

European Academic Libraries Offer or Plan to Offer Research Data Services

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Evidence Summary

European Academic Libraries Offer or Plan to Offer Research Data Services

A Review of:

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Abstract

Objective – To investigate the current state of research data services (RDS) in European academic libraries by determining the types of RDS being currently implemented and planned by these institutions.

Design – Email survey.

Setting – European academic research libraries.

Subjects – 333 directors of the Association of European Research Libraries (LIBER) academic member libraries.

Methods – The researchers revised a survey instrument previously used for the DataONE survey of North American research libraries and conducted pilot testing with European academic library directors. The survey instrument was created using the Qualtrics software. The revised survey was distributed by email to LIBER institutions identified as academic libraries by the researchers and remained open for 6 weeks. Question topics included demographics, RDS currently offered, RDS planned, staffing considerations, and the director's opinions on RDS. Libraries from 22 countries participated and libraries were grouped into 4 regions in order to compare regional differences. Data analysis was conducted using Excel, SPSS or R software

University of Tennessee, University of Tampere, and University of Göttingen.

Main Results – 119 library directors responded to more than one question beyond basic demographics, for a response rate of 35.7%. Among the libraries surveyed, more libraries offer consultative services than offered technical support for RDS, although a majority planned to offer technical services in the future. Geographically, libraries in western Europe offer more RDS compared with other regions. More libraries have reassigned or plan to reassign current staff to support RDS services, rather than hire new staff for these roles. Regardless of whether or not they currently offer RDS, library directors surveyed strongly agree that libraries need to offer RDS to remain relevant.

Conclusion – The authors determine that a majority of library directors recognize that data management is increasingly important and many libraries are responding to this by implementing RDS and collaborating across their institutions and beyond to help meet these needs. Future research is suggested to track how these services develop over time, how libraries respond to the staffing challenges of RDS, and whether consultative rather than technical services continue to be primary forms of RDS offered.

Commentary

Data management is increasingly a concern for academics and researchers, and therefore to academic librarians. In 2016, the Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL) identified RDS, data policies and data management plans, and professional development for librarians in RDS as three of the top trends in academic libraries (ACRL, 2016). The current literature on RDS in academic libraries focuses primarily on providing benchmarks for the current state of RDS as well as librarians' plans for future services. Past surveys have been geographic, including studies of RDS in North America, the UK, and Australasia (Tenopir et al., 2015; Cox, Kennan, Lyon, & Pinfield, 2017). This

study builds on that literature by extending this inquiry to a European context.

This study was found to have a 90% validity rating overall based on Glynn's critical appraisal tool for library and information research (2006). The study is well-designed, reflecting the authors' previous experience studying this topic in other geographic areas. The research methodology is thoroughly described and the outcomes are clearly stated and discussed with respect to the data collection. The questions on the survey instrument are well-designed to glean precise answers that directly address the outcomes that the researchers intended to measure. The full data set and survey instrument are available online, which is extremely valuable both for the purposes of critically appraising the study and for potential future replication.

A potential weakness lies in the study population, which consisted of the 333 LIBER member institutions identified as university libraries by the investigators. The authors do not discuss the degree to which including only LIBER member institutions may or may not have been limiting to the study. According to the European Bureau of Library, Information and Documentation Associations (2015), there are at least 5,974 academic libraries in Europe,. It is worth considering whether the 333 institutions offered the survey and the 119 respondents are truly representative of the entire field, particularly in such a nationally, culturally and linguistically varied region such as Europe.

The results of this study were in keeping with past studies in other geographic regions, which similarly found that libraries are likely to focus on the advisory rather than technical aspects of RDS (Cox, Kennan, Lyon, & Pinfield, 2017). RDS implementation also presents many challenges to academic libraries, and future research is vital to determining how RDS develops overtime and how librarians adapt to these challenges. Ultimately, this study has the greatest value as a baseline assessment of the current state of RDS in Europe that can be used to inform future research and map the development of this trend. The authors suggest

many future areas for research and with this well-documented study, they provide a vital foundation for future investigation.

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