



LIBER Case Study:

Developing Research Data Management Services at Humboldt University Berlin

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1 What was the starting point?

In summer 2012, the “Research Data Management Initiative” at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin (HU) was jointly established by the university’s library, the research support office and IT services (Computer and Media Service, CMS). A new dedicated, full-time position was created and is formally based at CMS. The Berlin School of Library and Information Science provides this position with professional backing. This position was initially organised on a fixed-term basis (one-year contract, later prolonged for another year) and funded from the university’s household budget. The main task is to develop an institutional research data management (RDM) concept and supporting services.

2 What kind of research data is targeted?

An institutional RDM concept should be university-wide and therefore target all of the researchers and disciplines represented at HU. However, it is not yet clear how much support different disciplinary/subject groups need as, for instance, high-energy physics is already well served by its own community. To get an idea of the types and characteristics of research data that are present at HU, we conducted a survey among our researchers. A comprehensive report was then published which in summary shows that research data are very heterogeneous and nearly all workflows are in place ([URN:nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:kobv:11-100213001](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:kobv:11-100213001), in German).

3 What is the organisational framework?

Roles and responsibilities

After gathering requirements, we undertook a gap analysis and produced a RDM roadmap which should help us to adopt a coordinated approach when developing demand-oriented RDM services and serve as a guide for central support & services.

Policies

Apart from major benefits in sharing research data such as enabling the research results to be verified or re-used, there is a formal policy on “good scientific practice” in place according to which researchers are committed to keep data underlying their scholarly publications accessible for at least ten years. Nonetheless, it is not clear what is meant by “accessible” and how this should be implemented in order to comply therewith.

A dedicated “research data policy” is currently being developed with more practical “guidelines” in addition to that. As a basic principle, researchers will be encouraged to share their data, but the decision as to what restrictions should apply or when the right point of time is to release data will remain their own responsibility.



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4 What kind of support services are provided to researchers?

Through the RDM survey we were able to gain very useful insights into researchers' needs and how to support them. The new RDM services as planned in the roadmap will therefore be embedded into existing structures and workflows, providing support where it is most needed. Training should be also provided and aimed at specific groups such as doctoral students, digital humanities researchers or subject librarians. We have already organised an event for the latter group and are working on a more comprehensive training programme.

5 What kind of infrastructure is provided?

RDM services and infrastructure – technical as well as human – are still in development. Nonetheless, the survey results showed 3 most-desired components: secure storage for research data, guidance & advice in solving legal issues, and support in technical issues such as using standards, metadata and ensuring long-term preservation. The latter in particular demands a closer cooperation with libraries. As HU is also involved in establishing a global registry of research data repositories (re3data.org), we see a suitable opportunity to build on this work and cooperate with other initiatives and (disciplinary) repositories.

6 What have you learned so far? What's next?

The biggest challenge will be to find a balance in roles and responsibilities between an individual researcher and the institution as a whole. Our survey results and further research showed that:

- Researchers are generally willing to share their data;
- They need support from central departments to make it easier to comply with data-relevant regulations (e.g. of funding agencies or journals)
- Professional skills regarding RDM have to be shared more efficiently, especially with younger researchers
- Legal issues are a very hot topic and some fundamental understanding or framework has to be provided as soon as possible
- A lot of issues cannot be solved by individual institutions alone and require strong cooperations and pooling of collective expertise.

Further information

WEBSITE: <http://www.cms.hu-berlin.de/dataman>

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