UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

Research Accreditation Panel

Minutes

Monday 23rd June 2025
Microsoft Teams
13:00-15:00

Members Present

Paul Boyle (Chair)
Sue Bateman (Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs)
Mark Brewin (HM Revenue & Customs)
Michael Chapman (NHS England)
Chris Dibben (Independent Member)
Tricia Dodd (Independent Member)
Andrew Garrett (Independent Member)
Emma Gordon (Administrative Data Research UK)
Roger Halliday (Independent Member)
Sarah Henry (Office for National Statistics)
Stephanie Howarth (Welsh Government)
Mike Jones (Department for Work & Pensions)
Alistair McAlpine (Scottish Government)
Andrew McHugh (Independent Member)
Philip Wales (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency)

Advisers

Nicola Shearman (Data Protection Officer, UK Statistics Authority)
Keith Nicholson (Security Advisor, Office for National Statistics)

Other Attendees

Colin Farrell (Office for National Statistics) (Items 7, 8 and 9)
Jil Matheson (Item 5)
Rhys Nadin (Items 8 and 9)
Johanna Salvage (Items 8 and 9)
Bill South (Item 4)
Brogan Taylor (Item 4)

Secretariat

Daniel Beck (UK Statistics Authority)
Lewis Hopcroft (UK Statistics Authority)
Stephanie Jacobs (UK Statistics Authority)

Apologies

Ann Berrington (Independent Member)
Martin Bowyer (Central Digital and Data Office)
Geraint Jowers (HM Revenue & Customs)
Alexander Singleton (Independent Member)

1. Minute and matters arising from the previous meeting

1.1 Members were welcomed to the meeting and apologies were received from Ann Berrington, Martin Bowyer, Geraint Jowers and Alex Singleton.

1.2 The minutes from the meeting on 31 March 2025 and 15 May 2025 were agreed, and actions were reviewed.

2. Review of Accreditation Criteria – Proposed Plan

2.1 Stephanie Jacobs introduced a paper providing RAP with an update on the plans for a full review of the Digital Economy Act 2017 (DEA) Accreditation Criteria (the Criteria) for processors, researchers and projects.

2.2 RAP members were invited to consider and comment on the proposed plans to:

i. initially undertake an informal engagement exercise to ensure the Authority understand the public's views on the different areas of the Criteria and evaluate the full extent of challenges faced;
ii. analyse the information collected during an informal engagement exercise and provide findings at a future RAP meeting along with a proposal for next steps, subject to RAP members feedback;
iii. proceed with formal consultation in late Autumn, subject to the Authority's Executive Committee approval; and
iv. analyse the formal responses at the beginning of 2026 with a view to publish new Criteria by Spring 2026, if necessary.

2.3 RAP were supportive of the proposal provided by the Authority to publish new Criteria by Spring 2026 following formal consultation and requested consideration of the following when carrying out this work:

i. engage with any persons that may have raised issues with the Criteria prior to the formal consultation to ensure the Authority will not be unexpectedly inundated with responses;
ii. ensure the consultation is as open as possible to encourage views from everyone; and
iii. if any major or more significant changes are identified, we should consider utilising existing mechanisms for active public engagement and ensure that these changes are supported by the appropriate legal frameworks.

ACTION: The Authority to proceed with their proposed plans for a review of the Digital Economy Act 2017 (DEA) Accreditation Criteria (the Criteria) for processors, researchers and projects and provide findings from the information gathering exercise to RAP in September.

3. Research Accreditation Panel Membership Review Update

3.1 Daniel Beck presented a paper providing RAP with a summary of the results from the recent skills matrix exercise and updated the panel on the Authority's RAP membership review.

3.2 RAP members were invited to review the latest findings from the Authority's RAP membership review and suggest improvements to the Authority's proposals.

3.3 RAP considered the findings from the skills matrix exercise and provided the following feedback:

i. the results from the skills matrix exercise were very interesting and show where there's limited experience or knowledge within the panel;
ii. it would be beneficial to understand the number of research projects accredited under the DEA under the research areas outlined within the skills matrix exercise;
iii. the RAP membership could be amended to ensure there are members who cover the gaps in experience or skills; and

iv. whilst it appears there are significant gaps in knowledge relating to business and economic research areas however, panel members queried whether this is due to the way the research areas are grouped and that we may have more experience that the exercise suggested.

3.4 RAP considered the implementation of tenure and discussed the following:

i. RAP members were supportive of the implementation of tenure and agreed it is healthy to ensure there is a regular turnover;
ii. the replacement of RAP members should be staggered to avoid potential issues with replacing multiple members at once and consideration of the resources within the Secretariat is required to ensure they are not overburdened with continuous recruitment. Therefore, a recruitment exercise should take place every couple of years;
iii. it is important to maintain continuity whilst enabling new ideas and fresh thinking within RAP;
iv. there should be care when replacing members to ensure the turnover of RAP membership is not forced, replacing members with a high level of interest and care for the role with others who potentially would not be as involved;
v. new ideas and fresh thinking could be provided to the RAP through alternative mechanisms such as encouraging views from others without requiring them to join the panel; and
vi. it could be appropriate to expand RAP membership before reducing it due to the amount of time it takes for new members to onboard and begin contributing effectively.

3.5 RAP members were supportive of the Secretariat's proposed updates to the Terms of Reference which will assist the project accreditation service and ensure all panel members are complying with their responsibilities.

ACTION: The Secretariat to provide RAP with information on the number of research projects accredited under the DEA under the relevant research areas and compare this with gaps identified in the skills matrix exercise.

ACTION: The Secretariat to review RAP membership and consider whether there are any people from research institutes who could cover existing gaps in skills or experience on the panel, particularly in the economics field.

ACTION: The Secretariat to consider whether it would be appropriate to first expand the RAP membership before reducing it to allow new members sufficient time to onboard, to begin contributing effectively, and to contribute to assessments.

ACTION: The Secretariat to draft a proposal on RAP membership including recommendations for implementing tenure at the September 2025 RAP meeting.

4. The Secure Research Service's Position on Handling the Risk of Reidentification

4.1 Bill South introduced a paper providing RAP with background information on how SRS are handling the risk of reidentification following the recent delays affecting several Secure Research Service (SRS) research projects.

4.2 RAP considered the information presented to them and raised the following points when discussing whether Trusted Research Environments (TREs) were complying with section 64.3 and 64.6 of the DEA:

i. consideration is required around what is considered 'reasonably likely';
ii. it is important to ensure the balance of measures in place to mitigate the risk of re-identification is appropriate and consider whether the benefits outweigh the potential risks; and
iii. data owners should be made aware of the flexibility around this control, and that they are able to exercise discretion around uses of their data and whether they are comfortable with risk mitigations put in place by TREs

4.3 RAP agreed that a session would be beneficial to allow TREs the opportunity to showcase how they are mitigating the risk of reidentification and complying with S64.3 and S64.6 of the DEA, recognising the need to bear in mind the protections provided by all of the 'five safes'.

ACTION: The Secretariat to provide the slides presented by Bill South to RAP members as requested.

ACTION: The Secretariat to invite data owners and TREs to a session which allows TREs the opportunity to showcase how they are mitigating the risk of reidentification and complying with S64.3 and S64.6 of the Digital Economy Act (DEA) 2017.

5. The Work of the UK Committee on Research Integrity

5.1 Jil Matheson presented to RAP on the UK Committee on Research Integrity (UKCORI), the concordat to support Research Integrity's principles and described their current work relating to research misconduct, AI and research integrity.

5.2 Panel members were invited to consider how they could contribute to strengthening integrity, provide feedback on whether there are any issues they foresee, and raise any queries they may have.

5.3 RAP raised queries relating to various aspects of the presentation and provided Jil with feedback based on their experiences. Points raised were:

i. the RAP welcomed the update and recognised how central research integrity is to the business of RAP;
ii. reproducibility is a major theme in discussions around data sharing and how it often complicates these data discussions. Jil explained that UKCORI focus on making data safely available and encouraging its ethical reuse, guided by care and responsibility toward participants;
iii. why aren't some government departments publishing their statements of compliance? Jil acknowledged that while it is not always clear why they don't, it often seems to relate more to systematics issues and needing ministerial sign off, rather than intentional avoidance;
iv. large language models have made more people interested in data, even in fields that didn't focus on it before. This has raised questions about where data comes from, how good it is, and how it's used. Statisticians have a chance to help, but the fast changes and lack of clear rules have created some uncertainty; and
v. embedding the reproducibility of research from the start builds trust with data owners. UKCORI are also showcasing good practice through case studies and welcome contributions to help amplify successful work.

6. Update on the Work of the Administrative Data Research UK's Task and Finish Group

6.1 Daniel Beck introduced a paper providing RAP with an update on the work of Administrative Data Research UK's (ADR UK's) Task and Finish Group to reduce duplicative requests for researchers' information during the application process. RAP members were informed of the plan for the next six months of Task and Finish Group work.

6.2 RAP members were invited to review the update and offer advice on the plan of work as appropriate. RAP considered the update and provided the following feedback:

i. Health Data Research UK (HDR UK) have completed a similar exercise and it is recommended to build upon the work already completed;
ii. having a governance structure on how changes will be made to the current project application process will be a useful outcome; and
iii. it is important to ensure there is a realistic timetable for any changes required and that there is effective engagement with those responsible for the changes.

ACTION: The Secretariat to engage with HDR UK to understand the outcomes from their work which could be built upon through the work of the Administrative Data Research UK's Task and Finish Group

7. Accreditation Extension for Edinburgh Parallel Computing Centre and electronic Data Research and Innovation Service, to Align Scottish National Safe Haven Accreditation Cycles

7.1 Colin Farrell introduced a paper providing RAP with a proposal to extend the accreditation for Edinburgh Parallel Computing Centre (EPCC) and electronic Data Research and Innovation Service (eDRIS) by one year to align with National Records for Scotland (NRS).

7.2 RAP members were invited to approve the extension of EPCC and eDRIS' respective accreditations as processors under the DEA until 31 December 2026, subject to an additional annual review that would be considered at the December 2025 RAP meeting.

7.3 RAP were supportive of the proposal to extend the accreditation for EPCC and eDRIS by one year to align with NRS.

8. DEA Processor Accreditation: Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency Research Support Unit First Annual Accreditation Review, Preparation and Provision of Data

8.1 Colin Farrell and Rhys Nadin introduced a paper providing RAP with the outcomes of the assessment under the DEA requirements for a decision on the accreditation of Northern Ireland and Statistics Research Agency Research Support Unit (NISRA RSU).

8.2 RAP members were invited to review the assessment report for NISRA RSU, consider and comment on the assessment outcomes and recommendation and decide on the accreditation status of NISRA RSU under the terms of the DEA.

8.3 RAP were supportive of the findings and recommendation provided by the DEA assessors and agreed to continue the accreditation of NISRA RSU for the preparation and provision of data under Chapter 5 of Part 5 of the DEA, based on the evidence provided in the accreditation report.

9. DEA Processor Accreditation: Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency Census Office Full Re-Accreditation Review, Preparation of Data

9.1 Colin Farrell and Rhys Nadin introduced a paper providing RAP with the outcomes of the assessment under the DEA requirements for a decision on the accreditation of Northern Ireland and Statistics Research Agency Census Office (NISRA Census Office).

9.2 RAP members were invited to review the assessment report for NISRA Census Office, consider and comment on the assessment outcomes and recommendation and decide on the accreditation status of NISRA Census Office under the terms of the DEA.

9.3 RAP were supportive of the findings and recommendation provided by the DEA assessors and agreed to continue the accreditation of NISRA Census Office for the preparation of data under Chapter 5 of Part 5 of the DEA, based on the evidence provided in the accreditation report.

10. Any Other Business

10.1 The Chair informed RAP that a draft of a blog post to highlight the work of the panel and any improvements made over the last 5 years since their establishment. RAP members were invited to provide their considerations on what could be included to the Secretariat via correspondence.

10.2 RAP members were invited to provide an expression of interest to become deputy chair of RAP if interested.

10.3 RAP were content with the supplementary information provided within the paper pack and were invited to review the forward agenda before providing feedback to the Secretariat to ensure important discussions are scheduled.

10.4 The next RAP meeting is scheduled for 22 September 2025.