

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

**Minute**

**Monday 20 April 2020**

**Present**

**Committee Members**

Professor Paul Boyle (Chair)  
Siobhan Carey (NISRA)  
Tricia Dodd (Independent member)  
Chris Dibben (Independent member)  
Kevin Fletcher (HM Revenue & Customs)  
Andrew Garrett (Independent member)  
Emma Gordon (UK Research and Innovation)  
Sarah Henry (ONS)  
Glyn Jones (Welsh Government)  
Paul Lodge (Department for Work & Pensions)  
Sarah Mathieson (Independent member)

**Advisors**

Nikki Shearman (Legal Services, ONS)  
Peter Stokes (Research Services & Data Access, ONS)  
Andy Wall (Chief Security Officer, ONS)  
Ross Young (Data Protection Officer, UK Statistics Authority)

**UK Statistics Authority**

Lily O'Flynn  
Simon Whitworth

**Apologies**

Roger Halliday (Scottish Government)  
Neil McIvor (Department for Education)

**1. Introductions**

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed the members to the fourteenth meeting of the Research Accreditation Panel.
- 1.2 Members approved the minutes of the meeting held on 16 March 2020.
- 1.3 Lily O'Flynn updated the meeting with progress on actions from previous meetings. All actions were complete or otherwise in progress.
- 1.4 It was reported that NHS Wales Informatics Service had not been able to progress their application to become an accredited processor under the Digital Economy Act due to the commitment of NWIS's resource to the ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

**ACTION: Glyn Jones to update the Panel on the NHS Wales Informatics Service's plans for DEA processor accreditation at a future meeting of the Research**

**Accreditation Panel, once resourcing pressures on health authorities across the UK have eased.**

**2. Data Access Landscape**

- 2.1 Ross Young presented the Panel with a paper that explored the ongoing complexity and fragmentation of the data access landscape for researchers wanting to access administrative data for public good research purposes. The paper re-emphasised the importance of the Research strand of the Digital Economy Act as a generic gateway that all public authorities can use to simplify and streamline the process for researcher access to de-identified public authority data, while maintaining appropriate levels of governance.
- 2.2 Kevin Fletcher recognised the benefits of the Research strand of the DEA and confirmed HM Revenue & Customs' support for making public authority data available via the DEA. The Panel were informed that HMRC are entering a transitional period whereby HMRC data will start to be made available for research purposes via the DEA, instead of through legacy legal gateways. HMRC is currently considering options for making data available under the DEA, be that through accreditation of the HMRC Datalab or by making HMRC data available in the ONS Secure Research Service (SRS). The Panel welcomed this commitment and noted current delays in this work due to HMRC prioritisation of the ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 2.3 Paul Lodge stated that he would provide comments on the paper from the perspective of the Department for Work & Pensions at the May meeting of the RAP.

**ACTION: Paul Lodge to provide comment on the Department for Work & Pensions' perspective on the Data Access Landscape paper at the May 2020 meeting of the Research Accreditation Panel.**

- 2.4 The Panel recognised that some departments, such as the Department for Education, use existing governance frameworks to approve research projects. It was agreed that more work could be done to communicate the robust and publicly acceptable safeguards the Research Accreditation Panel uphold when making decisions on research access to public authority data. The Panel agreed that increasing engagement with legal advisors to public authorities may help to promote the legal gateway provided by Research strand of the Digital Economy Act as a robust and efficient means to make data available for research purposes.

**ACTION: The Secretariat identify new opportunities to communicate the work of the Research Accreditation Panel to help build awareness and trust among data owners of the Digital Economy Act's accreditation processes.**

- 2.5 Siobhan Carey confirmed that the Digital Economy Act is NISRA's primary legal gateway for making secure data available to the research community. However, the exclusion of health data in the DEA powers means NISRA continues to use legacy gateways to approve research projects that include data collected for a public authority's health functions.
- 2.6 The Panel noted that the devolved administrations of Wales and Scotland also follow similar processes, whereby health data access governance is included in legacy approvals gateways used to also make non-health data available to the research community.

- 2.7 The Chair thanked the members of the Panel for the useful discussion on this paper and asked the Secretariat to re-draft the paper in light of the issues raised. The Panel agreed that this paper should be published at an appropriate time in the future to facilitate a wider public debate on the issue.

**ACTION: The Secretariat to re-draft the paper in light of the issues discussed during the meeting. The paper is to be prepared for future publication and to be used as context for a wider public debate on the issue.**

### **3. Project Accreditation: New Projects**

- 3.1 The Panel considered twelve new projects and the following eleven projects were accredited:

- Minimum wages and technology adoption
- Identification and monitoring of social impact indicators in the West Cumbrian region
- Subjective wellbeing impact of debt and debt-related factors
- Inequalities in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – Chapter on Labour Market Inequality
- Business dynamism
- The impact of the National Living Wage of Employment, Hours, Earnings and Household Income
- Digital skills in medium and associate professional job roles
- The determinants of performance-pay utilisation by firms and its consequences for firm behaviour, performance, and employee outcomes
- Assessing the impact of UK Enterprise Zones
- Modelling the regional implications of COVID-19 using Enterprise Research Centre's longitudinal firm-level dataset based on the Business Structure Database
- Research on digital trade

- 3.2 The Panel noted that the standard of project applications being submitted for accreditation this month was of a particularly high quality. The Panel anticipate an increase in the number of project change requests submitted for consideration in the coming months, as a number of these projects may wish to request access to additional datasets or change their research scope to provide additional analysis that can inform the national response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

- 3.3 Kevin Fletcher noted that the Panel have accredited a number of projects that are proceeding in both the ONS SRS accredited environment and the HMRC Datalab, which is not currently accredited under the DEA. Kevin confirmed that HMRC are working on internal processes to allow HMRC data to be held within the ONS SRS so that projects of this kind can proceed in one environment. Pete Stokes agreed that both ONS and HMRC are overcoming logistical issues to allow more HMRC data to be made available in the ONS SRS for use in DEA accredited research projects. The Panel welcomed this.

### **4. Project Accreditation: Precedent Process**

- 4.1 Simon Whitworth presented the Panel with a proposed process to accredit research projects via precedent. Given the recent accreditation of the UK Data Archive and the launch of the ONS Research Accreditation Service, the Panel is expecting to receive an additional 20 to 25 projects for consideration per month. Accrediting projects via precedent aims to ensure that the Panel's time is used efficiently by providing independent scrutiny of projects where it is most needed.

- 4.2 To ensure due diligence in the months following the establishment of a precedent process, the Panel asked to review in full one proposal accredited via precedent by the RAP Triage Group each month.
- 4.3 The Panel agreed for the precedent process to come into effect immediately, noting that the process exposed research projects to robust scrutiny while enabling faster access to public authority data for the research community.

**ACTION: The Secretariat to establish the agreed precedent process with immediate effect. The Secretariat to bring a report of all projects accredited via precedent in the intervening period to the May 2020 meeting, with a full report of one project submitted to the Panel for confirmation that the precedent process has been operationalised successfully.**

## **5. Processor Accreditation: Ongoing Applications Update**

- 5.1 Andy Wall updated the Research Accreditation Panel on the status of the ongoing accreditation of processors.
- 5.2 Andy confirmed that the Panel should expect accreditation reports for NRS and eDRIS in the coming months, as both Scottish environments are in the process of submitting final evidence packs for assessment. The Panel welcomed this progress and noted the need to consider new ways in which processor accreditation on-site assessments could be performed during the ongoing social distancing measures.

## **6. Amendments to Processes during the COVID-19 Pandemic**

- 6.1 Andy Wall presented a process to the Panel that would allow the UK Statistics Authority Accreditation team to partially accredit processing environments while it is unable to carry out site visits due to ongoing social distancing measures.
- 6.2 The UK Statistics Accreditation team would undertake a series of video conferences to assess the standard of security and capability controls held by applicants to recommend the partial accreditation of a processing environment. Full accreditation will be awarded once social distancing measures have eased and a site visit can be carried out to assess the outstanding physical security controls.
- 6.3 The Panel agreed the new process and noted that the UK Statistics Authority may want to use these new experiences to understand whether remote assessment of security and capability controls could be adopted by default once social distancing measures are eased.

**ACTION: The UK Statistics Authority Accreditation team to implement the process for recommending partial accreditation for processors applying for accreditation under the Digital Economy Act with immediate effect.**

- 6.4 Ross Young updated the Panel on amendments to assured remote connectivity protocol for researchers working on accredited projects in the ONS SRS from home, due to the current national restrictions.
- 6.5 The Panel welcomed this development and thanked the ONS SRS and the Data Governance, Legislation and Policy team, on behalf of the research community, that have worked to provide researchers access to data from home in specific circumstances.

## **7. Any Other Business**

- 7.1 The Panel asked for a progress update on the three ongoing project applications presented to the Panel in November 2019 requesting access to the Race Disparity Audit (RDA) dataset. While ONS and HMRC have provided the full and final data owner approvals required, Paul Lodge confirmed that the Department for Work & Pensions is continuing to work through security controls to ensure the onwards sharing of this data will meet the Secretary of State's approval standards.

**ACTION: Paul Lodge to update the Panel on progress made by DWP in securing data owner approval for the use of the Race Disparity Audit dataset in the three ADR-UK sponsored projects previously reviewed by the Panel at a future Research Accreditation Panel meeting.**

- 7.2 The Panel noted that an updated accreditation report for the ONS SRS will be presented at the June 2020 meeting, instead of the May meeting. Pete Stokes confirmed that the delay in the SRS's upcoming technological migration is due to increased works to enable approved research projects to access the SRS from home during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**ACTION: The UK Statistics Authority Accreditation team to submit an updated DEA processor accreditation report for the ONS SRS at the June 2020 Research Accreditation Panel meeting, to reflect the completed technical changes associated with the SRS technological refresh.**

- 7.3 The Panel welcomed the first report of the project change requests approved by the RAP Triage Group.
- 7.4 The next meeting of the Research Accreditation Panel is on 29 May 2020.