

Accessing Observatory data: Information for researchers

Summary

Access to Smart Energy Research Lab (SERL) Observatory data is provided via a secure lab environment and is restricted to accredited researchers working on approved projects. This aligns with the [5 Safes](#) protocols used by the UK Data Service (UKDS) for all access to any controlled data via a secure lab. Currently, SERL only provides controlled datasets via a secure lab environment.

The process to obtain access to controlled data is appropriately rigorous so it is strongly recommended that researchers read the detailed documentation associated with the SERL catalogue record in the [UKDS data catalogue](#) to ensure that SERL data is appropriate for your research project before any other steps.

Summary of steps and rough timelines:

1. Accredited Researcher status - Safe Researcher training and exam – 1 month
2. University Ethics approval – this varies by institution but allow at least 3-4 weeks
3. Project application – UKDS triage and SERL Data Governance Board review – 4-6 weeks

Therefore, if starting from scratch, it is recommended that researchers allow at least 3 months for completion of the above processes before access to the data is actually required.

The following sections describe the steps required for researchers to gain accredited researcher status and for projects to be approved in more detail.

Becoming an accredited researcher

You must be a member of staff at a UK Higher Education institution (typically a university). If you are a PhD student, then you can become an accredited researcher however your supervisor must also become an accredited researcher.

If you do not already have Accredited Researcher status, researchers should apply for 'DEA Accredited Researcher' status from the UK Statistics Authority (UKSA). Guidance is available [here](#). Please note that applications must now be made by registering a UKSA account [here](#) and applying for Accredited Researcher Status [here](#). The downloadable Word document version will not be accepted.

You will be required to attend Safe Researcher training and take and pass a training assessment. UKDS and ONS run training courses every few weeks. Information on UKDS courses can be found [here](#).

Once you have passed all the required steps, you will be granted full accredited researcher status and provided with a unique Accredited Researcher number. Accreditation lasts for five years and can be used to obtain access to many ONS and UKDS controlled datasets i.e. it is widely used beyond SERL.

Our research partners

Getting project approval

Once you have Accredited Researcher status, you can complete the following steps to gain project approval.

- 1) If you don't already have one, create a researcher account with UK Data Service.
<https://www.ukdataservice.ac.uk/get-data/how-to-access/registration/uk-he-fe-users.aspx>
- 2) Create a new project within the UKDS system using your UK Data Service account.
- 3) Find the SERL data you want to access for your project via the UK Data Service Data Catalogue.
<https://www.ukdataservice.ac.uk/get-data.aspx> For example, the first edition of SERL Observatory data is registered under Study Number [8666](#).
- 4) Add the SERL data you want to your registered project and request access to it. You will be required to complete the following steps.
 - a) All members of the project must have Accredited Researcher status (see above).
 - b) All project members must accept the standard UK Data Service End User Licence.
 - c) All project members must complete and submit a Secure Access User Agreement. This will need to be signed by an authorised signatory for your University and UK Data Service will be able to advise who this should be for you.
 - d) UK Data Service will need to verify the DEA Accredited Researcher status of each member of the project.
 - e) All project members must complete and submit a Secure Lab access form. This is to ensure there is an appropriate legal agreement in place between your institution and UKDS for you to utilise SERL's secure lab.
 - f) All projects are required to obtain independent ethics approval from their respective University. Projects will be required to include evidence of their approval and a copy of the form used to obtain this (where possible) with their project application.
 - g) All projects are required to complete a UKSA ethics self-assessment form and submit this along with their project application. <https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/about-the-authority/committees/nsdec/data-ethics/self-assessment-2/> This self-assessment form has been designed specifically to consider ethics considerations regarding the use of sensitive secondary data for research purposes with public interest benefits and is highly relevant to projects seeking to access SERL data.
 - h) The lead researcher must complete and submit a SERL Research Project Application form.
- 5) Once all of the above steps have been completed UK Data Service will review your application and, if anything is unclear, contact the lead researcher. If you want to avoid potentially lengthy delays at this stage, it is strongly recommended that due care and attention is paid when completing the project application form.
- 6) Once UK Data Service are satisfied with the content and quality of your application, they will send this to the SERL Data Governance Board who will review your project. Further information about the Data Governance Board can be found [here](#).
- 7) If the SERL Data Governance Board approve your project, then you will be given access to your requested data via a secure lab and only for the purposes specified for your project.
- 8) Any substantive changes to your project such as linking to new data, adding new members, etc. will need to be reviewed and approved.