

Safe Data Access Professionals Quarterly Meeting

13th March 2019

Edinburgh BioQuarter

Minutes

Attendees (in person)

Catherine Bromley, *Office for Statistics Regulation*; Olly Butters, *University of Newcastle*; Alistair Currie, *HMRC*; Cuna Ekmekcioglu, *University of Edinburgh*; Carlotta Greci, *The Health Foundation*; Yannis Kotrotsios, *Cancer Research UK*; Carole Morris, *National Services Scotland*; Robin Rice, *University of Edinburgh*; James Scott, *UK Data Service*; Declan Symth, *Central Statistics Office Ireland*; Dionysis Vragkos, *National Services Scotland*; Saffron Weeks, *Office for National Statistics*; Richard Welpton, *The Health Foundation* (Chair)

1) Introduction

The Chair thanked everybody for attending this March meeting of the Safe Data Access Professionals group, and welcomed new participants. The Chair also thanked Carole Morris and Dionysis Vragkos for their kind and generous help making the local arrangements for the meeting, and to the National Safe Data Haven Scotland for hosting.

2) Introduction from new participants

Olly Butters introduced himself and the Trusted Research Environment (TRE) at University of Newcastle. A key feature of the TRE will be the provision of access to health data images for research purposes. More information about the TRE at Newcastle:

- Part of the Connected Health Cities program, the TRE in Newcastle acts as a health information exchange to connect health data and data from other sources in the North-East.
- Aims to collect data from different sources into one secure location, for access by researchers, clinicians and hospital administrators.
- As well as availability of statistical tools, the team are working on using DataShield (<http://www.datashield.ac.uk>) to help ensure statistical results do not reidentify individuals.

3) Round-table updates (all services)

Edinburgh University Data Safe Haven

- Preparation for ISO27001 accreditation is underway, and due in 2019.
- Trialling the use of a 'gatekeeping service', whereby researchers safeguard other researchers' data and outputs; overseen by Data Safe Haven staff.
- Review of the service to be undertaken in 12 months' time.

HMRC Datalab

- Many more project applications being received.
- Hardware in the process of being upgraded.
- Data will soon be accessed under the Digital Economy Act.

Office for National Statistics

- ONS are continuing to work on their Secure Research Service 'shop front': an online platform for accessing information about, and applying for, data available from the service, and for requesting training. This is due to be launched in 2019.
- The new Secure Research Service, including remote access, is due to become available in 2020.
- The Secure Research Service will shortly be accredited under the Digital Economy Act
- Special training will be provided online for researchers who just want to review statistical outputs (and who do not require access to data).
- The Administrative Data Research Partnership has recently been launched by Peter Stokes at ONS.

UK Data Service Secure Lab

- Have observed a large increase in demand for statistical outputs requested for release.
- Undertaking the process for becoming accredited under the Digital Economy Act.
- Online resources for researchers are being updated, including information about data and how to use the Secure Lab.
- The service is now delivering the new Safe Researcher Training course (note the Expert Group for Safe Researcher Training has now reconvened).

The Health Foundation

- Now that the organisation has moved its Secure Data Environment to a secure online facility, a review of how to efficiently deploy R software is underway. This has been a particular challenge as the organisation uses large data sources from the health service.

Central Statistics Office, Ireland

- Access to data is now provided via virtual access and a safe room.
- Guidelines on output control will be made available to researchers shortly, to encourage them to be involved in the checking process.
- Training for researchers has recently been updated to cover statistical disclosure control.

Cancer Research UK – Cancer Intelligence

- The team are trialling the Microsoft version of R <https://mran.microsoft.com/open>.
- Recently completed its Data Security and Protection Toolkit, and noted that a 'score' is no longer generated, even though this is required by some data suppliers.
- Considering gaining the Core Trust Seal (formerly the Data Seal of Approval), which would enable the team to archive data for the long-term.

National Services Scotland (ISD)

- National imaging database in Scotland due to be made available, after development of a minimum viable product.
- Now receiving funding from Health Data Research UK (HDR UK) and research programmes are beginning to follow.

Other:

- SDAP members recently assisted NHS Digital with the testing of its new Data Access Environment. The meeting focussed particularly on statistical disclosure control and analysing large and complex datasets. NHS Digital will attend SDAP meetings regularly in the future.

4) [Presentation by Catherine Bromley,](#)

[Office for Statistics Regulation \(OSR\), UK Statistics Authority](#)

- Presentation covering the role of the OSR, and the introduction and implementation of the Digital Economy Act.

5) [Tour of the BioQuarter \(National Safe Data Haven\)](#)

- Tour of the facilities, including safe rooms and safe areas, where researchers can access different data sources.

6) [SDC Handbook](#)

- A copy of the final Beta version of the SDC Handbook, authored by Carlotta Greci, Christine Woods, James Scott, Arne Wolters, Emily Griffiths and Richard Welpton, was distributed.
- The authors thanked fellow SDAP members for contributing feedback.
- The SDC Handbook was warmly welcomed by everybody, as it is a much needed reference for staff undertaking statistical disclosure control.
- Discussion about publication followed:
 - Richard Welpton to check with The Health Foundation about funding a professional publication;
 - James Scott updated on UK Data Archive plans to place a bulk order for printing;
 - Digital Object Identifier and ISBN number to be added

- To be presented at a future workshop
 - Circulated around the IASSIST group
- Since the meeting, Richard Welpton has uploaded the SDC Handbook onto the SDAP website: <https://securedatagroup.org/sdc-handbook/>

7) Discussion on safe data professionals and career development

- The group identified the need to create development opportunities along with routine day-to-day work.
- Finding 'protected time' can be challenging, particularly as it is difficult to close down services for a day.
- Often, staff are not aware of job opportunities that arise.
- Other comments from the group included:
 - Parallels with the software engineering career path
 - Staff may be more aligned with 'data stewardship' roles rather than data science or data librarianship. The need for 'data stewards' is increasing
 - Requirement to improve staff retention
 - Roles sometimes do not fit in large organisations' professional employment schemes

8) Meeting closed

The meeting was closed at 16:00, and the Chair thanked everybody for their attendance and contributions.