# First Minister's focus on data and health informatics

## innovative health research will help improve the health and wellbeing of the nation

Scotland's First Minister Nicola Sturgeon chaired the 5th February 2016 meeting of the government's Council of Economic Advisers at Edinburgh's Bioquarter, where data science and health informatics featured high on the agenda.

University of Edinburgh Principal Professor Sir Timothy O'Shea welcomed the Council which toured the resident national big data research institutes – The Farr Institute Scotland and the Administrative Data Research Centre Scotland - which work shoulder-to-shoulder to support cutting-edge medical, healthcare and social research aimed at improving the health and wellbeing of individuals and populations in Scotland, across the UK and overseas.

The Farr Institute Scotland works closely with three other UK partner hubs based in London, Manchester and Swansea which collectively are funded by the Medical Research Council (MRC) and a 12 member consortium.

The Edinburgh centre is a collaboration between six Scottish universities and NHS National Services Scotland (NSS). Together, they have developed secure procedures to curate complex electronic health records that protect patient confidentiality and provide researchers with anonymised datasets to enable new medical discoveries, validate treatments, improve NHS healthcare delivery as well as develop commercial drugs, diagnostics and life saving medical technology– all with a speed and scale not previously possible.

"Health systems internationally are challenged to deliver better quality healthcare at reduced cost so we must find new innovative ways, underpinned by cutting edge research and new knowledge, to provide services and treatments that are better and cheaper," explained Professor Andrew Morris, Vice Principal Data Science at the University of Edinburgh and Director of the Farr Institute.

On the same floor as the Farr Institute Scotland, researchers at the Administrative Data Research Centre for Scotland (ADRC-S) work with government and local authority records on projects as diverse as the impact of benefit sanctions on behaviour and education, contributory factors to road traffic accidents involving older people and the amount of informal care people have access to at home in their last days of life. Funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) – and collaborating with other UK centres in Belfast, Southampton and Swansea - the ADRC Scotland helps researchers to securely link fragments of information together to create a broader picture of society, using data that already exists. This helps to track changes in society over time or in response to new policies.

By using skillfully linked ADRC-S data with the Farr Institute's medical datasets, researchers can reveal new ways to help individuals, populations and policymakers. Information from multiple sources can even overturn established views on how to tackle social and healthcare problems – so the public can enjoy better health and wellbeing, and the public purse can benefit too.

During the formal board meeting, the First Minister and the Council of Economic Advisers received a presentation by Professor Andrew Morris and University of Edinburgh Vice Principal (Resources & Research Policy) Jonathan Seckl on Scotland's capabilities in the data science sector with proposals on how to strengthen its position to maximize a share of the £1.8 trillion global market. The Usher Institute's MRC-funded Proximity to Discovery Programme hosted the meeting and provided logistical / technical support.

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