

**UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY**  
**RESEARCH ACCREDITATION PANEL**

**Research Accreditation Panel Terms of Reference**

**Introduction**

1. The Digital Economy Act 2017 (DEA) (Part 5, Chapter 5) includes an important new statutory framework to support the UK research community, both within government and beyond, that permits public authorities to share de-identified information with accredited researchers for the purposes of public good research.
2. Under the DEA, the UK Statistics Authority is the statutory body that will oversee the accreditation of researchers, projects, processors and secure access environments. and the Authority has published a set of criteria, set out in the [Research Code of Practice and Accreditation Criteria](#), that individuals, organisations and research projects must meet before being accredited for any of the functions set out in Chapter 5, Part 5 of the Act.

**Role and Responsibilities**

3. The role of the Research Accreditation Panel (RAP) is to ensure that the process for granting access to de-identified data to accredited researchers under the DEA is independent, consistent, and transparent. The RAP will assess each project against the following criteria:
  - i. Is there public benefit?
  - ii. Is there demonstrable analytical merit?
  - iii. Is the project feasible?
  - iv. Are any relevant privacy implications sufficiently mitigated?
  - v. Has the project successfully completed a formal ethical review?
4. The RAP will either approve or reject the application by consensus.
5. The Panel will also provide the governance of the accreditation of researchers and processors who wish to use the Digital Economy Act for the purposes and functions set out in the Act. This will involve having oversight of the training of researchers, which researchers must complete to become Accredited Researchers, and the security standards, policies and procedures that processors have to comply with to become Accredited Processors.

**Meetings**

6. The RAP will meet every four to six weeks. The Chair of RAP may convene additional meetings as deemed necessary and the Panel may transact business via correspondence as necessary.
7. There is likely to be a heavy demand placed on the RAP, particularly in respect of the accreditation of researchers and projects. For instance, the (now disbanded) ONS Microdata Release Panel (MRP) considered approximately 420 applications per year, on average (360 passed by precedent and 60 considered by a formal panel) and the former ADRN Approvals Panel approved 69 projects in the period after September 2014. Engagement with users suggests that the creation of bottlenecks in approving projects is a concern for the user community. To try to mitigate against this, the workload of the Research Accreditation Panel will be managed as follows:

- i. The Secure Research Service will validate each application against the criteria set out in paragraph 3 before the application is considered by the Panel.
- ii. Decisions of the Accreditation Panel may set precedents that can be used in assessing new requests for data access.
- iii. Projects can be approved or rejected by correspondence.

### **Reporting**

8. The RAP will report to the Board of the UK Statistics Authority through the National Statistician.
9. The RAP will operate transparently. Project proposals and the Panel's discussions on projects will be made publicly available on the UK Statistics Authority website. Summary information on applications rejected by the Accreditation Panel and the reasons for the rejection will be published.
10. The RAP may resolve to publish additional reports which communicate the work of the Panel and other relevant matters at any time.
11. Where project approval is granted by precedent, the application and the precedent that was used to approve the project will be reported to the Panel at its meetings and will be published as part of the minutes.
12. At least seven days prior to its meetings, the RAP will receive reports as it requires.

### **Appeals**

13. Researchers and potential processors will have a right to appeal the processes and procedures of the RAP. An appeal can be considered if sufficient evidence has been provided that the Panel's assessment was not conducted in accordance with the RAP's standard procedures and processes or some other material irregularity related to the assessment process has occurred.
14. Appeals must be submitted to the UK Statistics Authority within 28 working days of the Panel's initial decision.
15. If the appeal fulfils the criteria set out above the appeal will be considered by an Appeals Panel. The Secretariat will inform the National Statistician (or their nominee) and the National Statistician will convene an Appeals Panel including the Chair of the Accreditation Panel, an independent member of the Panel, and the chair of the National Statistician's Data Ethics Advisory Committee. The Appeals Panel have the option of including an independent subject matter expert on the Panel, depending on the nature of the project. Where an appeal is received from a processor (or applicant as a processor), the Panel will also include the ONS Chief Security Officer. Members of the Appeals Panel can appoint a delegate to attend the Appeals Panel in their place.
16. The Appeals Panel will convene a meeting within 15 working days after the submission deadline for the appeal. In reaching a decision the Appeals Panel will have access to all documents needed to reach a decision.
17. The RAP Secretariat will inform the appellant of the conclusion of the Appeals Panel within 15 working days of the Appeals Panel reaching a decision.
18. The Appeal Panel's judgement is final and cannot be subject to further appeal.

### **Membership and role of members**

19. The members of the RAP will include:
  - i. an independent Chair (appointed by the National Statistician);
  - ii. at least three representatives of data providers in the UK Government and the Devolved Administrations;
  - iii. a senior representative of the National Statistician; and,
  - iv. at least four independent members which should be senior researchers from different areas of specialism (e.g. social science, statistics, economics and data science) from a variety of different sectors (e.g. academia, commercial and third sector).
20. The Chair may invite other relevant experts as appropriate to advise the Panel.

### **Quorum**

21. The RAP meetings will be considered quorate when at least four or more members are present including the Chair or the Chair's delegated nominee, and at least one independent member.
22. Substitutes will not be permitted to attend meetings, unless with the invitation of the Chair.
23. In order for an application or research proposal to be formally approved by correspondence, a sufficient number of members would need to respond in accordance with a quorate meeting.

### **Secretariat**

24. The Authority's Data Governance, Legislation, and Policy team will be responsible for the Panel's secretariat, overseeing the appointment of members, organising meetings and ensuring that the Accreditation Panel operates transparently. The Secure Research Service team will be responsible for providing technical support to the secretariat including liaising with applicants, and reviewing the applications.

### **Review**

25. The Accreditation Panel will review the effectiveness of its meetings and its terms of reference annually.

### **Membership as at 1 December 2019**

26. The membership of the Research Accreditation Panel is currently:
  - Chair: Professor Paul Boyle
  - Independent lay/expert members: Tricia Dodd, Sarah Mathieson, Chris Dibben, Andrew Garrett
  - Representative of the National Statistician: Sarah Henry (Director, Methods Data Research, Office for National Statistics)
  - Representative of UK Research and Innovation: Emma Gordon
  - Representatives of data providers: Kevin Fletcher (HMRC), Neil McIvor (DfE)
  - Representatives of the devolved administrations: Siobhan Carey (NISRA), Roger Halliday (Scottish Government), Glyn Jones (Welsh Government)
27. The Research Accreditation Panel is also supported by:
  - Secretariat: Ross Young and Simon Whitworth (Data Governance, Legislation & Policy, UK Statistics Authority)
  - Advisors: Peter Stokes (Research Support and Data Access, ONS), Nicola Shearman (Legal Services, UK Statistics Authority), and Andy Wall (Chief Security Officer, ONS)