

Towards a research data management policy at Goldsmiths

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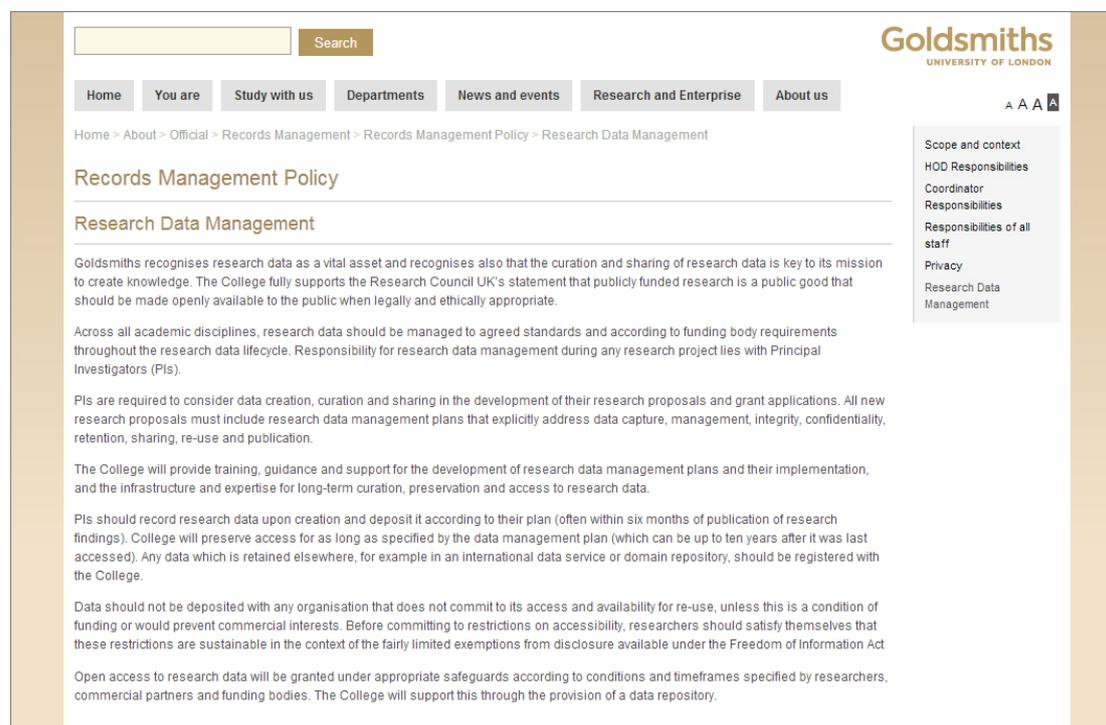


Photograph of studio space. © Goldsmiths, University of London.

Background

Goldsmiths, University of London, is a multi-faceted college that comprises a wide range of subjects including arts (visual and performing), music, social sciences, computing, psychology and a broad range of humanities. Part of the 1994 Group it has developed a distinct and rich research portfolio, attracting funds from UK research councils as well as from European sources. The research carried out at Goldsmiths reflects its heterogeneous home by being very inter-disciplinary, involving a mix of methodologies and varied research outputs. In this context, research data is equally diverse, ranging from “traditional” survey data to the elusive process materials that underwrite much of arts-based research. For the latter, ‘research data’ is a particularly difficult term to relate to as it has almost exclusively been employed in relation to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) subjects and the social sciences.

However, in light of recent developments that seek to further legitimize and valorise publicly-funded research carried out in UK universities, all subjects are required to have a firm conceptual and practical grasp on the nature of research data. The establishment of institutional research data management policies has emerged as a key part of a concerted effort, led by UK research councils, to advance the robustness and impact of research and facilitate innovation through data sharing. In January 2013, as a result of work from the KAPTUR project and with direct input from the Research Office, corporate governance, and other key stakeholders, a research data management policy was approved for dissemination, which is now available.



The screenshot displays the Goldsmiths University of London website. At the top right is the Goldsmiths logo. Below it is a search bar and a navigation menu with links: Home, You are, Study with us, Departments, News and events, Research and Enterprise, and About us. A breadcrumb trail reads: Home > About > Official > Records Management > Records Management Policy > Research Data Management. The main heading is "Records Management Policy" followed by "Research Data Management". The content includes a statement that Goldsmiths recognizes research data as a vital asset and a mission to create knowledge. It details standards for research data management, the role of Principal Investigators (PIs), and the College's support for training and infrastructure. It also mentions that data should be deposited with appropriate safeguards and that open access will be granted under certain conditions.

Fig. 1 Screenshot from Research Data Management policy on Goldsmiths website, <http://www.gold.ac.uk/research-data>.

Expectations

The key challenge in relation to establishing a research data management (RDM) policy is reaching a workable consensus on the definition of 'research data' and its practical implications. What is 'research data' in relation to practice as an artist, performer, film-maker, or musician? What does it consist of? What does it exclude? How can it be identified within the research process? How do you capture it?

These are just some of the questions that the team anticipated and encountered during the KAPTUR project. Given the wide variety of research happening at Goldsmiths and its often multi-disciplinary and experimental methodologies, figuring a coherent and stable concept of 'research data' was going to be extremely difficult. Nevertheless, knowing the requirements endorsed by research councils and other research funders, it was necessary to create a practicable working definition. In addition to this definition, the subsequent challenge was to properly address the practical implications of instituting a research data management policy. Aside from relevant information provisions, this would also include a technical, and social, infrastructure to support any demands on the storing and sharing of research data.

Approach

Two distinct approaches were pursued: one focused on researchers; the other, which built on the first, focused on research support, including IT, and management levels.

The researcher-focused approach was tied to the Environmental Assessment report carried out as part of the Workpackage 2 of the KAPTUR project, from October 2011 to January 2012. In preparation of this, two 'probing interviews' were undertaken with arts-based researchers, including one visual artist and one designer, which helped formulate some themes and anticipate challenges and queries. At the end of the Environmental Analysis, the team had a clearer picture of the arts-based research process and the kinds of materials and matters that could be considered 'research data' in this context.

Following on from this, a series of meetings were held with key individuals, telling them about the project, informing them about the key issues and discussing how formalised procedures concerning the management of research data would impact on their work. The people spoken to in these meetings included the Research Office, IT, Library, senior management staff and faculty. The meetings were kept brief and aimed at establishing a benchmark level of knowledge concerning the issues surrounding research data and the current and future policy landscape. Much of the issues resonated with issues already discussed during advocacy for the University's institutional repository, Goldsmiths Research Online. Hence, a familiarity with Open Access principles as well as with appropriate technical infrastructures was instructive.

In anticipation of drafting a research data management policy, a detailed review of all existing policies and regulations was undertaken, concerning research and records management as well as a stock-take of the current data storage and training provisions. This review also included details about the research data requirements of funders relevant to Goldsmiths. College policies concerning primary research data initially fell into two categories: Research Management and Information Management. There was no dedicated policy for research data management but there were plans for enhancing existing policies to encompass guidelines for managing research data. Any mention of research data in existing policies and regulations envisaged data produced in the laboratory. However, a clear concern

was evident for retaining data in an auditable format and for the paramount importance of ensuring proper management of confidential and or sensitive data. A summary of current provisions was produced together with a draft research data management policy and circulated amongst key people.

The draft RDM policy was then circulated to the individuals that had initially been spoken to and an RDM Policy Working Group was set up. This group consisted of members from the Research Office, IT, Library, Corporate Governance, academics and Martin Donnelly from the Digital Curation Centre (DCC), who was able to introduce key issues and answer any queries. This proved very fruitful and changes were incorporated into the draft policy that was once again circulated. In addition, the relationship with the Research Office was intensified, and working closely together on formalising provisions for supporting researchers during their funding applications. At the same time, support for researchers in relation to data curation is being developed through the Library. One key working group member, part of the senior management team, suggested incorporating the draft policy with existing policy for swift and efficient ratification. This was indeed pursued and the policy was approved by Academic Board in January 2013 and is now available on the Goldsmiths website.

In parallel to designing and ratifying the RDM policy, the project has also worked towards setting up relevant social and technical infrastructure that will help researchers meet the new RDM demands. The Research Office, the Library and IT services were identified as key sites for ensuring meaningful translation of good RDM practices. A sustained and detailed dialogue has been opened with the Research Office, which is perfectly placed to advance awareness and training of RDM as part of the widespread support it provides to researchers during the research lifecycle and have regularly attended RDM events throughout the project. In the Library, the Goldsmiths Research Online team and the subject librarians are the key pillars for ensuring effective RDM practices. This was progressed by an introductory event for subject librarians on research data in November 2012 and developed further in February 2013 by the delivery of an RDM workshop alongside Kerry Miller from the DCC to Research Office staff as well as subject librarians. One key aspect of good RDM practices is data curation and it is here that the knowledge and experience of subject librarians can make the greatest difference.

Enhancing and developing working relationships with other departments within the school has been a key advantage of the project. Collaboration between the Goldsmiths Research Online team and IT has resulted in the set up of Goldsmiths Data Online, an open access online archive for Goldsmiths' research data. While it is currently functional, it will be run as a pilot service in the course of 2013 to ascertain requirements. The close contact between KAPTUR and the Research Office has resulted in the delivery of a co-presentation to the Association of Research Managers and Administrators (ARMA) in February 2013, and collaboration with DCC has produced a Goldsmiths template within DMPOnline that will assist both researchers and the Research Office in producing data management plans. The Pro-Warden for Research acts as ongoing sponsor for research support initiatives including a high-level Open Access Working Group, which has been set up, reporting to the Research and Enterprise Committee, which will plan and co-ordinate Goldsmiths' contribution to the Open Access agenda for research into the future.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Developing the RDM policy has heightened awareness about research data management, which is a very positive outcome of this project. It has contributed to further embedding of the Library within the wider college research landscape. Also, it

has further strengthened the ties between different departments, including both academic and support. The project team at Goldsmiths are now in the process of translating the policy into practicable actions on the ground and will be supporting the Research Office in formalising research data management processes.

Key points

The key recommendations of this approach are:

- Meet with individuals on a semi-informal basis first.
- Identify key people that can act as spokespersons.
- Be practical and always think about how policy and regulation actually translates into a researcher's reality and, importantly, work load.
- Be sensitive to different disciplinary approaches and terminology.
- Researchers appreciate very specific recommendations when it comes to research data management: how and where to best store data; what devices to use to record and at what settings; and how best to preserve and describe specific data.
- Tie-in RDM actions with wider improvements to research support (for example, better networked storage facilities, DMP tool, and one-to-one advice).
- Tie-in RDM plans with the university's strategic aims.
- Be aware of changes in policy on public access to research from government and research councils, both current and on the horizon.
- Remain flexible and keep policies and services under review, this is a developing area that is likely to have a big impact on research.
- Ratifying a policy about research data management is just one step towards better research data management.

References

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