

Administrative Data Research Centres Call specification

Contents

Introduction	1
Background.....	2
Objectives and functions	4
Eligibility	5
Other call specific details and requirements	6
Application process	10
Assessment of applications	10
Event for potential bidders	12
Timetable	12
Contacts.....	13

Introduction

The Administrative Data Research Centres will be part of the Administrative Data Research Network (ADRN) - a partnership between government departments, research funders, national statistical authorities, and the research community that will reach across the UK to facilitate research based upon linked, routinely collected administrative data. This call is for four Administrative Data Research Centres¹ (ADRCs), one each in Scotland, Northern Ireland, England and Wales, and is being commissioned in parallel to a new Administrative Data Service - the information and coordinating body. Combined, this new data resource will help position the UK at the forefront of research based on linked administrative data.

Within this new resource, the ADRCs, in particular, will:

- provide state-of-the-art facilities for research access to de-identified administrative data by accredited researchers
- provide data management and statistical analysis support functions for external researchers accessing the data
- commission and create new linked administrative data resources for a growing research agenda
- conduct original research using linked administrative data and related analytical and methodological approaches
- engage in training, capacity building, and public engagement
- work in collaboration with other elements of the Administrative Data Research Network.

¹Official JeS funding opportunity title is Administrative Data Research Centres 2013

There will be a central role in the ADRN, in particular in the ADRCs, for the National Statistical Authority (NSA) in each of the four countries in the UK. Discussions to further specify the partnership are ongoing. An additional annex to clarify the arrangements in each part of the UK will be available to accompany this specification later on the website.

For a five-year period, the budgets for each ADRC application will be a maximum of £10 million and a minimum of £4 million, dependent partly on how much bids are built around existing resources. It is expected that the value of proposals will vary within this range. Costs should be calculated on a full economic costs (fEC) basis. As per standard funding rules, the ESRC will contribute 80 per cent of the total budget.

Full proposals must be submitted via the Joint Electronic Submission System (Je-S) by **16.00 on 4 July 2013**. <https://je-s.rcuk.ac.uk/>. Applicants must be registered with Je-S to make an application and should refer to the attached detailed guidance for making Je-S applications. If you are not currently Je-S registered and intend to apply, please ensure that you allow sufficient time for registration as no extensions to the deadline will be permitted. Hard-copy, faxed or email applications will not be accepted.

Proposals can be submitted by one Research Organisation, or may involve a collaborative application from more than one Research Organisation. Applications should clearly set out the proposed structure and arrangements of the ADRC.

Proposals will be submitted to external peer review and assessed by a specially constituted expert Panel. The Panel reserves the right to interview shortlisted candidates. This would take place on 5, 6, or 7 August 2013 (tbc) and applicants will be notified whether they have been invited to interview and /or shortlisted in the week commencing 26 July 2013. It is expected that the successful grant will commence **on 1 October 2013**.

Background

The UK has the potential to achieve world leadership in the use for research of deidentified administrative data, routinely collected by government departments and other agencies. Such data, made accessible for research in ways that prevent the identification of individuals, will provide a robust evidence-base to inform research, and policy development, implementation and evaluation. This entails not just the development of a safe, secure and efficient system for linking, managing and analysing administrative data, founded on secure technologies, but on trust between data owners, researchers and other interested parties including the public.

The challenges and opportunities set out in the 2009-2012 'National Data Strategy' and a two-day event organised by the Wellcome Trust, ESRC and MRC in May 2011, provided the impetus for establishing the Administrative Data Taskforce (ADT), chaired by Sir Alan Langlands.

The ADT worked throughout 2012 with a range of government departments,

academic experts, the funding agencies and representatives from all four nations in the UK, with the aim of improving access to and linkage between government administrative data for research and policy purposes. The initiative was led by ESRC in collaboration with the Medical Research Council (MRC) and the Wellcome Trust.

The ADT report “The UK Administrative Data Research Network: Improving Access for Research and Policy” – (<http://www.esrc.ac.uk/collaboration/collaborative-initiatives/Administrative-Data-Taskforce.aspx>) was published in December 2012. It made five key recommendations, which in their entirety sought to establish an Administrative Data Research Network (ADRN). The report identified some key elements within this envisaged network. These were:

- Four Administrative Data Research Centres (ADRCs) - one in each of the four countries in the UK, which the present call seeks to commission
- An Information Gateway, now referred to as an AD Service, which is the subject of a commissioning call running in parallel to this call
- A Governing UK Board to provide the governance structure and to lead on and offer strategic input into all key aspects of the ADRN activities
- UK-wide researcher accreditation and training
- a strategy for engaging with the public.

The legal barriers to accessing and linking administrative data across government departments and other public sector organisations were also highlighted in the Taskforce’s report. Access to and linkage across public sector administrative data can only be allowed to external researchers when such individual level data are anonymised or aggregated. The report, however, highlighted that legal restrictions on sharing data with external researchers vary across government departments and there may also be separate, department-specific legal issues to consider when requesting access to data or linkage with other data. The report concluded that “while there are possibilities to overcome these issues in specific circumstances, the complexity of the situation will remain given the wide permutation of linkage requests that the research community will demand” (p.17). Hence legislation was recommended to establish a ‘generic legal gateway’ that would provide a consistent set of rules for data linkage, and a more efficient set of mechanisms for achieving such linkages.

In its report, the ADT also recognised the need for a common approach to be adopted for the accreditation of those who wish to gain access to administrative data for research purposes. It proposed that a UK-wide approach to training should be designed building on existing courses and good practice, which would meet the needs of all organisations providing access to administrative data. The report also emphasised the importance of public engagement.

The ADT Report was presented to Ministers in December 2012 and the official response from Government to the recommendations within the Report is expected shortly. In order to progress the detail required to inform the development of specifications for commissioning, the ESRC set up a Technical Group of experts to

concentrate on the role and structure of the ADRCs and the Information Gateway (now named the AD Service), to review both the current landscape for secure data access facilities, and the current training provision and accreditation requirements of data controllers. The Technical Group met in late February and late April, and its Report was submitted to the ESRC in late May 2013. The Technical Group Report is available as background information and can be accessed at the call website.

Objectives and functions

The ADT reviewed various models of access to national administrative datasets and concluded that “to achieve consistency across the UK in protocols for data linking, and to provide data holders with assurances that procedures for data linking and research access are safe, secure and legal, it is proposed that a number of new centres should be established” (p.5). The ADT report further recommended that as a minimum workable objective, four ADRCs, one established in each country of the UK, should be set up. The report discussed models of access (p.6), highlighting a preferred model of trusted third party indexing (p.39), and presented a diagram illustrating the process of de-identifying records through the use of a Trusted Third Party (p.7).

The Technical Group set up by the ESRC has further elaborated on the role and functions of the ADRCs in its Report, and figure 1 (p.10) illustrates the functions of the ADRN and details the core activities of both the AD Service and the ADRCs.

While the exact specification of each ADRC will depend to some extent on national circumstances and relationships with the NSAs, there are certain objectives that must be met by each ADRC to achieve the appropriate security whilst providing a productive research environment. These are:

- to provide state-of-the-art facilities for research access to de-identified administrative data by accredited researchers, including:
 - provision of access to data at one or more safe settings (see section 5) for research that meets the most stringent international standards for data security
 - provision of an attractive research environment (*ie* powerful hardware and analytical software should be available within the secure access facility, together with access to relevant metadata supplied by the data owners)
 - data management, methodological and statistical support functions free to **bona fide** researchers who have gained accreditation status;
 - linkage between datasets achieved through the use of third parties who have the expertise to provide secure data linkage services for matching personal records from existing data systems
 - maintenance of a full audit trail of all activity relating to data access and linking, including the establishment of monitoring and performance indicators
 - operation of output control systems that provide for the vetting of all research outputs for confidentiality and disclosure issues.

- to commission and create new linked administrative data resources for a growing research agenda, through:
 - the use of trusted third party indexing and linkage services
 - undertaking linkage of data from different government departments
 - making the linked data available for analysis, thereby creating new resources for a growing research agenda.
- to conduct original research using linked administrative data, including:
 - exploring issues relating to data linkage methods, the quality of linked data, its coverage of specific populations and its suitability for particular research purposes
 - investigating legal, technical and/or ethical barriers to linking public sector administrative data with other types of secondary data including survey data, open data, organisational data and/or data from the private sector
 - building over time a programme of research in at least one key area of social sciences and economics.
- to engage in training, capacity building and public engagement
- to work in collaboration with other elements of the Administrative Data Research Network, especially with the AD Service, which will have a co-ordinating role and will provide common services to both data holders and the ADRCs.

To achieve collaboration between the national statistical authorities (NSAs) and the academic experts who together will provide the core functions of the ADRCs, the ESRC will enter into a partnership with the National Statistical Authority (NSA) in each of the four countries in the UK. An additional annex to clarify the arrangements in each part of the UK will be available to accompany this specification later on the website. The NSAs will assist the ESRC during the commissioning process and, subject to the availability of resources, will then contribute to the work of their national ADRC to deliver the core functions. The ESRC is currently in discussions with each NSA to finalise details of their role in the ADRN and their contribution to ADRCs in particular.

Eligibility

Applicants must be based at a research organisation eligible for Research Council funding; see the RCUK website for a list of eligible organisations www.rcuk.ac.uk/research/Pages/Eligibilityforrcs.aspx.

The proposal will be led by a single UK academic institution approved by the Research Councils. Only one proposal is permitted per applying host institution.

Bids involving multiple institutions are welcomed but will be required to demonstrate the added value of the consortium arrangement and how effective working across sites will be achieved.

The Director must be the principal investigator on the proposal.

Other call specific details and requirements

Management and leadership of the ADRCs

Each ADRC Director will take on representative and leadership roles in the strategic development of their own ADRC and of other ADRN elements. Centre Directors will be expected to dedicate an appropriate percentage of their time to the overall leadership and direction of the ADRC, including time for collaborative working with other ADRCs, the AD Service, strategic partners and funders to develop better ways of working together and to drive harmonisation across ADRN. In deciding the appropriate time commitment, the Director is expected to identify a senior leadership team to support them in the management and leadership responsibilities, and will be required to recruit an experienced project manager and senior administrator to lead the administrative management and reporting functions.

The ADRC Director and the senior team will be expected to demonstrate:

- experience of leadership of multi-institutional partnerships, including excellent communication skills
- excellent negotiation skills and the ability to manage and develop relationships effectively with stakeholders and collaborators
- high quality management skills
- an understanding of relevant infrastructures and how these will be used to develop the ADRCs.

The ADRC Director will also maintain constructive liaison with key stakeholder organisations, in particular the relationship between ESRC, the NSA, each ADRC, and other key infrastructure. This will be governed by a Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) to be finalised between the parties following commencement of the grant. It will set out obligations and responsibilities, particularly with regard to data access, security, governance and reporting. This MoA will be in addition to a standard ESRC grant to the host institution.

The proposed staffing structure within the ADRC should also include a public engagement and communications officer. All proposed roles and responsibilities and the structure of the ADRC management and internal governance will need to be clearly explained in the required attachment to the JeS application form.

Governance arrangements for the ADRN

The ESRC will develop and agree appropriate governance arrangements for the ADRCs. An ADRN Governing Board will be established in coming months to provide strategic direction and scientific advice and assurance. The Governing Board will promote enhanced access to and linkage between routinely-collected

administrative data held by various government departments and agencies. It will have cross-departmental, UK-wide membership with an independent Chair. Membership will include the research funders, statistical authorities, independent academics, policy-makers and data holders. The Director of each ADRC and the Director of the AD Service will be *ex-officio* members of the Governing Board. In addition, regular management meetings will be held with the ESRC to discuss emerging issues and progress against the contract.

Legal barriers

The Taskforce recommended that primary legislation should be sought to provide a generic legal gateway for research and statistical purposes to enable efficient access to, and linkage between, administrative data held by different government departments, agencies and other statutory bodies. However, given the complexities and pressures on the legislative timetable, a **dual track approach** was proposed. This will enable much to be achieved in advance of legislative change through the establishment of the ADRCs and the Administrative Data Service, which will improve and facilitate research access whilst building trust, thus laying the foundations for a new legal gateway.

National Statistical Authorities

Each of the four National Statistical Authorities (NSAs) will have a prominent role within ADRN. The ESRC is currently in discussions with each NSA to finalise details of their role in ADRN and with ADRCs. As commissioning partners with the ESRC we expect that the NSAs will later form partnerships with the successful applicants, to be governed by a Memorandum of Agreement. As each of the four countries in the UK have achieved different stages of development in terms of access to administrative data, the relationship and roles of the NSAs will differ, however all will be able to offer expertise in their datasets and other areas such as secure and anonymised data linkage.

The **Office for National Statistics (ONS)**, established since 2008 as the executive office of the UK Statistics Authority, is the national statistical institute for the United Kingdom. Of specific importance to the ADRN is the ONS's responsibility for the Beyond 2011 agenda in England and Wales, which aims to make better use of administrative data in any future replacement for the decennial Census of Population. Additionally, the ONS holds data which would have significant additional value if linked to administrative data sets (eg Census Longitudinal Study; Annual Population Survey; Labour Force Survey). Data on organisations, including the Inter Departmental Business Register, are key resources which could facilitate linkage between employees and their employers on a longitudinal basis. Such data are currently made available through the ONS Virtual Microdata Laboratory and the secure access facilities of the UK Data Service. The potential to include such facilities, expertise, and data from the ONS within the proposed Administrative Data Research Network will be of value to the network, and so ONS is in a position to play a key partnership role in the ADRCs and the wider ADRN.

In **Wales**, the Welsh Government has responsibility for the production and dissemination of statistical information about Wales. This includes production,

processing and dissemination of statistical information, for example in the areas of health, education, housing, agriculture, social care and the environment. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) holds Census data and is responsible for the production and dissemination of information about England and Wales. ONS are also responsible for certain data collections and surveys in Wales as well as the other countries of the UK (eg Labour Force Survey and other household surveys). Discussions are underway with the Welsh Government about the specification of the partnership, covering issues such as resources, expertise and data to be available to the ADRC and the wider ADRN.

In **Scotland**, the proposed Scotland-wide Data Linkage Framework (www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/datalinkageframework) positions the **Scottish Government** and **National Records for Scotland (NRS)** within a structure which will address both research and statistical needs for access to data. Steady progress is therefore underway in Scotland, but with the recognition that the developing Framework should become part of a wider network of activity created by the formation of the ADRN. Discussions about the specification of the partnership, covering issues such as the partnership arrangements with Scottish Government and NRS, and the facilities, expertise and data to be available to the ADRC and the wider ADRN are underway.

In **Northern Ireland**, the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) has a well established working relationships with the academic sector to develop and manage initiatives such as the Northern Ireland Longitudinal Study. There is an ongoing programme of work to gain access to and develop linkages between administrative sources of data for the **Beyond 2011** future census programme, and more widely. Discussions are underway with NISRA about the specification of the partnership, covering issues such as the facilities, expertise, and data to be available to the ADRC and the wider ADRN.

Training and accreditation

There is broad agreement on the need for a common approach to be adopted for the accreditation of those who wish to gain access to administrative data for research purposes. The ADRN will be seeking to establish a single UK-wide accreditation built on best practice. Accreditation includes trained and approved researchers; accredited access facilities and environments; and approved research projects. A harmonised, UK-wide, cross-governmentally agreed approach to all three is essential if the full benefits of the ADRN are to be realised and the risks of disclosure are to be minimised. As an early objective, a review of the approach to accreditation for researchers conducting their research within the ADRN is to be progressed, co-ordinated by the Administrative Data Service in collaboration with the ADRCs and wider stakeholders that include data owners and NSAs. Furthermore, following a review of existing training provision that is already underway, the Administrative Data Service, with the ADRC's, will be engaged at an early stage in their grants in designing, developing, and delivering training in collaboration with partners and existing training providers. Once established, the Administrative Data Service will lead on the collaboration with data owners to

ensure there is a uniform system of researcher accreditation, and to coordinate the provision of training throughout the ADRN.

Safe Settings

The Technical Group recommends that the ADRN should use existing accredited safe settings wherever possible, taking account of the access restrictions that data owners require of researchers. Data owners currently use safe settings within their own locations (eg the HMRC Datalab) or have approved such safe settings in external locations to their required standards (eg the secure access facilities within the UK Data Service at Essex). A critical part of the ADRN is to ensure that safe settings are available within the ADRCs, and to enhance the availability of remote safe settings through the development of a network for researchers.

UK wide Administrative Data Sources

Some administrative data sources are GB or UK-wide. These include data held by the Department for Work and Pensions and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs. Some are country specific, for example administrative data relating to education, justice and law enforcement. Others have both UK-wide and national coverage relating to their creation and governance (eg NHS administrative data). The data owners and the relevant ADRCs will be expected to agree how to address linkage requests across the four ADRCs. Such agreements will necessitate close coordination across the network of ADRCs to ensure that research requests to gain access to various datasets (which may be linked datasets from more than one data owner or subsets of data from one data owner) are directed to the appropriate ADRC. In such instances the Administrative Data Service will provide a coordinating role.

Organisational data

Although most administrative data are available at individual or residence level, there are also data at the level of and about organisations. From the outset, the ADRN will also be providing access to and linkage between government held data about organisations. The ADRCs should demonstrate the capability and capacity to support access and linkage to both organisational and individual level data.

Private sector data

The ADRN will not, in the first years, support requests for access from private sector organisations or individuals, nor will it support linkage between private sector and public sector data. However, there is considerable value to socio-economic research in many of the large datasets held by private sector organisations (eg customer databases, service records, financial transactions), and other initiatives with a focus on access and linkage to private sector data (such as the ESRC Business Datasafe initiative) will be developing in parallel. The ADRN and its Governing Board will need to review at appropriate intervals the stated position regarding the private sector, and to explore possible common areas of work between the ADRN and other initiatives that may provide for efficiencies and common approaches. The ADRC's will need to remain alert to initiatives aimed at, and debates around, private sector data and have the flexibility to respond to development or opportunities as they may arise and be agreed by the Governing Board.

Key performance indicators

From the identified objectives in Section 3 above, applicants are expected to propose a set of key deliverables that will be precise and verifiable (activity-based and output-based) and will be achieved during the funding period. The Pathways to Impact toolkit can be found at: [/www.rcuk.ac.uk/kei/impacts/Pages/home.aspx](http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/kei/impacts/Pages/home.aspx)

In addition, a **Pathways to Impact** annex, a **Data Management Plan**, and a **Justification of Resources** for all expenditure will be required by applicants. The accompanying Je-S application guidance provides all the details for completing the application and should be read in conjunction with this Specification.

All applicants must comply with the ESRC Framework for Research Ethics www.esrc.ac.uk/ResearchEthics.

Application process

Full proposals must be submitted via the Joint Electronic Submission System (Je-S) by **16.00 on 4 July 2013**. Applicants must be registered with Je-S to make an application and should refer to the attached detailed guidance for making Je-S applications. If you are not currently Je-S registered and intend to apply, please ensure that you allow sufficient time for registration as no extensions to the deadline will be permitted. Hard-copy, faxed or email applications will not be accepted.

Applicants must be based at a research organisation eligible for Research Council funding; see the RCUK website for a list of eligible organisations www.rcuk.ac.uk/research/Pages/Eligibilityforrcs.aspx.

All applicants should consult the ESRC Research Funding Guide- www.esrc.ac.uk/RFG, which sets out the rules and regulations governing funding. The 'Guidance Notes for Applicants' document provides details on the information that applicants will require to submit as part of their proposal.

Assessment of applications

The assessment of proposals will be a two stage process. Full proposals will be referred to a minimum of five expert reviewers. Applicants will be asked to nominate two academic peer reviewers and up to two users of the research from outside the research community. Applicants should seek the reviewers' permission before nominating them. We will also approach independent academic and user reviewers.

Proposals will be assessed by a specially constituted expert Commissioning Panel. The Panel reserves the right to interview shortlisted candidates. This would take place on 5, 6, or 7 August 2013 (tbc) and applicants will be notified of whether they have been invited to interview and /or shortlisted in w/c 26 July 2013.

It is expected that the successful grant will commence **on 1 October 2013**, for a period of 60 months. The ADRC grants will be subject to a mid-term review after the first two and half years of the grant.

Proposals will be assessed on the **following criteria**:

- Innovation and originality in the ADRC **vision** and **strategy** for:
 - facilitating safe research on administrative data for public and policy benefit
 - broadening access to linked administrative data by means of addressing key technical, legal and ethical issues and by engaging researchers
 - conducting research using administrative data.

- Expertise in the **delivery** of key functions:
 - relevant experience in setting up, managing, and running a substantial research resource or centre for the research community
 - experience of working in partnership with key stakeholders including data holders and NSA, and other centres or services
 - strong institutional commitment and practical contributions to hosting and sustaining the centres.

- A well-considered **approach** and **plan** for:
 - establishing, managing, and running the ADRC as a state of the art infrastructure that includes secure data facility and access arrangements, as well as data management and a statistical analysis support function
 - a clear timetable for the set up and running of the various functions
 - internal management processes for the handling of approved projects and managing the demands of research projects on a timely and sustainable basis
 - internal planning and resource management, including staffing strategies
 - a robust management structure with a committed Director, senior leadership team, dedicated project administration, and clear arrangements for co-ordination and management of the strategic direction of the ADRC
 - collaborative working with other elements of ADRN (eg, AD Service and other ADRCs) to harmonise activities and exchange knowledge;
 - engaging with and supporting users and key stakeholders (eg data holders)
 - public engagement
 - outputs, dissemination and impact.

- **Capability** and **expertise** in other key areas, including:
 - delivering training in collaboration with other providers and coordinated by the AD Service
 - capacity building

- extending the scope of the ADRC in response to other strategic and data developments and opportunities (eg, e-health informatics research centres, future ESRC investments on linked business data from private sector, international collaborations).
- **Skills** and **experience** of the Director and the Senior Leadership Team:
 - a demonstrable high-quality record of delivering large-scale and complex projects, to timetable within scope and budget
 - experience of successful collaborative working with a range of partners
 - significant experience of developing and delivering engagement with public sector data holders to access their data and of building infrastructures for safe access to this data
 - a well-established publication track record within their field.
- **Value** for money.
 - effective and well-considered inclusion of existing infrastructure and services within the proposals
 - demonstrable appreciation of the potential to exploit synergies across the ADRN and wider data infrastructure
 - justified costs, with the potential for flexibility once MoAs with NSAs and the other components of the ADRN are agreed.

Event for potential bidders

The ESRC will be hosting an event for potential bidders on 13 June 2013 at the Royal Society, London. This will provide an opportunity for potential bidders to learn more about this opportunity, funder's expectations, and will be able to participate in Q&A sessions. Further details and the application procedure for the workshop can be found on the ESRC website. Note that attendance at the workshop is not mandatory for a proposal to be accepted, however the ESRC believes it will offer opportunities to build stronger proposals.

Timetable

The ESRC will be following the timetable below for commissioning both the ADRC and the Administrative Data Service:

- Call for full proposals opens - 11 June 2013
- Call closes - 4 July 2013
- Peer review and panel shortlisting complete - applicants notified of shortlisting/interview - 26 July
- Interviews and decision - 5-7 August (tbc) 2013
- Start date - 1 October 2013

Contacts

If you have any questions or would like further information, please contact:

- Maria Sigala
Email: maria.sigala@esrc.ac.uk
Telephone: 01793 442855
- Vanessa Cuthill
Email: vanessa.cuthill@esrc.ac.uk
Telephone: 01793 413164

Enquiries relating to technical aspects of the Je-S form should be addressed to:

- Email: jeshelp@rcuk.ac.uk
- Telephone: 01793 444164