



MRS Policy Unit

Submission to Research Councils UK Draft Concordat on Open Research Data

Background: About MRS and self-regulation

1. The Market Research Society (MRS) is the world's largest research association. It's for everyone with professional equity in market, social and opinion research and in business intelligence, market analysis, customer insight and consultancy. MRS supports best practice by setting and enforcing industry standards.
2. MRS supports best practice in the research industry by setting and enforcing industry standards. The MRS adopted its first self-regulatory Code in 1954 and the latest fully revised version of the MRS Code of Conduct came into effect on 1 September 2014. The Code is designed to support those engaged in market research in maintaining professional standards and to reassure the general public that research is carried out in a professional and ethical manner. MRS individual members and Company Partners must comply with the Code which applies, whether they are engaged in consumer, business to business, social, opinion or any other type of research project. The commitment to uphold the MRS Code of Conduct is supported by the MRS Codeline service and a range of specialist guidelines.

Open Research Data: Comments on the Draft Concordat

3. We welcome the opportunity to respond to the draft Concordat on Open Research Data which sets out expectations of good practice in publishing research data openly.
4. MRS supports the principles of Open Data and transparency, as reflected in our membership of the Open Data Institute and our previous engagement in this area. Our members regularly use open data sets such as census data and other large survey data in market analysis and sampling. The supply of statistics as open data with minimal restrictions on re-use was a major advance which was especially appreciated in marketing and research. It has facilitated adding value through further products and services, ultimately adding to effective



communication of the statistical data. We consider that open access to greater research data sets can similarly deliver benefits.

5. The Concordat adopts a useful approach in setting out expectations of good practice rather than specific prescriptive rules and standards. We believe that this should provide a sufficiently flexible approach that provides clear expectations on commitments. For MRS Company Partners and individual members working on publically funded research projects it will complement the existing regulatory framework in the MRS Code of Conduct.
6. The ten fundamental principles set out in the document provide a strong framework for progressing and sustaining greater access to research data. We support the principles including the clear recognition of the right of creators of research data to reasonable first use. We also agree that there are trade-offs to be made between access and cost to reflect value for money and use, but stress that this should not be used to unduly delay progress towards greater opening up of research data.
7. MRS welcomes this initiative and considers that the document can make a valuable contribution in facilitating greater access to important data. We have made some specific comments, as set out in the following paragraphs, highlighting the role played by commercial researchers and noting a few points where clarification and refinement would be helpful.

Introduction

8. The Concordat is intended to "establish a set of expectations of good practice with the intention of establishing open research data as the desired position for publicly-funded research over the long term." However it is also important to recognise that publically funded research is carried out by a range of researchers including market researchers and Company Partners and individual members of the MRS. Research data collected by both academic and commercial researchers should ideally be made openly available for use by other where possible, subject of course to legal, ethical and commercial constraints. There should be recognition, as appropriate within the Concordat, of the role of commercial researchers who also conduct work on publically funded projects, either as sole suppliers or in collaboration with academic researchers. As drafted the Concordat



only covers academic research and the role of researchers working within academic institutions.

9. Clearer recognition of the collaborative and individual role of commercial researchers could be achieved by a statement in the introductory section on the diversity of the “UK research community” and clarity throughout the document as to any expectations being placed on the commercial research community undertaking publically funded work. Similarly, as references are made throughout the Concordat to research organisations it could be made clear upfront, as referenced in principle 4, that this is intended to apply only to universities or research institutes, and not apply more widely to commercial research organisations such as market research companies.

Principle # 1 Open access to research data is an enabler of high quality research, a facilitator of innovation and safeguards good research practice

10. We support the presumption on the publication of research data. Open access to research data should encourage the development of products and services in the private sector. The competitive market provides an environment for the development and marketing of more efficient, innovative and relevant products.

Principle #3 Data must be curated so that they are accessible, discoverable and useable

11. We strongly support the principle that data must be not only accessible but also discoverable and useable. Although as is noted methodologies will differ, it is important that consideration is given to ensuring that the needs of a range of users is taken into account and that methodologies are designed to be user friendly and appeal to a community outside of the academic research community.
12. It is laudable that open research data is prepared in such a manner that it is widely useable as is reasonably possible by specialists, wherever they are in the world. This recognises that variations in the global environment and different national levels of IT infrastructure and communications technology will impact on researcher’s ability to access open data sets.



Principle #5 There are sound reasons why the openness of research data may need to be restricted but any restrictions must be justified and justifiable

13. Reference is made to reasonable grounds for the withholding of research data from the public domain if doing so would compromise individual confidentiality or constitute an invasion of personal privacy or create security risks. Use of research data based on personal datasets will be one of the more difficult areas. There is a need to respect research participants expectations of participant anonymity (rather than mere confidentiality), and ensure the appropriateness of the use and re-use of research data. This section should explicitly recognise the legal framework under the Data Protection Act and the complexity and safeguards inherent in using sensitive personal data such as health data.

14. No part of this submission needs to be treated as confidential.

For further information or clarification on this submission please contact Dr Michelle Goddard, Director of Policy and Standards, (michelle.goddard@mrs.org.uk 020-7566-1882). This submission is made on behalf of The Market Research Society, 15 Northburgh Street, London EC1V 0JR. The Market Research Society is a company limited by guarantee, registered in England No. 518685.

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