

ADR Northern Ireland Strategy

2022-2026



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1. Context

ADR NI (ADR Northern Ireland) is one of the four national partnerships that form ADR UK, alongside ADR England, ADR Scotland and ADR Wales.

ADR NI shares ADR UK's vision for 2026 which 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 NI will contribute to the delivery of that vision over the next four years.

2. What is ADR Northern Ireland?

ADR Northern Ireland (ADR NI) is funded by ADR UK, an investment of the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), to provide a platform for the linkage and analysis of administrative data that is held within government departments. It was established as one of the UK centres as part of the ADR UK pilot phase in 2018. Our research portfolio, developed by academic and government partners, is focused on delivering high-quality and impactful evidence that supports policy and practice in NI and, more widely, across the UK. To date, ADR NI has delivered a range of policy-relevant research including in supporting the Covid-19 response.

Administrative Data Research Northern Ireland (ADR NI) is a partnership between the Administrative Data Research Centre Northern Ireland (ADRC NI, comprising [Queen's University Belfast](#) and [Ulster University](#)), and the [Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency \(NISRA\)](#), which is an [accredited data processor under the Digital Economy Act \(DEA\)](#). Together they support the acquisition, linking and analysis of administrative datasets, developing cutting-edge research to improve knowledge, policymaking and public service delivery.

The ADR NI 2022-2026 research programme has been formulated in consultation with policymakers and in context of the Programme for Government [consultation document](#) to ensure our outputs will be valuable and impactful. The ADR NI broad priority areas include: housing, health and well-being, vulnerable populations, impacts of Covid-19, education and world of work.

3. Mission and strategic goals

Mission: To optimise the use of administrative data for ethically approved research to improve decision-making, policy and practice.

There are **four strategic goals** underpinning the ADR NI mission.

1. **Acceptance from different publics and data owners on the value of linking administrative data for policy-driven research:** ADR NI will seek to ensure that linking administrative data are viewed as essential, credible and secure, thus maintaining public support and data owner trust throughout.
2. **Engagement with government departments to identify areas of policy importance and associated evidence needs:** ADR NI will work closely with government throughout the research cycle to ensure research is shaped to meet strategic policy needs.
3. **Growth in the availability, range and quality of administrative data that can be used for effective, evidence-based policymaking achieved through collaboration with data custodians:** ADR NI will engage with data owners to acquire administrative data related to NI and make these into sustainable research datasets that can address areas of policy need.
4. **Development of more widespread use of administrative data in the academic communities and increased capacity of researchers to analyse rich, linked administrative datasets for public good:** ADR NI will seek to increase its attractiveness to a wider pool of accredited researchers by making its infrastructure more flexible to enable cross-UK use and by developing its supporting information associated with its data assets.

4. Change objectives

The ADR NI objectives, outlined below, are developed around eight critical success factors detailed within the ADR UK Full Business Case. Based on these, our success will see ADR NI as an established and trusted means through which government departments or authorities can make better use of their data to inform policy.

We will have developed a series of research-relevant, linked datasets which can evolve and be updated over time and which will be readily accessible via trusted research environment and remote technologies, where appropriate. Our endeavours will be informed and shaped by public and policy engagement resulting in high impact research findings and valuable new insights.

Progress against our objectives will be formally monitored through regular highlight reports provided to the ADR UK Strategic Hub and the Economic and Social Research Council and by aligning with the ADR NI impact strategy.

ADR NI has developed detailed delivery plans for 2021-2023. Following a 2023 programme evaluation we will identify further projects to span 2024-26. An important contributor to these later plans will be the availability of Census 2021 data.

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

1. **Strengthen trust and sustainability through stakeholder and public engagement:** Public knowledge, acceptance and trust in ADR NI is central to our work. To maintain a high level of public visibility and confidence, we will continue to engage with people and communities throughout the research cycle. Our research is informed and supported by a range of government and community stakeholders who understand the issues and challenges and are best placed to support change and impact. Additionally, we will work directly with policymakers and service providers to clarify priorities for research and determine gaps in evidence.

To do this ADR NI will:

- Increase ministerial and Executive buy-in to the ADR NI initiative. We will seek a renewed commitment at Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) Permanent Secretary level.
 - Embed public engagement in all funded projects, maintaining representation from key stakeholders including community, government, and practice on all ADR NI studies.
 - Engage publics or populations represented in the data through the NI Public Data Panel, publication of Data Insights and policy briefs, and involvement workshops and policy symposium series.
 - Develop and maintain purposeful engagement between the NISRA, the research community and data owners.
2. **Prioritise and develop a suite of high-value research assets:** ADR NI will construct and provide access to research-ready data that is of value to the evidence needs of public policy and service provision.

To do this ADR NI will:

- Generate new multi-purpose datasets as sustainable and reusable research resources with the potential to be integrated with other data. Such datasets will be accompanied by rich metadata and other tools for future use.
- Ensure all datasets will be made as accessible as possible through the roll-out of remote data access infrastructure, including the SafePod Network and Assured Organisational Connectivity.
- Refresh the datasets at regular intervals to ensure they remain 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.
- Develop our metadata in line with best practice and in liaison with ongoing ADR UK developments.
- Further develop synthetic data for bespoke projects and themed datasets.

3. **Increase research capacity to maximise the potential of our growing administrative data resources:** ADR NI will work with university leadership to promote and encourage greater policy-targeted research using administrative data.

To do this ADR NI will:

- Increase the numbers of researchers using administrative datasets.
- Build interdisciplinary skills in the manipulation and analysis of complex administrative datasets.
- Promote and signpost new and existing training opportunities (with ADR UK partners).
- Develop training for researchers and analysts from academia and other sectors on existing and emerging linked datasets for early data familiarisation purposes (with data owner approval).

4. **Support open research and track and improve impact**

To do this ADR NI will:

- 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 and Data Insights.
- Encourage the use of digital object identifiers to ensure citations and impact can be tracked over time.
- Track and report on the public benefit and scientific impact of research using ADR NI data to complement reporting requirements from ADR UK.
- Continue to deliver a targeted knowledge exchange programme in partnership with key stakeholders, maximising the impact and reach of our research and findings.

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ADR UK vision 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.

ADR NI mission ADR NI's mission is to optimise the use of administrative data for ethically approved research to improve decision-making, policy and practice.

ADR UK aims	Trust & sustainability	Research for public good	Research access & support	Available data for research
ADR NI strategic goals	Acceptance from different publics and data owners on the value of linking administrative data for policy-driven research	Engagement with government departments to identify areas of policy importance and associated evidence needs	Development of more widespread use of administrative data in the academic communities and increased capacity of researchers to analyse rich, linked administrative datasets for public good	Growth in the availability, range and quality of administrative data that can be used for effective, evidence-based policy making achieved through collaboration with data custodians
ADR NI objectives	Strengthen trust and sustainability through stakeholder and public engagement	Support open research and track and improve impact	Increase research capacity to maximise the potential of our growing administrative data resources	Prioritise and develop a suite of high-value research assets

<https://www.adruk.org/adr-northern-ireland/>

Image shows a summary of ADR Northern Ireland's mission, strategic goals and objectives, as listed above.

