

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY
RESEARCH ACCREDITATION PANEL

Minute

Monday 7 September 2020

Present

Committee Members

Professor Paul Boyle (Chair)
Mark Brewin (representing Kevin Fletcher, HM Revenue & Customs)
Tricia Dodd (Independent member)
Chris Dibben (Independent member)
Andrew Garrett (Independent member)
Emma Gordon (UK Research and Innovation)
Sarah Henry (ONS)
Stephanie Howarth (Welsh Government)
Paul Lodge (Department for Work & Pensions)
Sarah Mathieson (Independent member)

Advisors

Jason Riches (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

In Attendance

Penny Babb (Head of Policy & Standards, Office for Statistics Regulation), for item 6

Apologies

Siobhan Carey (NISRA)
Roger Halliday (Scottish Government)

1. Introductions

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed the members to the seventeenth meeting of the Research Accreditation Panel.
- 1.2 Members approved the minutes of the meeting held on 9 July 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. Project Accreditation: New Projects

- 2.1 The Panel welcomed the pace at which COVID-related research projects are continuing to be put forward for accreditation, with the submission of multiple research project applications focusing on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic at this meeting.

- 2.2 Given the widespread impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on UK society and the economy, the Panel agreed that researchers may need support in thinking through the possible implications of the ongoing pandemic on planned research projects that are not directly related to COVID-19. The Panel suggested that researchers should consider this during the application process to allow any possible changes to project applications to be made ahead of submission to the RAP.

ACTION: The Secretariat to liaise with DEA Accredited Processing Environments to agree a process that allows researchers to consider the possible impacts of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the effects this may have on planned research that is not directly related to COVID-19.

- 2.4 The Panel considered fourteen new projects and the following eight projects were accredited:

- Analysis of the clustering of UK digital sectors
- Health of Older People in Places (HOPE): an asset for economic and social improvement for all
- Extending the use of the former measures of social class beyond 2021
- Understanding the social determinants of place of death in older adults
- Quantitative impact evaluation of transport schemes on productivity and employment
- Economic Cycles and Labour Market Outcomes of Migrants and Natives
- Occupational differences in mortality from Covid19
- Religion and Labour Market Outcomes in England and Wales: 1991-2011

3. Project Accreditation: Precedent Report

- 3.1 Lily O'Flynn presented the Panel with a report of the six 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.

- 3.2 Given the rising number of research projects submitted for accreditation that are exploring similar areas of research to existing research projects, the Panel agreed that it would be useful for processing environments to facilitate conversations between researchers working towards similar goals. While the Panel recognise that some level of duplication is positive in allowing research results to be validated, it would be useful for processing environments to point out these areas of similarity during application stages to allow researchers to collaborate where beneficial.

ACTION: The Secretariat to work with DEA Accredited Processors to help user support teams identify DEA Accredited Projects and new applications with strong similarities, and facilitate a dialogue between those researchers involved to reduce duplication and increase collaboration.

4. Processor Accreditation: Ongoing Applications Update

- 4.1 Andy Wall updated the Research Accreditation Panel on the status of the ongoing accreditation of processors. Andy confirmed that little progress had been made on the ongoing accreditation of the NRS and eDRIS environments in Scotland, due to the prioritisation of COVID-19 related work in each setting.

- 4.2 The Panel welcomed Stephanie Howarth's confirmation that NHS Wales Informatics Service (NWIS) is now in a position to progress with its application for Processor Accreditation under the DEA.

ACTION: Stephanie Howarth to update the Panel on NWIS's progress towards processor accreditation at the October Research Accreditation Panel meeting.

5. ADR UK: Barriers and opportunities for administrative data linkage

- 5.1 Emma Gordon presented a paper on the ADR UK's recently commissioned study to understand barriers and opportunities for administrative data linkage. Long-standing barriers identified in this study include: (i) resource and infrastructure pressures in government departments, and (ii) existing confusion and misconceptions around legal gateways.

- 5.2 The Panel agreed that the Research strand of the Digital Economy Act removes legal ambiguity for departments by providing a generic legal gateway for public authorities to make data that does not relate to an organisation's health functions available for research purposes.

ACTION: ADR UK and the UK Statistics Authority to work to address existing perception of legal uncertainty and make clear to public authorities that want to share data for research that the Research Strand of the Digital Economy provides a generic legal gateway to enable this.

- 5.3 The Panel also agreed that the research community would benefit from increased awareness around the security and confidentiality controls embedded within the DEA research framework, to promote the DEA's safeguards and governance processes to data owners, and also align the understanding of the research community with the DEA's governance requirements and accreditation criteria.

6. Office for Statistics Regulation Guidance: Unlocking the value of data through onwards sharing

- 6.1 Penny Babb, Head of Policy and Standards at the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR), presented the Panel with a draft version of the OSR's guidance on unlocking the value of data through onward sharing. The guidance focuses on what departments can do, and how departments can better work together, to improve the onwards sharing of data for public good research.

- 6.2 The Panel supported the OSR's guidance and its references to the Digital Economy Act Research framework and user support materials.

- 6.3 The Panel supported the OSR's acknowledgement of the importance of metadata and data curation in supporting the onwards use of administrative data. The Panel agreed that data quality is a key enabler for data re-use for public good purposes.

7. Any Other Business

- 7.1 The Secretariat introduced a proposal to streamline current project accreditation processes to the Panel. The Secretariat welcomes any comments on the proposal via correspondence ahead of the October Research Accreditation Panel meeting, to guide a substantive discussion of the proposal in October.

ACTION: The Secretariat to present the proposal for streamlining the current project accreditation process at the October Research Accreditation Panel meeting.

- 7.2 The Panel agreed the report of the ongoing accreditation of projects requiring minor revisions and project change requests by the Secretariat.
- 7.3 The Secretariat welcomed comments from the Panel on the UK Statistics Authority's upcoming presentation on the Research strand of the Digital Economy Act at the Data for Policy Conference 2020.
- 7.4 The next meeting of the Research Accreditation Panel is on 22 October 2020.