

# Northumbria Research Link

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Pryor, G., Jones, S. and White, A. (eds) (2014). *Delivering research data management services*. London: Facet.

Digital technologies have changed how research data is produced, stored, discovered, shared and reused within the academic community. In response, many researchers, institutions and policymakers have engaged in the creation and delivery of structured approaches to research data management (RDM), seeking to maximise the potential that digital technologies offer for research data to be tested and applied to new research. However, the scale of the issue – the volume of data produced, the resource implications of selecting, describing and storing that data in compliance with all relevant stakeholders and planning these activities – has meant many institutions have not fully engaged in good RDM practice.

The editors of this book include two senior support officers and a former associate director of the Digital Curation Centre (DCC), which provides practical support for developing policy, skills and services in RDM to the UK higher education research community. In this context, the book aims to be a step-by-step guide for those institutions now having to quickly identify ways to deliver RDM services. Though it presents background and explanation, the editors (each contributing chapters to the book) do not set out arguments for the advantages of RDM, assuming that such arguments are now well known and institutions are now seeking practical guidance for drafting and enacting policy.

Chapter One gives background to changes in the research landscape, showing how regulation from government and research funders has increased and RDM is no longer a matter of choice or good practice for institutions, but a matter of compliance. Following this overview of changes to research practice and the environment in which research is created, Chapter Two goes on to show how institutions have a range of approaches available to them to create policy in response.

This “how to” approach continues, with Chapter Three setting out the roles and responsibilities of institutional stakeholders in RDM infrastructure, focusing on three main areas: management, support and administrative services, and researchers/data producers. A helpful aspect of this chapter is that it focuses on the skills and competencies of stakeholders rather than specific job titles, particularly in the support and administrative services. Though in most cases major stakeholders will be the library, IT and the research office, representation from these areas will vary depending on the structure of the institution, the skills of the staff and the requirements of the RDM policy.

After identifying roles, Chapter Four sets out key phases in the establishment of an RDM service, showing how a business plan, including thorough scoping, engagement with researchers and support from University management, can ensure services are sustainable and remain relevant to the research communities they support rather than simply meeting their immediate needs. It draws on the DCC’s programme and gives examples of how its Data Asset Framework and CARDIO tools<sup>1</sup> can be used to assess current practice in the institution and to identify gaps for future service provision. From establishing the current position, planned services can then, as set out in Chapter Five, be approached incrementally, building on existing areas of research support and the skills of staff where possible. Such a modular approach can make the development of RDM services easier to manage financially, ensure services are embedded in the existing research culture of the institution and provide opportunity to pilot cross-service collaboration in institutions without a culture of working in this way.

The final chapters of the book are case studies from Johns Hopkins University, the University of Southampton, Monash University, the UK Data Service and Jisc’s Managing Research Data programmes, spotlighting current practice in RDM infrastructures in the UK, Australia and the USA. Common issues include the difficulties encountered in communication; for support staff to understand the nature of research and its data and for researchers to understand the technical and legal aspects of description, storage and access. Finding representatives of the research community willing to act as champions for the RDM policy is suggested as one solution to facilitate better communication in both directions. Though such themes emerge, the approach taken in each case study is different, showing that the response to the challenges of RDM is predicated on the institutional culture or purpose of the policymaker (and the broader environments they operate in) and no single approach is the “right” way to do it. Different approaches may be appropriate for different institutions, but each case study shows the benefit of extensive stakeholder consultation and cooperation between academics and support services. Each is an instructive example of current practice and how to

navigate the policy landscape, but the lessons extend beyond current policy and the case studies will remain relevant.

Pryor sets out in the preface that “anyone with an active stake in the generation, management and sharing of research data should find something of value in this book.” (p. VIII). I feel the book is particularly relevant to professional support service staff who now find RDM is part of their remit. Viewed as a whole book, it is a comprehensive guide to the drivers of change, the components of building and executing a policy and implementing an RDM infrastructure, but will also act as a reference text, to look up specific areas of guidance and examples or be signposted toward resources.

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<sup>1</sup> Digital Curation Centre. Collaborative Assessment of Research Data Infrastructure and Objectives (CARDIO) <http://www.dcc.ac.uk/projects/cardio> and Digital Asset Framework <http://www.data-audit.eu/index.html>