

# An agreed approach to assessing the trustworthiness and quality of SSH data repositories in EOSC

Adoption of CoreTrustSeal in Social Sciences & Humanities Open Cloud (SSHOC)



*Social Sciences & Humanities Open Cloud (SSHOC) is a project funded by the EU framework programme Horizon 2020 and unites 20 partner organisations and their 27 associates in developing the social sciences and humanities area of the European Open Science Cloud (EOSC). SSHOC partners include both developing and fully established European Research Infrastructures from the social sciences and humanities, and the association of European*

*research libraries (LIBER). The distributed character of the data infrastructures in use by members of the SSHOC community means that an approach to assessing their trustworthiness and the quality of their data repositories needs to be developed. SSHOC selected the CoreTrustSeal as the Trusted Digital Repository (TDR) certification framework for SSHOC repositories.*

## The challenge

The distributed character of data infrastructures within the SSHOC (CESSDA ERIC, CLARIN ERIC, DARIAH ERIC and E-RHS communities) requires developing an agreed approach to assessing the trustworthiness and quality of data repositories. Trust between all parties in the quality of data and services is critical for research infrastructure in terms of people, processes and technologies. The level of trustworthiness can be assessed through evaluation against agreed requirements.

## The RDA outputs adopted

We selected the CoreTrustSeal as the Trusted Digital Repository (TDR) certification framework for SSHOC repositories. CoreTrustSeal is based on the Repository Audit and Certification Catalogues, a two-part recommendation produced by the RDA Repository Audit and Certification DSA-WDS Partnership WG. Due to the diversity of repositories within the SSHOC communities, a flexible yet sustainable approach to trustworthiness is needed that is adaptable to a wide variety of data infrastructures. CoreTrustSeal provides a demonstrable approach to internal and external review, providing a means to determine the strengths and weaknesses of data stewards and a basis for comparison between them.

## The adoption process

During the SSHOC project, the Trust & Quality Assurance team will provide SSHOC repositories with support for achieving their certification goal which may vary from self-assessment to obtaining or renewing CoreTrustSeal certification. The main modes of support will be:

- » **Raising awareness** of the relevance of certification of repositories and the role of the CoreTrustSeal in this. The information will be openly available to everyone.
- » **Workshops and webinars on repository certification.** The aim is to have at least one event targeted at each SSHOC community. All events will, however, be open to all repositories (but especially in the case of face-to-face events subject to availability of space).
- » **Review of self-assessments based on the requirements of the CoreTrustSeal.** Detailed feedback will be provided on self-assessments primarily to selected repositories. The self-assessments and the feedback will be confidential and not published unless otherwise agreed.

Our report D8.2 Certification plan for SSHOC repositories (<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3725867>) lays the ground for the SSHOC trust work.

Find out more at:

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## The impact of the adoption

The benefits of self-assessment and peer review against an agreed standard do not depend on formal certification. Undertaking the process improves internal communications and understanding as well as facilitates comparison to peer organisations and cooperation with partners, which in turn helps improve the processes and quality of the repositories.

CoreTrustSeal is not necessarily perfectly fit for purpose for all SSHOC repositories and data services. Our process will help identify cases where the CoreTrustSeal requirements are 'not applicable' (and why), and where changes to the CoreTrustSeal framework could lead

to better support for a variety of repositories. The CoreTrustSeal Board currently engages with potential applicants with a view to supporting a wider range of more general-purpose galleries, libraries, archives and museums, as well as complex partnership models and entities providing technical infrastructure services. Work with the heterogeneous SSHOC applicants will help inform the development of support for the application of the CoreTrustSeal to the full range of data stewards.

Further SSHOC work includes providing recommendations for sustainably maintaining trust across the SSH ERICs beyond the lifetime of the SSHOC project.

## Lessons learned

CoreTrustSeal provides a flexible approach which can be applied to a wide range of repositories. Our repository selection process has shown that while some of the data service organisations related to SSHOC are traditional CoreTrustSeal applicants, others may not have equated their current data services with TDR concepts at all. In all cases, these organisations remain critical EOSC components as either potential TDRs or as service providers which support the trusted repositories.

Wherever possible, the SSHOC Trust & Quality Assurance team will seek to make self-assessments (or anonymised extracts) public even if they do not reach the point of submission to CoreTrustSeal. This kind of information sharing has several benefits including the fact that some CoreTrustSeal requirements are applicable to any data stewardship organisation, and that any 'gap analysis' of assessment support indicates a possible area of EOSC partnerships which do not have supporting standards.

Based on findings from forthcoming workshops, webinars, self-assessments, collaborations within SSHOC, EOSC and RDA and desk research, the Trust & Quality Assurance team will continue the work and discussion, and address emerging issues. The aim is to provide recommendations for sustainably maintaining trust across the SSH ERICs beyond the lifetime of the SSHOC project. The SSHOC Report on TDR status and certification solutions for SSHOC repositories (due in February 2022) will provide an update of the certification status of the SSHOC repositories and suggest certification solutions for them.

## The UK Data Archive CoreTrustSeal certified

One of the repositories certified within SSHOC is the UK Data Archive, providing access to the UK's largest digital collection of social sciences and population research data.

***"Achieving this accreditation demonstrates the ability of the UK Data Archive, to perform all of the relevant activities relating to providing long-term access to data of value to social science researchers"***, said the Archive's Repository and Preservation Manager and CESSDA Trust

Working Group leader, Hervé L'Hours.



**Contact: Hervé L'Hours**

UK Data Archive Repository and Preservation Manager and  
CESSDA Trust Working Group leader

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