

iridium project output

iridium evaluation of external DCC DMPonline (v3) tool

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iridium external DCC DMPonline (v3) tool evaluation

Background

The web-based DMPonline (v3)¹ research data management (RDM) tool, developed by the Digital Curation Centre (DCC), was progressively evaluated between November 2011 and June 2013 to support the draft RDM policy and local good practice. It should be noted that the tool is in continual development and an updated version of the tool (v4) is expected in August 2013.

DMPonline supports writing research data management plans (RDMP) for most RCUK funders and 2 major biomedical charitable funders, where template guidance is provided by the funder. Its use is formally recommended by certain funders such as the MRC.

Findings summary

DMPonline is a mature and comparatively easy tool to use. It proved a useful in supporting data management planning. Provision of available RCUK funders' templates and, importantly, in context further good practice information and DCC Checklist guidance was valuable. The templates seem up to date with recent changes to the NERC plan requirements implemented promptly.

By the nature of an online system it can support the sharing/collaborative aspect of RDMP. The tool allows export of users RDMPs in common file formats for offline use and further editing of data management plans which is still preferable for many users. Moreover, some formatting of exported plans will likely be required to work within funder page length limits and readability.

Development of a local institutional template (post-award) was required as the available RCUK directed (or inferred) templates only account for approximately one third of research projects funded at the institution (for example the EPSRC is a notable exception without a mandated template). An institutional template was authored after reviewing other RCUK templates across research disciplines for the most pertinent question themes with additions to support local institutional priorities (e.g. identification of RDM resourcing, not duplicating existing workflows on ethics permissions, etc.).

Local experience of using the DMPonline tool features was written up as a local user manual².

DMPonline recommendations

We recommend that addressing of the follow issues will aid DMPonline widespread utility both locally and nationally.

General recommendations

- Noting existing documentation updated during evaluation period (DMPonline Quick Guide³, User Guide⁴) and older screencast⁵, a full step-wise user manual is preferred from experience locally to give confidence that end users were aware of all system functionality and correct use.
- End users need advance notification of any changes to tool function, features and funder templates to allow for local resource planning and dissemination. A user subscribers' email list to announce these changes is needed as a priority.
- Particularly for users familiar with using official funder website directly downloaded template versions, reproduction within the DMPonline tool and exported plan template needs to be nearly identical for user acceptance.
- When a plan is shared with other users, notifications and history/versioning of changes made by different users should be stronger.
- Exportation of guidance notes, in context of template headings, from tool 'information' pop-up windows would be useful in the exported template as this seems to be a common end user preferred way of working.

¹ <https://dmponline.dcc.ac.uk/>

² http://research.ncl.ac.uk/media/sites/researchwebsites/iridium/iridium_NCL_DMPOnline_guidance_DRAFT_v6_JW_LW.docx

³ https://dmponline.dcc.ac.uk/system/attachments/12/original/DMP_Online_Quick_Guide.pdf?1350652998

⁴ https://dmponline.dcc.ac.uk/system/attachments/14/original/DMP_Online_User_Guide.pdf?1350652948

⁵ <http://www.screenr.com/Syo>

- When completing a plan, you can see the progress bar, but the progress bar does not tell you which sections need completing or which questions were not answered, thus you can easily get lost. Therefore greater tracking of progression is needed.
- Specific usability enhancements such as section heading titles navigation, or ‘hover over’ information, in addition to section numbers for easier selection of sections, and clarifying the locking/duplication workflows, etc. These will be proposed on DCC DMPonline Github feedback page⁶.

Specific recommendations on implementing an institutional RDMP

- A greater level of tool administrator privileges for an institutional template moderator in DMPonline are needed so institutions can edit, update and revise templates on demand themselves. This immediacy in making changes is essential.
- A DMPonline API for integration of up to date template content within institutional local systems, in collaboration with Funders, as a supported national service, is desirable.
- Creation/uploading of novel templates by the end user would be a desirable and popular feature.
- More direct access and channelling to the institutional specific template via use of a specific URL or linked to login details is required.
- Streamlining of numerous information ‘i’ buttons from DCC Checklists, external and institutional guidance in several places of the onscreen display, within a template section, can sometimes become confusing.
- Question ‘logic’ of linked, follow on questions, needs to be more robust to remove questions not relevant based on previous responses

Wider institutional data management planning implications

The increasing requirement for data management plans and an anticipated strengthening of the review process leads to some notable points for consideration.

- Formally documenting ‘end-to-end’ RDMP is new to many researchers and support will be needed.
- Robust data management planning takes time, particular if the process had not been documented previously. A standard RDMP for each research group, to be adapted for specific individual research project proposals would be beneficial. Sharing of RDMPs, with their examples of good practice, and local peer review would be beneficial.
- Elements of RDMP such as resourcing costs need to be considered at the earliest stage possible. Ethical considerations already appear as a ‘flagged’ question early in institutional research information management pre-award online workflow processes (i.e. MyProjectsProposals). Key elements of RDMP need to be similarity addressed.
- Arguably the current *iridium* project draft RDMP template if followed likely leads to more robust institutional RDM planning as it has strong focus on resourcing, collaboration and auditing – exceeding that required in some RCUK provided templates.
- Estimating the RDMP needs based on number of grant applications and successfully awarded projects, across various Funders and Faculties, will aid institutional resource planning.
- Information contained within RDMP plans has the potential to be used for better future institutional infrastructure and resource planning if it can be collated and analysed.

⁶ <https://github.com/DigitalCurationCentre/DMPOnline/issues>