Designing a rewards and support scheme for use in Higher Education

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Contents

Figures

1.0 Introduction

This report outlines the factors influencing the design of a scheme to reward staff within higher education institutions. It is based on the efforts of the JISC funded Rights and Rewards project to design a scheme to reward and support staff for depositing materials into a teaching resource repository at Loughborough University. The project's experience may provide a useful starting point for others who are considering creating a similar reward mechanism. The report suggests the need to work within the framework of existing institutional systems. It highlights the role institutional context plays in the design of the scheme and the benefits to be gained by aligning with, or cutting across, any existing reward schemes.

The report describes a general model for rewarding staff and illustrates this by reference to our local situation. Local factors will play a part in determining and prioritising the main considerations for success. The general model can be adapted to take into account the factors discussed here.

1.1 Background

The current trend towards establishing institutional repositories for housing an institutions research outputs continues to grow. Less common, however, is the establishment of a repository for teaching outputs and resources. The rewards for contribution to research repositories are well documented and include: speedier access to research materials, greater visibility, and higher citation counts for authors. The rewards for making teaching materials available are not so easily defined. The Rights and Rewards project survey[1] highlighted the key motivators for practitioners depositing into a repository of this type. These include financial gain, altruistic motives, availability of support, to improve teaching and student motivation, to ensure resources are preserved, and to assert copyright.

Approaches taken to rewarding contributors to teaching resource repositories do vary. Ferl[2], for example, accepts resource suitable for the post-16 sector. They conducted a survey of contributors that indicated that the main drivers for contributors to the service were the opportunity to share resources and good practice, recognition for their work, self development, raising an institutions profile and the opportunity to network and collaborate with others. Contributors to FERL are offered a range of items or amounts of funding, depending on the level of detail associated with the materials published[3]. JORUM[4], offers depositors a variety of support options: a help desk, user forums, newsletter, training materials and so on. Another project funded under the JISC Digital Repositories Programme, the CD-LOR project, conducted interviews with users of teaching resource repositories, their studies revealed that:

- o Use of the system provides its own intrinsic rewards.
- o Rewards / recognition are not needed.
- o The service provided is of value in itself.[5]

[1] Rights and Rewards Project Academic Survey: Final Report: http://rightsandrewards.lboro.ac.uk/index.php?section=21.
[2] Ferl: http://ferl.becta.org.uk/index.cfm.
[3] Ferl: Guidelines for contributors, N.D. http://ferl.becta.org.uk/display.cfm?page=727.
[4] JORUM: http://www.jorum.ac.uk/support/index.html.
[5] CD-LOR project: Report on LO repository user interviews, 2006. http://www.academy.gcal.ac.uk/cd-lor/deli.html.

Seeking high level support from within the institution is an important factor when attempting to align to existing mechanisms for rewarding staff. Committees have their own agenda and working towards satisfying this may be a useful approach. An additional consideration is the focus of the institution. A research-led institution will have a different focus to a teaching-led one, and the framework under which a reward scheme operates will vary accordingly.

2.0 Funding models

Universities are funded from a variety of different sources including Government, HEFCE, the Office of Science and Technology, Research Councils, research grants, charity, public sector, industry, international students and university companies. HEFCE funding is provided for both teaching and research; money for teaching is allocated according to student numbers, and their banding. The banding system is based on subjects and their associated costs. For example, veterinary science is in a high band as costs per student are high (equipment, labs); social science is in a lower band because students costs are reduced as they do not require such expensive resources. In addition to their general support for learning and teaching there are specific HEFCE initiatives to promote and reward excellence in learning and teaching. For example, Rewarding and Developing Staff 1 and 2 (RDS1 and RDS2). HEFCE money for research is allocated on the results of the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE). HoDs can exert influence over the income from research by actively encouraging staff to create significant amounts of good quality research outputs. Universities with good research status also tend to attract industry funding.

Universities funding models may differ; some institutions monies are top-sliced to fund administrative functions. In other institutions funds are distributed to individual Faculty Departments, from here it is taxed back to pay for central services such as Professional Development and the University Library. Under this model the university effectively has no money and decisions are taken at Faculty and Departmental levels. Budgets are thus dissolved at Department level and Resolved at Faculty level, where any deficit is made up.

3.0 Reward framework

The balance between support and reward is an important consideration. In our context support is made available to help:
- Remove the barriers to the creation and deposit of electronic resources, and
- To resolve intellectual property ownership issues.

Reward provides recognition for individual and group efforts – over and above what would normally be expected within a particular post. In our example reward is also offered to recognise good citizens who are prepared to share their teaching resources and materials with others.

The framework in Figure 1 can be used to illustrate the levels of support required to achieve the deposit of different categories of resource into an institutional repository for teaching materials.
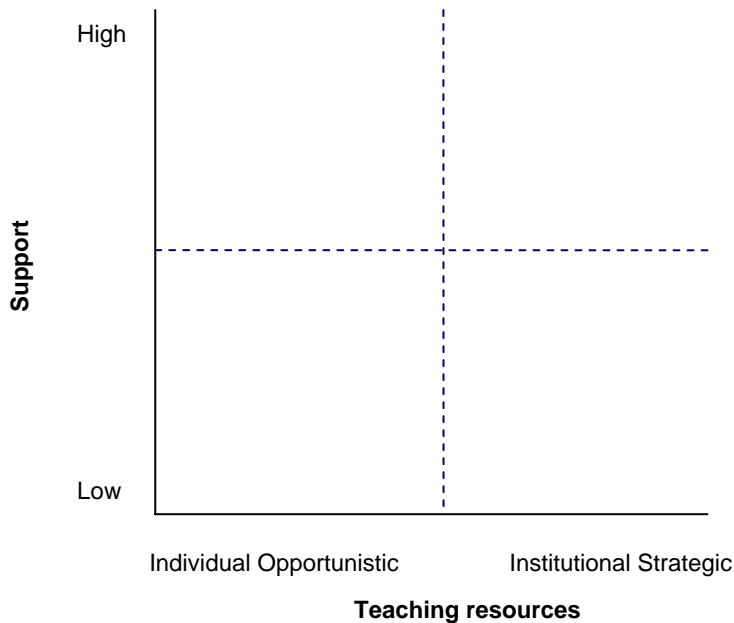
Figure 1: Teaching resource repository reward framework

Resources that are categorised as individual opportunistic are those resources created by an individual who then undertakes to deposit the item(s) into a repository. For this activity, relatively low levels of support would be needed. Institutional strategic resources are those the institution has identified a need for. These resources may well require higher levels of support in the areas of administration, creation, and quality assurance.

4.0 The reward and support scheme

The activities that the rewards provide recognition for are also a key factor in the reward equation. An institution is unlikely to offer rewards for activities that are an expected part of an employee's duties, but where these duties have been exceeded a lump sum payment may be appropriate. Similarly promotion for a one off activity may not be deemed appropriate. If seeking institutional backing for a reward scheme the reasons for rewarding certain activities or behaviour need to be clearly explained.

The desire for the provision of financial rewards has to take into account the fairness of the scheme and the sustainability of the awards. The benefits of aligning to an existing scheme in these respects are obvious. Additional advantages include: existing awareness of the established scheme; familiar application process; transparent selection process; single source for locating funding to support teaching and learning; and institutional backing.

For these reason, it was desirable for this project to align itself with existing mechanisms for rewarding staff at Loughborough. In our case want to test whether rewards for contribution to a repository are necessary, if so what types of rewards are expected, and at what level of funding. Rewards are offered to provide recognition for the additional work created by contributing, for sharing teaching resources / expertise / experience, to remove any barriers to contributing, and to increase resource availability. A suitable rewards scheme should encompass a broad range of elements including:

- Facilitating altruistic behaviour – effects of offering rewards on this behaviour.
- Financial rewards– long term e.g. promotion, salary increments, short term e.g. lump sum, prizes and project funding.
- Support channels – identifying existing support, stages where additional support is required and identifying who can provide extra support.
- Esteem / kudos.
- System rewards – well designed systems and services, feedback mechanisms and usage statistics.
- Time – encourage recognition for the time required to prepare and share resources via a repository.
- Removing barriers – time, IT skills and copyright awareness.

Cutting across existing reward schemes can also be beneficial. It may be possible to alter a wider range of benefits; the time to design and implement the scheme may be reduced; the application process can be controlled by the project or initiative; and reward timing can be devised to suit the requirement of the project or initiative.

Sources of funding for the awards and a suitable support mechanism may need to be identified. If the approach is to align with existing schemes, then funding may not be an issue. If not, then sources of funding will have to be identified and agreed. In the case of the Rights and Rewards project, we are attempting to align with an existing scheme, but we also felt that it was desirable to seek other sources of funding. This has been achieved by approaching the engCETL at Loughborough University. They have committed to providing funding and advice to assist with uploading items to the repository. Project funding has also been set aside to boost any award. Provision of industry-sponsored awards were also considered, although this is likely to prove problematic There are also issues relating to the sustainability of the reward scheme to be tackled.

Teaching staff at this institution have reported that existing support for the creation of teaching materials is good. This area may be a greater consideration for other institutions. The provision of support for repository activity may require additional skills, therefore, the engCETL have agreed to provide staff with support, and project staff will also fulfil this role. An added difficulty for a repository of teaching resources is that many research repositories are be hosted by university libraries or computing service departments. These departments may be able to commit to providing repository support, but they may not be able to offer advice on matters relating to the specific needs of teaching staff.

4.1 Equity

The perceived equity of any reward scheme that is implemented is an important matter. Some items for consideration are:
- Does the scheme afford all Faculties, Departments and individuals the same opportunities?
- If an institution has a CETL, it's support is not available to staff across all disciplines. However, CETLs do have a remit to provide reward and recognition for excellent teaching practice.
- Awards should be available for all staff whose job specification includes teaching or assisting teaching

The issues associated with the balance between teaching and research are important to many institutions. One way this can be illustrated is by looking at the promotion routes from lecturer to senior lecturer. In many HEIs, there are two routes,

one via research and one via teaching. Applications for promotion via the teaching route may be less common, perhaps because an applicant is required to prove their excellence in teaching and that they achieve good quality research, whilst in contrast, for the research route, excellent research is required and teaching is given a low priority. There may also be a stigma associated with being categorised as a 'good teacher'.

5.0 Conclusion

When designing a reward scheme it is important to understand the institution's financial framework, committee structures, and committee agendas. It is also necessary to clearly define the particulars of the scheme, how it will be implemented, highlighting any sustainable elements.

The reward and support scheme for the Rights and Rewards project repository of teaching and learning materials is designed to make the process of contributing materials as easy as possible. The provision of awards can ensure the recognition that staff time is valuable, and that the additional efforts that individuals make to excel in their role are recognised and rewarded. A variety of financial awards, rewards relating to esteem, as well as ensuring suitable support is in place to encourage staff to make a commitment to an initiative have been identified as the most appropriate way to achieve this goal. Institutional recognition and adoption of a reward scheme can add backing and authority to the aims of the scheme.