

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY
RESEARCH ACCREDITATION PANEL

Minute

Thursday 22 October 2020

Present

Committee Members

Professor Paul Boyle (Chair)
Mark Brewin (HM Revenue & Customs)
Siobhan Carey (NISRA)
Tricia Dodd (Independent member)
Chris Dibben (Independent member)
Andrew Garrett (Independent member)
Emma Gordon (UK Research and Innovation)
Sarah Henry (ONS)
Paul Lodge (Department for Work & Pensions)

Advisors

Jason Marsh (Deputy Chief Security Officer, ONS)
Jason Riches (Legal Services, ONS)
Peter Stokes (Research Services & Data Access, ONS)
Simon Whitworth (Data Ethics, UK Statistics Authority)
Ross Young (Data Protection Officer, UK Statistics Authority)

UK Statistics Authority

Lily O'Flynn
Grazia Ragone

In Attendance

Louise Corti (UK Data Archive), for item 5
Professor Felix Ritchie (Independent Accreditation Advisor (Capability)), for items 2 and 3
Deborah Wiltshire (UK Data Archive), for item 5

Apologies

Roger Halliday (Scottish Government)
Stephanie Howarth (Welsh Government)
Sarah Mathieson (Independent member)

1. Introductions

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed the members to the eighteenth meeting of the Research Accreditation Panel.
- 1.2 Members approved the minutes of the meeting held on 7 September 2020.
- 1.3 Lily O'Flynn updated the meeting with progress on actions from previous meetings. All actions were complete or otherwise in progress.

2. Processor Accreditation: ONS Secure Research Service Annual Review

- 2.1 Jason Marsh and Professor Felix Ritchie presented the Panel with the first annual review report of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Secure Research Service

(SRS). On behalf of the UK Statistics Authority's Accreditation team, Jason and Felix recommended that the accreditation of the ONS SRS should continue. The annual review demonstrated the following:

- i. The security posture of the ONS SRS has maintained the same overall level as assessed during initial accreditation in 2019, and in some areas had improved to a mature state; and,
- ii. The capability posture of the ONS SRS remains at the required level for accreditation as assessed during initial accreditation in 2019. In some areas, recommendations have been made for the ONS SRS to improve its state of maturity.

2.2 The Panel agreed to validate the continued accreditation of the ONS SRS under chapter 5 of part 5 of the Digital Economy Act, based on the evidence provided in the annual review report. However, the Panel acknowledged that some of the accreditation controls had regressed to a lower level of maturity and invited Peter Stokes, ONS SRS, to discuss how these controls will be improved at December's Research Accreditation Panel meeting.

ACTION: Peter Stokes to present on planned actions that the ONS SRS will take to enhance the maturity of the processing environment at the December 2020 RAP meeting.

3. Processor Accreditation: ONS Annual Review

3.1 Jason Marsh and Professor Felix Ritchie presented the Panel with the first annual review report of the Office for National Statistics (ONS). On behalf of the UK Statistics Authority's Accreditation team, Jason and Felix recommended that the accreditation of the ONS should continue. The annual review demonstrated the following:

- i. The security posture of the ONS has maintained the same overall level as assessed during the initial accreditation in 2019, and in some areas improved to a mature state; and,
- ii. The capability posture of the ONS remains at the level assessed during the initial accreditation in 2019. The capability assessor recommends that the ONS implement a number of recommendations to progress key capability controls towards a state of maturity.

3.2 The Panel agreed to validate the continued accreditation of the ONS under chapter 5 of part 5 of the Digital Economy Act, based on the evidence provided in the annual review report. The Panel acknowledged no outstanding points for improvement for the security controls reviewed and supported the Accreditation team's recommendation for improvements to be made on a number of capability control areas to enable the ONS to progress towards a state of increased maturity.

ACTION: ONS to present on the planned actions that the ONS will take to support the related capability control improvements at the December 2020 RAP meeting. Secretariat to identify most appropriate lead official to present.

3.3 The Panel reflected on the Information Commissioner's Office's (ICO) recently published outcome of an audit of the Department for Education's data protection practices, governance and other key control measures supporting the National Pupil Database and internally held databases, and the importance of legal compliance and data protection during the data sharing process. The Panel asked the UKSA/ONS Data Protection Officer to undertake an audit and review to provide assurance that DEA accredited parties are compliant with their legal obligations under the Research strand of the Digital Economy Act and the Data Protection legislation, as set out in the Research Code of Practice and Accreditation Criteria.

ACTION: Data Protection Officer to undertake an audit and review of the compliance of DEA accredited parties with their legal obligations as set out in the Research Code of Practice and Accreditation Criteria. The outcomes of this audit are to be shared with the Panel at a future RAP meeting.

- 3.4 The Panel agreed that it may be useful to invite a representative of the Information Commissioner's Office to a future RAP meeting so as to gain their insight into recommendations and areas of focus, especially in relation to data protection and data de-identification best practice.

ACTION: The Secretariat to invite ICO representative(s) to a future RAP meeting to discuss best practice and recommendations around data protection and data de-identification.

4. Project Accreditation: Processor Recommendation Proposal

- 4.1 Lily O'Flynn presented the Panel with a new process for presenting research project applications to the RAP for consideration. This new process aims to reduce the amount of paperwork submitted to the Panel for project consideration.
- 4.2 The Panel approved the proposed process to reduce the level of paperwork required in preparation of RAP meetings. The Panel will look at alternative solutions if this process does not significantly reduce time pressures.

ACTION: The Secretariat to implement the new process for the December RAP meeting, subject to ongoing review.

5. Project Accreditation

- 5.1 Lily O'Flynn presented the Panel with a report of the four projects that the RAP Secretariat agreed could be accredited via precedent, given their high level of similarity to previous projects. The Panel was satisfied that the precedent process had been applied rigorously and that the projects accredited via precedent were of significant similarity to projects previously accredited by the RAP.
- 5.2 Lily O'Flynn presented the Panel with a report of the three projects that had implemented major revisions at the request of the Panel. The Panel agreed that the implemented revisions were satisfactory and accredited the following projects:
- Evaluating Productivity Estimate from Information Technology Investments using UK microdata
 - Wellbeing in different occupations
 - The impact of early age voting on study choices
- 5.3 The Panel considered thirteen new projects and the following ten were accredited:
- Welfare and spending impact of COVID-19
 - Understanding Recent Fertility in the UK and Improving Methodologies for Fertility Forecasting
 - Exploring house sharing amongst people aged 30 and over in 2001 and 2011
 - The effect of policy uncertainty on firm productivity and trade
 - Glasgow City Region Economic Modelling
 - Using a city-region input-output table to model the impact of creative industries

- Fair to be unequal? Comparing the changes in earnings inequality in London and Beijing
- Estimation of energy demand drivers and the effect of public policies on consumption under the climate emergency
- Director relationships and UK firm performance
- The Impact of Innovation, Intellectual Property and Use of Standards on Business Performance

5.4 Emma Gordon asked whether researchers require project sponsorship to be in place ahead of an accreditation decision being agreed by the RAP. The Panel confirmed that the RAP is able to provide an accreditation decision on any project, as long as full and final data owner approvals are in place.

ACTION: The Secretariat to review the DEA Research Project Accreditation Application to ensure that this distinction around project sponsorship is clear to researchers.

6. Any Other Business

- 6.1 The Panel acknowledged the continuing ongoing progress on the DEA accreditation of the wider Scottish processing infrastructure.
- 6.2 The Panel noted that the Safe Researcher Training used to accredit researchers under the DEA is given by a number of training providers. To ensure that training providers are communicating the fundamental principles of Safe Researcher Training consistently, the Panel commissioned a review of the training that is currently provided to understand differences in training courses and advise on best practice. The Panel agreed that an overview of Safe Researcher Training practice should be reported to the RAP annually.

ACTION: The Secretariat to undertake a review of Safe Researcher Training and present the findings of the review to the Panel at the December 2020 RAP meeting. The Secretariat to ensure that this work is reported on annually.

6.3 The next Research Accreditation Panel meeting is on 7 December 2020.

