

ESRC's Secondary Data Analysis Initiative (SDAI) Factsheet

The following factsheet is drawn from the SDAI policy showcase event run by the ESRC and Vista Events on 29 February 2016 at the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors, London.

What is the SDAI?

The UK has a world-leading data infrastructure for social and economic research that provides a huge opportunity to address some of the most pressing challenges facing society today and in the future. The SDAI aims to deliver high-quality, high-impact research through the deeper exploitation of major data resources created by the ESRC and other agencies.

What is the value of the SDAI to policymakers?

In his keynote address, Dr Tim Leunig highlighted there are a huge range of high quality data resources, including those held by government departments, which can be used to undertake research that is directly relevant to policymakers. It was noted that departments such as the Department for Education are interested in this sort of academic research as academics can bring ideas and insights which departmental analysts wouldn't necessarily focus on. SDAI is therefore an excellent mechanism for these departments to gain access to these ideas and to research that will inform their future thinking. It was also highlighted that the SDAI offers the potential to help with evaluating the effect of policies and interventions and understanding what worked, and why. Several examples of impacts of SDAI projects were given in the presentations, the slides from which are available here.

What opportunities are there for policymakers to get involved in the SDAI?

The SDAI offers policymakers the opportunity to fund directly projects on topics of interest to them through Highlight Notices. The Department for Education recently funded such a Notice, further information about which is available at www.esrc.ac.uk/funding/funding-opportunities/secondary-data-analysis-initiative-sdai-open-call/secondary-data-analysis-initiative-highlight-notices/. The SDAI also encourages co-production and collaboration with policymakers on proposals on any topic and therefore policymakers are encouraged to form partnerships with academics to apply to the SDAI, as well as academics reaching out to policymakers and other non-academic stakeholders. It was noted at the showcase that early engagement on these partnerships is invaluable, allowing the project and pathways to impact to be developed with direct input from the partner organisation.

What kinds of topics of policy interest can the SDAI be used to address?

As the SDAI is not focused on a particular theme or disciplinary area it offers enormous potential for addressing topics of policy interest. A number emerged specifically from the showcase event ranging from the issue of lowering the voting age to 16 and questions relating to the degree that religious practice affects labour market opportunities, to the effect of the changes to the 14-19 education curriculum and identifying risk factors to help predict long term health questions. The SDAI Phase 1 impact leaflet (www.esrc.ac.uk/files/news-events-and-publications/publications/themed-publications/sdai-phase-1-research-impacts/) also demonstrates the range of topics, and impacts, that SDAI projects can focus on.

Who can be contacted about the SDAI?

Enquires about the SDAI, collaborations and Highlight Notices, can be sent to sdai@esrc.ac.uk or by phone to Doug Walton (01793 413054).