Access to Research Data: Addressing the Problem Through Journal Data Sharing Policies

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The principle of sharing

- The principle that research data supporting published articles should be shared is accepted by:
  - Funding bodies,
  - Researchers,
  - Publishers,
  - Librarians and other stakeholders.

- They accept the principle for reasons of
  - Research transparency, and
  - The potential for re-use of data.
Sharing in practice

• At the same time the principle seems to be ignored or rejected in practice, to varying degrees, by all of the stakeholders.

• Everyone professes to believe in sharing research data, but it does not happen.

• The JoRD Project, funded by UK JISC at Nottingham University investigated sharing through
  – A survey of journal data-sharing policies
  – A stakeholder consultation.
The research

- The JIoRD team examined nearly 400 journals, to find their policies on sharing.
- Policies when found were analysed for content.
- The details were entered into a matrix for statistical comparison.
- Additionally, a wide range of stakeholders were consulted using various qualitative methods.
- The stakeholder data was open-coded so that patterns could be identified and views compared.
Findings from the survey

- Scarcely half of the journals had a data sharing policy.
- Of the policies only a quarter (24%) could be called strong.
- Few policies clearly specified:
  - What data to deposit
  - When in the lifecycle it should be deposited
  - Where data should be deposited
  - What access should be permitted, and
  - Only one policy discussed metadata.
- Only 10% of policies provided for sanctions in the event of non-compliance.
Findings from the consultation

• The interviews, focus groups and online consultations across the stakeholder groups revealed:
  
• Low levels of mutual understanding.
  – Researchers avoided sharing if they could,
  – Publishers doubted the capacity of the digital infrastructure,
  – Both groups felt that data needed to be refined before sharing.

• The team concluded that a need for policies mandating sharing was strongly indicated.
Developing a model policy

- We chose to build a model policy emphasising stakeholder views (rather than cumulating ideas from existing policies).

- Messages that constrained policy included:
  - It was often impractical to share all data,
  - Researchers were often ignorant of where to upload data,
  - There was not a common time at which data should be shared.


- The content of our model policy will be outlined in an article currently in its second revision for JASIST.
Concluding remarks

- The case for sharing research data is unanswerable.
- The means for effective sharing are lacking.
- The crucial intervention needs to be in the form of journal policies.
- Once journals each have a strong, clear policy then further actions to create a sharing environment are feasible.