Introduction

Many institutions are developing research data management (RDM) policies and guidance to assist their people in following developments in good practice and increasing expectations from funders and other bodies. This guide suggests a number of steps that could be useful when thinking about formalising data management practices via a policy, whether at institutional, faculty or departmental level.

How to use this leaflet

Read it all before getting underway, and follow only the advice that works! You may find that some of the suggested steps occur in the wrong order for your situation (for example, you may already have senior managerial backing), or that not all of what is listed here is relevant for you. Remember to tailor the process to the purpose, and not vice versa.

1. Map out the existing regulatory framework
2. Develop a table of contents
3. Get managerial backing
4. Consult, draft, review
5. Approve and implement

Numerous different types of regulation are relevant to research data policy development. Depending on your circumstance, in descending order of criticality these might be:

- Laws, e.g. the Data Protection Act. These are 'must-haves' - failing to adhere to the laws of the land will make it impossible to do serious research.
- Professional/learned societies. Some of these bodies have particular requirements for accreditation or recognition. It may be appropriate to factor these into your policy, or alternatively to address them in specific departmental guidelines.

There's little sense in developing detailed text at this stage, especially if you haven't yet sought senior support. Instead, examine other internal policies to find out whether there is a standard shape and size for new policies. How long do your institution's policies tend to be? What level of detail do they go into? What supporting materials or guidelines typically accompany them?

You'll probably want to benchmark against peer institutions that already have policies in place. The DCC maintains a growing list of policies at http://www.dcc.ac.uk/resources/policy-and-legal/institutional-data-policies

If there's no standard structure, you might want to consider the ten sections on the next page as a starting point.
3. Get managerial backing

Find out your institution’s approval route for new policies. Many institutions require policies to be steered through a committee approval structure, and this is more likely to succeed with a credible senior figure driving the process. (You might also wish to address this stage first, before thinking about regulatory detail and policy contents etc.)

In other institutions the process may be less transparent, but senior approval will almost certainly be needed nonetheless. Taking a ready-made case to your identified senior champion, together with a draft idea of the policy’s proposed contents, may help to get them onboard.

Be aware that you may need to meet fixed dates in order to submit your policy to internal meetings which happen only infrequently, e.g. once per semester. Think about the timeline early in the development process. Your senior champion should be in a position to advise on areas where consultation might be necessary or beneficial.

• Draft: you might wish to capture requirements before you start writing the policy text, or you might already have a good feel for what’s required and will be consulting with stakeholders with a view to finessing the finer points. So you can start this stage at either Draft or Consult.

• Consult: think about stakeholder groups. It is common for RDM policies and their underlying services to be developed by steering groups or task forces featuring researchers, research students (if covered by the policy), research support staff in the Library, the Research and Enterprise office, Computing Services, etc. It will often be wise to involve records managers and/or Freedom of Information officers, particularly if these roles intersect with existing, related policies. You may want to form an advisory, action or steering group earlier in the process.

• Revise: discuss any substantial suggestions with the senior champion, and make the necessary changes. (N.B. You might need to go through this cycle more than once!)

4. Consult, draft, revise

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5. Approve and implement

When you’re submitting your draft for approval, you’ll probably want to accompany the policy with a concise covering document to brief the approving body on the implications of approval (or, indeed, rejection.) It can be useful to include facts and figures here, alongside a summary of competitor activity in this area, links to web resources, related procedures, and training resources. The DCC website (www.dcc.ac.uk) provides helpful information in each of these areas.

Post-approval, you’ll want to continue to develop your supporting guidance and resources. These will typically change more frequently than the policy, being reviewed in line with changes in good data management practice or relevant legislation. You’ll also need to raise awareness of the policy and its implications for different stakeholder groups (researchers, support staff, management, etc), training sessions and online materials.

About the DCC

The Digital Curation Centre (DCC) is the UK’s national centre of expertise in digital curation. Digital curation involves maintaining, preserving and adding value to digital research data throughout its lifetime. Digital curation is essential for ensuring that research data remains accessible, usable, and findable. Digital curation is also crucial for preventing the loss of research data and for facilitating the active management of research data. Digital curation is critical for ensuring that research data is not only stored securely, but also managed and maintained in a way that preserves its long-term value and usefulness.

The DCC provides services, training and tools to help you and your institution with all aspects of data curation and management. We organise regular events around the UK and an annual international conference. For more information on the DCC and our activities, sign up for our monthly newsletter via our website, www.dcc.ac.uk


For more detail on how to build the infrastructure and resources that underpin an RDM policy, see the DCC’s How-To guide on developing RDM services: www.dcc.ac.uk/resources/how-guides/how-develop-rdm-services

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Useful resources

• The Australian National Data Service (ANDS) has produced a useful guide to developing RDM policies, including a document template: www.ands.org.au/datamanagement/policy.html

• ANDS also ran a webinar on Data Management Policies (2012): www.youtube.com/watch?v=nnQK26QPTjE


• The DCC also maintains a Research Data Policy Briefing for the UK: www.dcc.ac.uk/sites/default/files/documents/resource/policy/DCC_policy_briefing_2011.pdf

• For more detail on how to build the infrastructure and resources that underpin an RDM policy, see the DCC’s How-To guide on developing RDM services: www.dcc.ac.uk/resources/how-guides/how-develop-rdm-services

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