

Repository Steering Groups

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Overview

A well-chosen, well-informed and committed Steering Group can make an important contribution to the sustained success of a repository. This Briefing Paper highlights some of the issues for consideration when planning the role, remit and composition of a repository Steering Group.

The role of the Steering Group

A repository Steering Group (or Project Board, Management Committee, Working Group, etc.) undertakes the high-level management of a repository on behalf of a Higher Education Institution. The Steering Group helps to ensure that the strategic objectives of a repository are aligned with those of the parent organisation, and to ensure that the necessary resources are made available for the repository to be effective. It is a forum for discussion and decision-making, for the approval and signing-off of plans and actions, for arbitration and solution-finding, and it should also champion all the publicity and dissemination activity linked to the repository.

A Steering Group may be formed with a limited lifespan, to oversee a fixed-term repository project; or it may have a remit for a repository as a longer-term, independent concern, with or without a project element.

Terms of reference

Terms of reference help participants and others to understand the role of a Steering Group. The terms of reference for a typical repository Steering Group might embrace some or all of the following themes:

- Overseeing the implementation and operation of the repository.
- Policy-making and strategic decision-taking.
- Monitoring budgets and staffing resources: ensuring that necessary resources are committed to the repository, and ensuring that any plans are achievable.
- Monitoring progress against plans and agreed objectives; evaluation.

- Overseeing and championing advocacy of the repository at all levels within the HEI, and maximising opportunities for publicity and dissemination.
- Reviewing outcomes and their impact within the HEI and elsewhere.
- Maintaining an awareness of similar activities and initiatives, and funding opportunities, nationally and in the wider world.
- Regular reporting, either to a named senior individual, or to a parent committee.
- Securing the long-term sustainability of the repository, ensuring that it is firmly embedded in the strategic thinking of the institution.

HEIs often have standard terms of reference for their Project Boards and Committees. If so, these would normally be used as a starting point, with adaptation where appropriate to reflect the repository remit.

Typical decisions

The work of a repository Steering Group may range across a wide variety of issues. A repository is more likely to be successful if it is developed in alignment with the needs and priorities of its institution. A good Steering Group can help to identify and address those concerns, and make sure that they are reflected in repository decision-making. It can ensure that the repository continues to evolve in sympathy with the changing needs and priorities of the institution, over time. It can also help to shape the future strategic priorities of the institution.

Issues associated with the day-to-day management and population of the repository might include:

- The respective merits of mediated deposit and true 'self-archiving'. Is one or other more likely to result in deposited content, and what are the resource implications of success?
- Copyright policies and institutional risk tolerance.
- The collecting policy: what types of research output should be eligible?
- The advocacy programme. When to target a particular audience, and how best to gain their support?
- The evaluation of opportunities for external project funding.

Issues relating to the place of the repository in the wider institutional strategic framework might include:

- The potential for the repository to serve as a comprehensive publications database.
- Supporting an institution's preparation for, and success in, external research assessment.
- The potential for the repository to contribute to institutional performance in national and international web rankings and league tables.

Examples of longer-term strategic issues for the HEI, which might be influenced by a repository Steering Group, include:

- The managed curation of digital objects other than research outputs, such as primary datasets and departmental image collections.
- Institutional digitisation strategy.
- Institutional strategy on digital preservation.

Composition

For the Steering Group to be influential, and for it to keep in touch with wider institutional strategy, it should be chaired by a senior member of staff - ideally, the VP for research, or the chair of the 'parent' committee (if applicable).

In addition to the Chair, and the Repository Manager, the Steering Group might include:

- the Chief Librarian, and relevant Library staff.
- Senior computing support staff.
- Research Administration staff.
- Staff with research assessment responsibilities.
- Representation from the Corporate Communications/Marketing department.
- Academic researchers from different disciplines. Seniority is less important than an ability to report the needs of researchers and to champion the repository within a given constituency. (The Arts, whose

practices and formats, particularly in the Fine Arts, can present some interesting challenges, should not be overlooked!)

Frequency of meetings

The Steering Group needs to meet with sufficient frequency to support continuity, without meeting so often that it becomes immersed in day-to-day detail. In a HEI, termly meetings may suffice. Some considerations when planning the meetings structure are:

- The institution's usual pattern of committee meetings.
- The meetings schedule of the 'parent' committee, where applicable.
- The timing of internal funding rounds.
- The demands and timescales of any specific projects for which the Steering Group is responsible.

Briefing the Steering Group

To make an effective start, the Steering Group will need to be adequately briefed. The Repository Support Project's Briefing Papers series (see below) may be useful as part of the induction of a new Steering Group.

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Further information :

Repositories Support Project <http://www.rsp.ac.uk/>

The Repositories Support Project (RSP) aims to co-ordinate and deliver good practice and practical advice to HEIs to enable the implementation, management and development of digital institutional repositories.

SHERPA-LEAP <http://www.sherpa-leap.ac.uk/>

SHERPA-LEAP (the London Eprints Access Project), funded by the Vice-Chancellor of the University of London, has helped to develop institutional repositories, supported by a cross-searching service, at 13 University of London HEIs.