

UK Open Educational Resources programmes 2009-2012

Institution & Institutional Context

The programme was funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England which funds public higher education teaching and research activities in the UK. It was managed by JISC

(<http://www.jisc.ac.uk>) and the Higher Education Academy (<https://www.international.heacademy.ac.uk/>)

Keywords and OEP themes

National policy; institutional strategy; open licensing.

What is the case study about?

The UK funded a large programme of investment in OER over a three-year period (2009-2012). About eighty projects were funded in total, and involved almost all UK universities and many colleges. Projects ranged from large scale OER developments to small-scale cultural change activities.

What is the issue or need you are addressing?

The programme was conceived in order to make a step change in the way that UK universities (and individuals) thought about their digital learning and teaching materials and to stimulate a culture of sharing materials openly with others, and to build up a mass of high quality resources that could be re-used by others. The motivations for HEFCE in investing in UK OER initiatives were broadly:

- to promote the sharing and reuse of learning resources by supporting the strategic development of a culture of OER release;
- to provide a reputational benefit to UK higher education through the promotion of high quality learning resources worldwide through the continued release of OER.

How was the initiative implemented?

The initiative was funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) which invested about £5 million

over a 3 year period in about a hundred different projects and activities, ranging in size from several hundred thousand pounds for the largest, to just a few thousand pounds for the smallest. There were three phases of activity, each with strategic priorities that responded to the changing landscape of OER activity and awareness. The first phase focused upon funding a wide range of 31 projects in different universities to create OER resources to be made available re-use by others. The second phase of 16 projects focused upon filling in some of the gaps in subject coverage in OER and also in partnering OER-aware institutions with others in order to 'cascade' expertise between institutions. It also focused upon tools and techniques that would help the discovery of OER. The third phase (30 projects) focused upon embedding of OER and sustaining the activity. Included in this was partnership between universities and a range of different organisations from outside higher education, including training organisations, the National Health Service and many others.

The initiative funded different types of projects: some created and shared new OER; some used or re-purposed existing open resources; others evaluated the use of OER or built up a picture of OER practice. The programme built upon open infrastructure, in particular using the Jorum OER repository (www.jorum.ac.uk) to collect a critical mass of open learning resources.

Outcomes

The programme led to outcomes on a number of different levels – local, subject-based (ie through subject networks), and national. For individual universities, knowledge and learning gained through the

programmes has been captured through detailed evaluation and written up into evaluation reports; these can be accessed at <https://oersynth.pbworks.com/w/page/60338879/HEFCE-OER-Review-Final-Report>

The key lessons about OER learned from analysis of all three programmes have been turned into an OER Toolkit (<https://openeducationalresources.pbworks.com/>). Key lessons from the third phase are summarised here <https://oersynth.pbworks.com/w/page/60540797/ukoer3keylessons> – the key areas are culture and practice; releasing and using OER; processes for sustainability and impact and benefits.

The student voice was captured through evaluation of each project, for example: "I have not yet come fully to terms with the internet ... So I am not representative... but I am aware how much I am missing. I plan to do better." (Student commenting in pilot student survey, SESAME Final Report)

Issues & challenges

The challenges varied during the lifecycle of the programmes. In the early stages, awareness of OER, why it is relevant to academic practice and an institutional priority, and understanding of the potential benefits of OER were not well understood. As the programmes progressed, awareness of open practices and the benefits of OER increased, and whilst there were still challenges related to awareness-raising, the barriers were more about copyright, ownership of resources and sustainability. Sustainability is one of the biggest ongoing challenges now that programme funding has finished; the programmes endeavoured to support subject networks and communities of practice that would continue

to support OER beyond the programme, and this has proven to be successful in many cases. Some projects have continued through other funding sources and there are now established communities in place that help to sustain sharing of OER. Also, use of key OER infrastructure like the Jorum repository means that there is now a critical mass of OER materials that can be explored and used by practitioners.

Insights and Recommendations for National and/or Institutional Development

We are at a different time from when the UK OER programme started, there is generally more understanding of open practices and more digital literacy amongst academic staff and students. We have also had the widespread discussion of MOOCs - which have helped to increase understanding of some of the value of open practice and online learning, whilst also somewhat muddying the waters, given the lack of open practices for some MOOCs. So awareness of the 'value of open' is much greater than it was, at both practitioner and strategic levels, so it is likely to be less of a challenge to explain the challenge and the issue. In fact, we might argue that the possible problems of 'closed' MOOCs, where content cannot be re-used easily, may help to make the case for 'proper' open practices where re-use is enabled and encouraged, and that there is a stronger need than ever to support and encourage the open sharing of resources through human networks and reliable, shared infrastructure (repositories and discovery tools).

We would also advocate a phased approach (the UK programme had three phases), as it means that more individuals and institutions can become engaged in the activity during its lifecycle, rather than restricting engagement to those who get involved at the start. We were pleased with some of the embedding projects where OER-aware universities worked with others to cascade practice, though found that there were challenges with transferring knowledge between institutions. Finally, the most successful outcome from the activity was arguably the development of human

networks of practice that have become self-sustained over time; sustainability is the biggest challenge in this area and this is one approach to meeting that challenge.

Contact person and details

Sarah Porter, sarahporterlee@gmail.com
Visitor, Oxford Internet Institute, University of Oxford and Independent Advisor