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Title: Consortial Routes to Effective Repositories

Overview

A consortial approach to the establishment of repository services can help a group of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to share costs, share technology and share expertise. Consortial repository work can tap into existing structures, or it can involve new groupings of institutions with a common interest in exploring repository development. This Briefing Paper outlines some of the potential benefits of collaborative repository activity, and highlights some of the technical and organisational issues for consideration.

Consortial repository provision

A consortial approach to repository provision offers a group of HEIs a collaborative route to the establishment of Institutional Repositories (IRs). There are now several exemplars of successful repository consortia in the UK and internationally, for instance:

- White Rose, UK (see Further Information)
- SHERPA-LEAP, UK (see Further Information)
- DARE, the Netherlands (see <http://www.surffoundation.nl/?id=5377>)
- ARROW, Australia (see <http://www.arrow.edu.au/>)

While these groups are all different in organisational and technical terms, each has benefited in some way from collective action when establishing, populating and sustaining IRs.

Benefits

Collaborative repository work can benefit institutions that are ready to make long-term strategic and financial commitments to repositories, and it can also help institutions which are not yet firmly persuaded about the merits of repositories, allowing them to assess demand, needs and costs with minimal initial outlay.

Among the potential benefits of a consortial repository network are the following:

- Opportunity to share technical costs.

- Opportunity to share non-technical costs, e.g. through a consortial advocacy programme.
- Opportunity to build on existing consortial structures.
- Potential for the alignment of repository activity around common mission, e.g. regional or subject agendas.
- Opportunity for the low-risk piloting of repository services, supporting the identification of more detailed requirements and feasibility over time.
- Creation of a community for experience-sharing, problem-solving, and the fostering of new ideas.
- Opportunity for the development of consortial solutions to common concerns, e.g. through shared digital preservation services.
- Increased visibility for the participating HEIs.
- A basis for future joint funding applications.

Technical planning

There are many ways in which a consortium might structure its repository implementation. The HEIs could share a single consortial repository (c.f. White Rose). The repositories could co-exist on a shared central host (c.f. the early phases of SHERPA-LEAP). The repositories could equally well be locally-hosted and largely autonomous, while subject to a layer of aggregation (c.f. DARE). Many permutations exist: a consortium should be able to find an architecture to suit both the needs of its members and its budget.

Some of the issues to consider at the technical planning stage are as follows:

- What costs can be shared?
- Who will be responsible for the initial software selection and architecture decisions?
- It is important to agree at the outset where responsibilities for technical support to consortium partners will lie.
- Responsibilities for software maintenance and development must be clearly defined.
- Is a Service Level Agreement (SLA) required?
- Care should be taken that any centrally-managed content is stored in such a way that it could easily be migrated, should the need arise.

Organisational issues

As with technical models, there are many organisational models open to repository consortia. Sometimes repository activity can easily be integrated within existing structures; sometimes new structures are appropriate. It is common in either case for there to be a designated management group with responsibility for the strategic governance of the consortial repository network.

Some of the organisational issues to consider when planning a consortial repository are as follows:

- What body (existing or new) will act as the management group? Are the interests of all stakeholders represented?
- Is a Consortium Agreement or Memorandum of Understanding required?
- Will the consortium remain viable if one or more partners withdraw?
- Ownership rights over any centrally-hosted data should be made clear.
- Any constraints on freedom of action or policy making which apply to consortium members should be clearly defined at the outset.
- Where does management responsibility lie for any staff employed by the consortium? Who determines the overall remit of those staff - especially as the needs of the partners begin to evolve?
- If funding is for a fixed term, what is the exit strategy?

The effectiveness of both the technical and organisational arrangements should be reviewed

periodically to ensure that they continue to meet the changing needs of the partners. Beware that collective responsibility does not lead to inertia!

Mutual support

The opportunity for networking and experience-sharing among members is one of the great potential 'value-added' strengths of consortial repository work. Fora to support this such as mailing lists, wikis, special interest groups and periodic meetings of repository staff from within the partnership will help to make the work carried out by the members of the consortium more effective. Cost efficiencies may be available, for instance in shared advocacy events or the production of marketing materials. Finally, occasional events aimed at audiences from outside the consortium can also be budgeted for. These are one way of raising the profile of the partnership; and, as the consortium matures, the collective wisdom and experience of the members will undoubtedly be worth sharing with others.

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Further information:

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

The Repositories Support Project (RSP) aims to coordinate 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), supported by the Vice-Chancellor of the University of London, has helped to develop institutional repositories at 13 London HEIs.

White Rose <http://www.whiterose.ac.uk/Home.aspx>

The White Rose University Consortium is a strategic partnership between Yorkshire's leading research universities of Leeds, Sheffield and York. White Rose Research Online is an open access repository of research outputs produced by academics in the White Rose universities.