \(part one\)](#)



[10,000 data collections: nearly six decades of data impact \(part two\)](#)

The new data catalogue: Building for the next 10,000

Built with users in mind

As the UK Data Service collection grows beyond 10,000 datasets, helping users find the right data quickly and confidently has become more important than ever. The [data catalogue](#) is often the first place researchers go to search, explore and understand what is available, making it a vital gateway into the Service.

In 2025, we launched a new data catalogue designed around user feedback and the changing needs of the research community. Users told us they wanted clearer navigation, more relevant search results, better filtering and easier ways to understand what each data collection contains. These insights shaped both the design and functionality of the new catalogue.

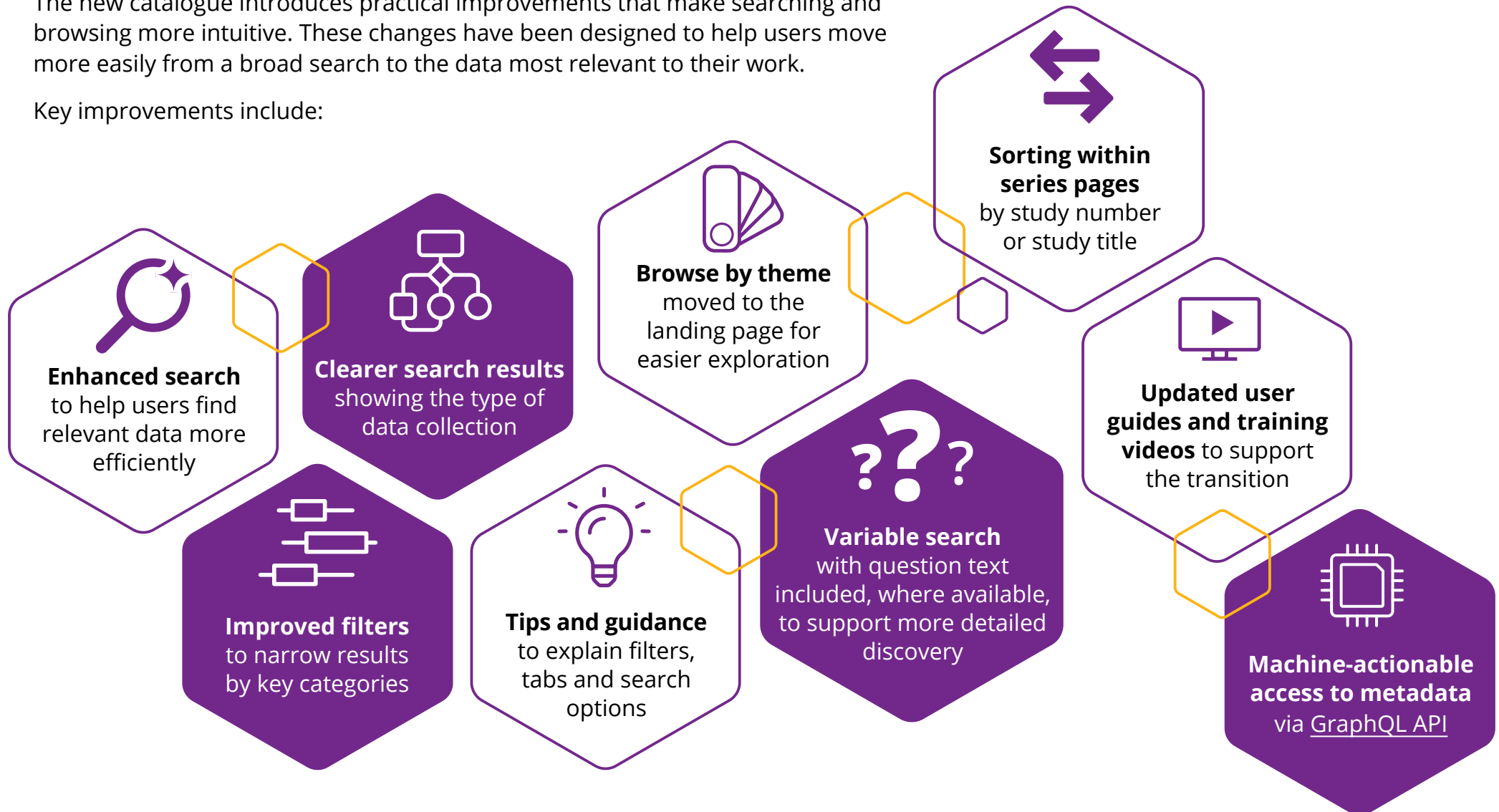
The result is a more modern, responsive and user-focused platform that makes it easier to search, browse and access data. It marks an important step in improving the discovery journey for users and preparing the catalogue for the next phase of growth.



What has changed for users

The new catalogue introduces practical improvements that make searching and browsing more intuitive. These changes have been designed to help users move more easily from a broad search to the data most relevant to their work.

Key improvements include:



A shared effort across the Service

The new catalogue was a significant cross-team project, bringing together expertise from Data Operations – including data curation, discovery and user support – alongside technical services and communications. The work required close collaboration to connect existing data pipelines with a new platform, while maintaining secure development practice and reliable service delivery.

User engagement was central throughout the project. Feedback was gathered

through surveys, user testing and review panels, helping the team move from what worked in theory to what worked in practice.

The project shows how technical development, curation and discovery expertise and user experience thinking can come together to improve a core service. It also reflects a broader shift towards continuous improvement, where user needs and data insights shape how the Service evolves.



The new data catalogue reflects the value of listening carefully to users and working closely across teams. From improved filters and clearer search results to better guidance, these changes were made possible through the combined efforts of colleagues across technical, curation, user support and communications teams. Their collaboration has helped create a catalogue that is more intuitive, useful and responsive to user needs. "



Camilla Philpot Thomsen

Associate Director,
Data Operations,
UK Data Service



What comes next

The launch of the new catalogue is an important milestone but the work continues. Further improvements are planned to make the catalogue even more useful and responsive to user needs.

Future developments include:

- **Filters within series pages**
to help users navigate larger collections.
- **Improved presentation of large series**
so related studies are better signposted.
- **Continued refinement of the search algorithm**
so the most relevant results appear first.
- **Further integration with future tools and services**
including developments such as a data sub-setting tool.

As the collection continues to grow, the catalogue will play an increasingly important role in helping users find and work with data. Built with users and delivered through collaboration, the new data catalogue provides a stronger foundation for discovery, access and future innovation.





Pillar 1

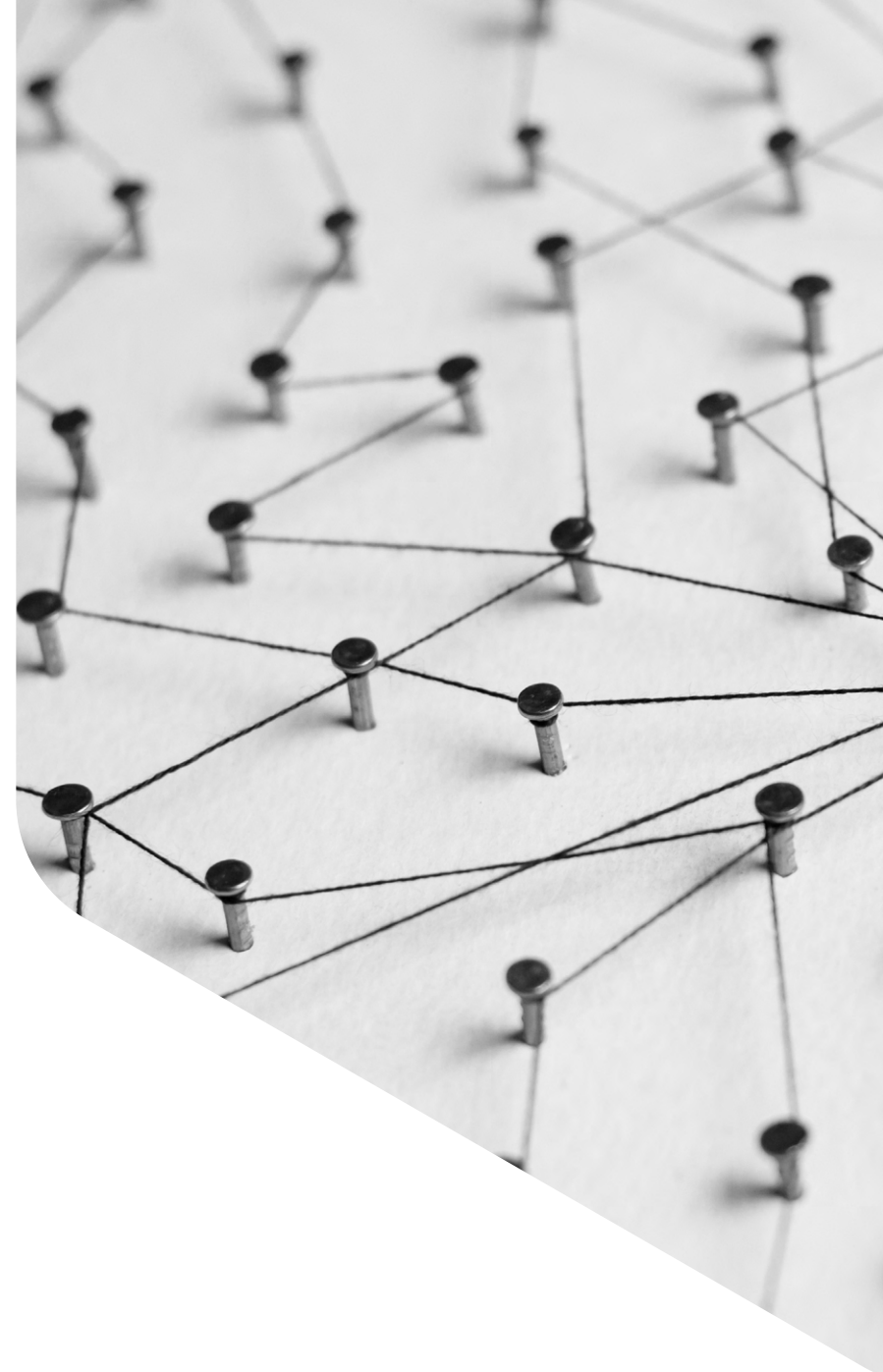
Data-enabled infrastructure

Innovative, secure and interoperable infrastructure is essential to supporting data-enabled social science research. As research data grows in scale and complexity, the systems behind discovery, access, curation and preservation need to evolve with it.

This year, the Service focused on strengthening the technical foundations that support a growing and increasingly connected data collection. From building the technology behind the new [data catalogue](#), to exploring machine-actionable metadata through

[Metacurate-ML](#), to maintaining recognised security standards, our work has centred on making data easier to discover, safer to access and more useful for future research.

Together, these developments show how the Service is responding to changes in the data and research landscape. By investing in cloud-first systems, interoperable metadata, AI-enabled workflows and secure infrastructure, we're building the foundations for more connected, resilient and future-ready data services.





“Upgrading the data catalogue was a complex project and required close collaboration and strong alignment across teams. The successful delivery of this project reflects the experience, dedication and professionalism of the whole team and the many others who supported it. I am incredibly proud of what we achieved together.”



Anhar Miah

Development Manager,
UK Data Service

Building the technology behind the new data catalogue

The launch of the new data catalogue was not only a major improvement for users, but also a significant technical development for the UK Data Service. Behind the updated design and improved search experience sits a modern platform built to support a growing collection and evolving user needs.

The new catalogue has been developed using a cloud-first approach, making the platform more robust, scalable and future-ready. It uses standardised [Data Documentation Initiative](#) metadata, improved indexing through OpenSearch and a responsive interface developed in React to support faster and more efficient searching across a large and growing volume of catalogue records.

A key part of the development was improving interoperability. The catalogue

includes a public [GraphQL API](#), allowing external developers and researchers to interact with catalogue metadata programmatically. This creates new opportunities for reuse, integration and more connected data discovery.

Delivering the platform required close coordination across development, curation and operations teams. The work involved connecting existing data pipelines with the new platform, while following secure development practices and undertaking extensive testing. This ensured that the catalogue worked not only in principle, but in practice.

Together, these improvements create a stronger technical foundation for discovery, access and future innovation, supporting the Service as it continues to grow.



Advancing data curation through Metacurate-ML

The UK Data Service continues to explore new ways to improve how data is prepared, described and delivered to researchers. As part of this work, our Research and Development and Curation teams have been working on [Metacurate-ML](#), a pilot project initially funded through the ESRC [Future Data Services programme](#), which subsequently received supplementary funding through the [EPSRC](#) AI for Science fund.

The project focuses on the FAIR data principles of making data Findable, Accessible, Interoperable and Reusable. In particular, Metacurate-ML is exploring interoperability, helping ensure that data and metadata can be understood and used effectively by both people and machines.

Led by [Jon Johnson at CLOSER](#), the project brings together the Service, the [University of Surrey's Computer Science Department](#) and the [Scottish Centre for Social Research](#). Each partner contributes expertise across metadata extraction, classification, concept mapping and integration into discovery platforms.

A key challenge is that while much of the Service's metadata is rich and detailed, a significant proportion is still held in formats such as PDF documents. These are useful for human interpretation but limit how metadata can be used by machines. Metacurate-ML is addressing this by developing approaches to automatically extract and structure metadata from existing documents.

Colleagues at the University of Surrey are using machine learning techniques to extract metadata from PDF questionnaires, including questions, response codes and categories. The Service then combines this PDF-extracted metadata with existing metadata to create a rich knowledge graph, powered by Data Documentation Initiative metadata schemas. This has the potential to support enhanced question banks, provide large language models with richer contextual domain knowledge and improve discovery and linkage.



One important application of this enhanced metadata is in improving how disclosure risk is assessed. Some elements of this process currently rely on manual workflows, including spreadsheets and specialist tools. By introducing structured metadata and automated classification, Metacurate-ML supports more efficient and consistent approaches to identifying and managing disclosure risk. This could reduce manual effort, minimise errors and improve the scalability of curation processes.

The project is also supporting the development of a prototype data sub-setting tool, demonstrating how enriched metadata can help curators explore datasets, identify key variables and create data products appropriate for different access conditions.

As a pilot project, Metacurate-ML is helping to test how these approaches can support curation teams and improve efficiency across key processes. The insights and tools developed through this work could also inform future improvements to the data catalogue, making it easier for users to discover and access the data they need.





Strengthening our security foundations

Secure and resilient infrastructure is essential to maintaining trust in the data we steward and the services we provide. This year, our lead partner, the UK Data Archive completed two important security milestones that strengthen how we protect information, systems and the data entrusted to us.

In March 2025, the UK Data Archive successfully completed the transition from ISO 27001:2013 to the new ISO 27001:2022 standard. This included a full recertification audit, with every control within the standard assessed. The updated standard introduces new controls, including those relating to cloud service use and threat intelligence, ensuring our approach to information security continues to reflect evolving risks and technologies.

In June 2025, the UK Data Archive also gained Cyber Essentials Plus certification. This UK government-backed certification confirms that an organisation has strong technical controls in place to protect against common cyber threats. Unlike the basic Cyber Essentials certification, Cyber Essentials Plus includes independent assessment and hands-on technical verification.

Together, these accreditations demonstrate our continued commitment to secure, responsible and trusted data services. They strengthen our security posture, support confidence among data owners and users and reinforce the safeguards around the data deposited with us.



“
Completing the ISO 27001:2022 transition and achieving Cyber Essentials Plus required careful coordination across teams and shows our continued commitment to protecting the systems and data that our users and depositors rely on. These certifications are an important demonstration of the care and rigour we apply to information security.”



Will Taylor

IT Service and
Security Manager,
UK Data Service



“Working on the project to evaluate the benefits, costs and utility of synthetic data showed me how innovation and responsible data stewardship can go hand in hand. Synthetic data has enormous potential to widen access to research opportunities while maintaining trust, privacy, and transparency. It has been exciting to contribute to work that is helping shape practical standards and guidance for the wider research community.”



Melissa Ogwayo

User Support and
Training Officer,
UK Data Service

Supporting responsible innovation in synthetic data and AI

The UK Data Service continued to strengthen its work in synthetic data, AI-enabled discovery and responsible data access this year, contributing to national and international efforts to improve how social sciences data can be used safely, effectively and with confidence.

This work reflects a growing priority across the research data landscape. It is well known and understood that synthetic data and AI have the potential to support research planning, training, code development, data discovery and access to data. At the same time, synthetic data require careful governance, clear standards,

robust evaluation and transparent documentation. During the year, the Service contributed expertise across these areas, helping shape practical approaches that balance innovation with trust, privacy and responsible reuse.

In April 2025, the Service completed the [ADR UK](#) and ESRC-funded project, [Evaluating the benefits, costs and utility of synthetic data](#) – a mixed method project with a final report that provides practical, sequenced recommendations for policymakers, funders, data creators and Trusted Research Environments (TREs), and the wider research community.



[Click to read more about synthetic data in this post on the Data Impact blog by Jools Kasmire and Cristina Magder](#)



Alongside the report, the project delivered hands-on knowledge exchange through workshops and training, developed for data producers a [minimal documentation standard for synthetic data collections](#) and contributed to an international community statement on principles and terminology. All project data was made available for future reuse. The final report has achieved strong early engagement, and the Service is now working with stakeholders to take forward the recommendations.

Another key area of progress was our contribution to the [DARE UK Synthetic Data Community Group](#), where it worked alongside co-chairs from [Dementias Platform UK](#), [Administrative Data Research UK](#), [Research Data Scotland](#), [University of Cambridge](#), [University of Oxford](#), [Centre for](#)

[Trials Research](#), [Cardiff University](#) and public representatives. The group is focused on promoting the responsible use of synthetic data by developing governance frameworks, standards and open-source tools.

As part of this work, the Service helped deliver several workshops designed to shape tools, standards and evaluation approaches for synthetic data. The workshops focused on practical needs around generation and assessment, including utility and disclosure risk metrics, transparent documentation and appropriate sharing routes. The work culminated in an open access report: [Perspectives & Recommendations on the Development of Synthetic Datasets in Trusted Research Environments](#).



“Bringing together such a diverse range of expertise is incredibly powerful. Our goal is to move synthetic data from a theoretical innovation into a practical, trusted reality. This report provides a clear roadmap for doing so and we continue to work together to turn these recommendations into action.”



Cristina Magder

Head of Collection Development and Data Producer Support, UK Data Service



“
SynthSprint was a collaborative, cross-organisational effort to create an innovative solution to a shared challenge. Thirty four participants from across academia and public policy organisations delivered a rich set of results, observations and insights, which will inform the development of a much-needed tool: a synthetic data utility framework. Huge thanks to everyone who was involved.”



Emily Oliver

Head of Research and
Capacity Building,
ADR UK



In a separate but complementary work stream, the Service also collaborated with the ADR UK Synthetic Data Working Group to publish the guidance paper, [Considerations for the provision of synthetic forms of secure data](#), which establishes key frameworks for generating low-disclosure, high-utility datasets.

The Service also contributed to the [ADR UK SynthSprint initiative](#) – a six-week collaborative programme exploring how synthetic data performs across different levels of fidelity in real-world analytical tasks. Insights from participants on usability, limitations and trust are now contributing to practical recommendations and a shared report, helping shape future approaches to data access.

Directly advancing these ecosystem goals of enhanced metadata and smarter data discovery, we also launched [CORDIAL-AI](#) this year, a UKRI-funded pilot under the ESRC [Future Data Services programme](#). Conceived and led by our internal census specialists from UCL, the project [uses generative AI to solve a long-standing challenge](#): making dense, multi-dimensional datasets accessible to non-specialists.

Rather than letting AI access raw data directly – risking errors and ‘hallucinations’ – the project pioneered a custom architecture. The team customised local, open-source models to run safely on internal infrastructure – addressing data privacy and security concerns.

By bridging the gap between cutting-edge technology and public trust, CORDIAL-AI successfully demonstrates how the Service is actively shaping the future of data services.

Together these activities show how we’re supporting responsible innovation across synthetic data and AI. By contributing to community standards, practical tools, evaluation frameworks, data ingest improvement, federated access thinking and AI-enabled discovery, we’re helping to shape future approaches to trusted data access with governance, transparency and user needs at heart.



[Click to read more from Vassilis about this project on the Data Impact blog: Bringing census flow data to life with large language models](#)



We aim to give greater visibility to synthetic datasets and help democratise access. While there are valid concerns surrounding this kind of technology – including ethical, economic, societal and environmental considerations – synthetic datasets hold considerable potential. As Future Data Services take shape, it’s not just about keeping up with the technology – it’s about shaping it to reflect the values we care about. ”



Vassilis Routis
Senior Research
Fellow, UCL



Pillar 2

Data quality and trust

High-quality, trustworthy data is essential for research that informs policy, supports decision-making and strengthens understanding of society. For the UK Data Service, this means not only providing safe and reliable access to nationally important data, but also supporting the standards, guidance and practices that help researchers and data producers use and share data with confidence.

This year, our work under this pillar focused on strengthening the foundations of trust. From contributing to shared frameworks for repository activities and continuous improvement, to developing guidance aligned with the pan-UKRI Research Data Policy, we continued to support clearer, more consistent approaches to managing, documenting and sharing social science data.





Strengthening standards for trustworthy data services

Trust in research data depends not only on the quality of the datasets themselves, but on the systems, standards and practices used to manage them. Data repositories need clear ways to describe what they do, how they operate and how they support preservation, access, technology, security and long-term reuse.

This year, the UK Data Service released the latest version of [Metadata and Data Services Activities-Functions \(MaDSAF\)](#) — a working paper created by Hervé L'Hours, Darren Bell and Oliver Parkes. MaDSAF identifies 30 common activities and functions undertaken across data repositories, covering organisational infrastructure, digital object management, technology and security.

The framework was developed by reviewing and mapping repository standards and requirements from UK, European and international sources. These included [CoreTrustSeal](#), which supports certification for trustworthy digital repositories; [DPC RAM](#), a maturity model for digital preservation and the FAIR and [TRUST](#) principles, which support good practice in data management, repository transparency and long-term stewardship.

The latest version of MaDSAF reflects feedback gathered through public consultation during the [FIDELIS project](#). FIDELIS helps trusted digital repositories demonstrate transparency and good practice in how they manage and preserve data.



The development of MaDSAF and its adoption within FIDELIS' TTRAM demonstrates how the UK Data Service is contributing beyond its own collections. By developing tools where repositories can demonstrate how they deliver their services, we're helping to create a more transparent and trustworthy landscape. "



Oliver Parkes

Repository Project and
Standards Coordinator,
UK Data Service



As part of this work, FIDELIS developed the [Transparent Trustworthy Repository Attributes Matrix \(TTRAM\)](#). Structured around MaDSAF's 30 activities and functions, TTRAM helps repositories identify the information they could make transparent about their work. The matrix also connects these activities with CoreTrustSeal's levels of retention, curation and preservation, supporting clearer understanding of the level of stewardship applied to different types of data.

For the UK Data Service, this work supports strategic planning, continuous improvement and clearer communication of repository responsibilities. It also contributes to wider efforts across the research data community to strengthen trust, transparency and consistency in how data services operate.

The latest version of MaDSAF is openly available on [Zenodo](#), alongside [FIDELIS](#) resources on [TTRAM](#), including an overview, template, guide, design statement and project deliverables.

Supporting clearer guidance for social science data producers

Research data policy plays an important role in shaping how data is managed, shared and reused, and both social science researchers and data producers need clear and practical guidance to ensure that data is well prepared, policy-aligned and suitable for future access and reuse.

This year, the UK Data Service worked with the Economic and Social Research Council and colleagues from across UKRI to support the development of the [UKRI Research Data Policy](#) and the creation of social science-specific guidance and resources. This also included working with colleagues from the [Medical Research Council](#) to develop guidance about sharing data collected about people.

The expected revisions to the UKRI Research Data Policy mark a shift from council-specific data policies to a broader pan-UKRI approach. The new policy will be published soon.

A significant outcome of this work was the development of an extensive and fully restructured guidance suite for social science data producers, with the new suite due to launch later in 2026. This represents a substantial expansion and consolidation of the UK Data Service guidance offer, designed to provide end-to-end support across the research data lifecycle.



“The UK Data Service continues to play a vital role in the research ecosystem by providing a long-standing repository for preserving and sharing data and expert support to help those who produce data, including researchers funded by UKRI. The UK Data service is one of the world’s most trusted digital research data repositories, and the team have made a significant contribution to the forthcoming UKRI Research Data Policy. ESRC is grateful for all the help and advice the Service have provided.”



Richard Welpton

Head of Data Services
Infrastructure, ESRC



We're delighted to have worked closely with ESRC and UKRI colleagues on this programme, with a clear focus on supporting data producers. The strengthened guidance offer reflects our shared commitment to making it easier for the research community to manage, share and maximise the value of their data. "



Cristina Magder

Head of Collection Development and Data Producer Support, UK Data Service

The work involved a comprehensive review and restructuring of existing materials to improve clarity, consistency and usability, as well as the development of substantial new content to address gaps in emerging areas of practice. It also strengthened the practical, step-by-step nature of the guidance to better support real-world application, ensuring it is accessible and usable for researchers, data managers and institutional stakeholders alike.

Rather than incremental updates, this work delivers a system-wide refresh of the guidance, ensuring that materials are easier to navigate, more consistent in tone and structure and better aligned with how data producers work. The new guidance is expected to be published on the UK Data Service website soon.

Alongside written guidance, the programme also strengthened associated training resources and supporting materials, helping to embed best practice in data management, documentation, sharing and preservation across the social science community.

The resulting suite of resources provides a significantly enhanced national training and guidance offer for social science data producers. It supports improved consistency in data preparation, strengthens compliance with funder expectations and contributes to higher-quality, more reusable research data collections being shared across the sector.



Making secure data access simpler and more consistent

Providing trusted access to sensitive data requires robust checks and governance, but the process should also be clear and manageable for researchers. During the year, the UK Data Service contributed to two collaborative initiatives aimed at simplifying access processes while maintaining the safeguards required for controlled data.

Standardising applications for administrative data

The Service contributed to an [Administrative Data Research UK](#) Task and Finish Group, working alongside the UK Statistics Authority and representatives from Trusted Research Environments (TREs) across the four UK nations. The group is working to standardise application forms for access to administrative data across the UK Data

Service, the [Office for National Statistics Secure Research Service](#), [ADR Scotland](#), the [Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency](#) and [SAIL Databank](#).

Following work to align common application questions across these environments, the Service piloted a new Digital Economy Act Project Application Form. The form brings together the

main project application and ethics self-assessment, reducing duplication and creating a more streamlined and user-friendly process for researchers.

This work supports greater consistency across the data access landscape with the aim of making it easier for researchers to navigate applications involving different Trusted Research Environments.



“ Researchers should be able to navigate secure data access with confidence, without facing unnecessary duplication or complexity. We’ve been delighted to collaborate with our partners on these pilot projects to explore how clearer, more consistent processes could improve the user experience and reduce turnaround times, while maintaining the robust safeguards required for controlled data. ”



Iraklis Kyritsis

Data Access Team Manager,
UK Data Service

Piloting the Safe People Registry

We also worked closely with [Health Data Research UK](#) to pilot the [Safe People Registry](#) – a centrally managed platform designed to standardise and simplify Safe Researcher checks for access to sensitive data.

Through workshops involving the Data Access Team and colleagues from Health Data Research UK, we helped shape the pilot and are now testing how the platform could support researcher verification in practice.

The pilot is exploring the potential for faster verification, a more consistent user experience and shorter turnaround times for access to controlled data, while maintaining the standards needed to protect sensitive information.

Together, these initiatives demonstrate how we work with partners to improve the researcher journey, reduce unnecessary duplication and strengthen consistency across trusted data access processes.



Pillar 3

Data curation and active preservation

High-quality research depends on data that is not only collected, but carefully prepared, documented and preserved for future use. Through data curation and active preservation, the UK Data Service ensures valuable social, economic and population data remains discoverable, understandable and reusable over time.

This year, we continued to expand and strengthen our collection through a wide range of new releases and

updates. Behind each addition is detailed work with data producers to assess, document, licence and prepare data for the most appropriate access route. Together, these activities protect the long-term value of important research data while opening new opportunities to investigate changing lives, communities and society.





Curating new data for long-term research use

The UK Data Service continued to strengthen its collection this year through the acquisition, curation and release of new and updated datasets across a wide range of social, economic and population themes.

A major release was the [National Child Development Study: Age 62, Sweep 10, 2019-2024](#). The study follows people born in Britain in a single week in 1958 and the latest release includes data from more than 8,400 participants collected when they were aged 61 to 65. It provides the most comprehensive picture of the cohort's

adult lives to date, with information on retirement, finances, employment, family relationships, mental health, physical health, social support and attitudes.

This release is particularly valuable because it includes objective health measures, including blood pressure, blood sampling, grip strength, balance, walking speed and body measurements. It gives researchers new opportunities to examine how this generation is ageing physically, cognitively, socially and financially.



We also supported the release of [Longitudinal Education Outcomes Synthetic Data: Version 1, 1995-2021](#). The original Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO) dataset links education, employment, benefits and earnings information for around 39 million people in England and is available to accredited researchers through the [Office for National Statistics Secure Research Service](#).

The synthetic version reflects the structure, variables and format of the original data while using privacy-preserving methods to ensure no identifiable information is included. By hosting the LEO synthetic data as safeguarded access, we enable researchers

to safely explore, understand, test and prepare for using one of England's richest education and labour market datasets, reducing barriers to access and improving the efficiency of the research process.

During the year, we also released and updated several Secure Access datasets. These enable researchers to use sensitive data through controlled access routes, with safeguards designed to support safe and responsible access. These included [Better Outcomes through linked Data: Homelessness and Offending, England, 2011-2023: Secure Access](#) and [Annual Population Survey, 2004-2024: Secure Access](#).

Secure access versions of the [Community Life Survey](#) were also made available, helping researchers work with more detailed data through appropriate controlled access routes.

Other releases and updates during the year showed the diversity of the research we support. These included new editions of the [British Social Attitudes Survey](#), the [Community Life Survey](#), the [Scottish Health Survey](#), [Understanding Society](#), the [Millennium Cohort Study](#), the [Family Resources Survey](#) and the [Continuous Household Survey](#), alongside new editions and updates to [Food and You 2](#). The collection also expanded through datasets on young people and gambling, planning and preparing for later life and [Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence](#).

Together, these datasets support research into ageing, education, health, income, employment, inequality, civic participation, food, wellbeing, social attitudes and life-course change. By continuing to acquire, curate and preserve data of long-term value, we're strengthening a trusted national resource for research – both today and for future generations.





Pillar 4

Data literacy and capacity

We support researchers from all sectors, students and data professionals to develop the skills needed to discover, access, manage, share and analyse data effectively.

This year, our training and learning offer continued to combine live events, online resources and specialist support, helping users build confidence at different stages of their data journey. From workshops and webinars to tutorials, guides, interactive modules and event recordings, we provide flexible opportunities for users to

develop practical skills and engage with data more effectively.

The following pages highlight examples from this wider programme, including dataset-specific training, digital learning resources, user conferences, student research recognition and investment in computational skills.

Find out more about the topics we cover through our [events programme](#), [Learning Hub](#) and [YouTube](#) channel.



121 training events

4,972 attendees at training

178,423 views of the online Learning Hub

48,400 views of our YouTube channel



Training attendee profile

36% higher education staff

29% postgraduate students

8% undergraduate students

27% outside academia

97% would recommend our training events to others



Growing our data skills module collection across key studies and topics

The UK Data Service offers a growing collection of asynchronous [data skills modules](#) designed to help users build confidence at a time and pace that suits them. These modules support learning across key studies, data access, analysis and research data skills, and we're continuing to expand this offer, with further modules planned over the next year and migration to our Moodle platform later in 2026.

This year, we combined the release of the latest [Family Resources Survey](#) (FRS) data with a new online learning module designed to strengthen user confidence and analytical capability.

The Family Resources Survey is a major source of evidence on household income and living standards in the UK, covering issues including poverty, pensions, benefits and family finances.

Developed in collaboration with the Survey Branch at the [Department for Work and Pensions](#), the free [Getting started with the Family Resources Survey](#) module introduces the survey design, datasets and supporting documentation. It also provides guidance on accessing the data, practical exercises in R and SPSS and expert video contributions that offer insight into the survey's design and purpose.

Suitable for independent learning and classroom teaching, the module supports new users beginning their analysis and provides a useful refresher for more experienced researchers. By bringing together data access, specialist knowledge and practical training, we're helping a wider range of users work confidently with an important national evidence resource.



Ahead of the release of the module, Steve Ellerd-Elliott, Chief Statistician at the Department for Work and Pensions, said:

“FRS datasets have been available to users through the UK Data Service for many years. We're pleased to have collaborated with the UK Data Service on developing new training for users. This module will be hugely beneficial to anyone interested in the incomes and characteristics of UK families. It will help new users get started with their analysis and provide valuable support for analysts at all levels.”



[Click to read more on the Data Impact blog:](#)
[The Family Resources Survey: how did we make it easier to learn?](#)



Celebrating undergraduate research through the UK Data Service Dissertation Award

Supporting students to develop confidence in finding, analysing and interpreting secondary data is an important part of building future research capacity. The UK Data Service Dissertation Award recognises outstanding undergraduate research using data available through the Service and demonstrates how archived data can help students investigate important social and policy questions.

Three students won the 2025 award, each receiving a £300 prize.

Christina Giasemidis, University of Leeds, developed the Women's Perceived Safety at Night Index to examine how safe women are likely to feel across different areas of Leeds. Drawing on several data sources and census boundary data, the research mapped local variations in perceived safety and highlighted implications for urban planning and design.

Lex Irish, Durham University, used longitudinal data from [Understanding Society](#) to investigate how a cancer diagnosis affects income. The analysis found that cancer diagnoses were associated with reduced average income, with greater falls among people on lower incomes or with lower educational attainment, highlighting the need for targeted financial protection.

Simrin Maryam Rahman, University of Manchester, examined the effect of austerity on local communities in England between 2010 and 2023. Using data from 317 councils, including the [Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings](#), the research identified a significant decline in social-economy organisations following reductions in local authority funding.

Together, the winning dissertations show the breadth of research enabled by our data collections, from public safety and health inequality to local economies and wellbeing. By recognising and sharing this work, the award encourages students to engage with high-quality archived data and strengthens the pipeline of skilled social science researchers.



Expanding postgraduate data skills through online learning

Alongside our study-specific online modules, we expanded our online learning offer for postgraduate researchers. Building research capacity requires training that can reach students at the point when they begin designing and delivering their projects. Our new self-paced online learning course — Introduction to Finding and Using Data for postgraduate students will be hosted on our Moodle platform.

The course comprises eight short modules covering how to find, evaluate, access and use social research data responsibly. Drawing on expertise from across the Service, it introduces data sources and types, ethical considerations, dataset navigation and reproducible research. A dedicated module also explores the data and research potential of [Understanding Society](#), the UK Household Longitudinal Study.

The course was developed and piloted with the [White Rose Doctoral Training Partnership](#), [Midlands Graduate School](#) and the [Scottish Graduate School of Social Science](#). Following feedback from students, it was refined and made available more widely across the ESRC Doctoral Training Partnership network, extending its reach to postgraduate researchers across England, Wales and Scotland.

The new Moodle platform provides a flexible, user-friendly learning environment, including progress tracking and certificates of completion. Together, the platform and course create a stronger foundation for expanding our online learning offer and helping more postgraduate researchers develop the skills and confidence to find, access and use data effectively in their research.



Fantastic speaker — really engaging, knowledgeable and clearly passionate about what they do. An hour and a half flew by! I work in research bidding support so this will help me to prompt academics to think about relevant issues in their proposals.



Training user feedback

Introduction to effective and practical research data management



Using evidence to strengthen computational capability

The social science data environment is evolving rapidly, and data services need to keep pace with changing technologies, methods and user needs. To better understand the skills required across the organisation, the UK Data Service conducted a staff survey on data and computational skills in November 2024. The survey identified existing strengths, perceived skills gaps and preferred approaches to learning and development, providing the first cross-Service evidence base on computational skills, use and training needs.

The survey achieved a strong response rate, with around 80% of the workforce taking part. It revealed a strong shared belief that computational skills are vital to our work, with 75% of respondents strongly agreeing and a further 23% agreeing that these skills are essential. Attitudes to learning were also highly positive, with 88% of respondents seeing the development of new computational skills as useful in their current or future role.

The findings have informed workforce development, future investment decisions and longer-term organisational planning, including activity linked to the [Future Data Services](#) agenda. Immediate action included access to DataCamp and other

training opportunities, helping staff build practical skills in areas such as coding, data analysis and emerging technologies. By using evidence to guide investment in people as well as technology, we're strengthening the capability needed to support innovation, improve services and respond to the future needs of the research data landscape.



[Click to read more](#)
[UK Data Service Computational Skills Survey:
Current use, value and training needs](#)

Brilliant session! Time to explore the database through simple activities was also appreciated. I will use the training in my own qualitative research and for student supervision.

Training user feedback
Getting started with secondary analysis



Connecting data users, producers and research communities through our user conferences

User conferences play an important role in helping researchers understand complex datasets, keep up to date with new developments and learn from others using the same data. They also create direct opportunities for data users and producers to discuss emerging needs, challenges and priorities.

During the year, we organised six user conferences across key study areas and research themes. By offering online, in-person and hybrid formats, the programme gave users flexible ways to engage with the content and take part in discussions.



The workshop will help me immensely on the case studies/interviews. It has been the most detailed and useful overview of anonymisation I have had to date.



Training user feedback
Introduction to anonymisation techniques

The programme included:

- UK Census User Conference
- Labour Force and Annual Population Surveys User Conference
- Health Studies User Conference
- Family Finance Surveys User Conference
- The Future of the UK Demographic System Conference
- Crime Surveys User Conference

A total 1,675 people attended live events or accessed recordings across the six user conferences, demonstrating the continued reach and value of the programme.

These user conferences strengthen our role as a connector across the research data landscape. They surface user needs, encourage shared learning and support better use of major UK data resources, enabling research that can inform policy, generate wider impact and contribute to a better society.



Making the case for continued population health data

Long-running population health surveys provide evidence that can't be recreated once data collection stops. They allow researchers and policymakers to track change over time, identify emerging inequalities and evaluate the effects of public health interventions.

The future of these surveys became a major focus at the [2025 Health Studies User Conference](#), organised by the UK Data Service with [UCL](#) and the [National Centre for Social Research](#). The event brought together 168 researchers, data producers and professionals working with health-related data. During the conference, the [Department of Health and Social Care](#) (DHSC) and the [Office for National Statistics](#) (ONS) outlined that NHS England wouldn't prioritise population health surveys within its long-term strategic work plan and that the 2025 [Health Survey for England](#) would be the final survey resourced under the existing arrangements.

The conference created an important platform for the research community to demonstrate the

continuing value of the survey. In her keynote address, [Professor Oyinlola Oyeboode](#) highlighted its role in monitoring population health, shaping policy and evaluating interventions – including research on chronic kidney disease, nutrition policy and smoke-free legislation.

Following the conference, the UK Data Service played an active role in ensuring researchers' and data users' voices informed national discussions on the future of population health surveys. Working with DHSC and ONS, we helped secure another opportunity for users to contribute to the consultation, generating an additional 140 responses from the health survey user community. We also coordinated evidence on the value and impact of the [Health Survey for England](#), including user experiences and research examples, to support decision-making as part of the wider review. The issue also gained national attention through coverage in [The Guardian](#), which referenced the UK Data Service briefing where the future of the survey was discussed.



“Population health surveys provide an essential evidence base for research and policy. It was vital that the people who use these data shared their experience and explained what could be lost without continued investment.”



Dr Vanessa Higgins

Director of Training and User Support,
UK Data Service



Pillar 5

Advocacy and outreach

This year, the UK Data Service strengthened how we share the value of the data we hold, the research it enables and the partnerships that help extend its reach. Our advocacy and outreach work focused on making evidence more visible, building stronger connections with stakeholders and showing how data supports decisions across research, policy and practice.

A major focus was continuing to develop our impact work through events, impact themes, [case studies](#), the [Data Impact blog](#) and new storytelling formats.

We also expanded our presence across the research data community through active participation in key conferences, including [IASSIST](#), [RSS](#), [TRE](#), [IDCC](#), [Understanding Society](#) and [ESRA](#).

This year also saw new ways of communicating who we are and what we do, including the development of a [new film](#) about the UK Data Service and a [collaborative podcast with CLOSER](#). Recognition as a finalist in the [British Data Awards](#) Not-For-Profit of the Year category for the second time further reflected the visibility and relevance of our work across the wider data landscape.





The event, [Perspectives on Engagement and Impact](#) was an important way for us to support Early Career Researchers by connecting them with policy engagement professionals and stakeholders. They learned practical techniques for engaging with different audiences, understanding what stakeholders in different sectors need to hear and how to communicate with them. Successful engagement is a key step to turning data-enhanced research into real-world impact. "



Finn Dymond-Green

Director of Impact,
UK Data Service

2026: Perspectives on Engagement and Impact

The UK Data Service's 2026 impact event, [Perspectives on Engagement and Impact: an event for Early Career Researchers](#) took place in February in Manchester.

At the event, more than 60 Early Career Researchers came together to develop ways to effectively communicate, engage and maximise impact from their work.

Lightning keynotes

Participants heard vital messages on communicating from the [King's Global Institute for Women's Leadership](#), [Resolve Poverty](#) charity, the [North West Ambulance Service](#) and a local councillor.

Mobilising research for policy impact

Colleagues from the policy engagement team at [CLOSER](#) delivered an insightful workshop on successful approaches to making their research stand out.

Stakeholder speed dating

In this interactive Q&A session, Early Career Researchers had the opportunity to meet stakeholders from charities, the NHS, local government and the ESRC, ask them questions and hear honest answers in return.

Topics included effective engagement techniques, submitting to committee enquiries and career opportunities outside academia.

Recordings and resources can be found on the [dedicated event page](#).



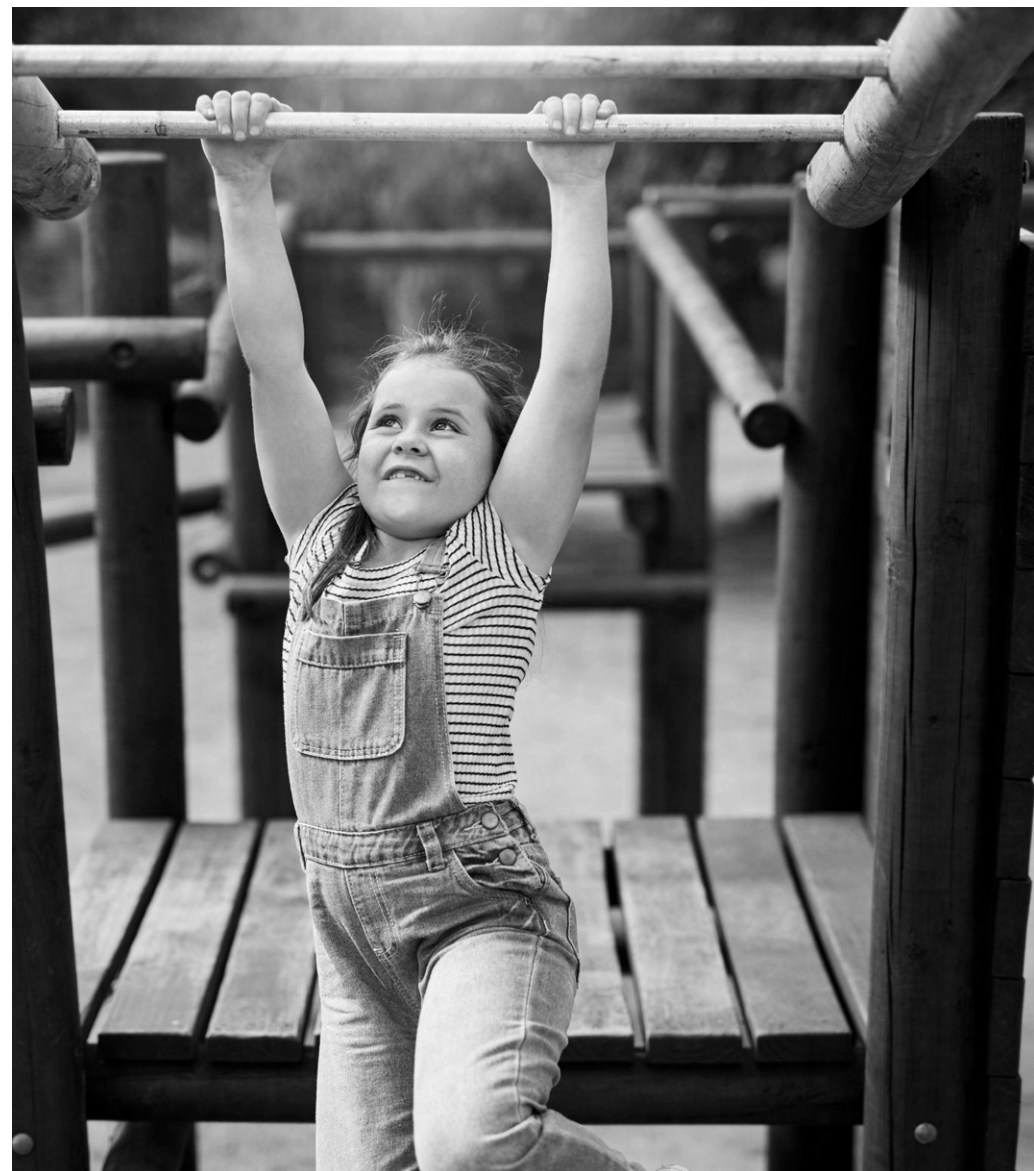
Data Impact blog: Continuing the conversation

The [Data Impact blog](#) continued to provide a platform for sharing how data, research infrastructure and data services contribute to better research, policy and public understanding.

During the year, the blog published 70 articles, featuring contributions from researchers, data professionals, policymakers and partner organisations. Posts included contributions from Data Impact Fellows, academic researchers, charities such as [Trussell](#), the [Royal British Legion](#) and [Resolve Poverty](#); and Professor Alison Park (former director of ESRC). Topics included mental and physical health, gender inequality, young people, literacy, neurodivergence, fatherhood, synthetic data and innovations within the UK Data Service and other research data infrastructure.

The huge range of contributions to the Data Impact blog helped to highlight the value of the data held by the UK Data Service and the research it enables.

The blog also continued to support wider discussion across the data community, sharing practical learning, new perspectives and examples of data being used to address important social questions. With over 37,000 page views during the year, it remains an important part of our advocacy and outreach work.





Data in action: Evidence supporting policy and public understanding

We continued to demonstrate the value and impact of our collections through case studies showing how researchers use data to address important social and policy questions. Among the valuable case studies published during the year, the two examples that follow show how data accessed through the Service is supporting research into gender and regional inequality and improving understanding of public attitudes towards climate change.

Mapping gender equality across the UK

[The Gender Equality Index UK](#) is the first index to systematically measure and analyse the socioeconomic outcomes of women and men across all 372 UK local authorities.

Developed by researchers at the [King's Global Institute for Women's Leadership](#), the index brings together 19 indicators across 6 areas: paid work, unpaid work, money, power and participation, education and health. It measures not only the gaps between women and men, but also how local outcomes for each compare with national averages, revealing where apparent equality reflects either shared prosperity or shared disadvantage.

[Understanding Society data](#) – accessed through the UK Data Service – was central to measuring unpaid work and power and participation. The research found that women spent an average of 12 hours a week on domestic work in 2023, compared with 7 hours for men. It also revealed substantial local variation in the gender gap in voting at the 2019 General Election.

The index found that no UK local authority had achieved full gender equality. It identified four local patterns, showing that a narrow gender gap can reflect either strong outcomes for women and men or shared disadvantage. More gender-balanced areas also tended to have higher productivity, stronger economic activity, better wages and lower deprivation.

The findings are already informing policy, advocacy and public debate. The index has featured in evidence submitted to parliamentary committees, supported engagement with local authorities and civil society organisations and been made available through an interactive public website.



[Click to read the full case study](#)
[The Gender Equality Index UK: what does gender equality look like in the UK today?](#)



Improving how climate attitudes are measured

A second case study examined how the wording and framing of survey questions can shape what researchers and policymakers understand about public opinion on climate change.

Researchers from the [Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research](#) reviewed more than 315 surveys from around the world, identified through the UK Data Service and the [GESIS repository](#). These included major studies such as [Understanding Society](#) and the [British Social Attitudes Survey](#), alongside smaller surveys covering local experiences, flooding, renewable energy and climate adaptation.

The team developed a framework that classifies climate survey questions into seven areas, including knowledge, beliefs, concern, responsibility, economic effects, policy support and evaluation of action. The research showed that these concepts should not be treated as interchangeable, as question wording, context and whether costs or trade-offs are mentioned can significantly affect responses.

Access to both large national surveys and smaller specialist collections through the Service enabled the researchers to develop a more comprehensive and geographically diverse framework. The data catalogue and [ReShare](#) also helped the team discover studies they may not otherwise have identified.

The framework is already being used by major European research initiatives, including [Infra4NextGen](#) and the [Social Aspects of the Green Transition](#) project. It has informed cross-national survey modules examining young people's views and how different generations and social groups experience the transition towards a more sustainable economy.

Together, these case studies demonstrate how access to diverse, high-quality data can support new research methods, improve public understanding and provide stronger evidence for policy and decision-making.



[Click to read the full case study](#)
[Classifying climate change questions used in public opinion surveys](#)

Building partnerships for a stronger data ecosystem

Partnerships are central to how the UK Data Service develops, strengthens and extends its role in the research data landscape.

This year, we continued to build partnerships that reflect the changing needs of the data community. These collaborations support better routes for sharing data, stronger public engagement and new approaches to making data more useful for researchers and decision makers.

One important area of work has focused on the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector. These organisations collect rich data about the needs and experiences of the people and communities they support, but this data can often remain underused once its immediate purpose has been fulfilled.

We're supporting work led by the [VCSE Data and Insights National Observatory](#) to explore how well-designed data infrastructure can help amplify the value and voice of the sector. Partners include the [British Red Cross](#), [Data Kind UK](#) and the [University of Strathclyde](#).



We also strengthened our long-standing collaboration with the [Department for Education](#) and the UK Data Archive through a [new framework agreement](#). This builds on a history of curating and providing access to Department for Education and linked data, creating a more consistent, transparent and auditable route for depositing and sharing research-ready datasets through the UK Data Service. Recent releases include the [Longitudinal Study of Young Persons in England 2, 2013-2021: Secure Access](#), [Children of the 2020s: Wave 1, Further Education Workforce Census in England, 2021-2024: Secure Access](#) and [Longitudinal Education Outcomes Synthetic Data: Version 1, 1995-2021](#).

Alongside these data access partnerships, we've taken the [Public Engagement in Data Research Initiative \(PEDRI\) Pledge](#), reinforcing

our commitment to responsible, transparent and trustworthy data research and statistics. This pledge supports our role as a trusted steward of economic, population and social data and provides a useful framework for considering how public perspectives can inform data research where appropriate.

Together, these partnerships demonstrate how we're working across the data ecosystem to support responsible access, build trust and improve the value of data for research and society. They also provide a foundation for new funded collaborations and projects that will move into delivery in the coming year, helping us turn strategic relationships into practical improvements for users, data owners and the wider research community.



“
Delivering the pledge means using the PEDRI Good Practice Standards to guide our approach. We will continue to consider where public engagement can add value, work with partners to share learning and ensure our data stewardship remains grounded in trust, transparency and responsible practice.”



Jo Webb

Associate Director of
Business Strategy,
Operations and
Communications,
UK Data Service

Future projects

During the year, we worked closely with partners to develop and secure successful bids for major new collaborations, including applying for [Horizon Europe funding to develop AI-enabled tools and services](#) to support access to data for researchers. We're now aligning our expertise and resources to support delivery of these projects.

We will contribute to two new projects that will drive the development of new AI-augmented tools and services, making it easier for researchers to integrate datasets between different repositories and across multiple countries.

Funding worth over €15 million has been awarded to two consortia of partners across Europe led by [CODATA \(the Committee on Data of the International Science Council\)](#), and the [Barcelona Supercomputing Centre](#).

The Service will receive just over €1.5 million from these awards to work on the two projects, with our participation forming part of our collaboration with [CESSDA \(Consortium of European Social Science Data Archives\)](#).

Developing and implementing the Cross-Domain Interoperability Framework for EOSC – CDIF4EOSC

The €8 million funding award will support the project [CDIF4EOSC: Developing and implementing the Cross-Domain Interoperability Framework for European Open Science Cloud \(EOSC\)](#) bringing together more than 16 partners across Europe.



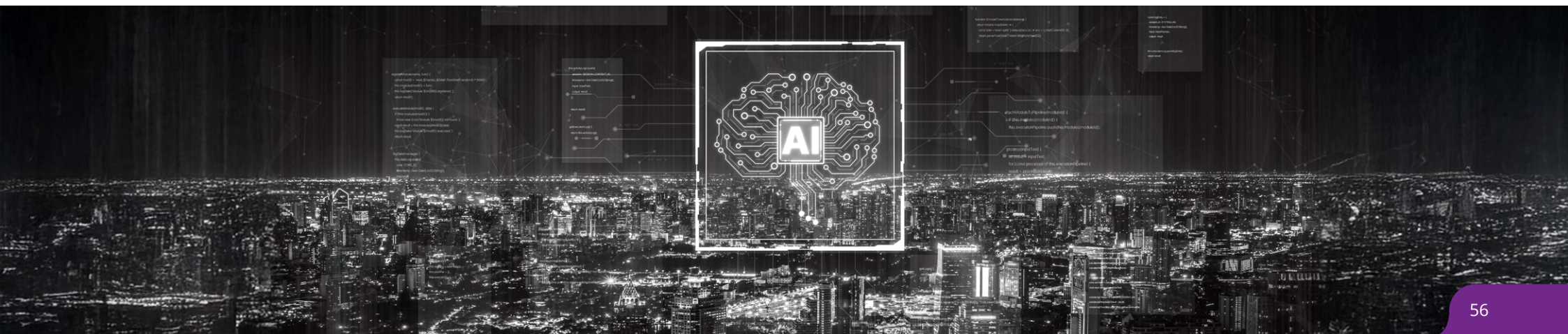
€1 million of this award has been allocated to the UK Data Service to spend 3 years on 2 work packages, which will involve developing 18 new tools that will use AI and API services to advance interoperability, FAIR (findable, accessible, interoperable and reusable) principles, plus high-quality data integration services across the [European Open Science Cloud \(EOSC\)](#) and beyond.

The project will increase the use of automated metadata within datasets across multiple domains – including the social sciences – using existing standards to create an intermediary neutral ‘lingua franca’ language between them. This framework, called CDIF, will allow services from all domains to interoperate with each other, so researchers can integrate extracted data from them more easily.

AI Readiness for Social Impact: AI4SOCIAL+

The €7.5 million funding award supports [AI Readiness for Social Impact, AI4SOCIAL+](#), a project led by the Barcelona Supercomputing Centre and running from 2026 to 2029. Through Stream B of the project, the UK Data Service will receive €0.5 million to develop new machine-actionability tools for data repositories. Overall, the project will help prepare the social sciences and humanities for the adoption of AI and identify the infrastructure and ecosystem needed to support this transformation.

Together, these future projects show how we’re working with international partners to shape the next stage of trusted, connected and AI-ready research infrastructure. In the coming period, we’ll draw on expertise across curation, metadata, infrastructure, governance, user support and stakeholder engagement to support delivery and bring learning from these collaborations back into our services.



Future Data Services: towards a more connected data landscape

In November 2025, the [ESRC](#) published its [Future Data Services Phase One Report, Fixing the Data Pipeline](#), setting out a roadmap for a more seamless, connected and researcher-centred data services landscape.

The UK Data Service contributed to the Future Data Services programme and welcomed its focus on a federated, whole-system approach. The report's recommendations align closely with our strategic priorities, including improved data discovery and access, interoperability, technological change, collaboration and investment in workforce skills.

Five guiding principles underpin the report's vision:





The ESRC is now working with its data infrastructure investments to take forward these recommendations. This provides us with an important framework for working more closely with partners, connecting services and developing practical solutions that make it easier for researchers to discover, access and use data.

We'll work with the ESRC and other data infrastructure investments to support implementation of the report's recommendations. This will include contributing to a more federated and researcher-centred data services landscape, strengthening collaboration and interoperability across services and exploring shared solutions that improve data discovery, access and use. We'll also continue to invest in the technology, skills and partnerships needed to support this direction.



[Click to read more
about the Future Data Services Phase
One Report and its recommendations](#)

Looking ahead

The future development of the UK Data Service will continue to be guided by the changing needs of researchers, data producers and the wider communities we serve.

As research becomes more data-intensive and increasingly interdisciplinary, users will need easier ways to discover, access, connect and use a growing range of data. Reaching 10,000 datasets was a significant milestone and the journey towards the next 10,000 will be defined not only by scale but by how effectively we connect data, services and expertise to meet the evolving needs of research.

Technological change, including advances in artificial intelligence, will create new opportunities as well as new expectations. While much about the future of AI remains uncertain, we'll explore how it can improve the efficiency, capacity and responsiveness of our services.





Meeting these needs will depend on stronger collaboration across the research data landscape. Through the Economic and Social Research Council's [Future Data Services](#) agenda, we will work closely with the ESRC, UKRI and our wider partners to help create a more connected and interoperable system.

As the international projects, [AI4SOCIAL+](#) and [CDIF4EOSC](#) move into delivery, a key focus for the coming year will be supporting their successful implementation and bringing learning from these collaborations into the development of our services.

By combining a deep understanding of user needs with innovation, trusted stewardship and partnership, the UK Data Service will continue to enable the next generation of data-driven research.



As the UK Data Service grows, our focus must remain firmly on the people who use our services. To ensure we continue to stay in step with users' needs, we will prioritise listening carefully, responding practically and making sure our systems, partnerships and innovations help users access and use our services with confidence. "



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 that 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.

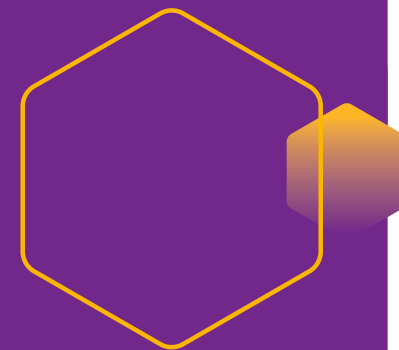
The department brings together academics and practitioners in these fields, with research aiming to develop the understanding and insights needed to shape the emerging information environment, while elucidating and building on the historical developments that have created this environment.

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. 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.





✉ help@ukdataservice.ac.uk

☎ +44 (0) 1206 872143

The UK Data Service is supported by the University of Essex, University of Manchester, Jisc, UCL and University of Edinburgh. We're funded by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) through the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

All images sourced from Shutterstock.com

UK Data Service
University of Essex
Wivenhoe Park
Colchester
Essex
CO4 3SQ

 [LinkedIn](#)
 [Bluesky](#)
 [YouTube](#)
 [Zenodo](#)
 ukdataservice.ac.uk

Strategy, content and coordination:
UK Data Service Communications Team
Design: creativejoy.co.uk
Editorial: sarahtownsendeditorial.co.uk
© 2026 University of Essex