

# Introduction to effective and practical research data management – Q&A April 2025



---

16 April 2025

**Public**

Copyright © 2025 University of Essex. Created by UK Data Archive, UK Data Service.

Version: 01.00



## **“I have a question about the data format for sharing data. I'm not sure whether sharing large data in CSV format is a good choice, especially if the large data is survey data”**

The most appropriate file format for sharing data depends on several factors, including the size and complexity of the data, the metadata requirements, and the tools or software that secondary users are likely to use when accessing the data.

In many cases, it is appropriate to share the data in multiple formats to meet the needs of a wider audience. It is important always to consider the needs of your designated user community i.e. the group of researchers most likely to reuse your data. For guidance on preferred file types please see the [list of recommended formats](#).

## **“I would like to know more about how to set out conditions of access for restricted data. Is there best practice in terms of information to include to help those who are requesting access understand what conditions they must meet?”**

It is important to clearly communicate the conditions of access so that secondary users understand what is required of them. This includes legal, ethical, and practical considerations for how the data may be used.

If you are sharing your data through a responsible repository, such as the UK Data Service, they will typically provide:

- Standardised access classifications (e.g. open, safeguarded, controlled);
- Legally binding user agreements that are user friendly; and
- Clear metadata fields to describe access restrictions and usage conditions.

For example the [UK Data Service End User Licence Agreement](#) outlines general responsibilities for secondary users. For Controlled collections, a [Secure Access User Agreement](#) is also required, which includes stricter access controls and additional terms and conditions.

Your data's metadata should reflect the access conditions. At UK Data Service we use the DDI metadata standard, which includes structured fields to describe access levels, licensing, and any usage restrictions. This helps users and systems automatically understand how and under what conditions the data can be accessed.

When writing an access statement for a publication be as clear and specific as possible about how the data can be accessed and include links to any licences or agreements that apply. You should also indicate whether the data are available immediately or under certain conditions (e.g. approved access, Controlled access, embargo).

## **“I'm interested in considerations when working in a Participatory Research approaches with non-academic partners. What key considerations need to be made when the data is co-created and people outside of academic need access to this.”**

When data are co-created there are several important ethical, legal, and practical considerations to consider, especially when it comes to data ownership, access, and responsibilities..

From both an ethical and legal perspective, all contributors, regardless of background, share responsibility for ensuring compliance with relevant legislation and research governance frameworks. In the UK this includes adherence to the UK Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR for personal data, and more generally any institutional or funder requirements around ethical research conduct and intellectual property rights or licensing agreements tied to outputs.

It is strongly recommended that data ownership, access rights, and responsibilities be defined clearly at the start of the project through a formal agreement or memorandum of understanding (MoU). This helps prevent confusion or conflict later on.

To support transparency, accountability, and continuity throughout the project, consider tracking who creates or collects which data, and where these are stored. This could be done by maintain a data inventory and we have a [template available here](#). Use secure and appropriate storage and file-sharing tools that accommodate collaborative workflows, we have some more information about this [here](#). And finally consider developing a shared resource library to help your team manage documents, data, and materials throughout the project lifecycle, we include further information [here](#).

## **“In case i want to publish my research data with consideration of all ethical aspect, do I need to ask for permission from the university?”**

Yes, before publishing your research data, you should always check with your university. While ethical considerations are a key part of the decision, there may also be legal, institutional, or intellectual property issues to consider.

For example copyright in the dataset or parts of it may belong to the university, to you, or may be held jointly; ethics approval may have placed conditions on how the data can be shared, particularly if the data include personal or sensitive information. Or there may be requirements

around licensing, consent, or third-party data use that affect how or whether the data can be made publicly available. You should review your original ethics approval documentation to check what was included in your data sharing plans, and consult your university's Research Office or ethics committee if you are unsure. Even if the data are anonymous or appear low-risk, it is always best to seek formal guidance or approval to ensure compliance with university policies and research governance standards.