

Safe Data Access Professionals Quarterly Meeting

6TH September 2018

Office for National Statistics, Titchfield

Minutes

Attendees (in person)

Richard Welpton (*Cancer Research UK*) – Chair, James Dainty (*HMRC*), Carlotta Greci (*The Health Foundation*), Yannis Kotrotsios (*Cancer Research UK*), Carole Morris (*ISD Scottish Government*), James Scott (*UK Data Service*), Declan Smyth (*Central Statistical Office, Ireland*), Joshua Symons (*Imperial College*), Amy Watts (*ONS*)

Attendees (dial-in)

Ben Green (*Connected Health Cities*), Emily Griffiths (*Connected Health Cities*), Nasir Mahmood (*NHS Digital*), Robin Rice (*University of Edinburgh*), Anna Waterhouse (*Connected Health Cities*)

Apologies

Cuna Ekmekcioglu (*University of Edinburgh*), Emma White (*University of Southampton*),

1) Introduction

The Chair thanked everybody for attending this September meeting of the Safe Data Access Professionals, and welcomed new participants. The Chair also thanked Amy Watts for her kind and generous help making the local arrangements for the meeting, and to ONS for agreeing to host.

2) Introduction from new participants (part 1)

Nasir Mahmood from NHS Digital, presented the Data Analysis Environment, a new service and data infrastructure under construction by NHS Digital to collect data from across the English health service, and provide secure data access to researchers and others who wish to access patient records for statistical purposes.

3) Introduction to the ONS Secure Research Service

Peter Stokes, Head of the new ONS Secure Research Service (replacing the previous Virtual Microdata Laboratory (VML)) joined the meeting to present the new service. Key features of the new service include:

- Upgraded hardware through cloud-procurement
- Dedicated virtual machines per user
- 'Bring your own software' service for users
- Roll-out to anybody who meets ONS criteria for accessing 'controlled' data (subject to data owner approval)
- Provision of access to non-ONS data (i.e. from other government agencies, subject to agreement), and linked data via the new Administrative Data Partnership
- New service expected to go 'live' in September 2018
- Future plans may include international access

The group would be interested in contacting the SRS for further. Amy Watts is happy to be contacted directly or through the group email.

4) Update on the Digital Economy Act – Codes of Practice

Martin Stringfellow (ONS) joined the meeting to provide an update on the Codes of Practice relating to the new implemented Digital Economy Act.

The full text of the Digital Economy Act can be found here:

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2017/30/contents>

More information about the Research Code of Practice can be found at:

<https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/about-the-authority/better-useofdata-statistics-and-research/>

And specifically about the research strand:

<https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/about-the-authority/better-useofdata-statistics-and-research/betterdataaccess-research/>

5) SDAP Terms of Reference and Governance

The Chair reiterated that 'membership' eligibility of the group is simply:

- That an organisation or service represented by an individual provides access to 'sensitive, confidential etc. data' in a 'Secure Data Environment', 'Trusted Research Environment', 'Research Data Centre' etc.

And in addition, the scope of the group is to discuss issues relating to 'safe data access' to such data, which can include information governance, statistical disclosure control, managing of services, technology, data processes etc., but not one single issue (for which other forums exist).

The group agreed.

AP: website to be updated

AP: Terms of Reference to be updated, circulated, and published on website when agreed.

AP: meeting minutes to be published when approved by the group

6) SDAP website

The Chair provided an update on the website, in particular the numbers of visitors to the site since it's publication in May/June 2018. Based on the WordPress statistics:

- There have been over 650 views from over 200 different individual locations
- The site has been accessed from approximately 20 countries, throughout North and South America, South Africa, Asia and Pacific, East Asia and Europe

It was discussed whether Google Analytics could be deployed to provide better statistics.

AP: Use of Google Analytics to be considered

7) Introduction from new participants (part 2)

Joshua Symons (Imperial College) provided an introduction to the Big Data and Analytical Unit (BDAU) at Imperial College. More information is available at <http://www.imperial.ac.uk/centre-for-health-policy/our-work/e-health-and-analytics/big-data-and-analytical-unit-bdau/>

Declan Smyth provided an introduction to the Research Coordination Unit (RDC) of the Central Statistics Office of Ireland.

8) Update on SDC

The Chair provided an update on the SDC Handbook, providing a summary of the meeting held on August 15th. Overall, feedback has been positive from service staff, and we have received useful expert advice from Matthew Woollard (UK Data Archive), Mark Elliot (University of Manchester) and Felix Ritchie (University of West of England). No further progress has been made owing to a mix of personal reasons and holidays, but the authors will meet in October to review the feedback and take further actions.

AP: Emily Griffiths (*Connected Health Cities*) has offered to review the Handbook as is, with the aim of proof-reading and removing duplicate text etc., by end of September.

With respect to the ONS Accredited Output Checking Accreditation, ONS are in the process of considering developing an output checkers course. An update on this will be provided at the next meeting.

9) Updates from all

Each member provided a 10-15 minute update on their own service.

10) Ideas for next meeting

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday 11th December, kindly hosted by HMRC. Usual time 10:00 to 16:30.

A number of challenges were identified throughout the meeting, including:

- Input/output control
- Software management (including R) and software licencing
- Connection to the Health and Social Care Network
- Wiki ideas – collaboration between researchers in a secure environment
- Archiving and retention requirements
- Researcher training

The format of the next meeting will change to cover each of these issues in more depth.

11) Future meetings

Carole Morris (*ISD Scottish Government*) has kindly offered to host the meeting on Wednesday 13th March 2019, at the BioQuarter at University of Edinburgh. Details to be confirmed in due course.

Emily Griffiths (*Connected Health Cities*) has offered to host a future meeting in Manchester.

12) Meeting closed

The meeting was closed at 16:15, and the Chair thanked everybody for their attendance and contributions.