

Criteria for the approval of applications to use the LS data

Purpose

These criteria have been agreed by the LS Research Board to help ensure the appropriateness and quality of research using LS data, and in particular to assist:

- Researchers to decide whether to apply for approval to use LS data, to formulate their applications, and to understand the reasons why an application may not be approved.
- ONS/CeLSIUS research advisers to respond to researchers' enquiries, advise researchers on the initial development of their proposals and formulation of their applications.
- The Board itself to decide on applications in an open, fair and consistent manner.
- Independent referees whose views may be sought on an application to focus their comments appropriately.

The Board's intention is to ensure a process for applications that is clear and transparent, and as flexible and informal as is consistent with good management of the LS.

Approval of an application, whether by the Research Board or under 'Exceptions to procedures' below, is only permission to use the data (under terms and conditions determined by ONS) and does not exempt the applicant from any of the usual processes of academic peer review or of consultation within ONS and other government departments, as appropriate, before publication or other dissemination.

Standards and criteria

1. Confidentiality

Standard

The confidentiality of the personal data in the LS is protected, as a matter of paramount importance.

Criteria

- 1.1 There is no risk that the proposed analyses or aggregated data tables may allow individuals or households to be identified.
- 1.2 All analyses and data tables to be provided to the applicant will be handled with adequate security safeguards.
- 1.3 The applicant understands the conditions for use of the LS and signs on the appropriate form an undertaking to comply with them.

Assessment

The research adviser must be satisfied that criteria 1.1-1.3 are met before the Board will consider the application. The Board will normally accept the research adviser's assessment.

2. Public confidence

Standard

Public and academic confidence in the LS, the integrity of ONS, the Census and the office of Registrar General, is protected.

Criteria

- 2.1 There is no indication that LS data will be used or published in a manner which is scientifically invalid or otherwise likely to mislead.
- 2.2 The research or its publication will not be associated with party political activities or the furtherance of any views or activities that are contrary to UK law.

Assessment

The research adviser should report any concerns regarding criteria 2.1-2.2 to the Board for consideration. The Board will decide whether these criteria are met, taking legal or other advice if it thinks it necessary.

3. Appropriate use of the LS**Standard**

The LS is used appropriately and efficiently, having regard to the resource implications of its use and the availability of alternative sources of data.

Criteria

- 3.1 The LS is the most appropriate data source for the proposed research.
- 3.2 The project will not require excessive resources at ONS/CeLSIUS, bearing in mind current and expected workloads and any other constraints. A project may be approved subject to the agreement of charges for anticipated higher level support.
- 3.3 The proposed research does not unnecessarily duplicate other past or current work using the LS.

Assessment

The research adviser will normally discuss any concerns relevant to criteria 3.1-3.3 with the researcher before the formal application is made. The research adviser should subsequently report any remaining concerns regarding criteria 3.1-3.3 to the Board, which will decide whether these criteria are met.

4. Value and conduct of the research**Standard**

Research using the LS is well designed, efficiently conducted, and produces outputs of scientific, educational or policy development value.

Criteria

- 4.1 The aims of the research have been well thought out and are clearly stated.
- 4.2 A plan for the research has been drawn up, with realistic timescales.
- 4.3 The applicant has access (personally or through named collaborators) to the necessary skills, knowledge and resources to complete the project successfully.
- 4.4 The application shows awareness of the relevant academic and/or policy literature.
- 4.5 The research is likely to make some contribution to the relevant field (see note (a) below) which justifies the commitment of ONS and ESRC-funded resources.

Assessment

The research adviser should normally be satisfied that criteria 4.1-4.3 are met before the application will be considered by the Board, but may forward an application accompanied by a note of any concerns. The Board will decide whether criteria 4.4-4.5 are met in the context of the particular application, and it should be noted that:

- a) The application of these criteria (but not 4.1-4.3) will be relaxed in the case of

student projects. Any application as a student project must be accompanied by a supporting statement from the academic supervisor.

b) Generally speaking, the Board will require evidence of scientific competence, but will not expect the excellence of any application to be demonstrated to the same standard, or apply these criteria with the same rigour, as would be usual when deciding on (for example) an application for Research Council funding.

c) An application for which Research Council or charitable foundation funding has been agreed will normally be assumed to meet these criteria without need for further consideration.

d) The Board may seek the advice of independent referees, and/or may require the applicant to provide further information, before deciding whether these criteria are met.

Exceptions to procedure

These criteria apply in principle to all proposals for research projects using the LS, with the modifications for student projects noted above. However, to avoid unnecessary formalities:

A research adviser may provide ad hoc analyses to customers, including researchers who are considering making an application, as long as they are certain that criteria 1.1-1.2, 2.1-2.2 and 3.2 are met.

ONS/CeLSIUS staff may carry out research and analysis using the LS in connection with internal ONS requirements, the development of methodology, testing of systems, or their own training needs, subject to the approval of the Head of LS Unit or Head of Health Variations Branch.

The Head of LS Unit or Head of Health Variations Branch may approve applications from or on behalf of other government departments, as long as they are certain that criteria 1.1-1.2, 2.1-2.2 and 3.2 are met.

Documentation

Every application, including one for approval under 'Exceptions to procedures' above, must be:

a) Documented on paper and/or electronic forms approved by the Research Board.

b) Recorded in a register of LS use maintained by ONS/CeLSIUS, along with up-to- date information on the status of the application or project.

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