



# Interim evaluation of Administrative Data Research UK: Summary report

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# Interim evaluation of Administrative Data Research UK

This report was produced by Oxford Insights and Lateral Economics. MEL advisory support was provided by the Open Data Institute.

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# 1. Executive summary

This summary report presents an overview of the results of the midterm evaluation of Administrative Data Research UK, conducted by Oxford Insights and Lateral Economics with support from the Open Data Institute. It provides an assessment of ADR UK's progress to date, as well as recommendations for getting further value out of the remainder of this investment period and tracking future progress. The evaluation employed a mixed methods approach, drawing on findings from interviews and surveys with stakeholders in government and academia, as well as bibliometric and economic analysis.

**Overall, the evaluation found that ADR UK is a beneficial investment which is returning significant value to both government and academic researchers.**

From the evidence available to date, our analysis of the cost savings incurred by the partnership and its projected wider social-economic impacts reveals that ADR UK's benefits significantly outweigh costs (see benefit-cost ratio below).

Beyond the economic value of the programme, qualitative insights collected from experts across both government and academia confirm that ADR UK is broadly on track to meet its intended goals. In particular, our interim findings highlight ADR UK's contribution to:

- **Supporting the acquisition, linkage and cleaning of over 200 new datasets**, which would not exist without the partnership's funding (and many more datasets which are indirectly enabled by ADR UK's funding of data linkage teams and TRE environments)
- **Improving data accessibility by funding remote access through SafePods and trusted research environments without compromising security**. Whilst researchers still highlight challenges with timely data access, ADR UK's investment has substantially improved access to administrative data across the UK, and, in most cases has obviated the need for users to visit a department. Data owners sharing data through ADR UK are confident in the security offered by the ONS 5 safe framework, and ADR UK has a solid reputation across government.
- **Building buy-in for administrative data sharing across Whitehall departments and devolved governments**. The work of the ADR UK Strategic Hub was highlighted as being crucial to "unlocking" data from across Whitehall departments by building the relationships and trust needed for data owners to share administrative data.
- **Establishing closer links between researchers and policy**. Whilst connecting academic evidence and policymaking comes with difficulties (which are not specific to ADR UK), case studies and bibliometric analysis show that research funded by ADR UK, or using ADR UK-funded datasets, is beginning to influence policy. The socio-economic benefits associated with more informed policymakers will increase as more projects move from the data

acquisition and analysis phases into publishing findings.

### **In terms of return on investment, we conservatively estimate that the partnership has a partial benefit-cost ratio of 5.05 to date.**

Our economic analysis of the first four years of the ADR UK investment points to strong return on investment (ROI) across the partnership. Using a relatively conservative methodology which is based upon economic estimates of ADR UK's outputs and outcomes as defined in the partnership Theory of Change we have calculated the benefit-cost ratio (BCR) of the programme as 5.05. That is to say, for every £1 spent on the programme, it produces an estimated £5.05 worth of benefits.

This excludes some of ADR UK's wider socioeconomic potential for informing evidence-led policy. We have begun to estimate the value of these impacts using case study examples (see section 6.11 in the full report), but excluded these estimates from the BCR at present, due to attribution challenges and the fact that most tangible impacts on policy are most likely to be realised in the future.

### **The partnership is performing significantly better than its previous iteration (ADRN), particularly when it comes to the sustainability of outcomes.**

From interviews especially, it is clear that stakeholders across government and academia who were involved in ADR UK's previous iteration, the Administrative Data Research Network (ADRN), feel that **ADR UK has made significant improvements upon the previous delivery model.**

ADRN functioned as the primary point of comparison for ADR UK in this evaluation since it also sought to promote the use of administrative data for academic research but under a different delivery model. A number of senior stakeholders also have experience of both partnerships, which facilitated direct comparisons. We have used ADRN as a counterfactual in qualitative interviews and surveys, and where data was available from the previous programme, to support the bibliometric analysis.

In particular, interviews highlighted how ADRN operated on more of a project-by-project basis, connecting academics with departments to conduct research on linked administrative data which then had to be destroyed upon the completion of research. **ADR UK's model is much more sustainable, conserving data linked under the partnership for future use**, and as such, opening up value through data reuse.

More generally, **ADR UK was also acknowledged as a more cohesive partnership between the four nations than its predecessor.** Whilst there remain opportunities for further knowledge sharing across

*“You had to destroy the dataset once the research had been done, which makes no sense [...]. It's night and day in terms of the effectiveness of the model”*  
*Interviewee 16*

the devolved governments, particularly between the trusted research environments (TREs), researchers in particular value the support of the Strategic Hub and the networking opportunities provided by ADR UK.

The only area where we were unable to identify a positive shift from ADRN to ADR UK concerned data access (see the following finding). Nonetheless, direct comparisons of data access between these two periods are somewhat difficult. Before ADR UK, educational outcomes data held in the National Pupil Database was the only administrative data widely used by researchers. The Department for Education would send physical copies of the data for researchers to analyse locally. This process was replaced by the trusted research environment model after the Information Commissioner's Office [identified security concerns](#), a move which coincided with the advent of the ADR UK pilot phase in 2018. As such, there is some risk that researchers associate ADR UK with longer waiting times for data, when these changes were actually external to the partnership.

### Researcher experience remains one of the partnerships' main challenges, particularly when it comes to the timeliness of data availability.

Despite the programme's successes, **the most significant challenges we uncovered through interviews and surveys concerned timely access to data.**

Whilst researchers were overall satisfied with how easy it is to use the TREs once access is granted (with the exception of some respondents facing technical issues), there was a general sense that data access takes too long.

In particular, we heard that access forms are long and complicated, accreditation can be time-consuming, and that some researchers have faced delays in linked data becoming available which haven't been well communicated by TREs.

*"This is the weak spot. It still takes too long to gain access to data and the process is very cumbersome."*  
Survey respondent

We recognise that **these concerns must be balanced against data owners' security requirements.** However, there is scope for ADR UK to work with the TREs to conduct more focussed service design work to find further opportunities for the researcher journey to be simplified, or, at minimum, to help set more realistic expectations around data access. Beyond this, the ADR UK partnership should also collaborate with the Central Digital and Data Office / Department for Science Innovation and Technology to explore how further external intermediation might be introduced in cases where delays are significant, to provide more motivation for departments and TREs to provide timely access to data.

This work is particularly important considering the planned migration to the Integrated Data Service, where we have heard ADR UK have already been instrumental in advocating for academic user needs (Interviewee 29, Interviewee 23). Continuing to reduce the barriers for researchers to access data will be instrumental to maximising data use, a prerequisite for the wider social and economic benefits of

the partnership.

## Research is beginning to inform policy, but more can be done to ensure academic insights transfer to policymakers and any impacts are tracked.

Experts we spoke to acknowledged how **informing policy through academic research can be notoriously challenging** and emphasised that this problem is not specific to ADR UK. On the one hand, academic research incurs large costs and delays associated with 'one size fits all' competitive funding bids and publication processes which are not optimised for informing policy. On the other hand, policymaking cycles run on much shorter timelines, are rarely influenced by a single piece of evidence and are often directed by ministerial imperative rather than academic research.

Yet despite these challenges, **bibliometric analysis and case studies show that ADR UK-funded research is starting to influence policy**. Examples include ADR UK-enabled research which informed Wales shift to Alert Level Zero during the COVID-19 pandemic and provided evidence for the extension of Scotland's Minimum Unit Pricing policy in 2024.

Influence on policy seems only set to increase as a result of ADR UK's investment in improving the interface between research and policymakers, whether that is through promoting digestible findings in the form of or directly embedding research fellows into government teams.

However, engaging with the ADR UK community throughout the evaluation made it clear that there is an opportunity to further strengthen ADR UK's influence on policy. We found that **it is currently very hard to track policy impact, and stakeholders feel responsibilities around recording impact could be better defined**. Further clarity here, as well as investment in resources such as Overton.io, which allow policy impact to be tracked more efficiently, would help ADR UK as more projects shift from data acquisition and analysis into disseminating findings.

## There are changes ADR UK can make to its MEL processes which will make it easier to evidence the partnership's value in 2026.

ADR UK Strategic Hub has made progress in creating an MEL framework for the programme and in collecting data from across the partnership through Quarterly Hub Reports. Nonetheless, the **information returned by partners is often reported back in different formats and to different degrees of detail**, which makes tracking progress over time more difficult.

We think there are some steps which can be taken to improve MEL reporting, to **make it clearer for partners how they need to report**, and in some cases to **centralise data collection** to remove burden on partners where it is clear that they are having difficulties responding. This should also make it easier for the team within the Strategic Hub to collate responses and provide updates on progress.

A more detailed set of MEL recommendations is included in the full report, including recommendations to:

- Ensure that partners are reporting either cumulatively, or quarterly shifts in totals such as dataset counts. Edit existing data to ensure consistency (already underway)
- Begin to track publication counts quantitatively in QHRs – as far as we are aware there is currently a lack of quantitative publication counts, and collating this information from across ResearchFish, websites and QHRs is time-consuming
- Begin to use bibliometric software such as Overton.io to track policy impact at scale, in combination with more targeted qualitative approaches which capture the nuance of research impacts
- Ask partners to provide DOIs to support the above, at the moment, collating DOIs from across various time sources is also time-consuming, which could pose a challenge if ADR UK is to use bibliometric tracking software on an ongoing basis

**Looking forward, ADR UK will need to navigate a changing data-sharing landscape, which comes with some new challenges but, more importantly, sizable opportunities.**

To get the best out of the remainder of the investment and beyond, ADR UK will need to navigate some upcoming changes. In the short term, ensuring the **migration from ONS' Secure Research Service to the Integrated Data Service** goes as smoothly as possible will be crucial to maintaining and improving upon the levels of data use, which are so integral to the wider benefits of the programme.

As mentioned, interviewees have flagged that ADR UK has already played an important role in helping to represent different stakeholder needs in conversations around the shift to IDS. Finding the balance between ensuring stakeholder needs are heard and moving towards a more modern infrastructure which may require researchers to update their practices will be important over the coming months. More targeted service design work, to seek out further efficiencies in the data access process, would help to tackle the issues with timely access encountered over the course of the interim evaluation.

A **new government** also looks set to change the wider data-sharing landscape in the UK in a way which aligns with ADR UK's existing objectives. For example, the manifesto pledge to improve cross-government data-sharing for the public benefit echoes the goals of ADR UK's Theory of Change. Moreover, research-ready data funded and enabled by ADR UK would be well suited for inclusion in the proposed new [National Data Library](#).

As such, the change in administration provides a promising opportunity for the partnership to seek further buy-in from the central government. In particular, it opens up the possibility of conversations around how the central government might provide departments with more of an incentive (or a mandate) to share data, reducing the current dependency on individual champions and paving the way for data sharing within their departments. ADR UK will need to form the right relationships to



ensure that its partners are granted a seat at the table during these upcoming discussions and that any new initiatives such as a [National Data Library](#) do not unduly replicate or diminish any of its efforts to date. We note that ADR UK has already acknowledged the potential of the National Data Library in [a blog](#) published in August 2024 by the partnership's Director.

## 2. Introduction

This report presents the findings of the midterm evaluation of Administrative Data Research UK commissioned by UKRI in 2024. ADR UK is a major ESRC investment which has established a UK-wide partnership to transform the wealth of administrative data held by the government into academic research assets, with the ultimate goal of informing evidence-led policymaking. The study ran from April 2024 to October 2024 and was conducted by Oxford Insights and Lateral Economics with advisory input from the Open Data Institute.

### *2.1. Evaluation questions and objectives*

Fundamentally, this evaluation seeks evidence to understand **to what extent ADR UK is a worthwhile and cost-effective investment**. All our work looks to provide insights and tools which can start to answer this question, paving the way for a final evaluation of the cost-benefit analysis of any future business cases. Supporting this overarching goal, the evaluation has 3 primary objectives, each with a relevant set of evaluation questions as defined by ADR UK:

#### **1. Understanding to what extent ADR UK is delivering as intended and progressing in achieving its strategic outcomes as well as its economic benefits and social impacts.**

- a. According to the theoretical model, is ADR UK delivering the expected changes in transforming access to public data and the use of research for policymaking? Are the assumptions still valid for the rest of the implementation period?
- b. Is the Theory of Change reflecting the way in which ADR UK should be enabling the government to make policy that supports economic growth and better public services to improve people's lives?
- c. To what extent and how has ADR UK increased trust and sustainability among stakeholders in the need to release data?
- d. To what extent and how has ADR UK increased research to deliver measurable public good with demonstrable impact in addressing major societal challenges?
- e. To what extent and how has ADR UK increased researcher access and seamless service support?
- f. To what extent and how has ADR UK increased the availability of useful long-term and

- research-ready resources to address societal challenges?
- g. What knowledge, economic and social impacts from ADR UK can be evidenced from case studies?
  - h. Are there any unintended spillovers, externalities or outcomes that were not expected as part of the implementation of ADR UK that are relevant to consider for future funding?

## **2. Learning what has and has not worked well in the implementation and delivery of ADR UK, including an articulation of the reasons, good practices that have been developed, and main bottlenecks.**

- a. What elements of ADR UK's processes and implementation plan have worked well in influencing policy and what elements have room for improvement and how?
- b. What are the main bottlenecks researchers, data owners and policymakers have encountered in producing and using research outputs to address major societal challenges?
- c. How effective has ADR UK been in collecting monitoring information to inform the delivery process?
- d. How effective has ADR UK been in engaging with policymakers (Whitehall departments and devolved governments) to link administrative data across sectors and geographies, make it available and use research outputs for public policy?
- e. How effective has ADR UK been in interacting with researchers to use public data to create knowledge and engage in partnerships to influence policymaking?
- f. To what extent will ADR UK's impact be sustained beyond its initial period of implementation, and what factors may influence or limit this?
- g. Considering the Critical Success Factors, how effective has ADR UK been in promoting the service and interacting with data owners and the research community?

## **3. Providing recommendations on methods for the final impact evaluation (in 2026) and any additional metrics or other data that ADR UK should be collecting to facilitate this.**

To what extent are the current indicators in the ADR UK's monitoring and evaluation plan pertinent to measure the outcomes and impacts of the investment?

- a. To what extent is the data collected by ADR UK relevant and sufficient to assess the economic and social impacts of the programme?
- b. What evidence needs to be collected for ADR UK to be able to measure the economic and social impacts and which tools would be the most feasible to use?

- c. What is the feasibility of conducting a counterfactual analysis to measure the outcomes and impacts of ADR UK and what are the necessary conditions to perform it?

## *2.2. Methodology and rationale*

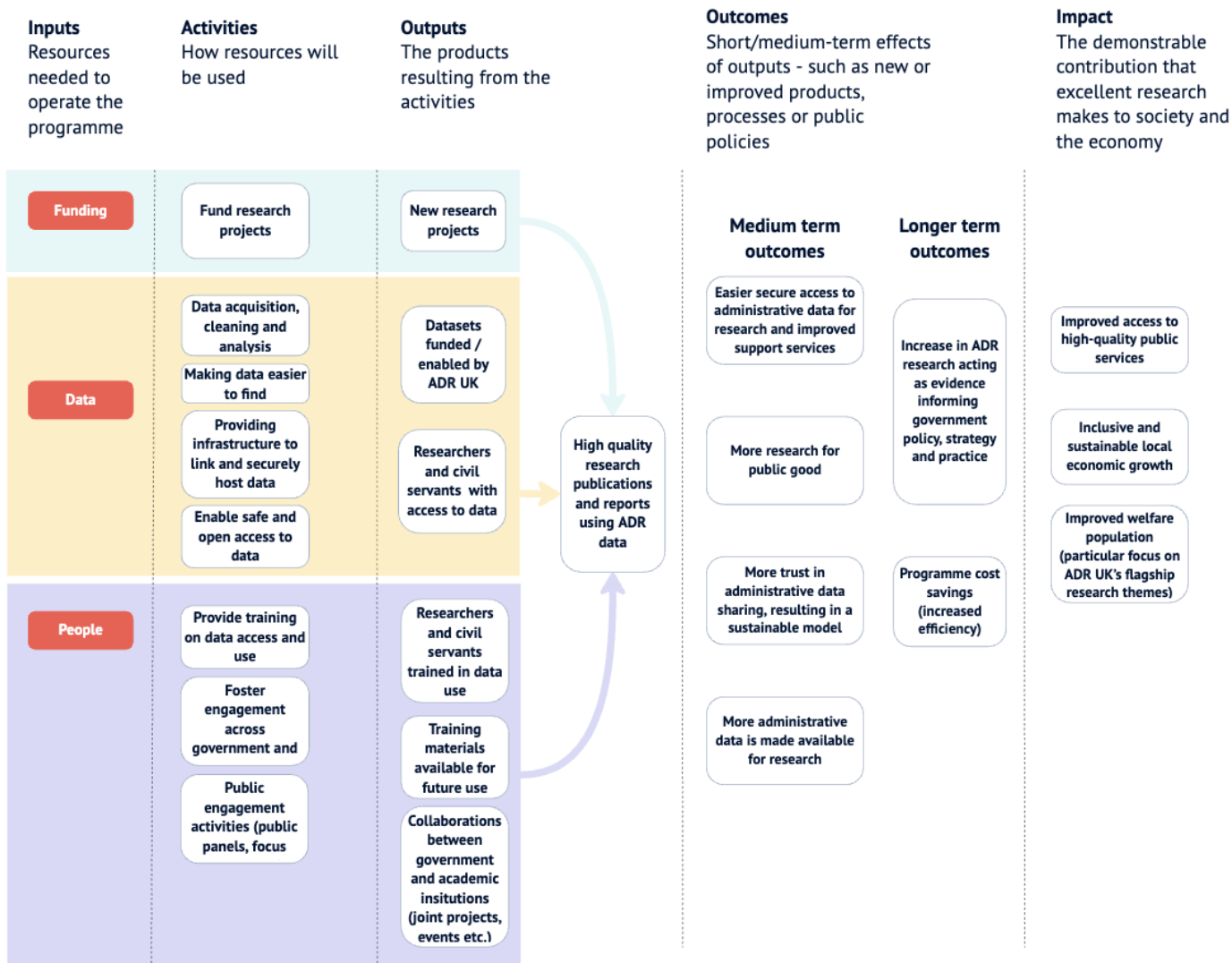
Phase 1 of the project was focussed on revising the programme Theory of Change and a draft evaluation framework, which sets out indicators for tracking progress against ADR UK's targeted outputs, outcomes and impacts. Having established a set of appropriate indicators, we then worked with ADR UK stakeholders to determine research methods. A **mixed-methods approach** was favoured due to the need to combine quantitative and economic findings with more qualitative assessments of the effectiveness of ADR UK's delivery model (meeting Objectives 1 and 2).

During Phase 2 we then collected data from a combination of secondary sources, trusted research environments, surveys and interviews that supported the economic quantification of ADR UK's outcomes, outputs and early impacts, feeding into a cost-benefit analysis. This ratio was calculated by simply dividing the benefits produced by the programme by the cost incurred in conducting it. To calculate the benefits, we quantified and monetised a number of the outcomes, outputs, and impacts highlighted in ADR UK's Theory of Change.

Calculating the BCR involved making a variety of simplifying assumptions, underpinned by the Theory of Change, around how these benefits are realised and, subsequently, monetised. These assumptions will be outlined in each of the relevant following sections as well as the Technical annex of the full report.

Phase 3 of the evaluation was then focussed on writing up our analysis.

An evaluation framework detailing indicators and methods and further detail on challenges and limitation is available in the annex of the full report.



Summary of the ADR UK Theory of Change as agreed in Phase 1 of this evaluation.

Method	Rationale
<p><b>Held a total of 30 key informant interviews</b> with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 8 researchers</li> <li>● 4 data owners</li> <li>● 5 TRE stakeholders</li> <li>● 5 ADR SHUB stakeholders</li> <li>● 8 policymakers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Allows us to collect more nuanced qualitative insights on the effectiveness of ADR UK's delivery model (what has and hasn't worked well)</li> <li>● Possibility of raising unexpected outcomes / consequences of the ADR UK programme not previously accounted for in the evaluation framework</li> </ul>
<p><b>Surveys</b> (targeting policymakers, data owners, data analysts and academic researchers)</p> <p>We received <b>109 survey responses</b> from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 68 researchers</li> <li>○ 8 data owners</li> <li>○ 9 data analysts</li> <li>○ 12 policymakers</li> <li>○ 12 Government Economic and Social Research network stakeholders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Broadens the sample of stakeholders who can be reached</li> <li>● Allows us to collect broad estimations of ADR's value across various indicators (e.g. time saved, number of times data is accessed)</li> <li>● A way of seeking counterfactual estimates (for those with ADRN experience)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Bibliometric analysis</b> Combination of key-word searches (how many times does ADR UK appear in policy) with DOI searches (how many times do ADR UK funded/facilitated research papers appear in policy)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Allows us to categorise the different ways in which ADR UK funded and facilitated research appears in policy documentation</li> <li>● Facilitates a comparison with ADRN</li> </ul>
<p><b>Case study analysis</b> of 6 case studies from across the devolved nations supported by desk research and interviews. Case studies included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● MoJ Data First – Criminal Courts Linked Data</li> <li>● Vaccination rates in Welsh Schools</li> <li>● Policing the Pandemic in Scotland</li> <li>● Trajectories of Social Care Leavers in Northern Ireland</li> <li>● Local Data Spaces – Supporting Local Authorities with COVID-19 testing</li> <li>● Informing Minimum Alcohol Unit Pricing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Allows us to evidence the way in which ADR UK is seeking to influence policy across different thematic areas, how research aligns with government priorities, and how projects are maintaining public trust in admin data sharing</li> <li>● Supports the economic quantification of benefits</li> </ul>

policy in Scotland

**Analysis of existing data collected by trusted research environments (TREs) and ADR UK Strategic Hub** (e.g. Quarterly Hub Reports).

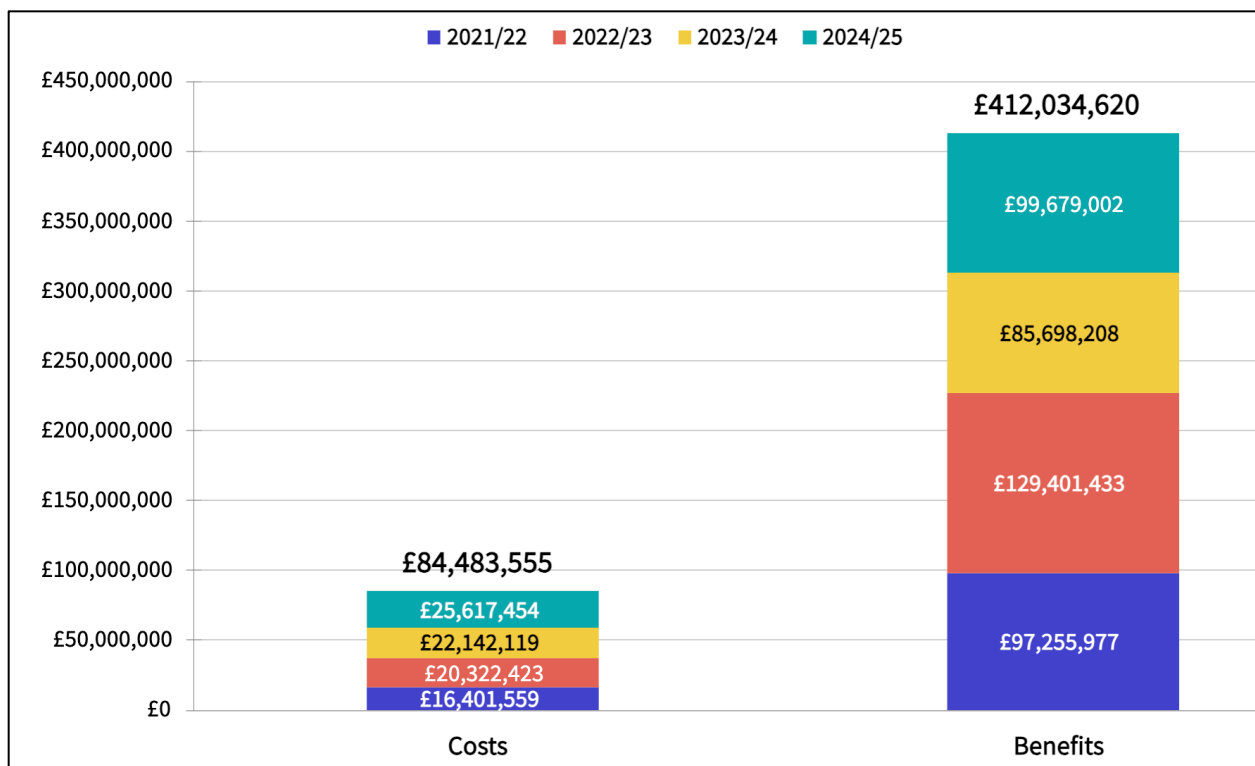
- Allows for the analysis of ADR's progress on core indicators related to dataset creation and researcher access
- Supports economic analysis (e.g. on value of datasets)

*Table of methods employed during the interim evaluation*

### 3. Overarching findings

Overall, ADR UK is delivering strong return on investment. A conservative estimation of the partnership’s economic benefits has a year-to-date benefit-cost ratio of 5.05.

Evidence collected during the midterm evaluation suggests that ADR UK is a cost-effective partnership that delivers benefits well in excess of the costs of funding it. We have calculated the year-to-date (YTD) benefit-cost ratio (BCR) of the partnership as 5.05. This means that for every £1 invested—that is for every £1 of cost—the programme produces £5.05 worth of benefits, factoring in yearly adjustments to account for inflation. **The full extent of the programme’s benefits is likely to exceed this BCR** since ADR UK’s major economic potential lies in informing evidence-based policy. Whilst we have begun to estimate the extent of these impacts through case studies (see [section 5](#) of this report) these figures are excluded from the BCR below at present to account for challenges in robustly attributing impacts to ADR UK funding specifically.



The benefit-cost ratio is primarily driven by outputs, as it remains difficult to quantify longer-term outcomes and impacts of the programme, such as informing policy, at scale at this stage. **The datasets funded and facilitated by the programme constitute the biggest driver of benefits within the BCR, accounting for over 92% of the total benefits quantified.** This aligns with findings from interviews, where stakeholders close to the partnership emphasised that ADR UK’s most

consistent value lies in the data and research environments it funds. As one interviewee put it, whilst policy priorities and government research interests will shift over time, the data and infrastructure funded by the partnership will endure (Interviewee 7). Due to datasets playing a fundamental role in the BCR, the total benefits for the third year of this investment are somewhat lower comparatively since the ratio of costs to datasets was lower in 2023/24.

Wider benefits included in the BCR include:

- Operational cost savings due to having a dedicated linkage team funded by ADR UK (6.78% of total benefit share),
- The value of ADR UK-enabled events and collaborations (0.03%),
- Wage premiums from ADR UK funded PhDs (0.02%)
- The value of ADR UK-funded training courses (0.01%).

To test assumptions further and give us a better understanding of the possible range of benefits for the project, we conducted a sensitivity analysis. This involved providing upper and lower bounds for some of our assumptions—primarily those most critical to the BCR and those which rely on single sources—and recalculating the BCR based on these changes. In doing this, we found that **the lower bound for a year-to-date BCR of the project is 4.56 and the upper bound is 21.20.**

More detail on the methodology behind the economic quantification of each benefit and how we conducted sensitivity analysis is available in the Technical annex of the full report.

**The midterm evaluation found that ADR UK is on track to deliver upon most of its expected outputs, outcomes and impacts as outlined in its Theory of Change.**

Where data is sufficient to track progress, the midterm evaluation found that ADR is on track to meet its goals, as illustrated in the Theory of Change. Indeed, **89% of survey respondents across government and academia claimed that they felt that ADR UK was either likely or extremely likely to meet its objectives.**

Even where pain points were identified, they did not call into question the validity of the partnership's logic model, but rather called for improvements in its implementation. Overall, interviews and a thorough review of the partnership's logic model found the Theory of Change and its underlying assumptions to be coherent.

The only area in which the Theory of Change was partially challenged was in its assertion that by supporting the creation of research using administrative data ADR UK can contribute to better informed government policy. Interviewees from both government and academia emphasised that policy is rarely influenced by a single piece of evidence and can be directed by competing factors (e.g. ministerial imperative) rather than academic research. Despite these doubts, there is evidence that ADR UK-enabled research *can* inform policy, leading to positive socioeconomic outcomes.



As such, this interim evaluation concludes that the logic model remains valid, but attributing policy impact to ADR UK interventions requires further attention moving forward.

## There is evidence of ADR UK meeting most of the Critical Success Factors (CSFs) as outlined in the 2020 programme business case.

ADR UK's 2020 programme business case identified a series of 8 critical success factors which were identified as being instrumental to achieving the partnership's goals. This interim evaluation has found evidence of the partnership meeting, or partially meeting, 8 of these critical success factors. Note that one CSF, regarding the establishment of Centres for Doctoral Training (CDTs), no longer applies, since ADR UK has pivoted away from its original plan to invest in CDTs.

ADR UK's progress in line with the 2020 critical success factors is summarised in the table below:

Critical success factor	Summary of evaluation findings
1. There is tangible evidence that ADR UK is known and trusted throughout government as a route to make better use of existing data and informing policy.	The midterm evaluation found evidence that <b>ADR UK is meeting this CSF</b> . In qualitative interviews and survey responses, we heard repeatedly that ADR UK has a positive reputation as a trusted mechanism for sharing data with the academic community. In the words of one academic “the reputation helped us out [...] the fact it is a UK wide consortium with a brand, it developed trust and interest” (Interviewee 10).
2. ADR UK is being approached directly by government departments to help them make better use of their data to inform policy. This has in part been driven by a cultural shift in government use of data, to which ADR UK has contributed. (Measured by an increase in departments with ADR UK funded projects).	<b>This evaluation found this CSF to be partially met.</b> We found no evidence of engagement beginning by departments reaching out to ADR UK. Whilst we heard that the Strategic Hub plays an important role in raising awareness of the model amongst departments and building trust, we did not encounter evidence of departments themselves proactively reaching out to the partnership. Nonetheless, the number of departments involved in ADR UK funded projects is steadily increasing year on year. However, the evaluation identified a need for further mandate from the central government in order to achieve a wholesale cultural shift in terms of how departments conceive of data sharing for research.
3. ADR UK has a growing suite of linked administrative datasets in the UK's secure setting and data centres, which researchers can apply to use, either with or without funding support from ADR UK, and these are well showcased online with comprehensive user guides.	The evaluation found evidence that <b>ADR UK is meeting this CSF</b> . Over the course of the investment, the partnership has contributed to at least 126 datasets becoming available, either by directly funding linkage projects, or the infrastructure that data is held upon. Datasets are well showcased online on ADR UK's comprehensive <a href="#">Data Catalogue</a> and academic researchers spoke of a recent improvement in metadata and user guides, due to the partnership's influence.

4. ADR UK has efficient and transparent processes for data deposit, acquisition and researcher access across the UK. Integration and sharing of administrative data exist between all parts of a coherent system and across the UK.

The evaluation found evidence that **ADR UK is meeting this CSF, but there remains scope for improvement.** Most academic researchers told us that without ADR UK there would be no transparent process for getting access to administrative data. However, there remain issues with efficiency in terms of delays getting access to data, as detailed in this report. Whilst ADR UK has established mechanisms for secure administrative data sharing for research across the UK, there also remain opportunities for further standardisation across devolved governments, particularly in terms of trusted research environment access times and conditions.

5. ADR UK has conducted a programme of public engagement that has produced recommendations for the research questions and issues that should be investigated using linked data. The engagement work is ongoing as newly linked datasets emerge.

The evaluation found that **ADR UK is clearly meeting this CSF** and has included public engagement activities as a requirement for all projects funded by the partnership. Researchers highlighted public engagement as a key contribution of ADR UK, emphasising that the partnership's funding in this area was fundamental in allowing them to "co-produce" research questions with the communities most affected by the social issues in focus.

6. Continuing opportunities, informed by engagement work for funding for research projects through targeted and open calls, with some projects near completion.

**There is strong evidence that ADR UK is meeting this CSF.** Funding data makes it clear that the partnership is continuing to support research projects, either through open calls or "core" funding allocated amongst the devolved nations.

7. ADR UK is producing high impact research findings which are being used to shape policy and build bodies of knowledge within population data science. Our research findings have revealed valuable insights which are utilised by policymakers.

**There is evidence that ADR UK is beginning to meet this CSF and is likely to inform more policy over the coming years as projects mature.** Over the course of the evaluation, we found various instances of research funded by the partnership informing policy. In our survey to academic researchers, most respondents reported that their research was likely to inform policy over the next two years.

8. New Centres for Doctoral Training are established to fund doctoral students to address significant public policy and public service challenges, supported by research fellows to ensure there is senior academic expertise to nurture the doctoral students and maintain the talent pipeline. In addition, work with ESRC

**This CSF is no longer applicable** in that ADR UK has made the decision to pivot away from funding a new Centre for Doctoral Training (CDT), due to [feasibility and efficiency concerns](#). Instead ADR UK decided to "focus instead on increasing the number of PhD students and other researchers at different levels of experience trained to use the more complex linked administrative datasets" ([source](#)).

**There is evidence, detailed in the full report, that the partnership is meeting this new aim.** Over this investment

to ensure ESRC-funded PhD students are trained to use ADR UK datasets.

ADR UK has funded one cohort of 20 new PhD students. Moreover, over 100 academics have attended ADR UK training events.

### **ADR UK's processes are facilitating the availability and use of over 200 linked administrative datasets, but there remain opportunities to improve the academic researcher user journey.**

ADR UK's current processes are effective in that they allow thousands of academic researchers and government users to access linked administrative data which would not be available without the partnership. In interviews and survey responses, we heard how the ADR UK process for accrediting academic researchers and providing them with secure access to data was fundamental in giving government departments the assurance they need to share data outside of the public sector. These rigorous procedures have helped the partnership to establish a reputation as a trustworthy intermediary between the academic community and government.

Nonetheless, there are several opportunities for improving ADR UK's processes, as detailed further in the report. In summary, we recommend the partnership should focus on:

- Making the researcher journey even more efficient, since many academic researchers are still reporting lengthy wait times when seeking access to data. This could involve introducing some form of intermediary into the process, who academic researchers can appeal to when wait times significantly exceed anticipated timelines.
- More efficiently tracking the impact of research on policy at the central level by introducing the use of bibliometric software to reduce reliance on ADR UK's current MEL mechanism, the Quarterly Hub reports.
- Exploring avenues by which ADR UK's processes for making administrative data available for research might be further standardised across government through central government mandate, given that the current delivery model is largely dependent on the buy-in of individual champions (see [General recommendations](#)).

### **The evaluation found no evidence of unintended negative consequences of the investment, but there have been positive spillovers not originally anticipated in the programme business case.**

Firstly, the programme has led to the creation of a new tool for improving data linkage practices: Splink. Splink is a free and open-source software library used for more efficiently linking datasets at scale, which was developed by the Ministry of Justice after they observed [a lack of an open-source tool for probabilistic record linkage](#) when engaging in the Data First project. The tool has

since been used to link some of the largest datasets held by the Ministry of Justice, has been downloaded more than 3 million times as of 2022, and has won [a number of awards](#) for public sector innovation.

A second unanticipated consequence of the partnership has been that working with ADR UK has allowed multiple government departments to gain additional funding for cross-government data sharing. The Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Department for Health and Social Care and Welsh Government have secured funding for cross-government data sharing through the [BOLD \(Better Outcomes through Linked Data\)](#) initiative following their involvement with the ADR UK partnership. In two interviews, stakeholders noted that this additional funding would not have been secured without the experience and successes of their engagements with the partnership.

BOLD differs from ADR UK in that it focuses on internal government data rather than opening up administrative data for academic use. Nonetheless, these examples demonstrate how ADR UK can build momentum for broader data-sharing initiatives across government, having spillover effects in terms of securing further funding.

## 4. General recommendations

### 1. Where the programme has succeeded in making data available, ADR UK's focus should shift from “getting the data in” to “getting the data *used*”

Across interviews, it was clear that a number of stakeholders across all academic and government interest groups are eager for the partnership to shift towards a **further emphasis on informing policy** (this argument was raised in 11 interviews).

As one interviewee (7) put it, the focus of a number of projects so far has been on “getting the data in”. Now that ADR UK is succeeding in making large amounts of administrative data available for research purposes, **stakeholders are keen for even more effort to be applied to ensuring research insights are *used* by policymakers.**

ADR UK partners have already taken important steps to promote the transfer of research insights to policymakers, as evidenced by the partnership's dual publication approach and the promotion of easily digestible research outputs in the form of blogs, [Data Insights](#) and [Data Explained](#) reports. The results of this approach are starting to be seen; bibliometric and survey data collected during the evaluation confirms that ADR UK research is beginning to inform policy in some cases.

More broadly, however, **interviewees across both government and academia were often unclear as to how and whether policymakers were engaging with the outputs of ADR UK-funded and enabled work.** In some cases, there appears to be a disconnect between policy teams and academics working

closely with their direct contacts within the government (who often work in data and analysis functions).

As ADR UK moves forward, it should explore ways of further bridging these gaps to ensure more policymakers are engaged with these outputs, know where to access them, and are aware of the value which ADR UK-funded research can bring them. The partnership should also continue to push for researchers to create policy-relevant research, **actively positioning itself as the interface between academia and government, which helps academics produce policy-relevant and policy-ready research**. We acknowledge that ADR UK has already made some progress here, for instance, by funding an [engagement programme through the Department for Education](#), which focuses on ensuring that all research aligns with policy priorities, as detailed in the Department's Areas of Research Interest.

One way to achieve this could be to introduce **more opportunities for researchers to interact directly with policymakers**, present their work, and respond to more urgent government queries (as evidenced during the pandemic) as part of standard project processes. For example, the partnership should consider introducing a requirement for academics on larger projects to meet with policy teams to brief them on findings and respond to any queries or invest in events targeted specifically at introducing more policymakers to research funded by the partnership.

## 2. The partnership should also clearly define who holds the responsibility for tracking policy impact and explore ways of tracking this impact more efficiently (e.g. through Overton.io)

As a corollary to the above, our research also made it clear that **it can be very difficult to track the impact of research on policymaking**, even if findings are delivered to government teams in an appropriate format. Academics we spoke to often lacked visibility of how their work had been used, limiting their ability to evidence the impacts of ADR UK in the evaluation.

We recognise that this is a challenge which is not specific to ADR UK; tracking policy impacts can be notoriously difficult; various pieces of evidence and political actors can influence policy, making it difficult to attribute policy changes to a single piece of research. However, **ADR UK can do more to ensure that any contributions to effective policymaking are well documented**. This will be particularly crucial as the programme matures and begins to shift its focus towards the latter half of its Theory of Change, seeking to evidence its impacts.

As a first step, stakeholders on all projects should ensure that they **clearly define who holds the responsibility for tracking policy impact**. It would seem logical that some of this responsibility falls within government, where stakeholders have better visibility over how findings are used.

Moreover, in any future investment, there could be an **opportunity for ADR UK to create more dedicated resources within the Strategic Hub for monitoring impact on policy**. For instance, a policy monitoring officer could be explicitly responsible for coordinating a more consistent approach

to tracking policy impact through government champions and research fellows embedded in departments. Additionally, **adopting new technologies such as Overton.io could help ADR UK to better track any impact on policy centrally and efficiently**, somewhat reducing the burden on Quarterly Hub Reports as the main mechanism for collecting this information.

### 3. ADR UK should lead the way on helping TREs to identify and remediate bottlenecks in terms of getting access to data, for example through focussed service design work.

Researchers across surveys and interviews acknowledged the power of ADR UK's good reputation in government when granting them data access. Many made it clear that datasets simply would never be available to them without ADR UK.

Nonetheless, issues with the timeliness of data access emerged as one of the biggest challenges facing the partnership. **Some academics remain dissatisfied with how long it takes for the data to become available to them**, with more than a third of academic survey respondents reporting that it took them more than 6 months to access data.

In particular, a number of researchers flagged that they had experienced **delays in accessing data which was previously promised to them for an earlier date**, which can be particularly challenging when working to tight academic funding deadlines. Delays can be significant - e.g. when interviews took place in 2024, researchers in Northern Ireland had only just gained access to linked datasets incorporating 2021 census data.

Some researchers felt that there is scope for ADR partners and the Strategic Hub to further “nudge” data owners to provide this data, and TREs to link it and provide access along more reasonable timelines. We recognise that it might not always be possible for ADR partners to speed up these processes in this way, due to dependencies on other actors.

However, in response to these challenges, **ADR UK should invest in more focused service design work across the TREs**, to better understand the nature of some of the bottlenecks alluded to in this evaluation (such as delays passing Research Accreditation Panels) and how to remediate them. Here, the partnership can build on early successes such as the [simplification of the ONS output clearing model](#), which help to showcase the potential for making the current process for accessing data more efficient. Investing in this work could help to reassure researchers that ADR UK is advocating for the fastest outcomes possible.

**At a minimum, ADR partners could also play more of a role in getting more realistic estimations of when data will be made available to research projects** (to assist in academic planning and managing expectations). Going further, **the partnership might also explore how delays might be escalated to some form of intermediary**, which could help to expose any lack of urgency and incentivise timeliness. Collaborating with the central government would be key to empowering such an ‘ombudsman’ style body (see recommendation 6).

#### 4. There is also an opportunity to promote even further collaboration across the four nations, especially when it comes to sharing expertise around providing efficient data access.

It is not surprising that the evaluation found that ADR partners have not progressed uniformly over the course of the investment, given that each of the devolved nations started the investment with varying contexts, challenges and levels of maturity. ADR UK is clearly succeeding in making its delivery model feel like more of a true partnership; a number of interviewees cited the role of the Strategic Hub in organising events and promoting networking as a real contribution to their work.

Nonetheless, **there remain even further opportunities to promote collaboration across the four nations, particularly when it comes to improving researchers' experience when seeking to access data.** Here, some of the TREs are trailing. For instance, NISRA does not yet provide remote access to datasets and needs to increase the frequency of its updates, and the experience in Scotland remains “clunky” to cite one interviewee (17).

Therefore, we suggest that as ADR UK looks to improve academics' experience along the first part of the user journey (as recommended above), it continues to encourage TREs to share learnings and best practices. This might involve hosting **more joint events for TRE stakeholders** or promoting **more projects across the four nations through which technical best practices can also be shared.** The latter could also meet researchers' calls for more projects using data from across the UK's devolved nations to tackle major societal challenges (Interviewees 14 and 25).

#### 5. ADR UK should focus specifically on ‘unlocking’ HMRC and DWP data, which has been identified as a priority by academics and civil servants alike.

It also became clear over interviews in particular that there is **particularly high demand for HMRC and DWP data to be made available** to researchers, both from academics and from government data owners in other departments who are eager to link their datasets.

We heard that the potential for HMRC and DWP data to contribute towards impactful research was particularly high, given that both departments hold data on income and socioeconomic deprivation. In the words of one interviewee (9), making this data available would “unlock masses more value” since data is applied to analyses across almost any research theme, to understand how poverty and wealth can be a driver of different outcomes.

Whilst ADR UK has recently succeeded in establishing a more formal partnership with HMRC, providing funding for them to explore how tax data might be made available for research, a number of interviewees alluded to **difficulties getting buy-in to release administrative data from DWP**, which unlike other departments requires ministerial sign off (Interviewee 3).

As ADR UK sets its goals for any future investment periods, **it should factor this high demand for DWP and HMRC data into its priorities for data acquisition.** In particular, a more explicit focus on

unlocking DWP data is required. Practically, this could involve following the approach taken with HMRC and dedicating an initial period of funding to establish a firmer proposal for how data might be shared, giving DWP staff more dedicated time to understand how the programme works and allay concerns. This proposal would emphasise the potential benefits of sharing the data.

However, **we also acknowledge the risk of ADR UK investing considerable resources into a department where administrative data sharing is unlikely to gain traction**, due to factors beyond ADR UK's direct control, such as a misalignment of priorities. Where this is the case, we recommend that ADR UK encourages the central government to play more of a role in standardising the approach to administrative data sharing for research across departments (see recommendation 7).

## 6. In a changing political landscape, with new data-sharing initiatives potentially emerging, ADR UK should restate its value.

The new government's plans to change the UK data sharing landscape by establishing a [National Data Library](#), resonate (and even have the potential to overlap with) ADR UK's mission. Research-ready data assets funded by ADR UK would be prime candidates for inclusion in a national repository of data sets intended to be used for public benefit. Moreover, there is clear alignment between the new government's [missions](#) (relating to societal challenges concerning health, justice, climate and security) and ADR UK's own [strategic research themes](#).

As interviewees (22,29) have highlighted, it is crucial that ADR UK establishes its footing within this new data-sharing landscape, making it clear where there is existing expertise, data, and infrastructure enabled by the programme.

Here, the ongoing work of the partnership's Strategic Hub will be particularly important in **keeping in-step with the latest developments regarding a National Data Library and responding quickly**, establishing the right relationships to ensure that any new investments build upon the successes of ADR UK.

The Strategic Hub is already aware of this need, as evidenced by [a blog](#) published in August 2024 by ADR UK's Director acknowledging the potential of a National Data Library. Nonetheless, we re-emphasise the risk of a new initiative, such as the National Data Library replicating or diminishing what ADR UK has achieved should the partnership be excluded from conversations within the new government about the future of administrative data sharing.

## 7. ADR UK should also drive for further mandates in terms of how departments engage with administrative data sharing for research.

Finally, in light of changing policy context around departmental data sharing at a UK-government level, there could be an opportunity for ADR UK to push the Central Digital and Data Office to standardise departmental approaches to administrative data sharing for research.



Right now, ADR UK’s delivery model is somewhat **dependent on buy-in from champions across government**, particularly in departments where there are not established data sharing programmes in place (such as Data First in the Ministry of Justice). From the perspective of some interviewees, ADR UK is limited by the fact that it can only “ask nicely” for data to be added to TREs but has no central directive to rely upon (e.g. Interviewee 1).

Ultimately, **centrally set targets and responsibilities**, making it clear that departments are expected to share administrative data for research, would reduce the dependencies around buy-in which ADR UK currently faces, leading to a more sustainable model. Moreover, **introducing scope to appeal to an independent party when data access is not granted, or is not timely**, could better ensure that decisions are made in the public interest, rather than in the interest of data custodians.

Whilst it is of course outside ADR UK’s remit to set such objectives, given the new government’s focus on “data-driven public services”, the partnership should look to **explore whether there is scope for a more centralised mandate for administering data sharing to be introduced** as it establishes itself in the conversation around the future of data landscape across government.

## 5. Annex: Case studies

**ADR UK’s wider socio-economic impacts are best estimated through case studies.**

Beyond the outputs and outcomes monetised in this midterm evaluation, in the long term, we anticipate that **most of ADR UK’s economic value will be derived from its potential to inform evidence-led policymaking**. This comes with a number of socioeconomic benefits, including improved access to high-quality public services, more inclusive and sustainable economic growth and improved welfare across the population.

At this point in the partnership, many of these benefits are yet to be realised, since most interviewees we spoke to are yet to be able to point to having a direct influence on policy in a way which will have led to tangible economic benefit (with some exceptions, as highlighted below). Even where benefits have been realised, stakeholders were reticent about the ability to attribute them to ADR UK, given how policy is often influenced by a myriad of factors beyond a single piece of research. As such, in an effort to be conservative in our estimations of the economic value generated by the programme to date, we have not included benefits related to impact indicators in the benefit-cost ratio at present.

However, the economic potential of ADR UK in terms of informing policy changes can still be illustrated through case studies, showcasing ADR UK’s impact on some of its key research areas such as health and wellbeing, crime and justice, and children and young people. Below, we illustrate how a series of leading ADR UK projects are estimated to result in **multi-million-pound cost savings to government and society as a whole**, drawing upon interview findings and economic literature to support our assumptions. In some cases, these benefits are projected, elsewhere they have been

realised.

Case studies were selected to cover all of the devolved nations which constitute the partnership, as well as to ensure a spread across ADR UK's [eight core strategic research themes](#). Upfront, we need to acknowledge the challenge of attributing benefits to ADR UK. Experts and stakeholders we interviewed were reluctant to give estimates of the contribution of ADR UK activities to the ultimate outcomes. In the case studies below, we assume attribution rates of 25%. This reflects that ADR UK made a significant contribution, but it was not responsible for the whole outcome nor even the majority of the outcomes in each case study.

### **ADR Wales funded data and research enabled the Welsh Government's move to Alert Level Zero by providing insight into vaccination rates in schools (realised benefit).**

Interviewees confirmed that [ADR Wales analysis of school vaccination rates](#) in 2021 played a role in informing Welsh Government policy by providing detailed insights into the demographics and vaccination status of the school workforce. The findings were used to produce the [Local COVID-19 infection control decision framework for schools from autumn 2021](#) which sets out guidance for delivering lessons in schools during the pandemic. Ultimately, the research also contributed to [Wales' shift into alert level zero](#) on 7th August 2021, which meant that children and young people under 18 no longer needed to isolate if they came into contact with an individual with COVID-19. This is corroborated by a [statement](#) by the Cabinet Secretary for Education in Wales at the time, Jeremy Miles, which cites ADR Wales generated figures when announcing the relaxing of restrictions.

Given the large economic and social costs of lockdowns, this policy change is estimated to have led to significant economic benefit. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has broadly estimated the disruption of normal schooling (½ year lost) during COVID could cost students £40,000 each in lifetime earnings (see [The Crisis in Lost Learning](#)). This amounts to an illustrative £350 billion loss in lifetime learning across the 8.7 million school children in the UK.

The way that COVID-19 absences have been recorded in Wales\* and confounding factors such as peaks in infection rates make it difficult to confidently attribute the shift to alert level 0 to reduced COVID related absences.

However, conservatively, we might assume that this policy change helped prevent 1 in every 100 Welsh school children avoid 5 days of absence from COVID-19. Given that there are 405,00 schoolchildren in Wales according to [Stats Wales](#), this would mean ~20,000 school days not lost across Wales and a benefit of £8 million.

**With ADR-related costs for data linkage and analysis around £0.8 million, and an assumed attribution rate of 25%, the benefit-cost ratio (BCR) can be conservatively estimated at 2.6:1.**

\*Note that Wales only began recording COVID related absences as such on the [6th September 2021](#). As such it is not possible to observe any direct shift in COVID related absence rates directly before and after the implementation of Alert Level Zero.

### **Helping to understand the drivers of recidivism within the Ministry of Justice (projected benefit).**

Reducing recidivism is a clear priority for the Ministry of Justice. Interviewees confirmed that work that helps to better understand the drivers of recidivism is therefore vital to helping inform good policy on the matter. ADR's Data First programme aims to do just this: through linked administrative data, it provides the ability to generate new insights into the nature and drivers of recidivism which can help inform better policymaking. The data linkage team at MoJ has linked 3 main justice datasets alongside data from [Indices of Multiple Deprivation](#) in England and Wales to facilitate this research.

There is a significant economic burden imposed by recidivism: according to [MoJ research](#) (p. 2), the total estimated economic and social cost of reoffending was £18.1 billion in 2017-18. Policies that effect a reduction in recidivism will therefore have extensive follow-through economic benefits. Suppose we take a conservative estimate that relevant research could account for 25% of the decision to change a particular policy. This means that 25% of the benefits of that policy could be attributed to the research.

If we conservatively assume that a good policy that reduces recidivism is able to do so by 0.5%. This 0.5% would correspond to an avoided cost of £90.5 million annually. This would correspond to a net present value (NPV) of £752.7 million over ten years (at a 3.5% discount rate).

Accounting for attribution, then, ADR UK-funded research that helped influence the decision to change policy would be responsible for £188.175m of those benefits over the 10 years.

From the funding agreement we know the ADR UK-related costs are £5.8 million. If we assume some additional program implementation costs (unknown at this stage) bring the total cost to £20 million in NPV terms, then the £188.175 would correspond to a **BCR of 9.4 over 10 years**.

## Research on the link between social care and mental health in NI could have a BCR of up to 13.0 (projected benefit).

ADR UK funded researchers in Northern Ireland to use over 30 years' worth of linked data to analyse young people experiencing care's mental health and long-term health outcomes ([ADR NI case study](#)). The research discovered that children in care have significantly fewer opportunities to achieve the same social and economic advantages in adulthood as their peers. It also found that people who are known to social services are more than 10 times more likely to receive antidepressant prescriptions and rates of self-harm amongst care-experienced children are more than 25 times higher. Of a cohort of individuals who died by suicide, almost [1 in 20 had previously been a care-experiencing child](#).

The research has been cited in [a set of fundamental facts](#) published by Northern Ireland's Mental Health Champion and in the Northern Irish strategy on caring for young people "[A Life Deserved: "Caring" for Children and Young People in Northern Ireland](#)" (see page 29). The latter sets out a commitment to improving mental health outcomes amongst care-experienced children, for example by introducing more mental health Interface officers to improve the integration between social care and mental health services and by exploring more early intervention strategies in schools (see page 30). The researchers working on the project also have a sustained engagement with the Ministry of Health in Northern Ireland, who have expressed interest in their research.

Whilst there is currently a lack of evidence documenting the implementation and effectiveness of the commitments outlined above, the potential for this research to make a substantial social and economic impact in Northern Ireland is significant. Mental health problems are costly to the community, currently costing £3.4 billion annually in Northern Ireland, according to [LSE research](#). The cost per suicide has been estimated at £1.46 million for every life lost to suicide, according to [research for Samaritans](#).

If ADR UK-supported research can prevent just one suicide annually, that would correspond to a benefit/avoided cost in NPV terms of £12.1 million over ten years. This is probably an underestimate of the total benefit. On the other hand, if ADR UK research were to contribute to a 0.1 percent reduction in mental health costs in NI would amount to £28 million over ten years. Costs for the ADR UK-supported research relating to mental health in Northern Ireland were £1.8 million, **meaning a BCR of 1.7 to 3.9**, assuming a real discount rate of 3.5% and an attribution rate for benefits of 25%.

### ADR UK research informed optimised COVID-19 testing in Liverpool, with estimated savings of over £1 million (realised benefit)

ADR-UK funded researchers brought together datasets from the ONS SRS to create 'local data spaces' for local authorities to access secure data which they previously not have been available to them. Ultimately, research using this data informed advice provided to the Liverpool City council helped to optimise the location of COVID-19 test sites, [which guided the design and evaluation of their mass testing pilot](#).

This COVID testing reduced COVID cases by an estimated 21% according to the [evaluation report produced on the pilot](#). In terms of infection numbers, the estimated impact was a reduction of 850-6,600 cases. For this analysis, we used the midpoint estimate of 3,725.

Given an employment-population ratio in the UK of around 60 percent, and assuming a five working days absence from work, that would mean the avoided cost of 11,175 workdays lost. Based on average daily earnings at the time of around £110, the optimised test sites avoided an economic cost of £1.2 million.

**Given relevant costs were no more than £0.3 million, the BCR is estimated to be at least 1.2:1, assuming an attribution rate of 25%.**

### ADR UK research informed a continuation of Minimum Alcohol Unit Pricing in Scotland (realised benefit).

ADR UK enabled [research in Scotland](#) into the effectiveness of minimum unit pricing as a policy intervention for reducing alcohol-related deaths. The project accessed death records for England through the ADR funded ONS [Secure Research Service](#), whilst Scottish death records were sourced from the [National Records of Scotland](#).

Following over two and a half years of enforcing minimum unit pricing for alcohol in Scotland, a notable reduction in alcohol-related harm has been observed. Deaths directly linked to alcohol consumption declined by 13.4%, potentially saving around 156 lives annually. Additionally, hospital admissions for alcohol-related conditions fell by 4.1%, translating to approximately 411 fewer admissions each year.

The findings received significant media coverage and a statement of endorsement from Scotland's Public Health Minister at the time (see [ADR UK website](#) for full quote). It was also cited in [a report](#) produced by the Scottish government examining the background of the Minimum Unit Pricing policy in light of its proposed continuation in 2024. On page 16, the paper cites the research by Wyper et al. as a significant piece of evidence proving that MUP is associated with a significant reduction in alcohol related deaths.

The report led public health Scotland to reach an overall conclusion that there was strong evidence that MUP reduced chronic alcohol deaths and hospital admissions caused wholly by alcohol consumption. There was some push back in the consultation but ultimately the policy was [extended in 2024](#).

The estimated mortality reductions and avoided hospital admissions suggest substantial benefits from minimum unit pricing. Consider that:

- The average age of a death in Scotland from alcohol-related causes is 58.7 years for females and 60.0 years for males<sup>1</sup>;
- Life expectancy in Scotland is 80.7 years for females and 76.5 years for males, implying average years of life saved of 22 years for females and 16.5 years for males<sup>2</sup>; and
- A recommended value for a Quality Adjusted Life Year (QALY) of £70,000.<sup>3</sup>

This suggests an upper bound of a value per avoided death from an alcohol-related cause of £1.3 million for females and £1.0 million for males, after applying a 1.5 percent annual discount rate as suggested in the Green Book.<sup>4</sup> Assuming males account for two-thirds of avoided alcohol-related deaths (i.e. their share of current deaths<sup>5</sup>), and based on 156 lives saved annually as reported above, the annual gross benefit from lives saved by minimum unit pricing amounts to around £170 million.

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<sup>1</sup> See [Alcohol deaths rise to highest level in 14 years](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Health and life expectancies: Scotland](#)

<sup>3</sup> See section 9.3 of [The Green Book \(2022\) - GOV.UK](#)

<sup>4</sup> This is an upper bound because it assumes each person that is saved from an alcohol-related death each year goes on to achieve the full additional life years. However, in reality, some people may be saved one year but succumb to an alcohol-related death prior to reaching their full life expectancy.

<sup>5</sup> [Alcohol Harms in Scotland](#)

We were unable to find a reliable estimate of the average cost per alcohol-related hospital admission but assuming (conservatively) an average cost of £2,000, the 411 fewer admissions per year reported above would mean an annual benefit from avoided hospital admissions of at least £0.8 million. In other words, the vast bulk of benefits of minimum unit pricing relate to prolonging life rather than avoiding hospital admissions *per se*.

We have yet to obtain cost estimates for the ADR UK activity relevant to this case study. Hence, we have not yet estimated a BCR. We note benefit attribution would be challenging in this instance. Although ADR UK data has helped strengthen the case for continuing minimum unit pricing, it is not clear that it was the driving factor behind this decision.

**Overall, based on case studies and cost-saving estimates, we can expect significant ROIs from ADR UK activity in terms of social value generated, ranging from between 1.2 and 9.4 for the case studies considered above.**

These case studies suggest a very high ROI from selected data linkage projects from ADR UK, ranging from 1.2 to 9.4. Such high BCRs may appear extraordinary but are similar to estimates reported in [Lateral Economics' study](#) of the Australian data linkage facilitator Population Health Research Network. This study reported BCRs of 12.7 to 16.5 across various scenarios.

Without thoroughly reviewing every data linkage exercise, we cannot necessarily extrapolate the BCRs we have estimated to the full range of ADR activities. **Nonetheless, we expect significant ROIs from ADR UK activity generally, as reflected by both these case studies and the (highly conservative) overall BCR estimation.**

Indeed, if we were to include the total projected impact of the 6 case studies in scope into the BCR, the programme's ROI would rise even further to 6.52 (see illustrative chart on next page).

