



Engaging Researchers with Data Management The Cookbook

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2.1. Taking Advantage of Existing
Administrative Systems: MRC/CSO Social
and Public Health Sciences Unit,
University of Glasgow

Authors: Joanne Yeomans, Iza Witkowska

Contributor: Mary-Kate Hannah

Piggybacking onto an existing system for approving research proposals, the Health Sciences Unit at the University of Glasgow automatically contacts researchers that might need RDM support at the beginning of their projects, and then follows up throughout the project's lifespan.

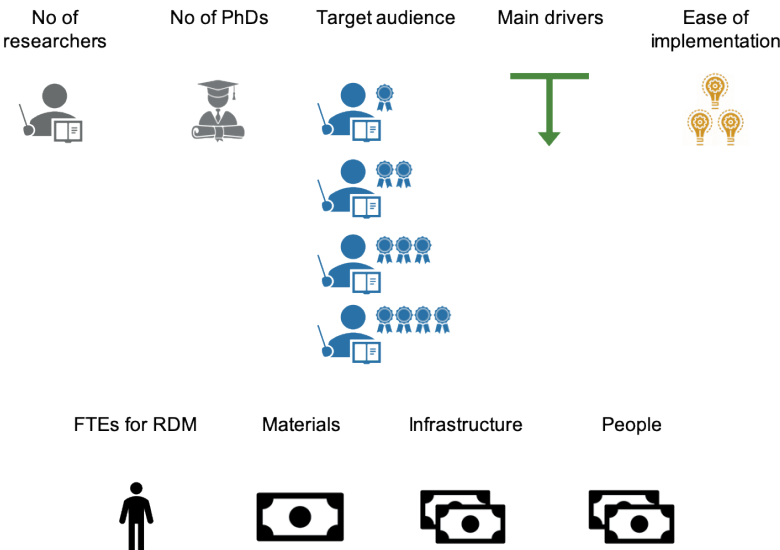


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Engagement as Early as Possible — The WHY

In the MRC/CSO Social and Public Health Sciences Unit at the University of Glasgow,¹ the department representatives decided to use an existing administrative reporting system to help engage with researchers about data management issues and to manage requests coming to the IT (Information Technology) and other support staff offices.

Part of the reason we set up this system is that people would apply for grants, and then when the research started they'd go to the support staff and ask: can you help me with transcribing, can you help me with fieldwork or whatever else was needed, and the support staff representative would say: we don't have this in our diary, we have two other surveys happening at the moment, so we can't do this, we need warning that these things are going to happen. So now, because it's reported in advance in the system, they can plan, they can take on new staff, anything that is needed. — Mary-Kate Hannah, Data Scientist in the Unit.

How Early Is Early? The HOW

Whenever a project is initiated, a researcher has to fill in and submit an online form. The research proposal is considered by the 'Portfolio Group' which checks that the topic is in line with the unit's focus and identifies what resources might be needed within the department, whether space for staff members, IT facilities, and so on.

The Portfolio Group consists of senior and experienced research staff, and senior representatives of all the different research programmes. Representatives from various support offices also sit in on the meetings. The group considers the proposal and, among other things, identifies whether there is data collection or data creation planned and whether data will be stored at Glasgow University. If so, they tick a box in the form that indicates a data management plan (DMP) is required and

1 MRC/CSO Social and Public Health Sciences Unit at the University of Glasgow receives joint core funding from the Medical Research Council (MRC) and the Scottish Government Chief Scientist Office (CSO).

this triggers an automatic email to Mary-Kate and to the submitter so that they can follow this up. Without Mary-Kate signing off on the completion of a satisfactory DMP, the researcher cannot move forward with their grant application or their research.

The automated email starts the process of putting Mary-Kate in touch with the researcher to assist with the writing of the plan. This happens regardless of whether a funder requires a DMP or not: if the research is going to generate data that will be stored at Glasgow University, then the department itself still requires a DMP to get things right from the start.



Fig. 2.1.1 Mary-Kate Hannah helping a researcher to complete a DMP at the MRC/CSO Social and Public Health Sciences Unit, University of Glasgow. Photograph by Enni Pulkkinen, 2019, CC BY 4.0.

Benefits for the Researcher — The WHAT

So, what happens after the sending of the automated email saying that a DMP is needed? The next step involves Mary-Kate sending a customized email and flagging up resources such as the pre-filled DMP template and the DMPonline tool, as well as offering support on any other Research Data Management (RDM) relevant aspect (for example, handling personal data). She also refers researchers to a recorded presentation about RDM consisting of PowerPoint slides with recorded

voiceover. This personal touch is definitely the key factor in making the implementation of this process successful.

The RDM support doesn't end there. Once a project begins, a study or trial master file² is set up on the network drive and customized for the project team. It has standard folders for storing common administrative documentation, such as grant application and legal documents, and includes a folder for data management. This generic folder structure was developed after looking at and reviewing many studies at the department. 'Researchers and support staff are very happy with this; it saves time as they don't have to think about this themselves,' says Mary-Kate.



Fig. 2.1.2 Mary-Kate Hannah delivering a training session on data management planning at the MRC/CSO Social and Public Health Sciences Unit, University of Glasgow. Photograph by Enni Pulkkinen, 2019, CC BY 4.0.

2 Trial master file, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trial_master_file

Looking Back, Does It Work?

Yes, it does! People are getting used to the idea of planning their data management: because they did it for their last project, they are expecting it for their next project. They have often reported that the process of writing the DMP has been helpful and that they have found conversations with the research data management advisor to be useful.

Having said that, there is still room for improvement in the system to save researchers' time. For example, researchers need to write similar details in different forms for their grant application, their ethical review request, and their DMP. These forms are delivered at different times and the procedural timing could be better optimized.

Sometimes the detailed information requested in the DMP comes too late, for example, 'the researcher might have had ethical approval for their data collection consent form which did not contain data-sharing information, then they start to write their data management plan and realize that they will have to make an amendment to their consent form and ask for an amendment to their ethics application,' says Mary-Kate.

What is clear though, is that embedding a requirement for data management planning directly in the unit's authorization process is crucial in getting researchers to think about their data management at an early stage, and in putting RDM support staff in contact with researchers right from the start.

