

Collection development policy



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1. Scope

The mission of the UK Data Service is to support high quality social, economic and population research, teaching and learning through assuring long-term access to high-quality research-ready data, supporting and promoting their use, value and impact.

This policy describes the functions and activities implemented by the UK Data Service for developing its data collections to ensure the successful delivery of its mission. These functions and activities include the acquisition, selection and appraisal of data collections while aligning with and meeting the data needs of our major stakeholder communities, other relevant organisational policies (both internal and external), national and international standards and legislative requirements.

2. Definition of terms

Acquisition: The process related to acquiring materials for inclusion in the collection.

Archiving: A curation activity that ensures that data are properly selected, stored, can be continuously accessed, and that its logical and physical integrity is maintained over time, including authenticity and security.

Data Collection: Used to describe a collection of data files and associated resources. Data files within a data collection in the context of this policy are social science research data that comprise evidence about people, populations, organisations and society. The data collection can be made up of quantitative, qualitative and mixed-methods data and emerging digital and computational data types.

The data collection includes but is not limited to large-scale government and ESRC-commissioned survey and aggregate data, international macrodata, qualitative and mixed methods data, as well as other funded or non-funded social sciences data collections.

Data Owner: The natural or legal person, public authority, agency or any other body which alone, or jointly with others, holds the copyright and associated intellectual property rights in a Data Collection.

Designated User Community: The UK Data Archive's designated user community is made up of social science and related data users within HE and FE in the UK, though best efforts are made for all users. (For the purpose of this definition, quantitative and qualitative data collections created by or for historians are considered to be 'social scientific'). All users are expected to have a basic understanding of social science methods and techniques relevant to the data collections being accessed. Additional requirements will be expected in the case of users of data subject to secure access.

End User Licence Agreement: The User Agreement entered into by a User when registering to access Safeguarded and Controlled data from the UK Data Service.

Ingest: The processes related to receiving information from an external source and preparing it for archival storage and access.

The Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations (PECR): These regulations sit alongside the Data Protection Act and the UK GDPR. They give people specific privacy rights in relation to electronic communications to (a) ensure that personal data can be accessed only by authorised personnel for legally authorised purposes; (b) protect personal data stored or transmitted against accidental or unlawful destruction, accidental loss or alteration, and unauthorised or unlawful storage, processing, access or disclosure; and (c) ensure the implementation of a security policy with respect to the processing of personal data.

Personal Data: Are defined as in accordance with the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) Article 4(1) and the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018 s3(2) as: data that relate to an identified or identifiable natural person, be it directly or indirectly, taking into account other information derived from published sources.

Personal Information: Information that relates to and identifies an individual (including a body corporate) taking into account other information derived from published sources (as defined in section 39(2) of the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007).

Preservation: An activity within archiving in which specific items of data are maintained over time so that they can still be accessed and understood through changes in technology. Unlike 'archiving', preservation does not include maintaining the logical and physical integrity of a data object.

Selection: The process of identifying materials to be made accessible and in many cases to be preserved for long-term use.

User Agreement: An agreement setting out the terms and conditions of data use and establishing the rights and responsibilities of the Registered User.

3. Introduction

The UK Data Service is a domain-specific trusted digital repository acquiring, curating and providing access to research-ready data and related resources for its designated user community, primarily within the social sciences and related disciplines. The aims of this policy are:

- To define the policy drivers and scope of the UK Data Service collection.
- To provide an overview of the criteria for, and principles behind, inclusion of data.
- To steer the selection and appraisal of data collections and to ensure a consistent and transparent approach.
- To inform key stakeholders including existing and prospective data owners and data users, funding bodies and partners of the applicable criteria for data collections that are to be acquired.
- To inform the effective resourcing needed for the implementation of key collection development activities.

This policy directly informs the key service requirements of the UK Data Service and significantly impacts on the UK Data Archive's Preservation activities.¹

4. Background and context

The primary policy driver is the UK Research and Innovation Economic and Social Research Council (UKRI ESRC) Research Data Policy² and the emerging pan-UKRI Research Data Policy, consulted on in 2025 and expected to be adopted in 2026. The UK Data Service will update this policy following formal publication of the new pan-UKRI policy to ensure continued alignment, while maintaining its established disciplinary remit and service focus.

This policy demonstrates the UKRI ESRC's commitment to the provision of access to data as the primary asset for economic and social research regardless of its underlying access criteria (section 7) and supports UKRI's commitment to open research and the implementation of FAIR-aligned research data infrastructure across disciplines. The principles are guided by the OECD's report Enhanced Access to Publicly Funded Data for Science, Technology and Innovation³ and the Principles and Guidelines for Access to Research Data from Public Funding and the UK Strategy for Data Resources for Social and Economic Research.^{4 5}

This policy is also informed by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) research and data access policy⁶ and the 2017 Digital Economy Act Research Code of Practice and Accreditation Criteria⁷ that make a commitment to the provision of access to ONS microdata for statistical research and other research relevant digital objects, such as metadata and bespoke algorithms, workflows, models, and software (including code), and to provide updated policy guidance structured around key policy areas that have emerged as crucial to enhancing access to research data since its adoption.

This strategy is also enshrined in the Concordat between the ONS and the UK Data Service. The UK Census 2031 programmes further offers the opportunity to provide access to

¹ dam.data-archive.ac.uk/controlled/cd062-preservationpolicy.pdf

² ukri.org/publications/esrc-research-data-policy/

³ oecd.org/en/publications/enhanced-access-to-publicly-funded-data-for-science-technology-and-innovation_947717bc-en.html

⁴ ukri.org/publications/esrc-research-data-policy/

⁵ oecd.org/en/publications/2007/04/oecd-principles-and-guidelines-for-access-to-research-data-from-public-funding_g1gh7fe5.html

legalinstruments.oecd.org/en/instruments/OECD-LEGAL-0347

⁶

ons.gov.uk/aboutus/transparencyandgovernance/datastrategy/datapolicies/onsresearchanddataaccesspolicy

⁷ gov.uk/government/consultations/digital-economy-act-part-5-data-sharing-codes-and-regulations/research-code-of-practice-and-accreditation-criteria

enhanced data products under this policy for the research community.^{8 9 10}

There are many external policies and legal frameworks, which may indirectly affect the implementation of this policy. These include legislation, e.g. the Census Act 1920; the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007, §39(5); The Digital Economy Act 2017; the Data Protection Act 2018; the Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations (PECR); the United Kingdom General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR); and the General Data Protection Regulation (EU GDPR), international standards, e.g. ISO 27001; and HMG Infosec documents.

This policy demonstrates a commitment to aligning the data needs of our major stakeholder communities: data users, data owners and data funders and ensuring that those needs can be met by the data service infrastructure provided by the UK Data Service. The policy is intended to be flexible enough to meet the challenges and changing demands from these communities in an ever rapidly evolving data landscape.

This policy shall be responsive in both meeting the demands of changes in technology and resulting new types of data. The UK Data Service will advance the mission of the UKRI ESRC by investigating and supporting the deposit of new types of data and new resources in the collection in response to current and emerging research themes and user needs.

5. Policy principles

This policy is founded on the following principles:

1. Advancing the strategic objectives of the UKRI ESRC.
2. Contributing to the successful delivery of the UKRI ESRC Research Data Policy.
3. Contributing to the successful delivery of the UKRI ESRC Strategic Delivery Plan.
4. Supporting the designated user community by providing access to a wider range of data sources and resources, regardless of access method (i.e. Open, Safeguarded, Controlled).
5. Ensuring that data collections brought into the service are of high quality.
6. Promoting and supporting high-quality basic, strategic and applied research in the social sciences.
7. Promoting teaching and learning use of data and other resources to encourage secondary usage.
8. Strengthening existing partnerships with data owners and producers whilst establishing

⁸ ons.gov.uk/census

⁹ nisra.gov.uk/statistics/census/2021-census

¹⁰ scotlandscensus.gov.uk/about/

new collaborative partnerships and creating new opportunities.

Commentary

Principles 1 and 2: The UK Data Service as a data service provider is mandated by the UKRI ESRC through its Research Data Policy to provide advice and guidance to award holders on implementing effective data management plans. UK Data Service will provide guidance to award holders on issues relating to confidentiality, security and ethics in data management and sharing and work closely with other UKRI ESRC investments such as the Cohort and Longitudinal Studies Enhancement Resources (CLOSER) to ensure the discoverability of UKRI ESRC funded data assets. Guidance provided by the UK Data Service will explicitly support FAIR-aligned data management planning including persistent identifiers, metadata standards, interoperable formats and reuse licensing.

Principle 3: The vision of the UKRI ESRC Strategic Delivery Plan¹¹ is guided by four principles for change: diversity, resilience, connectivity and engagement. This policy will reflect the objectives of the strategy while continuing to build on good scientific training and ‘breadth and depth’ of readily available resources.

Principle 4: This work continues to support the long established principle and commitment of the UKRI ESRC to ensure that publicly funded research data are a public good, produced in the public interest and should be openly available to the maximum extent possible. The UK Data Service will strive to maximise the access to any data it collects while meeting legislative and legal requirements.

Principles 5, 6 and 7: The UK Data Service will ensure the authenticity, reliability and logical integrity of all resources entrusted to our care while providing usable versions for research and teaching or learning in perpetuity. The UK Data Service will ensure that its user community has access to the materials it requires by continuing to maintain existing resources, and the currency of its major data series.

Principle 8: The UK Data Service will work with European partners to provide and facilitate access to international data in both quantitative and qualitative forms. We will work to facilitate new collaborative partnerships and explore opportunities to contribute to the development of federated resourced discovery efforts and methods and tools for data curation and exploration.

¹¹ ukri.org/who-we-are/our-vision-and-strategy/our-strategy-2022-to-2027/

6. Scope of collections

For the purposes of this policy, social science research data are understood as evidence about people, populations, organisations and society. This includes data that describe or support analysis of social, economic, demographic, behavioural, cultural and institutional processes, such as how people live, work, learn, vote, travel, use services, care for others, spend and save, and engage online.

The UK Data Service supports a wide range of data modalities, including quantitative, qualitative and mixed-methods data and emerging digital and computational data types, enabling interdisciplinary and cross-sector research, including linkages between social science data and health, environmental, administrative and computational data sources, where aligned with the UKRI ESRC remit. The collection includes but is not limited to large-scale government and ESRC-commissioned survey and aggregate data, international macrodata, qualitative and mixed methods data, as well as other funded or non-funded social sciences data collections.

6.1 Disciplines

Supporting the implementation of the UKRI ESRC Research data policy, remit and portfolio¹², and recognising the growing importance of supporting cross-disciplinary research, UK Data Service selects, acquires and disseminates data from a wide range of disciplines including but not limited to:

- area and development studies
- demography
- economic and social history
- economics
- education
- environmental planning
- human geography
- international relations
- linguistics
- management and business studies
- politics
- psychology
- science and technology studies
- social anthropology
- social policy
- social statistics, methods and computing
- social work
- socio legal studies
- sociology.

¹² ukri.org/councils/esrc/remit-portfolio-and-priorities/

6.2 Strategic values

The UK Data Service acquires data to meet three strategic values.

- Potential secondary use and analysis for research:
 - to enable researcher access
 - to allow researchers to ask new questions
 - to undertake a restudy or follow-up study
 - to undertake methodological work
 - to materials originally created to inform and support research
 - or to new and novel forms of data not directly collected for academic purposes but of interest to the social scientist.
- Teaching and learning use: to provide access to data that have been created or repurposed specifically for teaching purposes to enhance use of the collection and support skills development.
- Replication, validation and reproducibility of research: to provide researchers with access to original research, which allows checks for consistency, validation of sources and validation and replication of research outputs, both published and unpublished.

6.3 Out of scope materials

Where feasible, the UK Data Service will work with data depositors to remediate documentation, metadata or rights issues to enable future inclusion, rather than automatically excluding data.

However, where materials fall outside of scope, efforts are made to determine whether another archive, data centre or responsible institutional repository is more appropriate for the dissemination, curation or preservation of these data.

There are two criteria for not accepting data:

- Legal and ethical issues: there are insurmountable rights management issues e.g. consent, Intellectual Property Rights, copyright and Data Protection issues which are unable to be satisfactorily resolved and where full use of the data would not be possible without infringing legislation.
- Lack of sufficient contextual materials, such as minimal documentation and DDI compliant metadata, to enable re-use.

7. Selection and appraisal criteria

The UK Data Service takes a proactive approach in identifying collections to meet the needs of its designated user community. This policy is enacted by selection and appraisal criteria that are both transparent and accountable to enable monitoring of processes and planning. Materials will be rigorously reviewed to determine if they may be viably managed, preserved and distributed. The criteria used to review materials consider:

- **Relevance to the remit:** The content of the materials meet the ESRC's current strategies and are within the 'Scope of Collections' (section 4). This includes being high quality, authoritative, reliable, up-to-date with good temporal and spatial coverage, with long and consistent time series (as appropriate), and strong opportunities for comparable research.
- **Scientific or historical value:** The materials are considered important resources either for research purposes and/or meet current demands in research trends and/or there is research and/or teaching activity in the subject area covered by the data.
- **New sources or types of data:** The materials fill a gap in the collection, may supplement areas of the collection, meet new research, such as interdisciplinary, drivers and/or have been requested by users.
- **International value:** The materials are important for international research.
- **Uniqueness/risk of loss:** The materials form a rare and complete resource of value to the research community and/or are at risk of loss if not acquired; data collections which are costly to reproduce or where continued access to data is threatened; data are not generally available in any other form e.g. paper.
- **Usability/redistribution/operational benefits:** The materials have been well prepared according to data format/documentation and ethical/legal guidelines and fall within Scope; accession to the UK Data Service makes the resources more accessible. Where data is made 'Open' by the data owners, the UK Data Service may continue to make accessible versions of the data because it fits well with the portfolio of other data.
- **Replication Data and Resources:** Materials and related outputs required to reproduce published or unpublished research, or undertake a restudy.

The Collection Development Selection and Appraisal criteria document sits alongside this policy to enable implementation of the policy. Suggestions or materials identified for inclusion in the collection can be recorded, and their ingest managed in a transparent and accountable manner.¹³

¹³ ukdataservice.ac.uk/app/uploads/cd234-collections-appraisal.pdf

8. Curation categories

The policy of the UK Data Service is to classify data collections in four broad categories:

1. Data collections selected for in-house curation by UKDS Curation Officers. These data will have long-term secondary analysis potential, and are reviewed, quality checked and enhanced. These collections are likely to be made available for download or order, or accessible via online access tools.
2. Data collections selected for “short-term” management. These collections will not (initially) be retained for long-term preservation, rather they will be backed-up (i.e. bit-level preservation only), are reviewed and quality checked and made accessible and discoverable through repository software (ReShare)¹⁴ or online access tools.
3. Data collections selected for ‘delivery’ only, e.g. where data from third parties are accessed via APIs/web services and delivered to end users via a UK Data Service interface.
4. Data collections selected for “discovery” only. These collections will not be brought formally into the UK Data Service collection, they will exist only in other (institutional) repositories, but the UK Data Service will host or harvest (or in exceptional circumstances, create) metadata records to increase their discoverability.

Data collections may initially fall into categories two or three but be moved to category one at a point of time in the future.

9. Licence and access framework

To support FAIR¹⁵ data sharing, the implementation of the policy, the UKRI ESRC Research data policy and the UKRI ESRC Strategic Delivery Plan the UK Data Service implements a robust, three tier licence and access framework including the provision of a Trusted Research Environment for personal data, personal information and/or sensitive data commercially or otherwise.

Data are classified according to their level of detail, sensitivity and confidentiality and appropriate data handling and access safeguards are put in place as follows:

¹⁴ These include UK Data Service online data access tools, Nesstar, QualiBank and UKDS.Stat.

¹⁵ go-fair.org/fair-principles/

Open data

- Suitable for data that are neither classified as Personal Data nor Personal Information and with no residual risk of disclosure or where consent to share Personal Data or Personal Information as Open Access is in place.
- These are made available to any user without the requirement for registration for download/access.
- Usual licences for re-use are the Open Government Licence¹⁶ and Creative Commons¹⁷ variations.

Safeguarded data

- Suitable for data that are neither classified as Personal Data nor Personal Information but where there is a potential residual disclosure risk. These data are typically effectively anonymised¹⁸ but some exceptions may apply¹⁹.
- Use of data is subject to the UK Data Service End User Licence Agreement²⁰.
- These data are made available to registered, authenticated users, and where appropriate, additional conditions and agreements are put in place.

Controlled data

- Suitable for data classified as Personal Information or Personal Data and data that are particularly sensitive, commercially or otherwise.
- Use of data is subject to the End User Licence Agreement and facilitated via the Five Safes framework²¹.
- These data are made available to registered, authenticated, trained and accredited researchers, with projects approved by the data owner(s) through a secure connection method.

Deposit licences are negotiated during the acquisition process with data owners. The UK Data Service supports and promotes widespread use of data collections with a key focus on legal and ethical considerations for sharing and using data. There are no costs associated with the deposit or accessing of data for non-commercial and teaching usages.

¹⁶ nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3/

¹⁷ creativecommons.org/licenses/

¹⁸ ico.org.uk/for-organisations/uk-gdpr-guidance-and-resources/data-sharing/anonymisation/

¹⁹ Exceptions may include audio and image data files, where participants have given permission for these to be shared.

²⁰ ukdataservice.ac.uk/app/uploads/cd137-enduserlicence.pdf

²¹ ukdataservice.ac.uk/help/secure-lab/what-is-the-five-safes-framework/

www.ukdataservice.ac.uk

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