



Economic and Social Data Service

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# Economic and Social Data Service

## Strategic Plan 2004-2009



# ESDS Strategic Plan 2004-2009

**ESDS Mission Statement** To support high quality research, teaching, and learning in the social sciences by acquiring, developing and managing social and economic data and related digital resources; and by promoting, disseminating, and supporting the use of these resources as effectively as possible.

The ESDS Strategic Plan is formulated around its mission statement, which identifies its overarching vision of supporting high quality research, teaching, and learning in the social sciences through a series of six key strategic activity areas. These strategic areas form the basis and rationale for ESDS developments over the coming years. Underlying it all is a requirement for effectiveness, efficiency, and accountability to all its stakeholders, which forms a seventh key strategic activity area.



# Background

The Economic and Social Data Service (ESDS) is a distributed service providing social science data and related digital resources and support to researchers and teachers nationally and internationally. Over the course of 2003, ESDS registered 5,649 distinct users from over 150 institutions, who collectively accessed approximately 18,000 data collections.

The service comprises six functions, operated by four units at two institutions: the UK Data Archive (UKDA) and the UK Longitudinal Studies Centre (ULSC) at the University of Essex, and the Centre for Census and Survey Research (CCSR) and Manchester Information and Associated Services (MIMAS) at the University of Manchester.

UKDA has primary responsibility for the **management** of the whole service, and it operates **ESDS Access and Preservation** (the core acquisition, processing, preservation and dissemination service) and **ESDS Qualidata** (the specialist service supporting

users of qualitative data). It is a joint partner with ULSC in operating **ESDS Longitudinal** (the specialist support service for users of longitudinal data) and joint partner with MIMAS in operating **ESDS International** (the specialist service supporting users of cross-national and foreign data, with MIMAS operating the service for macro data and time series, and the UKDA the service for survey micro data). **ESDS Government** (the specialist service supporting users of large-scale government social surveys) is operated by CCSR with support from the UKDA.

ESDS is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) of the Higher Education Funding Councils to provide these services free of charge at point of delivery for UK higher and further education. Through its reciprocal arrangements with sister data services worldwide, ESDS also provides data internationally.

# Vision: High quality research, teaching, and learning

ESDS is above all a data service supporting research, teaching and learning in UK higher and further education. Everything it does must be mindful of the ESRC's own mission to promote and support high quality research and training in the social sciences, and relevant to the needs of its core academic community. ESDS must be embedded within its community and ensure that the services it offers, the data it acquires, the advice and support it provides, are all timely, up to date, and relevant to the needs of UK social science, now and in the future. Capacity building is an important part of this mission, building data literacy by enabling the training of students, tomorrow's data users both within academia and beyond. Accountability and transparency are key, and every aspect of the service must be under continuous scrutiny to ensure that resources are being invested wisely, carefully, and where they will yield best results for its users.

Quality must be a keynote guiding ESDS operation and strategic direction. Quality implies adoption and careful monitoring of compliance with standards: standards for decisions around collections development; standards for procedures for validating and adding value to data and documentation; standards (both technical and content) for metadata creation and metadata and data dissemination; standards for preservation clearly explicated in a preservation policy; agreed standards for service delivery and reporting on service levels via the JISC Monitoring Unit; and generally operating the 'back office' transparently and in accordance with explicit procedures and policies. But quality also means enabling quality research, developing the service in new and novel ways to expand the scope of research, finding ways to inform users about dataset quality and usability, and working with data creators to improve the quality of their dataset documentation and metadata.

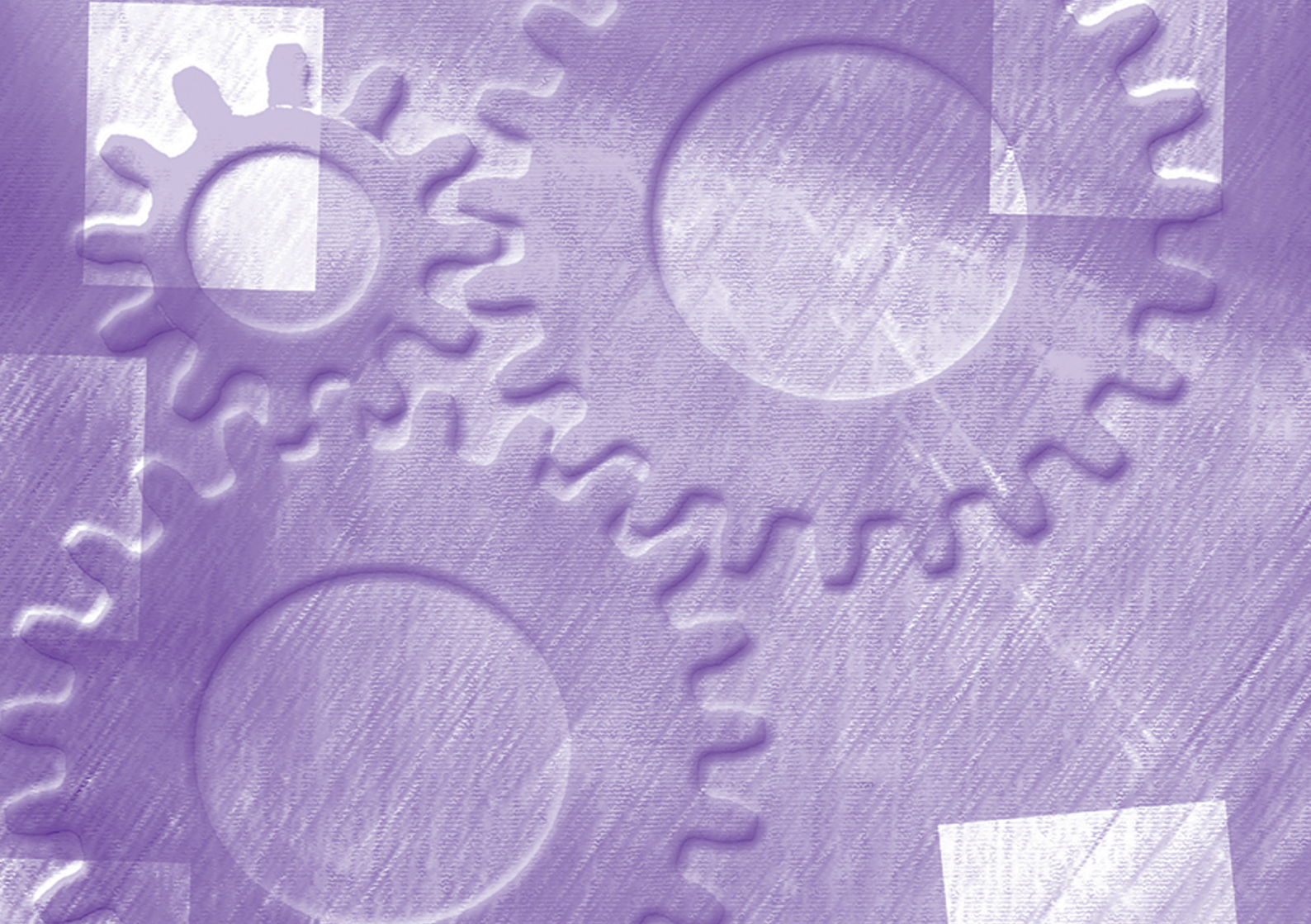


# Quality research

## enabling in the social sciences

In the complex modern information environment, more than ever ESDS must strive for integration. There are a myriad of services and sites offering resources to social scientists and educators. ESDS must seek at all times to ensure that it works together with sister organisations to maximise synergy and minimise overlap. In the first instance this means careful integration with the ESRC family of research resources, but it also means looking beyond social science and ensuring the service is embedded within the JISC Information Environment and interoperating effectively there. It means closer co-working with ESRC grantholders and programmes to ensure that existing data resources are best used, and that depositing of data outputs from grants is as smooth as possible.

Even further afield, it means participating in international organisations and endeavours, such as Council of European Social Science Data Archives (CESSDA), Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR), the Data Documentation Initiative (DDI) Alliance, International Association of Social Science Information Service and Technology (IASSIST), International Federation of Data Organisations (IFDO), and ensuring that developments both here and abroad are cross-fertilised for maximum yield. It means active involvement in a National Data Strategy, and working together with major data providers (e.g. Office for National Statistics (ONS)) and other data sponsors (such as the other research councils) to ensure synergies are harnessed. Clearly, integration means a commitment to enabling, participating in and furthering the UK's e-social science agenda.





# Key Strategic Activities 2004-2009

The mission statement identifies six key strategic activity areas through which ESDS seeks to support high quality research, teaching, and learning in the social sciences, along with an overarching strategic commitment to achieving these six activities as effectively as possible.

Outlined are the key strategic developments under each of these activity areas, followed by strategic developments in accountability to ensure all ESDS activity is as effective and efficient as possible.

This framework will guide the formation of quarter-by-quarter milestone goals for the service as a whole and for each of the constituent ESDS specialist services, which will serve as a detailed implementation plan for the strategic vision outlined here.

# Acquiring

Acquisition of datasets of interest to the academic community is where it all begins. ESDS will seek to expand its relationships with a variety of data producers in the government, charitable, commercial, and academic sectors, nationally and internationally.

Over the period covered by this plan, ESDS proposes to implement an agreed joint strategy with the ESRC, to identify datasets of interest to users arising from ESRC-funded research at the grant application stage, so that acquisition of ESRC-funded data resources can be scheduled and managed, the deposit process eased, and quality improved.

The process must be flexible enough to accommodate unforeseen circumstances over the course of the grant which render a dataset unsuitable, but identification at the grant application stage of likely acquisitions can only improve the quality of the dataset and the efficiency with which it is acquired. Another important aspect of acquisitions is working with data creators to improve the quality of incoming data and metadata, and offer advice to data creators on data management, metadata creation, and legal and ethical issues.

Acquisition strategy must be guided by a Collections Management Policy, and must be informed by all stakeholder groups.

## Key strategic objectives

- implementing a new way of working with ESRC grantees, to ensure efficiency and quality in the deposit process
- widening the scope of data holdings into new areas of demand and interest, and reviewing and improving the Collections Policy in consultation with stakeholders
- developing model licences/agreements for data acquisition and dissemination and ensuring advice given on legal and ethical issues are up to date with recent legislation
- working with data creators, especially National Statistics, to ensure that the maximum possible detail is available to researchers whilst maintaining respondent confidentiality and enabling mechanisms by which the tensions between these objectives can be negotiated
- working with data creators to improve the quality of incoming data and metadata

# Developing

## Developing

Adding value to data and metadata resources are a key part of ESDS activity. ESDS Access and Preservation does significant work in enhancing data and documentation resources before they are released for use, and the four subject-focused specialist services within ESDS are charged with further enhancing these resources and providing in-depth guidance and support to users.

Key to developing ESDS resources over the period of this plan is the theme of linkages – linkages between different datasets, linkages to contextual metadata to help interpretation of the data, linkages to outputs and experts, and linkages enabled via the Grid and e-social science methods.

### Key strategic objectives

- enhancing data and documentation
- pioneering work to enable online browsing of data – qualitative data, micro data, tabular data, time series, etc.
- working on data linkage and fusion, and the implications for confidentiality
- linking of related but not overlapping resources: bringing together information about analysis methods with data resources
- linking to related publications, human resources (experts in the field), and other forms of contextual metadata
- developing strategies for Grid-enabling data to serve the e-social science agenda



# Managing

Proper data management and adherence to standards is absolutely central to ESDS strategy and practice. ESDS is an internationally-renowned resource for good practice in data management, and our data preservation policy has been held up by the Digital Preservation Coalition (DPC) as outstanding.

Managing data goes beyond good practice internally; it also means getting the most out of ESDS resources by ensuring that they can interoperate with other resources in the JISC Information Environment and beyond. It also means ensuring best practice in rights management frameworks, and ensuring that relevant legislative requirements are met proactively.

## Key strategic objectives

- ensuring compliance with data security standards on a machine level
- ensuring, through data migration and preservation activities, that data continues to be usable and securely accessible
- improving technical interoperability
- interoperability at a content level achieved through metadata and data standards
- interoperability with sister services via common authentication regimes
- complying with legislation and guidelines (e.g. Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA), Data Protection, Freedom of Information (FOI) etc.)

# Promoting

## Promoting

Promoting ESDS is a multi-faceted activity. It includes the obvious promotion of the use of ESDS resources via various workshops and outreach events (both those sponsored and those attended), but it also includes activity which seeks to identify and eliminate barriers to broader usage.

This may include: tailoring resources for use in further education or in learning and teaching; working with JISC on authentication developments which will ease access for the user whilst protecting the data owners and respondents; and investigating ways in which ESDS can interoperate more closely with sister services to create user service wholes which are greater than the sums of their parts.

It means taking part in the development of a National Datasets Strategy and working as closely as possible with other research councils and government bodies to maximise data provision and synergies whilst minimising unnecessary overlap.

### Key strategic objectives

- identifying, and wherever possible, removing or mitigating barriers to use
- improving and extending outreach and promotion of data use
- sharing expertise in data preservation, data dissemination, and user support nationally and internationally through visits, conference presentations etc.
- working with funders to promote service
- working with sister organisations nationally and internationally to extend service
- supporting future ESRC and cross-council research programmes

# Disseminating

Disseminating data and related resources is not purely a matter of having a good download web site. It means that every part of the dissemination process must be examined and improved, from resource location through registration, authentication, ordering and delivery.

In the age of e-science, dissemination may come to mean something entirely different, as the Grid enables the pulling together of multiple disparate resources.

ESDS must meet this challenge, and this opportunity, with a truly twenty-first century data dissemination strategy.

## Key strategic objectives

- improving service infrastructure (registration, authentication, ordering, access control)
- Grid-enabling data for use in e-social science
- enhancing access to data through improved service provision
- enhancing tools for data discovery, data browsing, data analysis, data visualisation, data download

# Supporting

What distinguishes ESDS from what came before is an accent on specialised user support.

The four subject-focused specialist services within ESDS (ESDS Government, ESDS International, ESDS Longitudinal and ESDS Qualidata) are charged with developing and tailoring support services and related resources for their subject areas. Clearly this cannot be done in a vacuum, and so user and stakeholder consultation is an important part of the strategic process.

## Key strategic objectives

- extending and improving specialist support services
- focusing workshop and training activities for data creators and data users
- working with users to focus service
- working with data creators to improve service
- enhancing understanding of data content by producing related information, contextual metadata, linkages to other resources, guides and publications



# Effectiveness

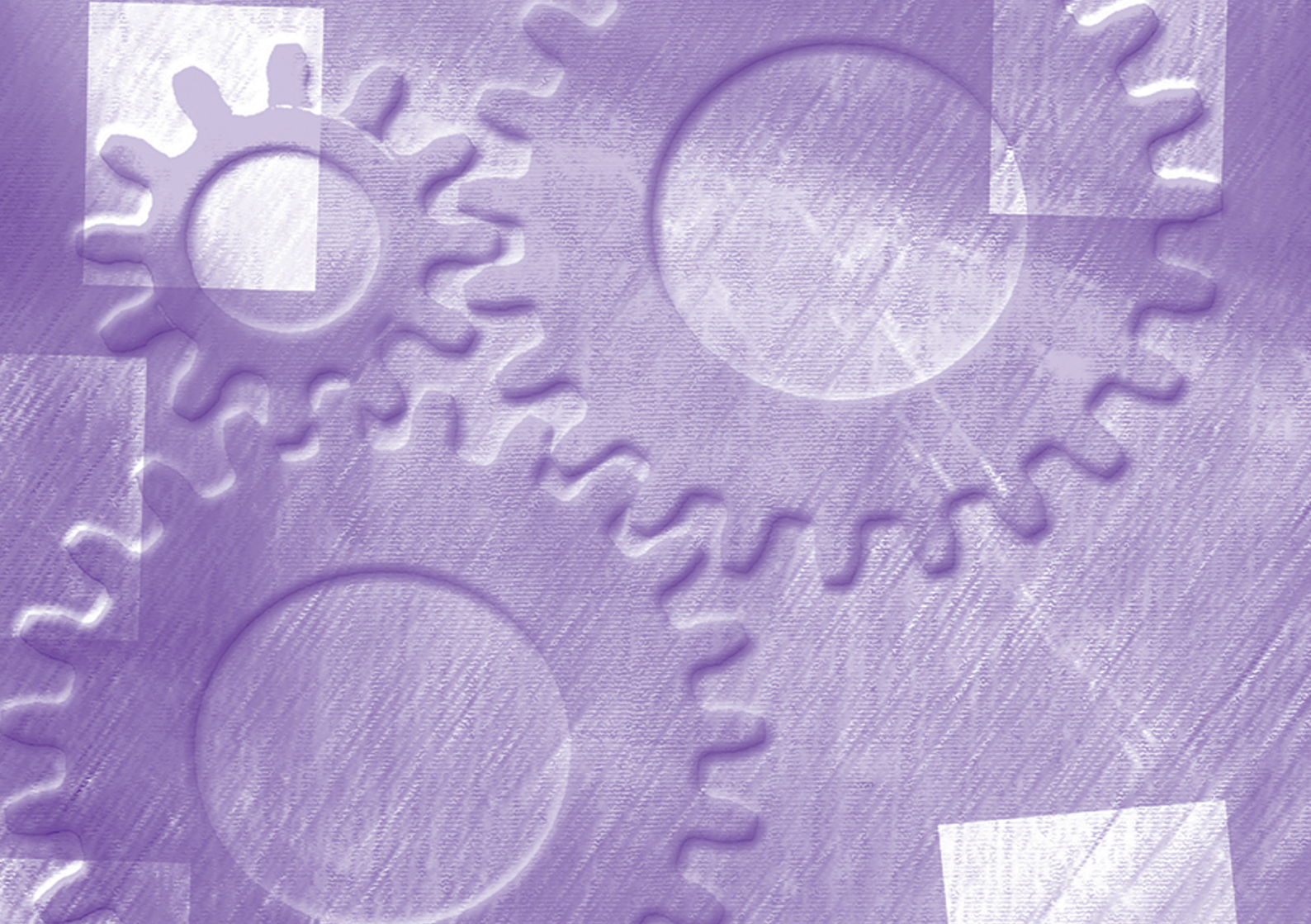
## Effectiveness

Underpinning the six key strategic activity areas put forward in the Mission Statement is a charge that all service activity be undertaken as effectively and efficiently as possible. Much of this is achieved through careful integration and interoperation with sister services and endeavours nationally and internationally.

Effectiveness also implies a high level of transparency and accountability to all of the ESDS stakeholders.

### Key strategic objectives

- accountability to users via a service level definition and quarterly reporting
- accountability to funders via Activity Based Costings and secure financial audit procedures
- accountability to community via milestones and annual reporting
- accountability to depositors via adherence to defined procedures and standards in data acquisition and data and documentation processing
- accountability to staff through best practice in human resource management and staff development



# Approach

## Approach Structure

This final section of the Strategic Plan outlines the structures, systems, and relationships which form the framework that will enable the development of concrete plans, policies, and activities for the implementation of the key strategic objectives.

ESDS is structured around its component services: four specialist services supporting users of particular kinds of data, a core preservation and dissemination service, and a management service which unites the parts. The ESDS Director is supported by a Senior Management Team comprised of the heads of the five (four specialist and one core) services, which meets regularly in person and via videoconference. The service as a whole reports to its funders via a quarterly troika meeting with representatives from the ESRC and JISC secretariats, and the three ESDS grantholders from the universities of Essex and Manchester. The service is further guided by an Advisory Committee which meets biannually, and consists of representatives from all the stakeholder communities, including funders, users, depositors, sister data services, national statistical and central government, and data professionals from outside government and academia. This committee is chaired by a senior executive officer of the Office for National Statistics.

# External

## External networks

ESDS is represented on a number of crucial national and international forums which affect the future of digital services internationally. It is a member of the Digital Preservation Coalition (DPC), the Council of European Social Science Data Archives (CESSDA), the International Federation of Data Organisations (IFDO), has members on the Administrative Committee of the International Association of Social Science Information Service and Technology (IASSIST), sits on advisory and steering groups of a number of organisations including the Data Documentation Initiative (DDI), the National Data Strategy group, and the National Centre for e-Social Science (NCeSS).

ESDS is regularly called upon during consultation activities carried out by organisations with an interest in data, digital preservation, and social research. ESDS staff regularly attend and present papers at relevant conferences and workshops nationally and internationally. ESDS also sponsors workshops and conferences on a wide variety of topics for a wide variety of stakeholders.

Through its strong networks, ESDS keeps abreast of, and has an impact on, national and international developments in its areas of interest and expertise, and constantly seeks to both inform and implement its strategic aims through these relationships.



# Milestones and reporting

## Service levels – accountability

In consultation through the troika, ESDS agrees quarterly milestones with deliverables on an annual basis for each of the component services. Milestones and deliverables are set explicitly to achieve the key objectives outlined in the Strategic Plan. Progress against these milestones is reported quarterly to the troika, and these quarterly reports are also disseminated to the Advisory Committee for information and comment.

In addition, progress against the Strategic Plan key objectives is detailed in an Annual Report, which is circulated widely among stakeholders. The Annual Report also reports on the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) set by the ESRC for each of the services it funds.

On a more specific level, ESDS activity is monitored by the JISC Monitoring Unit (MU), with whom the ESDS has established a Service Level Definition (SLD) which sets targets for service performance in a number of very specific areas. The SLD is subject to annual review and revision via the troika in light of changing technology, service demand, and resources. SLD reporting is returned quarterly, and is available to the public on the MU web site.

# Internal working groups, policies, and procedures

Within ESDS are a number of cross-service working groups and committees which oversee and control implementation of the strategic aims. Standing groups include an acquisitions strategy group, an acquisitions review committee, a data services group, a support services group, a publicity and promotions group, a web development group, an information development group, a systems and preservation group, a programmers and developers group and a director's advisory group. These groups are responsible for ensuring the timely delivery of service milestones and meeting agreed service levels.

ESDS also has a number of internal policy and procedural documents which outline best practice in its day-to-day working. These documents are also mindful of our strategic aims, and are regularly revised in the light of changing technology, legislation, and practice.

These structures, systems, and relationships are the practical means through which this Strategic Plan will be implemented.



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