

Setting up a data steward team @ Ghent University & the national context in Belgium

RDMF21: Data stewardship in research institutions, 13-07-2021

In October 2019, Ghent University set up a small team of dedicated data stewards. Its mission:



Promote & facilitate good RDM practices



Contribute to cultural change towards FAIR & open data, data reuse

Rationale:

- Human, not just technical infrastructure required
- Offer professional, more tailored support
- Ensure consistent messages & optimal information exchange



How?

1. Make the case
2. Shape local implementation of data stewardship
3. Recruit
4. Get started

1. Making the case

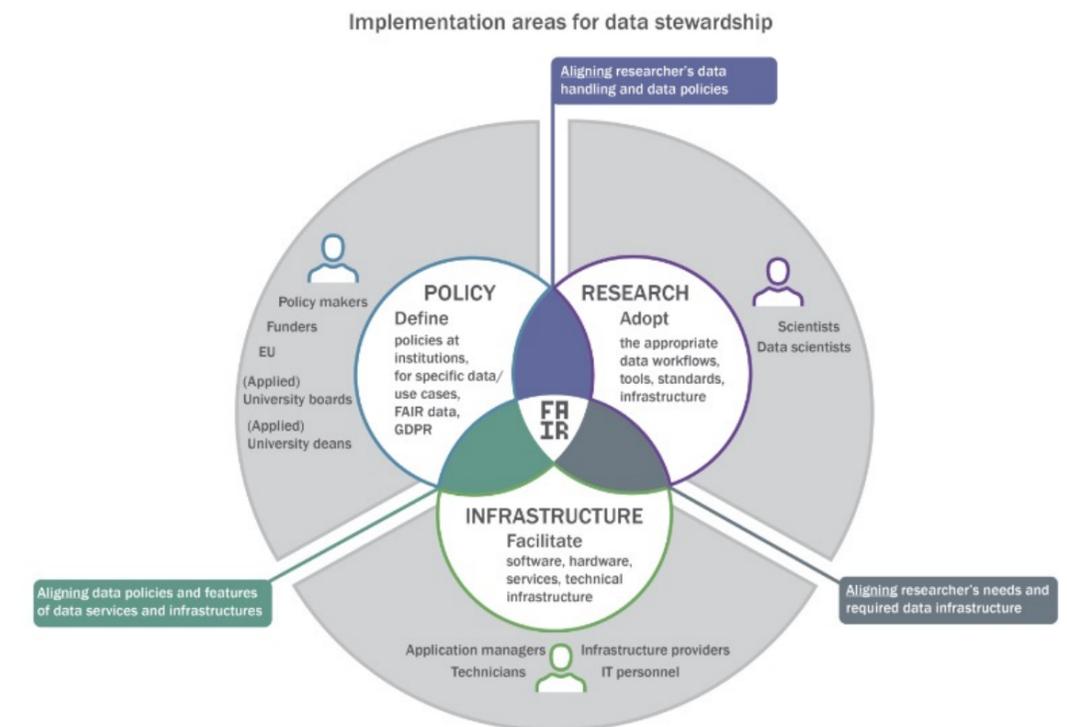
To get buy-in from our Board of Governors, we pointed to:

- Changing legal & data policy landscape
- RDM knowledge & skills gap among our researchers
as demonstrated by Flemish inter-university RDM working group¹
- Emergence of new kind of data professional + data stewardship programmes elsewhere²
- Expectation of future government funding for open science

2. Shaping the local implementation of data stewardship

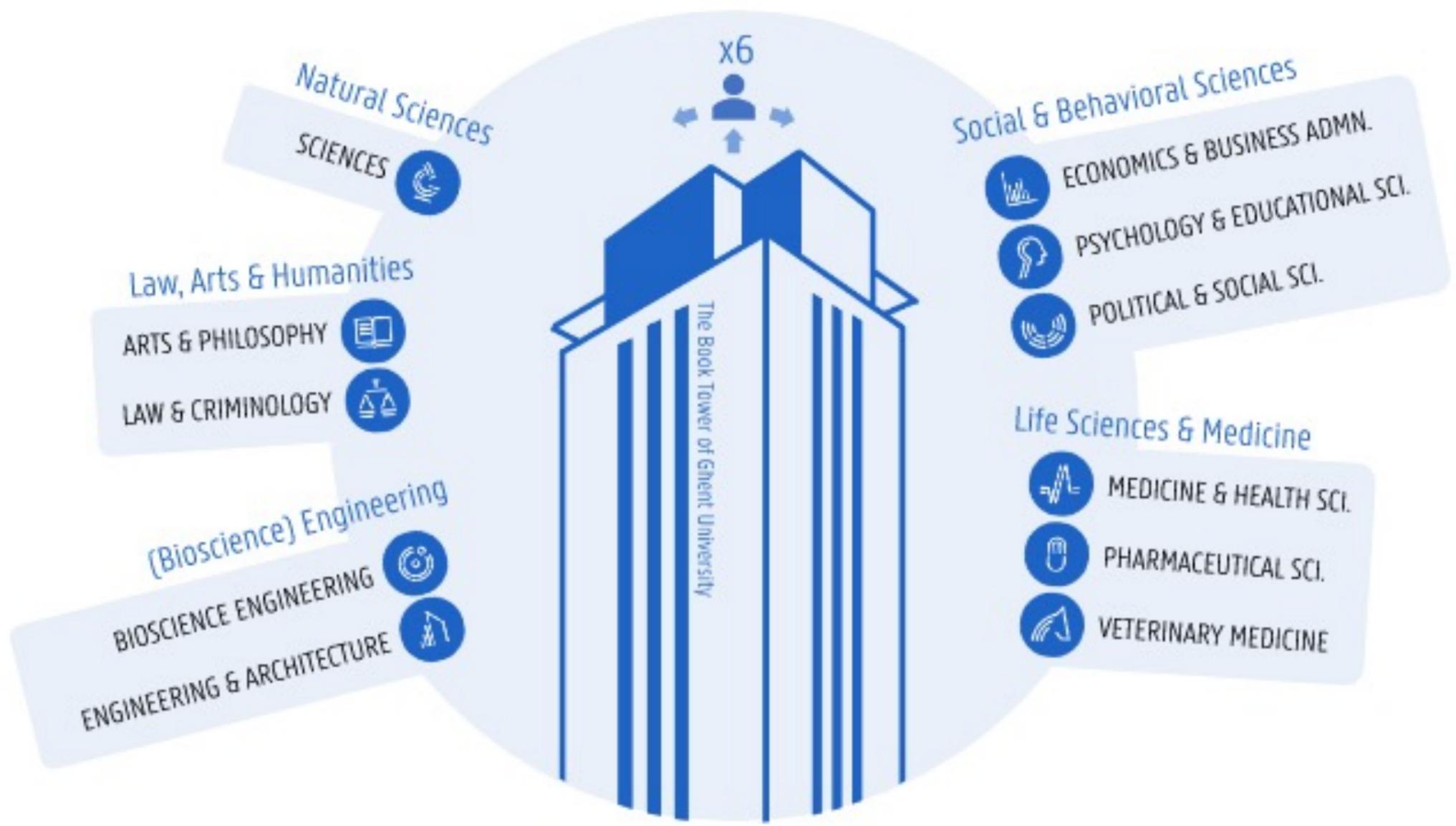
How to position this new role within our institution?

- We drew inspiration from Dutch data steward landscape studies¹
- Between central & faculty level
- 3 main task areas



2.1 Between central & faculty level

Team within Ghent University Library (Book tower), with one team coordinator and one data steward for each faculty cluster:



2.2 Three main task areas

Advisors, not operational data managers!

- 1 Raise awareness, inform, train & advise
- 2 RDM infrastructure-related projects
- 3 Monitor & shape RDM policy and strategy

3. Recruiting

With no formal learning for data stewards in Belgium yet, we looked for:

- Research experience + keen interest in RDM (support)
- Variety of disciplines & skill sets
- Relevant attributes as identified in other institutions' RDM job ads

4. Getting started

We set out with an initial 3-phased work plan:

1. **Onboarding** via self-study, group discussions & meetings with key central services staff
2. Start **faculty outreach** to introduce data stewards & gather input for phase 3
3. Launch **more proactive support** with advisory & training services

ADVISORY & TRAINING SERVICES

-  **DMP support**
Templates, guidance, examples, providing feedback
-  **Online information & guidance**
UGent RDM web-pages, (re)search tips
-  **RDM helpdesk**
rdm.support@ugent.be
For all RDM-related questions
-  **Consultations**
With individual researchers or groups
-  **Training, info sessions & other events**
Formal and informal, about RDM topics
-  **User support for Library RDM tools**
E.g. DMPonline.be, OSF for UGent, etc.



Meanwhile at the **national/regional level**:

- Scope of open science policies gradually expanding beyond publications, to include research data
- No policy harmonization yet across research funders & governments, but European developments shaping new policies
- Flemish government in particular driving implementation of institutional research data policies & services across Flanders



Flemish government's [Open Science policy plan](#) (12/2019):

- Foundation of Flemish Open Science Board (FOSB)
- € 5.000.000/year to support research institutions' transition to Open Science

including dedicated funds for hiring data stewards!

- Open Science KPIs & targets to monitor annual institutional progress
including for DMPs, Open & FAIR data



Emergence of national/regional **RDM peer networks**:

- Policy-oriented networks (e.g. inter-university council, FOSB)
- Staff from institutions providing shared planning tool DMPonline.be
- Start of informal exchange among data stewards via recently launched Flemish Research Data Network 'Knowledge Hub'
- Ad hoc training events

e.g. recent [instructor training](#) co-organised with FAIRsFAIR/EOSC-Pillar/EOSC-Synergy

→ How do we further develop & professionalise our growing data steward community in Belgium/Flanders?

- Shared understanding of data steward roles & competences?
- Coordinated development of structural training offer?
- Role of transnational & disciplinary communities (e.g. European Research Infrastructures)?



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