

## **Business plan and sustainability discussion group**

Discussion group participants included Rachel Bruce, Jisc (facilitator), Sarah Jones, DCC (notes), and research data management support staff from a number of universities.

We began by discussing experiences of developing a business plan: the challenges faced, unresolved questions and any successes. A number of themes emerged.

### **Making the case**

Several universities have put together business cases. One commented that the biggest obstacle has been that it went to a senior committee, was taken seriously, but no money was attached. They have been able to slip through some IT work as general infrastructure improvements, but it can be hard to get firm commitments. It can also be difficult to get same level of enthusiasm and input from different services.

Canvassing plays a critical role to get others on side. One reflected that they rolled ideas in with CRIS and got support for that as opposed to RDM. Another commented on the need to build relationships with key decision makers before putting forward a case. They spoke to research directors and found out which committees they sit on so they knew who would have an influence on approving the plan.

Some felt prioritisation was a challenge and questioned how we could push RDM up the pecking order, while others remarked on a current sea change – ears are beginning to prick up in light of EU mandates and requirements from other funders.

One university has used risk as a strategy to engage people. This has proved to be a useful tactic as researchers were storing data on USBs and had suffered some data breaches. It may have been opportune timing and only takes you so far though. There was another suggestion to speak the language of senior management. Don't sell a set of services, rather an increased set of benefits (e.g. getting more grant income) and risk mitigation. Selling RDM as a way to help you meet research targets around research capability and impact etc can be more persuasive.

One university reflected that they have had a few business cases. They had one around IT solutions and another about staffing went through last year. The business case has changed and evolved. Another reflected that they used it as ONE research case not the only one, with the projection that it will grow. Approaching it in a modular way like this may be more achievable as all the questions and justifications don't need to be presented at once.

### **RDM staff**

Reflections from the group suggested fits and starts in terms of making progress on staffing. Some managed to get a little resource then hit recruitment freezes, or managed to make the case for a couple of staff on a short-term basis only. On the whole, RDM forms part of existing roles. It can be a challenge to know exactly what type of posts you need and make the case for long-term contracts. There was a feeling that even in the case of former JiscMRD projects, most had been followed up with fixed-term project posts. Only a few have any form of permanency or sustainability.

Permanent posts had been secured in one instance due to careful positioning of responsibilities. The attendee reflected that they linked the jobs to a range of core activities rather than just RDM. New roles cover RDM, the repository and digital archives. You need to embed posts in different ways to slip them through, as just going forward as RDM is difficult. The digital archive work will begin with EPSRC funded data and extend to corporate data. It was felt that advertising a post as RDM co-ordinator alone would have led to it being short-term.

Others suggested incremental approaches. If you convinced people that there was a need for a service and at least one person to be employed then you could try to leverage more from this. Analysing that role and the number of queries received could help to make projections on the amount of work that could be achieved by different numbers of staff. Universities could possibly get by with one person for a few years and then scale up.

### **Making projections and justifying costs**

One of the challenges in getting a business case approved is providing evidence of the demand. Estimating how much storage is needed, the anticipated level of retrieval and how much time is needed to review data and support researchers was all felt to be a major difficulty.

One commented that you can't convince IT to build infrastructure for research data without demand, while another questioned "how long is a piece of string?" – IT were happy with that, but finance wasn't. Business cases are responding to a need to provide services but we don't have any meaningful sense of demand or how that will grow – it's all very conjectural and an act of faith.

The Slough data centre was felt to have changed things and helped with estimating costs. Another reflected that high-up committees are good at looking at next year. It's easier to project for that based on surveys. Overall though, this area had more questions than answers.

One university is aiming to gather analytics to feed into service development and justify costs. If researchers are buying their own storage then it can be costed in, but using core service is difficult due to double dipping. Some are considering classing RDM support as a small research facility.

Responsibilities for implementation were also considered with a discussion of central versus devolved management. One commented about wanting to devolve work out to schools but being concerned about balls being passed. It can be hard to get an imperative to make a case for centralisation – the size can mean you can't get a big enough central team and processes can also differ widely across the institution.

### **What support is needed?**

There was a feeling that not much information has been shared in this area. Costs and scale vary greatly, so you need to compare against similar organisations. Many won't share their costing model though due to sensitivities. One university reflected that sharing is an issue for them as RDM is build into the wider costing model.

It would be extremely helpful to have more case studies on the benefits of RDM – more examples than the Heather Piwowar paper from 2007. One commented that the EPSRC should take on some responsibility for communicating their own policy directly to researchers too. Researchers are surprised when they get all their grant funding from EPSRC and have never heard about this from them. It can be hard to make the case if they only hear about it from the institution.

Several felt a stronger message was needed from HEFCE and RCUK on publishing data. The HEFCE message was diluted. Suggestions were made that RCUK could work with universities more too. EPSRC for example could be clearer that it requires a DMP and suggest that this should be provided to a certain group at the uni. Others were wary of demanding this, but felt awareness needed to be raised nonetheless.

Research Councils come up with harmonisation of requirements on policy, and look to invest regionally, but there could be more cost-benefits around teaming up to encourage this. Alliances and partnerships could be directed by others potentially. Or maybe we should look collectively across disciplines rather than comparator universities? Some universities are looking into collaboration and potentially shared services. They've been sharing ideas so far, possibly library systems in future. There weren't many examples of this to date though.