



Engaging Researchers with Data Management The Cookbook

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5.3. Data Stewards at Wageningen University and Research

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Contributors: Saskia van Marrewijk and Erik van Den Bergh

Wageningen University's network of Data Stewards will be formed primarily from existing academic and research-related staff given new formal roles and responsibilities around supporting RDM.










No of researchers	No of PhDs	Target audience	Main drivers	Ease of implementation
				
FTEs for RDM	Costs Materials	Costs Infrastructure	Costs People	
				

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The Wageningen Data Competency Center (WDCC) was established at Wageningen University and Research (WUR) in September 2017 to support developments in the field of big data. The Center encompasses five WUR policy lines: (1) education, (2) research, (3) data management, (4) infrastructure, and (5) value creation, to integrate and strengthen the existing organisation of education and research within the University.

Meet the Team

The Data Management Support Team, a collaboration of WUR Library and IT (Information Technology), coordinated by the WDCC, comprises 9 employees from the library, legal services and IT, who provide guidance for researchers throughout the research lifecycle. Additionally, the WDCC data management website¹² is a useful resource where PhD candidates can read WUR data policy¹³ and regulations. What's more, researchers can contact the 'Data Desk'¹⁴ via an open mailbox to have all of their data questions answered by a member of the support team.

From 'Data Savvy' to 'Data Steward'

It seems as though WUR have all bases covered when it comes to helping researchers engage with their data. However, following the recent establishment of the WDCC, the major reform on EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), and the amendment to WUR Data Policy that stipulates all PhD researchers must archive the data underlying their publications (as well as write a data management plan), there is increasing pressure on researchers to incorporate sustainable data management in their workflows to meet the requirements of research institutes, funding bodies and publishers alike.

The WDCC realises that one centralised support team alone will be insufficient to meet these requirements within all 6 graduate schools at WUR and have, therefore, decided to implement a community of Data

12 WDCC, <https://www.wur.nl/en/Value-Creation-Cooperation/WDCC/Data-Management-WDCC.htm>

13 WUR data policy, <https://www.wur.nl/en/Value-Creation-Cooperation/WDCC/Data-Management-WDCC/Data-policy.htm>

14 WUR Data Desk, <https://www.wur.nl/en/Value-Creation-Cooperation/WDCC/Data-Desk.htm>

Stewards to more effectively engage with their research community about data and to provide better Research Data Management (RDM) support for researchers.

According to WDDC Data Management Secretary, Saskia van Marrewijk, 'a WUR Data Steward will fulfil a similar role to that of the Data Champion at the University of Cambridge or TU Delft in the sense that they are volunteers with discipline-specific experience in good RDM practice.' She continues, 'however, at WUR we will formalise the roles and responsibilities of Data Stewards as we expect them to complete specific tasks within their research departments.'

WDCC Infrastructure Coordinator, Erik van Den Bergh, adds, 'we haven't yet appointed Data Stewards within departments but they already exist as "data-savvy personnel" working within their various departments at WUR.' Indeed, there are approximately 120 employees who frequently undertake RDM tasks as part of their daily work at WUR. 'Finally being able to award these data experts the official title of "Data Steward" means that they will be recognised for their efforts,' says Erik. 'More importantly, they will be allocated specific time to undertake RDM tasks that counts towards their working hours instead of them having to find time to complete tasks.' The WDCC anticipates that Data Stewards will dedicate time accounting for around 0.2 FTE (Full-Time Equivalent) for every 30 researchers within their departments.

Another unique aspect of the WUR Data Stewards programme is that a Data Steward position may not be available to everyone. Erik hopes that the position will be filled by established staff members, such as senior researchers, lab assistants and technicians, who have long-term employment contracts in order to avoid the risk of Data Stewards leaving with their acquired knowledge. He also believes that the position would be too laborious and time-consuming for an early career researcher. Again, this represents a very different approach to those taken by the University of Cambridge and TU Delft to build their networks of Data Champions.

Measuring Cultural Change

Aside from basic counts of the number of visitors to the WDCC data website, the data management support team don't currently measure

whether their contributions are driving cultural change within the WUR research community. However, they hope that by empowering so many staff members to advocate good data management practices, researchers will become more engaged with data topics. The WDCC is eager to measure the impacts of implementing a Data Stewards programme and plans to achieve this by using Change Performance Indicators implemented as part of their university-wide, strategic, three-year plan that was presented earlier this year. These indicators are metrics used to assess the effectiveness of the programme in improving RDM practice across WUR.

