UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

RESEARCH ACCREDITATION PANEL

Minute

Thursday 13 February 2020

Present

Committee Members
Professor Paul Boyle (Chair)
Mark Brewin (representing Kevin Fletcher, HM Revenue & Customs)
Siobhan Carey (NISRA)
Chris Dibben (Independent member)
Andrew Garrett (Independent member)
Emma Gordon (UK Research and Innovation)

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
Tricia Dodd (Independent member)
Roger Halliday (Scottish Government)
Sarah Henry (ONS)
Glyn Jones (Welsh Government)
Sarah Mathieson (Independent member)
Neil McIvor (Department for Education)

1. Introductions

1.1 The Chair welcomed the members to the twelfth meeting of the Research Accreditation Panel.

1.2 Members approved the minutes of the meeting held on 17 January 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 Mark Brewin, on behalf of Kevin Fletcher, updated the Research Accreditation Panel on the following issues discussed at the January 2020 meeting that the Panel had requested additional information on:

   i. Project 2020/001 is accessing data in both the HMRC Datalab and the ONS Secure Research Service, instead of in one processing environment, due to the lead researcher's research design. HMRC Datalab approved an application relating to this project, which requested access to HMRC data only in July

2019, while the secondary application to access the data in the ONS Secure Research Service only came to the Panel in January 2020.

ii. Kevin Fletcher has not yet discussed the possibility of approving use of Race Disparity Audit data by DEA accredited researchers in projects accredited to the Research Accreditation Panel on an ongoing basis with HMRC's executive data governance board.

ACTION: Kevin Fletcher to update the Panel on whether HMRC's executive data governance board approves use of the Race Disparity Audit in DEA accredited projects on an ongoing basis, once these discussions have taken place.

2.   Project Pipeline

2.1   Peter Stokes and Emma Gordon updated the Research Accreditation Panel on the expected pipeline of projects due for submission to the Panel over the coming months, as no projects were submitted for consideration by the Panel at this meeting.

2.2   The Panel noted the lack of projects and suggested that the slow-down in projects may be a maturity issue, as the Panel only began accrediting projects in the last four months. Peter Stokes assured that Panel that a minimum of eight projects from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Secure Research Service will be submitted for consideration at the March 2020 RAP meeting.

2.3   The Panel asked whether enough support and guidance is given to researchers wanting to submit a project for consideration at RAP. As well as written guidance available on the UK Statistics Authority website, Peter Stokes confirmed that additional guidance will be integrated into the Research Accreditation Shopfront online portal. The Secretariat agreed to work with ONS's Research Services and Data Access team to increase and improve the range of user support guidance available for researchers wishing to use the Research Strand of the Digital Economy Act (DEA).

ACTION: The Secretariat to work with ONS's Research Services and Data Access to improve user support and guidance for researchers wanting to submit a research project application for consideration by the Research Accreditation Panel.

2.4   ONS are continuing to make data available through the Approved Researcher gateway for project applications from UK Data Service, as UK Data Service's application to become an accredited processor under the DEA is still ongoing. The Panel raised concerns over this twin-track process whereby data is continuing to be made available under multiple legal gateways where the level of oversight and transparency in the security of processing environments and the research uses of public data varies considerably. The Panel agreed that this risks encouraging a fragmented data access landscape, which could undermine public trust, add further complexity and delays for researchers, and compromise the realisation of the benefits of the Research Strand of the DEA with all the safeguards attached to it.

ACTION: The Secretariat to present a paper which provides an overview of the current accreditation landscape for access to administrative data to the March 2020 meeting of the Research Accreditation Panel.

2.5   The Panel agreed that, while data-owning government departments may have alternative legal gateways to make their own data available to the research community, the DEA should be used to make linked datasets from multiple data-owning departments available to the research community. The Research

Accreditation Panel provides independent scrutiny of research projects, with input from key data-owning government departments, which should remove the need for consultation of multiple approvals panels for access to linked datasets. This should provide the research community with more timely and efficient access to administrative data and the ADR-UK should seek to take advantage of the opportunities that this presents.

3.   DEA Processor Accreditation Status Update

3.1   Andy Wall updated the Research Accreditation Panel on the status of the ongoing accreditation of processors. An accreditation report for NISRA's Census Office will be considered at this meeting, while the Panel can expect accreditation reports for the ADR Scotland processing environments and UK Data Archive by the May 2020 meeting. The Panel welcomed this progress.

3.2   Mark Brewin confirmed that HMRC's Datalab is considering processor accreditation under the DEA. Peter Stokes confirmed that ONS data cannot be transferred to the HMRC Datalab until HMRC Datalab becomes accredited under the DEA. Andy Wall offered to facilitate a call between representatives of HMRC Datalab and the UK Statistics Authority Accreditation team to ensure HMRC colleagues understand the full requirements of the accreditation process.

4.   Accreditation Report for SAIL/UKSeRP

4.1   Andy Wall presented the Panel with an accreditation assessment for the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency's Census Office. The Research Accreditation Panel agreed that the accreditation process had been applied rigorously to NISRA Census and took the decision to accredit the facility for the preparation of data for five years.

ACTION: The Chair to write to NISRA Census Office to inform them of their accreditation.

5.   DEA Processor Annual Review Process

5.1   Andy Wall presented new guidance for the processor accreditation process, which had been updated to provide information on scheduled annual reviews for DEA accredited processors.

5.2   The Panel asked whether the UK Statistics Authority Accreditation team had adequate resource to commit to annual reviews for an increasing number of DEA accredited processors. Andy Wall assured the Panel that the proposed annual review process is manageable; the UK Statistics Authority Accreditation team can commit two working days for each annual review for between 15 and 20 DEA accredited processors.

5.3   The Panel agreed the proposed annual review process, which is to be published on the UK Statistics Authority website.

ACTION: The Secretariat to publish the updated DEA Processor Annual Review Guidance on the UK Statistics Authority website.

6.   DEA Accreditation Metrics Report

6.1   Simon Whitworth presented the Panel with updated metrics detailing how the accreditation of projects, researchers and processors is progressing.

6.2   The Panel welcomed the amendments made to the metrics, suggested in the December 2019 meeting. The Panel asked for information to be included to illustrate the following:

      i.   Linked data from multiple government departments that is being made available to the research community through the Digital Economy Act; and

      ii.   How quickly researchers are getting access to data following accreditation by RAP.

ACTION: The Secretariat to implement the suggested amendments to the Research Accreditation Panel metrics dashboard. ONS's Research Services and Data Access to provide metrics from the Research Accreditation Shopfront to feed into the metrics report at the April 2020 meeting.

6.3   Mark Brewin asked whether researchers trained to use the HMRC Datalab are accredited under the DEA. Peter Stokes confirmed that, as HMRC is an approved Safe training provider, researchers that have undertaken HMRC Safe training can apply for accreditation under the DEA without needed to undertake any further training. Should HMRC Datalab pursue processor accreditation under the DEA, researchers trained to use the processing environment could be ported over to automatically receive DEA researcher accreditation.

7.   Research Accreditation Shopfront Portal Demonstration

7.1   Sarah Fisher, ONS Research Services and Data Access, presented the Research Accreditation Panel with an overview of the Research Accreditation Shopfront online portal, which is going into public beta on 19 February 2020 for researchers to submit project applications to the Research Accreditation Panel. The Panel welcomed this.

7.2   The Panel asked whether research projects planning to use DEA accredited processing environments other than the ONS Secure Research Service could use the online portal to submit research project applications. Sarah Fisher confirmed that the online portal will accept research project applications for all DEA accredited processors. However, the online portal does not yet have the functionality to allow researchers to book research slots in processing environments outside of the ONS Secure Research Service.

7.3   Sarah Fisher confirmed that the Research Accreditation Shopfront can provide real-time performance indicators to the Panel, such as the length of time it takes for a project application to be completed and submitted to RAP, and the time it takes for accredited projects to receive access to data. The Panel asked for this information to be included in bi-monthly DEA metrics reports and Sarah Fisher agreed to provide this.

ACTION: ONS Research Services and Data Access to provide to the Secretariat agreed metrics available from the Research Accreditation Shopfront for inclusion in bi-monthly metrics reports.

8.   Any Other Business

8.1   The Chair welcomed that Paul Lodge, Chief Data Officer, Department for Work & Pensions, will join the Panel as a member from March 2020 onwards.

8.2   The Chair asked the Panel to identify potential influencers within the research community that the Secretariat can approach to discuss the benefits of using the Research Strand of the Digital Economy Act.

ACTION: Panel members to identify potential influencers in the research community. The Secretariat to follow up with these key influencers and discuss the benefits of using the Research Strand of the DEA.

8.3   The date of the next meeting is 16 March 2020.