

To share or not to share

Publication and quality assurance of data research outputs

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Research Information Network briefing

www.rin.ac.uk



‘...realising the full potential of research data requires further progress in data management policies and practice.’

The Research Information Network (RIN) report *To share or not to share: Publication and quality assurance of research data outputs* (June 2008) investigates whether or not researchers do make their research data available to others, and the issues they encounter when doing so.

Produced in association with JISC and the Natural Environment Research Council, the study is set in a context where the amount of digital data being created and gathered by researchers is increasing rapidly. There is also a growing recognition by researchers, their employers and their funders, of the potential value in making research data available for sharing, and in curating them for re-use in the long term.

The last two years have seen the development of a variety of policies from research funders both in the UK and internationally, seeking to optimise the value and the use of data produced during the course of research that they fund. Both policy and researchers' practice continue to evolve, and this study should be seen as a picture of current activity that will change further in the future.

The report finds that realising the full potential of research data requires further progress in data management policies and practice. Based on the results of more than 100 detailed interviews with researchers across eight different subject areas, it seeks to provide a clearer picture of how researchers are responding to data creation and usage challenges. Are they making their data available and accessible to others, and what are the issues they are encountering when and if they do so?

The main report, executive summary and annex are available at www.rin.ac.uk/data-publication

The key findings and recommendations are overleaf.

Key findings and the RIN's recommendations



1. Taking account of the complexity of data creation and preservation

- Policy-makers need to take full account of the different kinds of research data researchers produce, their value as a research tool, and the different needs of potential users.
- Researchers, funders and institutions need to cooperate to ensure that sustainable arrangements are in place to preserve valuable data and to make them accessible.

2. Publishing data: Motivations and constraints

- Research funders and institutions should actively promote data publishing and re-use, by providing case study evidence on the benefits of data publishing, training and support for researchers in developing sound data management plans, and strategies to address current skills gaps, as well as highlighting career-related rewards.

- Learned societies should work with researchers, funders and others to develop and promote standard methods for citing datasets.

3. Discovery, access and usability of datasets

- Publishers should play an important part in promoting the ease of access and use of relevant data sets, and a need to clarify the current confusion over policies on access for text-mining tools.
- The take-up of Web 2.0 applications should be monitored and their implications considered.

4. Quality assurance for data

- Funders should work with interested researchers, data centres and other stakeholders to consider what approaches to assessing datasets are most appropriate, acceptable to researchers and which are most effective.

More information

The Research Information Network aims to facilitate the implementation of these recommendations and would welcome contributions from any interested organisations. Please contact Sarah Gentleman, email sarah.gentleman@rin.ac.uk or telephone 020 7412 7241, website www.rin.ac.uk

What do we mean by research data?

By research data we mean data created or gathered in the course of research, experiments or observations – it can include archival material used as a basis for a research project, the data generated by an experiment, or can take a variety of forms depending on the academic discipline. It can loosely be described as any kind of ‘resource’ that could be useful to researchers.

Useful links

Data Share Project –
Data Information Specialists Committee
www.disc-uk.org/datashare.html

Dealing with Data: Roles, Rights, Responsibilities and Relationships – JISC, June 2007
www.jisc.ac.uk/media/documents/programmes/digitalrepositories/dealing_with_data_report-final.pdf

Digital content and e-research –
Research Information Network
www.rin.ac.uk/digital-content-menu

Digital Curation Centre
www.dcc.ac.uk

Research data – JISC
www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/themes/information_environment/researchdata.aspx

Stewardship of digital research data: A framework of principles and guidance (January 2008) –
Research Information Network
www.rin.ac.uk/data-principles

UK Research Data Feasibility Study
www.ukrds.ac.uk