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