Research Data Management course

The Doctoral School of Nova University Lisbon since 2015 offers a course in Research Data Management. This course was designed for doctoral candidates but allows other researchers, researcher managers, librarians, and research support staff from NOVA University to register. The initiative was taken by members of the University libraries, who saw an opportunity in national and European-level policy developments to propose the dissemination of good practices on research data management to better address the needs of the academic staff at their institution.

The development and implementation of this course show the ability of members of the staff to drive capacity building within their institution. Being close to the needs of doctoral candidates regarding RDM and FAIR data, practitioners such as academic librarians and members of the research support staff are shown to be able to act as drivers for change by sharing their knowledge and bringing new initiatives to the attention of the leadership. As such, this case also shows the importance of university leaders being attentive to the ideas emerging from within their institution and taking action to integrate them into broader institutional strategies. Finally, this case shows that such efforts can be even more effective when supported by a broader policy framework at the national or European level that offers an anchor point for bottom-up initiatives.

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Use case: building staff capacity and leveraging senior management support to foster the initiation of training courses and ensure their sustainability

Type of initiative: cross-disciplinary training course

Organiser of the initiative: Nova Doctoral School (Nova University Lisbon)

Scope and objectives

Nova's Doctoral School Research Data Management course aims to foster the ability of doctoral candidates to better manage their research data, following the FAIR principles and complying with the new requirements to access national and European funding.

The initiative to develop the course came from members of the university's library who, inspired by new policy developments happening at the European and national levels, wanted to address challenges and issues related to the lack of RDM and FAIR data-related skills and training at the institutional level. In this case, policy drivers for change were the Open Research Data Pilot of Horizon 2020 and the publication, in 2014, of two policies on Open Access and on data sharing and management promoted by the Portuguese national funding agency.

Interviewees highlighted how new European requirements and the guidelines and recommendations set by the national policies supported them in identifying which were the most urgent needs related to RDM and FAIR data in their institution. At the time, the concepts of data and FAIR data sharing were still new, and these practices were not yet common among doctoral candidates and other researchers. Targeted training activities were therefore needed to ensure that they would be able to comply with the new ambitions and demands coming from the national and European level.

Implementation

The Research Data Management course was launched in 2015. The course is organised twice per year and is now in its 9th edition. While the main target is doctoral candidates, the course is also open to other researchers, professors and the research support staff of Nova University Lisbon.

As mentioned, the initiative to develop the course came from members of the university's Libraries, who leveraged their existing contacts within the institution to, first, verify if they agreed on the need to create a RDM course, and second, to build a stable network to present this idea to the leaders of both the university and the Doctoral School.

Interviewees stressed how ensuring support from the leadership was a key step in bringing forward the development of the initiative. Meetings with the Vice-Rector of Nova University Lisbon and the Head of the Doctoral School were set to introduce the objectives of a potential new course and to persuade the leadership on the need to implement it. To achieve this aim, representatives of the Doctoral School highlighted how the new policy developments at the national and European level were used as key arguments to present a convincing case to the leadership and ensure receiving both the staff and financial resources needed to implement the course.

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Capacity

The Research Data Management course is part of the training offer of the Nova Doctoral School. In terms of financial capacity, the main funding stream comes from the existing budget of the Nova University Lisbon, which is made available for activities organised within the Doctoral School.

In terms of staff capacity, lecturers of the course are the members of the university's Libraries who originally promoted the initiative and were then entrusted by the leadership to develop the content and deliver the course. In this regard, interviewees highlighted how the presence of an institutional leadership that was attentive to the voice and input coming from the staff was a key driver that motivated them not only to propose the idea but also to work on it to achieve the final result.

Impact

During its nine editions, the Research Data Management course received positive feedback from attendees, as shown by the results gathered through the evaluation surveys sent after each iteration of the course.

Across the years, the results of the course's evaluation surveys were a clear indication of the need for RDM training activities to take place in the Doctoral School. Responses received showed that awareness of how to manage research data in compliance with the FAIR principles was very low among participants. **Supporting the emergence of RDM skills by enhancing training activities was therefore seen as a key action to raise awareness among doctoral candidates and the research support staff, as well as to fill potential gaps in the implementation of these practices at the institutional level**.

At the same time, **the experience of Nova Doctoral School shows how skills training is a necessary, but insufficient practice to promote RDM and FAIR data**. Through informal exchanges with doctoral candidates from past editions, interviewees discovered that while doctoral candidates are well- intentioned to apply what they learned in the course, they still find different challenges and obstacles that prevent them from doing so. In this particular case, these challenges vary from lack of time and resources to inadequate support from doctoral supervisors.

Promoters of the initiatives are now working on the creation of a longer-term monitoring scheme to verify if and how participants have been putting into practice the skills and tools learned during the course in their daily research activities. Establishing a more structured feedback loop might help oversee if a real change happened in how research data are managed within the Doctoral School. Results of this effort will also provide support in calibrating the content of the course according to new needs and challenges that might emerge in the future.

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About this use case
This use case is part of a collection describing how FAIR education is being embedded in educational programmes and presented in the **"Good Practices in FAIR Competence Education" report**.

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