

# DARE UK (Data and Analytics Research Environments UK)

## DARE UK Interest Group (IG) Charter Template

Name of proposed Interest Group: *UK Data Linkage Community*

### The WHY

#### Introduction:

Despite the growing importance of data linkage in data research, data linkage practitioners often operate within their own siloed institutions, leading to duplicated efforts and missed opportunities for collaboration. This interest group aims to create a central, open community where methodologies, best practices, and developments in data linkage can be shared, discussed, and advanced collectively.

While there are existing communities focused on specific areas of data linkage such as transparency, particular datasets, or governmental needs, this group will take a broader approach. It will complement these groups by acting as an umbrella network, promoting cross-group communication and coordination without displacing existing efforts. Events, materials, and activities will be open and collaborative, with opportunity to contribute and showcase collective progress across various areas of the data linkage problem.

By bringing together data linkage practitioners across domains, the proposed group will support a range of needs: from improving technical standards and alignment in methodology, to providing educational resources that empower users to understand and appropriately use linked data. The group will also foster research collaboration among technically-focused practitioners, enabling development of methodologies. Equally important will be public engagement efforts, aimed at building trust and understanding value and limitations of linked data.

Crucially, this group will operate as an open community, spanning academia, government, healthcare, industry, and the public. It will promote shared learning and resource pooling across domains. In doing so, it will become a valuable, persistent contribution in supporting data linkage efforts.

#### User scenario(s) or use case(s) the IG wishes to address:

The driver for establishing this interest group stems from a clear gap in the current landscape of communities in the area. While the UK is widely recognized as a global leader in record linkage and the innovative use of linked data, there is currently no dedicated UK-wide community focused specifically on data linkage methodologies and practices. Existing groups tend to concentrate on problem areas or datasets (such as the [ITALO group](#), [ECHILD user group](#), ONS's Longitudinal Education Outcomes research community etc.), leaving a lack of shared space for cross-sector dialogue and collaboration on broader data linkage issues.

This absence is particularly notable given the increasing demand for open, accessible knowledge-sharing in the field. Closed networks, such as the [Data Linkage Champions Network \(Civil Service\)](#) and the [Data Linkage Hub \(NHS England\)](#), provide valuable internal support but are not structured to serve the wider community of practitioners, researchers, and stakeholders. An open, inclusive community would help provide access to knowledge, best practices, tools, and developments within record linkage.

An example of this need can be seen in the experience of the ADR UK-funded [Splink project](#). Splink offers a powerful open-source data linkage framework, and its GitHub page frequently receives general methodological inquiries that fall outside the scope of the software itself; this reflects a broader appetite for support, guidance, and knowledge in data linkage problems. This highlights the demand for a centralized resource hub and community of practice to support the wider ecosystem of data linkage users and contributors.

## **The WHAT Objectives:**

The core objective of this group is to establish an open, cross-sector community dedicated to the general practice of data linkage, namely methodologies, applications, and principles. Unlike existing groups, the proposed group will take a broader and more inclusive approach. Its openness and generalist focus will facilitate cross-community pollination, enabling members from a variety of sectors to engage in shared learning and collaborative problem-solving.

This group is distinct in its emphasis on openness and its positioning as a central hub rather than a specialized silo. It will provide a platform where practitioners can share best practices, explore innovations, align on standards, and discuss the challenges and nuances of data linkage at scale. By doing so, it supports the foundational infrastructure upon which quality linked datasets are built and responsibly used, regardless of the specific research or policy domain.

The group's work will touch on many of DARE UK's strategic priorities:

- **Linkage of sensitive datasets across multiple TREs**, by aggregating expertise and promoting harmonization of approaches.
- **Privacy protection during data ingress**, by engaging with privacy-preserving record linkage communities for wider exposure of related methodologies.
- **Disclosure control in multi-TRE contexts**, by reviewing and sharing approaches to secure quality assessment of produced linkages.
- **Data standards across domains**, by identifying common elements in linkage practice that support interoperability, agnostic to the application domain and datasets.
- **Governance models**, by articulating needs and challenges from the practitioner perspective.
- **Effective public engagement**, by integrating public voice and understanding into data linkage processes and the usage of linked data.

Through this wide-reaching yet focused scope, the group will play a foundational role in strengthening the responsible, effective use of linked data across the UK.

### Outcomes:

This group aims to establish a vibrant, cross-sector network of individuals engaged in data linkage methodologies, spanning academia, industry, and government. By providing dedicated infrastructure for sharing best practices and educational materials, the community will support both the production and confident use of linked data.

The group will also serve as a focal point for collaboration and coordination, offering support and visibility to existing groups addressing sub-fields such as transparency, quality reporting, privacy preservation, geospatial linkage, and technological deployment. To drive progress, the group plans to organize a series of workshops focused on core linkage methodologies and fostering connections between related groups under the data linkage umbrella.

In addition, the group will host a showcase event to highlight the current state of record linkage within the UK, covering advances in methodologies as well as contributions from affiliated groups. A comprehensive report on the state of record linkage in the UK will be produced, including recommendations for best practices in data linkage routines.

Key tangible outputs from this group will include:

- A networking infrastructure that facilitates ongoing engagement across the record linkage community
- A repository of educational and best practice materials
- Workshops addressing core methodologies and related linkage fields
- Detailed reports summarizing workshop findings
- A national showcase event on UK record linkage
- A flagship report providing a strategic overview of linkage practices and recommendations

Together, these outputs will enhance collaboration, knowledge sharing, and methodological innovation across the UK's data linkage community.

## The HOW

### Participation/Collaboration:

The community will collaborate closely with key existing groups and teams specializing in data linkage, including (but not limited to) the ITALO community, ONS Linkage Team, NHS England's Linkage Hub, and the Ministry of Justice linkage teams. These partnerships will leverage deep expertise in linkage methodologies, implementation, and operational practice across government and research sectors.

To ensure broad dissemination and foster rich discussions, the community will also engage with wider organizations such as ADR UK, HDR UK, SCADR. Collaboration with global forums and conferences like IPDLN will further enhance knowledge exchange and foster cross-jurisdictional learning, as well as open up communication channels with international groups including colleagues in Australian, Canadian, and US linkage centres.

By connecting with these established communities and expert groups, the interest group will build on existing strengths while fostering an inclusive, coordinated approach to advancing data linkage research and practice, identifying areas for potential working groups to explore.

### Mechanism:

The community will sustain ongoing engagement and progress through a combination of persistent communication infrastructure and regular meetings. A GitHub repository and dedicated website will provide continuous platforms for resource sharing, discussion, and collaboration between members, whilst a communications platform will help with core management.

Regular online meetings, conducted via Zoom or Teams, will be held to discuss development updates, set targets, and coordinate activities. These sessions will ensure consistent momentum and enable agile responses to emerging challenges and opportunities.

In addition, the group will organize periodic workshops and showcase events. These gatherings will focus on core data linkage methodologies and practices while inviting participation from sub-area groups and related communities to foster cross-pollination and broader engagement.

**Potential members:** [Including a minimum of two proposed chairs and all members who have expressed interest]

FIRST NAME	LAST NAME	EMAIL	(Co-)Chair / Member
Michael	Edwards	michael.edwards@swansea.ac.uk	Co-Chair
Josie	Plachta	josie.plachta@ons.gov.uk	Co-Chair
Sam	Lindsay	sam.lindsay1@justice.gov.uk	Co-Chair
Simon	Thompson	simon@chi.swan.ac.uk	Co-Chair
Public contributor lead to be sourced on award			Co-Chair

Members:			
Joseph	Lam	joseph.lam.18@ucl.ac.uk	Member
Peter	Christen	peter.christen@ed.ac.uk	Member
Stephen	Jobling	stephen.jobling@justice.gov.uk	Member
Anahita	Zamani	a.zamanidehkordi@swansea.ac.uk	Member
Sean	Scully	s.t.scully@swansea.ac.uk	Member
Roshan	Toby	roshan.toby@swansea.ac.uk	Member
Other public members to be sourced on award, through communications channels calling for engagement.			

\* Note, please do not hesitate to point out gaps in the current DARE UK set of strategic themes and/or recommendations that the programme should consider as it continues to evolve these. Community feedback and input is welcomed.