# Semi-structured interview with PhD student in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

**Interviewer**: So, here’s a copy of the University of Reading’s statement on Open Research. Please take some time to have a read through, OK?

**Interviewee**: Sure.

**Interviewer**: What is your opinion on Open Research?

**Interviewee**: Ok, I mean Open Research, I mean it’s not something that I think about. I mean it’s not something that I’ve actually formed an opinion on I’d say, but just by being in the role of a PhD student it’s one of those things that you just pick up and these opinions that are formed. So, I mean, modern technology has improved access to research, I mean to me that seems a bit of a no brainer, having kind of open access and improved access to research through all of these methods. I mean it just seems a no brainer that people should be able to do that.

This is something that I’ve had a chat with my friend about who I share an office with, this is something that we’ve had a chat about quite a bit because she comes from a, like a, I guess a lower income, a developing country - she said that in a lot of ways this is really difficult for her because the universities there don’ t have access to a lot the things that we do here. So open access for her and a lot of the colleagues that she works with in her home country I mean, they don’t have any other choice so they’re relying on these open access principles and things that more developed countries like we have here that they’re able to churn out and kind of give to them.

And I guess that’s something also going forward that led to her doing her PhD. Essentially what she’s doing, she’s targeted a certain computer system that is open access and that was one of her guiding principles that she does want to contribute to that system, make the code available at the end of it, all that kind of stuff, so essentially she’s developing a tool that will be completely open access, free for people to use and obviously that’s beneficial for people back home as well so it’s something that she’s been quite passionate about I guess.

To me, I mean in a context of open research it seems, as I say it seems a no brainer that it should be like this, but at the same time I am conscious that there’s certain contextual and confounding variables that come in to it for why it can’t always be open access so political decisions, more management decisions within universities, certain pressures that academics are under. I'd say and even PhD students to an extent.

I mean, if you want to follow on further with this – transparency, ok no brainer I mean, that’s one of the bedrocks of academia in general that when you’re reporting on results you’re reporting on certain methods. I mean it has to be reproduceable that’s the whole point of academia is that someone that can come along you know, along months, years later and be able to reproduce the exact same study. In my field especially, this is something that’s increasingly becoming more common. Just on [redacted (social media platform)] a couple of hours ago I saw that there’s a book that’s just been released where people are essentially bringing up their old data sets and putting it through the exact same analysis to see whether there’s anything different or if they look at it from a different perspective years later, are they finding anything different? So, there’s a whole book just come out on that. There’s also something coming up, I don’t know if it was a conference or a conference series or a special issue or something, but that’s similar right, its different people taking each other’s studies and looking at replicability in it. So that’s in Linguistics, all of that, likewise in Psychology, I’ve had chats with my supervisor about replicability within Psychology which is, kind of notorious at the minute. That’s the whole point of academia results you should be able to put data through the exact same methods and see if you get the same results basically, so yeah.

**Interviewer**: So, do you think that there’s a role for senior leadership to play in relations to Open Research?

**Interviewee**: I mean yeah. I mean to me as a PhD student, I find it very difficult to, I guess to have any kind of say in this or have any kind of impact in it because I’ve been, I’m not going to say, indoctrinated or anything but you’ve kind of been of brought up and trained in this system which is very set in its ways and then it’s almost as if open access and I mean when I say open access, open access journals, putting your code out there, putting your data out there for people to use, it’s almost as if it’s, coming at it from a slightly different angle to what you’re used to I guess. So, I guess I feel like you can’t really have much impact especially at my level, and I guess even when you’re in a full-time lectureship role there’s not a lot you can do because you’re stuck in this system. So I think, in terms of senior leadership having an impact, I mean for me that’s where it has to start right, you need people who do actually have impact both within the academic community at an institutional level, who have impact at a governmental level and are able to influence politics, are able to actually take on publishers and turn round and say, ‘well no we’re not going to pay you if you keep on doing this’, so for me I think that’s kind of where it has to come from I mean if you’re making big demands. I mean me as an Early Career Researcher, I feel like pretty helpless I guess, where as senior leadership who do actually have more, more sway and more power in it I think it has to come from them, yeah.

**Interviewer**: And coming at it from another angle, do you think that there’s a role for the community to play? That could be the community of researchers for example…

**Interviewee**: Yeah probably, and also increasingly it’s something I’m seeing in the Linguistics community especially in my research, which deals with sharing data I mean essentially sharing a lot of language with each other so it’s the same data sets that’s being shared with lots of people, so I think within fields it’s probably something that’s increasingly being done but I mean I can only speak for Linguistics in my own field so yeah sure I mean within fields and you know starting out at this level definitely plays a role , I mean it has to start from somewhere. Senior leadership can hardly make a decision and get to that point if they don’t know that the researchers at the grass roots level are actually unhappy about it, so yeah sure someone needs to call for, for some change and some impact I’d say.

**Interviewer**: Uhum, but your position is that, fundamentally, openness is, is a good thing that you would be interested in pursuing and promoting and pursuing yourself within your career with the right support in place. Would you say that’s fair?

**Interviewee**: I think that’s fair. I’d, I’d say that within the current system it’s difficult to do and it would need a kind of a paradigm shift, I guess. I think in terms of my principles, morals, my attitude towards academia, I mean that’s the whole point of it, is that everyone should benefit from everything. At the same time I’m also conscious that as an Early Career Researcher there are certain decisions that you have to make that do not align with those open access principles, and the system is just completely at odds I guess, so in the position that I’m in, completely open to it and with the support of my field, my colleagues and senior management I think that’s the gold standard , you know end point where we should be ending up, but I’m also conscious that it’s a long way away I suppose, from my view anyway.

**Interviewer**: Sure. So, I’m just going to hand over to you now an adapted list of the 8 pillars of Open Science as described by the EU Commission.

Looking at this list, we have a Lancaster University Open Research Statement, Open Research Rewards and Incentives, Metrics to Measure Openness, Open Access to Publications, Open Peer Review, Open Research Skills and Training, Open Research Systems and Services, and Open Data. So, looking at the list, are there any particular areas that you would like to discuss further?

**Interviewee**: Uhum, I can go through them. Number 1, a Lancaster University Open Research statement. I mean it’s one of them things that sounds good. I mean it’s a good place to start, it’s a nice photo opportunity if you have the VC there signing a statement, yeah we’re all for open access brilliant, you get a press release out of it it’s good for raising an awareness and it shows the institution is committed to it. At the same time a statement’s not really good enough right unless you’re actually doing something about it, unless you’re actually talking to publishers and talking about how everybody can upload their data and create this kind of online sharing community, a statement isn’t going to achieve that in its self, so yeah sure it’s nice but I mean it doesn’t do a lot on its own.

Open Research rewards and incentives. I don’t know I mean what would an incentive be?

**Interviewer:** I guess it would be something that, that resonates with your sense of how your career is moving forward, something that’s tangible, so recognition for example, within a promotion panel, that open practises are desirable, or for example when applying for an academic role yourself, within say, the person specification perhaps, there’s an opportunity for you to evidence certain activity you’ve been involved in as an Early Career Researcher that has demonstrated a desirable commitment in respect of open research.

**Interviewee:** I think I’d say so. I think that’s great. I mean as I mentioned one of the things that holds me back as an Early Career Researcher is obviously you’re thinking about career progression, so I mean if you are changing person specifications to actually reflect that, I mean that’s brilliant and that is one of the things that would encourage people in my position to kind of take on these, these principles and start that shift.

I’m going to draw on one example that I had. Ok so I had my first paper out. It was two or three weeks ago now and essentially it went online on this morning I [shared it on social media] and everything and then there was a guy from Algeria that got in touch with me and he said, “Ok I’ve seen your paper, looks really interesting, can you send me a copy?” Me being me, I was like oh well, am I allowed to do this kind of thing? Is this something I should be doing? Essentially, I don’t want a black mark against my name from the publisher if they find out I’m distributing this thing. I mean is this going to be a black mark against my name? It was written with a co-author who’s a Professor and you don’t want to upset him if he gets wind that you’re distributing things that is also his work at the same time. So, of course I was thinking I couldn’t share it, but if it was open access, this guy would be able to see it right, and make advancements.

So, there were all of these things to consider and I mean because it was the first paper, I didn’t really know what the procedure was or anything, so I sent an email to the guy I wrote it with. He’s pretty much my mentor in the department. He’s not my supervisor but someone I consider as more of a mentor and he referred me to the Open Access kind of statement that they have on, on this particular journal’s website and essentially it was, because the paper was in its preprint stage, it was still hidden behind this wall right so you can’t view it unless you have the institutional access which is, I’m guessing why this guy from Algeria got in touch with me, but one thing that it did have was a, a, I think it’s available free for a year or something so when it is actually published its open for a year and my advice from my mentor in the department was basically tell this guy in Algeria that he should wait until it , until it comes out basically in a year so that he can view it himself. So to me this struck me as quite odd because, I mean it’s my work, I mean it’s my kind of intellectual property, I mean, it was my work that was put in to it, I feel I should be able to do what I want with it and you’re kind of constrained by this, I mean you’re constrained by the practises of the journal. I mean because we submitted to that journal, we are therefore constrained by that. So yeah, I guess in that sense it kind of comes full circle because you’ve got professors who are similarly constrained by it, this is all they’ve ever known I suppose.

They’re in this system, the only way to change something like that is to put it in a promotions criteria start, start encouraging Early Career Researchers to actually adopt it because if it wasn’t through things like this knowing you, chatting to people in the Library, all of that kind of stuff, I’d still be very much stuck in what’s happening in the department and what my mentors and what my supervisors are saying. So, I guess from my perspective that’s one way of kind of changing the culture I’d say.

**Interviewer**: Great.

**Interviewee**: Next. Metrics. I mean what would that be like, the amount of people who read something I guess, read something online?

**Interviewer**: I could be, it’s still, it’s still an emerging area, but essentially ways of, of quantifying openness, evaluating whether or not people are being open in terms of their practises and their procedures.

**Interviewee**: Ok. Cool. Open Access to publications I think I’ve covered publications pretty much. I mean that’s, that’s the thing for me. I think people should be able to just, I mean if they want to read something, they should be able to read it, I mean so you can’t put a value on research and education really. If you want to read it, you should read it.

Ok. Open research skills and training. Yeah, I think that’s important. I mean at an institutional level if the institution is supporting it then it only makes sense that they should be training it and skills that people support that. Open research similarly with systems and services.

**Interviewer**: Excellent. So, are there any, any ways you can think of that the university can more effectively support open research?

**Interviewee**: I don’t know really. I’ve said it needs to be a culture shift…. Ok, ok, so, before I came here, I made a list of other stuff to say about all this kind of stuff. So, this is based on my own experience right. One of them is, so I’ve covered the whole you know poor countries can benefit from this kind of stuff but also in my field I’ve noticed a shift that, it’s almost becoming quite fashionable to be Open Access, so whilst some of my mentors are still very much stuck in this old system, there is other people in my field, so I’m talking much broader and mainly through [a social media platform] I’d say social media is having a big impact in my thoughts on this, I’d say, and there’s several people at the minute in my field that are releasing their papers and their books as Open Access and this is a really big selling point because they can say uh my book is available for free and obviously that’s getting a lot of shares because it is free for people and that’s good for the researcher as well because they’re getting their name out there more. So, I think that’s one good way in terms of supporting these Open Access publications then it’s kind of inadvertently good for the, the researcher as well, it’s almost becoming quite fashionable I’d say.

This also feeds in to conversations that I’ve had with my supervisors about, about my data and namely that because the dataset that I’ve made is quite valuable in my area, my supervisors warned me essentially not to give it out because I spent a year of my thesis making this thing and transcribing this thing and therefore you know, I should get the credit for it. So, what, what they’ve advised me to do in essence is kind of give it to people that I trust or make sure that I’m put as a co-author on it or whatever so that I still get the credit. At the same time this is quite at odds with my beliefs because I’m kind of thinking well if they want to use my data they should be able to use it but at the same time I am aware that because of the system, this is what other people do, right? They share their data with each other and then they expect to be put as a co-author so all the big people in my field, the only reason they’re so big is because they get their name put on all these papers because they shared their data with them, and they put it on. So again, that’s one of those weird, blurred lines that I suppose is, is whether you’re getting credit for it. Does it matter if you get credit for it?

**Interviewer**: It’s an interesting dilemma, research data stand in their own right as a research output. It’s established practice, if you’re using another’s paper, you know, you cite the author, you cite the co-authors, whatever the case might be, you provide attribution and as a standalone research output, you know a data set ought to be treated in the same way you ought to cite appropriately and give credit where it’s du. There are also issues there that you’ve identified around fair use. As the data creator you know, it’s quite reasonable of you to want to get good fair use out of a data set, potentially before it’s made openly available for other people to, to reuse freely. It all depends on a number of variables, but I’d be keen to impress upon you that you can ask for advice from the RDM team anytime, just drop us an email, we’d be glad to help.

**Interviewee**:That’s really good to know!

**Interviewer**: Are there any other areas that you’d like to touch on today?

**Interviewee**: No, that’s all, I think.

**Interviewee**: Thank you very much for your time today.