ADR UK PhD Studentships Using Linked Administrative Data: Assessment Reference for DTPs

Purpose of this Document

This document includes excerpts from guidance for members of the specially convened ESRC-ADR UK Panel who will be assessing and making funding decisions for proposals received under the [ADR UK PhD Studentships Using Linked Administrative Data Funding Opportunity](#).

ADR UK is providing this document as reference and to provide further insight to members of the ESRC [Doctoral Training Partnership (DTPs)](#) responsible for making decisions on which supervisor-led opportunities to submit to ADR UK for funding consideration.

Note: DTPs are invited to apply for funding to host up to four supervisor-led PhD studentships each; however, the DTP could co-fund the studentships through their existing allocation or other sources to increase this total number. Please contact us at hub@adruk.org to discuss co-funding.

What is ADR UK?

[Administrative Data Research UK](#) (ADR UK) is an ESRC investment which plays an important role in transforming the way researchers access the UK's wealth of public sector data. By joining up the abundance of administrative data already created by government and public bodies across the UK and making it available for researchers in a safe and secure way, we are enabling vital research that has the potential to lead to better informed policy decisions and more effective public services.

Over the past four years, ADR UK has made significant advances in making de-identified administrative data easier for researchers to access securely, and there is now an impressive collection of new flagship datasets available through our partnership's trusted research environments across the UK. ADR UK is developing further resources including explainer videos, training courses, synthetic data which can be used to develop and test code, and communities of practice in which researchers can share ideas, questions, challenges, and successes.

ADR UK is offering new funding for [ESRC Doctoral Training Partnerships (DTP)](#) to host PhD studentships focused on **quantitative research using linked administrative data**.

DTPs have been accredited as part of a robust peer review process and as such have demonstrated that they provide a high-quality environment for research and training. ESRC currently funds 14 DTPs covering the full range of the social sciences, as well as areas of interdisciplinary research. The 14 DTPs are comprised of 73 high quality research organisations. Studentships must be aligned to a pathway within the DTP, and we define 'pathway' as the training a student will receive in a particular disciplinary or thematic area during the course of their PhD.

The [ESRC's review of the PhD in the social sciences](#) highlighted the continuing need for us to develop capacity in data skills and advanced quantitative methods (AQM) training. As confirmed in the [current call for DTPs](#), for studentships starting from October 2024, ESRC will be steering a proportion of studentships strategically to reward strength in our priority areas including data skills and advanced quantitative methods, including the use of administrative data. The studentships available as part of this opportunity are aimed at supporting DTPs to develop their capacity for using linked administrative data ahead of the recommissioning process.

DTPs are invited to apply for funding to host **up to four supervisor-led PhD studentships** each. **Funding will be available for up to 20 PhD studentships located anywhere in the UK, starting October 2023**. The cohort of supervisors and the students selected will join a pilot programme to develop exemplar case studies to promote wider use of administrative data for research.

As part of the Funding Opportunity documentation, ADR UK is providing a [brochure](#) showcasing a suite of flagship linked administrative datasets from across all 4 UK nations with information about the data, including the types of questions it could answer and the breadth of related relevant topics. Administrative data covers a wide range of topics and therefore applications will be considered from both within and beyond the social sciences. However, applicants are encouraged to consider how the [ADR UK mission](#) and [flagship datasets](#) can steer the research areas that PhDs are based around.

This call encourages the use of the flagship linked administrative datasets presented in the brochure in order that they be used, as intended, for research to inform public policy and practice. While this call is not limited to ADR UK flagship datasets, **applications based on one or more of the datasets in the [brochure](#) will be prioritised**. Applicants who want to base their application on different existing linked administrative data may do so but with the understanding that they are likely to have a greater chance of success if they **also** include a dataset from the brochure, for example, to enable a comparative study.

Note: for the purposes of the Panel's assessment, "applicant" refers to both the DTP and the individual supervisor(s) who have applied for a studentship opportunity.

UKRI Principles of Assessment and Decision Making

We are committed to the [UKRI principles of assessment and decision making](#) which include expert assessment; transparency, impartiality; appropriates; confidentiality; integrity and ethics; equality, diversity and inclusion; and separation of duties.

Completing Assessments

The Panel are asked to review and assess each allocated application against the Assessment Criteria outlined in [Section (c)](#). Following their independent review, they are asked to provide an [overall score out of 10](#) for each application, justifying their score with comments. Each application will be scored by two members of the Panel.

(a) Panel Assessment Form

The Panel Assessment Form is divided into five sections.

SECTION I: Self-Assessment covers the panelist's knowledge of the application and a self-assessment of their level of confidence to assess the proposal. If they identify (or are uncertain about) any potential conflicts of interest, they are asked to contact ADR UK for advice. The information provided in this section will be treated as confidential.

SECTION II: Assessment of the Application consists of an assessment table broken down into the five Assessment Criteria for this call. Panelists are asked to justify their assessment using the Comments column provided.

SECTION III: Overall Score. Given considerations of the application based on the five Assessment Criteria in Section II, panelists are asked to provide their overall score for the application on a scale of 1-10, with 1 being the lowest score and 10 being the highest.

SECTION IV: Feedback for the Applicant provides an opportunity for panelists to include any

overall feedback they would like to share with the applicant. The content inputted into this section could be shared with applicants, anonymously and unedited; therefore, comments must be clear and constructive, and avoid identifying members of the Panel, or other applicants.

SECTION V: Comments and Considerations for the Panel asks for a summary of the panelist's overall advice and feedback on the application for the Panel's and ADR UK's considerations.

(b) Important Note on Completing Assessments

Panelists are reminded to carefully **consider the full application** and reflect on the grading structure *before* starting their assessment. All five **Assessment Criteria** should be considered before providing an **overall score**.

Numerical scores must be supported with clear substantive comments. These comments need to clearly set out how the panelist reached their overall score. It is vital that the comments provided correspond with the score, and any factors which influence the score – either positive or negative – are substantiated.

(c) Assessment Criteria

The Panel will assess each application against the following Assessment Criteria:

Criteria	Guiding Questions

Fit to the call	• Are the rationales provided for hosting studentships, and the indicative research topics/questions aligned to the aims of the initiative, including:
	   o ADR UK's mission to support quantitative research that realises the potential of administrative data for academic/government/public good
	   o ADR UK Training & Capacity Building Strategy to support researchers trained to analyse complex linked administrative datasets
	• Have applicants sufficiently articulated how they will make use of administrative data?
	• Is the proposed studentship based on an ADR UK flagship dataset? *

The quality of the research environment and training provision	• Have applicants demonstrated sufficient strength in quantitative research/analysis/training? Does this include the use of administrative data? • Does the studentship contribute to the continued development of the DTP?
Supervisory arrangements	• Has the supervisor demonstrated sufficient capacity and expertise to host this studentship? • Has the supervisor identified any areas for training? Are these realistic within the award timelines?
Approach to community building	• Have applicants described how studentships contribute to the growing community of administrative data researchers?
Recruitment process	• Have applicants described how they will seek to pro-actively attract candidates, including those from under-represented groups? • Are the arrangements for the selection of students open and transparent?

** While this call is not limited to ADR UK flagship datasets, applications based on one or more of the datasets in the brochure will be prioritised. Applicants who want to base their application on different existing linked administrative data may do so but will have a greater chance of success if they **also** include a dataset from the brochure, for example, to enable a comparative study.*

(d) Overall Application Score

Each application must be assigned a score using a ten-point scale, where 10 is an exceptionally strong application. Applications are to be individually assessed based on their own merits, rather than a score relative to other applications. Half scores or other decimal values are not permitted.

For reference, below is the ESRC scoring scale for our responsive mode research grants and career development schemes. Please note that **7 is deemed the "fundable" threshold**.

Score	Score description based on scientific quality. *All Assessment Criteria should be considered before arriving at an overall score.*
10	**Exceptional** proposals which are of outstanding scientific merit, i.e., of such innovation, novelty, or timeliness that they are highly likely to make an exceptional scientific contribution, in line with the objectives of this Funding Opportunity.
9	**Outstanding** proposals which are of excellent scientific merit, i.e., of such innovation, novelty, or timeliness that they are likely to make an outstanding scientific contribution, in line with the objectives of this Funding Opportunity.
8	**Excellent** proposals which are of significant value and are highly likely to make a very important scientific contribution in line with the objectives of this Funding Opportunity.
7	**Very good** proposals which are of significant value and are likely to make a very important scientific contribution in line with the objectives of this Funding Opportunity.
6	**Good** proposals which are of considerable value and have the potential to make an important scientific contribution in line with the objectives of this Funding Opportunity.
5	**Good** proposals which are of high value and have the potential to make a valuable scientific contribution in line with the objectives of this Funding Opportunity.
4	Proposals which are of value in their scientific contribution.
3	Proposals which offer some value in the potential scientific contribution of the proposal, but which may not be of a consistently high quality.
2	Proposals which will add to understanding and are worthy of support, but which are of lesser quality or urgency than more highly rated proposals.
1	Proposals which are flawed in their scientific approach, or are repetitious of other work, or otherwise judged not to be worth pursuing, or which, though possibly having sound objectives, appear seriously defective at a technical level.

Panel Meeting Day

The goal of the Meeting Day is for the Panel to come together and collectively reach a consensus on a final score and ranking for each application, judged on its own merits and against the criteria set out in this guidance.

As part of the final funding decisions, the Panel may wish to take into consideration:
- The range of administrative datasets and themes proposed for research use
- DTP development and overall geographical distribution of awarded opportunities