ADR England Strategy
2021-2026

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1. Context

Launched in April 2021, ADR England formalises the model of working with UK Government departments successfully developed by the ADR UK Strategic Hub during the ADR UK pilot period (2018-21). As part of the next phase of the ADR UK programme, ADR England is becoming an externally recognised part of our four-nation partnership, alongside the established ADR Wales, ADR Scotland and ADR Northern Ireland.

ADR UK's vision for 2026 is to be the default choice to host linked administrative data from across the entirety of UK and devolved government, making it accessible to a deep pool of trained researchers to generate insights routinely used to inform policy and practice. This strategy sets out how ADR England will contribute to the delivery of that vision over the next five years.

2. What is ADR England?

ADR England is a portfolio of data linking and research projects delivered by an array of academic and government partners, to provide policy-relevant insights using data held by UK Government departments. The projects within ADR England are commissioned and managed by the ADR UK Strategic Hub, embedded within the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). The Strategic Hub is also developing pathways to both increase the number of researchers accessing linked administrative data for research and to facilitate training for this growing academic community.

The primary geographic focus of ADR England projects is England. Where ADR UK delivers projects that cover England and Wales, Great Britain, or the whole of the UK, these projects may also be led by ADR England – but they may equally be led by ADR Scotland, ADR Wales or ADR Northern Ireland. While ADR England data linkages will always relate to England, ADR England research insights may have wider relevance for public policy and practice beyond England, including at regional or local levels.

With the roll-out of remote data access infrastructure, including the SafePod Network and Assured Organisational Connectivity, ADR England researchers can be based throughout both England and the rest of the UK. The location of the researcher should no longer be a barrier.

Training and capacity building provision will be tailored to those who want to develop a career path as an accredited researcher unlocking the potential of ADR England's linked administrative data to inform public policy and more effective public services. This is in line with the training and capacity building provision taken forward by ADR UK partners in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The ADR England portfolio will be delivered in close collaboration with the Office for National Statistics (ONS), who as an ADR UK-funded partner will provide the Trusted Research Environment and supporting services for research access to ADR England data, through the ONS Secure Research Service (SRS).

3. Vision and Strategic Goals

> *Vision*: ADR England's investment from 2021 to 2026 in data linking, research and researcher skills and capabilities ensures priority national, regional and local decisions are informed by economic and social research insight based on the best possible data.

There are **four strategic goals** underpinning the ADR England vision:

1. **A research-ready data linkage programme which enhances, enriches and makes administrative data more accessible for research for public good:** Administrative data is not collected for research purposes, yet has enormous research potential. ADR England will convert raw administrative data related to England, English regions or local authorities into useable research assets through the creation of linked, 'research-ready data', that can address public policy or service needs and which is made accessible to the wider academic community to maximise use and impact.

2. **Substantial increase in UK research that crosses public policy boundaries and enhances bodies of knowledge for public good:** ADR England will widen and increase independent, collaborative and innovative administrative data research – using ADR England data – that creates and sustains new and existing bodies of knowledge that address current and future societal challenges across and beyond England.

3. **More UK economic and social scientists with the skills to use rich, linked administrative data for public good:** ADR England, in collaboration across ADR UK, will increase the number and capabilities of UK researchers who can conduct administrative data research to inform public policy, both directly and in partnership with others. ADR England is not only recognised as an enabler of research that improves policy but also as bolstering the platforms and futures of researchers.

4. **Widespread acceptance among publics and data owners of the value of linking administrative data for research:** ADR England will work in ways that ensure linking administrative data for research is seen as credible, sensible and essential, maintaining public trust and the trust of data owners throughout.

4. Change Objectives

There are **eight change objectives** that will enable the strategic goals to be attained:

1. **Build trust and address the needs of those at the heart of public policy and practice:** ADR England programmes will be designed to ensure the needs of public policy and service delivery organisations can be addressed through the insights of administrative data research. Stakeholder and public engagement will influence the entire strategy and be both structured and responsive to changing needs. Key ADR England stakeholders will include UK Government departments and arms-length bodies (as data suppliers, policy partners and/or users of data and research findings); UK Parliament; third sector public service partners; UK Research and Innovation (UKRI); other funders; evidence intermediaries (for example, What Works Centres); as well as the academic community and the UK public.

   To do this the Strategic Hub, in partnership with ONS, will:

- Build durable connections with key stakeholders to understand their public policy and service needs.

- Signpost clear processes and promote the value of administrative data research.

- Seek opportunities to partner, co-fund, collaborate and co-produce research-ready data, research using this data, and pathways to develop researcher skills and experience.

- Engage relevant publics/data subjects (or their representatives), for example by creating an ADR England public panel, as well as embedding public engagement into all funded projects.

2. **Prioritise and create high-value research assets and tools for reuse:** ADR England will facilitate the creation of, and access to, 'research-ready data'. Funds will be prioritised towards linked administrative datasets that can add most value to the evidence needs of public policy and wider public services, especially where they address issues that cut across multiple policy areas. All datasets will be created to be sustainable and reusable research resources that have the potential to be integrated with other data. They will be deposited in the ONS SRS, accompanied by rich metadata and other tools that can support future users.

To do this the Strategic Hub, in partnership with ONS, will:

- Launch a funding opportunity for research-ready data, tools for data reuse (such as reusable code and standardising linked metadata), and support in streamlining data access.

- Champion best practice and share expertise in creating research-ready data, including publishing a guide to its creation and use.

- Support the FAIR Guiding Principles for scientific data management and stewardship.

3. **Enable research that addresses local, regional and national public policy, practice and wider societal needs:** ADR England will fund and co-fund research designed to meet the needs of organisations that shape public policy, evaluate the effectiveness of public spending and/or deliver public services in practice. Research may be substantive, methodological, or more exploratory, as long as it demonstrates clear policy relevance. Research calls will be shaped with policy organisations to ensure it has a higher likelihood of improving public outcomes. In addition to directly funding research, the Strategic Hub will convene funding partners, evidence intermediaries and research users to stimulate a broader collection of funded opportunities and placements. These will offer the growing community of administrative data researchers opportunities to deliver impactful administrative data research for public policy.

To do this the Strategic Hub, in partnership ONS, will:

- Fund policy-relevant or capacity building research, including research fellowships and embedded secondments within government.

- Collaborate with public sector partners and academia to identify themes, projects and approaches to catalyse administrative data research for evidence-based policy and practice.

- Convene others to stimulate and promote funding for administrative data research opportunities.

4. **Raise awareness and encourage adoption of the Digital Economy Act (DEA) as a suitable legal framework to permit research use of administrative data and streamline sustainable mechanisms for research access:** The DEA will be ADR England's default legal framework for providing research access to data (acknowledging that alternative legal gateways are available and used across the ADR UK partnership, including where health data is involved). In collaboration with ONS and the UK Statistics Authority (UKSA), information to support the navigation of legal and security barriers for linking, sharing and accessing data will be developed and shared. In addition, we will continue to work with data owners and the academic community to streamline and promote pathways for data access for research.

To do this the Strategic Hub, in collaboration with ONS and the UKSA, will:

- Provide data owners with clear guidance and legal documentation regarding data linkage.
- Champion best practice and share expertise in sharing and accessing data for research including publishing a guide to the legal and policy framework for research use of administrative data.
- Fund or support activity which unblocks or simplifies the experience of gaining research access to linked administrative data.

5. **Increase UK analytical capacity to the level needed to produce high impact research for public good from ADR England data:** To release the potential of the growing collection of long-term administrative data research resources, ADR England will increase the number and capability of researchers undertaking policy-relevant administrative data research. Access to more research-ready data assets needs to be matched to increased research capability, otherwise the potential of the data for public good will not be fully unlocked. New pathways will be activated to increase the number, and support the development of, individual researchers from post-graduate level (or equivalent) upwards who are interested in and have the skills to conduct high-quality administrative data research and convert it into policy impact via interpretation and engagement.

To do this the Strategic Hub, in collaboration with other ADR UK partners, will:

- Promote and signpost existing training opportunities.
- Identify specific training gaps, in collaboration with academia.
- In collaboration with academic institutions, develop a set of training pathways including embellishing the existing quantitative methods training offer.
- With data owner approval, develop training for researchers and analysts from academia and other sectors on existing and emerging linked datasets for early data familiarisation purposes. This will include encouraging synthetic data creation with lower barriers to use.
- Fund PhDs associated with linked administrative data, delivering these through existing networks of Centres for Doctoral Training and Doctoral Training Programmes, and/or PhD supervisor-led projects.
- Offer research placements embedded in public policy or public service environments.

6. **Nurture the administrative data research community and enable future opportunities for conducting impactful research:** In addition to growing the number of individual academic researchers with the necessary skills and appetite to conduct administrative data research, ADR England will also take a leadership role in convening and enabling this growing 'club' to develop as a professional peer network. The needs of this community can be self-determined but will ultimately be focussed on increasing the likelihood that research will have impact for public policy and service delivery; for example, through improvements to data quality, data access, training, methods, research opportunities or knowledge exchange and impact.

    To do this the Strategic Hub, in collaboration with other ADR UK partners, will:

    - Develop additional supporting structures for ADR UK Research Fellows.

    - Build a community of practice which has a collective drive to present, share and publish administrative data research.

    - Develop approaches to promote collaboration between academic and public service organisations.

    - Increase awareness among the broader academic community of the opportunities, benefits and logistics of conducting administrative data research.

7. **Maintain and enhance accessible research assets:** Over the long-term, ADR England will, with the support of ADR UK colleagues at ONS, curate all ADR England datasets to ensure they are broad and sustained resources that hold or even increase their research value over time. All data should be well described, findable and accessible via the ONS SRS.

    To do this the Strategic Hub, in partnership with ONS, will:

    - Improve, promote and curate an ADR England data catalogue with high-quality metadata.

    - Refresh the data at regular intervals to ensure it remains up to date.

    - Explore the possibilities of adding additional variables to further contextualise the data or enhance the granularity of the data, such as lower level geographies.

    - Encourage researchers to develop and share research concepts such as derived variables.

    - Encourage and facilitate researchers to share code, documentation and feedback to drive up the quality of the data.

    - Augment longitudinal survey data with linked administrative data, in support of initiatives such as the National Cores Studies agenda and other strategic priorities aligned to the ESRC data strategy.

8. **Evidence a unique contribution to existing bodies of knowledge:** The ADR England portfolio of data, research and researcher skills and capabilities, supported by the direction of the Strategic Hub and ONS, will deliver a unique contribution that fills gaps in existing bodies of knowledge. The research conducted will contribute to a relevant and growing base of expertise and evidence around cross-cutting policy themes. Where relevant, research findings will be shared with evidence intermediaries, such as the What Works Centres and other observatories, that can further synthesise this evidence into existing bodies of knowledge to increase the likelihood of lasting impact.

To do this the Strategic Hub, with ONS, will:

- Prioritise funding decisions and broader activity on what will best create evidence to inform public policy and improve public services.
- Encourage repeatable research by advocating for open code and documentation.
- Advocate for a dual publication policy supporting both academic outputs (published in open access journals) and non-academic outputs, such as policy papers.
- Encourage the use of Digital Objective Identifiers to ensure citations and impact can be tracked over time.
- Routinely track and report on the public benefit and scientific impact of research using ADR England data.
- Require funded award holders to have a knowledge transfer plan with a knowledge sharing partnership to ensure research findings continue to have direct benefit to policymakers.
- Work with UKRI to better align, integrate and showcase our work within wider bodies of knowledge.