**RESEARCH DATA SCOTLAND** (the “**Company**”)

Minutes of a general meeting of Research Data Scotland (RDS) held online 09 September 2024 at 10.00.

1. **Quorum**

**1.1 ￼**It was noted that a quorum was present in accordance with the Articles of Association of the Company (the “Articles”).

## **1.2 ￼**There was produced to the meeting a notice (“Notice”) convening the meeting and, with the consent of all members present, the Notice was taken as read.

## **Present Name Position**

## Paul Boyle Chair

## Roger Halliday Director / Trustee

## Mark Parsons Director / Trustee

## Martin Sinclair Director / Trustee

## Emma Gordon Board Advisor

## Jill Pell Director / Trustee

## Sapna Marwaha Trustee

## Julie Fitzpatrick Director / Trustee

## Scott Heald

## Allan Johnstone

## Hugh Wallace

## Shona McElroy

## Layla Robinson

## Ruth Flannery Minute Taker

## **Apologies**

## Janet Egdell Board Advisor

## Andrew Morris Board advisor

**2.   Items on the Agenda**

* 1. **Introduction and welcomes**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies were received from Janet Egdell and Andrew Morris.

* 1. **Minutes of the previous meeting**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 10 June 2024 and previously circulated were approved by the Board.

1. **Action Update**

The Chair noted that all actions from the previous Board meeting have been completed. The Chair thanked Sapna for joining the Finance, Audit and Risk Subcommittee and Julie for joining the Remuneration and Nomination Subcommittee.

The CEO gave a verbal update on five outstanding actions from the Action Log.

* UKRI bids / funding and SG business case – an agenda item which will be discussed later in the meeting.
* KPIs - worked up ideas from RDS staff and partners. This is shaping into a proposal but is not quite ready. It was suggested to bring this to the December Board meeting.
* Data Governance – it was noted that they are in a similar position. They have worked up a solution for Scotland around effective anonymisation of data in the Safe Haven that RDS are talking to data owners about. They are working to align this with the UK Research Accreditation Panel. They have initial ideas, but this will take time to get support and to have to refined proposal
* Industry access – It was noted that RDS have a draft policy that they are looking to test. Scottish Government will publish a response to the "Unlocking the value of data" programme around private sector access to data that they're going to launch.

1. **Standing Items**
   1. **RDS Q1 2024-25 Progress Report**

AJ discussed the key items from the Progress / Performance Report – 2024-25 Q1 paper. It was noted that progress has been made in a number of key areas, including:

* Projects being delivered relatively quickly through the Researcher Access Service.
* Detailed plans for improving service being established, including a more efficient data governance approach, changes to how data is held and linked, more datasets, and improvements to user experience.
* Securing £110k additional income from UKRI and submitted bids for a further £840k.
* Agreed a vision for an aligned data service through the RAS with the Scottish Safe Haven network.
* There is a separate paper on finances, as this remains the biggest strategic risk.

AJ highlighted that in terms of performance, there are other goals and projects that have been started and should make their way into the report in the coming months once completed. It was noted that everything is on the right track and that there is nothing of concern at this point.

The Chair asked for confirmation from the attendees that the report was helpful and that the style and structure of the report was clear. There were no objections to this.

The Chair noted that this was crucial for the Board to come back to understand the implications that this might have for RDS and to help understand the broader context.

MS followed on from MPs point, noting that the first financial challenge is the Scottish Government grant.

**Action**: Allan to add the Programme support costs paper as an agenda item at the next Board meeting in December.

**5. Agenda Items**

**5.2 Researcher Access Service**

Hugh Wallace, Chief Information Officer, and Shona McElroy, Senior Programme Manager, gave a five-minute presentation about the current performance and next steps of the Researcher Access Service. HW discussed the progress with the Researcher Access Service to date, highlighting that there are nine Public Health Scotland datasets available, there's an improved tool set to administer the service, and all data is only accessed within the Scottish National Safe Haven. HW also highlighted that there has been 62 new project enquires, with 6 progressing through the fully digital service. HW noted that the clear focus must remain on developing the service to ensure faster, simpler data access. The next phase of development includes implementing the necessary governance arrangements for effective anonymisation, implementing an anonymous linkage method for all datasets in the National Safe Haven, developing a scalable project decision-making process, expanding the datasets available for RAS approvals pathway, enhancing the value of the National Safe Haven and continuing to develop the underlying technical platforms with a focus on increasing speed and efficiency. SM added that in phase 2, they are working to expand the number of data controllers as phase 1 was Public Health Scotland focused.

The Chair thanked HW and SM for the update and invited any questions.

SH noted that the number of projects still going through the Public Benefit Privacy Panel, the existing process where health and non-health datasets go through in terms of data access requests, was still quite high and asked HW if they know if this is down to the Researcher Access Service only having 9 data sets or if it is down to the complexity of the projects. HW noted that it could be partly down to the availability of datasets and that the team are looking at what datasets make sense in terms of data linkage to get more volume through the Researcher Access Service.

SM highlighted that they have started a piece of work to articulate to Scottish Government where they will see the benefits of the Researcher Access Service in comparison to the current process.

EG suggested focusing efforts on offering pre-linked curated datasets as a way forward.

* 1. **System Alignment**

The CEO discussed the paper 4.8 RDS system simplifications. The paper provides an exploration of the options for RDS in simplifying the Scottish data for research landscape in three ways:

* Simplifying the message to the research community so Scotland has a clear single brand for data for research services
* Simplifying and aligning the systems, policies and processes across data for research service providers
* Consolidating the organisations providing data for research services

SH noted that he is in support of the paper and the options outlined within. SH and the CEO met to discuss the various options in detail and landed as it is outlined in the paper. The Chair, MS and JF agreed the paper was useful as it sets out various options.

The Chair noted that as there are various options for potential RAS users to seek data elsewhere, RDS need to be ensure they are as efficient, quick and simple as possible. JP noted that there are different types of end users and because of this, the front end of the system needs to be as simple as possible to get less frequent users to commit to using it.

All members supported the paper and agreed that integration is the way forward.

* 1. **Strategy Update**

Layla Robinson, Chief Partnership & Strategy Officer, gave a verbal update on the 5-10-year Strategy, highlighting what was discussed at the June Board meeting, progress on those areas, the external factors and next steps following that discussion.

It was noted that there are four main strategic steers for the 5-10-year strategy:

* RDS is the entry point to the Scottish system to deliver federation to work they are doing with the Connect 4 project and with the wider Safe Haven network.
* RDS are to further develop their relationship with government as both a user and funder, and clarify both their main policy interests, and who their friends are in government​.
* Alongside the data, the value of new linkages and linkage methodologies (e.g. household structure). Bringing linkage and the Researcher Access Service (RAS) to scale.
* Focus in more on what is unique to Scotland and where they could be world leading.

LR discussed the progress on these areas since June. Continuing with “making it simpler and quicker for researchers to access public sector data for public good”​

* **Federation:** Progressing with the Scottish Safe Haven Network (SSHN) (and SAIL and Smart Data Foundry) down a four-step path towards federation; Connect 4 project progressing positively. Continuing involvement with DARE. ​

Signposting; integrated content; integrated enquiry; federated access​

* **Relationship with Government:** With Scottish Government, positive meeting with Digital directorate (new sponsor) and progress with draft updated business case. On UK Government, positive discussions with Office for Life Sciences (OLS), upcoming DARE funding and MRC bids.​
* **Data sourcing strategy and prioritisation** – bringing the RAS to scale​

Communications e.g. blog posts and position paper - clearer articulation of approach and areas of work​

* **Developing the standout areas:** SCAN-DAN (Scottish AI in Neuroimaging to predict Dementia and Neurodegenerative Disease) helping to make the case, particularly for imaging and wider private sector engagement​

LR noted the external factors taken into consideration, including the following:

* **Broad developments:** Artificial intelligence and challenges of cost-of-living crisis and ageing population, for example, and opportunity for data to assist in tackling challenges
* **UK Level:** New Government​, ongoing development of SDE network​, National Data Library, Labour life sciences report: “Ensure proper federation of data sets, with a single access point for researchers to use data from all our genomic resources (UK Biobank, OFH, GEL, NIHR Bioresource)” and reference to four nations approach
* **Scottish Government:** Financial pressures​, ongoing delivery of Health and Social Care Data Strategy (fits with RAS, Safe Havens, approvals transformation; SG Programme of Government), federation and possible political change​

LR noted that the key next steps are that RDS will continue to work up the draft strategy to finalise in early 2025 and bring an overview in key areas for discussion to the next Board meeting in December. Majority of the work will involve building and finessing the existing direction but also testing with Board members, RDS staff and partners to ensure that there is greater clarity. LH noted that there will also be a paper on a challenge led approach aligned to data sourcing.

The Chair thanked LR for the update and asked if some good examples can be put together on how linking data has enabled answering specific questions that are going to be of real value to Scottish Government. The UK Labour Government focus on its missions and give a good opportunity for people in the UK to think about how they prove that they can help deliver on those missions. The Chair noted that these examples may be a great way of showing value to members of Scottish Government who may not see the full picture. LR noted that RDS have use cases that were developed about the use of data in terms of cost efficiency for public service reform and child poverty.

EG noted that as part of the ADR UK programme, they are preparing to submit another business case for future funding and that she will keep the Board updated on this and publish part of the business case that she is allowed to.

1. **AOB**

Julie Fitzpatrick noted that she will be attending the RDS All Partners meeting on Thursday 12 September 2024.

There being no further business, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 11:52.

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Chairperson

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(Date)

**Actions:**

* Allan to add the Programme support costs paper as an agenda item at the next Board meeting in December.
* Roger to work through how the income from the Researcher Access Service income will work as the source of the savings in budget from Scottish Government and come back to the board on this.