

Research data management: why is it important?

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Abstract

Research Data Management is a hot topic these days, with research funders making it a requirement for institutions that they fund. This report will give an overview of research data management (RDM) activities, Data Curation Profiles (DCPs) and RDM training for librarians and support staff. It will focus on the importance of planning for both data preservation and data sharing from the very start of a research project, and the various ethical issues relating to the subsequent sharing of data that is increasingly a research funder requirement. Finally, it will highlight the range of potential RDM support roles that might emerge within institutions, and the requirement for adequate training of librarians and other support staff to enable them to meet the challenges that these new activities and responsibilities might present.

Key words: research data management (RDM); data sharing; data curation profiles (DCPs); RDM support; librarian training; MANTRA.

This workshop aimed at offering guidance to those who are getting involved with research data management (RDM) support activity for the first time. We kicked off with a clear explanation and description of research data for the uninitiated – what they are and why they are important. As data often have a lifespan that extends beyond the research project for which they are created, the various stages that make up the data life cycle were also explored, together with the many challenges that RDM presents, for both researchers and support staff.

Research funders now also place substantial requirements on researchers as to how their data should be managed, both throughout the research project that is being funded by them and beyond. We, therefore, emphasised the importance of good data management planning, outlined the process and detailed the activity through which this can be achieved. We also discussed the importance of planning for both data preservation and data sharing from the very start of a research project. Specifically, we considered the various ethical issues relating to the subsequent sharing of data that is increasingly a research funder requirement, while acknowledging and addressing some of the many valid concerns

about the latter. This part of our presentation was augmented by some hands-on exercises for the participants.

We talked about Data Curation Profiles (DCPs) which are essentially an outline of the ‘story’ of a data set or collection, describing its origin and lifecycle within a research project. We discussed how DCPs can help librarians understand the ‘business’ of the academic discipline they support, get to develop strategies to support research staff in their academic area, and give them confidence in speaking to academics about their research and the data that underpin it.

We gave highlights from the Toolkit that we developed at the University of Edinburgh (<http://datablog.is.ed.ac.uk/?s=First+Data+Curation+Profile&submit=Search>) together with the DCP interviews, the outcome of these interviews and reported on the very positive response from those Academic Support Librarians at Edinburgh who had both undergone the training and participated in the DCP exercise.

Finally, we discussed the range of potential RDM support roles that might emerge within institutions and the requirement for adequate training of librarians and other support staff to enable them to meet the challenges that these new activities and

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responsibilities might present. We also emphasised that rather than being the sole source of RDM support at Edinburgh, our Librarians form part of a collaborative network – that includes research officers, IT support, senior managers and researchers themselves – that are all working together across the University of Edinburgh to make good RDM a reality.

We concluded our presentation with a mention of the internationally successfully MANTRA course, that was developed by the Data Library Team at the University of Edinburgh (<http://datalib.edina.ac.uk/mantra/>) and which offers self-paced, interactive training on all aspects of RDM, together with practical exercises to assist researchers and their staff with the day-to-day handling and management of their research data.

