Applying through the Research Data Access Pathway

This article is for researchers applying for data access through Research Data Scotland (RDS)'s Research Data Access Pathway. Information is arranged based on the statuses you will see on your dashboard as you move through the digital application process: Enquiry, Application in progress, In review, Data assembly and Research in progress. Guidance is also provided for Requests and Amendments.

Enquiry

ℹ️ Applicants should submit an enquiry using the form: Enquiry Form

Submitting your enquiry

1. To complete your enquiry, you will need to provide an overview of:
   - Your details
   - Your project
   - The datasets you'd like to access for research
   - The secure environment in which you intend to access the data
   - Any secured funding for your research project
2. A read-only version of the enquiry form is available to help researchers prepare their submission.

Triage

On submission of your enquiry, you will receive an email to confirm receipt. We will then review your enquiry and advise you of next steps.

Notes to consider

- Researchers must have funding in place to receive eDRIS support on their applications once a project has been assigned a pathway.
- The cost to use this service covers assistance through the data access process, including information governance support and data linkage services.
- The Research Data Access Pathway operates a tiered component-based pricing structure based on:
  - The type of organisation you are applying from (e.g., academic institution, charity, public sector organisation, private sector organisation);
  - The number of researchers who require access, and;
  - The number of years access required.
- Costs are also based on the complexity of the project and the amount of support required. Find out more about pricing on the RDS website.

What happens next?

Depending on the nature of your enquiry, you will receive an email to notify you of one of the following next steps:

- If your project is deemed suitable for the Research Data Access Pathway, you will be invited to create an account and begin your application online.
- If your project is deemed suitable for either the Health and Social Care Public Benefit and Privacy Panel (HSC-PBPP) or the SG & NRS Data Access Panel (previously known as the Statistics Public Benefit and Privacy Panel (S-PBPP)) you will be contacted by the eDRIS team to begin an application.
- If your project is not suitable for either pathway, the eDRIS team will contact you to discuss your options.

Automated cost estimates

Depending on the nature of your enquiry, you may receive an automated cost estimate at the point of submission. If not, our team will be able to provide one for you. Automated cost estimates will use the current financial year's pricing model by default and will be generated regardless of whether an applicant has indicated that they already have funding in place.

Cost estimates are intended to help researchers gauge funding requirements and are subject to confirmation by the eDRIS team. eDRIS team members will manually adjust cost estimates when new information is supplied to them that affects project costs. Updated cost estimates will be automatically generated and emailed to you as a PDF.

Setting RDS up as a supplier

We will also send a document outlining the details required to set up Research Data Scotland as a new supplier with your institution. This is sent as an attachment along with the cost estimate. You will need to liaise with your institution's finance department to get RDS set up as a supplier to pay the invoice for your data provisioning costs.

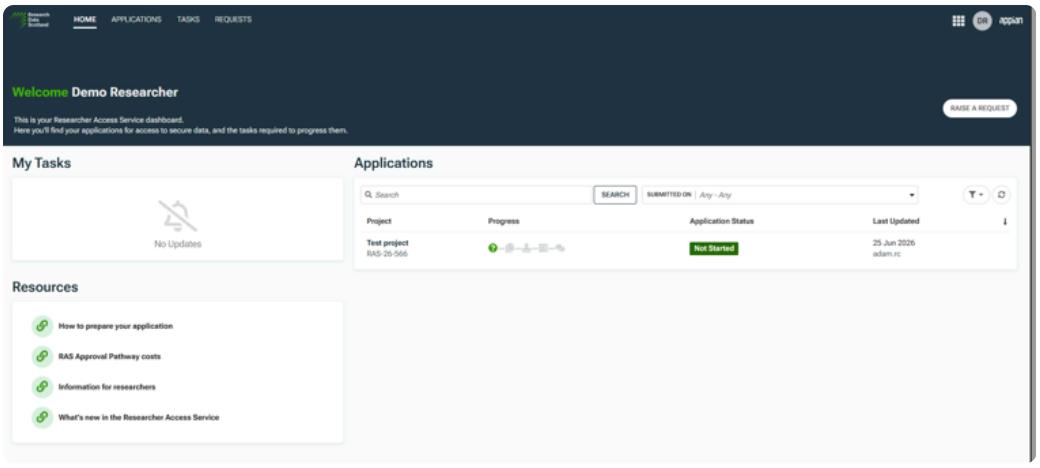
Platform interface

> We will assess your enquiry against the Research Data Access Pathway criteria to ensure only projects that meet the criteria for this pathway are progressed through the digital Researcher Access Service platform**.**
>
> If your enquiry is deemed suitable, you will be sent an invitation to create an account with the institutional email address provided in your enquiry form. You can then log into the platform to begin an application.

Dashboard

When you log in, you will find a dashboard with the following navigation options in the header:

- Home
- Applications
- Tasks



An example of the applicant dashboard

Your dashboard also displays the following sections:

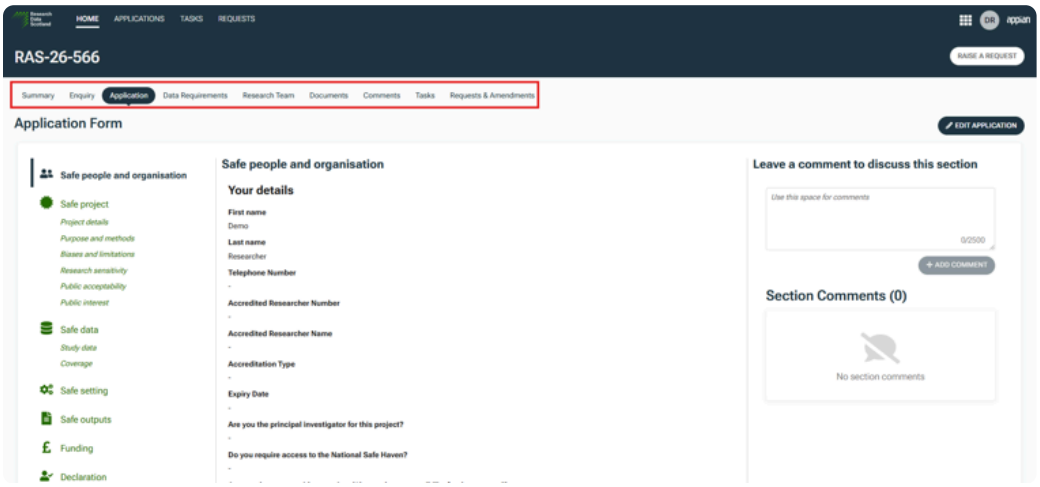
- **My Assigned Tasks** – This is a summary of the tasks you must complete. It will populate with tasks as you move through the data access process

- **Applications** – A list of your applications and their statuses
- **Resources** – Links to useful documents and resources

“Application” view

When you select your application from the Applications list, you are taken to the *Application* section, where you can view or edit your application.

Your application is pre-populated with the information provided in your enquiry.



Example of an application showing the sub-navigation options highlighted

Sub-navigation

The sub-navigation items (highlighted above) provide the following functions:

Summary

Here you’ll find an overview of your project, including applicant information, datasets and research team members.

Enquiry

This is a record of your original enquiry, submitted at the start of the data access process.

Application

This section provides a read-only view of your application, along with the ‘Edit application’ function to begin/continue editing your application.

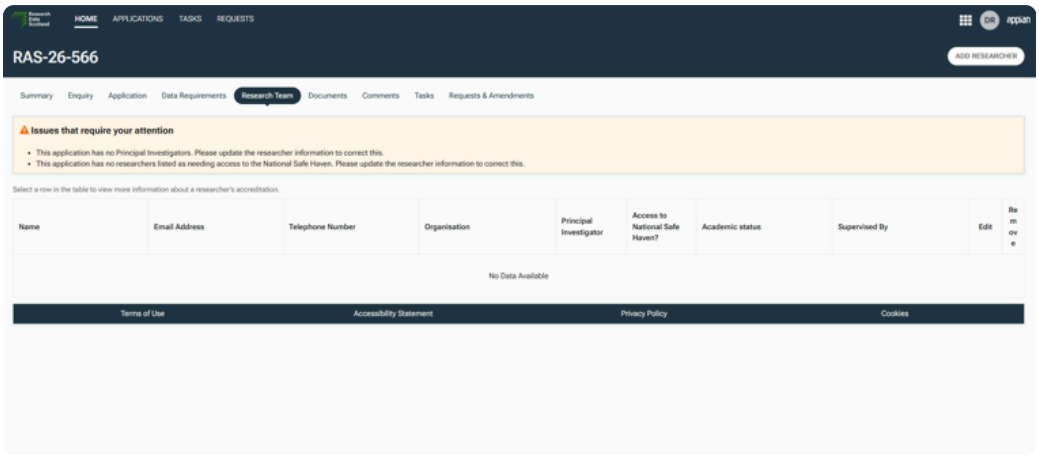
Data Requirements

This section shows the variables associated with each selected linked dataset. Any updates made by the Data Analyst will be reflected here.

Research Team

Under Research Team you will see a dashboard showing each person who has been added to the application. Details of research team members can either be added, removed or updated

here or within the Safe People and Organisation section of the application form. If any required team members or specific details are missing, it will be highlighted above the dashboard under ‘Issues that require your attention.’ For example, you must include a Principle Investigator (PI) within your research team.



A screenshot of the ‘Research Team’ tab with issues highlighted that require the applicant’s attention

Documents

This section provides an overview of the documentation uploaded throughout your application, including any supporting documentation, user agreements and purchase orders.

Comments

The Comments section provides an overview of all comments between you and the eDRIS team throughout the application process. Use this function to send messages to the eDRIS team with any questions about your application. You can also view responses to questions and comments throughout the process.

Tasks

Under Tasks, you will see the current actions required for you to progress your application.

Requests & Amendments

All requests and amendments you submit will be recorded in this section.

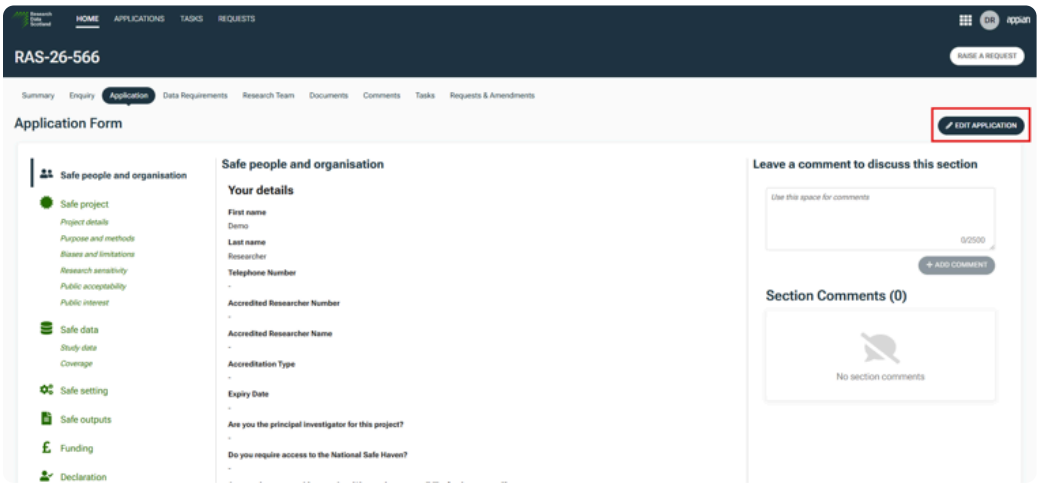
Application in progress

Editing your application

As a lead applicant, once you have been notified that your enquiry is suitable for the Research Data Access Pathway, you will be sent an email with login details for your new account.

- When you log in for the first time, you will be asked to re-set your password.

- Please refer to the read-only application form for guidance on what information is required for the application.
- To begin editing your application, select the ‘Edit application’ button (see screenshot below). This will open the application in edit mode.
- The form will autosave anything you’ve added when you move between each section. If you need to leave the form and return to it later, you can ‘Save and Exit’ at any time.
- As you work through the form, you’ll see a green tick appear beside the section header when all questions in that section have been completed.



A screenshot of an application showing the ’Edit application’ button highlighted

Accredited Researcher details

You must have accredited researcher status before data access can be provided.

Applications for researcher accreditation are processed by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). We encourage early contact with ONS to start this process, as it takes around three to five weeks. You can continue to edit and submit your application for panel review while your accreditation is being processed but will need accreditation before data access is provided.

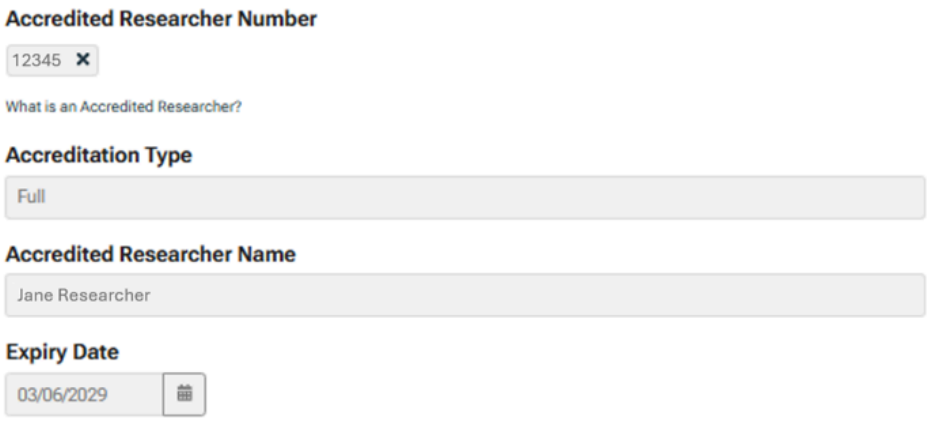
There are two types of researcher accreditation: full and provisional. Eligibility depends on your qualifications and research experience. If you have provisional accreditation, we require a fully accredited member of your research team to act as your supervisor for the duration of the project.

- The RDS website has more information on how to apply for researcher accreditation

How to add your accredited researcher details

As the lead applicant, you must input your five-digit accreditation number in the ‘Your details’ section. Your accreditation will be automatically confirmed if you are already listed on the UK

Statistics Authority Public Register (see below screenshot). The same details must be added for each named researcher in your team.



A screenshot of the 'Accredited Researcher Number' section of the application showing the details that are returned once a valid number is entered.

Please note: Your details may not validate if your accreditation was completed within the last 14 days. If this happens, please wait until 14 days have passed and try again.

Your research team

Managing your research team

Prior to submitting your full application for review, you can update your research team by selecting the Research Team tab. In this tab you can view your research team, update a researcher's details, and add or remove researchers to/from your team.

Only Principal Investigators, supervisors and users requiring entry to the National Safe Haven should be added to your research team. This is to ensure that no one on your team will be prompted to complete Approved Researcher training when this is not required of them. PhD students are not required to add a backup supervisor.

Please note that, if you enter a different number of researchers requiring access to the National Safe Haven than initially requested, the online application system will prompt you to correct this before proceeding with the rest of your application. For example, if your initial application requested access for two researchers but you have added three researchers requiring safe haven access to your application, a new cost estimate will be automatically generated and emailed to you.

Please check the Research Team tab to ensure you have entered the correct details for each member of your team. The 'issues that require your attention' alert in this section will alert you to

anything that needs to be updated.

Once your application is approved by the Research Data Access Pathway Approval Panel, we will contact each researcher on your team by email to request that they sign and return the Linked Data License and Scottish National Safe Haven User Agreement.

Mobile telephone numbers

- Please note that a UK mobile number is required for each member of your research team requiring access to the Scottish National Safe Haven (NSH). This number is used for two-factor authentication when setting up access. To ensure that only UK mobile numbers are entered, this field requires the number to begin “07”.

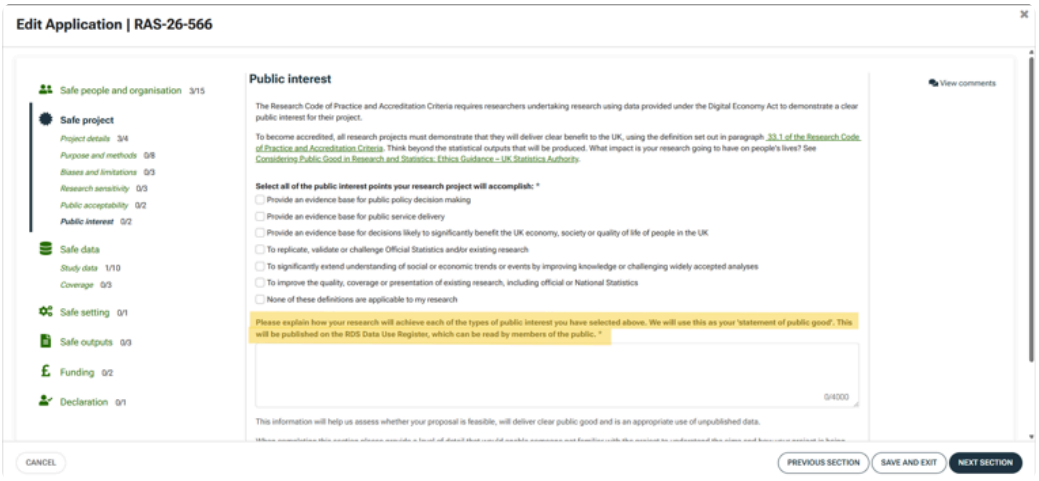
Principal Investigator(s)

- We require applicants to provide the details of a Principal Investigator (PI) for their project. A PI is required as they hold overall legal responsibility for data access, and this information would be required in the event of a data breach.
- The addition of a PI is a mandatory requirement for each application.
- It is possible to add multiple PIs to a project, using the toggle.

Providing a statement of public good

This question is in the ‘Public interest’ section of the application form, under ‘Safe project’:

“Please explain how your research will achieve each of the types of public interest you have selected above. We will use this as your ‘statement of public good.’”



A screenshot of the ‘Public interest’ tab in the application with the explanation of public interest highlighted

- Statements of public good for all projects are added to RDS’s Data Use Register, where they can be read by members of the public.

- To avoid delays to project approval, it is crucial to provide an accurate and detailed public good statement that explains how your project will benefit the public.
- Please consult the public good statements from approved projects as exemplars and think carefully when crafting your own statement, using as much of the 3000 character-limit as necessary.
- More guidance on statements of public good can be found on the RDS website: Research for public good. This page should be treated as compulsory reading for those seeking data access through the Research Data Access Pathway.

Safe data

When completing your application, you will be asked to select all the variables you require from your selected datasets for both your cohort and your linked data. For each dataset you request, you will need to provide a reason for access.

Applicants are required to:

- Specify the time periods relevant to their project (for example, particular years or date ranges).
- Indicate whether all records are needed, or only those meeting specific conditions.
- Provide additional codes (such as ICD-10 or other classification codes) to describe the data they need.

If you have any questions when completing your application, you can add a comment to your application. Depending on the nature of your question, our team of Research Coordinators and Data Analysts will reply to comments and provide support in your application.

Your data requirements will be reviewed by a Data Analyst once submitted for review, at which point our Analysts will discuss any specific information or datasets restrictions with you.

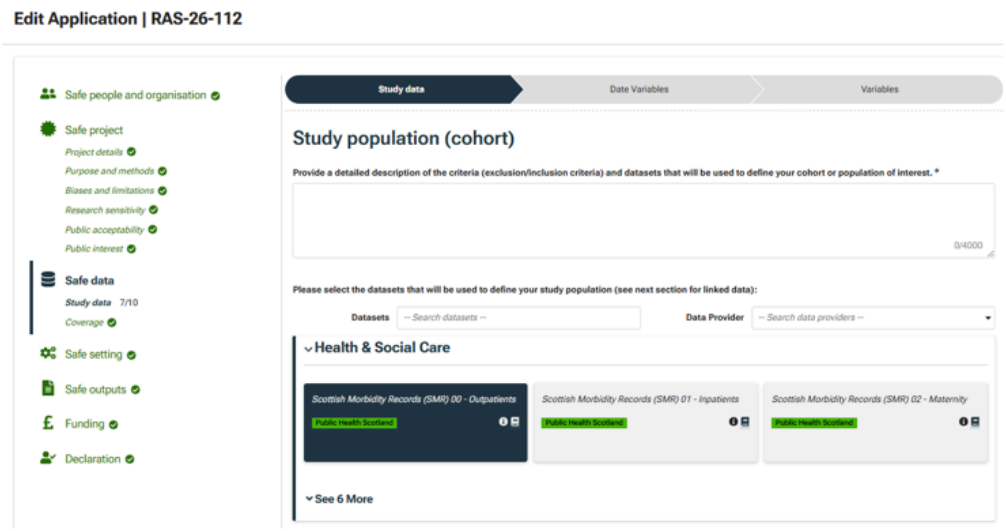
Data minimisation

Please think carefully about the specific data you require for your project, ensuring you request only the variables you **need** to carry out your study. This is to ensure that you have applied **data minimisation:** the principle within data protection law such that data are **sufficient**, **relevant** and **limited to what is necessary** in relation to the purposes for which they are processed. Our team of Data Analysts can support you through this if you are unsure about the specific data you will require.

Safe data: Study data

In the ‘Study data’ section, you will be asked to provide a detailed description of your study population (or cohort), along with the datasets you require for both your study population and

linked data.

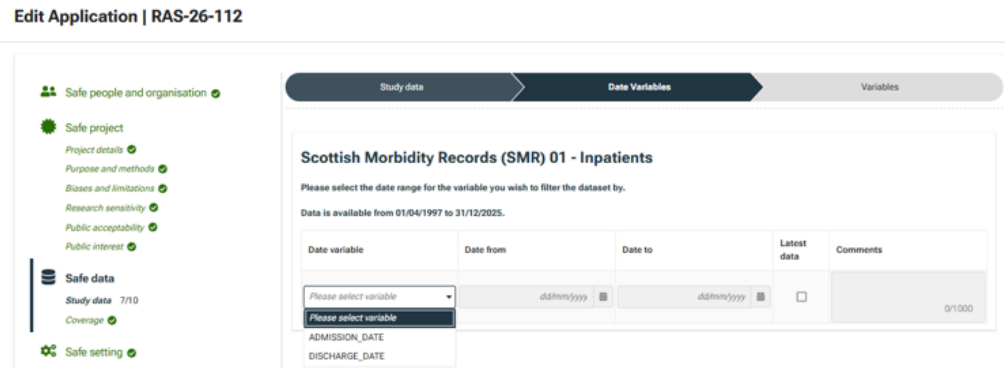


The 'Study data' section of the application form has been enhanced to include additional data capture

Safe data: Date variables

In the 'Date variables' section you will be asked to select the date range for the variable you wish to filter the dataset by. You will be asked this for each dataset you have selected for your study population only.

Date range availability is shown on screen for each dataset, with the option available to select 'latest available'. Please note, selecting this option will ensure you receive the latest extract available on the date when your project is approved. Amendments can be submitted to access subsequent releases of the data as they become available.

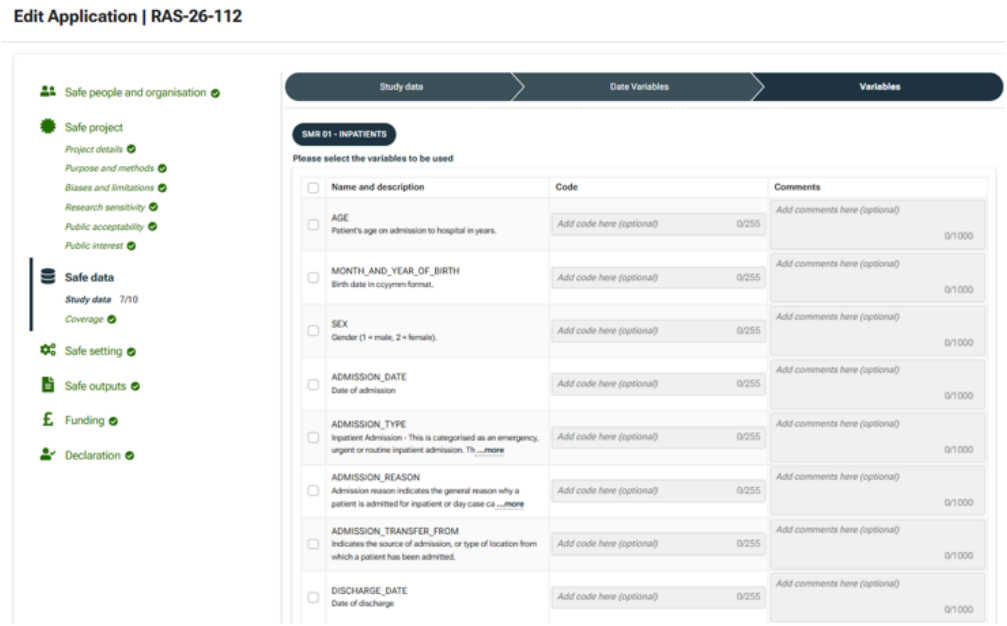


The 'Study data' section of the application form now includes the capture of 'date variables' for each study population dataset

Safe data: Variables

The 'Variables' section is where you can select the variables required for your chosen linked datasets. Each dataset is shown as a button above the grid, and you are required to select from the list of variables.

You are also able to indicate any additional codes (such as ICD-10 or other classification codes) or comments to describe the data you need.



The 'Study data: Variables' section of the application form includes fields to add optional codes or comments per variable.

Funding

Before you can submit your application, you must have secured funding to cover the entire cost of your data provisioning. After submitting your enquiry, you should have received a cost estimate letter advising you of the anticipated total cost of your project. As you discuss your requirements with our team, they will ensure this cost estimate is updated as necessary. By submitting your application, you confirm that you are happy with the cost estimate and have secured funding to cover all costs quoted.

Requesting a consultation

If you would like to request a consultation with the eDRIS team to advise on any aspect of your application, you can do so by leaving a comment in your application or by submitting a request. The Comment function is there for you to ask questions about the application form and clarify anything that is unclear. The eDRIS team will respond to your comments to help complete your application.

Public Impact Advisory Group (PIAG) pilot

The Public Impact Advisory Group (PIAG) is a new advisory group that is providing early feedback on applications, with a particular focus on reviewing public good statements and public engagement plans. The PIAG pilot began in October 2025 and remains ongoing.

The PIAG will review all applications made through the Research Data Access Pathway before the applications go to the panel for final approval.

The PIAG will meet monthly to discuss new applications. The group won't review any technical information about statistical analysis plans, but will consider the following information from each application form:

- Summary of research
- Background to research (for example, is it part of a larger programme?)
- Public good statement
- Datasets requested
- Public acceptability statement
- Public engagement plans
- Dissemination
- Risks and risk mitigation

The advisory group will provide feedback on these sections of the form, including any concerns they have or clarifications they would like to see made. The PIAG cannot approve or reject this project. It is the responsibility of the lead applicant to consider what changes to make ahead of Research Data Access Pathway Approval Panel review, based on the feedback provided.

Read more about the PIAG pilot on the RDS website

Applicant feedback

You will be invited to provide feedback on your experience with the digital platform in the form of a star rating from 1-5 and an optional text entry box. The feedback provided will help inform service improvements moving forward. This feedback is invited at three points during the application journey:

- Submission of Enquiry
- Submission of Application to Research Data Access Pathway Appproval Panel
- Completion of the "Confirm Data Suitability" task once data has been accessed in the Safe Haven

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Application in review

Application submitted for review

Once you have submitted your application, you will receive email confirmation that the eDRIS team has received it for review. This will move the status of your application to "In review."

This consultation is intended to minimise the amount of back-and-forth between you and the eDRIS team and to clarify any outstanding questions. If necessary, your application will then be returned to you for edits before it is sent to the Research Data Access Pathway Approval Panel for a decision.

Second eDRIS review

If edits were required to your application, the eDRIS team will review these changes when you resubmit your application. The eDRIS team will check if your edits are appropriate and that no other changes have been made that would take your project out of scope for the Research Data Access Pathway. Once they are confident that your application is ready to be reviewed by the Research Data Access Pathway Approval Panel, they will send it to the panel.

Research Data Access Pathway Approval Panel decision

Research Data Access Pathway Approval Panel

The Research Data Access Pathway Approval panel is made up of representatives from Research Data Scotland and Public Health Scotland. The panel is responsible for confirming that your application meets all criteria for Research Data Access Pathway eligibility and that the proposed research is in the public good.

The Research Data Access Pathway Approval Panel will make one of the following decisions:

- **Approve** – The panel is satisfied that the project meets all necessary criteria for data access. Data assembly can begin once all required agreements are in place.
- **Approve subject to minor revisions** – The application may be approved once minor revisions are made. Revised applications are resubmitted for verification by the Panel Manager and do not need to be reviewed again by the panel.
- **Requires major revisions** – The application must be resubmitted to panel for full review after the applicant has implemented recommendations.
- **Reject** – The panel has determined that the project does not meet the necessary criteria for data access and cannot meet these criteria through revisions.
- **Not suitable for Research Data Access Pathway** – The panel has determined that the project should be evaluated by a Public Benefit and Privacy Panel (PBPP). In this case, the applicant will be advised to begin a different application.

Revising your application

If the Research Data Access Pathway Approval Panel has requested revisions to your application before a decision can be made, your application will be returned to you. It is then your responsibility to make **only the requested changes** to your application before resubmitting

it for panel review. Please note, your revisions will be checked by a member of the eDRIS team before being sent back to the Panel Manager or the Research Data Access Pathway Approval Panel.

Application approved

Once your application has been approved by the Research Data Access Pathway Approval Panel, you will receive email confirmation of this decision. This will move your application to the next stage: Data assembly.

Data assembly

Requirements for eDRIS to begin data assembly

Once your application has been approved by the Research Data Access Pathway Approval Panel, the eDRIS team will begin to assemble your data. All data will be delivered to the National Safe Haven.

At this point in the process, the lead applicant will receive an email notification asking them to complete the following task:

- Upload a Purchase Order (PO) to cover the cost of data provision

Where required, each member of the research team will receive an email notification asking them to complete the following tasks:

- Upload a signed Data Linkage License
- Upload a signed User Agreement for the Scottish National Safe Haven
  - Please note, this requires countersignature by the individual's organisation
  - The eDRIS team will review and countersign each user agreement. The agreement may be returned to you if information is missing or incomplete.

Purchase orders and invoicing

Once the lead applicant has uploaded a Purchase Order, the RDS Finance team will notify eDRIS that this has been received.

It is assumed that you will be billed the entire cost for your project upfront. In rare circumstances, such as the end of the financial year or if a department needs to spend money within a specific timeframe, you may request to split the invoice.

Invoicing will take place directly between the RDS Finance team and your institution's finance office. You can request a copy of the invoice by emailing the RDS Finance team at finance@researchdata.scot.

Data assembly

Once the Panel has approved your application, a Data Analyst will begin data assembly. Data assembly and quality assurance will involve the following steps:

1. Cohort created and data linked by analyst based on predefined specification as agreed under the Data Requirements tab in the application
2. Quality Assurance checks and changes carried out (a second review of the data assembly by another eDRIS Data Analyst)

Data release

Once the data assembly has been completed and a second review has been performed by another Data Analyst, an eDRIS Senior Manager will review the data assembly. The Senior Manager will also check that a Purchase Order is in place before signing off on data release.

National Safe Haven accounts and project areas

After countersigned user agreements have been uploaded, eDRIS will set up National Safe Haven (NSH) accounts and a study area for all researchers on your team requiring data access.

Please be aware that the National Safe Haven analytical environment runs on a Linux Operating System (OS) and offers the following analytical and office software packages:

- Libre Office
- R/ R Studio Desktop
- STATA
- Python
- MATLAB (provided a researcher's institution has a license)

Logging into the National Safe Haven

Once your NSH accounts and the study area have been set up, an eDRIS Project Support Officer will share NSH logins with you and your research team by email. Each member of the research team will be provided with their own account to access the National Safe Haven.

If you or a member of your team has any trouble logging into your National Safe Haven account, please raise a request and our team will help you regain access.

Research in progress

Confirming data suitability

Once data access has been provided and at least one researcher on your team has accessed the Scottish National Safe Haven, a task will be created for the lead applicant to confirm the

suitability of the data.

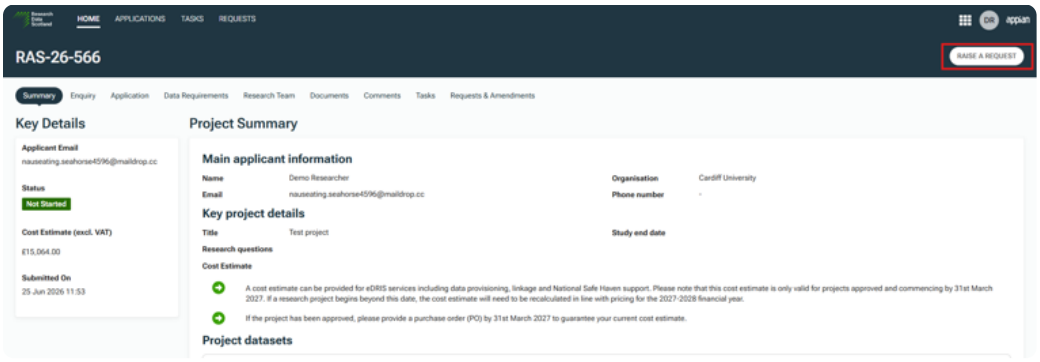
Please confirm data suitability **within 30 days** of your data being delivered to the National Safe Haven to avoid additional costs.

If there are any problems with the data, you will be prompted to raise a request.

Outputs

Please note: Only **fully unrestricted** outputs will be released. Intermediate outputs are **not** available due to the unavailability of intermediate Statistical Disclosure Controls (SDCs). This ensures process and guidelines are followed at all times. PhD students should make this clear to their supervisors if asked to provide intermediate outputs.

Raising a request



Applicant view highlighting the ‘raise a request’ button in the top right-hand corner

If you require additional support after data access has been provided, you can raise a request using the button in the top right-hand corner above the Summary tab. Requests will be resolved through Comments between the lead applicant and a member of the eDRIS team.

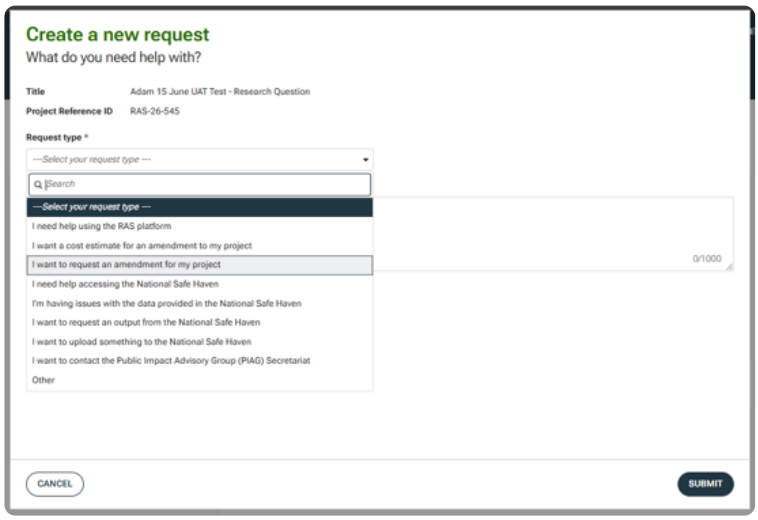
Screenshot showing the types of requests an applicant can make

Applicants can choose the following request types from the dropdown menu:

- I need help using the RAS platform
- I want a cost estimate for an amendment to my project
- I need help accessing the National Safe Haven
- I'm having issues with the data provided in the National Safe Haven
- I want to request an output from the National Safe Haven
- I want to upload something to the National Safe Haven
- I want to contact the Public Impact Advisory Group (PIAG) Secretariat
- Other

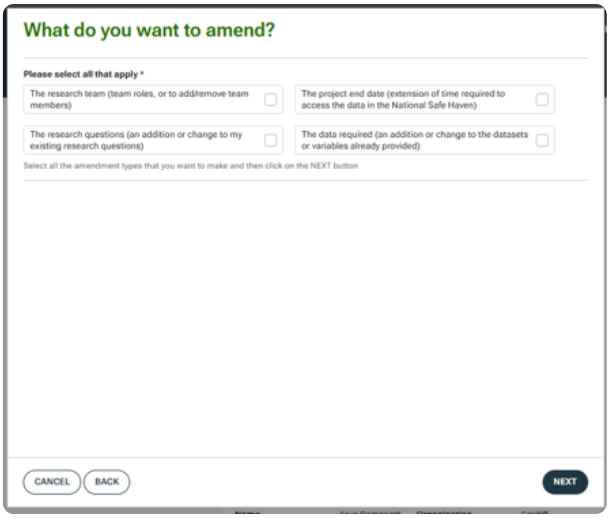
Raising an amendment

Once a research project has reached the 'Research in progress' stage, where researchers have access to data in the National Safe Haven, the option to raise an amendment becomes visible in the Raise a request dropdown menu.



Request drop-down menu highlighting the option to request an amendment

There are four main types of amendments you can make to your application after data access has been provided. Multiple amendment types can be raised together as part of the same submission but only one amendment may be submitted at a time.



Screenshot showing the four types of amendments you can make to your application

You can request an amendment to the following:

1. **The research team** – You can add or remove research team members or reassign team roles.
2. **The research questions** – You can add research questions or change an existing question.
3. **The project end date** – You can extend the amount of time you have to access data in the National Safe Haven.
4. **The data required** – You can add datasets or change the datasets or variables required provided they are within the scope of the Research Data Access Pathway.

Please note: if you request an amendment that takes your application out of the scope of the Research Data Access Approval Pathway, this amendment will either be rejected, or you might be asked to submit a new application through the PBPP Approval Pathway, which will incur additional cost.

📋 Related articles

Filter by label

There are no items with the selected labels at this time.