Open practice across sectors: briefing paper

The HE Academy/JISC UKOER Programme has encouraged cross-sector approaches to OER development, and is increasingly focussing on broader issues around open educational practices (OEP). Synthesis activities for the first two phases of activity have included cultural and institutional issues across a number of sectors. Activities to date include a UKOER phase 2 programme webinar on OERs across sectors and a presentation at the JISC Innovating eLearning Online Conference in November 2011 - Open practice across sectors. It is anticipated that phase three activities will continue to address cross-sector issues and identify good practice for the wider community. A briefing paper on OER models (add link) identifies a wide range of potential benefits for different stakeholders but it has become clear that a significant benefit of engaging with the concepts and challenges of OEP and OER is in the way it encourages cross sector understanding, collaboration and outcomes.

The UKOER Phase 2 Synthesis report considered practice change in detail:

"Collaborative practice has emerged as important during this funding phase. Cross disciplinary approaches are beginning to have an impact at an institutional level and reveal a new benefit of open content - that it is easily shared and co-constructed across existing boundaries. Engaging with partners outside the academic sector has been challenging but has encouraged new partnerships, trust and levels of understanding. Several projects comment that working across boundaries to develop project outcomes (business/community/academy, staff/consultants, students/teachers) has been one of the most radical aspect of their experience and has the potential to change practice more widely."

Motivations - why engage with OER/OEP?

The range of different models/approaches to OER present challenges for the educational community as no one simple model exists and each stakeholder group has different motivations for engaging - either in developing, releasing or using OERs in learning and teaching activities. These complexities make it difficult to come up with quick one-stop definitions, guides or summaries. The lack of a common vocabulary means that people are still asking fundamental questions about use, re-use and re-purposing of learning resources and about the nature of the concept 'open' itself. In some ways 'open' can be viewed simplistically as being about open licences, but there are 'degrees of openness' and licences can become fairly complex. Is there something inherent within an 'open resource' that makes it different from content generally available on the web or is the context of use the

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defining characteristic? UKOER projects have invested considerable effort to engage their staff with concepts around OER and have developed some excellent [guides and materials (pilot phase)](), particularly around identifying benefits and encouraging people to consider changing their own practice. Projects report several instances of staff changing their views and own individual practice after being involved with an OER project.

A key outcome from this project has been the opportunity to work closely with and learn from university teachers in a range of subjects about the ways in which they academically engage their diverse students. Pre and post observation meetings with teachers, students and in some cases student support staff, provided the opportunity to think about inclusive practice within different contexts and from different perspectives. Discussions with staff not only led to changes in their practice, they also challenged our thinking, as researchers and academic developers, around inclusive practice. (Learning to Teach Inclusively)

Recognising new or changing practice as 'open' or OEP has added to the complexity in the field as it needs defining and explaining - is existing practice becoming more open or does it require people to change their practice? During the JISC online conference discussions many people argued that some people have been engaged in open practice (and even producing OERs) for many years but do not use this terminology to describe it. Whilst some may prefer not to use new terminology, it can be useful to engage people with the concepts and generate institutional-wide understanding that can be fed into strategy, policy and practice. It can also be valuable to situate open practices as an extension of existing practices, which may generate less anxiety or resistance and establishing OEP as a credible and valid form of scholarship has been identified by projects as one way of normalising these practices. It is clear from the UKOER programme of activities that the level of understanding and engagement can vary depending on the context of the stakeholder (individual staff and learners, the institution, the community) which is fluid and often multi-faceted. Most people have different motivations for engaging with OER or OEP depending on which stakeholder role they have at any particular time - I might be an employee, a learner and a teacher and bring different views of what open needs to be for me. Motivation to engage is not the only factor, but it can have a major impact on how we approach open practice and on the OERs themselves. The OEP briefing paper and the models and benefits paper consider these issues in depth but it is worth noting that some of these challenges can be amplified when cross-sector partnerships and issues are considered.

A focus on practices and the impact of different cultures helps to tease out the challenges and approaches that can support wider communities to adopt appropriate open models. Practice in the context of this paper includes:

- practices at an institutional level (carrying out those activities that support learning and teaching) including practices of different departments/faculty, practices of

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different staff roles and of different individuals within those; open practices of this type include

- providing institutional systems to make learning resources open
- changing institutional strategies or policies to reflect open approaches
- recognising and rewarding staff for releasing or using open resources
- making courses open as MOOCs (massive open online course)
- cross department collaboration and sharing
- communities of practice (such as subject or professional discipline, sectoral, regional); open practices of this type include
- Finding resources to support formal learning (diglits)
- Creating content as part of learning activities
- Managing content for learning
- Commenting/rating oers they have used
- Using oers for informal learning or work-based learning
- practice of individuals as formal or informal learners; open practices of this type include
- Finding and using appropriate resources to support formal learning
- Creating open content as part of learning activities
- Managing open content for learning
- Commenting/rating oers they have used
- Using oers for informal learning or work-based learning
- Practice of teachers/supporters of learning in formal educational contexts; open practices of this type include
- Searching for oers to use in their own teaching
- Adapting oers for their own use to support teaching
- Making their own resources available openly
- Reflection on approaches to learning and teaching – changing pedagogy, learning design, changing how resources are used, changing content for different contexts, rethinking the learning experience
- Open assessment and accreditation
- Changing relationships with learners – in negotiating the curriculum and developing and using content

As this list illustrates, OEP involves more than just the development, release and use of OERs. Broader conversations with learners and other stakeholders around how learning and teaching practices need to accommodate more open approaches to knowledge sharing have added a richness to the UKOER Programme. Funding separate strands of work across different stakeholder groups may have had a significant impact on this, thus generating spaces for like-minded conversations, although the programme also benefits from an

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unusual level of cross strand dialogue. The OEP paper highlights that whilst some of the conversations may have begun in the context of OER/OEPs they are actually providing opportunities for subject teachers to recontextualise and reconsider their approaches to teaching the discipline.

Arguably, though, what subject teachers are doing here is rediscovering the specificity of their disciplinary pedagogy through the lens of content sharing on the open web, rather than partaking of a new generic 'open' pedagogy.

Synergies and similarities

Considering practice across sectors highlights differences and unique aspects but also identifies similarities and opportunities for sharing and learning across sectors. Opening cross-sector dialogue has been identified as being of major value for staff involved in UKOER projects. Many UKOER projects included partners from other sectors. Educational sectors involved in the programme were predominantly HE and HE in FE, although some included schools. The Adult and Community sector and Independent learning have also been flagged as important to include in educational sector considerations. Those projects with a subject or professional discipline focus often included a wide range of partners from different sectors. Whilst some factors impact on all sectors, such as current financial constraints and limited time to be innovative or engage with new practices, there are specific aspects which bring both challenges and strengths.

HE in FE

The UKOER programme webinar in April 2011 focussed on HE in FE and this conversation is captured in various blogs and drawn together on the [OER infokit](). The conversation revealed a genuine openess to learn from both HE and FE partners. Of note from those discussions:

- The issue of professional identity – and the challenges for staff caught between two cultures with the increasing HE in FE provision. This is clearly not just an OER related issue but the consideration of where these staff bring the two cultures together in their practice is of particular interest for open practices discourse. Increasingly blurring professional boundaries highlight the need to develop common vocabularies and understanding of different aspects of work.
- Workplace and employer involvement has been identified as important and deserves more consideration as projects produce guidance and support materials, as well as OERs. Involvement of employers was identified as an academic imperative although this can involve several different professional, academic and workplace cultures. HE in FE can bring considerable experience of these types of collaborations and was noted as being particularly responsive to local needs.

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> *"There is considerable experience in HE in FE- it has grown up and a signature Pedagogy is emerging that supports curricula that involves employers as academic imperatives and is delivered increasingly through a blended and/or WBL format"* (EDOR project)

- A strength in the emphasis on teaching and student satisfaction and the FE experience of providing for a wide range of 'non-traditional' learners – such as work-based learners, or students who find it challenging to access post 16 education and a high level of pastoral care for students
- Management culture in FE was identified as a possible challenge in that it could be inflexible, but it also emerged as a strength if senior management were very supportive of OER initiatives.
- Staff and student digital literacies were discussed and clearly cross all sectoral boundaries – but of particular interest is the notion of students as producers of content.
- Standardised curricula offers string incentive to share generic content
- Strong culture of re-use and sharing - supported by investment in high quality resources made through national agencies such as Becta. Some projects, however highlighted that this may negate against individual development of OERs which are unable to match quality of nationally funded resources
- Potential for OERs to improve the visibility of HE in FE and in establishing their own identity.

Projects continued to report on sector specific issues and these are included in the [main phase 2 synthesis report](#).

> *The main barrier at the individual level limiting generation of OERs by staff working in the HE in FE sector is lack of confidence. In order for OERs to take off in the HE in FE sector it may be necessary to promote greater cross-institution collaboration. This would build on the culture of sharing resources which already exists within FE colleges. However, it is unlikely that such collaboration would emerge "bottom-up" given the pressures on staff in the sector.* (OER Cafe final report)

The Ripple project noted that because their FE partner had no history of uploading materials to Jorum, it was helpful to develop an intermediate stage in the process, with release to a limited-access collection of land-use materials followed by automated transfer to Jorum. This ties in with findings from UK OER phase 1 that intermediate steps towards open access 'in the wild' are often essential, and that a subject-based turnstile system in which trust is built within a relatively small community of users is often the most effective. Either way, it seems that FE colleges lag behind HEIs in developing the technical expertise and person-power for repository management and routine upload to external repositories.

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Specific challenges identified for the the FE sector include (may be seen as barriers to engaging with OERs):

Cultural/ academic practice	Organisational/ management	Learner issues
High teaching workloads & limited staff time to repurpose OERs	Limited long-term thinking in FE (with respect to HE delivery)	Accessibility needs of FE students
Limited staff skill-set to repurpose OERs and lack of training opportunities	Management culture in FE	Students not ready to use OERs
Limited knowledge of IPR issues	Inflexible curricula - not much space for experimenting	OER literacy for students (and teachers)
Professionalism and dual identity – FE lecturers trying to develop HE academic practice	Link between HE and FE can be 'bolt on' rather than properly integrated	
Staff autonomy in FE different from HE		
FE teachers anxiety around being 'replaced' by OERs	Lack of central institutional repository or content management system - reliance of national repositories	
OER literacy for teachers (and students)		
Confidence issues in quality of their own resources (result of experiences of high quality, branded materials produced by national bodies such as Becta)		
OER not being separately resourced for staff development (but can be incorporated into general training		

Other sectors

Some of the most significant challenges for projects emerged as a result of having to engage with very different organisational cultures of their partners. Projects working closely with the NHS, Pharmaceutical industry, professional bodies, employers and publishers all had to be flexible in their approaches and expended much energy in bringing such diverse cultures together. Despite a few barriers that were insurmountable (pharmaceutical industry - SCOOTER and publishers- LEARNING LEGACIES) many projects achieved their original goals.

> *The considerable achievements of the project were set against what was at times a somewhat bewildering antagonism to OER. As one Steering Group member put it. "I felt I was between two quite different cultures. On the one hand, HE with its attitude of sharing resources as long as it did no harm to do so and on the other, the commercial world where sharing of resources was only undertaken if the question*

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> 'what is in it for me?' was answered favourably and without any undue hassle".
> (LEARNING LEGACIES)

Whilst this presented barriers for the project it generated interesting conversations.

> " the translation of a project, created within the cultural context of higher education, into the commercial and legal environment surrounding both the 2012 Games and the publishing industry proved particularly challenging." Evaluation
> report (LEARNING LEGACIES)

Other project teams worked with sectors that already have their own educational and/or training practices and cultures - notably the NHS and Workplace/employers. Whilst there were similarities in motivations to engage with OERs, and in widely reported low levels of awareness, time and capabilities of staff, differences emerged in terms of organisational policy and practice. This was particularly evident for the NHS - with policies and guidelines on sharing, copyright and consent not always being readily accessible and with varying content and implementation.

> The project has highlighted significant differences in culture, practice, infrastructure, business cases, expertise and rate of change between the two cultures of academia and clinical practice in terms of engagement with the OER agenda. There is a risk that further funding constraints might reverse the current direction of travel towards open access in the long-term: at present, it seems likely that the innovations in policy and practice set in motion by the project will be sustained. PORSCHE evaluation report

The PORSCHE project carried out a review and recommended that future national frameworks become better coordinated and more favourable to open approaches. For organisations which have education as one aspect of overall provision the general notion of 'open practice' may be much more relevant than focussing specifically on OEP, as this is likely to have wider impact. (Although HE institutions also fall into this category with research and development being impacted by broader open practices).

Barriers to OEP/OER for NHS and Healthcare education in a clinical setting:

- Lack of awareness at an institution-wide level of changes to IPR and the move towards open licenses
- Lack of awareness of OER release and use from individual staff across disciplines
- Costing models - desire to see return on investment
- Technology know-how
- time to develop 'polished' resources, particularly establishing provenance, and clearing copyright and consent

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- patient consent
- 'life and death' aspects and reliability of accurate up-to-date information
- culture of closed systems with strong authentication mechanisms to ensure confidentiality and personal data
- confusion about the copyright status in the NHS eLearning Repository in the NHS Photo Library

Focussing on raising awareness and offering guidance was seen by the project as having significant impact on reducing barriers and workshop and survey feedback indicated shifts in awareness and practice by the end of the project. However, like other projects working with non-educational institutions they noted the impact of economic conditions as highly likely to impact on some of the progress made, both in relation to time to engage and increasing competitive aspects.

> *Analysis of policies and interviews have also shown new pressures from upcoming changes to the NHS, resulting in uncertainty, and a worry that there will be a strategic move away from sharing and open access and towards a more commercial future.*

> *"All NHS trusts by 2013 have to become foundation trusts. One of the requirements of that is to become income generating, working as a commercial organisation rather than historically how we've worked. So there is a bit of a conflict over the willingness to share something openly versus the need to generate income." PORSCHE Evaluation Report*

 The Learning from WOeRK project raised some interesting issues around employer engagement and highlighted the need to reconsider, and include employers in, curriculum design, resource development and learning support. Their focus on supporting remote learners led them to conclude that providing OER for use anytime, anywhere supports democratisation of education but they also highlight the notion of learning support in organisations being or paramount importance.

> *Some of the changes envisaged by interviewees in the medium term represent large paradigm shifts in how the University designs and delivers the curriculum.*

> - *separation of learning content, process and accreditation, exemplified by the use of OER and the need to signpost learners to opportunities for assessment and accreditation.*
> - *more specialised roles emerging, such as those providing more technical support for OER development, modelled by the Learning from WOeRK project*
> - *radically flexible, negotiated curricula, as envisaged by the CPD shell framework*

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- *marketising the support of learning in organisations (rather than marketising content or on-campus learning experiences), as envisaged by the CPD shell framework*
- *all learning materials being available openly by default* (Learning from WOeRK)

As well as encouraging cross sector dialogue these initiatives depended on working with new partners within their own institutions across professional and departmental boundaries. This led to increased confidence for staff and better understanding of how curricula could be developed and supported by OER and how it can also support employer needs.

> *One of the other challenges is that we have been very supply driven. When we create a new product it's on the basis of what expertise and interest we have. Based on the signals from the marketplace, that is not what employers are looking for. So we need to buy in expertise to deliver what employers want. That's about separating the content from the accreditation. (Learning from WOeRK Academic Leads) Learning from WOeRK*

Moving forward

Projects took a number of different approaches to address barriers and challenges of specific sectors. Some produced specific guidelines and toolkits (such as OER for beginners: an introduction to sharing learning resources openly in healthcare education), and most encouraged cross-sector understanding and dialogue through workshops and space for broad conversations. The ORBEE project developed a resource taxonomy for the built environment to support increased awareness and understanding between academic and industry.

> *This document could be particularly supportive of increasing understanding between higher education and the built environment industries, including their intermediaries. It could be drawn on in clarifying how higher education fits with what is required in professional occupations. This could be a side effect as far as HEA and JISC see it, but it is potentially a welcome one. It could bring industry and higher education closer together. "(ORBEE External Evaluation report) ORBEE*

Phase 3 projects are likely to continue these conversations and add to our understanding of differences and synergies - with several projects working with publishers, sector skills councils and employers. It is also anticipated that the increasing awareness in the UK around OEP and OER may bring other sector needs and challenges to the fore. Of interest are Adult and Community providers and also those supporting independent learners.

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Pages from the UKOER phase 2 synthesis report that may be of interest:

Phase2 Practice change

Release Cultural Issues

 This briefing paper has been informed by work undertaken by UKOER projects in phases one and two, but particular thanks are due to Terry McAndrew, Helen Richardson, Anna Gruszczynska, Suzanne Hardy who contributed to both the Programme webinar and the JISC Online Conference session 2011.