Postgraduate Research Student Data Management Plan: Review Guidance for Supervisors

Introduction
This document provides guidance for Supervisors on reviewing a research student’s Data Management Plan (DMP). This applies only where a student is participating in the PGR Data Management Plan Pilot.

Postgraduate Research Students whose enrolment in any of the AHRC SWW, ESRC SeNSS or NERC Scenario Doctoral Training Centres commenced on or after September 2018 are required to submit an up-to-date Data Management Plan (DMP) as part of their annual review reports if they will collect or create primary data in the course of their research project.

The Data Management Plan Pilot Policy and related documents can be found at http://www.reading.ac.uk/reas-PGR-DMP.aspx.

When a DMP is required
A DMP must be submitted if the student’s research will involve the collection or creation of primary data. Primary data may be collected or created by means of experiment, observation, simulation, and processing or aggregation of existing data sources.

Creation of primary data from existing sources may occur, for example, through processing of observational data to provide inputs into a numerical model, or compiling information from disparate archival and published sources into a new database.

A DMP is not required if no primary data will be collected or created by the student, for example if the research is based solely on the interpretation of published and archive materials, as may be the case in literary and historical studies.

What the student must do
Students participating in the pilot are required to complete the Annual Review (DMP Pilot) report form instead of the standard Annual Review report form for each annual review. The student must complete section A.2, stating whether or not primary data will be collected or created in the course of the research project. Where data will be collected or created and a DMP is required, the student must also submit a first/updated version of the DMP using the template provided.

The Supervisor’s responsibilities
At the start of the research programme, the Supervisor is expected to make the student aware of the requirement to submit a DMP where primary data will be collected or created in the course of the research project.

Where it is established that a DMP will be required, this should be recorded by the Supervisor, so that progress developing the DMP can be discussed in future meetings.
The Supervisor is expected to discuss data management in the Learning Needs Analysis, and to recommend training on ‘Managing data and research material’ and/or ‘Writing a data management plan’ (delivered via RRDP). Information about support materials and services should be signposted (see Support, below).

Where the proposed research will not collect or create any new data, the Supervisor should record that the student is expected to submit a statement of exemption in their annual report.

If the Supervisor is in any doubt whether a DMP is required, a request for clarification should be submitted to the Research Data Manager.

Where the student has stated in the Annual Review (DMP Pilot) Report Form that no primary data will be collected or created in the course of the research project, this will be confirmed by the Supervisor in section B.5 of the form.

Where a DMP is required, the Supervisor will record whether this has been submitted. Where a DMP has been submitted, this will be reviewed by Supervisor. The review should be carried out using the DMP Review Checklist. The Supervisor will record whether the DMP is satisfactory, and will note any comments and recommendations on the Annual Review (DMP Pilot) Report Form.

Purpose of the Data Management Plan
Students are required to abide by the University’s Research Data Management Policy, which expects that where data collected or created in the course of a project support research outputs, these data will be preserved using a suitable data repository and made openly accessible wherever possible, or accessible to the fullest extent compatible with any legal, ethical or commercial restrictions.\(^1\) If the student is in receipt of funding from a public or charitable funder, such as a Research Council or the Wellcome Trust, they will be subject to similar requirements from their funder as well.\(^2\)

The purpose of the DMP is for the student to document how they will manage their data and supporting materials such as software code throughout their research project, and how they will preserve these materials and make them accessible to others in support of their completed thesis and any associated publications.

The DMP is a practical research instrument, which can help students manage their research data on a day-to-day basis throughout the research workflow, from collection, through processing and analysis, to preparation for archiving and sharing on completion of the research and communication of results. It should be treated as a living document, and developed iteratively throughout the research process as more information is acquired and the research evolves.

The student will not be able to complete all sections of the DMP at a first attempt: in the early stages of research a lot of the practical detail, and some of the key data management decisions, may be as yet undetermined. But the student can use the plan to document their data management requirements, identify questions they need answers to and people to ask, and put down markers for future development of the plan.

The ability to write an effective DMP is a key research skill, which will enable students to become more efficient researchers, to identify requirements and manage risks, and to apply appropriate

\(^1\) http://www.reading.ac.uk/reas-RDMpolicies.aspx.
\(^2\) http://www.reading.ac.uk/reas-FundersRDPolicies.aspx.
solutions. It is also an essential professional skill for the prospective career researcher, as many funders of research now require applicants for grant funding to submit a DMP as part of their application.

**Support**

For advice on reviewing the DMP contact Robert Darby, Research Data Manager, at r.m.darby@reading.ac.uk / 0118 378 6161.

Training for students on ‘Managing research data and material’ and ‘Writing a Data Management Plan for your research project’ is delivered termly through the Reading Researcher Development programme. For more information see [http://www.reading.ac.uk/gs-reading-researcher-development-programme.aspx](http://www.reading.ac.uk/gs-reading-researcher-development-programme.aspx).

Training for staff on research data management and writing a data management plan is provided through People Development. Search for ‘data management’ via ESS or on the People Development website: [http://www.reading.ac.uk/internal/stafflearning/](http://www.reading.ac.uk/internal/stafflearning/).

**Instructions for reviewing the Data Management Plan**

The latest version of the student’s DMP must be assessed by the Supervisor at each annual review (unless exemption from this requirement on the grounds that no primary data will be collected or created has been agreed). The Supervisor’s assessment report must state whether a satisfactory DMP has been submitted, and record any comments or recommendations. The Supervisor may make recommendations for improving the DMP, or, where the DMP is deemed unsatisfactory, recommend remedial action and/or a support referral to the Research Data Manager.

**What is a satisfactory DMP?**

*If a DMP has been submitted, the Supervisor may in almost all cases consider this a satisfactory DMP.*

The Supervisor has discretion to deem a submitted DMP unsatisfactory if little effort has been made to complete it, or if it demonstrates an obvious lack of understanding or preparation on the part of the student.

The student should complete each section of the DMP. If a section is not relevant to them (e.g. students who are not collecting data from research participants will not need to complete the Ethics and Legal Compliance section), they should write N/A (with a brief explanation if necessary) and move on to the next section. The student must not delete sections from the template.

The student may not be able to complete all relevant sections of the DMP in the version submitted for the first annual review. This is quite acceptable, but the student should demonstrate that data management requirements have been considered and put in place markers for future development of the plan.

**What to look for**

When assessing a DMP, you should look for the following qualities:
• The plan looks realistic, and appropriate to the nature of the project, e.g. the data collection campaign is necessary and relevant to the research question, and is not out of scale with the project scope.

• The plan demonstrates awareness of all relevant policy and legal requirements, and indicates how the student will comply with them. Relevant requirements will include:
  
  o the University’s policy expectations on data preservation and sharing;
  o legal and ethical requirements in respect of personal/confidential data;
  o any contractual dispositions regarding IP ownership and publication, for example under a CASE/industrial sponsorship agreement or IP assignment.

• The plan should identify any possible restrictions on data sharing, and demonstrate how the student will manage these and take measures to maximise possibilities for data sharing. For example, if the student will be using secondary data, they should show they are aware of the data provider’s licence conditions or terms of use and how these may affect their freedom to share derived data; or if the student is collecting data from research participants, they should plan to obtain consent for data sharing wherever possible and to anonymise data so that they can be safely shared.

• Any non-standard or additional support or resource requirements should be identified and justifiable, for example if funds are required for a training course, or if use of experimental or national computing facilities is planned.

• Where applicable sections are incomplete or lack specificity, the student demonstrates awareness that more information is needed and will be provided in future iterations of the plan.