

**UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY**  
**RESEARCH ACCREDITATION PANEL**

**Minute**

**Thursday 12 December 2019**

**Present**

**Committee Members**

Professor Paul Boyle (Chair)  
Siobhan Carey (NISRA)  
Chris Dibben (Independent member)  
Tricia Dodd (Independent member)  
Kevin Fletcher (HM Revenue & Customs)  
Andrew Garrett (Independent member)  
Emma Gordon (UK Research and Innovation)  
Roger Halliday (Scottish Government)  
Sarah Henry (ONS)  
Glyn Jones (Welsh Government)

**Advisors**

Jason Riches (representing 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**

Emily Mason-Apps  
Lily O'Flynn  
Simon Whitworth

**Apologies**

Neil McIvor (Department for Education)

**1. Introductions**

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed the members to the tenth meeting of the Research Accreditation Panel.
- 1.2 Emma Gordon raised some comments on section 3.2 of the minute of the November Research Accreditation Panel meeting, agreed by the Panel members on 27 November 2019. Emma's comments will be communicated to the Secretariat via correspondence.
- 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 In Mark Brewin's absence, Kevin Fletcher assured the Panel that re-use of the Race Disparity Audit dataset for research purposes has been agreed in principle at the HMRC executive level. As data owners, final approval will be given on a case-by-case basis at official-level once research project applications are received.

## **2. DEA Processor Accreditation Status Update**

- 2.1 Andy Wall updated the Research Accreditation Panel on the status of the ongoing accreditation of processors. Andy noted that target accreditation dates have slipped, as the organisations involved need to provide additional evidence and related documentation, and therefore require rescheduling. The UK Statistics Authority Accreditation team is working closely with prospective processors to ensure that final evidence packs can be reviewed in January to provide the Research Accreditation Panel with an accreditation recommendation by the February meeting.

## **3. Proposed Accredited Processor Security Assurance Framework**

- 3.1 Andy Wall provided the Research Accreditation Panel with a proposed process for assuring data owners of the security of DEA-accredited processing environments.
- 3.2 The Panel agreed the UK Statistics Authority Accreditation team may share the high-level accreditation recommendation attached to a DEA-accredited processor and a summary spreadsheet of security and capability controls with data owners seeking assurance.
- 3.3 The Panel agreed that data owners requesting additional assurance may request sight of the UK Statistics Authority Accreditation team's evidence pack, through a request made to the Research Accreditation Panel. Given the sensitive nature of the information held in the processor accreditation evidence pack, Andy Wall proposed a process for making this information available to data owners in a secure way. This would involve the Accreditation team presenting the detailed information to data owners during a site visit, while accompanied by a representative of the DEA-accredited processor in question. The Panel asked for this process to be formalised and presented to a future Research Accreditation Panel meeting for agreement.

**ACTION: Andy Wall to present a procedure for giving data owners information about the accreditation assessments and evidence for DEA-accredited processing environments, for agreement at the January meeting of the Research Accreditation Panel.**

## **4. DEA Accreditation Metrics Report**

- 4.1 Simon Whitworth presented the Research Accreditation Panel with proposed metrics detailing how the accreditation of projects, researchers and processors are progressing.
- 4.2 The Panel welcomed the report, noting that the metrics illustrate the effective functioning of the accreditation of research projects under the Research Strand of the Digital Economy Act. The Panel suggested amendments to the metrics presented to highlight more clearly the geography of accredited projects and the cumulative number of researchers accredited under the Digital Economy Act.
- 4.3 At the request of the Research Accreditation Panel, Peter Stokes agreed to provide metrics that illustrate the following:
- i. The level of researcher interest in the Research Strand of the Digital Economy Act, from first contact with ONS's Research Support and Data Access team to submission of a research project application to the Research Accreditation Panel;
  - ii. The average length of the Research Accreditation process for researchers, from first contact with ONS's Research Support and Data Access team to receiving access to requested data in a DEA-accredited processing environment; and
  - iii. The impact of DEA-accredited research projects that have provided a particularly significant public benefit, set out in a series of case studies.

**ACTION: The Secretariat to implement the suggested amendments to the Research Accreditation Panel metrics dashboard. Peter Stokes to provide metrics on the issues raised by the Research Accreditation Panel for presentation at a future meeting.**

4.4 The Panel asked about the number of projects that are taking place within the DEA accredited processor environments that are happening outside the Research Strand of the DEA. Concerns were raised about inconsistencies in project approval decisions across the administrative data access landscape. The Panel asked for an overview of the data access approvals landscape for researchers requesting access to administrative data to inform a discussion on the Research Accreditation Panel's role within the wider administrative data approvals process.

**ACTION: The Secretariat to present a paper which maps out the approvals processes at a future meeting of the Research Accreditation Panel.**

**5. Project Accreditation: Major Revision Re-submissions**

5.1 The Panel reconsidered two projects that had implemented major revisions recommended by the Panel at its meeting in November 2019. The following projects were accredited, following satisfactory implementation of revisions:

- Homeownership of the young
- Research on homeless mortality among St Mungo's clients

**5. Project Accreditation: New Projects**

5.1 The Panel considered the use of the ethics self-assessment tool in research projects that are submitted by university institutions with established ethical review bodies. Given that the ethics self-assessment tool was designed for use in instances where researchers do not have an alternative source of ethical governance, the Panel asked that this be raised with researchers during the early stages of the application process to ensure that accredited research projects are complying with their own institutional ethical requirements.

**ACTION: ONS's Research Support and Data Access team to routinely make enquiries with researchers to ensure that research project applications from universities undergo institutional ethical approvals processes prior to submission to the Research Accreditation Panel. Should this not be possible, researchers should provide suitable justification in their applications. ONS's Research Support and Data Access team to appropriately adjust applicant guidance in respect of these issues.**

5.2 In the interest of streamlining the Research Accreditation Panel's project accreditation process, the Panel requested that ONS's Research Support and Data Access team summarise projects' supporting documentation in corresponding project cover notes. Supporting documentation and evidence will be made available to the Panel on request.

5.3 The Panel considered four new projects and the following two projects were accredited. The project on the Northern Ireland Concessionary Fares Scheme is accredited subject to the successful DEA accreditation of NISRA's trusted third party linkage processor:

- Economic environment and child development

- Understanding the uptake and use of the Northern Ireland Concessionary Fares Scheme for the population aged 60 and over

## **6. Any Other Business**

- 6.1 The Panel supported the inclusion of a regular information paper providing oversight of the accreditation of minor revisions projects undertaken by the Secretariat and the accreditation of researchers undertaken by approved training providers under the Digital Economy Act. It was agreed that a paper of this nature would be presented to the Panel on a bi-monthly basis.
- 6.2 Following a discussion with an accredited researcher applying for project accreditation via the Research Accreditation Panel, Andrew Garrett questioned the level of scrutiny projects by researchers working at Masters level should undergo.
- 6.3 The Panel noted that, in order to receive accredited researcher status, researchers must demonstrate that they have suitable research qualifications and/or experience, as set out in the Research Code of Practice and Accreditation Criteria. The Research Code of Practice also sets out that applicants working towards acquiring this level of skill are only eligible for provisional accreditation and therefore must be under the direction and supervision of an accredited researcher, for example their supervisor. Given that all applicants are either accredited researchers or under the supervision of an accredited researcher, the Panel agreed that all projects should be exposed to the same level of scrutiny, regardless of the lead researcher's background. The Panel agreed that it is the responsibility of ONS's Research Support and Data Access team to ensure project applications from provisionally accredited researchers have undergone prior review from an affiliated fully accredited researcher.
- 6.4 The date of the next meeting is 17 January 2020.