Abstract

At its inception, Open Access (OA) was created as a new way of freely sharing traditional research outputs such as peer-reviewed journal content to all 'scientists, scholars, teachers, students, and other curious minds' via the internet (Budapest Open Access Initiative, 2002). Since then, OA has become a cornerstone of a wide variety of research practices across many discipline areas, enabling academics to instantly access current research, and allowing the public to access taxpayer-funded innovations (UKRN, 2020; UKRN 2024a). This success has led to an expansion of the concept of 'openness' in research, making space for further paradigms such as Open Data whereby 'evidence that underpins the answer to the research question, and can be used to validate findings' are made open under licenses which permit reuse (UKRI, 2016:3). Open Data is rapidly becoming an important part of research, as more journals require data access statements to be provided as part of published papers due to an increased number of funders requiring research data to be made 'as open as possible, as closed as necessary' (H2020 Programme, 2016).

DOI: https://doi.org/10.20919/3w80mp95

ISSN 2979-8280
Issue 2 | Autumn 2026

Open Research Bulletin

Open Data in the Arts

Henry Gonnet and Dawn Woolley

henry.gonnet@leeds-art.ac.uk

Henry Gonnet is the Research Coordinator at Leeds Arts University. He is a Local Network Leader for UKRN, and co-leads UKRN's Arts Research SIG. His research explores how the arts operate within the broader research ecosystem. He co-authored *A Systematic Review of Arts Practice-Based Research Abstracts from Small and/or Specialist Institutions* (2026, MDPI) and *Creative Dilemmas: Balancing open access and integrity* (2025, Exchanges).

https://orcid.org/0009-0001-3201-9211

Dr Dawn Woolley is a Research Fellow at Leeds Arts University and an artist and researcher examining popular and consumer cultures through a queer, feminist lens. Outputs include *Consuming the Body: Capitalism, Social Media and Commodification* (2023, Bloomsbury), 'Relics: Objects of devotion for contemporary life', Salford Museum and Art Gallery, 2026; and 'Joy and Revolution: Rebel Selves', Diskurs, Berlin, 2023.

https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6958-5658

The *Open Research Bulletin* is published by Open Press University of Sussex

OPEN PRESS UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

Contributions

Both authors contributed to this piece equally.

Keywords

Arts Research; Practice-based research; Data Management; Open Data; Open Research; Non-traditional Data.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Leeds Arts University for supporting us to write this piece.

Abstract

Open Data is rapidly becoming an important element of open research. It can increase the reproducibility of research, provide additional context to outputs, and increase public trust in research (UKRI, 2016:4). This article discusses the implications of Open Data in arts practice-based research. Arts practice-based research is research that uses creative methods such as performance, video and painting to understand an issue and/or to answer a research question. During arts-based research processes data is generated which provides insights into underpinning methodologies and thinking (Leavy, 2015; UKRN 2024b). Drawing on experiences gained during an interdisciplinary practice-based research project, the authors discuss the benefits of robust data storage and management plans, the need for suitable data repositories and the ethical complexities around data sharing, intellectual property rights and informed consent in arts practice-based research. The article concludes that one size does not fit all in terms of openness. Open Data is equally important to every discipline area, but with potentially different outcomes. It is

therefore important that open data is supported in all discipline areas to ensure equity of growth and the shared benefits of creative research.

Introduction

At its inception, Open Access (OA) was created as a new way of freely sharing traditional research outputs such as peer-reviewed journal content to all 'scientists, scholars, teachers, students, and other curious minds' via the internet (Budapest Open Access Initiative, 2002). Since then, OA has become a cornerstone of a wide variety of research practices across many discipline areas, enabling academics to instantly access current research, and allowing the public to access taxpayer-funded innovations (UKRN, 2020; UKRN 2024a). This success has led to an expansion of the concept of 'openness' in research, making space for further paradigms such as Open Data whereby 'evidence that underpins the answer to the research question, and can be used to validate findings' are made open under licenses which permit reuse (UKRI, 2016:3). Open Data is rapidly becoming an important part of research, as more journals require data access statements to be provided as part of published papers due to an increased number of funders requiring research data to be made 'as open as possible, as closed as necessary' (H2020 Programme, 2016).

The benefits of Open Data are potentially highly significant. Open Data can increase the reproducibility of research, provide additional context to outputs, and increase public trust in research (UKRI, 2016:4). This creates more opportunities for innovation as other researchers are able to access and reuse that data for their own inquiries. Owing to this, it is important that Open Data is made available in the most useful format possible. To enable this, guidelines such as the FAIR data principles can be applied to ensure 'the Findability, Accessibility, Interoperability, and Reuse' of research data (GO FAIR, 2016). Adhering to FAIR means that data can be found easily by ensuring high standards of rich metadata, use of Persistent Identifiers (PIDs) such as Digital Object Identifiers (DOIs), use of open licenses, making it available in a widely used machine readable format, and curated in a way which can be easily understood by those

who wish to reuse the data (Wilkinson et al., 2016).

Arts practice-based research describes research that uses creative methods such as performance, video and painting to understand an issue and/or to answer a research question. In the arts, the idea of using or creating data as part of a practice-based inquiry can seem an unusual concept, as the term 'data' does not necessarily translate well to these discipline areas as 'instead of validating results, arts outcomes generally resonate with an audience or viewer' (Gonnet & Broadhead, 2025). Nevertheless, data is inherently something which is produced as a by-product of arts practice-based research, taking the form of sketchbooks, score drafts, storyboards, or 'any other datasets that were instrumental in the process of the research inquiry' (Bulley & Şahin, 2021).

Arts practice-based research and data are often misinterpreted as being qualitative, but are in fact a separate paradigm instigated through arts-based methods. Arts practice-based research generates data which provides insights into underpinning methodologies and thinking (Leavy, 2015; UKRN 2024b). In some ways, sharing arts data is about sharing the methodology of how the research was undertaken, and the data itself tends to be more subjective and contingent on the style of the individual artist.

Data management in the arts

Research at Leeds Arts University is predominantly art practice-based research. Thus, the data can comprise a range of practice-based materials from sketchbook entries to photograph contacts sheets and developmental musical scores. For example, one author for this piece (Woolley) uses participatory arts methods in community settings to gather data on experiences of online cultures, including gender stereotypes in selfies and viewing or receiving objectifying content on social media.

Participatory practice-based research is an approach to arts practice-based research that uses co-creative methods to explore issues and ideas using creative methods, such as sculpture or drawing workshops. In this practice, the researcher and data gatherer is the lead artist. For Woolley, who leads an interdisciplinary research team of academics specialising in social marketing and social psychology, data sets

include qualitative data such as visual arts, transcribed interviews and focus groups, and quantitative data from psychology tests.

Woolley finds that a robust data management plan is vital when planning an interdisciplinary project, and most of the funding applications submitted by Woolley's team require an outline of a data management plan. These plans are relevant for projects with various forms of anonymised and non-anonymised data. Working with institutions and faculties that use a combination of arts-based, qualitative, and quantitative methods results in multiple data controllers on each project. The data controller is responsible for the local collection, storage, anonymisation and predetermined sharing arrangements for a data set. The data management plan identifies which institution is responsible for each data set and subsequent anonymisation processes based on the expertise available at each site. This is of particular importance when working with small specialist institutions, as their institutional expertise tends to be in-depth, focused, and discipline specific. Having these relationships and responsibilities determined prior to submitting a funding application makes collaboration agreements and contracts more straightforward when funding is awarded, and contributes to ethics application processes.

In the arts, datasets tend to be stored as file types such as AVI, MPEG, MP3, JPG, and PDFs. As a small specialist institution with a developing research culture, Leeds Arts University doesn't currently produce a large volume of data to store. However, the University's data volume is likely to be comparatively larger than other similar size institutions, so the environmental and financial costs will need to be considered as the University's storage requirements increase.

Hardware and software are prone to obsolescence. Thus, it is vital to store data as transferrable file types in universal formats that will run on many different technologies and application. For example, PDF, jpg, and mp3 are stable formats which are generally more reliable and will open on most devices and software. However, less widely adopted file types (such as Apple's HEIC) or formats that have become obsolete (such as Adobe's SWF) pose challenges for preservation and reuse. These may require specialised software, lack cross-platform support, or depend on technologies that are no longer

maintained, making them less suitable for the purposes of open research and long-term preservation.

Finding suitable data repositories for arts research data

Data repositories provide a space for researchers to deposit data on a platform compliant with FAIR data principles. Generally, data repositories assign items with a Persistent Identifier (such as a DOI) upon deposit and make the data findable through repository aggregators and search engines. However, with arts practice-based research it can be difficult for researchers to locate repositories which host data in a meaningful way, as existing systems (such as Figshare, OSF, and Zenodo) are perceived to generally fail to represent 'the complex, interconnected and often messy ways in which practice research is carried out' (Jackson et al., 2023; Bulley & Şahin, 2021). Owing to this, there has been recent significant investment by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) towards projects such as International Image Interoperability Framework (IIIF), Materialising Open Research Practices in the Humanities and Social Sciences (MORPHSS), and SPARKLE (Sustaining Practice Assets for Research, Knowledge, Learning, and Engagement), which work towards better representation and understanding of arts practice research (Padfield, 2020; Adams et al., 2026; McLaughlin et al., 2022).

Existing subject-specific arts repositories generally serve as digitised collection archives for museums, galleries, or a cultural institution's art collection rather than as an open space for academics in arts discipline areas to upload new or current data. Examples include the Tate collection and the Yale Center for British Art's archives, both of which host images of artworks under OA licenses (Yale, nd; Tate, n.d.).

These limitations highlight a recognised technological gap in repository infrastructure capable of supporting the complexity of arts practice-based research. There is significant work being undertaken to address this gap, including the Enact project, which is currently developing a repository specifically for arts practice-based research and builds on insights from SPARKLE and PR Voices (Evans et al., 2025; McLaughlin et al., 2022).

Sharing data created by participants during the research process (e.g. in workshops) where artwork has been created as data

In participatory arts research practices in particular, there are competing interests around agency, anonymity, safety, and voice, which challenge pre-conceived notions of ethical practice. Hence, it is important to recognise the need to center participants in the co-construction of good ethical practice for the research, and that ethical practice – for example, surrounding identifiability – may be different from one participant to another. It is essential that participants are able to state which identifiable data (if any) they consent to being shared and under what circumstances / which locations (only in academic outputs, also on blogs and social media etc.). These complex options must be clearly stated in data management plans, enabling data to be as open as possible and as closed as necessary whilst giving participants agency over their creative work.

For example, granular consent is required when using social networking sites in research. In Woolley's projects about selfie practices on Instagram, researchers and participants shared selfies via qualtrix or during online workshops. They were asked to give permission to share their images and hashtags on an Instagram account created for the project. When working with participants who are marginalised, for example in relation to their gender and / or sexuality, it is important to make sure that they are not exposed in ways that they do not expect or desire. Therefore, when gaining consent to share photographs, it is essential that participants can withdraw from the project at any time and delete images from social media when requested. However, it is also important to make clear that it is not possible to ensure that an image has not been shared by other users on, or outside of, the social media platform it was originally posted on, and that it will not exist elsewhere. In the case of this Instagram project, participants were able to specify if the researchers could: (1) use their selfies for image analysis, (2) share the selfies during conference presentations and academic publications, and (3) post them on a live Instagram account. Prior to publishing images in a journal article, the researchers

asked participants to reconfirm consent for the publication of the images to be included, and the context in which they were published (i.e. the article was shared with participants so that they knew how their image might be used).

Current status of open data in the arts

Çaldağ and Gökalp identified that, currently, the most significant barriers for uptake of Open Data practices across discipline areas are external pressures. This includes 'the influences of competitors, technological developments, external evaluation, public expectations, social influences, pressure from higher-level government', compounded by innovation and culture barriers at an institutional level (2025). In arts research, examples of external pressure include pressure from the disseminators of practice research, where dissemination can be 'iterative rather than a single linear occurrence' as with traditional research publication (Broadhead & Gonnet, 2025:41). In that context, there is a fear that making arts outputs or data openly accessible online can lead to the perception that they are less desirable for future dissemination (Broadhead & Gonnet, 2025:41). This is an issue as iterative sharing of arts research at higher profile or international venues can strengthen the perceived value of a creative practice-based output for research assessment (REF Steering Group, 2019).

In terms of innovation and cultural barriers, many institutions struggle to encourage buy-in and uptake of Open Data practices in arts research, which has been slower to grow in comparison to other academic disciplines. In recognition of and to work towards overcoming these barriers, online resources and case studies from organisations such as UKRN have begun to emerge which provide information to promote the uptake of open practices in arts discipline areas (UKRN, 2024b). In addition to this, the MORPHSS Catalogue of Open Research Practices in the Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences provides a clear and comprehensive overview of the diversity of open research happening within AHSS spaces. By bringing together and making visible a wide range of ideas, methodologies, and frameworks specific to AHSS discipline areas which are often overlooked or misunderstood, MORPHSS has greatly increased the

visibility for diverse concepts of openness in the arts – including open data (MORPHSS, 2026). Through resources such as these, the open research community has begun to foster a greater sense of inclusion and belonging for researchers whose practices have historically been underrepresented.

Conclusion

There is some good and important work ongoing to support open data in the arts (Bulley & Şahin, 2019; MORPHSS, 2026; Evans et al., 2025; McLaughlin et al., 2022; Jackson et al., 2023). However, despite this, there is still some considerable work to do – as research in arts discipline areas require a subject specific response due to differences in format, methodology, and terminology (Adams et al., 2026; Bulley & Şahin, 2019). One size does not fit all in terms of openness. Open Data is equally important to every discipline area, but with potentially different outcomes: 'in the case of the sciences, that can mean new medicines and useful technologies, and in the case of the humanities it can mean enriched education, politics, compassion, imagination and understanding' (Suber, 2014). It is therefore important that open data is supported in all discipline areas to ensure equity of growth and the shared benefits of creative research.

References

Adams, J., Barnes, M., Moore, S., Pinfield, S., & Soni, S. (2026). Openness in the arts, humanities and social sciences: Documenting open research practices beyond STEM (A MORPHSS Project Report). MORPHSS Project. https://doi.org/10.17613/h10rz-qk035. [Accessed 28/07/2026].

Broadhead, S., & Gonnet, H. (2025). Creative Dilemmas: Balancing open access and integrity. *Exchanges: The Interdisciplinary Research Journal*, *12*(3), 31-49.

Budapest Open Access Initiative. (2002). Read the declaration. Budapest Open Access Initiative. Available at: https://www.budapestopenaccessinitiative.org/read/.

Bulley, J. and Şahin, O., (2021). Practice Research-Report 1: What is practice research? and Report 2: How can practice research be shared? London: PRAG-UK. Available at: https://research.gold.ac.uk/id/eprint/30222/ .

Çaldağ, M. T., & Gökalp, E. (2023). Understanding barriers affecting the adoption and usage of open access data in the context of organizations. Data and Information Management, 100049. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dim.2023.100049. [Accessed: 26/11/2025].

Evans, J., Mclaughlin, S., Molloy, S., Bailey, H., White, N., & Knowles, C. (2025). Enact Practice Research Data Service: PR Voices and SPARKLE Phase 2. Available at: https://gtr.ukri.org/projects?ref=AH%2FZ000769%2F1#/tabOverview. [Accessed: 22/07/2026].

GO FAIR. (2016). FAIR Principles. Available at: https://www.go-fair.org/fair-principles/.

Gonnet, H., & Broadhead, S. (2025). Creative arts researchers: Give them the credit! UKSG eNews, (584). https://www.uksg.org/newsletter/uksg-enews-584/creative-arts-researchers-give-them-the-credit/ .

H2020 Programme. (2016). *Guidelines on FAIR Data Management in Horizon 2020*. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/grants_manual/hi/oa_pilot/h2020-hi-oa-data-mgt_en.pdf. [Accessed: 11/11/2025]

Jackson, T., Knowles, C., McLaughlin, S., Kotarski, R., De Little, A., Warren, M., & Horne, A. (2023). Sustaining Practice Assets for Research, Knowledge, Learning and Engagement (SPARKLE): Final Report and Recommendations. Available at: https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/id/eprint/203045/3/SPARKLE%20Final%20Report%20-%202023.pdf. [Accessed: 11/11/2025]

Leavy, P. (2015). Method meets art: Arts-based research practice (2nd ed.). The Guilford Press. Available at: https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2015-10558-000 .

McLaughlin, S., Jackson, T., & Knowles, C. (2022). SPARKLE: Sustaining Practice Assets for Research, Knowledge, Learning and Engagement. University of Leeds. Available at: https://ahc.leeds.ac.uk/directories1/dir-record/research-projects/1694/sparkle-sustaining-practice-assets-for-research-knowledge-learning-and-engagement. [Accessed: 26 November 2025].

MORPHSS. (2026). Catalogue of Open Research Practices in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences. Available at: https://catalogue.morphss.work. [Accessed: 22/07/2026].

Padfield, J. (2020). Practical Applications of IIIF. Towards a National Collection. Available at: https://www.nationalcollection.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-02/Practical%20Applications%20of%20IIIF.pdf. [Accessed: 26/11/2025].

REF2029. (2025). *Section 5 – Open Access policy – REF 2029*. Research Excellence Framework. https://2029.ref.ac.uk/guidance/ref-2029-open-access-policy/. [Accessed 10/11/2025]

REF Steering Group. (2019). Panel criteria and working methods (REF 2019/02). Available at: https://2021.ref.ac.uk/media/1450/ref-2019_02-panel-criteria-and-working-methods.pdf. pp. 49. [Accessed: 26 November 2025].

Suber, P. (2014). Preface. In M. P. Eve (Ed.), Open access and the humanities (pp. ix–xi). Cambridge University Press.

UKRI. (2016). *Concordat on Open Research Data*. Available at: https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/UKRI-020920-ConcordatonOpenResearchData.pdf

UKRN. (2020). *Open Access: a Primer from UKRN*. Available at: https://osf.io/preprints/osf/94rsp_v1. [Accessed: 11/11/2025]

UKRN. (2024a). Open Research Across Disciplines. Available at: https://www.ukrn.org/disciplines/. [Accessed: 11/11/2025]

UKRN. (2024b). Open Research Across Disciplines: Art and Design. Available at: https://www.ukrn.org/art-and-design/. [Accessed: 11/11/2025]

Tate. (n.d.). Collection. https://www.tate.org.uk/about-us/collection. [Accessed: 11/11/2025]

Wilkinson, M., Dumontier, M., Aalbersberg, I. *et al.* (2016). The FAIR Guiding Principles for scientific data management and stewardship. *Sci Data* **3**, 160018. https://doi.org/10.1038/sdata.2016.18

Yale. (n.d.). Archives at Yale. https://archives.yale.edu/. [Accessed 11/11/2025]