
DARTS3: The Third Discover Academic Research Training & Support Conference

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Conference review by Michelle Blake
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The DARTS3 conference was held at the end of June over two days at an idyllic setting at Dartington Hall in Devon. It was opened by Anna Dickinson, who spoke about the Research Excellence Framework (REF). This was useful for anyone unfamiliar with how the REF will work and a good reminder for those of us who are going to be more closely involved.

Judith Stewart from the University of the West of England (UWE) then spoke about why their library is leading on Research Data Management (RDM). She was speaking from the perspective of a post-92 institution that was successful in gaining JISC funding for a project to develop a data management system focusing on health and life sciences. Judith answered questions about the library role with the help of Laura Malloy from the Digital Curation Centre (DCC). The DCC has gathered evidence and case studies on the leading role of libraries in RDM. The reasons why libraries increasingly take on this role include:

- Library staff are used to asking the right questions to establish information needs.
- We are used to managing information and know the dangers of not doing so.
- We understand how to curate.
- RDM is about discoverability – one of the things that we are good at.
- We are used to training people and offering guidance and tools that help people find things.
- RDM is largely about information literacy.
- Often library staff are removed from the politics that can surround other departments

- we are a central service that can often see the bigger picture.
- We have a track record of bringing things together – looking at different perspectives but providing something for general benefit.

Judith discussed why others are surprised that libraries are taking the lead and identified some interesting possible misconceptions about libraries and RDM.

- UWE conducted a survey of researchers 18 months ago; this found that researchers did not realise that the library was interested in supporting research. This compares to similar findings in a recent study published by Sage.
- There is a perception that data management is all about technical requirements, and it is seen as just a storage issue. However, it is really about talking to people and understanding what their needs are.
- Research is seen as trendy, and libraries aren't.

Judith also mentioned some of the key benefits and challenges for libraries of being involved in RDM. Benefits included raising the profile of the library and building relationships across the institution (which can bring longer-term benefits). Challenges include a very steep learning curve, issues around sustainability (JISC programmes are finite) and resources being hard to find. More information about the project on the pilot study in health and life sciences in managing research data can be found at <http://bit.ly/KvfW1W>.

Jenny Coombs of the University of Nottingham and Liz Martin of DeMontfort University spoke about online learning for researchers and their experience of creating a collaborative online tutorial. They found, after looking at what was

currently available, that online resources to support researchers were inadequate. They decided to use some Roberts funding to employ a research assistant to conduct a survey that would analyse researchers' experiences of using online tutorials. This included asking researchers to rate the importance of different research tasks and then to rate their own abilities with these tasks. They found that peer support was a popular way to get help and wanted to integrate this within the tutorials. They did so by using talking heads videos in the tutorials, which they had created using the Xerte software. Recognising that their first ideas were over-optimistic, they decided to concentrate on the dissemination of research. Jenny and Liz felt that the most important recommendation for a collaborative project was to have a consortium agreement. In their project roles this happened naturally, but they felt it may have been better to formalise an agreement early on. They have not yet looked closely at the sustainability of maintaining these resources, but it was felt that there is the potential to make savings across institutions by collaborating, and not re-inventing the wheel. All the tutorials can be downloaded from the Jorum repository (<http://www.jorum.ac.uk>) and they will be used in teaching programmes with PhD students this academic year.

Jez Cope of the University of Bath spoke about supporting research using social media. Jez is an ICT project manager based in a research centre and he began by looking at what tools were already available and their potential for researchers. He started by running training sessions with research students to evaluate the outcomes. His approach is to use external speakers who are active researchers who use social media as part of their everyday work. He has also had panel sessions with researchers who can then answer questions posed by audience members and has used hands-on workshops. These sessions focus





on why and when to use social media just as much as the 'how to' and provide demonstrations of good practice.

In the next session delegates broke into groups and discussed the tools we currently use and how we use them. This was a good opportunity to reflect on our current practice in our own institutions and to think about other tools we might introduce (and what we would use them for). Jez mentioned that older academics who are more established are often more willing to engage and are comfortable about spending time using social media. Postdoctoral researchers are often worried that they need to be focused on their next funding bid. Finally Jez mentioned two useful resources:

- Social media: a guide for researchers
<http://rinarchive.jisc-collections.ac.uk/our-work/communicating-and-disseminating-research/social-media-guide-researchers>
- Diigo bookmarks for research resources
<http://groups.diigo.com/group/connected-researcher-bath>

Gareth Cole from the University of Exeter concentrated on research data management and the role of librarians. The Open Exeter project is a JISC-funded project based in the library; it aims to develop a policy on research data management at Exeter, to understand how people use, create and share data, and to create training materials (looking at integrating them into current programmes). It also aims to develop a one-stop shop website and a series of 'lunch byte' workshops. Gareth started by covering what research data management means, summing it up as promoting good research practice that will safeguard loss of data. 'Data' can be anything from cannon balls to film

posters as well as the more traditional quantitative data. Training is a key element of the Open Exeter project and it is important that professional services staff know about RDM issues. Gareth believes that researchers do need support and that you can train the trainers as well as the researchers. Training needs to be embedded into existing training schemes and the argument at Exeter was that librarians were already well placed to teach across all the areas they identified that needed support. It is essential there be training on the postgraduate research (PGR) programme but also that doctoral supervisors receive training to ensure consistency. It has been demonstrated in Research Information Network (RIN) reports that the supervisor is the biggest influence on a PhD student. At Exeter a PhD student and supervisor should meet at least once a year to discuss RDM issues.

Gareth spoke about how training has to be seen to be relevant in order for it to work, otherwise researchers will not attend sessions. Exeter conducted research to understand what training researchers wanted. The results were similar across different faculties; however, it is possible that it was a self-selecting sample, so further work is being done to talk to staff who did not complete the survey. Talking to people and building relationships between researchers and librarians was emphasised by Exeter as being vital to ensure that there is a match between the training provided and researchers' needs.

The final session of the conference was by Miggie Pickton of the University of Northampton. She spoke about librarians as researchers and the benefits that this can bring to an organisation, outlining her own experience as a researcher before

speaking about the University of Northampton and their approach. Library staff are encouraged to embark on their own research to improve services and to present their research at an annual conference to which academic staff are invited. This has resulted in a culture that is research-active and has brought considerable benefits to the organisation.

Universities vary widely in their cultures, sizes and experience with RDM, but it was clear from the speakers that library staff are already very much engaged in supporting researchers. Speakers at the conference helped to identify some new tools and techniques and made a very good case for libraries to play a leading role in this activity within their institutions.