



Engaging Researchers with Data Management The Cookbook

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1.2. Does a Policy Solve Everything? Policy as a Driver for Engagement at Leiden University

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The Centre for Digital Scholarship at Leiden University reaches out directly to research institutes to understand the support they need to implement RDM policy.

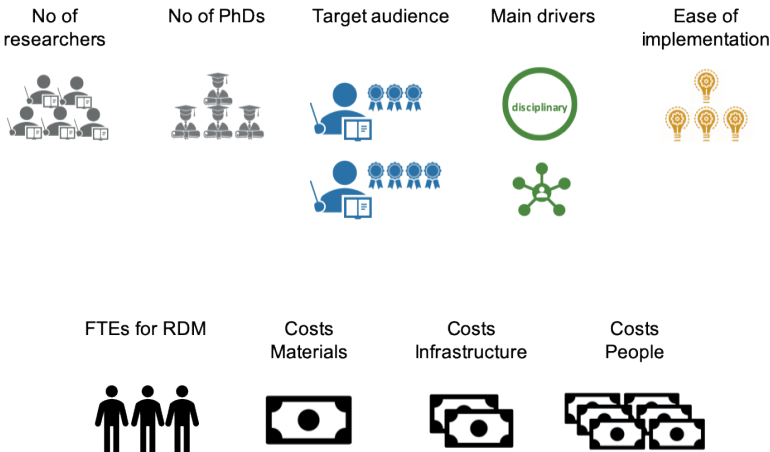


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A Crown Is Merely a Hat that Lets the Rain In

A Research Data Management (RDM) policy can outline expectations but by itself will rarely engender a change of behaviour. Worse, although it may be the culmination of many months or years of work, it may prove to be ‘merely a hat that lets the rain in’ if not properly implemented, exposing gaps in service provision and support, and magnifying the resistance that academics feel towards administrative tasks that take them away from their research.

Engaging researchers to help produce a practical plan for implementing an RDM policy can, however, prove to be an ideal way of learning first-hand what they need to support their data management. The policy can therefore become the ‘crown’ that demonstrates the effectiveness and success of the resulting RDM services.

Leiden’s Use of its RDM Policy to Prompt Discussion

Leiden University Libraries’ Centre for Digital Scholarship is taking the RDM discussion directly to researchers, by engaging with individual researchers on a one-to-one basis and by reaching out to research institutes and finding out what they need in order to be able to implement the Leiden University RDM Regulations¹ approved in 2016.

‘We can use our RDM policy as the reason to arrange a meeting and discuss what is expected by the university in terms of data management,’ says Fieke Schoots, a Data Management Expert at the Centre for Digital Scholarship who initiated and coordinates the data management activities at Leiden University Libraries. Once a meeting is underway, ‘we can use the policy as a focus for finding out what is needed, by an individual or a research group, to improve their data management and so we can plan to work on solutions to make their data management easier.’ These solutions help to provide incentives that result in compliance with the policy.

The result is an environment where researchers know where to go to ask for support with their data management and the central support

1 Research Data Management Regulations, Leiden University, April 2016, https://www.library.universiteitleiden.nl/binaries/content/assets/ul2ub/research-publish/research-data-management-regulations-leiden-university_def.pdf

services have a better understanding of the practical needs of the research staff regarding their research data.

‘One Size’ Does Not Fit All

The Leiden policy regulations recognise that disciplinary differences exist for many practical data management decisions and, therefore, avoid imposing a ‘one-size-fits-all’ solution. The regulations indicate explicitly where departments and institutes should devise their own procedures, and include a whole section on ‘elaboration’ that lists the specific decisions that need to be taken at a faculty or institutional level to supplement the generic policy.

Implementation of the regulations was expected to be completed by 2019 and was to be carried out jointly by the faculties and various central services: the ICT (Information, Communication and Technology) Shared Services, Academic Affairs, Information Management, and the Centre for Digital Scholarship. Some progress was made with some faculties, but by 2018 it became clear that the levels of engagement required to bring about change across the entire University were beyond the current staffing capacity. The implementation period was, therefore, extended to the end of 2020 and new support staff appointments began.

Why Does this Kind of Engagement Take Time?

In early 2019, two members of the university library visited every faculty board to discuss the needs for support regarding open access, data management (including the procedures and services needed to elaborate and implement the policy), and the use of digital tools and methodologies. Regarding data management there were still too many diverse needs at the faculty level and so a new round of talks has begun with the 29 institutional scientific committees.²

To begin the conversation, a report on the current data management support for researchers in each institute has been produced, using enquiry and training statistics and a qualitative description of the

2 Leiden University Scientific Institutes, <https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/en/about-us/management-and-organisation/faculties/institutes>

current relevant services. This kind of engagement is staff- and time-intensive to organize and carry out.

Although the absence of dedicated staff was slowing the pace of change, it was not the only problem. ‘Research staff were sometimes reluctant to start discussing new services whilst still waiting for solutions to long-standing problems,’ says Fieke. It was clear that solutions would need to be delivered to persuade research staff to engage in new discussions. As a result, several pilot projects have begun in parallel to develop solutions for the storage of legacy data sets and encryption tools.

Continuing the Engagement with a Matrix of Support Services

In order to improve the connections between staff, maintain the ongoing engagement, and deliver solutions, the steering board has agreed to a new approach to organising and strengthening support that employs both decentralised and centralised expertise (see Fig. 1.2.1).

Fieke explained this new approach:

The matrix identifies key support themes, such as ethics and legal advice, where there are existing staff both in central support units and embedded within the faculties or institutes. Upon this matrix you can build multidisciplinary and thematic networks to bring these staff members together at a faculty level and a theme level, respectively.

The first thematic ‘Data Management Network’ event was organised by the Centre for Digital Scholarship in June 2019. It brought together embedded data stewards, central RDM support staff, and researchers who are particularly active in data management from across the whole university, to talk about their priorities for developments to improve data management practice.

Through this meeting, central support staff have already learnt more about the research processes and needs of researchers, and researchers have learnt more about the expertise and possibilities offered by further engagement with central support staff.

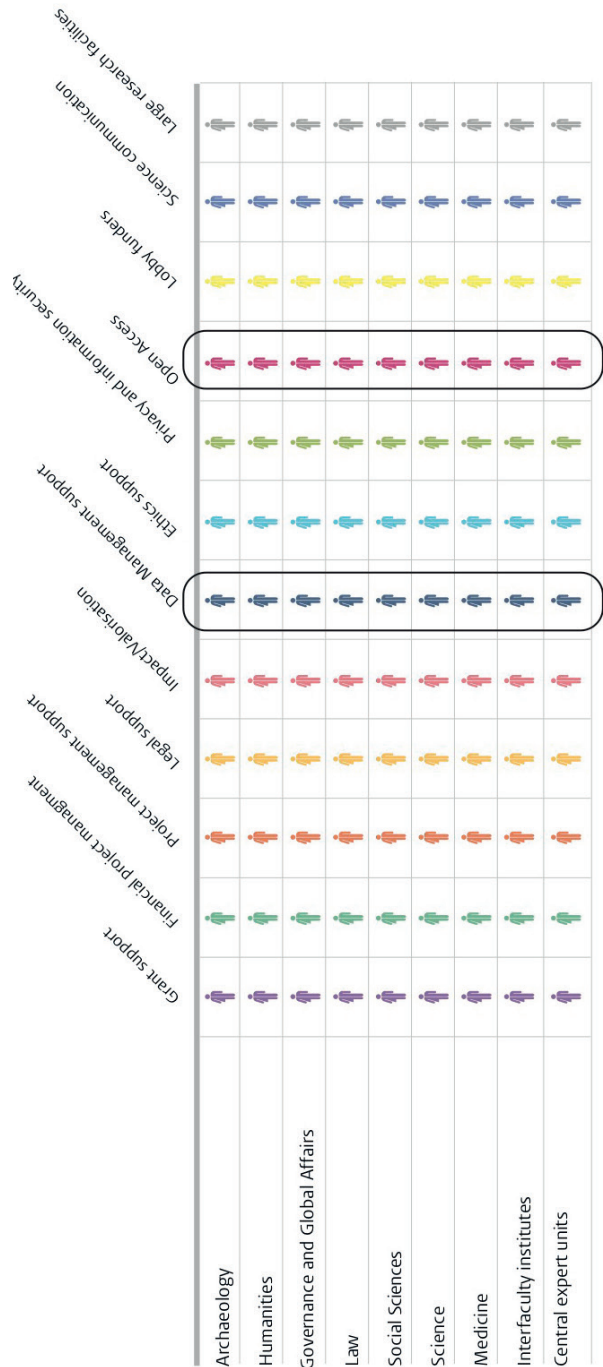


Fig. 1.2.1 Leiden University's proposed thematic and disciplinary networks, 2019. By Marcel Villerius, Leiden University, CC BY 4.0.

The ongoing efforts to engage researchers have been very rewarding for both sides, but have also been necessary to ensure that the regulations are a welcome tool for change.



Fig. 1.2.2 Leiden University's Data Management Network convening event, 27 June 2019. Leiden University Libraries, CC BY 4.0.

