

The safe share project board

Group:

This is the closed group for safe share project board members and those directly involved in the project.

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Initial press release when the project was announced:

Jisc enables the safe and secure sharing of medical research data

Jisc is enabling researchers across the UK to safely and securely share health data to progress their research with a collaborative initiative.

This initiative is showcasing how the UK's research and education network Janet, provided by Jisc, can offer additional controls and safeguards for researchers working with sensitive data.

Jisc is working in partnership with leading UK universities to support three new initiatives. Rather than each of the research programmes and organisations developing one-off solutions to manage collaborative secure communication and user authentication between partners, Jisc is securing the networks across the organisations so that approved researchers working in one partner organisation can gain access to the data they need wherever it is stored.

The first is the development of the Farr Institute of Health Informatics Research, a UK-wide virtual organisation with four connection points and ten funding organisations. The Farr Institute provides a cutting-edge collaborative infrastructure for the safe use of patient and research data for medical research. This will lead to advances in preventative medicine, improvements in NHS care and better development of commercial drugs and diagnostics. It will also allow researchers to discover new insights into the causes of ill health, which in turn will lead to new therapies.

The second initiative, Medical Bioinformatics, is funded by the Medical Research Council, and will provide capacity for the safe use and analysis of biological and patient data for medical research across all diseases.

The Administrative Data Research Network is the third programme, and is the first phase of the Big Data Network funded by the Economic and Social Research Council. This network aims to facilitate access to and linkage of de-identified administrative data routinely collected by government departments and other public sector organisations.

Jeremy Sharp, Janet's director of strategic technologies, says:

“Providing researchers with controlled access to data and resources through the network is key to enabling them to focus on their research. In validating this use of the Janet network for sensitive, anonymised health data, we are ensuring that the UK’s investment in Janet will reap larger returns in the future and continue to respond to the considerable challenges facing those people who are doing valuable work analysing large quantities of data.”

The longer term aim is to create the conditions for a national infrastructure for secure access to data for researchers across various academic disciplines.

John Ainsworth, senior research fellow at the University of Manchester and e-infrastructure lead for the Farr Institute, says:

“The network is changing the way we do data analysis. It will provide a secure infrastructure for collaboration and the sharing of resources for data science. This will enable researchers to concentrate on what they do best – discovering new knowledge.”

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