

DARE UK (Data and Analytics Research Environments UK)

DARE UK Interest Group (IG) Charter Template

Name of proposed Interest Group: *UK TRE Community - Community Management and Engagement*

The WHY

Introduction:

Research with sensitive data needs to be trustworthy, i.e. deserving of the trust of the public and data subjects, which in turn requires trusted research infrastructure. Infrastructure includes the secure environments where analysis takes place, called Trusted Research Environments (TREs), the governance processes that manage activity in these environments, and the technology that underpins those governance processes.

Trust requires understanding, openness, and collaboration across everyone involved in research, including researchers, the public, and those whose jobs are to provide trusted research infrastructure. The UK TRE Community was born out of existing efforts among Research Software Engineers to better collaborate in the design and delivery of TREs, yet it soon realised its need to go beyond the RSE community.

There are several challenges facing TREs:

- Trustworthiness and transparency: Currently the information shared publicly about the policies, processes and systems used to protect sensitive data is limited and insufficient to verify that the data is appropriately protected. Validating that the systems used to protect sensitive data are appropriate is difficult when neither the design nor the deployed systems are independently auditable against broadly accepted and agreed standards.
- Accessibility and usability: Many organisations do not have the resources to independently develop trustworthy and usable policies, processes and systems. Environments can be extremely cumbersome to gain access to and use, raising barriers to accessing data-driven research methodologies, or encouraging researchers to work outside secure environments, risking a data breach.
- Effectiveness and efficiency: Currently many organisations independently develop their own policies, processes and systems to work safely with sensitive data. Much of this work involves independently solving the same problems repeatedly.

An open, collaborative community meets these three challenges in a way that no other approach can.

- Open, collaborative approaches to developing information governance processes and policies as well as technology means these can be co-designed and co-engineered with technologists, policy communities, professionals and data subjects working together.
- Open policies, processes and systems are transparent and verifiable.
- Reproducible resources ensure developments are made available across the entire community, allows problems to be solved once, prevents the duplication of work across organisations, and allows independent verification.

- Modern open source collaboration tools are uniquely scalable, both for code and for other artefacts: a global community can work together, at the same time, whilst still ensuring that community contributed resources are of appropriate quality and robustness to be relied upon.

User scenario(s) or use case(s) the IG wishes to address:

This IG will focus on expanding and maintaining a community around TREs to foster collaboration and facilitate the sharing and distribution of innovative ideas to support the delivery of trusted research. It will identify the principles and ethos the community believes in, starting from the [Newcastle Commitment](#) and updating it to be inclusive of the increasing reach of this community. The IG will promote working together to create a more secure, robust, and capable community research infrastructure, leading to enhanced research outcomes. It will operate as a volunteer-based, community-driven initiative, and rely on the expertise and resources contributed by our members from across the UK and beyond including universities, research institutions, industry organisations, public engagement groups and other relevant bodies.

The WHAT

Objectives:

In order to achieve this development model the IG will focus on:

1. Outreach and Engagement
 - Identify stakeholders and interested parties by exploring the roles and resources required in designing, planning, building, and maintaining Trusted Research Environments.
 - Periodically review the wider TRE landscape to build a community which represents the whole of the UK and all those potentially affected by the policies and frameworks intended to guide the development of a harmonised TRE design.
 - Establish connections, communication methods and resource sharing pathways with other community groups in the UK and beyond, ensuring no work is duplicated and knowledge is disseminated throughout the ecosystem effectively.
 - Send representatives to external events and build out our presence beyond our own community.
2. Supporting Collaboration
 - Facilitate consensus-building and collaboration among community members by maintaining open communication spaces, such as a Slack channel and Jisc mailing list.
 - Community Days: host quarterly half-day events to facilitate knowledge sharing, problem solving, and networking. This includes at least one annual in person event, which in September 2023 was attended by over 150 people.
 - Identify and run additional events for the community on a needs basis, or when ad hoc opportunities arise.
 - Foster the development of smaller working groups within the community to address specific time-bound objectives.

Outcomes:

The ultimate outcome of this IG will be a self-organised and sustainable UK TRE Community able to deliver a community driven model for TREs.

In the short term this will translate into the following specific outputs:

1. Generate and distribute ideas, innovations, and best practices for building and maintaining trusted research environments. These will be shared in the community GitHub repository, website, and by creating any other resources required by the community.
2. Ensure community resources are open, reproducible, attributed and up to date.
3. Provide communication and meeting spaces and structure.
4. The organisation and delivery of events listed above.

The HOW

Participation/Collaboration:

This community will involve anyone interested in TREs regardless of skills and experience. At the moment it involves many members of the research software engineering community, DARE UK, TRE teams within UK universities and research institutions, and independent experts/consultants providing advice on TREs. It also benefits from the participation of several commercial TRE and cloud providers.

Currently the UK TRE Community organises itself in different subgroups (referred to internally as working groups but not presently DARE UK's WGs) focused on different topics. Subgroups form and organise according to member's interests and therefore are not fixed. Existing subgroups are:

- Open Source TREs: moving towards referenceable, interoperable open TRE infrastructure
- Community Management & Engagement: building the community by engaging all relevant stakeholders , and providing the necessary support and organisation
- Funding & Sustainability: Exploring funding models and operation models to enable long-term sustainability and realisation of TRE infrastructure
- Information Governance: Managing information governance requirements within TRE infrastructure, and moving towards standardisation

The proposed Interest Group intends to align our working groups more closely with the DARE UK definition of Working Groups (specific, time-bound pieces of work for the community) going forwards. This may involve the translation of some of the above, continuous working groups into more specific, output-oriented working groups.

It will also continue existing efforts to invite and work with individuals and organisations in the TRE space such as statistical agencies and charities. Representatives from such organisations, such as the ONS, ICO, NISRA, and RDS, have already attended meetings and Community Days, and the IG will work to further engage them.

Mechanism: [Describe how often the group will meet and sustain progress between meetings]

The UK TRE Community meets quarterly, with subgroups self organising in between. The Community Management and Engagement subgroup meets weekly, it communicates predominantly via Slack and makes its minutes and outputs publicly available via HackMD and GitHub.

The proposed Interest Group intends to establish guidance for newly formed working groups on best practice around meeting frequency, project management and communication of outputs.

Potential members:

Numerous people participate regularly in the community meetings and events, the list of individuals on the mailing list is over 300. Therefore we have only included the co-chairs in the table below.

FIRST NAME	LAST NAME	EMAIL	(Co-)Chair / Member
Pete	Barnsley	peter.barnsley@crick.ac.uk	Co-chair
Madalyn	Hardaker	madalyn.hardaker@kcl.ac.uk	Co-chair
David	Sarmiento	dsarmientoperez@turing.ac.uk	Co-chair
Simon	Li	spli@dundee.ac.uk	Co-chair

** Note, please do not hesitate to point out gaps in the current DARE UK set of strategic themes and/or recommendations that the programme should consider as it continues to evolve these. Community feedback and input is welcomed.*