

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY
RESEARCH ACCREDITATION PANEL

Minute

Thursday 9 September 2021

Present

Committee Members

Andrew Garrett (Chair, deputising for Professor Paul Boyle)
Mark Brewin (HM Revenue & Customs)
Chris Dibben (Independent member)
Roger Halliday (Scottish Government)
Sarah Henry (ONS)
Stephanie Howarth (Welsh Government)
Alex Singleton (Independent Member)
Misa Tanaka (Independent member)

Advisors

Jason Riches (Legal Services, ONS/UK Statistics Authority)
Ross Young (Data Protection Officer, UK Statistics Authority)
Andy Wall (Chief Security Officer, ONS)

UK Statistics Authority

Sophie Gwilym
Lily O'Flynn
Grazia Ragone
Simon Whitworth

In Attendance

Louise Brown (Research Services & Data Access, ONS) for item 4
Sarah Fisher (Research Services & Data Access, ONS) for item 4

Apologies

Professor Paul Boyle (Chair)
Tricia Dodd (Independent member)
Emma Gordon (UK Research and Innovation)

1. Introductions

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed the members to the twenty-second meeting of the Research Accreditation Panel.
- 1.2 Members approved the minutes of the meeting held on 9 March 2021.
- 1.3 Lily O'Flynn updated the meeting with progress on actions from previous meetings. All actions were complete or otherwise in progress. The Secretariat confirmed that recruitment for new independent members were in progress, ONS are working to coordinate the Welsh and Scottish infrastructure reviews and the Frequently Asked Questions document will be published on the UK Statistics Authority website.

2 Integrated Data Service: Data Stewardship Model

- 2.1 Andy Wall presented the data stewardship model for the Integrated Data Service (IDS) which is being funded by Central Government to bring together ready-to-use data and enable faster and wider collaborative public good research. The presentation set out the

concept of data stewardship that IDS research governance processes are being built upon. The model set out the accountable individual(s) responsible for the data available on the platform, and its use with levels of accountability falling into three categories which will be developed as the model progresses.

2.2 The Panel welcomed Andy's presentation. The following comments were raised in the discussion that followed:

- i. The RAP was supportive of the levelled stewardship approach proposed, as this would allow for decisions to be made on data access in a standardised way across government departments;
- ii. The RAP recommended this approach be socialised across key data owning government departments to understand the level of buy-in for this model across government;
- iii. The RAP agreed that its primary role within this data stewardship model would be an independent assessment of the public good of a research project; and,
- iv. The RAP requested to be kept updated with progress on the operationalisation of this model within IDS governance, so that the RAP is able to further understand how it can best support access to data via the IDS.

2.3 The Panel approved of the suggested model in principle, as an appropriate concept to support access to data within the Integrated Data Service.

ACTION: ONS to update the Panel on engagement with other government departments on planned governance mechanisms for the IDS.

ACTION: The Secretariat to present an item at the next meeting of the Research Accreditation Panel to set out how the ONS plans to operationalise the data stewardship model for the IDS through discussion surrounding red, amber, and green project categorisation, and the new project application form.

3 Updated to Terms of Reference: Approved Researcher Gateway and Integrated Data Service (IDS)

- 3.1 Lily O'Flynn and Simon Whitworth presented the Panel with an updated Terms of Reference to:
- i. include the RAP's role in providing oversight of project accreditation under the Approved Researcher Gateway in the Statistics and Registration Service Act (SRA) 2007; and,
 - ii. clarify the RAP's oversight responsibilities for research projects accredited for access in the Integrated Data Service (IDS).
- 3.2 The Panel was supportive of assuming oversight of the Approved Researcher gateway within the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007. The following comments were raised during discussion:
- i. The RAP agreed that the Digital Economy Act 2017 (DEA) Research powers should remain the default way in which the ONS makes its data available for research. In those limited circumstances where the ONS is unable to make the data it holds available under the DEA, due to exemptions within the legislation, the RAP agreed that it is a positive step to establish common governance standards across legal gateways to ensure common and transparent standards of accreditation.
 - ii. The RAP was assured that the additional datasets that could now be made available within accredited research projects under the framework that the RAP has oversight of will not lead to a vast increase in RAP members' workload, and requested that the Secretariat tracks levels of research projects requesting accreditation via each gateway.

ACTION: The Secretariat to monitor the number of projects coming through each legal gateway the RAP has oversight of and feedback to the RAP in the event the RAP's workload vastly increases.

3.3 The Panel requested that accredited processors and the Secretariat ensure that the legal gateways used to make data available within accredited projects are clearly labelled in all paperwork relating to a research project application to aid with project review.

ACTION: DEA accredited processing environments and the Secretariat to make clear on research project accreditation applications, the UK Statistics Authority website and the collaboration platform used by the Panel of the legal gateways that are in use depending on the datasets being accessed as part of accredited projects.

ACTION: The Secretariat to update the UK Statistics Authority website and public facing materials to give clarity on the RAP's expanded role as having oversight of Approved Researcher gateway in the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007, as of 9 September 2021. The ONS to update public facing materials to clarify that the Approved Researcher gateway in the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 is being operationalised in line with the Research Code of Practice and Accreditation Criteria.

3.4 The Panel approved the new Terms of Reference.

4 Person Accreditation: Update to the Processor for Researcher Accreditation

4.1 Sarah Fisher (ONS) presented a proposal to streamline the way in which government analysts are accredited as researchers under the DEA. This change has been motivated by emphasis on streamlining access to data in the context of the Integrated Data Service.

4.2 As part of their recruitment into the Civil Service, government researchers are often badged in a Government Statistician Group. Sarah assured that RAP that the criterion used to badge a government researcher to a Government Statistician Group aligns to the DEA Code of Practice requirements.

4.3 To minimise duplication in form completion, the RAP agreed for badged government analysts will complete a revised researcher application form, which only collects additional information needed. The Panel recommended that analytical profession subgroups are reviewed to ensure that these all meet the same criteria that are specified within the new accreditation form, as subgroup requirements may sometimes differ.

ACTION: Sarah Fisher to look into requirements for all data professionals and ensure that sub-categories in each profession share same requirements so as to give assurance to RAP that all meet the relevant criteria. Sarah Fisher to update the RAP if necessary.

4.3 The Panel members were very positive about the streamlining approach and agreed to the operationalisation of this new process.

5 Project Accreditation Tool Review

5.1 Sophie Gwilym presented the Panel with an update on the three-month review of the Project Accreditation Tool which is used to accredit projects at an official level. It was noted the Tool has been implemented well, with positive reviews from accredited processors that are implementing the tool, and an overall decreased waiting time for researchers submitting research project accreditation applications.

5.2 The Panel were very supportive of the improvements made to the Project Accreditation Tool, which focused on removing two categories from the Tool to remove duplication of information already collected as part of a research project application's ethical review.

ACTION: The Secretariat to operationalise the improved Project Accreditation Tool as agreed, through circulation across all DEA accredited processors that support researchers in completing research project accreditation applications.

6 Any Other Business

6.1 The Chair noted the 'for information' reports. These included:

- i. a governance process overview for research projects that were enabled via both the DEA and an alternative legal gateway;
- ii. a paper providing RAP members with an overview of the Longitudinal Educational Outcomes (LEO) dataset that has been recently acquired by the ONS SRS and made available via the DEA; and,
- iii. the usual reports of accreditation processes undertaken by the UKSA and overseen by the RAP.

6.2 The Panel noted the urgency surrounding the accreditation of the processing environments National Records Scotland (NRS) and Digital Health and Care Wales (DHCW), and agreed for these to be reviewed via correspondence once available.

ACTION: The Secretariat to circulate via correspondence the full accreditation reports of National Records Scotland and Digital Health and Care Wales once ready.