Meeting minutes

General meeting of Research Data Scotland  
14 March 2022

# **Attendees**

## Present:

Paul Boyle Chair

Roger Halliday Director, Trustee

Mark Parsons Director, Trustee

Scott Heald Director, Trustee

Jill Pell Non-Executive Director

Giselle Cory Non-Executive Director

Shannon Vallor Non-Executive Director

Andrew Morris Non-Executive Director

Neil Rawlins Minute Taker

## Apologies:

N/A

# Agenda

## 1. Introductions and welcomes

The Chair welcomed everybody to the inaugural Board meeting of Research Data Scotland (RDS). Those present gave a brief introduction to themselves.

## 2. Board terms of reference

Paper circulated previously regarding the role of the Board. RDS has three owners, Scottish Government (SG), Public Health Scotland (PHS) and the University of Edinburgh (UoE). Owners can nominate a trustee. Board members who are advisors cannot vote but provide advice to the Board. Gillian Docherty (University of Strathclyde) has agreed to join the Board as an advisor. The Chair noted that the Board needed more diversity and it is inappropriate that there are four male trustees. The articles of the company say shareholders / owners can nominate trustees, it is not a deliberate exclusion. It was agreed that the trustees would seek to increase diversity amongst trustees as a matter of urgency.

RDS as a charity is registered with OSCR. Discussions are ongoing with SG regarding Freedom of Information regulations and their application to RDS. Subcommittees in development include one for Renumeration and one for Audit and Risk.

## 3. RDS strategy and business case

The paper previously circulated outlined a proposed organisational strategy. The paper outlined three steps:

* Simplification, faster, cheaper;
* Build user base;
* Build high value services.

It was noted that the document is intended for both the public and internal use and that the intention is to move away from data warehouses, there is some evidence / feedback users are wanting to use data directly. Stage one is to pick up some demo projects from sectors not engaged with before such as the social sector or organisations not currently engaged with and to reach out and identify what look like good tests and create value.

Comments on Values and Principles included:

* Data ethics – the Board should be alert to potential harms;
* Principle 2 – combination of datasets makes decision possible. What constraints are there on public data – what mechanisms are there to stop re-anonymisation;
* Under ‘Values’ RDS should be transparent, the definition is different to what the public are used to, however, under ‘Principles No. 6’ – transparency is the traditional view, but when read both together there is a lack of clarity;
* ‘Courage’ – there is a ‘body of worry’ about the overthrow of the status quo for a reason – ‘move fast and break things’ – it is a question of tone;
* There is no mention of risk and harm and no mention of ‘public good’ – there is a need to protect the interest of vulnerable groups.

It was agreed to share information regarding the ‘Five Safes’ and RDS management to reflect upon these comments. It was noted that RDS has to make research easier, and not scare the public. There is an issue of public squeamishness about the commercial use of datasets.

Regarding public engagement it was noted that RDS was working in partnership, there was a common voice, shared direction and more public engagement, as well as aligning and working with HDR-UK, ONS, ADR and D&IN. Regarding widening membership, RDS is currently talking to a number of universities. Collaboration agreements have been signed with the RSH and ONS. Funding of £5 million for the next four years from SG has been secured, but there is a need to diversify funding by the end of this period.

It was noted that the Strategy and Business Case needed further work in the following areas:

* Other bodies to join and widen the organisation;
* Data beyond health data to be considered eg UK Govt. data;
* Trust from other data holding organisations is required;
* Clarity going forward on external funding is required, including the funding strategy;
* Independent accreditation is important.

## 4. Key performance indicators

The paper previously circulated on KPIs was discussed. It was noted that as a startup, up front targets KPIs for RDS had not been included as they were not considered important at the moment, rather they help to understand how the business operates but that this will change over time. The eDRIS process is part of the RDS KPIs and the intention is to build upon this piece with partners. It was noted that there was a need to understand the landscape in order to shape KPIs and also a need for Service Level Agreements with partners. An update to the paper which will have numbers attached to KPIs will be brought to the next Board meeting.

## 5. Risks issues

Three papers circulated previously were discussed; the current RDS Risk Register which includes both Corporate and Strategic risks, along with Operational risks, a draft Risk Policy and a draft Risk Appetite Statement. The Risk Register will be a standing agenda item for the Board.

The Board noted that:

* Risk review dates to be tied to the Board meeting cycle;
* Timescales, mitigations and risk wording needs improvement;
* There was insufficient risk covering a break of public trust and there was a need to expand a risk regarding breach in ethical duties;
* Cyber security was seen as a major risk;
* The loss of SG as a funder should be added to the risk register;
* It would be helpful if the risks were sorted by ‘bucket’ e.g. Finance, Governance.

The Risk Appetite paper was discussed. It was noted that moderate should be the default position, but as the organisation grows, it would change.

## 6. RDS policies papers

A number of policy papers were introduced and Board comment and approval were sought. It was noted that:

* Further work was required on the CSR policy;
* Whilst RDS itself has a low carbon footprint, RDS should have a net zero policy;
* RDS should consider external verification and ISO9001;
* The OSR did not mention anything about Ethnicity, Diversity, Inclusion and no EDI statement which needs to be referenced in business ethics.

It was noted that a policy statement around equality duty is due, however there was not time to bring to this meeting as it is still in establishment mode. There will be a separate specific equality statement.

It was agreed that the Board were content to take the delegation approach to Operational Policies approved by the SMT and only significant policies to be reviewed by the Board.

## 7. AOB

It was noted that trust needs to be embedded in documents and that whilst RDS operates within Scotland, it should have ambition within the UK eco-system and as a global leadership opportunity. The Board agreed to discuss further at a subsequent meeting.

Date of the next meeting – 13 June 2022 in Edinburgh.

There being no further business, the chair declared the meeting closed.