# Safe Data Access Professionals Quarterly Meeting

Wednesday 10th June 2020, 10.00 - 12.00

Virtual meeting

## Attendees

**Christine Woods** (UK Data Service) (Chair); **James Scott** (UK Data Service) (Deputy Chair); **Oliver Parker** (UK Data Service) (Minute taker); **Carole Morris** (Public Health Scotland);; **Aida Sanchez** (UCL Institute of Education), **Lydia Underdown** (University of Oxford Nuffield Orthopaedic Centre); **Simon Parker** (Cancer Research UK); **Richard Welpton** (The Health Foundation); **Martin O'Reilly** (The Alan Turing Institute); **Tony Stone** (University of Sheffield); **James Dainty** (HM Revenue and Customs); **Beate Lichtwardt** (University of Essex); **Alexa Bradley** (Office for National Statistics); **Anthony Macken** (Central Statistics Office), **Raff Cobb** (Office for National Statistics), **James Robinson** (The Alan Turing Institute).

## Apologies

**Mary McDerby** (University of Manchester); **Cuna Ekmekcioglu** (University of Edinburgh).

## Minutes

### 1. Welcome and Introductions

The chairs welcomed everyone and members went around introducing themselves.

### 2. Proposal for SDAP going forward

The chairs thanked everyone for nominating them to chair the group going forward and also offered a big thank you to Richard Welpton for his work organising the SDAP group, chairing the meetings, developing the website, and leading the development and publication of the guides and training.

The chairs updated the group on the status of the funding bid to the ESRC. It was decided that they would not take the bid forward with the ESRC, as it was a methods bid which was likely to have some tough academic competition, and as a result may not have been successful. The other reason funding was not taken forward with the ESRC, is that there is funding available within the UK Data Service to help fund the group up to September 2022.

The chairs then presented how they thought the group should operate going forward. They had three main aims, which the funding from 1 October 2020 – 30 September 2022 will help support:

1. Establish a formal and sustainable SDAP group.

2. Run topic-based quarterly networking and knowledge exchanges events similar to meeting but based on a topic.

3. Develop and publish web-based guidance on specific topics.

To continue running a formal and sustainable SDAP group, the chairs plan to:

- Set up a Steering Group, chaired by Christine Woods, with a number of work strands (e.g. Statistical Disclosure Control/privacy) with each strand to ideally lead to a publication.
- Create a sub-group for website/publications/communications, which will be headed by James Scott.
- Agree a calendar of meetings and events.
- Publish a sustainable membership model.
- Run and maintain the website, which might change from WordPress.
- Maintain a subscription mailing list.
- Co-ordinate both internally and externally (where possible) to help ensure no duplication of work

The chairs plan for topic based meetings are continuing the round table meetings and then following them up with a knowledge exchanges/networking events on a set topic. Topics suggested by the chairs were:

- running safe settings,
- evaluating tools for (semi)automated output checking,
- legal gateways for use of personal data,
- training researchers to use safe settings,
- statistical disclosure risk,
- Safe Pod Network.

The idea is that web based guidance would then be developed from the topics discussed at the knowledge exchange/networking events. The chairs added that this guidance could also be used to present at events, highlighting potential events like IASSIST 2021 and the Secure Data Management Summer School 2021 at the University of Essex.

There was recognition that the development and publication of the SDC Handbook was resource intensive, and that capacity across the group would need to be considered when producing any new guidance.

The new funding will also help to cover some staff costs:

- James Scott (0.5 days per week),
- Christine Woods (0.5 days per week), and
- a new Project Officer (2.5 days per week).

The group discussed other potential topic ideas like the utility vs privacy trade-off and the chair added that the group should feel free to pass on any more ideas. It was also raised that prioritising work streams would be important – with more impactful topics and issues less likely to be covered by other groups taking priority.

It was added that in addition to the new funding, other organisations would still be happy to provide support, meeting rooms and advertising.

The group discussed plans should membership grow significantly. One of the ideas suggested was to have one large annual networking event where everyone would be able to attend and also smaller meetings, which would have a capped attendance limit. It was also added that virtual meetings

could be a good way to accommodate larger numbers, although it was added that many would prefer to have a face-to-face meeting. It was also raised that there are no institutions from Wales currently represented by a SDAP member. It was noted that it would be useful to approach SAIL to see if anyone is interested in becoming a member.

## 3. Round table updates – how are we all adapting during COVID-19

**UK Data Service**

- Adapting the Safe Researcher Training to deliver it online. This meant making changes to the content of the training, so that it's not 5 hours long, but still covers the essential material, and can be deliver via Zoom. It was added that they had started the training by using GoToMeeting, but switched to Zoom as it is easier to use and allows for better verification of trainees.
- It was added that they're re-shooting their instructional videos as Secure Lab has had a mini-update. In addition, new software (e.g. Python) should be added to Secure Lab soon.
- It was added that some users are able to access Secure Lab from home. For non-ONS data there are 9 additional conditions and there is a list on the UK Data Service website of which datasets they can access. For ONS data, some researchers can access from home, but there are tighter restrictions than non-ONS data (e.g. the machine used at home must be organisational/institutionally provided and the working from home form must be considered and approved by the UK Statistics Authority Research Accreditation Panel (RAP).

**University of Sheffield**

Noted that they were working through remote access and working during the lockdown had been a largely positive experience.

**HM Revenue and Customs**

- Reported that the HMRC Datalab was shut, but staff are still working from home.
- HMRC Datalab does not have a remote network and would be interested to hear what other people in similar situations have been doing.
- Still working on DEA accreditation.
- Updating training materials and documentation.

**Central Statistics Office**

Recently been granted access to work from home.

**Health Foundation**

- Working with hybrid of a Safe Room and working from home, where staff have been supplied with their own desktop.
- The Health Foundation are still recruiting, so IT staff have been setting up machines and equipment and then sending it on to new staff members.
- They are now working on COVID and feeding into SAGE.
- Recently had their ISO Surveillance audit.

**The Alan Turing Institute**

- Currently trying to work out how they can additionally handle health data.
- Working on a reproducible research project and looking at the utility vs privacy trade off.

**The Office for National Statistics**

- Safe Researcher Training has been moved online. A backlog of people waiting for training has built up due to face-to-face cancellation. To counter this, they have been putting on 4/5 courses a week to clear the backlog. This has prompted conversations moving training online in the long-term.
- Users can access data remotely if the criteria have been met (request form, with justification for why), although this is for lockdown only and will be removed when the lockdown is over.
- Started to think about how Safe Rooms can be used for when it's safe to return to work.
- Starting to think about if the lockdown continues, do we need to widen the criteria for accessing projects at home?
- Currently working to support COVID related projects. COVID is being prioritised, then existing projects and then new projects.

It was added that it would be interesting to see the compliance of users that have been trained online versus those that have been trained face-to-face. If positive, this could lead to further changes down the line.

**SSHOC**

- Access to IADS is limited to the Safe Room which have mostly been closed and will be for a while.
- Noted that GESIS's Safe Room has reopened, although only one person can access at a time.

**Public Health Scotland**

- Working from a hybrid of remote and physical safe room access.
- Asked data controllers to grant temporary remote access and most said yes for the duration of the COVID pandemic.
- Currently dealing with the backlog and keeping business as usual projects going,
- Also obtained permission to host the data in the national data safe haven, so reporting and linkage can be done quicker.

**Centre for Longitudinal Studies**

- Migrated to the UCL safe haven in March, so have been able to work remotely and are now using Microsoft Teams which is working well.
- There is a problem for data users using their secure lab where they can't access the data at the moment as their PC is turned off in the building and they cannot access it to turn it on, so they can't connect via VPN.

**Cancer Research UK**

- Switched to working from home easily, as they were already quite cloud based.
- Prioritising COVID projects currently.
- Currently working on the Research Data Alliance guidelines.

## 4. AOB and close

It was added that it could be useful to have a list of groups similar to SDAP, so that we can see what they're working on and not duplicate work.

The chair added that the next steps for achieving their plan for SDAP was a meeting with the steering group to formalise the proposal and then to circulate that information. They are also reliant on recruiting a Project Officer and are aiming to have the post filled by October.

The group then discussed whether they felt the two-hour meeting was sufficient. Members agreed that two hours is a good duration for online meetings.

The chair then closed the meeting at 12:00 and thanked everyone for their time and looks forward to the next meeting in September, which will most likely be held online.