

Open Research Champions Networks: a Primer from UKRN



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What is an open research champions network?

An Open Research Champion is typically someone based in an academic school or department who promotes and advocates open research, acts as a role model of open research practices, is knowledgeable of where to find information on open research practices and facilitates their adoption. A Champion may also:

- enable a central team, for example in the library or overarching committee, to communicate information about new open research initiatives and training opportunities at the institution, as well as information about open research events and opportunities beyond the institution;
- help central teams to produce training and information resources which are suitable for various disciplines at the institution;
- act as a source of feedback to central teams and committees regarding the needs of their school or department when it comes to open research-related resources, training, etc.
- they are often responsible for reporting on an “open research” agenda item at meetings within their school or department

There might be more than one Open Research Champion in any particular school or department, for example to work specifically with staff and students. Champions may work closely with and be members of the UKRN Local Network, where that exists at an institution.

An Open Research Champions network is a set of arrangements that enable Champions to work well as a community of practice across the institution. This might include guides and resources (including funding) for Champions, collaboration and communication tools, and meetings to provide updates, to share learning, and to provide feedback to the central institutional teams and committees.

Why would I set up an open research champions network?

The principles of openness and transparency are common across research fields and methods, for example as outlined in the Concordat to Support Research Integrity. Hence, it is likely that an institution will have a single open research policy, which might be divided to cover aspects such as publications, data and software, pre-registration and public engagement. However, open research, as defined for example in the UNESCO Recommendation on Open Science, means and implies rather different practices for different kinds of research. What works for laboratory science is probably not going to work in the same way for ethnographic research.

An Open Research Champions network in a multi-disciplinary institution enables that institution to be confident that the principles of openness and transparency are being made relevant across its entire research community. It also provides a community of expertise that can guide the design, implementation and evaluation of policies and procedures that work across research fields and therefore promote research integrity while minimising bureaucracy.

How do I set up an open research champions network?

At a basic level, setting up an Open Research Champions network is relatively straightforward. It has typically been achieved by calling for expressions of interest from the local research community using an institution's usual communication channels. However, some institutions are now embedding open research "championship" within research strategic roles, as an alternative approach.

Practical experience suggests the following might improve the effectiveness and resilience of an Open Research Champions network:

1. Work with existing structures and communities. For example, an institution may have a UKRN local network, or a network of research integrity leads or associates, or data champions, or a community of those who take a leading role on research culture or of research software engineers. Open research practices overlap with these remits, though they are not a subset of any of them.
2. Engage with both the leaders and other parts of academic departments and schools, to encourage local support for the Champions, including from line managers and within appraisal and promotion procedures. Consider whether departments and schools might have a leading role in the recruitment process but avoid siloing Champions within departments.
3. Consider whether setting up Champions as purely voluntary, additional responsibilities might have adverse effects. For example, that approach might either disadvantage or over-burden individuals who are already in some ways marginalised. Relatedly, it might mean that the network is not representative of the research community. It might also compromise the effectiveness, influence and/or sustainability of the network.
4. Ensure that the network is resourced administratively and financially. Communities of practice require resource, both to define, enable and evaluate their activities (meetings, guides, training, etc) and to encourage those activities to be prioritised within a very busy local environment.
5. Review whether sufficient expertise in open research exists across all departments and schools at the institution. This will affect the way the network is planned, for example, if expertise is patchy, then some early steps such as training might be needed to address this.
6. Where possible, seek project funding for preliminary work such as compiling locally-relevant materials like case studies and convening staff and students to raise the profile of open research and make it relevant especially, for example in the arts and humanities, prior to launching a network.
7. Take advantage of the expertise within professional services as a complement to the expertise of researchers in open research practices. Designing a network that combines participation from both professionals and academics will likely be a success factor. Furthermore, professional services staff will likely be able to brief Champions about relevant national and international developments.

8. Position the network within the formal leadership arrangements of the institution, for example by having it report into a committee chaired by the relevant senior member of staff such as an associate vice chancellor or dean for research excellence or culture, and define specific roles for it within an action plan for open research.
9. Relatedly, be clear what success looks like for the network, what is intended in terms of problems to overcome or opportunities to take, and communicate this clearly both to the Champions themselves and to the wider institution.
10. Where nearby institutions are working in a similar way, explore whether some cooperation between them might build momentum and visibility for the network at each institution. Existing regional networks of institutions can be a good basis for this.
11. Celebrate the successes of the network, for example as part of an annual open research week run either by the institution or by a regional group of institutions.

It is unlikely that any institution will be in a position to take all of these steps but this does not necessarily mean that a Champions network should not be established.

More information and resources

International Network of Open Science & Scholarship Communities (INOSC): <https://osc-international.com/>

Shephard, N (2023) How I Accidentally Started an Open Scholarship Community: <https://ns-rse.github.io/open-research-conversation-2023-11/#/title-slide>

INOSC Open Science community starter kit: <https://www.startyouosc.com/>

University of Reading call for Champions 2022: <https://research.reading.ac.uk/open-research-champions/wp-content/uploads/sites/199/2022/01/OpenResearchChampions-Call-2022.pdf>

University of Reading supporting documentation: [Reading OR Champions SWOT Analysis](#)

University of Surrey Open Research Champions website: <https://www.surrey.ac.uk/library/open-research/teams-advance-open-research-surrey#Champions>

University of Surrey supporting documentation:
[Surrey Call for Open Research Champions](#)
[Surrey Open Research Champions Guide](#)
[Surrey OR Champions Induction Slides](#)
[Surrey OR Champions Terms of Reference](#)

University of York Open Research Advocates network: <https://wiki.york.ac.uk/display/YorkOpenResearch/Become+an+Advocate>



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