



Big Data: Public views on the use of private sector data for social research: The BLG Response

The Business and Local Government Data Research Centre (BLG) felt that the public dialogue sessions were successful in their aim. Professor Vania Sena, Director of the Centre, participated in both sessions alongside team members from communications and outreach.

There was a guided discussion with members of the general public around the use of data from the private sector and how this is used for research. The sessions were repeated in both London and Glasgow with members of the public and representatives from the other two Centres in the Big Data Network 2 bringing a wide variety of views. The findings report brought together the breadth of the discussion across all sessions and identified key messages for all centres in BDN2 to reinforce and integrate into future outreach and communication activities.

The report reassured our Centre that “there is wide public support for the use and reuse of private sector data for social research...” and that “the benefits of using private sector data outweigh the risks for this specific purpose” (pg.35).

The Centre addresses the majority of the concerns raised in the findings report in our existing communications and outreach work. For example, on our website and in our public facing literature information, we explain how we are funded, the aims of the Centre’s research. We are also transparent and provide information on how we store, process and ensure the security of data held by the Centre.

Next steps

However the Centre could do more to relay this information in a more accessible way on the website and in public facing literature, including giving clear information on what data the Centre uses (i.e. only data that supports the research streams is collected), how data is stored and for how long and what security and safeguards are in place.

For example we are working with the other two Centres to ensure consistent messaging tailored for a general public audience. FAQs are being developed and will be maintained on each of the three Centre’s websites, additionally a co-branded leaflet will use jargon free language to show how we securely manage data and the potential benefits of using data for social research.

The participants in the Public Dialogue report expressed positive attitudes to the use of data for social science research but showed a limited understanding. To help demonstrate the importance of using private sector data in social science research we are working with our Co-Investigators to build case studies showing key research findings and outcomes from related



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research projects. These case studies will clearly show what social science is and why the use of data is important to achieve informed research that can have real world impact.

Overall, the Centre will consider the recommendations from the report on how to improve the communications and outreach work with the general public, by using accessible jargon free language across our communication channels and impact case studies to showcase how our research offers public benefit. Effort will be put into reinforcing our key messages through our planned and future outreach activities.

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