



Strategy paper

ADR UK Training and Capacity Building Strategy 2026-2031



Economic
and Social
Research Council

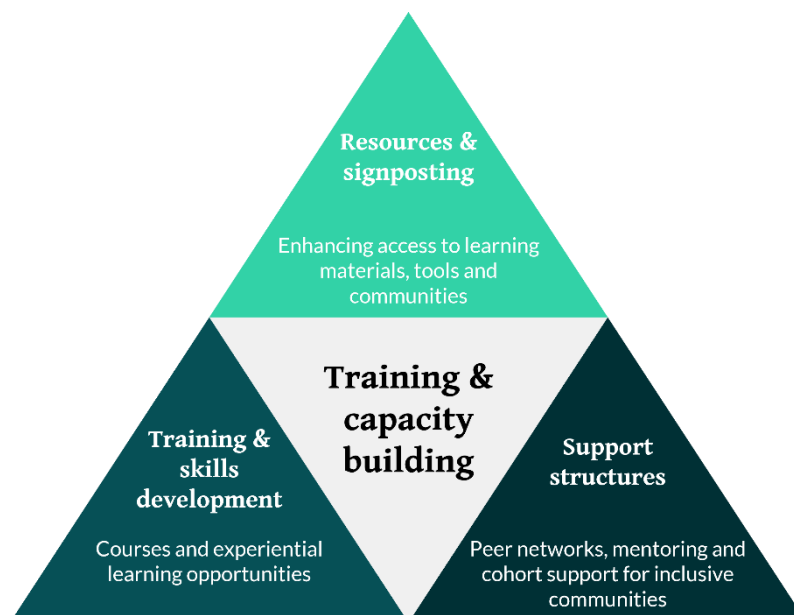
Executive summary

This strategy sets out ADR UK’s vision and approach for Training and Capacity Building (TCB) during the 2026-2031 investment phase. It aims to support ADR UK’s overall mission to improve access to and use of secure forms of administrative data for research that informs better policy and outcomes.

Building on the successes and lessons of the previous investment phase, this strategy outlines a collaborative, UK-wide framework for developing the skills, knowledge and support structures needed to enable researchers to work confidently and effectively with administrative data. It reflects the diverse strengths of the ADR UK partnership across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and responds to evolving needs identified through stakeholder engagement and survey analysis.

The strategy is structured around three core delivery pillars:

- **Resources and signposting:** Enhancing access to learning materials, tools and communities through platforms like the ADR UK Learning Hub and DataCise.
- **Training and skills development:** Offering a range of courses and experiential learning opportunities tailored to flagship datasets, research methods and public engagement.
- **Support structures:** Strengthening peer networks, mentoring and cohort support to foster inclusive and sustainable communities of practice.



Key goals include:

- Aligning training provision with ADR UK’s strategic objectives, including public good, data access, researcher support and public trust.
- Expanding reach across disciplines, career stages and geographic regions.
- Embedding equity, co-design and evidence-informed practice throughout delivery.
- Establishing robust mechanisms for monitoring, evaluation and continuous improvement.

Through this strategy, ADR UK aims to build a scalable and sustainable training ecosystem that empowers researchers, supports innovation and maximises the impact of administrative data research across the UK.

Background and strategic context

ADR UK’s mission is to transform the way researchers access and use the UK’s wealth of public sector data to generate insights that lead to better policy and outcomes. **Training and Capacity Building (TCB)** is a vital component of this mission, enabling researchers to develop the skills, confidence and support networks needed to work effectively with administrative data.

During the 2021-2026 investment phase, ADR UK tested and refined a range of approaches to TCB. These were delivered through five key routes:

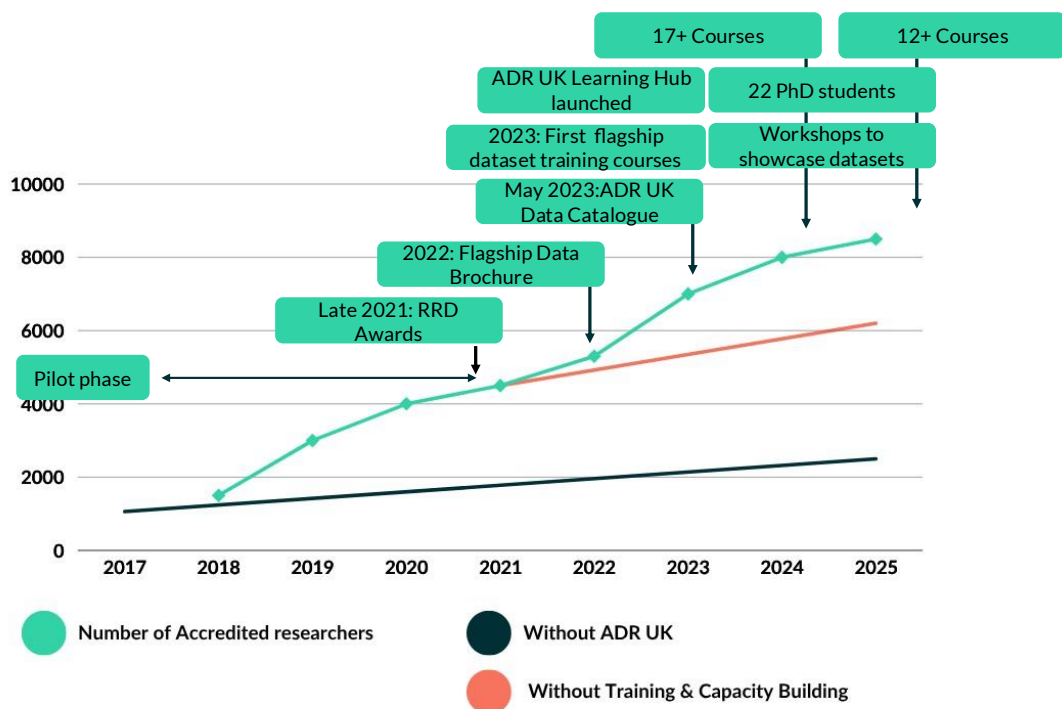
- Information provision
- Signposting
- Existing ESRC-funded programmes (PhDs)
- Training courses
- Experiential learning

Appendix 1 summarises the activities we have delivered through each of these routes.

These efforts have been integral to ADR UK’s broader success, complementing the provision of research-ready data, funding for research, and communications and engagement activities. While it is difficult to attribute the impact of TCB alone, the [2024 Interim Economic Evaluation](#) highlighted a cost-benefit ratio of 5.05, with flagship datasets (which routinely have bespoke training programmes and resources provided alongside them) valued at £42.58 million and non-flagship datasets at £1.86 million.

Figure 1 below shows the trajectory of accredited researchers in our trusted research environments (TREs), annotated to show TCB activities that have supported growth:

Figure 1: The number of accredited researchers using ADR UK TREs



This strategy builds on those foundations, aiming to scale up and strengthen TCB provision across the UK. It draws on lessons learned, addresses identified gaps and embraces new opportunities to support researchers at all career stages and across disciplines.

The Training and Capacity Building Partnership group comprising representatives from the academic and government arms of ADR England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland has co-produced this strategy and assumes shared ownership of it.

Training needs analysis

To inform the 2026-2031 investment phase, ADR UK conducted a needs analysis during 2025 using a survey to reach individuals through our networks across the partnership. The findings highlighted four key areas where researchers require further training to effectively use administrative data for research:

- **Reproducibility** – including the use of GitHub, developing robust code using various software packages, and adopting good practice for reproducible research.
- **Public engagement** – particularly developing strategies for identifying and recruiting public representatives, and having access to case studies for demonstrating successful engagement
- **Making an impact** – understanding effective research dissemination strategies, co-production and the use of focus groups
- **Flagship datasets** – navigating ethical and legal approval processes, access protocols and developing deeper knowledge of the data.

In addition to the survey, ADR UK partners provided information about their planned training provision based on demand. This is shown in Appendix 2 and worked into the following strategy.

1. Vision and purpose

ADR UK’s vision for Training and Capacity Building (TCB) is to facilitate a sustainable, inclusive and scalable system to support researchers across the UK to obtain the skills, confidence and capabilities needed to use administrative data for research for public good.

This strategy builds on the previous investment phase and sets out a collaborative approach to delivering training, resources and support across the four-nation partnership and ADR England’s new core partners (DfE, MoJ, HMRC, DWP, DHSC).

2. Alignment to ADR UK’s strategic objectives

ADR UK strategic objective	TCB alignment and contribution	Success measures
Drive research for public good	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide training and resources for each flagship dataset and the data skills needed to use them to inspire new researchers. • Collaborate with ADR UK core partners and academic leads, networks and stakeholders to develop research agendas which will drive public good research to inform improved policy and practice. • Provide training that helps researchers from different disciplines work together and present their findings in ways that are accessible to policymakers and valuable to society. • Support researchers to understand policy contexts, navigating government data systems and communicating findings for impact. Provide dedicated sessions on policy engagement, co-production and translating research into actionable insights. • Commission a new diverse cohort of PhD studentships to feed the researcher pipeline and continue to support students in the original cohort to complete their studentships. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training available for every flagship dataset within 6 months of being made available to researchers • 30 PhD studentships starting in 2027/28 academic year
Increase the data available for research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drive the provision of synthetic data for learning and planning research. Promote it through diverse researcher networks and communities and make it discoverable. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Synthetic data routinely produced and available for all flagship datasets

Improve researcher access and support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with core partner academic leads to provide training to support researchers to produce scholarly, reproducible, impactful and trustworthy research. • Identify skills gaps and ways to fill them for administrative data users. • Embed support into Research Fellowships and PhD Studentships to build a pipeline of users with a breadth of skills. • Support the development of effective communities of practice by geographic region, theme or discipline. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skills and data training aligned to requirements of the ADR UK Flagship Dataset Framework • Provision to support inclusive communities of practice
Increase sustainability and efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-design delivery frameworks with core partners and academic leads to streamline training provision and resource sharing. • Encourage scalable models and shared infrastructure for training and resources. • Work with data owners and those responsible for federation to ensure appropriate training is a key consideration in the federation process. • Encourage durability of training resources using good practice in their creation, sharing and review • Collect evaluation data to update content, retire outdated materials, and develop new resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration through DataCise and provision of resources through Learning Hub
Public trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In collaboration with PEDRI (Public Engagement in Data Research Initiative) integrate public engagement training into researcher development. • Communities of practice support ethical, transparent, and inclusive communication. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PE training is available and explicit in community charters

3. Guiding principles

- **Access, equity and inclusion:** Ensure training is available to all administrative data researchers, reaches under-represented groups, and strives to attract a diverse mix of audiences.
- **Co-design and co-delivery:** Work with a diverse range of delivery partners, researchers and other stakeholders such as data owners to shape content and delivery.
- **Sustainability:** Build durable resources and inclusive networks.
- **Evidence-informed:** Use consistent and meaningful monitoring and evaluation to improve and adapt provision.
- **Strategic agility:** Be responsive to emerging needs identified by ADR UK and its wide mix of stakeholders.

4. Audience

The strategy recognises the diverse needs of its target audiences, including PhD students, early career researchers, established academics, policymakers and data practitioners. Training offers will be tailored to career stage, discipline and familiarity with administrative data.

5. Delivery routes

In 2026-31, we will focus on three delivery routes – Resources and Signposting, Training and Skills Development, and Support Structures) – building on lessons learned and expanding reach across disciplines, career stages and regions.

A. Resources and signposting

ADR UK Learning Hub: The hub provides centralised access to training materials, lists training courses and webinars, hosts information about emerging communities of practice, and has a dedicated noticeboard space for PhD students

We will:

- Direct learners to training courses and events with up-to-date information
- Grow our User Groups and Communities section to reflect the communities emerging geographically and by topic
- Explore and post opportunities for placements and internships as they arise to help administrative data users to get hands-on experience
- Update our signposting to recognise new providers (such as ESRC's Researcher Capability Hub), emerging collaborations and relevant training provided by other organisations
- Where relevant and appropriate, explicitly point to sources of other forms of data which could complement administrative data in social research, such as smart data and longitudinal data.

International Data Access Tools repository: ADR UK has led the development of this initiative in collaboration with organisations from Canada and Australia with whom we are connected through the International Population Data Linkage Network (IPDLN). The repository is a means of sharing good practice across the world. It provides access to a range of resources including interactive data discovery tools, reusable resources such as data governance templates, and good practice tools.

We will:

- Promote the repository across the International Data Linkage Population Network to encourage tool sharing and propagate good practice
- Moderate content for appropriateness and post new resources
- Review and adjust content categories annually.

Datacase platform: This online learning portal hosted by ADR Wales provides self-directed learning resources for data practitioners and researchers across domains and career stages. The platform actively supports skills development through a sandbox environment where learners can experiment with synthetic data in a safe, TRE-like setting.

We will:

- Provide strategic direction and leadership for Datacise
- Promote the Datacise platform across the ADR UK partnership for hosting training materials
- Utilise the Datacise resource to support course delivery from other parts of the ADR UK partnership
- Collectively build the course offering and collaborative learning opportunities using Datacise to meet the needs of a diverse audience.

Synthetic data: ADR UK supports the routine production of synthetic versions of secure datasets and has made its provision a condition of meeting the ‘flagship dataset’ criteria.

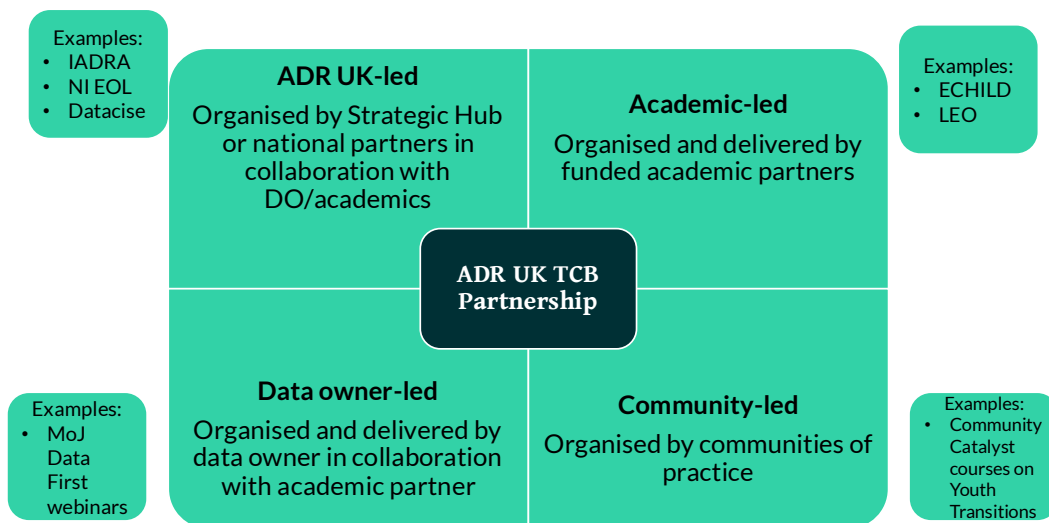
We will:

- Collaborate with a range of stakeholders to develop, test and update guidance on the provision of synthetic data, including evidence for its utility
- Work with data owners and providers to support their provision of suitable synthetic data.

B. Training and skills development (courses/activities)

Our courses are typically organised in four ways as illustrated in Figure 2 below. These are not always entirely distinct and there can be cross-over between them.

Figure 2: ADR UK training delivery models



Courses 2026-2031: Based on our strategic objectives, the Flagship Dataset Framework, and responding to the 2025 user needs analysis, we will:

- Create and maintain a cross-partnership course development working group and a living repository of training courses (dataset-specific, methodological and generic) which can be used to guide prioritisation of investment in new courses and spread of delivery across the partnership
- Work with flagship dataset owners to ensure each flagship dataset has a bespoke training offer
- Work with representatives across our networks to identify skills gaps to enhance the impact of administrative data research, including developing courses targeted at government analysts and other users outside of academia
- Routinely utilise Datacise for hosting online training courses, maximising the use of it as a shared space that amplifies and supports training efforts across the partnership
- Work with our diverse communities of practice and wider networks to identify training needs and how to fill them, including courses to support the development of a pipeline of a breadth of researchers through outreach to potential users of administrative data earlier in the pipeline (such as undergraduates and master's students)
- Maintain existing relationships and grow new ones with other ESRC investments offering insight and training on topics relevant to a diverse mix of administrative data users in order to share opportunities, particularly across data types, and reduce duplication.

Learning innovation: The new investment phase presents an opportunity to build our portfolio of learning options in order increase our breadth and capacity and grow user capabilities. Working across the spectrum of career levels and rich diversity of stakeholders across our networks, we aim to provide a variety of learning approaches to help a diverse mix of users and potential users to acquire the skills they need in new ways.

We will:

- Run hackathons (datathons) to drive innovation through hands on learning, knowledge exchange and experimentation
- Collaborate with new and emerging learning providers (such as the PRUK's synthetic data training lab, Researcher Capability Hub) to cross-fertilise ideas and develop learning opportunities.
- Actively support community-led learning by engaging with our communities of practice and helping them to identify and deliver learning through our infrastructure and networks.
- Regularly review learning provision across the partnership and consider where and how we can add value with innovative learning opportunities, seeking co-funding and in-kind support where necessary to deliver more.
- Share plans for attending conferences and one-off events to stimulate collaboration and involvement from across the partnership.

C. Support structures

Over the last investment period we have learned how vital support structures are for users of administrative data. Not only are these data hard to access and complex to use, but there are also relatively few researchers working with them within the social sciences. Often, the datasets are so new that our Research Fellows become flag bearers - quickly emerging as the leading experts.

Here we outline support structures and mechanisms for potential users, new applicants, early users of new datasets, PhD students and Early Career Researchers, as well as more advanced researchers. We recognise the important role that users can play in supporting one another, and the development opportunities which arise from creating such support structures.

Peer support: Research Fellowship applicants can access advice from previous award holders.

In this new offer, applicants can request up to an hour with a current or former award holder for guidance on preparing their funding application. This includes advice on skills, time management and budgeting. It does not include advice or information about specific datasets or project feasibility. We will extend this model to PhD supervisors applying for studentships.

Mentorship: ADR UK is committed to supporting researchers throughout their fellowship journey. Our mentoring programme offers tailored peer-to-peer support to help Research Fellows build confidence and skills in using linked administrative data. ADR UK's Research Fellows can apply for peer-to-peer mentoring for the duration of their fellowship to help support their research agendas.

This programme is designed to support researchers who may have:

- little or no experience using linked administrative data, and/or
- limited quantitative analysis skills
- limited or no experience or working in a trusted research environment

ADR UK will work with all participants in the scheme to match mentees with mentors. Paired participants will work together to outline expectations and goals for the relationship.

Communities of practice: ADR UK will support the creation and development of self-sustaining, strategically aligned research communities that foster collaboration, capacity building and knowledge exchange amongst researchers who share similar themes of work and/or are geographically close. This initiative recognises that community-generated activity is key to developing a critical mass of expertise and long-term sustainability.

We will work with communities to identify leadership and develop goals and ways of working. Once a community is aligned with ADR UK's strategic objectives and has agreed an initial programme of activity, it may be granted ADR UK 'Affiliate' status. As affiliates, communities will receive both strategic and operational support from ADR UK, including guidance on aligning activities with ADR UK goals, access to relevant networks, and opportunities for collaboration and visibility across the ADR UK partnership.

Cohort support: ADR UK-funded researchers (including Research Fellows and PhD students) will automatically be connected to a cohort based on when they received their funding. Support will be provided by staff teams issuing the grants. Support through this route will include:

- Regular catch ups to check in on data access
- Collaborative discussion on methods and challenges
- In some instances, in-person gatherings to build connections and share insights

6. Implementation

This strategy is co-produced by the ADR UK Partnership. Implementation is coordinated by the TCB Partnership Working Group as follows:

The Strategic Hub TCB team will:

- Lead and manage strategy delivery through the TCB Partnership Working Group
- Run a funding opportunity to commission a new UK-wide cohort of PhD studentships to start in Autumn 2027 and lead the support of this cohort throughout their studentships
- Organise generic training and resources to fill gaps not covered by partners
- Facilitate training on ADR England flagship datasets in collaboration with partners
- Develop and support sustainable administrative data communities, with a focus on ADR UK Research Fellows and PhD students.
- Collaborate with other ESRC investments to make best use of learning opportunities for data users and reduce duplication

ADR UK national partners will collaborate through the TCB Partnership Working Group to share opportunities and make specific contributions. These will cover, but are not limited to:

- Training on national level flagship datasets,
- Introduction to Administrative Data Research and Analysis
- Safe Researcher Training
- Datacise platform
- AI training
- Data skills including R, Stata and Difference in Difference
- Soft skills training including Introduction to Government, Policy and Impact
- Research skills including Understanding Data Quality, Mixed Methods using administrative data, Public Engagement Training

National partners will implement the ADR UK TCB strategy by tailoring UK-wide priorities to their context, focusing on nationally relevant datasets, specific researcher needs, public engagement and impact. They will contribute to the UK-wide training offer while strengthening local capacity, ensuring all ADR UK researchers are equipped to deliver high-quality, trusted, and impactful research.

Key milestones:

- Launch of new datasets – align with the Flagship Dataset Framework requirements
- End of the 2023 PhD cohort and launch of the 2027 PhD cohort
- UK Research Fellowships (3 rounds)
- Mid-point reviews of delivery approaches
- Evolution of collaborative models

Sustainability and legacy: ADR UK will endeavour to facilitate the creation of sustainable and durable resources and learning structures which can be maintained and accessible beyond 2031. Successful models will be institutionalised through partnerships, shared platforms, and integration into long-term programmes.

7. Monitoring & evaluation and continuous improvement

Monitoring and evaluation will be embedded throughout the strategy to ensure effectiveness and adaptability. The TCB Partnership Working Group will regularly review mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation to ensure appropriate metrics are being collected consistently across the partnership, including from new core partners. As much as possible, Datacise dashboards will collect data from training courses. For activities and events that are not run through Datacise, the following information will be collected by each delivery partner:

Minimum Key Performance Indicators (KPIs):

- Number of courses/activities delivered
- Number of learners (include breakdown learner type as per PMO requirements)
- Provision of training resources
- Participant satisfaction and learner experience

Impact measurement:

- Research outputs linked to training
- Placement and career progression
- Community development and sustainability

Learning loops:

- Annual strategy review – to be conducted by the TCB Partnership working group in March of each year of the investment
- Feedback-informed course updates – continuous improvement, based on participant feedback
- Adaptive planning based on emerging needs – to be managed through the Cross-Partnership Training and Research Communities Working Group

Risk and mitigation: Key risks to delivery include limited capacity, uneven engagement across regions, lack of consistency in delivery and collecting metrics and technological barriers. These will be mitigated through proactive planning, flexible delivery models and regular feedback from partners and learners.

8. Costs

The TCB budget for this investment period comes from a flexible, shared, operational budget for ADR UK's Strategic Hub. Costs which enable core partners (national partners and ADR England partners) to deliver on the Flagship Dataset Framework should already be accounted for within individual core partner awards. TCB costs are therefore focused on additional activities and contingencies to support the TCB programme and growth. Funds are available (when not covered by an existing award) for:

- Data access costs for PhD students in instances where the ADR national partner is unable to cover costs
- Synthetic data generation
- Dataset training
- Special and generic skills training
- Innovative learning opportunities
- Communities' activities
- Capacity building at regional events
- PhD annual gatherings (national partners will share costs).

Appendices

- Appendix 1: Activities delivered during 2021-2026 investment phase
- Appendix 2: ADR UK partners' planned training focus based on demand

Appendix 1: Activities delivered during the 2021-2026 investment phase

Delivery route	Activity delivered
Information provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborative work to agree and define what we mean 'research-ready data'. This laid the foundation for the Flagship Dataset Framework. • Development of clear, systematic information about each flagship dataset, including how to access it, what supporting resources are available, and references to previous research were made available on the ADR UK website.
Signposting	Development and growth of the Learning Hub, offering guidance on getting started with administrative data, and providing learning resources, synthetic data, communities of practice, and training courses.
Existing ESRC-funded programmes	<p>The ADR UK PhD programme used the ESRC-funded Doctoral Training Partnerships to place 22 PhD students in 16 research organisations across the UK.</p> <p>We formed a training partnership with ESRC-funded NCRM. We contributed to the Future Data Services programme of work with examples and experience from our networks.</p>
Courses	<p>Between 2021 and 2025, the ADR UK Strategic Hub organised more than 30 courses attracting around 1000 learners.</p> <p>Further training and resources were developed by academic teams funded by Research Ready Data grants. Nation-specific initiatives included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ADR Wales' Datacise platform launched in 2023, reaching over 5000 learners to date • ADR Scotland's IADRA course running twice a year and routinely registering up to 30 learners from across the UK • ADR Northern Ireland's pilot training using the Education Outcomes Linked (EOL) dataset • Courses were routinely monitored for attendance numbers and feedback was collected. ADR UK TCB Partnership worked together to identify gaps and needs for courses and to how respond to these.
Experiential learning	Through our networks we have raised awareness of the availability of our PhD cohort for placement opportunities. Students from this cohort have been successful in obtaining placements in a number of Government departments.

Appendix 2: ADR UK partners' planned training focus based on demand

Partner	Planned training focus based on demand
ADR England	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to Flagship datasets • Coding • Mixed methods • Public Engagement • Dataset-specific training • Introduction to Government, Policy and Impact
ADR NI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public Engagement • Intro to R • Intro to GitHub • Coding • AI
ADR Scotland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coding using R • Intro to Admin Data, Research and Analysis • Safe Researcher Training • Privacy Preserving Data Linkage
ADR Wales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coding using R • AI for Responsible Data Sharing & Deployment • Analysis of Linked Data • UK Data Linkage Community courses • UKDS TRE training • SAIL Databank TRE user training • Flagship dataset webinar series (different themes eg Education, Environmental data) • Healthy Households course