Abstract for IDCC 2013 Poster Sessions

Encouraging junior researchers to value and share data management skills

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This poster illustrates aspects of the work being carried out by the Open Exeter project team alongside our joint workshop on training techniques and strategies with the University of Bath.

Open Exeter is a JISC-funded project investigating how best to embed good practice in research data management and Open Access in the research lifecycle. This is essential to ensure compliance with funder policies and that the maximum possible benefits of exposing data accrue at an individual and institutional level. So that we can help researchers and postgraduate students to comply with funder and institutional policy, we are developing a range of integrated training courses and resources, using different formats, styles and content tailored for differing audiences.

Whilst trying to engage established researchers, we have made particular efforts to reach postgraduate students and early career researchers on the basis that they will take lessons learned with them throughout the trajectory of their academic careers, cascading good practice in turn to their students and research fellows. Alongside more traditional workshop sessions, we have experimented with the introduction of more conversational, interactive and 'fun' training formats for younger researchers.

Evidence from our 'Follow the Data' work with PGRs confirms the following:
- Junior research students learn survival techniques and key coping skills from more experienced students via well-established but informal peer-to-peer communication routes. Such researchers are likely to value information received from the 'bottom-up', rather than information that is imposed from the 'top-down'.
- All junior researchers, regardless of discipline, value the opportunity to debate issues with students from other subject areas: a Business student may learn more effective use of spreadsheets from an Engineering researcher; Law and Medical researchers can share experiences of using confidential data; a History researcher can advise on storing and organising archival digital images.

One of our most successful training events has been 'Discuss, Debate, Disseminate'. This informal, interactive workshop comprised a number of different elements, all giving the opportunity for junior researchers to discuss and share with peers. One of the most popular exercises was Research Data Dating – involving two facing circles of participants, given three minutes to discuss their data, identify key issues and note highlights for a reporting session. After three minutes, participants in the outer circle moved on to discuss these issues with a different researcher.

A very important benefit of bringing junior researchers together across disciplines has been to allow them to recognise and value their own skills and knowledge and to provide a platform for the wider sharing and distillation of expertise. For example, a group of multi-disciplinary PGRs has produced a RDM survival guide for junior researchers. Encouraging researchers actively to evaluate, share and disseminate their knowledge is a significant step towards sustainable embedding of RDM skills in research communities.