

Centre for Applied Data Ethics **Strategy**

Enabling ethically appropriate
research and statistics for the
public good

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Foreword

by Professor **Sir Ian Diamond**



Foreword

I am delighted to introduce the UK Statistics Authority's new Centre for Applied Data Ethics which we committed to establishing in the UK Statistics Authority's five-year strategy published last year. Being able to show that researchers, statisticians and analysts have not only considered how they can use data but also how they **should** use data from an ethical perspective is vital to ensuring public acceptability around the use of data for research and statistical purposes. For this reason, I believe that it is important that as the UK's national statistical institute, we play a lead role in providing statisticians, researchers and analysts with applied sources of advice, guidance and other tools to help them ensure they use data in ethically appropriate ways. I have therefore established the UK Statistics Authority's Centre for Applied Data Ethics with the aim of being recognised as world-leaders in the practical application of data ethics for statistics and research.

The new Centre will build on the excellent work of the National Statistician's Data Ethics Advisory Committee that will continue to provide me with valuable independent data ethics advice and assurance about the collection and use of data for research and statistics.

The significant role the analytical community across Government and beyond has played in informing the response to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic highlights the importance of using data in new ways to produce timely statistics, research and analysis to inform the important policy questions of the day. Demonstrating how we apply the principles of good data ethics is an important part of this and is a key enabler, and safeguard, to unlock the power of data for better research and statistics for the public good. By focussing our efforts on providing practical data ethics support and guidance to researchers collecting and using data, the Centre for Applied Data Ethics will help the UK Statistics Authority to meet its strategic objectives of producing statistics for the public good to inform the UK, improve lives and build for the future.



Professor Sir Ian Diamond
National Statistician


Who we are

The UK Statistics Authority is an independent body at arm's length from government, which reports directly to the UK Parliament, the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Parliament and the Northern Ireland Assembly. The Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 (SRSA) established the Authority with the statutory objective of “promoting and safeguarding the production and publication of official statistics that serve the public good”.

The public good includes:

- informing the public about social and economic matters
- assisting in the development and evaluation of public policy
- regulating quality and publicly challenging the misuse of statistics

Promoting and safeguarding the production and publication of official **statistics that serve the public good.**



The UK Statistics Authority is committed to using data in ethically appropriate ways and giving robust consideration to not just how data can be used but also to how it **should** be used to reduce potential harm to all individuals involved in the research, and maintain public and data owner acceptability around the production of research and statistics.

The **UK Statistics Authority's strategy** for 2020 to 2025, Statistics for the public good, sets the ambition for the organisation "to be recognised world-leaders in the practical application of data ethics for statistics and research, with a centre of excellence to deliver this". This document presents our strategy for delivering on this ambition.




Our ambition is to be recognised world-leaders in the **practical application of data ethics for statistics and research.**

Our data ethics so far

In 2015 the National Statistician established the **National Statistician's Data Ethics Advisory Committee** (NSDEC) to provide independent and transparent advice about the collection, access, use and sharing of data, ensuring it is ethical and for the public good. NSDEC is chaired by Dame Moira Gibb and consists of expert members in research ethics, statistical research, information law, data science and data protection.

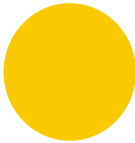

To provide a consistent framework to enable NSDEC to assess the ethics of research proposals, the UK Statistics Authority has developed a **framework of ethical principles** which has been widely disseminated across the research community.

To help researchers apply these principles to research projects the UK Statistics Authority has developed an **ethical self-assessment tool** which asks researchers to score their research against different components of the ethical principles at the research design stage, which therefore promotes a culture of 'ethics by design'. The tool provides an overall ethical risk score for a project. This is used to help identify areas where changes to the research design can be made to reduce the ethical risks of research projects. Those projects that are considered more ethically risky are reviewed by NSDEC to enable the projects to benefit from the independent ethical advice and assurance that NSDEC can offer.



The UK Statistics Authority provide guidance and training to researchers in applying the ethics self-assessment tool to their work and to help mitigate any potential or actual ethical risks.

These services have been widely used across the research and statistical community with over 300 research projects in the last year from across the government, academic and commercial research community using these services. More recently these services have supported our COVID-19 response by providing valuable and timely independent ethical advice and assurance on projects such as the COVID-19 Infection Survey, the Schools COVID-19 Infection Survey and other 'satellite' studies, and the linkage of Hospital Episodes records with Census data, mortality data and primary care data from NHS Digital to determine the level of relative risk of hospitalisation or death from COVID-19. These services have also helped enable important ethically appropriate research on a range of different issues across the research and statistical system. For more information about the various projects that we have engaged with, please visit the [NSDEC webpage](#).



Where our data ethics work is going

This work has made a valuable contribution to the applied data ethics infrastructure as recognised by organisations such as the Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation and the UK Government's National Data Strategy but we want to build on this and go further so that we can support the ethical collection and use of data across the Statistical system as it develops over the next five years. The next stage in our maturity model is to become recognised as world-leaders in the practical application of data ethics for statistics and research.

To achieve this the UK Statistics Authority is launching a **Centre for Applied Data Ethics** (the Centre) to add world class applied practical ethics advice, support and services for researchers and statisticians across the whole breadth of the Statistical system. The work of the Centre will be guided by the following principles which directly align to the UK Statistics Authority's core principles of being:



radical in our decisions



ambitious in our actions



inclusive in all that we are and do



sustainable in our outlook



We will be **radical** in our decisions and **ambitious** in our actions by improving our practical advice, support and services to enable ethically appropriate research and statistics. Our experience has taught us that it is important not just to talk about good data ethics but also to provide practical advice, support and services to empower researchers to put good data ethics into practice. The work of the Centre will build upon the UK Statistics Authority's existing work in the data ethics space and move beyond ethical theory and principles to provide world class 'applied' support to help researchers and statisticians to identify and mitigate ethical risks in their work robustly and efficiently.

To achieve this, we will deliver the following:



a new more **user-friendly ethics self-assessment tool** enabling researchers to efficiently consider the ethics of their research and identify any ethical risks



new **interactive online ethics training** to empower researchers from across the research community to make more informed considerations of ethics in their research design



a new **user support function** enabling us to provide specialist ethics user support and expertise to work with researchers and statisticians from across the Statistical system to overcome ethical issues at the research design phase



new published authoritative and respected **guidance on cross-cutting and innovative ethical issues** in research and statistics which researchers can use and apply in their research.



We will be **inclusive** in all that we do by proactively looking to collaborate with others. The work of the Centre will focus on providing support for researchers and statisticians across the United Kingdom, but we will collaborate with other organisations working on data ethics, from a range of different sectors, to seek opportunities for sharing of best ethical practice and developing ethical thinking and services in areas of mutual interest. This will enable the UK Statistics Authority to become a respected thought leader in the data ethics space.

Our work will be guided by an independent advisory panel consisting of representatives from key stakeholders which will be established to advise the Centre on aspects such as research priorities, service provision, partnerships and future work programmes.



We will be **ambitious** in our actions and **inclusive** in all that we do by being international in our outlook and impact. The work of the Centre will actively engage with other National Statistical Institutes (NSIs) and international bodies to learn from, and influence, international ethical best practice and thinking in research and statistics. We will become a recognised world leader in applied data ethics by leading a new international ethics work programme which reviews international best practice on data ethics, leads the development of international ethical standards for research and statistics and provides advice and support to other NSIs based on our experiences developing the UK Statistics Authority's ethics framework.

Delivering the strategy

This strategy sets out the aims and priorities for the **Centre for Applied Data Ethics**. It is not a detailed blueprint for everything that needs to be done in the applied data ethics space. The strategy will be delivered by the Data Ethics team within the UK Statistics Authority's Data Governance, Legislation and Policy team. We will regularly publish information on our work on the [UK Statistics Authority website](#) and we will publish an Annual Report which will report on our progress.



Contact us

To contact us for more information email:

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