



Engaging Researchers with Data Management The Cookbook

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4.5. Talk to Understand Your Community

Better: Informal Events at the Open University

Author: Marta Teperek

Contributor: Dan Crane

Reflections on how informal discussion forums and speaker-led lunchtime events have helped Open University RDM engage with their research community.

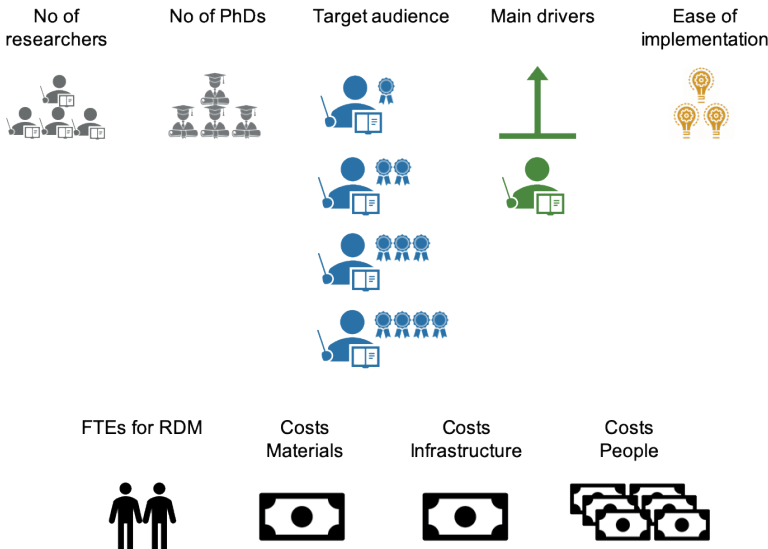


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The Open University (OU) in the UK used informal events as a vehicle to hear from researchers about their work and what was important to them. ‘We offer RDM support through our website, training, repository and enquiries, but contact with researchers is largely limited to those who get in touch or attend our sessions. It seems natural for us to focus on the mandated and defined goals of data management planning and meeting funder requirements — they are of course important — but are they the things that are most important to researchers as well?’ wonders Nicola Dowson, Senior Library Services Manager for Research Support at the OU Library.

Two Informal Events to Get Discussions Started

‘We’ve held two events where we invited researchers to come and talk about RDM in an informal setting, without us talking at them or pushing an agenda of policy compliance, or telling them why they should write a DMP,’ explains Dan Crane, the librarian at the OU.

The two events were:

- ‘Data Resolutions’: an open discussion forum without an agenda or structure, just allowing the conversation to flow.⁷
- ‘Data Conversations’: a more structured lunchtime event, following the Lancaster model explored in case 4.3, with a mixture of academic staff, PhD students, and RDM staff as speakers.⁸

So What’s Next?

The OU aren’t sure yet whether they will organise more events of this kind in the future. These initial discussions highlighted that research at the OU is varied; different disciplines, methods, and groups, require different solutions and approaches. This has inspired them to launch a Data Champions programme (similar to the Cambridge University model detailed in case 5.1) and a call has been issued for researchers

7 Data Resolutions at the OU (blog post): Dan Crane, ‘Research Data Resolutions’, 8 February 2018, http://www.open.ac.uk/blogs/the_orb/?p=2553

8 Data Conversations at the OU (blog post): Dan Crane, ‘Data Conversation — talking with researchers about open data, 14 December 2018, http://www.open.ac.uk/blogs/the_orb/?p=3091



Fig. 4.4 Informal discussions with researchers. © Jan van der Heul/TU Delft, CC BY 4.0.

who are ready to lead by example and share best practice within their communities.⁹

Advice for Others Who Want to Start

‘Be bold and do it! Don’t spend too much time thinking about whether it will work and if it will be successful. The worst result would be that not many people turn up. But just go ahead and do it. Someone will come!’ says Dan. ‘Seeing researchers engaged and enjoying the event makes it really worth the effort.’

⁹ Call for Data Champions at the OU (blog post): Isabel Chadwick, ‘Call for Data Champions!’, 26 June 2019, http://www.open.ac.uk/blogs/the_orb/?p=3267