

# Yes, we're open!

## Fostering awareness and dialogue on Open Science at the University of Groningen

### 1. Introduction

University libraries function as vital information hubs, fostering literacy, preserving knowledge, and facilitating research. Amid rising disinformation, they serve a crucial democratic function in academia and society. In recent years, in addition to their traditional tasks, academic libraries are increasingly providing research support: They advise researchers on publication strategies, provide copyright advice, especially in dealing with commercial publishers, and set up and manage institutional repositories for research output. One central aspect of these new tasks is support for Open Science. Many university libraries have built substantial expertise in Open Science knowledge over the past decades. They provide the necessary infrastructure and support for the academic community, essential for fostering a culture of Open Science.

Academic libraries have thus a major innovative and transformative role and are pivotal intermediaries between researchers and policy makers. So how can they position themselves as a key player in this context and at the same time provide Open Science-related information for academics that acknowledges their information needs?

As an example, let us look at the University of Groningen Library (UB), which provides research support in areas such as the registration and archiving of research output, Open Access publishing, research data management, and research analytics. A key focus of the UB's research support is to address researchers' needs while alleviating their workload and time pressures. The UB serves an academic community of 7,150 FTE staff (including the University Medical Center Groningen) and 34,000 students at the University of Groningen. Established in 1614, the university is one of the oldest universities in the Netherlands with a rich academic tradition and an international orientation.

### 2. Communication challenges

The Open Science movement aims to make scientific research more accessible, transparent, and collaborative. It is important to acknowledge that Open Science is a community-driven movement that originates from researchers' desire for reproducibility, transparency, and sharing their results. However, much of the communication about Open Science practices and policies is dictated by institutional mandates, funding agencies' requirements (e.g. guidelines by cOAlitionS)<sup>1</sup> or government regulations. In the last decade, the academic landscape of the Netherlands has been influenced by

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1 Examples are the Plan S by cOAlition S, <https://www.coalition-s.org>, last accessed 24.11.2024 or the Open Access policy by the Dutch Research Council NWO (a funding organisation), <https://www.nwo.nl/en/open-access-publishing>, last accessed 24.11.2024.

new governmental policies on Open Science, national and European legal guidelines, and evolving methods for evaluating researchers.<sup>2</sup>

This hierarchical approach often fails to resonate with researchers who are the primary stakeholders in the Open Science ecosystem, particularly when immediate benefits are not readily apparent. Researchers may feel that these policies are imposed upon them, which can foster resistance or disengagement. Top-down communication tends to be one-size-fits-all, failing to address the diverse needs and circumstances of different disciplines, research environments, and individual researchers.

In addition, academics juggle multiple responsibilities, including teaching, research, administrative duties, mentoring, and staying current with developments in their field. This demanding schedule leaves little room for engaging with information that isn't immediately applicable to their work. In an environment already saturated with information, striking the right balance is essential to ensure that critical messages are received and acted upon.

Open Science communication needs to be researcher-centric in order to be effective. Engaging researchers in the policymaking process, considering their feedback, and tailoring communication strategies to address their specific concerns can foster a sense of ownership and increase compliance and enthusiasm towards Open Science practices. For this reason, we have developed a dialogue-based communication approach to foster Open Science at the University of Groningen.

### 3. Towards a dialogue-based communication strategy

For academic libraries to develop tools and services that are genuinely useful to researchers, they need to understand their target audience, including their needs and behaviour. At the University of Groningen Library, we laid the foundation for dialogue-based communication a few years ago. In the following, we will explain how we sought cooperation with faculties to establish a communication matrix for a tailored communication strategy, how we measured Open Science awareness and adoption among the academic community and developed a dialogue-based communication approach.

#### 3.1 Seeking cooperation with stakeholders

In the Netherlands, several university libraries, among them the University of Groningen Library, have undergone centralisation, leading to the disappearance of faculty libraries. During 2010 and 2014, our nine faculty libraries were centralised, leaving three locations: the central UB, one branch serving an outer city campus, and one library for the university medical centre. These locations serve eleven faculties in total. This shift posed a significant challenge for us, since it made it harder to remain in contact with our users. Library staff that were previously situated in faculty libraries maintained their individual connections within faculties and often independently initiated communication regarding

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2 Cf. In the Netherlands: the 100 % open access ambition, open access.nl, <https://www.openaccess.nl/en/in-the-netherlands>, last accessed 24.11.2024; Regieorgaan Open Science NL, <https://www.openscience.nl>, last accessed 24.11.2024; Dutch Recognition & Rewards programme, <https://recognitionrewards.nl>, last accessed 24.11.2024.

UB services. While these connections were valuable, they lacked an overarching, strategic approach to engage the entire academic community comprehensively.

Therefore, we conducted a thorough assessment of communication practices within the faculties to determine which (successful) channels were available and could be made use of. What communication tools do faculties employ internally, such as faculty intranets, dedicated newsletters, monthly staff meetings, or specialised workshops for e.g. PhD candidates that we could also use?

Based on this assessment, we developed a matrix that forms the foundation for a tailored strategic communication approach. This matrix guides our daily operations for all research and education support content from our library. It allows us to successfully pinpoint faculty interests, preferred communication channels, and the timing of internal communications, so we can coordinate our content accordingly. We regularly assess this workflow with faculty representatives to ensure it continues to meet the needs of all stakeholders involved.

### **3.2 Mapping Open Science awareness and adoption**

Given the positive outcomes of our cooperative groundwork, we concluded that it was time to take the next steps towards a true dialogue-oriented approach. In 2021, the University of Groningen launched an Open Science programme. The programme aims to stimulate Open Science and make it an integral part of the university's research and teaching culture. The UB has been responsible for developing a suitable communication strategy for the programme. To get clearer insights into the effectiveness of our groundwork and in order to refine the Open Science communication strategy, we conducted a comprehensive survey to assess researchers' knowledge of Open Science, their practices, motivations, barriers, and awareness of existing support infrastructure. We also examined their communication behaviours regarding Open Science information access within the university. Survey results were categorised by discipline, accounting for varying knowledge levels and needs across fields and faculties. This categorisation helped identify topics requiring different communication emphases, guiding our information campaign focus.

Utilising our faculty communication matrix, we tailored messages to specific segments of the academic community and selected effective channels to avoid information overload. Communications were customised for faculty, postdocs, and graduate students based on their distinct needs and roles. Feedback mechanisms were implemented to evaluate and adjust our communication strategy, ensuring the information delivered is relevant, accessible, and engaging to the academic community.

### **3.3 Two ways to tell a story**

Taking into account both the community-driven roots of Open Science and the more policy-mandated information that is relevant for researchers, we created a dialogue-based communication approach. This two-way approach aims to foster collaboration between our library (and the Open Science Programme) and researchers, consisting of two main components: information provision and peer influence.

Firstly, as a library, we need to provide comprehensive information about e.g. funders' mandates, our services and national Open Science initiatives or guidelines. By keeping researchers informed about available support and our expertise on e.g. data management, Open Access publishing, or Open Education, we sought to establish ourselves as essential partners in the research process.

Secondly, leveraging peer networks, we aimed to showcase success stories from academic staff who have effectively utilised our services. Highlighting these experiences through e.g. interviews with academics or using testimonials can serve as powerful endorsements. By facilitating peer-to-peer communication, libraries can position themselves as vital facilitators of academic discourse. We believe that this bottom-up approach fosters trust and encourages wider engagement, as researchers may rather be convinced by their colleagues' positive outcomes than by a library telling a promotional story.

By integrating these two components, we aim to enhance the visibility and perceived value of our library services while strengthening the support system for researchers.

## 4. Dialogue-centred communication in practice

This chapter highlights several key initiatives: our Open Science Ambassadors, collaboration with bottom-up initiatives, our blog and podcast, the Pop-up Library as well as our social media strategy.

### 4.1 Open Science Ambassadors

The concept of ambassadors was introduced in 2019 as part of professionalising our Open Access services. Now called Open Science Ambassadors, they provide valuable feedback on Open Science-related policies and services and serve as a thermometer within our academic community.<sup>3</sup> We recruited them through a university-wide call, ensuring a bottom-up approach central to the Open Science movement. Their voluntary commitment stems from intrinsic motivation and a strong identification with Open Science. Ambassadors come from all faculties and academic levels, enhancing the reach and effectiveness of Open Science initiatives. They raise awareness within their networks, act as multipliers, and provide feedback on concrete strategic or practical issues.

When developing policies or introducing new services, such as an Open Access policy or a book fund, we consult the ambassadors for their views. This ensures that our initiatives represent the interests and meet the needs of academic staff. We also engaged them to corroborate the results of the aforementioned Open Science survey to refine our communication approach. By fostering dialogue and incorporating their feedback, we increase the credibility of our services and ensure broad-based support. This approach allows us to develop effective, well-received Open Science initiatives across the university.

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3 Open Science Ambassadors, University of Groningen, <https://www.rug.nl/research/openscience/open-science-ambassadeurs>, last accessed 24.11.2024.

## 4.2 Collaborating with bottom-up initiatives

The UB also collaborates with grassroots initiatives such as the Open Science Community Groningen, one of twelve bottom-up social infrastructures in the Netherlands to promote Open Research practices. The annual Open Research Award, established in 2020, exemplifies this partnership.<sup>4</sup> Using an innovative lottery-based selection process, it recognizes efforts in enhancing research and teaching accessibility, transparency, and reproducibility.

Researchers, lecturers, and students submit case studies detailing their Open Research and Education experiences. A researcher-led jury evaluates submissions, with all qualifying entries receiving certificates. Three winners, selected through a bingo lottery, receive 500 EUR and present their work at the Celebrating Openness event.

This award process is designed to place researchers at the centre of the initiative, from concept development to jury participation and case study presentations. This approach ensures robust researcher engagement and visibility. The UB positions itself as an enabler and facilitator in this process, aligning with its mission to support and promote Open Science practices while maintaining researchers as the primary focus.

## 4.3 Open Science Blog and Podcast

We introduced our Open Science Blog in 2019 and the “Open Science Bites” podcast in 2023.<sup>5</sup> They are platforms for researchers to disseminate best practices, experiences, and perspectives on Open Science. The blog features recurring series, such as “Open Access Publication in the Spotlight”, which showcases Open Access publications across disciplines. The series incorporates interviews with authors, highlighting their research while emphasising the importance of Open Access and Open Science in their work. Although researchers are the primary focus, the underlying message underscores the value of Open Access publishing and the UB’s commitment to providing support.

The “Open Science Bites” podcast provides a platform for academics to share their personal journeys in Open Science and offer practical insights into open practices in research and teaching. The podcast consists of concise episodes, each approximately 10 minutes in duration, designed to accommodate the time constraints faced by academics. Each episode focuses on a specific Open Science practice. Recent episodes have highlighted Open Education and public engagement. Since its launch, we have reached over 8,600 downloads with an audience of almost 6,000 unique listeners.

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4 Open Research Award, University of Groningen, <https://www.rug.nl/research/openscience/open-research-award>, last accessed 24.11.2024.

5 Open Science Blog, University of Groningen, <https://www.rug.nl/library/open-access/blog>, last accessed 24.11.2024; Open Science Bites (podcast), University of Groningen, <https://www.rug.nl/research/openscience/podcast>, last accessed 24.11.2024.

## 4.4 Testimonials

Through the use of testimonials from researchers and lecturers, we aim to create credibility and trust for our expertise and services, such as our Open Access publisher University of Groningen Press or during promotional campaigns, e.g. on Diamond Open Access initiatives we support.<sup>6</sup> This communication approach with a personal touch allows fellow academics to relate to peers with similar needs or concerns. We encourage engagement and emphasise specific benefits and features of our services, illustrating their value in real-world scenarios. The testimonials are displayed on our website, through social media and the narrowcasting facilities (screens) across the entire university.

## 4.5 Pop-up Library

Since 2022, we have toured the various faculties of our university with a so-called Pop-up Library.<sup>7</sup> The Pop-up Library is a means of bringing the library closer to its target group. The concept involves setting up a booth on a designated day and location, promoting engaging conversations with users. We use this outreach tool specifically to seek dialogue with academic staff. During a Pop-up Library, they can meet our information specialists and experts, for example in the field of Open Access publishing, Open Educational Resources, and FAIR data, get on-the-spot support for their questions, and let us know what they think of our services. We often highlight two topics per Pop-up Library, chosen by the faculties themselves, so that these fit their specific library-related questions or needs. The Pop-up Library is particularly important to us because of the aforementioned centralisation and therefore greater distance to academic staff.

## 4.6 Community-focused social media strategy on Mastodon

In addition to our locally-, university-focused approach, we have adopted a dialogue-centred approach on social media, transitioning from X (formerly Twitter) to Mastodon as our primary engagement platform since October 2023, aligning with Open Science principles.<sup>8</sup> We shifted from mere information dissemination to value-driven content, focusing on Open Science topics. This strategy has fostered a vibrant international community and significant follower growth, making us one of the largest academic institutional accounts in the Netherlands on Mastodon. Our future plans include investigating academic staff's motivations and usage patterns on Mastodon, exploring perceived challenges and benefits of its professional use. These insights will refine our strategy and contribute to the broader discourse on Open Science communication in academia.

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6 Diamond open access at the UG, University of Groningen, <https://www.rug.nl/library/open-access/diamond-open-access-at-the-ug>, last accessed 24.11.2024.

7 Pop-up Library: the University Library is coming to you, University of Groningen, <https://www.rug.nl/library/support/user-groups/staff/pop-up-library>, last accessed 24.11.2024.

8 Mastodon account of the University of Groningen Library, <https://social.edu.nl/@Bibliotheacaris>, last accessed 24.11.2024.

## 5. Outlook and conclusion

The University of Groningen Library has observed a significant increase in the visibility of its services, both within and beyond the university, following the implementation of a dialogue-based communication approach for Open Science-related topics. This enhanced visibility has manifested in e.g. higher workshop attendance rates and an increased frequency of expert consultations on topics such as Open Access publishing and Open Education.

We intend to conduct a follow-up Open Science survey as part of the second phase of our Open Science Programme. This iterative assessment aims to provide fresh insights into the adoption rates, motivations, and challenges associated with Open Science practices within our academic community.

Academic libraries play an essential role in the promotion and facilitation of Open Science. Through the implementation of effective, dialogue-centred communication strategies, they can enhance their support for researchers and catalyse a cultural shift towards greater openness in academic research and teaching. The key to achieving these objectives lies in sustained engagement, regular feedback collection, and the adaptive refinement of communication methodologies.

Maintaining an open dialogue between library staff and researchers ensures that library offerings remain finely tuned to the evolving challenges and objectives of the research community. This collaborative synergy optimises the library's potential as an indispensable partner in the research process, ultimately enhancing both the quality and impact of scholarly output.

*Babette Knauer, University of Groningen Library, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6021-3695>*

*Josca Westerhof, University of Groningen Library, <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3587-7091>*

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