

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY
RESEARCH ACCREDITATION PANEL

Minute

Friday 24 May 2019

Present

Committee Members

Professor Paul Boyle (Chair)
Siobhan Carey (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency)
Chris Dibben (Independent member)
Tricia Dodd (Independent member)
Andrew Garrett (Independent member)
Emma Gordon (for Rebecca Endean) (UK Research and Innovation)
Roger Halliday (Scottish Government)
Sarah Henry (ONS)
Glyn Jones (Welsh Government)
Sarah Mathieson (Independent member)
Neil McIvor (Department for Education)

Advisors

Peter Stokes (ONS)
Andy Wall (ONS)
Jason Riches (for Nikki Shearman) (ONS)

UK Statistics Authority

Emily Mason-Apps (UK Statistics Authority)
Simon Whitworth (UK Statistics Authority)
Ross Young (UK Statistics Authority)

Apologies

Kevin Fletcher (HMRC)

1. Introductions

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed members to the sixth meeting of the Research Accreditation Panel.
- 1.2 Members approved the minutes from the fifth 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.

2. Updated accreditation report for the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency Research Support Unit (NISRA-RSU)

- 2.1 Following the discussions that had taken place at the last meeting of the Panel, Andy Wall provided the Research Accreditation Panel with an updated accreditation report for the NISRA-RSU. The Panel felt that all their comments on the previous version of the accreditation report had been addressed and confirmed the accreditation of the NISRA-RSU processor environment for a five-year period.

ACTION: The Chair to write to NISRA-RSU to inform them of their accreditation.

3 Accreditation report for ONS

- 3.1 Andy Wall presented the Research Accreditation Panel with an accreditation assessment for the Office for National Statistics (ONS). The accreditation team recommended that the Research Accreditation Panel approve the accreditation of ONS for five years.
- 3.2 It was reported that ONS had met with HMRC and DWP to discuss the accreditation criteria and the initial feedback suggests that they agree with the principle of the assessment approach, recognise how it has been applied to ONS and the level of control ONS operate, agree that the approach is challenging enough and agree with the assessment scale and the requirements for a yearly review. The Panel were informed that DWP and HMRC would be providing ONS with more detailed feedback soon.
- 3.3 The Panel felt the accreditation process was rigorous, thought that this had been applied to ONS in a robust way, and were satisfied with the evidence presented in the accreditation report. The Panel also welcomed the initial positive feedback that DWP and HMRC had provided about the accreditation of ONS. It was noted that it is for the Panel to make the accreditation decision. However, given more detailed feedback from DWP and HMRC is expected soon, the Panel wanted to review this before confirming the accreditation of ONS.

ACTION: The Secretariat to circulate the more detailed feedback from DWP and HMRC to enable the Panel to confirm the accreditation of ONS. The Panel may choose to review this feedback, when received, via correspondence.

4. Accreditation report for ONS-Secure Research Service

- 4.1 Pete Stokes presented an accreditation assessment report for the ONS Secure Research Service (ONS-SRS). The accreditation team recommend that the Research Accreditation Panel approve the accreditation of the ONS-SRS for five years.
- 4.2 The Panel felt that the accreditation process was a rigorous process, felt that this had been applied to ONS-SRS in a robust way, and were satisfied with the evidence presented in the accreditation report. It was noted that it is for the Panel to make the accreditation decision. However, given more detailed feedback from DWP and HMRC is expected soon, the Panel wanted to review this before confirming the accreditation of ONS-SRS.

ACTION: The Secretariat to circulate the more detailed feedback from DWP and HMRC to enable the Panel to confirm the accreditation of ONS. The Panel may choose to review this feedback, when received, via correspondence.

5. Data Ethics

- 5.1 Simon Whitworth presented the UK Statistics Authority's ethical self-assessment form and guidance which has been approved by the National Statistician's Data Ethics Advisory Committee (NSDEC) and the ONS Data Governance Committee. It was reported that the UK Statistics Authority's ethical self-assessment process was introduced in 2018 to provide researchers with an easy-to-use framework to consistently review the ethics of their projects in light of the ethical principles of the independent National Statistician's Data Ethics Advisory Committee (NSDEC). The self-assessment process is supported by the guidance, training and user support.
- 5.2 It was agreed that this was an excellent tool that enabled researchers to robustly consider the ethics of their research.

6. Appeals Process

- 6.1 Simon Whitworth presented a suggested appeals process against decisions made by the Panel. It was reported that when there is an appeal the National Statistician will convene an Appeals Panel including: the chair of the Accreditation Panel, an independent member of the Panel, the Chair of the National Statistician's Data Ethics Advisory Committee and the ONS Chief Security Officer (when an appeal is from a processor). It was suggested that it would be useful to also include on the Appeals Panel an independent subject matter expert.
- 6.2 The Panel were informed that appeals will only be considered if the researcher has provided evidence that the assessment was not conducted in accordance with the Panel's standard procedures and processes, or if some other material irregularity related to the assessment process has occurred. It was suggested that further guidance needed to be provided to make it clear when an appeal would be investigated.

ACTION: The Secretariat was asked to make these changes to the Appeals Process and share this with the Panel at the next meeting.

7. Methodology guidance for applicants

- 7.1 Simon Whitworth presented methodology guidance that Andy Garrett had led the development of when he was a member of the Administrative Data Research Network Approvals Panel. This guidance was provided to help researchers provide better information on their proposed methodology.
- 7.2 It was suggested that researchers applying to access data under the Research Strand of the Digital Economy Act should be provided with similar methodology guidance so that the Research Accreditation Panel could make informed accreditation decisions.

ACTION: Pete Stokes was asked to produce methodology guidance for applicants and present this to a future meeting of the Research Accreditation Panel.

8. Any other business

- 8.1 It was agreed that the next meeting of the Research Accreditation Panel would be conducted via correspondence.