

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY
RESEARCH ACCREDITATION PANEL

Minute

Friday 29 March 2019

Present

Committee Members

Professor Paul Boyle (Chair)
Siobhan Carey (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency)
Chris Dibben (Independent member)
Tricia Dodd (Independent member)
Rebecca Endean (UK Research and Innovation)
Kevin Fletcher (HMRC)
Andrew Garrett (Independent member)
Roger Halliday (Scottish Government)
Glyn Jones (Welsh Government)

Advisors

Peter Stokes (ONS)
Andy Wall (ONS)
Nikki Shearman (ONS)

UK Statistics Authority

Simon Whitworth (UK Statistics Authority)
Ross Young (UK Statistics Authority)

Apologies

Sarah Henry (ONS)
Neil McIvor (Department for Education)
Sarah Mathieson (Independent member)

1. Introductions

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed members to the fourth meeting of the Research Accreditation Panel.
- 1.2 Members approved the minutes from the third meeting of the Research Accreditation Panel.
- 1.3. Simon Whitworth updated the meeting with progress on actions from previous meetings. Most actions were either complete, or in progress and would soon be complete.
- 1.4 The Chair informed the meeting that he had been appointed as Vice Chancellor of the University of Swansea. The meeting heard that the University of Swansea hosts the Secure Anonymised Information Linkage (SAIL) and SAIL Databank, which has core funding from the Welsh Government. The Chair will nominate one of the independent members to lead any future discussions and decisions about any accreditation decisions or related matters that the Panel will consider involving the University of Swansea and

SAIL. The Chair's appointment as Vice-Chancellor of the University of Swansea will be recorded by the Secretariat in the Panel's Register of Members' Interests.

2. ONS accreditation: update on progress

- 2.1 Andy Wall briefed the Research Accreditation Panel that testing of the accreditation process had taken place in respect of the secure research environments of both ONS and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA). It was reported that this exercise had gone well, and that the breadth and level of evidence that was being asked for as part of the accreditation process was correct. Input from ONS and NISRA staff about how they found the accreditation process was being sought. Siobhan Carey reported that NISRA staff had found the process thorough and rigorous. Updated detailed information about the technical and personnel requirements for Processor accreditation will be issued shortly. It was expected that the Research Accreditation Panel would consider applications from ONS and NISRA for processor accreditation at its meeting in May.
- 2.2 It was reported that appropriate contacts in DWP and HMRC had been engaged throughout the development of the Processor accreditation process, and these had indicated that they were happy with the approach. ONS will continue to engage with DWP, HMRC and appropriate external professionals to ensure that there is an appropriate external scrutiny of the accreditation of the ONS environment as a potential future Processor.

ACTION: Andy Wall and Pete Stokes to present the evidence for the accreditation of ONS and NISRA at the next meeting of the Research Accreditation Panel.

3 Demonstration of ONS Secure Research Service Shopfront

- 3.1 Sarah Fisher from the ONS Research Support and Data Access team presented the 'shopfront' portal that Researchers will use to apply for accreditation as an Accredited Researcher (and their projects) under Part 5, Chapter 5 (Research) of the Digital Economy Act 2017.
- 3.2 The following points were raised in the discussion that followed:
- i. It needs to be made clearer to researchers using the shopfront precisely which legal gateway is open to researchers and for which data. It was reported that most researchers and projects will use the Digital Economy Act framework.
 - ii. The information that researchers will be asked for during the accreditation application process must better align with the requirements that are set out in the statutory Research Code of Practice and Accreditation Criteria approved by Parliament in July 2018, and published.
 - iii. The shopfront portal needs to make it clear that Accredited Researchers should be encouraged to publish their research, once completed, in formats which are freely available, for example in open-access journals.
 - iv. The shopfront portal should make it clearer that researchers can apply to bring their own data into the secure environment and link it to sources in the data catalogue with the permission of the data suppliers.
 - v. The permission of data suppliers will need to be obtained for accredited research projects that are aligned to broader research themes. The Panel concluded that care needs to be taken to ensure the broad research themes were not 'stretched' in areas that data suppliers would not easily recognise as included in particular research themes, so as not lose the trust and confidence of data suppliers in how their data is being used.
 - vi. The Panel was informed that a number of different software packages will be available to researchers within secure environments, and that researchers can apply to use their own software subject to licensing agreements.

- vii. ONS are engaging with other potential processors with the aim of making the shopfront the portal by which all researchers will apply to access data available in all DEA accredited processors.
- viii. Significant further work is required to provide more detail and information about the ethical approvals process in the shopfront.
- ix. The Panel agreed that an annual user satisfaction survey should be undertaken in order to assess and evaluate how well the shopfront is working for users, and the overall user experience.
- x. The Panel was told that the shopfront portal is expected to be available by Summer of 2019.

ACTION: Pete Stokes to amend the shopfront in line with the comments made above and to provide a further report about the progress of deployment of the shopfront portal in due course.

4. Devolved Administrations' perspectives

- 4.1 Glyn Jones, Roger Halliday and Siobhan Carey provided the Panel with an update from the Devolved Administrations' perspectives. These updates included an overview of the various local networks of interest in the Research framework of the Digital Economy Act, the support shown by Devolved Administration Ministers, and the development of impactful, policy-relevant research questions that are facilitating the potential release of local datasets to support wider research activity. The Panel heard the clear message of the Devolved Administrations about the value and importance attached to access of DWP and HMRC datasets, in particular, to support the production of devolved statistics as well as the wider research community. The representatives of the Devolved Administrations clearly articulated that, in order to fully realise the potential of the DEA and satisfy demand from within the research community, there was a demonstrable need to build confidence among researchers that these and other data sources will be available for research purposes under the Research framework of the DEA, for which the Panel is responsible in supporting the UK Statistics Authority as the statutory accreditor of researchers, projects, and processors.

5. Any other business

- 5.1 Ahead of the formal accreditation of processors, researchers and projects beginning, the Panel requested that one or two potential projects that have been recently been received for access to ONS data, should be presented to the Panel at its next meeting for consideration. This would afford the Panel an opportunity to develop its approach to the detailed scrutiny of projects, ahead of the full opening-up of the application and accreditation process in a few weeks' time.

ACTION: Pete Stokes to work with the Secretariat to identify suitable projects which may be discussed by the Panel at the next meeting.

6. Date of Next Meeting

- 6.1 The Research Accreditation Panel will next meet on 25 April.