[Microdata Release Panel](#_top)

[Research Project
Application Guidance](#_top)

This guidance is to be used when completing the ‘Microdata Release Panel Research Project Application’ if the researcher wishes to carry out a full research project. Any researcher applying for exploratory analysis should use the relevant guidance.

If the researcher is applying through the UK Data Service (UKDS), full guidance can be found on the [UKDS website.](https://www.ukdataservice.ac.uk/get-data/how-to-access/accesssecurelab)

To access detailed ONS data, there must be a legal gateway that allows it. For central and local government there is usually legislation that allows this. Most other researchers will need to be accredited under the Approved Researcher scheme. This form should be used whether or not the researchers will be accredited.

1. **Application Type**

Please tick which type of project application you are applying for; full project or exploratory analysis.

1. **Lead Researcher**

If you are an Accredited Researcher, you only need to give your name and Accredited Researcher (AR) number in this section, but it is possible to apply for accreditation and project approval at the same time.

The Lead Researcher will be responsible for the overall project and will be our main contact for consultation on any project changes throughout the process, including any discussions about the project being listed on the ONS public record of Accredited Researchers and AR projects.

If you are applying for accreditation and project approval together, please give your full contact details here and complete and submit the separate application for accreditation at the same time. Both applications will be considered in parallel, but access to data can only be granted once both applications have been approved.

We would expect the Lead Researcher to hold full accreditation, but we understand that in certain circumstances a Provisional Researcher may need to act as Lead. If this is the case, we will discuss this with you prior to project approval.

Note: to place an ‘x’ into the available check boxes, please double click on the box and select ‘checked’ under the Default Values heading in the menu that appears. To save your changes and close the menu, click ‘OK’.

1. **Researcher Team** If there are to be a team of researchers working on the project, we will require each member’s details, including the organisation/institution they represent.

There may also be times when a researcher (or lead researcher) on the project doesn’t need to access the research data as they will only be reviewing cleared aggregated outputs. If so, that researcher wouldn’t need to be accredited to work on that project.

1. **Research Sponsor**
	1. This question should be answered ‘yes’ if you are carrying out the research project for an institution/organisation that is not your employer, for example as a consultant under contract/commission to another organisation.
	2. If you have answered ‘yes’ to question 4.1, you will need to provide details of the third party organisation including your relationship to them.

The institution/organisation name may be published with the research project record in accordance with the Approved Researcher scheme rules.

If you are based overseas, you will need to complete this section with the details of the UK based organisation sponsoring your research project. There will be a requirement that the project deliver a public benefit to the UK and any research must be undertaken within a UK based secure environment (such as the Safe Research Service (SRS; previously known as the VML) or Secure Lab).

1. **Title of the Research Proposal**

The title of approved research projects will be published in the Approved Researcher public record.

Please also provide the start date of your data research and your estimated end date.

1. **Abstract of the Research Proposal**

This should be a short description (100 words maximum) of the proposed research project and the public benefits it will provide, which will be published in the Approved Researcher public record.

1. **Research Theme**Please tick the theme(s) which most closely match the subject of your research project. If none are suitable, please tick ‘other’ and specify the theme in the space provided below.
2. **Purpose of the Research Proposal**

Please provide a detailed description of your research proposal. This information will help the Microdata Release Panel to assess whether your proposal will be feasible, deliver clear public benefit and be an appropriate use of ONS data. Please ensure this is no longer than 500 words.

1. **Research Methodology**Please provide details of your research methodology. This must include any statistical methods, collaborative work and additional data sources to be used (linked data, web scraping, survey etc). Please ensure this is no longer than 500 words.
2. **Data Required**
	1. A catalogue of SRS data is available on the ONS website as a download from the [Approved Researcher Scheme webpage](https://www.ons.gov.uk/aboutus/whatwedo/statistics/requestingstatistics/approvedresearcherscheme). If you are applying to access the data through the UK Data Service, you can search for available data on their [website](https://www.ukdataservice.ac.uk/get-data).

	If your research would require data not currently included in the catalogue, it may still be possible for you to access them. Please contact the Research Support team (Research.Support@ons.gov.uk) to discuss any such requests.

If you require access to data from the ONS Longitudinal Study, please also complete the appropriate supplementary form from the ONS website.

* 1. Access to unpublished data is only permitted for research which cannot be completed using aggregate or published data. Please explain which other data sources you have considered and explain why these would not be sufficient for you project.
	2. If your project would require any matching of data from another source, this section must include; a description of the data source(s) to be matched to ONS data, a summary of key variables they will be using, and a summary of the matching methodology.
	3. If your project would require any linking of data from another source, this section must include; a description of the data source(s) to be linked to ONS data, a summary of key variables they will be using, a summary of the linking methodology, and a justification for the linking. This will help us to understand the confidentiality risks involved.

***Note:***Data linkage is defined as two or more separate data sets, linked at individual record level data via a common identifiable field.

Data matching is defined as summarising two or more data sets by a common variable (e.g. region or local authority area) to combine and compare summary results.

1. **Ethics**

Please state whether you have sought ethics approval via your Institution, Organisation or Sponsor and provide details of this.

If you have not sought or do not need ethics approval, your application may still be subject to consideration by the Microdata Release Panel (MRP) and/or the National Statisticians Data Ethics Advisory Committee (NSDEC). We will advise you of any consideration during the approval process.

1. **Public Good**

All research completed through the Approved Researcher scheme must deliver clear public benefit to the UK, using the definition set out in the scheme rules in section 3 of our [Approved Researcher Scheme webpage](https://www.ons.gov.uk/aboutus/whatwedo/statistics/requestingstatistics/approvedresearcherscheme#approved-research-projects). Please provide as much detail as possible about how your analysis will provide a public good, e.g. specific policies or decisions that you anticipate the research will provide an evidence base for.

If you are based overseas, the same scheme rules also apply, and any research must be undertaken within a UK based secure environment (such as the SRS).

Please detail how your project will achieve a public benefit within the table provided. If your project will fulfil more than one public benefit requirement, please fill in explanations for all benefits that will apply.

1. **Duration of Access**

Please provide an estimate of how long you are likely to require access to data.

1. **Location of Data Access**

Please let us know in which secure environment you intend to use to produce your data analyses.

1. **Publications**

ONS expects that the results of research undertaken through the Approved Researcher gateway will be published (e.g. on your organisation’s website) to help ensure that the intended public benefits are delivered. An exemption to this requirement will only be granted in exceptional circumstances (e.g. a need for confidentiality of sensitive policy development within government).

**Transparency**

We will maintain a public record on the ONS website of accredited researchers, their institutions and projects under the Approved Researcher scheme. This will hold relevant information from those fields marked with an asterisk (\*) on the application form.

ONS may grant exemptions to publishing this information in exceptional circumstances, which could include security concerns around naming individuals, or a need for confidentiality of sensitive policy development within government.

You should only request an exemption on the Researcher form if you consider that your identity should always be hidden. Normally we would expect the request to appear on the project form for that project only. Any requests for information to be withheld will be considered on a project by project basis.

Each request for a name and/or project to be withheld from the public record will be considered by the Microdata Release Panel. If the Panel decline the request, you will be given the option to withdraw your application.

**Submitting your application**

Once completed, please return an electronic copy of your completed form to ONS via the Research Support team; Research.Support@ons.gov.uk

Microdata Release Panel
Research Project

Application Process

One of the key functions of ONS, as stated in the Statistics and Registration Service Act, is to promote and assist statistical research by providing access to its data. The data for statistical research release process has been developed to enable this to be done as efficiently as possible, whilst continuing to protect the data and promote transparency.

If a researcher needs access to unpublished ONS data, they will need to complete a research project application and submit this to the Research Support team (Research.Support@ons.gov.uk ). If a researcher is applying via the UK Data Service (UKDS), full guidance can be found on the [UKDS website.](https://www.ukdataservice.ac.uk/get-data/how-to-access/accesssecurelab)

Once the application has been received, the applicant will be sent confirmation of receipt, and the application will be reviewed by the ONS Research Data Access team to ensure that the applicant is an Accredited Researcher, that the data access requested is lawful and that all necessary information has been provided.

Once this is completed, the project application will be sent to the ONS Data Owner to assess whether the research proposal is feasible and to ensure that the data requested is appropriate.

Once a project application is endorsed by the Data Owner, the application will be submitted to the Microdata Release Panel (MRP). If the project is not supported by the Data Owner, the reasons for this will be explained to the applicant.

The MRP will review the application, and consider the views of the data owner, before deciding whether or not the project would serve the public good and whether the proposals for publication are acceptable.

If the Panel decides that more information is required, the researcher will be asked to provide it.

Where the Panel concludes that the proposed research meets the scheme requirements but has concerns around its ethics or sensitivity, it will be referred to the National Statistics Data Ethics Advisory Committee (NSDEC) for advice. NSDEC meets quarterly, though it can consider research projects via correspondence where needed.

If the project application is approved, the applicant is notified of the approval, and the Data Access Agreement is sent for the applicant to agree the terms of access and sign. Once ONS has received the signed Data Access Agreement, arrangements for secure access to the data will be made.

If the panel concludes that the research proposal does not meet the requirements of the Approved Researcher Scheme, then that application will be rejected and the applicant notified of the reasons why.

A process flowchart, including anticipated timescales can be found overleaf.

