



UK Research  
and Innovation

# Executive Director for Data Infrastructure and Skills

UK Research and Innovation

Candidate Prospectus  
January 2026



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Candidate Prospectus  
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# Welcome

**Dear candidate,**

Thank you for your interest in the Executive Director for Data Infrastructure and Skills position at the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). ESRC is one of the constituent councils within UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), an exciting organisation with a real commitment to funding and supporting research that makes a significant contribution to society, the economy and people's lives.

This role offers an exciting opportunity to join the Executive Board of ESRC. The successful candidate will work closely with me (the Chief Operating Officer), the Executive Director for Research and Strategy, and the Directors of our hosted programmes (ADRUK, SDRUK, and the R&D Missions Accelerator Programme). They will contribute to the overall strategic direction of ESRC, and to lead our work on data infrastructure and skills.

Our data infrastructure portfolio is significant and supports important research. Last year we launched Generation New Era (GNE), the UK's first longitudinal birth cohort study in 25 years.

Smart Data Research UK (SDRUK) is the only UK organisation making smart data safely accessible to the UK research community, so it can be used to improve lives, communities, and the environment. To do this we have established a family of data services based at UK universities and research organisations. Our work has been shaped by researchers, data experts, industry leaders, policymakers and the public to position the UK at the forefront of smart data research and innovation.

Administrative Data Research UK (ADRUK) links together data held by different parts of government and facilitates safe and secure access for accredited researchers to these new, de-identified datasets. This creates a sustainable body of knowledge about how our society and economy function and gives decision-makers the answers they need to solve important policy questions.



# Welcome

ESRC also has its own portfolio of data infrastructures including Understanding Society, Centre for Longitudinal Studies, the British Election study and a number of other longitudinal and cross-sectional studies.

This portfolio provides a major platform that the Executive Director will ensure is positioned as core national infrastructure to support the delivery of government priorities to improving people's lives across the UK and to driving economic growth.

It is an exciting time to join UKRI. Our new Chief Executive, Ian Chapman joined us this summer with a focus on how UKRI can drive growth through choiceful investments in both curiosity-driven research and on national priorities. The Executive Director for Data Infrastructure and Skills will play a key role in ESRC's engagement with this mission.

Thanks again for your interest, I look forward to seeing your application.

**Stian Westlake**  
**ESRC Executive Chair**

# About UKRI

UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) is a non-departmental public body sponsored by the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology. UKRI is the largest public funder of research and innovation in the UK, spanning all disciplines and all sectors, investing £9 billion each year on behalf of the UK government.

UKRI inspires and enables talented people to push the boundaries of discovery, support innovative businesses to grow and scale, and target solutions to national and global priorities.

UKRI connects the seven research councils, Innovate UK and Research England, and works with the funding agencies in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland to deliver an ambitious agenda. It does so by drawing on its great depth and breadth of expertise and the enormous diversity of its portfolio.

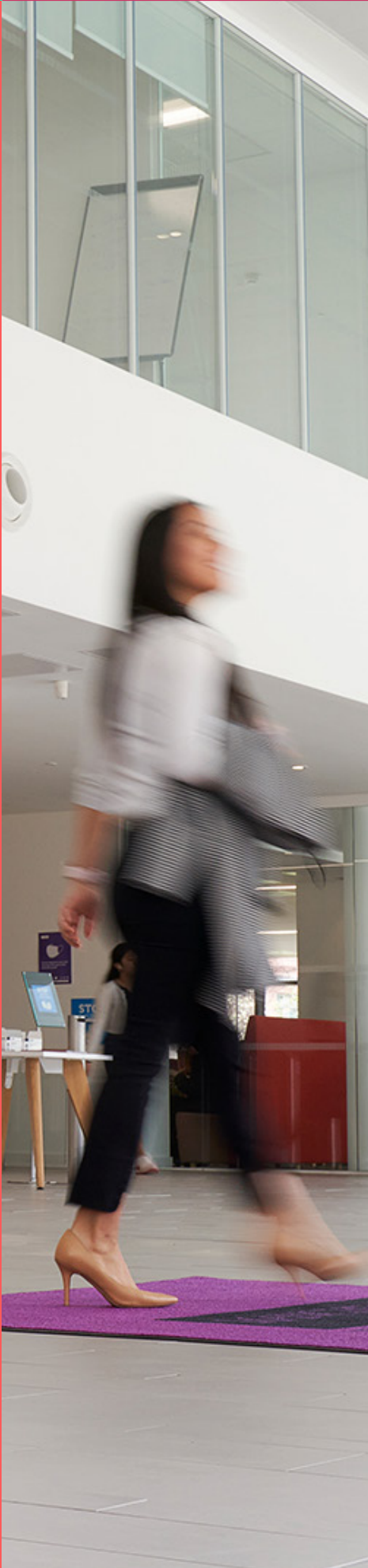
UKRI maintains and champions the creativity and vibrancy of disciplines and sector-specific priorities and communities. Its councils shape and deliver sectoral and domain-specific support and work together to ensure a fully joined-up research and innovation investment portfolio.

Whether through research grants, quality-related block grants from Research England, or grants and wider support for innovative businesses from Innovate UK, UKRI works with its stakeholders and partners to understand the opportunities and requirements of all the different parts of the research and innovation landscape, maintaining the health, breadth and depth of the system.

We fund people and teams in over 140 universities, 60 institutes and 3,600 companies across the UK, supporting a diverse range of research and innovation environments. Our investments in research and development (R&D) deliver benefits across the whole of the UK.



# About ESRC



The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) is part of UK Research and Innovation. We fund world-leading research, data and postgraduate training in the economic, behavioural, social and data sciences to understand people and the world around us.

We are committed to supporting research that will benefit:

- the economy
- society
- culture
- public policy or services
- health
- the environment
- quality of life beyond academia

We work in partnership to bring a wealth of opportunities to the social sciences and to create an environment where our research can have an impact on society's most complex challenges.

We invest in high-quality research training and development opportunities to produce skilled researchers who can tackle social and economic challenges and have an impact on society.

Researchers require access to world-class data to deliver high-quality research and maximise impact. We take the lead in developing the UK's data infrastructure and supporting cutting-edge methodological developments.

We are an international leader in the social sciences. We foster international collaboration with a wide range of international partners. We enable UK social scientists to collaborate on challenging global issues with the very best international researchers from around the world.

Read more about our work in our [strategic delivery plan](#).

# About the role

We are seeking a dynamic, creative research leader who thrives on making a difference to research and the wider world, turning complex challenges into opportunities.

It's your chance to influence how new and existing social science data infrastructure is positioned as a core national infrastructure to support the delivery of government priorities to improve people's lives across the UK and to driving economic growth.

Also you will have the opportunity to influence how the development of talent and skills related to social and economic research are nurtured and deployed.

## You'll bring:

- data infrastructure leadership with a track record of building bridges between disciplinary fields to unlock transformative research outcomes
- research delivery experience drawn from universities, institutes or research centres, where you can show credible, impactful results
- entrepreneurial vision that sees challenges as catalysts for innovation.
- a passion for understanding how data can unlock an understanding of society, the economy and people's lives
- a collaborative and engaged mindset, working as part of our executive team to exemplify credible, empathetic and effective leadership of ESRC's workforce and diverse partners

## Your impact:

- shaping the future of ESRC's social science data infrastructure to drive impactful research on society and the economy
- national presence as ESRC's authoritative voice on the value of our data infrastructure and skills investments and responsibility for senior liaison across the UK's research ecosystem
- direct engagement across university and national research organisations in relation to data infrastructures, talent and skills
- leading role in ensuring ESRC's data infrastructures support the delivery of impactful research that helps inform the nation's social and economic future
- ensuring ESRC's data infrastructures are positioned to take advantage of, and contribute to, developments in AI and other analytical advances

# Purpose of the role

As ESRC Executive Director you will be responsible for data infrastructure and skills, and will play a key leadership role at the heart of the executive team. You will ensure our data infrastructure and skills investments support impactful research that informs decisions about the economy, public service delivery and society over the next decade.

The role has direct responsibility for all ESRC budget lines related to data infrastructures, talent and skills funding. You will ensure that outcomes align with UKRI's priorities, and that ESRC keeps pace with:

- evolving social science data needs
- technological changes (including the use of AI techniques)
- computational capabilities

It will be important to seek out opportunities to create funding and collaboration partnerships with other research councils, UK government departments and the devolved governments. An example is in relation to other major data infrastructure investments.

You will need to command esteem and pro-actively engage across ESRC's social science community. You must keep pace with their insights on new developments in the data infrastructure and skills landscapes and communicate ESRC's agenda, particularly to senior leaders.

You will join a strongly collaborative executive team, working closely with ESRC's Directors. You will ensure that data infrastructure, talent and skills priorities are coherent and optimised across all programmes and are reflected in the ESRC Data Infrastructure and Skills strategy.



# Key accountabilities

Reporting directly to the ESRC Executive Chair, you will be the Senior Responsible Officer (SRO) for:

- the Administrative Data Research UK (ADR UK) programme, which has recently received approval of £168m for the next investment phase (2026 – 2031)
- the Smart Data Research UK (SDR UK) programme
- the UK Data Service (UKDS)
- the Population Research UK (PR UK) programme
- the Understanding Society longitudinal study
- the UK Centre for Evidence Implementation in Adult Social Care (IMPACT)

Additionally, you will be responsible for:

- delivery of over £100M per year of UKRI's research and talent budget, programme evaluation
- direct responsibility for the leadership management and development of circa 80 staff across data and infrastructure investments, talent and skills, and public engagement
- leading on the inception, direction and timely delivery of any new ESRC data infrastructure investments
- working collaboratively across UKRI to align with UKRI policies and to inform and shape the latest thinking around data infrastructures, talent and skills funding, to continually improve the efficiency and effectiveness of these investments
- exploiting your ESRC domain expertise to seek out opportunities for collaborations that leverage partnerships to support the delivery of data infrastructure, talent and skills programmes
- being a critical point of contact across the ESRC community, winning trust and confidence at senior level to:
  - pick up the latest intelligence on data infrastructure developments (including the benefits and risks related to AI in these environments)
  - ensure the smooth running of ESRC's programmes
  - empower UKRI's head office with relevant insights

# Key accountabilities



- contributing to the corporate management of ESRC as a member of an inclusive and collegiate executive team, and representing ESRC and UKRI at senior level to a wide range of communities and stakeholders
- executive change leadership within UKRI and ESRC as responsibilities continue to evolve
- acting as an effective representative of ESRC's Executive Chair at senior-level government and other meetings
- participating in the evaluation and planning of ESRC Council activities and attending council meetings
- championing equality, diversity and inclusion



# Your skills and experience

We recognise that a variety of perspectives, backgrounds and experiences enriches our work environment and therefore we actively welcome applications from a diverse range of candidates. Candidates will be assessed against the following criteria throughout the recruitment process.

(S): Assessed at shortlisting

(I): Assessed at interview

(S&I): Assessed at shortlisting and interview

- qualified at graduate level with a strong personal record of research leadership achievement and an understanding of social science data infrastructures and their value, sufficient to gain the confidence of the research and data community (S)
- a sustained first-class track record of leadership relating to data infrastructure or data driven research relevant to the social sciences, with experience leading and managing significant initiatives and programmes (S&I)
- senior level experience of stakeholder management including the ability to negotiate with partners to build effective relationships for mutual benefit, reconcile potentially conflicting interests, and influence others not in your management line to achieve desired outcomes (S&I)
- experience of the management and oversight of major programmes, including proactively managing risks, and delivering to support agreed outcomes (I)
- experience of effective leadership and management of staff performance and development (S&I)

# Terms of employment

## Salary

£94,931 - £110,000 (+ £5,560 London allowance) per annum

## Hours

Full Time or Part Time (minimum 0.8 FTE)

## Contract type

Open Ended (secondments welcome)

## Location

Caxton House, London

## Grade

UKRI Band X

## Positions available

X1

# Summary of benefits

UKRI can offer the successful candidate:

- flexible working
- 30 days annual leave + public holidays
- access to Civil Service Pension Scheme
- various everyday discounts through our dedicated provider

Visit our dedicated benefits webpage for more info: [Benefits of working at UK Research and Innovation \(UKRI\)](#)



# Timescales and selection

The selection process will include a panel interview with questions assessing your skills and experience against the advertised criteria of the role.

PROCESS	DATE
■ Closing date	15 February 2026
■ Shortlisting	W/C 23 February 2026
■ Interviews	W/C 9 and W/C 16 March 2026

Please note, dates and details are subject to change.

# How to apply

Please submit your application via the Careers Portal by 23:55 on 15 February 2026

You will need to supply:

- A curriculum vitae (up to two pages)
- A supporting statement / cover letter (up to two pages)

Your supporting statement should provide specific information about why you believe you would be suitable for appointment for this role.

Think about your:

- knowledge
- skills
- experience
- personal attributes
- vision for the organisation

Take full advantage of the space available, use practical examples where possible and ensure you refer to which of the essential criteria your application is aligned to. Again, please aim for no more than two A4 pages.

Please note, failure to provide a supporting statement/cover letter or failure to address the above points may result in your application not being considered further.

You will only be assessed on the content of your CV and supporting statement.

If you experience any issues while applying, please contact [seniorrecruitment@ukri.org](mailto:seniorrecruitment@ukri.org)





# General information

## Equality, diversity and inclusion

UKRI believes that everyone has a right to be treated with dignity and respect, and to be provided with equal opportunities to flourish and succeed within an ethical and trusted working environment that is attractive and accessible to everyone interested in developing their career with us.

We are committed to increasing the diversity of our board and executive positions and bringing in talent, regardless of its origins. We encourage applications from all candidates regardless of:

- ethnicity
- religion or belief
- gender
- sexual orientation
- age
- disability
- gender identity.

We also value diversity of thought and experience and are committed to creating systems that value difference so that everyone can feel welcomed, included and nurtured throughout their time with us.

As a Disability Confident leader, UKRI will offer interviews to disabled candidates who meet the published minimum requirements for a job or role. Whether you choose to apply under the Disability Confident scheme or not, you can still ask us to make particular adjustments for you when attending an interview.


We know actions speak louder than words. For further information, please visit the UKRI web page: [How we support EDI in the workforce](#)

## Pre-employment screening

To enable us to hire the very best people and to safeguard our people, our assets and our important role, we will conduct a comprehensive pre-employment check on successful applicants as part of the recruitment process.

UKRI supports research in areas that include animal health, agriculture and food security, and bioscience for health, which includes research on animals, genetic modification and stem cell research. Whilst you may not have direct involvement in this type of research, you should consider how this aligns with your personal

# General information



values or beliefs. Our pre-employment requirements include a security check and an extreme organisation's affiliation check.

The role-holder will be required to have the appropriate level of security screening/vetting required for the role. UKRI reserves the right to run or re-run security clearance as required during the course of employment.

## Standards

In 1995, the Committee on Standards in Public Life defined seven principles, which should underpin the actions of all who serve the public in any way.

Consistent with the Commissioner's Code of Practice, applicants will be assessed on merit, and all candidates will need to uphold the standards of the UKRI Code of Conduct and conduct set out in the Seven Principles of Public Life, which are:

### Selflessness

Holders of public office should take decisions solely in terms of the public interest. They should not do so in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or other friends.

### Integrity

Holders of public office should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might influence them in the performance of their official duties.

### Objectivity

Carrying out public business, including making public appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for rewards and benefits, holders of public office should make choices on merit.

### Accountability

Holders of public office are accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office.

### Openness

Holders of public office should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions that they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands.



# General information

## Honesty

Holders of public office have a duty to declare any private interests relating to their public duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest.

## Leadership

Holders of public office should promote and support these principles by leadership and example.

## Complaints procedure

If you feel you have reason to complain, you should direct your concerns in the first instance to the Senior Appointments team ([SeniorRecruitment@ukri.org](mailto:SeniorRecruitment@ukri.org)) who will make every effort to deal with this and respond to you within 48 hours.

If your complaint is not dealt with satisfactorily, you can find information about the steps you can take under [UKRI Complaints Procedure](#)