

Open Research Pilot project: reflections from the Research Support Team

In the fifth blog in the series from the end of the [Open Research Pilot](#), the project's latest Research Support team, Georgina Cronin, Dr Debbie Hansen and Dr Lauren Cadwallader, reflect on their individual contributions and thoughts about the pilot. The team's knowledge and skills include those related to open access and research data management as well as general research librarian and scholarly communication support.

Georgina Cronin

I became involved in the project during the initial launch preparation stage in October 2016. I had been in my post as the Research Support Librarian at the [Betty & Gordon Moore Library](#) for seven months by this point, and so felt that being involved with the pilot would not only allow for me to assist researchers in developing good open research practices, but would also allow me to gain insights as a research support professional.

Once the launch and recruitment phase was completed, I was assigned [Dr Laurent Gatto](#) as the researcher that I would be supporting throughout the pilot. I was already familiar with Laurent and his commitment to open research as I had previously worked with him in organising the Cambridge offshoot of the [OpenCon](#) conference. I was grateful for the opportunity to learn more throughout this pilot about his work in proteomics and about how he uses open research practices to share his work.

However, after several meetings, it soon became clear that Laurent was less in need of research data management and open practices support from me, and more in need of facilitated opportunities to discuss issues surrounding open research, funder insights (especially from the Wellcome Trust), and tools to facilitate these discussions throughout the pilot project. Whilst I tried to enable this with the project management team – and some progress was made during group meetings – the unique needs of each research group within the pilot and the wider focus on using the Wellcome Trust's Open Research platform meant that some of this discussion failed to get the traction that we had been seeking. Perhaps this was due to the fact that open research means different things to different people, and the unique context of a group's research area and funding plus their existing knowledge and priorities of practicing open science denotes whether such extensive discussions can take place.

As the project progressed, several members of the project management team left for roles in other institutions and so, in mid-2017, I took over supporting [Dr David Savage's research group](#) which was looking at type 2 diabetes and insulin resistance. David had been excellently supported so far by my colleague Dr Marta Teperek and so there was little additional support that I could offer in the first instance other than offering further advice on the publication process and establishing a public-facing website for David's research group.

Whilst I valued the opportunity to work more closely with two research groups as part of this pilot, there were many occasions when I felt out of my depth in the research support that I was able to offer and in the motivation that I was able to provide to my groups. Whilst open research as a concept was the main goal for the pilot, the intended steps towards achieving that goal were vague at times, and I think that this is shown in the feedback that both of my groups gave as part of their reflections on the project. They were both initially keen to be involved but, as the pilot progressed, their own motivations did not always align with the overall focus of the project. I think that we all learned a lot from one another, from the other research groups, and from Wellcome Trust, but the two year duration of the pilot meant that maintaining interest and focus while also managing other demands on time was a challenge.

Dr Debbie Hansen

When I took on the role of Research Support to [Ben Steventon's group](#), the project had been running for over a year and there had already been two others in this role. My two predecessors had worked with Ben to explore and identify existing and potential repositories appropriate for his team's imaging and tracking data and put him in touch with others in the University and field who would possibly be able to help. There is further information about the team's challenges around the open sharing of their data in this [blog](#).

I was familiar with the Open Research Pilot as I was involved in a secretarial capacity, and so was aware of the open data issues Ben's team were facing. By this stage, it had become clear to Ben that an existing single solution to the problem was not available. However, through his and Wellcome Trust's engagement with the project, Ben became acquainted with the various schemes Wellcome Trust were running in support of open research, and what they were looking for in submitted proposals. I was pleased when Ben approached me to review an application and was subsequently thrilled to hear that he had been successfully awarded [Open Research Enrichment funding](#) as a result of his application. It will be interesting to follow how this project develops towards the sharing of his team's image data and related data.

For me, being part of the project has been an opportunity to find out about the range of issues related to open research, and how, for researchers to work openly, this requires the backing of government, funders and institutions. I have also learnt more about how 'on-the-ground' research support can help advise on open research policy and on particulars related to Open Access, research data management and research tools.

Dr Lauren Cadwallader

Upon starting this project, I wasn't really sure what to expect. I was keen to help researchers with open research and find out what they needed from us, but as to the actual, practical day to day stuff – I wasn't sure what to do. I was keen to working with the [Jefferis group](#) because they work collaboratively, and I was interested in how open research works in that kind of setting when your co-researchers aren't necessarily bound by the same open research requirements as yourselves. I thought my involvement would be much more

focused on this line – for example, helping with how to negotiate where to publish based on OA requirements, or on data ownership/authorship queries.

In reality, the advice and support I gave was much more locally focused. At the beginning we identified an immediate area of support I could help with: Electronic Lab Notebooks (ELNs). The group was already participating in the [University wide trial](#) but I could help with providing further advice on the products, which I attempted to tailor to their specific needs. However, it was difficult to get a handle on their workflows to establish how an ELN might fit and therefore which solution would be most suitable. This was in part due to time – I was unable to fully immerse myself in their group and practices – and also on expertise. Had I been able to get immersed, I'm not sure I would necessarily have understood what was going on! At times I felt a bit out of my depth – I knew about open research in general but not in enough detail to advise on specific aspects, especially technical systems. It was also difficult to really understand what issues the group needed help with. I think in reality they were already quite ahead with open research; the fact that this pilot enabled them to have new conversations with funders was enough, but as I was expecting to do more for them, I felt a bit lost.

This feeling has been redeemed now we are at the end of the project. I've realised just how useful it has been for the group to have a way to talk about the funding of resources. I've also been able to link them up to our Data Champions so they can receive training. This is a really nice outcome for me as it is marrying up two projects we are running for the benefit of all involved. I think this is a nice example of how networks can really help facilitate open research across the University.

What do I think this means for the future of supporting open research in Cambridge? Firstly, that it can be difficult to offer really focused support if you are not fully integrated with the research group. I think that the [embedded librarian](#) model has been a lot more successful at this. Secondly, that groups don't necessarily need this type of embedded support! Actually, just knowing who you can ask a question to, even if your question is then redirected to the right person, is very helpful. It was surprising for my group to learn that librarians offer this type of support, so I think making researchers more aware of the research support aspect of our roles is important. Finally, I think that having conversations around open research is really valuable – not only to get someone else's perspective on it and how it relates to their discipline, but to also highlight issues and know that others are thinking about them and looking for solutions.

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