

ADR UK Research Fellowships

General Research Specification

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1. Summary

Administrative Data Research UK (ADR UK)'s research fellowship scheme invites applicants to propose research and analysis to demonstrate the potential policy impact of ADR UK's flagship datasets. Researchers can apply for a research grant of 18 months in duration, up to a maximum of £200,000 for the entire programme at 100% full economic cost (FEC). ADR UK will fund 80% of the full economic cost subject to [ESRC's funding policy](#). The remaining 20% should be funded by your research organisation.

Applications should propose research projects which incorporate:

- data cleaning and exploration;
- impact-driven policy and public engagement; as well as
- easily digestible publications and academic peer-reviewed articles.

2. Background to ADR UK funded Research Fellowships

The ADR UK Research Fellowship programme was established to enable the use of purposefully curated linked administrative data from specific government departments across the United Kingdom. ADR UK has worked with our partners to ensure data is research ready and now identify these data as part of our [ADR UK flagship dataset](#) collection. In some cases, our fellows have been the first to use specific flagship data. Their shared experiences and understanding of the data are building our collective understanding of the quality of each flagship dataset, informing what it can tell us. Research undertaken through this funding opportunity reflects our mission to grow the use of our flagship data and enhance contributions to social science by answering key societal questions and creating positive public and policy impacts.

3. An overview of ADR UK funded Research Fellowships

Our research fellowships are designed to act as 'pathfinders' for conducting research and deriving insights which showcase the potential of ADR UK flagship datasets for policy impact and public benefit. Fellowship research projects should make explicit links to known policy or public service evidence gaps and reference published research priorities or letters of support from project partners, such as relevant data owning departments or other public policy decision makers or informers. In support of this, each fellowship should also foster opportunities for engagement between academia and government as well as maintain public acceptance for the use of data for research purposes.

Fellows are not only expected to undertake novel research but contribute to the evolution of the flagship datasets as useful research resources for future users. To support this, we expect ADR UK funded researchers to build relationships with data owning departments throughout the duration of a grant.

The aspiration is that the ADR UK Research Fellowship scheme also develops leaders in administrative data research who contribute to self-sustaining communities around datasets or themes. This is regardless of previous experience of using administrative data, or a researcher's career stage; as the ADR UK Research Fellowship programme is accessible to any researcher interested in using linked administrative datasets.

All successful applications will be reviewed by governing bodies, including associated data owners, via appropriate legal gateways (such as the Digital Economy Act) that support the use of administrative data for research. These processes are separate from any within the institution or university system of review. This is to ensure that all external requests for individual data are legal, ethical, proportionate and secure. ADR UK supports applicants to navigate gaining secure access to our flagship data, including the required approval from ADR UK flagship data owner(s). Funding decisions will be provisional pending full project accreditation.

Detailed information about access and conditions of use for each ADR UK flagship dataset are available [on the ADR UK website](#). Please refer to the advertised funding opportunity for eligibility requirements associated with the use of specific flagship datasets.

4. Who can apply

Proposals are welcome from individual researchers with a PhD or equivalent experience from [eligible UK Research and Innovation \(UKRI\) Research Organisations \(ROs\)](#). Researchers on fixed term contracts are eligible to apply if their institutions are willing to extend their contracts to cover the period of the fellowship and meet the Full Economic Cost Requirements.

5. What we're looking for

We are looking for research proposals that meet the following four objectives:

Objective 1: Useful research.

Demonstrate the potential of administrative data research for public policy impact within the timeframes.

To do this, proposals should:

- be focused, with well-defined research questions specific to [ADR UK flagship datasets](#);
- demonstrate alignment to current policy or public service delivery themes. This can be evidenced by:
- referencing published [Areas of Research Interest](#) or other advertised research priorities and evidence gaps highlighted by the funding opportunity; or
- using letters of support from project partners or public policy decision makers or informers; and
- demonstrate consideration of how policy recommendations will be delivered, inclusive of public engagement.

Although not required, research fellows can:

- develop collaborative proposals with project partners, inclusive of government data owners, the voluntary and community sector, or other relevant bodies who can use the evidence your project generates and have aligned strategic priorities,
- include the use of a supplementary datasets to add value to a programme of work, provided these datasets:
 - are already available through the ADR UK trusted research environment where fellows are accessing their flagship dataset of choice (please see specific funding opportunity for eligible datasets) or;
 - are pre-existing datasets such as data collected from stakeholder or public engagement or publicly available data, that can be brought into that trusted research environment (TRE).

Please note that the use of additional data will need to be justified and achievable within the fellowship. All applicants are responsible for seeking appropriate advice to confirm this before submitting their application.

Objective 2: Useful data

Develop our flagship datasets as useful research resources for future users.

Either individually or collectively with other fellows, all successful applicants will be required to enhance the research value of our flagship datasets for the benefit of others, including future researchers and data owners by committing to the following:

- supporting work to improve the understanding of data quality including via the user guide and metadata files e.g., through a ‘Data Explained’ output (see [Communications and Engagement Expectations for ADR UK Research Fellows](#)); and
- developing reusable methods; and
- depositing code on open access platforms for all researchers to use; and
- making recommendations for plausible enhancements to the data for future use.

Objective 3: Useful engagement

Foster opportunities to engage with government and the public to shape the project to deliver impact and to maintain public acceptance for the use of data for research purposes.

Research fellows will need to plan and action deliverables that equally identify government bodies and the public as key interested parties:

- **Government and public policy stakeholders:** ADR UK data owners are government departments. They are also recipients of knowledge gained from the use of ADR UK flagship data. Fellows should invest time in developing engagement plans to translate findings to government, both as data owners and policy makers. Importantly, government are not the only policy and decision makers, and work should be positioned to explore additional public policy beneficiaries of fellowship deliverables and insights. To support this, ADR UK can aid fellows in making connections with government and related organisations through our established partnerships.
- **The public:** Administrative data derives directly from members of the public. As a user of public data, ADR UK is committed to involving and listening to the views of the public in different ways. Therefore, you should ensure public engagement is embedded throughout the research process to inform the contextual and practical application of your research. Fellows should have a **purposeful plan to meaningfully engage with the public** over the course of their fellowship. If not identified prior to the commencing of a project, the “initial (pre-data access) phase” should be used to develop this element of a fellowship (please see section 7.1 for an explanation of this phase).

We will support successful fellows to plan and deliver at least one public engagement event based on the research undertaken and where possible, offer introductions to relevant stakeholders from the voluntary and community sector. Support will also be offered to share and develop data analysis plans, research and output production. More information on how to deliver public engagement in practice can be found on the [ADR UK website](#).

Previous ADR UK Research Fellows have evidenced the value of developing and maintaining a project stakeholder working group. Therefore, and in addition to external engagement events, researchers are strongly encouraged to organise, host and manage a **project stakeholder group** to assist with developing the impact of the research and supporting dissemination of answered objectives. This group should include practitioners and/or members from the voluntary or community sector whose expertise can represent the interests of members of the public relevant to their project.

Objective 4: Community Building

Actively participate in and personally contribute to new or existing communities of practice in support of your development as a research leader using administrative data.

Building on our growing base of [user groups and communities](#), fellows should participate in and contribute to communities of practice around topics of their choice such as:

- **‘Research-readiness’ enhancement:** evolution in the quality of the ‘research-readiness’ of the data including improving the awareness and communication of dataset quality.
- **Researcher capacity:** sharing knowledge and expertise with other users and potential users to:
 - raise awareness and stimulate interest in linked administrative data (including cross-disciplinary reach);
 - address data queries;
 - disseminate research; and
 - develop new collaborations.
- **Thematic research partnerships:** Engagement with public policy stakeholders, and publics, around priority research interests to shape the insights delivered through the research and ensure they are relevant and useful.
- **Knowledge development:** Co-producing outputs that summarise policy relevant research to increase our understanding of key insights, findings or gaps in the evidence or data.

6. Funding condition: maintaining secure access to data

Given the unique nature of our ADR UK flagship data and how the use of it is underpinned in legislation, there are conditions that must be met to receive funding via our ADR UK fellowships programme.

6.1. Five-safes framework

ADR UK partners have rigorous safeguards in place to ensure the data cannot be accessed by any unauthorised persons, or for any reason other than research that passes the public benefit test. These safeguards are defined by the [‘Five Safes framework’](#) developed by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and include accreditation of the researcher and approval of the research project.

The Five Safes are a set of principles adopted by a range of secure labs, to which researchers and their organisations must adhere. These protocols provide complete assurance for data owners.

The Five Safes are:

- **Safe People:** trained and accredited researchers trusted to use data appropriately.
- **Safe Projects:** data that are only used for valuable, ethical research that delivers clear public benefits.
- **Safe Settings:** settings in which access to data is only possible using our secure technology systems.
- **Safe Data:** data that have been de-identified.
- **Safe Outputs:** all research outputs that are checked to ensure they cannot identify data subjects.

This means that all awarded fellows will have their projects accredited by governing bodies that are responsible for overseeing the legal frameworks that enable the use of administrative data. These bodies, along with the associated data owners, operate independently from any institutional or university-led review processes. This ensures that all external requests for individual-level data are evaluated to be legal, ethical, proportionate, feasible and in the public good.

6.2. Researcher and project accreditation

ADR UK Research Fellowship funding decisions will be provisional pending full project and researcher accreditation.

Successful applicants must become accredited researchers following the awarding of an ADR UK Research Fellowship grant. Likewise, formal project accreditation is required to progress with an ADR UK funded award. All ADR UK flagship datasets' access and costing requirements can be found on the specific [ADR UK flagship dataset pages](#).

It is advised that work to ensure compliance commences following the awarding of a grant, and before an ADR UK fellowship begins.

Please note: should research objectives or project methodology be amended during the course of a fellowship, then further project approvals may be required. Should a project mentor or research associate require access to project data or project outputs, they will also be required to become an accredited researcher and be named on the [project application](#).

7. Considerations for planning a feasible and deliverable research fellowship

It is an applicant's responsibility to ensure that their proposed project is feasible using the identified flagship data and is achievable within the timeframe of a fellowship.

7.1. Planning for secure data access

Conducting research using administrative data inside a secure environment requires several steps to ensure the data is kept safe (see the [Five Safes framework](#) above). This takes time and careful planning. We ask that applicants do not anticipate being able to access their data inside a secure environment for the first three months and should plan activities accordingly. This ‘initial’ phase (whilst waiting for project approval and data access) can include training, use of synthetic data (where available) or any other activities not dependent on the data including planning for the ‘core’ research phase (remaining 15 months).

We advise on the following time commitments which need to be reflected in the grant costings as well as being affordable within the maximum sum available:

- A maximum of 0.4 full-time equivalent during the ‘initial’ phase (3 months).
- A minimum of 0.6 full-time equivalent for the ‘core’ research phase (15 months).

7.2. Project feasibility

We strongly encourage prospective research fellows to attend relevant ADR UK advertised events (e.g., webinars, training and the opportunities of engagement with relevant data owning departments) during the launch of our funding opportunities, especially where support is offered around data feasibility. All applicants are responsible for developing projects that can be accredited under the [Five Safes framework](#) and per the guidance provided by each ADR UK trusted research environment. This includes working with data owners before you submit your research fellowship application to ensure your project is feasible and can be delivered with available data.

All funding decisions are provisional, pending formal project accreditation by the ADR UK trusted research environment and relevant data owners.

7.3. Understanding and preparing data

To complement planning for secure data access, applicants should identify and schedule stages of work which may run concurrently and could include:

- data cleaning, data exploration and analysis;
- public and stakeholder engagement; and
- the dissemination of findings.

Identifying appropriate time to understand and prepare data for analysis and interpretation is essential. This can consume a significant proportion of a fellowship, please seek advice if necessary and note, informed evidence suggests this can be as much as 70-80% of your “core” research phase.

7.4. Planning for output clearances

Output clearance (and in some cases additional data owner approval) is needed for any information (e.g., analytical code and results) to be removed from a trusted research environment. This is a necessary step to disseminate project outcomes and deliverables as identified in the [Communications and Engagement Expectations for ADR UK Research Fellows](#) document. Applicants should consult the relevant trusted research environment to ensure the appropriate amount of time for output clearance is accounted for in the project plan. Engaging with data owners about your research and outputs as early as possible can support the approval process.

8. ADR UK Research Fellowship expectations

ADR UK is committed to funding research that delivers societal benefit. By enabling the use of our flagship data, ADR UK empowers researchers to shape and inform public practice and policy. To support public good research through the lawful and secure research use of linked administrative data the following points need to be part of a fellow's programme of work.

8.1. Communication and engagement expectations

ADR UK promotes the publication of research findings in forms that are easily digestible and useable for both government policymakers and academics. Furthermore, engagement with government, the voluntary and community sector and the public are important to maximise the impact, reach and public acceptability of research using public sector administrative data.

Researchers are expected to follow the [Communications and Engagement Expectations](#) for ADR UK Research Fellowship grant holders in full. This document sets out the key communications and engagement outputs fellows are required to produce over the course of their fellowship. It includes the development of materials aimed at policymakers, practitioners and the public, as well as researchers and data owners, in line with ADR UK's dual publication strategy (where communicating research in accessible ways for policymakers and wider society is expected alongside academic publications). It also includes ADR UK's requirements for stakeholder engagement including meaningful public engagement described in objective 3: useful engagement.

In addition, ADR UK fellows are expected to produce:

- a project page on the ADR UK website;
- a Data Explained publication;
- a Data Insight publication; and
- additional deliverables of a researcher's choice.

Academic outputs are supported but we anticipate some to be published outside of the funding period and therefore research fellows should plan for data access to extend beyond the planned fellowship. Academic publications should be published in open access journals or be available in open access platforms within 12 months of publication in line with [UKRI policy](#).

8.2. Additional fellowship expectations

In addition to the communications and engagement requirements laid out above successful fellows will be expected to:

- attend an induction meeting with ADR UK and the data owners within a month of starting or before, to agree expectations of the fellowship;
- attend quarterly cohort meetings with ADR UK, submitting written documentation in advance and sharing progress against your research objectives with their cohort of other fellows;
- attend wider networking events with other UKRI-funded researchers and ADR UK stakeholder events – budgeting for all necessary travel and subsistence costs;
- support ADR UK in the evaluation of the Research Fellowship scheme via a completion meeting at the end of their fellowship;
- publish all code used in analyses of research on an open access forum (e.g., [GitHub](#)), after they have been cleared for publication by ONS.

9. Use of funds

The following are all eligible uses of the available funds: salaries including nominated research support staff or mentorship time, travel and subsistence, project-specific engagement and events, public engagement, production of outputs, and training. For further details please see the [UKRI policy](#).

10. Our support

ADR UK supports applicants to navigate both gaining secure access to our flagship data, including the required approval from ADR UK flagship data owner(s) as well as any difficulties throughout their fellowship journey, to ensure project goals are achieved. This support does not replace or circumvent the standard researcher support systems and process offered by trusted research environment and helps us identify new ways to smooth the researcher journey for all accredited researchers.

11.1. ADR UK wide training, resources and communities for all researchers

Our support is underpinned by our [Learning Hub](#), which outlines training and communities. ADR UK developed the Learning Hub to support all researchers who use administrative data for research. It addresses both dataset-specific needs and more generic materials to support all aspects of a researcher's journey including tools and resources, self-directed learning and advertised training courses.

Through our Learning Hub and infrastructure, we support the entire researcher journey when administrative data and specifically our flagship data is used in research. Within the Learning Hub, we signpost to a growing base of user groups and communities that bring together researchers, community and public practitioners, including dataset specific groups as well as those working on some of society's most pressing issues.

11.2. Communication and Engagement

Please see our [Communications and Engagement Expectations](#) document for further details of expected outputs and support available.

In addition, we may have contacts and infrastructure to foster topic-focused relationships with public-facing groups and bodies, that can contribute to the delivery and dissemination of fellowship deliverables. Please get in touch with ADRfellowship@esrc.ukri.org should you wish to discuss this.

11.3. ADR UK Flagship Dataset Mentoring Programme

Building on the strength of our previous fellowship mentoring programme, ADR UK continues to ensure successful applicants can access mentoring support from individuals with expertise in using ADR UK flagship datasets. A costed mentoring offer is available to all research fellows awarded a grant, regardless of career stage.

ADR UK flagship dataset mentors are distinct from other types of mentorship and can help support researchers who may have limited or no experience of:

- using linked administrative data; or
- developing analytical code for assessing a specific ADR UK flagship dataset; or
- working in a trusted research environment; or
- working with Government held data; or
- working with the public, representatives of lived experiences, or those that benefit from research insights.

This programme is managed by ADR UK staff and depending on the mentor's specific skills and experience the programme can provide:

- general support in navigating access to data and using admin data for research;
- research expertise related to particular datasets and their associated resources;
- guidance in developing quantitative research skills;
- familiarisation with specific government systems, such as the legal system;
- opportunities to connect with a wider community of researchers working with administrative data.

Applicants who are interested in being matched with an ADR UK flagship dataset mentor should cost it into their grant application by following guidance in the specific funding opportunity. Researchers will be assigned a mentor if their application is successful, based on areas of need, determined at the start of a fellowship.

11.4. Facilitated fellowship learning and support

Our required quarterly cohort meetings are structured to ensure we can monitor progress, but also enable fellow-to-fellow connections around ADR UK flagship dataset use and supporting methods to deliver ADR UK research projects. Through the sharing of experiences, knowledge and ideas, these gatherings enable joint problem-solving discussions.

11. Further information

Should any aspect of this outline of ADR UK's fellowship programme require further explanation please contact ADRfellowship@esrc.ukri.org.

To be the first to hear about newly available data or funding opportunities, please sign up to [our mailing list](#).