

CASE STUDY

A Digital Curation Centre Case Study
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Increasing Participation in Internal RDM Training Sessions

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Section of the How to guide that this supports
Guidance, training and support

Introduction

This case study looks at the approaches taken by two Jisc MRD Projects to ensure good attendance at their internal research data management (RDM) training sessions.

Background context

Researchers (be they postdoc students, PhD students or paid academic staff) and research support staff (be they librarians, research support or IT services) are all extremely busy carrying out their day job. Attending training sessions on research data management is often low on their priority list.

Two Jisc MRD Projects, Open Exeter based at Exeter University and Research360 based at the University of Bath, have both had success with consistently high attendee numbers (18+) for training sessions.

Overview: Research360

The Research360 project is looking at the challenges that arise from private sector partnerships and research collaborations in a research-intensive university. One of the project's primary aims is to develop the technical and human infrastructure for RDM at the University of Bath. In order to do this they are experimenting with different training approaches including face-to-face workshops and online training.

In 2012 Research360 ran a series of three training workshops aimed at PhD students. These were informed by a Data Asset Framework (DAF) based survey run prior to training, which gained insight into current practices and future needs, and by an existing RDM training presentation that had been delivered annually, by different academic staff, prior to Research360. The first workshop was attended by students from the Doctoral Training Centre for Sustainable Chemical Technologies. It included an overview of RDM followed by an in-depth data management planning exercise comparing four available templates, including one developed at Bath specifically for postgraduates. The second workshop had a broader postgraduate audience from across the university and was more didactic with fewer hands-on activities. The third workshop with a similar audience was more discursive in nature. All three workshops focused on 'immediate' and practical issues, such as avoiding data loss. This approach was fed by the DAF findings suggesting that PhD students often don't distinguish between research data and other documentation, to them it is all "stuff that needs looking after".

After each workshop, the attendees were surveyed by the University Learning and Teaching Office. Their feedback advised that for workshops of this type (information-based rather than skills-based) students prefer to be presented with information in a more familiar lecture format. In addition, the high number of scientists and engineers (who represent the majority of researchers at Bath) tend to favour a more didactic approach for this type of skills training. Future workshops are likely to be a hybrid of the best features of previous workshops: the detailed approach of the second workshop with a few practical exercises from the first/third workshops. For the future there is a short introductory video and an online training module planned, these should help satisfy the rising demand for training at Bath.

Overview: Open Exeter

Open Exeter is a collaborative project combining the expertise and experience of the University of Exeter Library, IT and Research and Knowledge Transfer staff and the know-how of researchers and postgraduate students (PGRs). The work consists of three main strands: *Follow the Data* has assessed the current state of RDM at Exeter, using an adaptation of the DAF survey and will produce PGR case studies, for example, a case study on PhD research and copyright. *Exeter Embeds* will develop an advocacy, governance and training framework to fully embed the Exeter RDM policy across the University and *Technical Enabling* will work to develop a fully functioning research data repository

The project has already conducted a variety of different training sessions including two separate instances of the DCC101 training, one aimed at postgraduate students and one aimed at professional services (library, IT, research office) staff, a full suite of events during Open Access week and inductions on RDM for new postgraduate students held in their individual colleges. The *Discuss Debate Disseminate* workshop aimed at PhD students trialed some novel approaches. Participants were encouraged to bring a piece of their research data with them and in groups discussed whether they would delete, keep or share it and why. The 'speed data dating' session allowed researchers to spend 3 minutes discussing their data with each other looking at common problems or solutions. A session in the Doctoral Supervision course for new doctoral supervisors raised awareness of the roles and responsibilities involved in the implementation of the new University policy on RDM for PGR students.

In the future there are hopes to expand the current target audience for training to include Directors of Research and college peer-review as well as researchers who are writing data management plans through the Learning and Development suite of courses. Open Exeter is also piloting a self-directed course designed to help all subject librarians become familiar with the concepts and practicalities of research data management based on the 23 things approach. Other training sessions include a series of relatively short (1 hour or so), practical, interactive workshops covering areas such as how to organise your files, how to store and backup your data securely, what to keep, open access and how to write a data management plan. These are integrated into the Researcher Development Programme (RDP) for PGR students and early career researchers. Sessions are also planned in other existing educational programmes such as the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice and the ASPIRE programme.

Successes

Both OpenExeter and Research360 have had good attendance from their target audience. This success seems to be down to a number of factors:

Integration

The vast majority of training delivered by Bath and Exeter uses existing programme structures and adds to them. Researchers are already participating in these programmes and have already allocated time for attending. The courses are designed with the academic year in mind and are usually physically located close to partaking groups.

At Bath postgraduate students are required to complete a set number of days training per year, the RDM course has been formally approved as a module in the PGskills series and so would contribute to this total. Exeter have found that assimilating RDM into the Researcher Development Programme and PCAP sessions is by far the best way to "get to" junior researchers. There have been concerns that early career researchers sometimes miss out on training due to their temporary and transitory status. Other training is delivered in departments and colleges, and also as part of training sessions which are focused on other issues, such as bid writing and open access to research publications. For example in Exeter one talk was conducted as part of the English Department's away day; academics were more concerned with open access issues because of the new RCUK policy, but RDM queries were also discussed.

The integration approach can also save organisational time and effort and is beneficial to the long-term sustainability of the training modules. One-off training days can work but need good management support. Success is guaranteed if you can "sneak training into lots of different places".

Promotion

To ensure attendance events need to be well-publicised. Integrated training is likely to be advertised as part of an already agreed marketing plan. In Bath students are sent emails with a list of PGSkills courses available to them at the start of each academic year. In Exeter it was found that emails for surveys or training that were sent from a member of the appropriate department, or from a respected researcher were more likely to achieve registrations than those from admin staff or the project team. Use of informal networks such as strategic research groups can also work.

Collaboration in training design

Well-designed training with appropriate content will encourage attendance. Academics are unlikely to engage unless the subject matter is relevant to them, so there is a need to ascertain training needs before delivering workshops. Gaining a researcher perspective when developing a course is also valuable. The Open Exeter project worked with six postgraduate students to create an RDM survival guide. The students were heavily involved in the process of selecting the content and the guide features as a training resource at postgraduate inductions.

For Bath and Exeter training has tended to be practical, focused on requirements and provided in a relatively short time period. Training has been sensitive to audience needs; for example different audiences respond better to different timing schedules: support staff may prefer a lunch-time session with food provided while students can manage short morning sessions. Bath worked with their postgraduate training team early on in the workshop development. The team gave useful support, both in developing the workshops and administrative effort. They also provide an external view on workshop design.

One important step in training design is asking for and using feedback. Both Bath and Exeter have taken an iterative approach and adjusted training when necessary.

Use of interactive elements to engage delegates

Research360 and Open Exeter have found that the use of interactive elements has been successful in engaging students during face-to-face workshops. The two projects demonstrated exemplar exercises at their IDCC13 workshop in January 2013. Open Exeter ran a 'Speed Data Dating' session in which researchers were required to describe their own RDM challenges to fellow researchers in a 3 minute slot. In a highly-interactive session Research360 used audience response systems, or 'clickers', to gauge researchers' knowledge on certain areas and get them thinking about the issues. Both exemplar exercises demonstrated that RDM training can be engaging, informative and fun. Such sessions result in word-of-mouth recommendations and ultimately in higher attendance of future sessions.

Challenges

Not all the training delivered by the two institutions has been successful or well-attended. However both projects recognise that understanding what doesn't work is as important as understanding what does work. Obtaining feedback and building on constructive criticism is an important step in training development.

Some training sessions have achieved better engagement than others. As mentioned the didactic approach worked better in Bath when dealing with science postgraduates, as there seemed to be a reluctance by some scientists to discuss certain subjects openly. One issue is how institutions deal with disciplinary specificity and resourcing can be an issue. At Bath there is agreement that generic training with discipline-specific examples is the most effective approach with resourcing constraints in mind.

The timing of events can be an issue, for example a clash with half-term or exams can badly affect numbers. At Bath some departments are showing an interest in making basic RDM training mandatory for new PhD students. Research360 are assessing what point in the PhD process would be the best for students to receive this training. Right at the start of their PhD is too early as students are busy with other administrative duties and are not fully aware of what data they will collect or the issues involved. However leaving it too late can mean that students are too busy with other aspects of their work to participate and any lessons learned could result in a lot of extra effort organising and backing up previously-collected data.

Open Exeter's approach has been to offer different types of training at different stages to postgraduate students. For example, the induction sessions take the form of a short presentation, whereas the RDP course are more in-depth and interactive and more suitable for postgraduates who are at a later stage of their degree. Differences in level of knowledge is another challenge that the project has faced, with some students stating that they would like a more basic level of training and others left wanting to know more. A solution to this issue would be to provide different tiers of training e.g. basic, intermediate, advanced. However, providing advanced training for some topics is likely to have to be discipline-specific, rather than interdisciplinary.

Further information

Research360 blog:

<http://blogs.bath.ac.uk/research360/>

Research360 Training materials on Opus:

<http://opus.bath.ac.uk/32296/>

Open Exeter blog:

<http://blogs.exeter.ac.uk/openexeterrdm/>

Open Exeter training materials: <https://eric.exeter.ac.uk/repository/handle/10036/3737>

IDCC13: Exemplar RDM Training Exercises:

<http://www.dcc.ac.uk/blog/idcc13-exemplar-rdm-training-exercises>

Key Points:

- Integrate RDM training into existing programmes
- Publicise training well through formal and informal networks
- Collaborate with researchers, academics and course experts in training design
- Interactive training can help encourage attendees to engage

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