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Framework for systematic communication between trainers and data stewards to facilitate professionalisation and the exchange of experiences, best practices, needs, and to develop training modules
Gap Analysis and Recommendations for the Higher Education Institutions

Context

As part of the Programme Open Science I and to implement Action Line C2.3 of the National Action Plan for Open Research Data (ORD), the Delegation Open Science of swissuniversities commissioned a project led by the Università della Svizzera italiana (USI) to examine the communication between research data management (RDM) trainers and data stewards from October 2024 to June 2025.

Key findings and identified challenges

- RDM training is offered across institutions, but with unequal scope, and training formats and audiences vary.

- RDM-related roles are varied and frequently overlap. There is little collaboration between central units and faculties RDM professionals; communication is mostly informal and person based.

- Universities of applied sciences and universities face different realities: Universities of applied sciences are strongly characterized by practice-oriented or industry-related research. Currently, RDM initiatives are mostly tailored to the academic reality of universities and need to be adapted for universities of applied sciences.

- A need for institutions to provide clearer processes, defined standards, and explicit expectations around RDM responsibilities and training requirements was expressed by the participants of the study. In the absence of such frameworks, support efforts often remain fragmented and dependent on individual initiative. Furthermore, there is a need for institutional figures who actively promote RDM, particularly in smaller or more application-oriented institutions.

Recommendations for the Higher Education Institutions

The final report of the project makes the following proposals to address these challenges:

- Distinction between RDM support and training roles
  - can be addressed in a gradual way by making distinct roles explicit, even if in early stages such roles are likely performed by a single person or a small team

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- Varied communication practices across units
  - ➢ institutions can develop mechanisms that promote cross-unit communication and shared planning (regular meetings, ticket systems and shared faculty-library staff positions) and introduce social incentives e.g. through monthly seminar lunches
- Coordination between central and peripheral units
  - ➢ e.g. through a matrix-style coordination model, where each peripheral unit has a designated data champion who liaises bi-monthly with central data support professionals and trainers; through mapping all existing courses into an openly accessible training catalogue; by establishing a "Data Steward-IT-Legal" steering committee meeting periodically
- Structuring training pathways with credit recognition
  - ➢ formally integrate RDM courses on generalist RDM foundations taught centrally and open to all disciplines and discipline-specific deep dives, co-delivered by central RDM trainers and peripheral data management support staff; weaving these tracks into coherent curricula, with prerequisites and formal credits
- Identifying researcher needs through effective dialogue
  - ➢ e.g. through regular feedback sessions, surveys embedded into institutional DMP workflows and/or systematic documentation of RDM service usage (ticket system, internal wiki); this allows to prioritize content development, avoid duplication of effort, and ensure that training remains tightly aligned with emerging researcher challenges
- Formalizing communication channels
  - ➢ establish a shared knowledge base – using platforms such as Confluence or GitBook – that hosts training materials, FAQs, and key documentation in an accessible and regularly updated format; formalize the organization of the RDM community of practice through clearly defined roles, governance documents, rotating leadership mechanisms, and annual review cycles
- Fostering peer-to-peer learning
  - ➢ e.g. through a reciprocal "train-the-trainer" model and/or regular peer exchange workshops
- Leveraging existing networks as communication platforms
  - ➢ established national and international RDM communities – such as the SRDSN, the European RDA Chapters, or discipline-specific consortia that can serve as neutral ground to exchange guidelines, curricula, and lessons learned. A formal RDM Community of Practice at the national level could rotate hosting duties among Swiss institutions, offering webinars, shared repositories of teaching materials, and joint hackathons to refine communication workflows.

For more detailed information, please refer to the final report of the mandate.