

# Open Data and Researcher Assessment in the Social Sciences and Humanities

## Addressing Challenges and Building Tailored Support

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### Open Science for SSH Disciplines?

The researcher assessment reform is reshaping how we define scientific excellence – moving beyond publication metrics to embrace the diversity and broad impact of scientific activities. Open science is central to this shift. However, for researchers in the social sciences and humanities (SSH), open data presents unique challenges, from ethical concerns to the lack of suitable repositories.

At the University of Oulu (UO), discipline-specific support services have helped SSH researchers navigate these complexities. We foster ethically sustainable open data practices that are aligned with FAIR principles. We outline major challenges faced by SSH researchers and present the best practices adopted by UO to help researchers better showcase their data-related merits, making our scientific community more open, inclusive, and impactful.

### “Open Data? Where to Start?”

#### Lack of awareness and training keeps researchers from engaging with open data

Since 2019, UO has provided discipline-specific data support, which is crucial in helping SSH researchers comply with the requirements of open data. The focus is on raising awareness, promoting positive attitudes and providing practical, hands-on support for ethical FAIR data – all of which are important elements of open data practices. UO offers a variety of data-related training opportunities across different stages of academic and professional development. We also offer tailored lectures and self-study materials for students and researchers in the SSH fields.

#### Data stewards support researchers with:

- Developing Data Management Plans**
  - Guidance throughout the research lifecycle
  - Review services for funder and institutional compliance
- Data Privacy & Confidential Data**
  - Support for GDPR compliance and ethical handling
  - Help with privacy notices and sensitive data
- Data Storage, Preservation & Archiving**
  - Secure storage solutions during research
  - Long-term preservation and archiving support
- Opening Datasets & Metadata**
  - Advice on publishing in trusted repositories
  - Support for FAIR principles and open science practices
- Tools & Solutions**
  - Practical tools for managing research data
  - DMP review and improvement

Promoting data openness requires the support of university and faculty management. The UO data policy promotes open and FAIR data, requiring at least the publication of metadata. This statement respects the SSH field, which contains a lot of personal data. In 2025, UO established a working group to map data management needs for further development. All data stewards have a research background, which is important in fostering active dialogue between researchers and management.



A screenshot of a metadata record that was published using the Qvain tool.

### “Extra Work with No Rewards?”

#### Without visible benefits, open data remains a low priority

UO is committed to the principles of responsible researcher assessment, which considers the quality, impact, and openness of research outputs, while acknowledging disciplinary differences. As part of the assessment reform at UO, two tools have been introduced: the Career Assessment Matrix (CAM) and the narrative CV. These tools encourage SSH researchers to pursue open science practices. The CAM outlines UO's valued merits and recognises the openness of various research outputs as a contributor to scientific excellence. The narrative CV model enables researchers to highlight research activities that may not appear in a traditional CV, such as curating sensitive data or enriching reused data.

1. Area of competence	2. Key competencies	3. Recommended merits and competencies
A. Scientific Excellence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Scientific quality and impact, renewal of science</li> <li>Openness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Publications by publication type</li> <li>Openness of publications</li> <li>Research methods and theories</li> <li>Code and software development and possible opening</li> <li>Artistic results</li> <li>Using the FAIR principles for research data and methods</li> <li>Opening research data and/or their descriptive metadata</li> <li>Reproducibility of research outputs and the supporting documentation</li> <li>Preregistration</li> </ul>

*Openness as a key competence of scientific excellence and recommended merits related to open data in UO's CAM.*

UO coordinated the CoARA Boost-funded teaming project, *Exchange & Promote Evaluation Criteria Changes Together*, which produced and openly shared a series of instructional videos promoting responsible assessment. Targeted at evaluators, researchers, and organisations, the videos highlight the role of open science merits in enhancing research quality.



A screenshot with captions from the video "Recognising Open Science in Responsible Researcher Assessment", illustrating merits in open science.

### “It's Too Sensitive – Why Bother?”

#### Ethical and legal concerns discourage SSH researchers from exploring open data possibilities

Privacy and ethical concerns are addressed through several measures, enabling SSH researchers to be more active in the field of open data.

#### National-level support:

- Possibility to publish metadata through the national Fairdata services
- Free data anonymisation services provided by the Finnish Social Science Data Archive
- A key research funder emphasises legal and ethical aspects of data sharing in research proposals

#### Institutional-level support:

- Metadata training and workshops targeted at SSH researchers
- Specialised support from data stewards with expertise in data protection within SSH faculties
- Management support through policy encourages cultural change in SSH research

### “But Where's the Evidence?”

#### SSH researchers need to be able to show they have engaged in open data practices

Infrastructure at UO supports researchers, enabling showcasing of efforts:

- Promoting the national Fairdata Qvain research data description service for SSH researchers who can only publish metadata.
- Metadata of datasets imported into OuluCRIS from the national Fairdata Metax and DataCite, requiring no additional effort from researchers.
- Metadata records validated by the library, enriched with the researcher's unit affiliation and ORCID, to be used in CVs, profiles, and unit or faculty-level reports.
- Future plans include exporting verified metadata records to the national research information hub, Research.fi.

### It Works! – What's Next?

#### Observed benefits of discipline-specific support:

- Better understanding of current issues in the field
- Utilising day-to-day interactions to communicate open data practices
- Close connection between support services, researchers, and faculty management

#### Remaining challenges:

- Reaching researchers who are not actively seeking advice or are unaware of the available services
- Lack of infrastructure for sharing video data
- Promoting data reuse and showcasing reuse efforts

#### References

UO Data Policy: <https://www.oulu.fi/en/research/responsible-research>  
 UO principles of researcher assessment, narrative CD model, and CAM: <https://www.oulu.fi/en/research/responsible-research/principles-for-assessment-research-and-researchers-university-oulu>  
 Frick, Maria. 2019. "University of Oulu Kikosa Collection". Version 1. University of Oulu. <http://um.fi/urn:nbn:fi:csc-kata20190315143424155015>.  
 Fairdata services: <https://www.fairdata.fi/en/>

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