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The challenges of OER to Academic Practice

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Abstract: The degree to which Open Educational Resources (OER) reflect the values of its institutional provider depends on questions of economics and the level of support amongst its academics. For project managers establishing OER repositories, the latter question - how to cultivate, nurture and maintain academic engagement - is critical. Whilst participating in the HEFCE funded institutional OER programme (2009-10), the team at the University of Exeter encountered a range of academic opinions on OER, and followed many as they rode the peaks and troughs of opportunities and challenges that this kind of work entails.

This paper discusses the potential motivators for academics in providing OER material, as an understanding of these is helpful when introducing the subject to new contributors, and when informing planning decisions - both procedural and financial - so that key incentives are protected. We will also look at the reasons for some academic scepticism surrounding OER and how these views can be - if not tempered - then at least understood with a view to informing future policy.

The enthusiastic advocacy that some academics possess in relation to OER is borne of their vision of its use. It is important to ensure that the high priority objective of obtaining academic support does not overlook instances where there is tension between this vision, and what can be achieved with available resources. We will discuss the key information that OER managers need in order to mitigate this scenario.

OER projects do not work in isolation from internal competition and it has been essential to be sensitive to the conflicting pressures that academics have to contend with in their work profile. We will discuss the value of establishing where an OER project sits within an institution's educational and research strategies, and its financial framework, the questions to ask and the signs to spot to obtain this information, and how managers can use this knowledge to make decisions, avoid pitfalls and garner support. This will involve addressing academic initiatives and reward schemes, including a discussion of how IPR and copyright can not only present challenges but also play an important role in motivating and demonstrating academic engagement.

This paper draws upon formal and informal engagement with a range of stakeholders who have been involved in the project, including the many colleagues who attended several staff development sessions.

Keywords: education strategy, IPR, copyright, reward and recognition, quality, academic engagement, HEFCE, JISC, OER



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1 Introduction

In response to government edicts and economic pressures, many institutions are re-examining how appropriate it is to hide their course material behind their institutional authentication, where much of it is regarded as the ‘crown jewels’, a highly prized and protected resource rather than viewing it as merely the precursor to learning. Also, in its basic character, much material is replicated throughout the sector. In 2009, significant funding in the UK was made available to further the exploration of the usefulness of OER and to evaluate the practicalities of releasing existing course material in this format. Explicitly, the aspirations were identified as follows (JISC, 2009a):

...promote the sharing and reuse of learning resources, and to provide a reputational benefit to UK higher education through the promotion of high quality learning resources world wide.

We expect to see benefits to the institutions involved and the UK HE sector as a whole in terms of overseas recruitment and academic reputation as a result of the work started by this programme.

We witness here two subtly different agendas, learning and branding, which are not necessarily always in harmony.

The term ‘Open Educational Resources’ was coined as recently as 2002 (UNESCO, 2002) and from the very beginning, the internet was identified as a key element:

Open Educational Resources are defined as “technology-enabled, open provision of educational resources for consultation, use and adaptation by a community of users for non-commercial purposes”. They are typically made freely available over the Web or the Internet.

The Cape Town Declaration (2008) identifies the role that OER can play more forcefully:

They ... nourish the kind of participatory culture of learning, creating, sharing and cooperation that rapidly changing knowledge societies need.

In terms of momentum, Educause (2010) in their latest ‘Horizons’ report consider that OER will become mainstream in less than a year and further states that:

The movement toward open content reflects a growing shift in the way academics ... are conceptualizing education to a view that is more about the process of learning than the information conveyed in their courses. ... As customizable educational content is made increasingly available for free over the Internet, students are learning not only the material, but also skills related to finding, evaluating, interpreting, and repurposing the resources they are studying in partnership with their teachers.

The sources noted above identify that the learning process in many instances has a pre-eminent role and the students also acquire generic skills. It also notes content as being ‘customisable’, a particularly important property of OER and that it can also be created as a part of student/tutor collaboration. This is undoubtedly a challenge to much current academic practice and if the Horizon report is to be believed, it will happen sooner rather than later.



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It is important to note what OER is *not* perceived as contributing to in an Exeter context. We do not primarily regard it as a medium for distance learning or student learning without an instructor devoid of an Exeter-based curriculum context. Whilst both scenarios are valid, Exeter positions itself as a destination University with there being much near-campus and face to face contact.

2 A cascading agenda

Exeter's engagement with OER is a result of a UK externally-funded initiative, which in turn has been influenced by various international initiatives. Several international bodies have already been pro-active in producing invaluable guidelines and case studies, e.g. Open eLearning Content Observatory Services (Guntram, 2007), OECD (2007), William and Flora Hewlett Foundation (Atkins, Brown and Hammond, 2007) and UNESCO (2009). In the UK, Professor Cooke (Cooke, 2008), in responding to a government invitation on how on-line innovation in HE in the UK should be taken forward, stated that although the UK is regarded as world class with respect to Information and Communications Technology in many respects, we 'lag behind in generating and making available high quality modern learning and teaching resources'.

This momentum then led HEFCE to announce funding in 2009 for pilot projects [1], beginning in May 2009 and running for 12 months, to create OERs from existing high-quality education resources. Exeter was one of seven successful universities in England that obtained funding to establish an institutional OER. Our project is described in Browne and Newcombe (2009) and is called Open Exeter [2], which also doubles up as the name of our repository [3]. These institutional projects were in fact part of a wider context of funding that also included fourteen discipline strands and eight individual strands. The programme was jointly managed by the Higher Education Academy and JISC, with the former taking primary responsibility for the subject and individual strands and JISC taking primary responsibility for the institutional strand [4].

3 Exeter's motivations

The University took the view that the OER agenda was sufficiently convergent with its own ambitions and that it complemented our research-informed learning culture. Indeed, our Education Strategy states that we will, for 2009/10:

Develop open education materials for use worldwide

So we anticipated being able to leverage OER to inform and support the widespread transformations in learning and teaching that we were already promoting. It would also encourage sharing and reusing, allied to an array of social networking tools, and that such practices would become an integral component of curriculum design and delivery.

In discussions with numerous staff, the following motivations were identified, (in theory) in terms of learning, with a focus on the supply-side. The extent to which academics bought into these motivations is recorded later.

- Altruism – contributing to the public good and creating worldwide communities.
- Raise personal profile – allow you and your work to be known.
- No competitive advantage in everyone creating their own 'basic' courses.



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- Career enhancement within the teaching research nexus (TRN) virtuous circle.

The following institutional motivations were also noted.

- Supportive rhetoric in all our core strategies – predicated on active learning.
- University reputation – marketing institutional ‘brand’ across the world.
- Student satisfaction – increasing the quality of learning materials.

For OER to be placed high on the agenda by University senior management, we must identify synergies with our research and knowledge transfer, internationalization, marketing and employability strategies. As a ‘kid late on the block’, OER has not been explicitly noted in these strategies but it has been essential that we make those linkages. The extent to which the academic and the institutional motivations are convergent is an active debate but in placing a high premium on being a research intensive university and the concomitant career rewards, this adds urgency to a related agenda of allying teaching with research, i.e. creating a virtuous circle within a teaching research nexus. OER also helps to rebalance the debate in relation to responsibilities, moving students from being passive consumers to students as co-producers (McCulloch, 2009).

OER may also provide a new stimulus to the ‘learning design’ movement (Conole and Weller, 2008), which arguably has undergone much criticism, though perhaps more for its inadequate technological expressions than the concept itself. OER need a pedagogical underpinning and learning design could be that vehicle. It also gives new life to the ‘self-regulated learning’ movement as implicitly noted by Steffens and Underwood (2008), who, in introducing the topic state that the stimulus is:

the increasingly diverse nature of learners and the incipient opportunities and issues they entail and the changing nature of delivery of learning as digital technologies become commonplace

4 Why yet another project?

A project deliverable was to make available a minimum of the equivalent of 360 credits of material. Another was to establish our own repository. Both these targets have been met. In order to demonstrate institutional commitment, we had to put forward resources from several departments. Mostly, the material is pitched at Levels 1 and 3. But as important to the funders was to capture the story of how we have gone about making them available and also how we aim to embed the educational cultural changes that we have identified, in a sustainable manner. But why could we not just ‘learn’ from elsewhere? Of course we have drawn upon much reported experience. However, although senior missives are very important, academic buy-in is vital. It has proved priceless in being able to learn from our own experiences, working alongside and with numerous academics in their own setting and culture. It is these experiences that this paper describes. More broadly, one experience that we could never have obtained without direct engagement is that our OER project has involved harnessing many strategic relationships within the University, creating synergies between many disparate teams, each with their specialist knowledge and who may not have had prior reason to engage with each other in a significant way. The impact of these new synergies upon the academic experience is also part of our story.



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5 Staff awareness

The following quotes reflect an enlightened view that is held by some academics:

Currently we tend to teach as if we are the gatekeeper of all knowledge. OER can be enlightening and allow student interaction. ... The notes should just be one resource in conjunction with others.

It is what education will look like in an increasing digital environment.

but these views are by no means mainstream. Without academic buy-in OER has no future so it was important to have a staff development workshop as soon as was realistically possible. The timing itself was a challenge. Our OER project has been pursuing many strands in parallel and therefore it was not been possible to take the more measured, reflective approach that we would have preferred. But this too is a practical reality and a challenge we had to address. Therefore our first workshop took place in November 2009. The most conspicuous conclusion was that we placed far too much emphasis on supply-side issues (e.g. copyright, recognition). In subsequent staff development we have given more focus to the demand-side agenda and these have proved to be an effective entrée into considering OER. As part of our staff development programmes, we have been encouraging the investigation of subject categorised resources that exist at other institutions. This has elicited responses of the form:

I found some very useful courses which are relevant to my teaching.

It could help beleaguered teaching fellows who have multiple courses in subjects they are not experts in

Reduces the uncertainty whether a particular material may be used legally

However, there were also some negative responses. Many were of the form:

Unless I have invested in creating course content I feel I lack the authority to teach a course.

It is far easier to create my own resources and then feel confident I understand the material.

As Wiley (2007) concurs, for the educator much of the learning, both about the subject and how to teach it, comes from the process of creation. But as an advocate of OER he also argues that much material is used 'as is' because the perception is that it is difficult to adapt.

Our first workshop did elicit some positive comments relating to the supply side, e.g:

All I'm really interested in as a contributor is making my resources more freely available to other educators to use as they see fit - I think there is some value in my resources that I'm happy to see others take advantage of if they wish.

But it would be disingenuous to imply they were in the majority. Some comments were forthright in their rejection of the concept of OER:



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Making this material available as OER is the equivalent of giving away research that would otherwise be patented (and hence could earn income) and would not be in the best interests of either the staff or the University.

Most comments however, were couched in terms of concerns that unless there was a sea-change in policies, particularly in relation to improving the emphasis placed on teaching in relation to research, then staff would not be prepared to commit the time. These issues are now discussed below.

6 Reward and recognition

There is no point in attempting to push academics into irrational behaviour. Where are the career rewards in investing time into developing OER? Does senior management regard it as fundamental to the future of the university? Academics said they would need tangible evidence of examples of career rewards from teaching that mirror those traditionally limited to a more narrow view of research excellence. There is considerable scepticism, e.g.

Spending time putting my work on to OER is not going to help my career at Exeter

At the moment teaching is not rewarded by the system and therefore what incentive is there to develop materials?

However, our newly revised Education Strategy for 2010-2015 says categorically that the University will:

Ensure that criteria for probation, annual performance review and promotion fully recognize the importance and value of teaching and provide appropriate rewards for excellent teaching.

However, some academics could identify with a changing agenda, e.g.

Having moved away from RAE to QAA it demands that lecturers place value on teaching and are qualified, more like OFSTED.

7 The debilitating impact of IPR and copyright

Whilst technology permits, copyright constrains, and technology makes these issues more visible and with regard to OER, highly visible! There is no shortage of advice and toolkits on how to handle IPR (e.g. JISC, 2009b). Internally, we have obtained considerable support and goodwill from our Corporate Legal Department, IPR Office and our Insurance Office. As an aside, our 'corporate' thrust had been more focused on a protective approach. The OER philosophy of open access was new to them but they have fully embraced its relevance in appropriate contexts. Yet we along with other current and previous JISC projects continue to struggle with this issue. As Charlesworth, Ferguson, Schmoller and Smith (2007) note, we still do not seem to be able to make much positive progress:

Despite the numerous studies, reports and recommendations that have been produced over the past decade by JISC, HEFCE and others, attitudes towards intellectual property rights, and specifically copyright, remain an inhibiting factor in the adoption of innovative teaching and research strategies. This has been exacerbated by the increased importance attached to intellectual property rights in the digital environment and the resulting need to pay more than lip service to the concept of legal compliance.



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It was salutary, in our first workshop how little participants knew about copyright in any respect, even those issues that are relevant to their material locked down behind our Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) authentication.

At Exeter, copyright is waived by the University to the author and we have needed to stress, in terms of gaining trust, that the author will retain copyright in his/her work and will simply license, i.e. give permission to the University to use the material for the purposes of OER. Since the 'licence-in' (the licence contributors sign when giving material to the University to be turned into OER) will be on a non-exclusive basis, the author/originator will still be able to use the material for his/her own purposes and could even non-exclusively license it elsewhere. The challenges of then looking at the material began.

JISC stated that existing materials should be made available rather than creating new materials explicitly timed to address the project timetable. But the realities have proved much more complex because of the challenges of IPR. We have sought expert advice from a number of agencies, including JISC Legal [5], who were very responsive. We have a process of 'due diligence' and a rapid take down policy. But we still had too many 'it all depends' type of responses. Concerns around litigation therefore obliged us to seek expert guidance from the firm of solicitors used by the University. We explicitly asked for practical rulings and we sought *generic* advice, because it would be far too expensive to get advice on a case by case basis. Regrettably, the advice has been given *commercial in confidence* but suffice to say that the overriding outcome is that Exeter is taking an extremely risk-averse approach.

Checking for potential copyright infringements has proved to be a resource hungry activity. Contributing academics are asked to mark up their material, indicating what they know is their own authorship, what is third party (and whether they have permission to use it), and any content whose provenance they are uncertain about. The material is then forwarded to professional support colleagues who check more forensically, including passing text through plagiarism detector software. Disturbingly, their observations are that awareness of copyright issues by academics is low, interest probably lower but non-compliance at a worryingly high level! Much discussion then ensued with the academics in seeking e.g. infringement-free replacements or re-writing some portions of text. In such negotiations, inevitably the initial goodwill became strained and the academic's enthusiasm considerably dimmed. There is an unanticipated call upon academic's time and OER is unlikely to be anywhere near the top of their agenda. Typical concerns are:

Having reviewed some material ... [it] is so riddled with copyright sensitive images that there isn't going to be much left ... As a result it isn't going to resemble the polished diamond we hoped.

I am having some trouble, in that the IPR requirements mean very, very drastic changes are necessary to the existing material. ... I am concerned that academic credibility is being lost, because of the ferocious requirements of IPR.

I'm slightly disillusioned after wasting several hours over the last couple of weeks chasing permission to use a map only to be told no, and that was just one map.

So respectively, quality, coherence and time are raised as concerns, all induced by the challenges of IPR.

Born out of necessity, we revised our procedures and took a more pragmatic and arguably more mainstream approach. We had begun our clearing process by taking a 'proportionate' view on the



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number of credits we could claim for the amount of material we had cleared. But we are now ‘claiming’ the credits so long as the volume of material cleared is sufficiently representative of the course as a whole and quality and coherence are not impaired. This approach fits in more with the ‘for the teacher’ model, a scaffold of resources that are made available but are not necessarily for self-paced, independent learning. Indirectly, it has also addressed the concerns of some academics who are concerned about giving away their ‘crown jewels’ but are willing to deposit a ‘taster’ proportion in order to promote their courses.

Our current approach to copyright clearance is not sustainable on a large scale beyond the life of our project because we only have a small team of experts within the University. How, then, do we ensure that a proper understanding of copyright issues is understood by all academics? As Charlesworth *et al.* (2007) notes:

Currently, there is a failure to embed adequate training for IPR for academics/lecturers/staff into staff development processes. If IPR education is presently done at all (and it usually isn't), it is in an ad hoc and unstructured ... there are insufficient FHE-experienced training staff currently available to take it.

They also argue that occasional visits from, for example a law firm or copyright consultant is rarely adequate or even appropriately focused. Our answer lies in a much more structured staff development programme, as is outlined later.

8 Issues of trust

The University will ‘license-out’ the material, using a licence framed around the internationally recognized Creative Commons licence, so although this retains ‘some rights reserved’, we have needed to promote the mindset away from ‘all rights reserved’. Some concerns were expressed over the ‘derivative’ option, with academics not wanting their material to be repurposed in ways they were unaware of, or even worse, e.g.

Is there any possibility of protecting ourselves from merely appearing in a montage on YouTube?

We have also chosen the option of ‘non-commercial’ use rather than ‘commercial’, despite Bissell (2009) encouraging depositors to seriously countenance the commercial option. Indeed, the UNESCO OER definition (UNESCO, 2002) says ‘... for non commercial purposes’. But overall, part of the challenge to academics is to think less regarding what they don’t want to allow but rather, the potential of liberal access on the basis that we are all contributors and users. But it takes time to build a cooperative sense of trust and confidence and coping with a sense of loss of control of your resources to people you don’t know and are unlikely to meet, given the reach of the internet. Indeed, as Corner (2009) implies, to many academics, issues of trust weigh more heavily than do those of copyright. Ironically, it was also acknowledged that a lot of resources which they produced were passed around by students and were therefore ‘out there anyway’ and are reused in various ways.



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9 Defining the ‘quality’ of OER

As one Exeter academic astutely observed:

An OER repository definitely does give an impression of the institution and the staff (team) that produces it.

This opens up the debate as to whether a marketing agenda or a more educative agenda is paramount. Although courses have to go through rigorous validation protocols, all this is completed before materials are produced and their quality and particularly their usefulness to stimulate learning are rarely if ever evaluated prior to course delivery. We therefore need to devise some protocol to determine whether the materials to be released as OER are of sufficient quality. In relation to a view of institutional reputational branding, quality needs to be ‘high’. But we must also be mindful that learning contexts can be very varied, and on occasions, unanticipated because it is in re-purposing that pedagogic purposes are also adapted. Material would have begun with some clearly stated pedagogical intent, but it may address many other purposes, unknown to the original contributor. With some exceptions, most course material within the University was originally designed for a campus-based context with surrounding face to face elements. It therefore carries this pedagogical DNA. So how do we determine what may be regarded as ‘good enough’ quality and for whom? Philip, Lefoe, O’Reilly and Parrish (2008), in considering options for a new Australian national OER repository, have produced a very useful summary of the typical models that could be applied. Briefly, they range from the formal and resource intensive model of peer scholarly review, akin to the processes used in reviewing academic research albeit promoting a more supportive and less judgmental attitude, to a more informal, community led review process.

An approach that could accommodate both models is to identify a sliding scale that will provide a measure of reputational credibility, marking a separation between a ‘branding’ approach and an approach exclusively focused on community sharing, where the resources can be regarded as ‘useful’ without having to be ‘exemplar’. But we are meeting resistance to this approach too, with ‘high quality’ being insisted upon even by the contributing academic and indeed the institution would not wish to be associated with material that endangered its own sense of self-regard, e.g.:

I would not want my name linked to something that has not been quality approved / peer reviewed.

To have some kind of external open access with exemplary examples of material would be good for each college and would entice people – it would be promotional, but it should be small scale.

However, there is some resistance to peer review of colleague’s material and concern was expressed at the potential for the marketing aspect to take over and distract from providing valuable educational resources.

10 Pressures of time

Time pressures are often expressed as a proxy for a raft of other inhibiting factors, though the following is representative of an overwhelming concern:

There needs to be much more consideration for lecturers work loads if Exeter is going to push this.



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Academics interviewed who had attended our staff development programmes said that they would struggle to find the time to adapt existing material for OER in an environment in which they were already struggling to fulfill their teaching obligations. However, there was a general consensus whereby staff felt it would be an acceptable use of time to embed an OER approach, most notably taking account of copyright issues, when preparing new or revised material.

From the demand-side perspective, repurposing was not necessarily thought to be a time saver by everyone, though when pressed, it was generally acknowledged that we are all 'borrowing' from what is around us, and in a non-attributable way!

11 Accessing Open Exeter

Another academic challenge is to understand what users value about our resources. We have made the decision not to require registered access, so Open Exeter is indeed, truly 'open'. But this then makes it difficult to know *who* is downloading material. We only request this information voluntarily. However, it is a simple matter to determine *what* is being downloaded. But we also wish to promote a community of practice within which we understand *why* material is downloaded and *what for*. We are developing tools to encourage this, the logic being that social networking really takes place around some mutually shared resource rather than just between individuals. Be it through metadata harvesting or other means, we also need to ensure that Open Exeter resources can be readily found via internationally regarded OER clearing houses as well as any well constructed generic search engine enquiry. However, as Conole (2009) notes; content is distributed, everything is miscellaneous so there is little point in attempting to categorize it. End users have highly individualized means of locating and aggregating material.

Arguably, this makes redundant in part the discussion as to whether we have, for example, institutional or disciplinary repositories. It may even reduce the importance of metadata. Although we have 24 user specified fields, only two (author and title) are compulsory. Currently, project staff insert the metadata and they are being very systematic. But when this task is devolved, we cannot compel depositors to fill in all the fields. Indeed, as stated by Downes (2007), sustainability becomes more problematic if it is centralized.

12 Support issues

For OER to be a sustainable model at Exeter, it was widely agreed that staffing and funding must be provided for support. In an argument that mirrors that relating to the now well-established process of creating materials for our internal VLE, the University:

will have to invest massive amounts of resources in supporting teachers to deliver OER material

Many of the staff worried that they would need not just technological support but also expert assistance in IPR. Indeed, as one respondent said:

in noting the heavily resourced models such as MIT and the UK Open University's OpenLearn and even worse, the community driven Wikipedia, would it not be better to let them get on with it and merely promote a demand-led model?

We also encountered a challenge brought about by the 'power' relationships between the educational technologists employed on the project and the academics with whom they were liaising. From the



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technologists' perspective, the academics were often very tardy in responding to queries regarding their material. However, in parallel, we worked through academic champions within our initial departments. This model proved to be more effective in releasing logjams.

As noted by Wiley (2007), resources developed for teachers are clearly less expensive to produce than resources for learners because the former do not need to be complete in all respects. As noted in our revised copyright clearance protocols, we have indeed implicitly moved towards this model.

13 Staff Development

Our views on staff development link very closely with our concerns regarding sustainability. As much as possible, our OER project has been designed so that the many different types of staff who have been involved will be able to take their new awareness and practices into their routine work. There will of course be hardware and software maintenance and development implications but these should be marginal costs because our OER infrastructure has been consciously embedded within larger frameworks. For example, our OER repository is now one of 4 existing or planned repositories which share much in common. The real challenges are with human resources – both the support staff that will be necessary and the additional expectations placed upon academics. The extent to which these additional costs are significant depend in part upon whether the University focuses on a marketing, exemplar model or aims to substantially embed OER into academic practice.

Reflecting upon our own experience, a substantial 'sensitisation' or staff awareness programme with respect to OER is vital. In particular and as alluded to above, it is not feasible to expect the whole academic and support community to rely upon the currently insubstantial means by which IPR queries can be resolved. Further, and most importantly, all the elements of OER must be seen as an integral part of *scholarly endeavour*. The inevitable consequence of such a proposition is that the OER agenda should be formally incorporated in accredited staff development programmes. The most obvious vehicle is therefore our programmes that lead to Associate and Fellowship status of the UK Higher Education Academy. By updating these two programmes, we will 'capture' all new staff and inculcate them with affordances that OER can bring. We plan to promote the development of OER materials from scratch (which clearly, could involve repurposing other OER material), and, with each academic having an appropriate understanding of IPR, the work involved in producing infringement-free materials would merely be a marginal load on the time taken to produce traditional digital resources. We then aim to incorporate OER more generally into academics' continuing educational practice.

As noted by Hunt, Richardson and Fung (2009), the national agenda originally envisaged that HEA accredited courses would focus on 'teaching quality' but the founding course team at Exeter expanded the terms of reference to cover the much broader remit of 'teaching practice'. But as they have noted, the perceived increasing 'performativity culture' mitigates against academics overly committing to teaching excellence. To note but one response from an early career academic at Exeter and quoting again from Hunt *et al.* (2009):

I have been advised by senior academics that we should not strive for teaching excellence if this undermines the delivery of grants and publications.



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And this was stated prior to any awareness of the OER agenda! Ultimately, for Exeter, we must acknowledge the pre-eminence of research and we must therefore highlight how OER can contribute to that profile.

In increasingly adopting the language of business or revenue models (see McGill, 2008; Guthrie, Griffiths and Maron, 2008) it is important to observe whether the intent and motivation of different models might lead to different outcomes and also how the term 'free' becomes much more nuanced. Our staff development model thus proposed will take time to embed. Meanwhile, with minimal resources, the University could promote a small selection of exemplar course materials that e.g. also map onto our areas of research excellence in order to promote branding and international marketing. This would help generate a 'spiral of success' that hopefully will invest some meaningful kudos into our staff development programmes. A final quote from an Exeter academic:

Until there is enough good quality resources to make it worthwhile looking for OER then it will be a struggle to get people engaged into producing them.

Our response to address this issue of critical mass is to aim to release a sample of course material for all our programme specifications.

The end game is, as Wiley (2007) observes:

Ideally, open educational resource projects will become another service that the public simply expects of every institution of higher education, and each institution will find the will and the resource within itself to engage in these projects. In the intervening years until that time comes, pilot open educational resource projects must navigate the highly contextual waters of sustainability.

14 The future of OER at Exeter

Notwithstanding the issues previously noted, most staff interviewed believed that OER could contribute to the strategic objectives of the University, giving reasons such as:

A missed opportunity if we do not use it to fly the Exeter flag.

However, the overriding perception was that it is:

Not fundamental to the future of the university.

Clearly, it is this perception that needs to be challenged and it is currently being addressed by identifying linkages with our Internationalisation, Marketing, Research and Knowledge Transfer and our Employability Strategies.

The project funding has enabled us to develop an incipient technical, organisational and personnel OER infrastructure. Indeed, as noted by several respondents:

So many players have become involved and it really has penetrated every aspect of the University.

OER has the potential to glue together so many areas of the University for a particular purpose.



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Our challenge now is to build upon that momentum and indeed the University has very recently agreed to invest additional funds for this purpose.

15 Conclusion

The demand-side aspect of OER is gaining traction at Exeter but more work needs to be done to gain senior support to address the supply side challenges. This is in hand. Currently, engaging with producing OER is not perceived as enhancing an academic's career. This is related to a general view that the University will need to decide how important OER is on the agenda and for what purpose, e.g. marketing or as educational resources and how relevant it is to the University's research profile.

Even in a supportive policy environment, in order to translate OER from mere 'stuff' to something much more useful, we need a sensitisation programme for both academic and also professional support staff and a radical view of how our learning and teaching practices need to be modified to embrace OER. At Exeter, we are just beginning to build awareness of OER into our HEA accredited staff development programmes. This approach lies at the heart of our view on sustainability.

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17 Footnotes

[1] JISC grant 14/08: http://www.jisc.ac.uk/fundingopportunities/funding_calls/2008/12/grant1408.aspx

[2] Open Exeter project website: <http://as.exeter.ac.uk/support/educationenhancementprojects/openexeter/>

[3] Open Exeter repository: <https://open.exeter.ac.uk/repository>

[4] List of all institutional, discipline and individual projects: <http://www.jisc.ac.uk/oer>

[5] JiscLegal: <http://www.jisclegal.ac.uk/>

[6] Open Exeter project team:
<http://as.exeter.ac.uk/support/educationenhancementprojects/openexeter/projectmembers/>