Access to Research Data from Public Funding:
The development of international principles and guidelines for OECD countries

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OECD

- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
- Successor to OEEC (Organisation for European Economic Co-operation) to implement the post World War II Marshall Plan for reconstructing Europe
- Thirty member countries which are among the most industrialised in the world, including those outside Europe, notably US and Japan.
- Several non-member countries, including China, participate in the work of the OECD.
OECD Committee for Scientific and Technological Policy (CSTP)

- A body of the OECD responsible for
  - “Encouraging co-operation among Member Countries, and, as appropriate, with non-member economies, in the field of science, technology and innovation policy, with a view to contributing to the achievement of their economic social and scientific aims, including growth and the creation of skilled jobs, sustainable development, improved well-being of their citizens and advancing the frontiers of knowledge.”
At the Ministerial level meeting of the CSTP in January 2004

A Declaration on Access to Research Data from Public Funding was adopted by the Ministers.

This reflected in part the move towards “open access” to scientific information in many countries.

The Ministers mandated the CSTP: “To develop a set of OECD guidelines based on commonly agreed principles to facilitate optimal cost-effective access to digital research data from public funding, to be endorsed by the OECD Council at a later stage.”
CSTP launched a project

- To respond to this mandate.
- By setting up a Group of Experts from Member countries.
- And by launching a survey to examine current practices in access to research data.
Survey on practices

- Carried out late 2005/early 2006
- Covering practices in: Australia, Belgium (Flanders), Canada, Finland, France, Germany, Japan, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, UK, US and the European Commission
  - Twenty government/funding agencies
  - Fifty three research/data institutions
Governments/funding agencies

- Recognised the positive impacts of increased access in enhancing advancement of science
  - Through efficiency gains and cost savings
  - Implying higher returns to investments in research and boosting the quality of research.

- Adopted different types of policies, including
  - Laws, policy statements, accepted practices of specific research communities
Research/data institutions

- Had often already developed data policies to promote advancement of science.
- Thought that access to data is an important policy issue.
- Pointed to barriers to increased access, mainly in legal restrictions regarding privacy of information, national security and ownership of intellectual property.
- But many felt that the barriers should be overcome.
- Felt international guidelines would be useful, but pointed to a need for flexibility in implementation.
The content of the OECD guidelines: Objectives

- Broad policy recommendations to governmental science policy and funding bodies of Member countries.
- Promote data access and sharing among researchers, research institutions, and national research agencies, while recognising the various national laws, research policies and organisational structures of Member countries.
- Improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the global science system.
- Not intended to hinder its development with onerous obligations and regulations or impose new costs on national science systems.
The content of the OECD guidelines: Guiding principles (1)

- Openness – access at lowest possible cost
- Flexibility – account for rapid technological change and cross-country differences
- Transparency – information should be made available in a transparent way, ideally through the Internet
- Legal conformity – protecting the legal rights and legitimate interests of all stakeholders
- Protection of intellectual property – considering the applicability of copyright or other IPR arrangements.
- Formal responsibility: development of formal institutional practices for facilitating access.
The content of the OECD guidelines: Guiding principles (2)

- Professionalism: based on relevant professional standards and values.
- Interoperability: ensure technical compatibility for international and interdisciplinary access.
- Quality: explicit quality standards
- Security: guarantee integrity and security of research data
- Efficiency: avoid duplication of data collection efforts
- Accountability: evaluate data access arrangements to access costs, benefits and performance of the arrangements
- Sustainability: considering long-term preservation
Development of an OECD Recommendation on Data Access

- The guidelines are designed to guide member countries (and other countries, where appropriate) in developing their own policies towards data access.

- They are to be annexed to a Recommendation by the OECD Council, which is not legally binding but a “soft law”, i.e., expression of strong “moral commitment” of OECD member countries: “practice accords them great moral force as representing the political will of Member countries. There is an expectation that Member countries will do their utmost to fully implement a Recommendation.”
Current status of the project

- Draft Recommendation has been finalised.
- A supplementary consultation was undertaken over the summer with research institutions in OECD countries that did not participate in the original survey, showing that:
  - OECD guidelines were considered helpful, to support development of new policies, or to validate existing policies
- The project will be discussed by the CSTP on 26 October, at its meeting in Seoul.
- CSTP will decide whether to send the Recommendation to the OECD Council for endorsement.
- If this occurs, the Recommendation may be adopted by the OECD Council later this year.
Possible follow-up

- The draft Recommendation includes a provision that CSTP will need to monitor implementation of the Guidelines.
- Moreover, several countries have indicated interest in further work on data access and best practices, for example:
  - Further analysis of costs and benefits of data access – as harder evidence on benefits may support funding and sustainability
  - Further analysis of current and good practices (as already underway through CODATA and GICSI)
  - Incentives – are scientists rewarded for data archiving?
  - Application of the principles and guidelines in public-private partnerships
Thank you