

From planning to practice: building a culture of data sharing in the Institute of Education



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The Institute of Education has progressively embedded research data management into its School ethics process, generating evidence of an active Open Research culture that other Research Divisions and REF Units of Assessment may find useful for their own approaches and environment narratives.

Embedding data management in School processes

Research data management can feel like an administrative burden, particularly for researchers in social science and humanities disciplines where sharing qualitative data raises questions about fit with research paradigms. Over the past three years, the Institute of Education (IoE) has tried to address this not by imposing requirements from above, but by building a process that makes data management planning a natural part of how research is approved and conducted.

The starting point was a University pilot in September 2022, which invited Schools to integrate a Data Management Plan (DMP) into their ethics application process. The DMP component ensures that applicants make appropriate plans to manage and share data in line with ethical and data protection obligations, and in accordance with the University's [Research Data Management Policy](#).¹ IoE joined the pilot, and during that first year the School organised two sessions within its Research and Scholarship seminar series to

¹ A DMP requirement was introduced for applications to the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) in 2020, through a collaboration between UREC, the Data Protection Office and the Research Data Service, and was subsequently extended to selected Schools. As of June 2026, submission of a DMP is required for all School-level ethical review. See <https://libguides.reading.ac.uk/researchdata/ethics>.

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introduce colleagues and PGR students to DMPs. Professor Rebecca Harris and Dr Anthony Zhang, who jointly oversee the School ethics process, each completed a DMP for one of their own projects and provided feedback to the central Research Data team on the template and supporting guidance.

From September 2023, submission of a DMP became a mandatory component of all ethics applications in the IoE, so that planning for data storage, management, and sharing now happens at the project approval stage rather than as an afterthought. In a typical term, the School processes around 16 ethics applications evenly split between staff and PGRs, each accompanied by a DMP, with an average turnaround of just over two weeks.

Closing the gap between planning and delivery

Embedding DMPs at the point of approval was meant to be the beginning, not the end, of the process. In May 2025, the School introduced a follow-up procedure to check whether researchers had implemented their DMPs, with a particular focus on whether data had been deposited in a data repository and shared where appropriate. This follow-up uses the ethics application master spreadsheet to track each project through to its intended data outputs, and is the part of the process that has made the most material difference, because it closes the gap between what researchers plan and what they actually do.

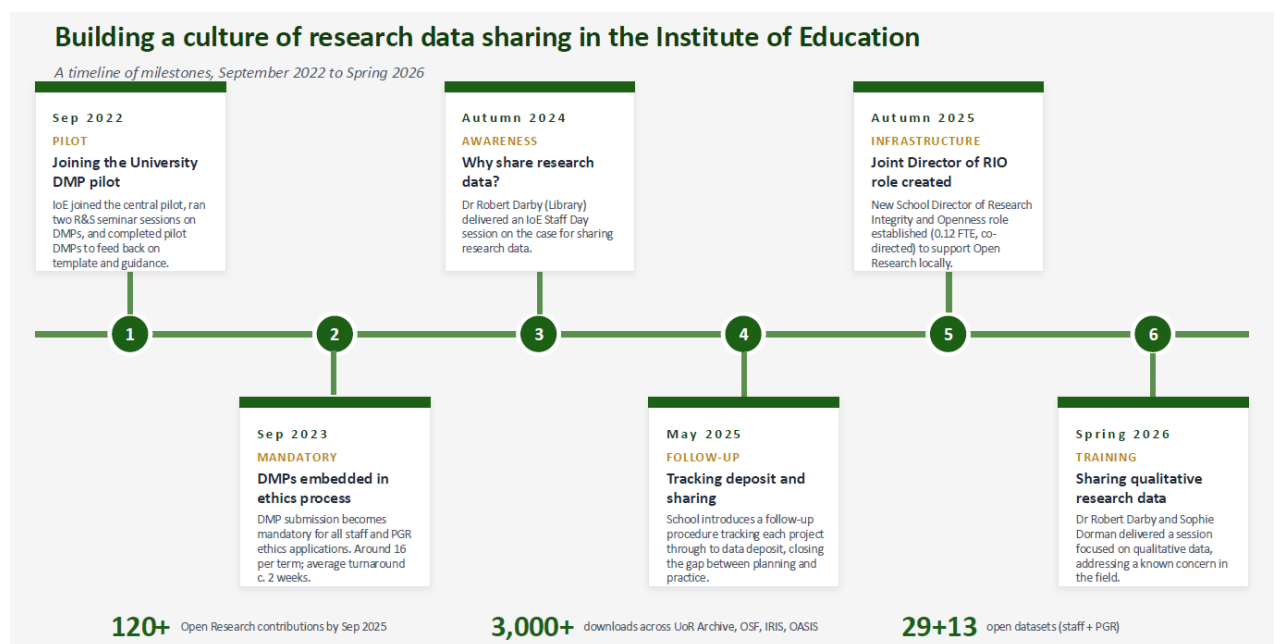
Both the pilot and the subsequent implementation were fully supported by the IoE Research Committee, chaired by the School's Research Division Lead. This backing at committee level gave the work formal standing, ensured that new procedures were endorsed rather than simply introduced, and made it easier to communicate expectations to colleagues across the School.

Building a culture of Open Research

The School has continued to invest in training and community engagement. In Autumn 2024, Dr Robert Darby (Research Data Manager, Library) delivered a session at the IoE Staff Day on why sharing research data matters; and in Spring 2026 Robert and his Library colleague Sophie Dorman led a session focused on sharing qualitative research data, addressing concerns that many colleagues in education and social science contexts have found particularly

challenging. A seminar on pre-registration of qualitative research took place in Summer 2026. These sit alongside a now well-established IoE training offer including a weekly R coding club for beginners and intermediate users, a journal club on advanced quantitative methods, and a regular statistics drop-in clinic.

In Autumn 2025, the IoE created a new joint role of School Director of Research Integrity and Openness, currently held by Dr Daisy Powell and Dr Anthony Zhang as co-directors on a 0.12 FTE allocation. This role emerged from findings in the University's Statistics Community of Practice, which identified the need for dedicated local advocates for Open Research at School level. The co-directors work alongside the ethics leadership to support Open Research practices across the School, providing a joined-up infrastructure for this work in close collaboration with the Research Data Service.



Evidence of cultural change

The combined effort is now starting to show in concrete outputs. By September 2025, IoE researchers had recorded more than 120 Open Research contributions across platforms including the University's [Research Data Archive](#), the Open Science Framework (OSF), Instruments and Data for Research in Language Studies (IRIS), and Open Accessible Summaries in Language Studies (OASIS). Open datasets, accessible summaries, shared

instruments, analysis code, and preregistrations all feature. Between them, these outputs had accumulated more than 3,000 downloads, demonstrating that the data and materials are being found and used. Staff now account for 29 open datasets and PGR researchers for a further 13, reflecting a research community in which data sharing has moved from being exceptional to being routinely expected.

Cultural change is also evident in the conversations within the School. Qualitative data sharing in particular has historically been contested, with some researchers feeling that sharing sits uneasily with their epistemological commitments and the relational nature of their work with participants. What has been encouraging is seeing how those reservations can shift once researchers go through the process themselves.

At a recent Research and Scholarship seminar, Professor Naomi Flynn discussed her experience of sharing a substantial qualitative dataset created during her large British Academy-funded project, [Talk-rich teaching: oracy for multilingual learners](#). The [dataset](#) was deposited in the University's Research Data Archive with the support of the Research Data Service. She spoke about



how, having begun from a position of scepticism, her thinking about the value of data sharing had changed, and she encouraged colleagues to consider sharing their own data. Contributions of this kind, from within the School's own research community, have been among the most effective drivers of culture change.

Modest investment can generate real returns

Embedding DMPs in the ethics process has required modest but real resource. The ethics portfolio in IoE is led jointly by a Chair and a Deputy Chair, with a collective workload allocation of 0.1 FTE covering review coordination, liaison with reviewers and committee chairs, and reporting to School and University committees. DMP monitoring forms one part of that work, and having two

colleagues sharing the role has made the work more manageable and provided continuity when one of us is on leave or particularly stretched.

The outcomes are both quantitative and cultural. Ethics applications and DMPs now run together as a matter of routine; follow-up monitoring is closing the gap between planning and practice; Open Research outputs are being deposited, found, and downloaded in meaningful numbers; and colleagues who once approached data sharing with caution are increasingly becoming its advocates. The IoE's experience suggests that with relatively modest workload investment, a School can generate sustained and demonstrable Open Research activity, providing the kind of evidence that REF Units of Assessment will want to draw on for their environment statements.

Open at a glance

- By September 2025, IoE researchers had recorded more than 120 Open Research contributions, with over 3,000 downloads across the University Research Data Archive, OSF, IRIS, and OASIS
- Integrating DMP requirements into an existing ethics workflow is a practical, low-resource way to raise engagement with data management planning
- A follow-up monitoring procedure closes the gap between what researchers plan to do and what they actually implement
- Strong backing from the School Research Committee and dedicated School-level Open Research roles provide formal standing for embedding new processes locally
- Peer-to-peer advocacy from researchers who have been through the process themselves is particularly effective in disciplines where qualitative data sharing has traditionally been contested

For more information

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A timeline of milestones, September 2022 to Spring 2026

