



ADRN Institutional Guarantor FAQs

1. What is the Administrative Data Research Network?

The Administrative Data Research Network is a partnership between universities, national statistics authorities, the Economic and Social Research Council, government departments and agencies, and researchers. We enable researchers to carry out social and economic research using administrative data – the information government departments and agencies collect when they register people and carry out transactions.

2. Why does the applicant need an 'institutional guarantor'?

The Network allows researchers access to very detailed data. In a lot of cases these data come from government departments and relate to population groups and sub-groups, so it is vital that we hold this information safely and securely. Researchers can only apply to use the Network when they have a clear project defined, and their project proposal has to be approved by an independent Approvals Panel which reviews every Network project. The Network then works to bring together the required data and provides a secure setting where the data can be analysed.

Researchers, service providers, data providers, and institutions all have a role to play in keeping data safe. Before researchers can access data, for example, they have to be accredited. To achieve this, they must have training, provide evidence of their ability to work with the data, and show that their application is endorsed by their institution.

Existing data services, such as the UK Data Service Secure Lab, find that having an explicit guarantee from a researcher's institution helps reassure data providers that researchers accessing their sensitive data will do so safely.

3. How does the process work?

Getting evidence of an institutional guarantee is part of the Network's standard application process – which involves handling the researcher's application separately from the application for their project.

The process works as follows:

- The 'lead researcher' fills in a project proposal – and provides details of the researchers involved with the project
- Each researcher is provided with a researcher application form (either as a web-form or as an email)

- The researcher completes the form – with the exception of the final section (institutional guarantor)
- The researcher forwards their application by email (or submits by webform) to the person or department with the requisite institutional authority who will act as their institutional guarantor
- The institutional guarantor completes the final section of the application form and forwards by email (or submits by webform) to the ADRN

4. Why me?

We usually require the institutional guarantor to be a senior member of staff with signature authority for the institution. This is because a commitment is being made on behalf of the organisation as a whole, which is usually a level of authority which is limited to a small number of people within an organisation. By guaranteeing an application the organisation is making a significant undertaking that, in the event of a researcher misusing data, may impact on the organisation as a whole.

This reflects the fact that this access to data in the ADRN is a serious undertaking. We are funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, so we have a responsibility to them and the public to handle data, and the process of granting access to it, carefully – and to abide by the statutes and regulations governing such access, and make sure researchers follow them, too.

5. What does it mean for me / my institution?

Being an institutional guarantor means that your institution has a clear role in making sure its staff are accessing data safely, lawfully and responsibly. It gives the process transparency, in that the Network can see that an authorised individual at the institution is aware of the obligations and that the institution has taken responsibility for the researcher.

It also means that if the researcher misuses data, or otherwise breaches the terms of use of the service, there is potential for the institution to which they belong to have sanctions imposed upon them. This will be dependent on the circumstances of any breach, but ultimately it may lead to an organisation being barred from use of the ADRN for a set period of time.

This is one of many safeguards we have in place to make sure researchers are accessing data safely, lawfully and responsibly. In the unlikely event that a researcher breaks the rules, it is important for the Network to have a point of contact with the institution in order to begin taking action to prevent any leak and impose any sanctions which are necessary.

Further questions?

If you have any other questions, feel free to contact us at help@adrn.ac.uk or 01206 873435.