



# Sensitive data curation: evidence-based skills and training landscape for stakeholders

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The landscape for working with sensitive data is rapidly evolving, with the [expansion of TREs/SDEs/Safe Havens across the UK](#) and the advent of the Health Data Research Service (HDRS) increasing the demand for staff with appropriate technical, governance, and professional skills. In this context, effective skills development in sensitive data curation is critical to ensure safe, high-quality data handling while avoiding siloed approaches that limit collaboration or consistency across projects and organisations. Upstream decisions by data providers (including data structuring, documentation, etc) also materially shape curation effort, though these actors were not a primary focus of this study.

Without clearer alignment in skill development and recognition, capability will continue to develop unevenly across the system, limiting access to the sufficiently skilled workforce required to scale sensitive data use whilst also limiting workforce mobility.

The [Skills for the Curation of Sensitive Data report](#) provides an evidence-based snapshot of current skills gaps, training provision, and barriers in sensitive data curation. It draws on surveys, focus groups, and interviews with curators, TRE/SDE/Safe Haven operators, governance specialists, and training providers across multiple sectors and data types. Detailed findings, methodology, and underpinning data are available in the [full report](#) and reuse is strongly encouraged.

This work sits alongside a range of UK initiatives that support community building, knowledge exchange, and the professionalisation of roles in data curation, sensitive data, and technical research support including (but not limited to): the [UK TRE Community](#), [TREvolution](#), [Careers and Skills for Data-Driven Research \(CASDAR\)](#), [Secure Data Access Professionals](#), [SDE Team Development Hub](#), [The DIRECT Framework](#), [DARE UK](#), the [BHF Data Science Centre](#), and the [Technician's Commitment](#). Our work complements these efforts by providing a systematic, evidence-based picture of where skills gaps, training gaps, and barriers currently exist, helping stakeholders understand where action is most needed in this rapidly evolving landscape.

Building on this evidence, we present targeted, actionable recommendations for stakeholders, recognising that individuals may operate across multiple roles and that different groups hold distinct levers to influence change, making collaboration and coordinated action essential to address sensitive data curation skills and training needs effectively.

# Recommendations for stakeholders

## Training providers and skills organisations

**Evidence snapshot:** Existing training fails to meet professional needs for sensitive data curation; informal and self-directed learning dominates; skills frameworks would benefit from finer granularity to fully capture sensitive data curation.

### Actions:

#### 1. Develop training aligned to priority skill gaps

Expand structured training to cover priority skill gaps (such as TRE literacy, understanding/translating what researchers need from the data, statistical analysis, and knowledge of legal obligations) in coordination and collaboration with others to ensure alignment and reduce duplication.

#### 2. Engage practitioners in design and delivery

Embed input from TRE operators and data curators to ensure training reflects real workflows and is applicable across different secure data environments and career stages.

#### 3. Strengthen skills frameworks with more granular detail

Adopt evidence-based insights from the report into relevant existing skills frameworks in collaboration with other training providers and skills organisations to help guide training choices, clarify professional boundaries, and support shared understanding of sensitive data curation across organisations.

## TRE/SDE/Safe Haven operators and host organisations

**Evidence snapshot:** Sensitive data curation skill gaps and reliance on informal learning create variability; risks slowing research, increasing operational burden, and limiting interoperability across infrastructures.

### Actions

#### 1. Align skills frameworks, role expectations, and training standards for sensitive data curation

Ensure consistency in how skills are defined and applied across sensitive data environments to better support portability of skills and staff mobility.

## **2. Strengthen staff access to formal training opportunities across career stages**

Reduce reliance on informal learning and improve consistency of capability. For example, by enabling staff to participate in and provide feedback on new training addressing priority skill gaps such as TRE literacy, dataset knowledge, standard models, ontologies and vocabularies, domain expertise, and statistical analysis.

## **3. Recognise sensitive data curation as a technical skill in roles and career pathways**

Formalise sensitive data curation within job design and progression pathways to strengthen role clarity and support retention and mobility.

# **Funders**

**Evidence snapshot:** Training is uneven, with limited protected time; strengthening data curation skills is seen as career-enhancing and there is strong interest in a skills framework or professional pathway.

## **Actions:**

### **1. Continue to invest in workforce and capability development**

Support the skills, competencies, and governance capacity required for safe and effective sensitive data curation, in line with increasing demand across secure data environments.

### **2. Enable coordination of training across organisations**

Incentivise collaboration between stakeholders, including shared curriculum development and visibility of existing training, to reduce duplication and improve consistency particularly in priority skill areas (such as TRE literacy, understanding researchers' needs, statistical analysis, and knowledge of legal obligations).

### **3. Embed expectations for protected development time**

Ensure funding mechanisms support continuing professional development alongside dedicated training time/resource at all career stages.

## Data and information governance bodies

**Evidence snapshot:** Legal obligations form a core and foundational skill for sensitive data curation, uniquely critical compared with general data work, though concentrated among senior staff; AI awareness is emerging as a key area for safe and responsible practice.

### Actions:

- 1. Support the interpretation of legal obligations (including and beyond GDPR) as a core component of data curation**

Work with other stakeholders to ensure legal and governance risks, including emerging risks such as AI, are understood and managed appropriately in sensitive data curation.

- 2. Promote consistent governance frameworks across sensitive data environments**

Reduce variability and enable standardized training/skills, acknowledging that TREs operate under diverse legal bases and that governance requirements differ accordingly across data models (e.g., consented cohort data, unconsented national-scale datasets, and identifiable versus de-identified environments).

- 3. Formalise skills within governance standards**

Strengthen recognition of sensitive data curation as a professional skillset by formalising expectations within governance standards, role definitions, and oversight frameworks.

## Data curators and professional communities

**Evidence snapshot:** Curators rely heavily on peer networks and informal learning; TRE literacy and legal obligations remain priority areas alongside AI as an emerging skill requirement.

### Actions:

- 1. Contribute to defining and articulating core skills and competencies**

Ground skills frameworks and training provision in practice by providing your experience and expertise, particularly in priority areas such as TRE literacy and legal obligations.

- 2. Continue to strengthen communities of practice**

Recognising that peer networks are a key mode of knowledge sharing across the sensitive data community, and are increasingly important for shaping understanding and practice in emerging areas such as AI.

### **3. Advocate for the recognition of sensitive data curation as a professional skillset**

Such that curators have clearer career pathways, portable expertise across organisations, and better visibility of their specialist work.

