



Remote access to secure data in the ONS Secure Research Service (SRS)

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Abstract:

This presentation will explain how the Office for National Statistics (ONS) manages remote connection to its Secure Research Service (SRS) and how this arrangement has enabled vital analyses to inform the UK Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It will explain the type of analysis that takes place in the SRS using these secure microdata.

ONS provides access to de-identified survey and administrative data for statistical research that delivers a public benefit for the UK and where access is granted to researchers in a safe and consistent way, in line with legislation and ONS policies. We have been accredited as a [Digital Economy Act \(DEA\) 2017](#) processor by the UK Statistics Authority for the preparation and provision of data for research purposes. The SRS provides a safe setting, as part of the [Five Safes Framework](#) to protect data confidentiality. The framework is a set of principles adopted by a range of secure labs, including ONS. These protocols provide complete assurance for data owners.

Once researchers and their research projects are accredited or approved, projects using the SRS will achieve access through a safe setting. Data owners may determine how that access to a SRS safe setting is permitted. These may be in safe rooms on ONS sites, in safe rooms on other certified sites, or through an organisation which has an Assured Organisational Connectivity (AOC) Agreement with ONS and which maintains a current (reviewed annually) certification. AOC access must be via an organisation computer and network. The presentation will set out further information on the conditions and arrangements for AOC approval and certification.

With the closure of many offices and traditional workplaces at the start of the lockdown in the UK in March 2020, a temporary arrangement was put in place to enable home access (in addition to access from the organisation) to the SRS for research that met the criteria and conditions. As a result, around 200 projects are accessing the SRS remotely, many from home, with the number of organisations with an AOC agreement increasing from 4 to 81 since March 2020. The presentation will provide insight on the provision of these arrangements, for example in relation to use, policies and conditions of access, to manage remote access and ensure data confidentiality isn't compromised.

The demand for remote connection has grown considerably, particularly as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and it is anticipated to continue to expand. This creates many challenges and opportunities, and the presentation will set out how we will consider and respond to these to ensure the continuation of safe access to data for research.

Keywords:

1. Microdata; Remote Access; Privacy Protection; Research Data