

Building networks to strengthen research data management advocacy and training



Daniel van Strien
Research Data Support Officer
UCL Library Services
University College London
d.strien@ucl.ac.uk



Myriam Fellous-Sigrist
Research Data Support Officer
UCL Library Services
University College London
m.fellous-sigrist@ucl.ac.uk

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University College London (UCL) is a research-intensive university with 380 research departments, units, institutes and centres that are home to 12,000 research staff and research students. The university has been at the forefront of delivering open access to research publications through Discovery, the institutional publications repository. In August 2013 the Research Data Executive Services Group published a Research Data Policy outlining the responsibilities of research staff and students and describing the variety of institutional services that are available to support Research Data Management (RDM). UCL's Research Data Policy is supported by two Research Data Support Officers (RDSOs) who work as part of the Liaison and Support Services within UCL Library Services and work on a regular basis with the Research Data Service based in Research IT Services and a number of other central services. This article will briefly describe how the RDSOs have developed links with other services in order to improve awareness of RDM services.

Research Data Management advocacy at UCL

The RDSOs support best practices in RDM and sharing through a number of avenues, including a website that provides guidance on practical issues in RDM, support on UCL and research funder policies and advice on writing data management plans. The website was developed by a working group of library colleagues; the ongoing development of guidance on the website continues to draw on the expertise of subject librarians, copyright officers and others in the library.

Attending faculty and departmental meetings has been a primary channel of advocating for effective RDM and sharing. Alongside this, the RDSOs regularly attend events in the university aimed at research staff and deliver tailored training and workshops for research groups and departments.

One-to-one and research group support are other key areas of our advocacy activities. Responding to enquiries and meeting researchers is part of day-to-day support to users. In addition, the RDSOs review data management plans by giving feedback on the content and layout of each plan as well as advice on where to find funders' requirements and guidance for writing the plan. They also provide information on relevant university or external resources to improve it. Users are offered the opportunity to submit a second draft of their plan for a last review. Through the very positive feedback sent by users, we have observed that such assistance has an extensive and immediate impact on their grant application and potentially on their future project. It also provides an opportunity to point to relevant central services, and to explain to a researcher several aspects of data management.

Challenges to advocacy

The size and structure of UCL present a number of challenges to the RDSOs, including the number of researchers the service is trying to support, the diversity of research taking place, and researchers working as part of overlapping institutions such as the NHS. Working across a broad range of research areas also presents a challenge in developing domain-specific knowledge of Research Data Management. Since the inception of the RDSO roles, one approach to tackling this problem has been to draw upon the expertise of library colleagues.

The results of a survey carried out in 2016 (Fellous-Sigrist, 2016) showed that whilst a positive 70% of respondents were aware of the UCL and funders' policy on research data, there was a much lower level of awareness of local services: both the RDM website (online since September 2015) and the Research Data Storage facility (available since 2012) were unknown to 60% of the participants. The survey also helped to identify areas in which researchers felt they were in particular need of support.

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Responding to the challenge: building links with other support services

The RDSOs have used the expertise and knowledge of other support services across the university to address the challenges outlined above. Some of these links have been 'obvious' ones, whilst others have been more specific to UCL.

Collaboration within Library Services

The Open Access Team at UCL provides support to researchers in achieving green and gold open access. There are frequently links and overlaps between RDM and open access services in universities in the UK. At UCL links with the Open Access Team were established early on in the process of developing a RDM support service; such collaboration includes, for example, giving joint presentations in research departments. Frequently requests for support around open access also involve requests for support on data management planning, research funder and publisher policies, and information on where to deposit research data. As data management planning (ideally) takes place early in a project, it provides opportunities for the RDSOs to promote open access and data sharing early on in the research lifecycle and help researchers plan for both of these activities.

The RDSOs have worked to introduce subject librarians to RDM issues through a series of workshops that presented some of the 'theoretical' issues around RDM. The fourth workshop was run jointly by the library and UCL IT department (Information Systems Division), and was attended by subject librarians and local departmental data managers. The RDSOs have organised further workshops drawing upon previous work on internal library education (Mattern, Brenner and Lyon, 2016). These sessions focused on discipline-specific guidance and data management plans. Outputs produced during these sessions will feed into further discipline-specific guidance being developed by the RDSOs.

Finally, the Digital Curation Manager and the Records Manager, both of whom work in Library Services, have been involved in the Library RDM Working Group from its inception. Their expertise has, for instance, been beneficial in creating online how-to guides on topics such as file formats and sensitive data for the RDM website.

Collaboration with other central services

Alongside these 'standard' collaborations, links have been made with other support services across the university. A particularly strong and useful link has been made with Research IT Services (RITS), which offers a range of support to researchers, including the Research Data Service. This provides the live research data store and is currently developing a research data archive. RITS also provide researchers with support on high-performance computing, research software development, and training. The RITS team includes two research IT facilitators who share a similar role to the RDSOs by providing support and guidance, links to other services and advocacy for the services offered by RITS. A major benefit of these close links has been the ability to provide support to researchers on both technical and policy-related questions as well as to coordinate communications about our services and presentations in research departments. Recently the RDSOs have collaborated with colleagues from RITS to set up regular drop-ins twice a month, where researchers can get support on a range of topics, including funder policies and best practices in RDM, practical advice on data storage, support for research software development, high-performance computing and handling sensitive data. On average, five researchers have attended each of the last four sessions; interestingly, they represented six out of UCL's eleven faculties. Though still a new offering, we have found it a useful way for researchers to get advice quickly on a number of related areas without enquiries having to be passed across different teams. It has also given members of the services contributing

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to the drop-ins a better understanding of each other's services. Since December 2016 a new half-day session for PhD students has been offered on the theme of research integrity. It is a collaboration between the RDSOs, the Office of the Vice-Provost (Research) and the Doctoral Skills Development Programme. Sessions aim to provide an overview of research support services at UCL whilst also engaging early career researchers on the issue of research integrity. Research integrity is conceived of broadly – sessions include an introduction to ethics, data protection, RDM, open access and research IT – and there is interactive discussion of dilemmas faced by researchers around these topics as well as an opportunity for PhD students to get advice on them. The feedback from doctoral students has been very positive: out of 108 participants so far, 56% found the course 'useful' and 36% found it 'very useful'. There was particular enthusiasm for the practical nature of the session and the overview provided of the various research support services available whilst they are at UCL.

Conclusion: continuing to develop links

Developing links across support services within the university has allowed the RDSOs to have a broader and more meaningful impact than would otherwise be possible. Whilst ensuring researchers comply with funder and university policies is a core aim of the RDSOs, the service is also keen to promote RDM as integral to good research practice. By developing links across the university, the RDSOs have been able to incorporate discussions of RDM into sessions on research integrity, provide support on RDM alongside support on high-performance computing, software development and data storage, and develop further links across the university. One of these future links is with the Organisational Development department of Human Resources, who have proposed including sessions on RDM as part of a bi-annual research staff conference. The RDSOs have found drawing upon the expertise in the library and developing links across the university useful in tackling the challenge of advocating RDM across a large and diverse research community. This experience may potentially be applicable to other services.

References

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Notes

- 1 As listed in the UCL Departments A to Z available at <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/departments/a-z/> [accessed 4 August 2016]
- 2 Figure from the UCL Human Resources as of 1 October 2015 and Registry Services as of 1 December 2015
- 3 Available at: www.ucl.ac.uk/library/research-support/research-data [accessed 24 March 2017]

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