Dr. Emily **Clough**

Research Data Scotland

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EDINBURGH

Thank you for the opportunity to apply for the role of Chief Data Officer at Research Data Scotland. After two decades as an academic developing and leading data-led research projects, I pivoted to a career in civil society in 2022 in order to apply my data skills to important societal problems. I think my combination of academic and civil society research experience could really contribute to RDS's mission to unlock the potential of public sector data securely, responsibly, and for the benefit of everyone in Scotland. The recent attacks on high quality government data and statistics in the US have really reinforced to me the importance of continuing to improve and advocate for high quality public sector data.

Leading Cross-Organisational Programmes

My experience leading significant cross-organisational programmes involving data and research directly aligns with RDS's need for someone to establish and oversee the range of programmes that source your portfolio of datasets. In my recent role as Head of Data Investigations at Global Witness, I re-established and led a cross-organisational team of five researchers. This required working across six different campaign areas, each with distinct priorities and timelines, to identify high-impact opportunities for data-led research. At the same time, I established a sense of esprit de corps among my own team, encouraging them share ideas and problems with their teammates and to develop their own skills through helping one another.

As a team leader, I emphasise professional development, learning, and collaboration. I foster a collaborative environment within my team, holding weekly learning sessions that we use to share skills or help each other develop ideas, as well as encouraging them to take advantage of opportunities for networking and developing in the broader sector.

Research Governance and Process Standardisation

My academic background has provided me with expert knowledge of research procedures and governance. Over thirteen years at Newcastle University, I published several well-cited articles (300+ citations) using quantitative methods, supervised three PhD students to completion, and served as Programme Director for eight MA programmes involving seven staff and 60-80 students. When the pandemic required an immediate transition to online learning, I successfully led this transformation across multiple programmes, demonstrating my ability to standardise and simplify processes under pressure while maintaining quality standards.

At Global Witness, I have implemented standardised approaches to data investigations that ensure consistency and quality across different campaign areas. I established new and more consistent procedures for documenting our work in GitHub and ensuring quality control through an updated data factchecking procedure.

Building Relationships and Driving Delivery

Relationship-building is central to the way I approach my work. As the Head of Data Investigations Team, I worked with campaign leads across each of Global Witness's six campaigns to help identify high-impact ideas for data-led research. I attend campaign strategy days to better understand long-term goals, and maintain monthly meeting schedules with campaign leads to make sure collaborative projects are progressing smoothly. My team is consistently sought out to collaborate on high-impact, data-driven projects that align with campaign goals. Maintaining a clear sense of campaign goals helps me identify which projects and ideas are the best use of my team's skills and resources.

I also work closely with external partners. While at Newcastle University, I designed and led an innovative research placement module in which students co-produced research with local third-sector organisations, including Citizens Advice Newcastle and Youth Focus NE. At the Ada Lovelace Institute, I led a research project exploring the intersection of AI and climate justice, engaging with stakeholders across philanthropy, venture capital, and climate technology start-ups to inform my research that included actionable recommendations for policymakers and funders. I have also co-authored a series of policy reports for UN-DESA focused on SDG implementation, co-developed an SDG assessment framework for the Greater London Authority, and contributed to the UK's first comprehensive review of national progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals. These experiences have equipped me to manage high-level partnerships and convene actors across academia, government, and civil society.

Leadership Through Uncertainty

My experience has taught me that effective leadership in complex environments requires composure under pressure and knowing when to pivot in response to changing contexts. During my time as Programme Director at Newcastle University, I successfully managed the shift to online learning at the beginning of the pandemic, working with colleagues and students to maintain programme quality while adapting to entirely new delivery methods.

Technical Communication and Strategic Oversight

My ability to articulate technical issues to senior leaders has been demonstrated through my academic teaching, conference presentations, and media engagement. I have presented research findings at international conferences and webinars. At the Ada Lovelace Institute, I developed and led a research project exploring climate justice considerations in AI development, which required communicating complex technical and ethical issues to diverse audiences including policymakers, technologists, and community advocates.

My project and portfolio oversight capabilities have been developed through managing multiple streams of work simultaneously. At Newcastle University, I oversaw eight MA programmes while maintaining my own research agenda and helping to secure significant grants including £100,000 from the British Academy and £31,000 from the Economic and Social Research Council. These experiences taught me how to balance competing priorities, manage budgets effectively, and ensure that individual projects contribute to broader strategic objectives.

Information Governance and Public Sector Understanding

My work at the Ada Lovelace Institute deepened my understanding of information governance and data security issues, particularly regarding the ethical challenges involved in using data and technology to address social problems. I explored issues of fairness, bias, and unintended consequences in AI applications, which has informed my approach to ensuring that data work serves the public interest while protecting individual privacy and rights.

Through my academic career in the UK, my board positions with UK charities, and my consultancy work with government bodies, I have developed familiarity with policy and delivery models in public sector and academic organisations. My current board positions with Rainforest Foundation UK and Scotswood Community Garden have given me insight into charity governance and the importance of demonstrating public value, which I believe will be valuable as RDS continues to establish its reputation and secure additional funding.

I am excited about the possibility of bringing my experience in cross-organisational programme leadership, research governance, and relationship building to support RDS's critical work. Thank you for considering my application, and I look forward to discussing how my skills and experience can contribute to RDS's mission to improve outcomes for people in Scotland through better use of data.

Sincerely,

Dr. Emily Clough