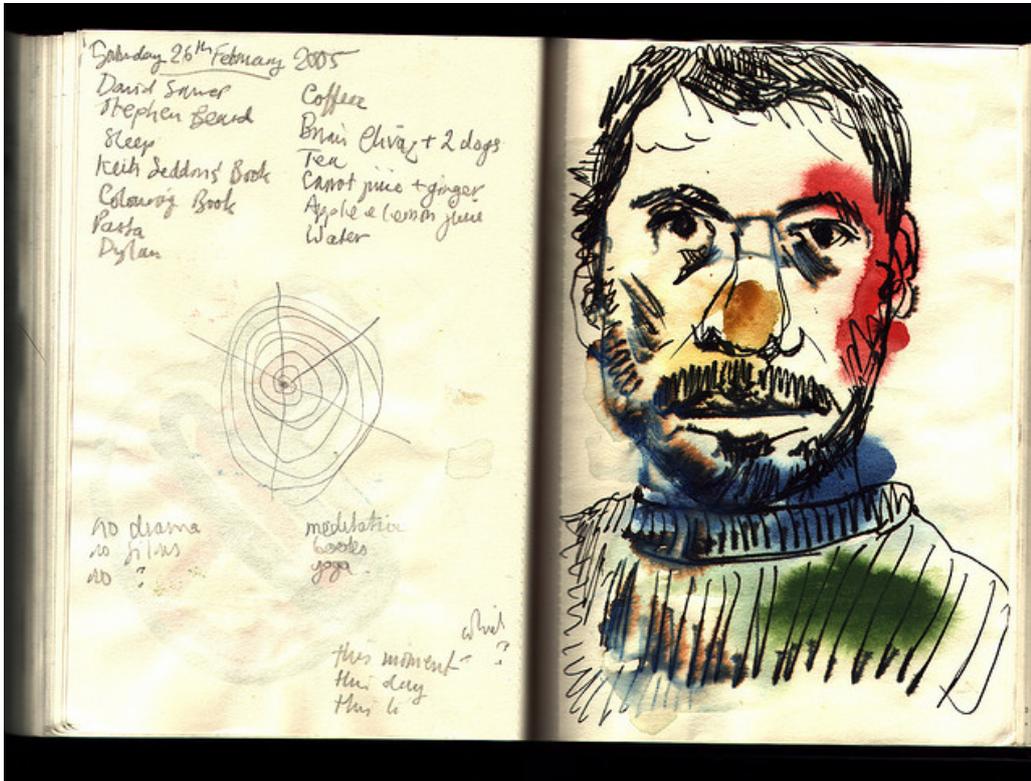


Research Data Management at the University of the Arts London

John Murtagh, Sarah Mahurter, and Emma Hancox
University of the Arts London



Sketchbook pages by Paul Ryan

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/paulryanandsketchbooks/2906508327/in/set-72157607661375770>

Background

University of the Arts London (UAL) is a collegiate university comprising six constituent colleges and is Europe's largest provider of education in art, design, fashion, communication and the performing arts, as well as being one of the most famous and prestigious art universities in the world. The KAPTUR project fitted well with the University's Research Strategy (2012-2015) to, 'develop a world-class, sustainable research culture...particularly in practice-based research.' The KAPTUR project builds on existing knowledge from JISC funded projects both within UAL and elsewhere, particularly Kultur, Kultivate, Digital Integration into Arts Learning (DIAL), Arts Learning and Teaching Online (ALTO), ALTO-UK, and Curating Artistic Research Output (CAiRO).

Expectations

Visual arts research data presents particular challenges in terms of the diversity and nature of the research area. This research is frequently non-text based and may comprise artefacts, events, performances, time-based media or interactive software. There can be considerable difficulties storing and archiving such data and making it accessible to the wider research community. Discipline-appropriate tools to develop competency in arts research data management are needed by arts researchers and the staff who support them. The findings of the KAPTUR Environmental Assessment report have emphasised these challenges in particular the difficulty of creating a working definition of research data in the visual arts. The expectation is that the KAPTUR project will further investigate and address these challenges.

Approach

In order to establish environmental practices and commonalities, the project conducted formal interviews with active and data-producing researchers. The interviews helped to gather detailed qualitative information that could better inform the KAPTUR project and help to build relationships with visual arts researchers at the four KAPTUR project partner institutions. The interview process provided first-hand experience of the types of data that researchers were producing, how they were being managed as well as researchers' attitudes to data. The resulting Environmental Assessment report synthesised the findings of the project interviews and has served as a casebook of examples and views from the visual arts.

At the KAPTUR Steering Group, the findings of the assessment report specific to UAL were presented and as a result the environmental investigation continued, with a focus on examples of the research projects currently under way. At the next project team meeting held in July, each Project Officer talked about two externally-funded projects and their outputs at their institution; this information is now available in a spreadsheet. This exercise engaged the project with the Research Management Administration and provided a greater awareness of projects at other institutions. It also provided context to the types of research data being produced in the visual arts and at UAL specifically.

Following the recommendations from the KAPTUR Project Steering Group, a Working Group for KAPTUR and Research Data Management (RDM) was also established which included key members of senior management such as the Director of Research Management Administration, Associate Dean of Research at Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, the Director of Doctoral Programmes at UAL and a senior member of Library Services staff. Since April 2012 the Working Group has met monthly to discuss the outputs of the KAPTUR project. One of its first tasks was to respond to the Engineering & Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) research data management expectations for institutions in receipt of grant funding, which included the requirement for development of an institutional 'Roadmap'. This was achieved through the development of a generic Commitment to Research Data Management discussion paper drafted by the KAPTUR project. It was subsequently adapted by UAL and presented to Research Standards and Development Committee (RSDC) in May 2012 and was endorsed with a policy and implementation plan to follow.

This plan was subsequently assisted by UAL's involvement with the Digital Curation Centre (DCC) and its Institutional Engagement programme which built upon existing knowledge from the KAPTUR project and vice versa. With the assistance of the DCC, a detailed ten point plan was developed. Firstly a review of externally funded research at UAL was created which highlighted the requirements for RDM. The Project Officer then spoke to 15 researchers across all colleges via telephone for a minimum of five minutes and a maximum of 15 minutes. The purpose was to explore current practice needs, and to identify subjects for more in-depth conversations. The interviews found evidence for the need for support in dealing with solving research data issues as well as providing advice and technological support for managing data; these findings were reported to the Working Group and to KAPTUR.

As part of this work with the DCC's Institutional Engagement Programme, an in-depth online survey with researchers was conducted, which aimed to establish the amount of data that researchers produce and what they require to successfully develop RDM skills. This was prepared and carried out with 15 senior researchers across disciplines during the summer of 2012. The results of this will be synthesized and recommendations fed into the current RDM procedures and strategy of the University as well as to KAPTUR.

An RDM policy document was written with several drafts and iterations passing through the Working Group for consideration. The Policy was presented and approved at Research Standards Development Committee in October 2012 establishing UAL as the first university in the creative arts to have a specific policy for managing its research data.

An RDM specific web page was then created within the University's research website advertising the commitment to RDM at UAL and the newly agreed Policy and procedure, as well as funder requirements. As part of the training plan produced by the KAPTUR training and support work package, UAL provided the first workshop on RDM to Research Support staff within RMA and to Academic Liaison Librarians in November 2012. Further work on the website will be developed along with an in-depth training programme for researchers at UAL, in collaboration with the DCC. This will also be shared with KAPTUR.

The screenshot shows the 'Research Data Management' page on the UAL website. At the top left is the UAL logo. A navigation menu includes links for University Home, About Us, A to Z, News & Events, Showtime, Prospective Students, New & Current Students, International Students, Courses, Alumni Association, Library, Learning and Teaching, Jobs and Careers, Research, Supporting Us, Business, and Widening Participation. Below the navigation menu is a breadcrumb trail: University Home > Research > Research Environment > Our Organisation > Research Data Management. The main heading is 'Research Data Management'. On the left, there is a list of links: Research Committees, Research Ethics: Code of Practice, Research Data Management Resources, Research Management and Administration, Research Standards, and Research Strategy. Below this list is a photograph of several sticky notes on a desk. The main text area contains the following text: 'In common with RCUK, the University affirms its commitment to data management as a core academic activity, and a key element of good research practice. The University also acknowledges its responsibility to ensure that researchers meet the stipulations of funders, and to support the needs of researchers. Furthermore, the University notes its institutional responsibility to manage Freedom of Information requests, including those relating to research data. Finally, the University believes that planning and communicating data management activities throughout the research lifecycle leads to better results.' On the right side, there is a search bar with a 'Go' button. At the bottom of the page, it states 'The University is a partner on the KAPTUR project'.

Fig. 1. Screenshot from Research Data Management web page on UAL website.

Engagement with the project's aims and work packages, within UAL and externally, has produced a number of successes. The KAPTUR project workshop, "Managing the Material: Tackling Visual Arts as Research Data", brought together various stakeholders within UAL and externally, including RMA and the Library. It also featured a presentation from postdoctoral researcher Dr Paul Ryan from UAL which presented TAG, a process that could be beneficial in enabling arts researchers to identify and assess their research data. Dr Ryan has also been involved in formulation and conducting of the RDM survey with researchers.

KAPTUR's achievements and the developments in RDM up to this point were presented at UAL's Library Services Conference in September 2012, which received positive feedback. Results will be further disseminated through the RDM website at UAL

As reflected across Higher Education institutions, the understanding of research data management was underdeveloped. However, the KAPTUR project has raised awareness of the profile of research data in the visual arts; it has increased the knowledge of the types of research data being produced and also developed a working definition specific to this discipline. It has discussed the complexity of data, which has informed the institution on how to centrally support our researchers' needs. UAL took part in the Technical Infrastructure work package for centrally supported research data management and hosted a demonstration by the KAPTUR Technical Manager in November 2012 to senior management and stakeholders within UAL, representing IT, RMA, Library, the institutional research repository and Open Education Resources.

From the beginning of the KAPTUR project we have sought to raise the awareness of research data in the visual arts and its management. During the lifetime of the project, an active Twitter account for UAL representing KAPTUR has resulted in 321 tweets with 83 followers. The Project Officer has written blog posts on the KAPTUR blog and on the Digital Curation Centre blog.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The challenges to the project have largely been the esoteric nature of the terms used to define Research Data and the applicability of Research Data Management to researchers' everyday work. It was clear from engagements with researchers within the arts that the term "research data" was not a widely used term across several creative disciplines at the University of the Arts London and had no clear definition.

For researchers who think they do not use or create 'research data' the term remains problematic. It appeared that the only compelling way to fully engage researchers with the concept of research data was via the research funders' requests for management of the data underlying the research output. The term was often understood in conjunction with specific examples of how the researcher uses research data in their own field, for example, in an archive, or with sketchbooks or test results. The involvement of a postdoctoral researcher, Dr Paul Ryan, in the initiative to look at RDM at the University contributed to the vocabulary to use when conducting the second in-depth online survey with researchers.

The KAPTUR project has subsequently engaged in a dialogue with researchers in order to identify an understanding, vocabulary and synergies with research data. The expressions: 'documenting the research process' and 'visualisation and documentation' were suggested as meaningful in the visual arts context. From our interviews, for example, a cultural history researcher at UAL used the term: "archiving the process" rather than research data.

The project has demonstrated that there are unique issues, with associated challenges and opportunities, in managing research data in the visual arts. Further work on these will be necessary, post-project, to embed the understanding and management of research data with individual researchers in the visual arts.

The KAPTUR project identified research projects at UAL that were funded by the EPSRC and therefore affected by RDM requirements. This raised awareness of data management across the partner institutions as a result, as well as the tool for data management plans (DMP) using the DCC's DMP Online for current bids to the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC).

The project has raised the sector-specific issues of RDM in the creative arts and with other parts of the JISC programme. In order to further understand the sector's needs, UAL has also worked together with a postdoctoral researcher for further explorations of research and data gathering.

The KAPTUR project has also brought the issue of support and storage of research data within the University to the attention of IT Services who are actively looking at solutions using Cloud storage computing.

Key Points

- The vocabulary surrounding RDM must have a tangible and related application to a researcher's work.
- A central service such as RDM involves lots of different stakeholders such as IT, Library, Freedom of Information (FOI) Office, and the Research Office.
- Leadership from senior management and a clear understanding of the issues, impact, and funding requirements by key stakeholders is important.
- Evidence-based decision making is vital to a successful project as is knowledge and understanding from other RDM projects.
- Views, opinions and engagements with active researchers will inform decisions, provide context and challenge assumptions.
- Worthwhile engagement with other project partners involved in similar endeavours.

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Contact

Sarah Mahurter
Manager, University Archives and Special Collections Centre
University of the Arts London
s.mahurter@arts.ac.uk