

## Open Practices: a briefing paper

This **briefing paper on Open Practices** is based on [outcomes of the UK OER programme \(phase 2\)](#). It was produced by the UK OER support and evaluation team in February 2012 to review evidence of relations between use and reuse of open educational resources and other aspects of open practice in education.

### What are 'open educational practices'?

The [International Council for Open and Distance Education](#) defines open educational practices, quite simply, as '*practices which support the production, use and reuse of high quality open educational resources (OER)*'. However, this implies a narrow view of educational practice which centres on the production of content. A broader definition would encompass all activities that open up access to educational opportunity, in a context where freely available online content and services (whether 'open', 'educational' or not) are taken as the norm. The [JISC case studies in open education](#) demonstrate something of range: four very different institutions that are taking distinctive approaches to open education at a strategic level.

The [Capetown Open Education Declaration](#), a founding text of the OER movement, concurs with this broader approach:

*'open education is not limited to just open educational resources. It also draws upon open technologies that facilitate collaborative, flexible learning and the open sharing of teaching practices that empower educators to benefit from the best ideas of their colleagues. It may also grow to include new approaches to assessment, accreditation and collaborative learning'*. (Cape Town Open Education Declaration, 2008)

Open educational practices, in light of JISC's case studies and the Capetown declaration, seem to encompass all of the following.

Practice	Examples
Production, management, use and reuse of <b>open educational resources</b>	Openly licensing recorded lectures and associated materials, and making them publicly available via the institution's web site (e.g. <a href="#">OpenSpires</a> ) Collating and managing openly licensed materials relevant to a particular subject area in an open repository (e.g. <a href="#">HumBox</a> )
Developing and applying <b>open/public pedagogies</b> in teaching practice	Facilitating/participating in massively online open courses (see for example the <a href="#">Connectivism MOOC</a> ) Designing courses that require students to contribute to public knowledge resources (e.g. <a href="#">wikipedia</a> , web sites) alongside teachers, academics, and the public
<b>Open learning</b> and gaining access to open learning opportunities	Learners accessing freely available online content (e.g. through sites such as the <a href="#">OER Commons</a> , though more usually through standard internet searches) Learners enrolling on free open/distance learning courses, either as 'tasters' for paid courses (e.g. <a href="#">OpenLearn</a> ) or on a

peer to peer model (e.g. [P2PU](#))  
Learners collaborating on open knowledge-building projects (e.g. wikis, web sites)  
Learners sharing outcomes with one another (e.g. essay sharing sites)  
Open accreditation or certification is an emerging aspect of open learning (see e.g. the [OERU](#))

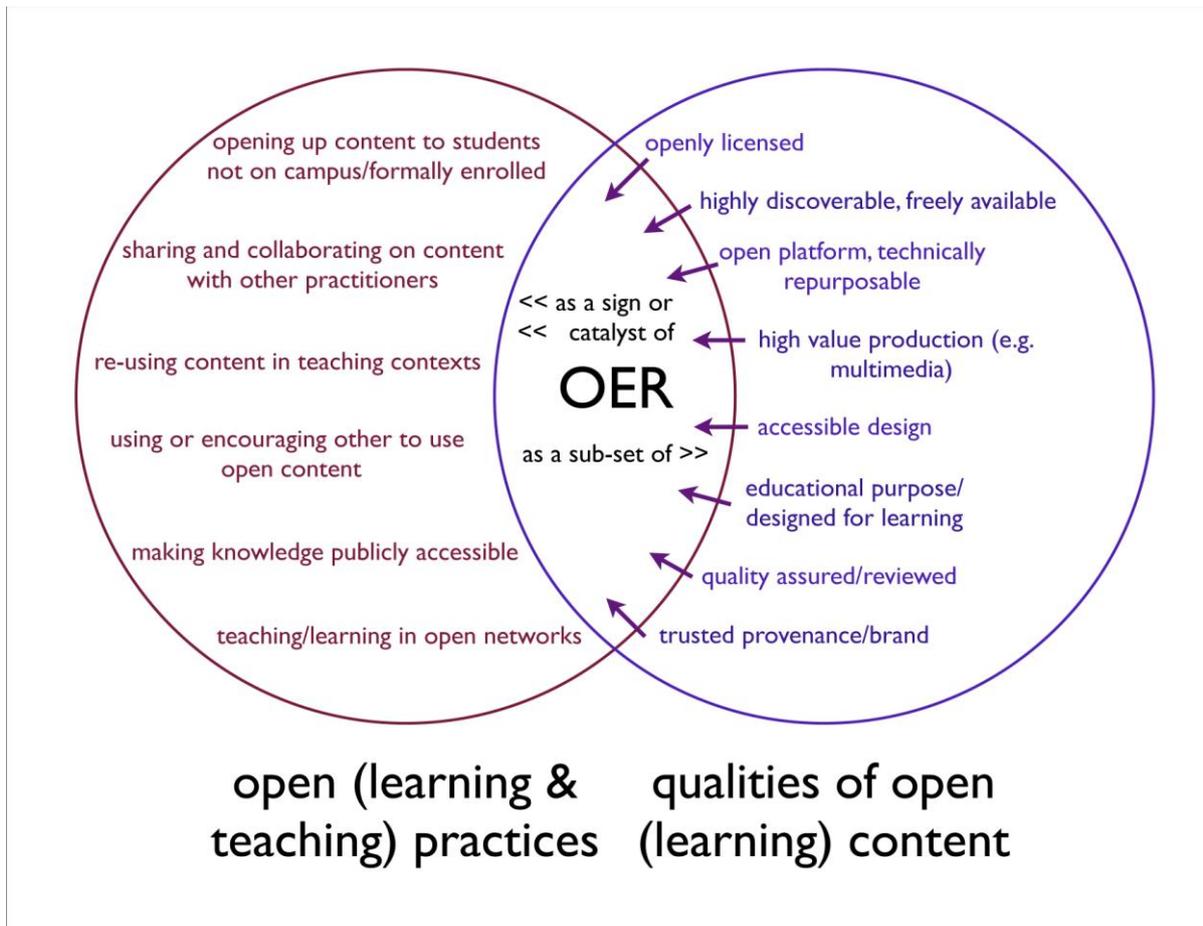
Practising **open scholarship**, to encompass open access publication, open science and open research (See Weller, Martin (2011). [The Digital Scholar: How Technology Is Transforming Scholarly Practice](#)) Making [research data](#) available in an open institutional repository, perhaps supported by apps to enable learning/teaching use (see e.g. City University's [Open Access Repository](#) and the University of Southampton [Open Data service](#))  
[Publishing research findings](#) in an open peer-reviewed journal (see e.g. the [OpenScience](#) directory) or repository

**Open sharing** of teaching ideas and know-how Contributing to an open wiki or database of expertise in the use of specific learning technologies (see for example [Cloudworks](#))  
Sharing examples of teaching practice in an open subject community or repository (for example created using [EdShare](#) open source software)

Using **open technologies** (web-based platforms, applications and services) in an educational context Using freely available third party software or [web 2.0 services](#) to support learning activities, ensuring all learners have equal access  
Building open environments for collaboration using cloud services such as [social bookmarking](#) and [media sharing](#) sites.

This briefing paper is written from the perspective of the [UK open educational resources](#) (OER) programme. We are not experts in these other aspects of open practice. However, we are interested to know how the use and re-use of OERs is related to openness in other areas of educational activity, both personal and institutional. Does a general embrace of open educational practices make individuals and/or institutions more likely to engage with OER? Does OER activity make other kinds of open practice more attractive or achievable? And does a more general engagement in open practice lead to greater benefits than a focus on OERs alone? This latter question is particularly important when it comes to developing [benefit models](#) for engagement in OER.

To support this investigation, we have visualised OERs as the conjunction of open *content* practices with open *educational* practices more broadly. In relation to open content, it is interesting to ask what is special about *educational* content and how it is made openly available, licensed and distributed or shared. In relation to open practices, it is interesting to ask how practices around *content* contribute to or are supported by other open practices across the sphere of educational activity.



## Why engage in open educational practices?

Our evidence for the [benefits of open educational practices](#) are drawn from our experience with OERs, but we have used this to speculate about the general benefits of making educational activities more open through the use of web-based services and media.

## Institutional benefits

Many universities are releasing open educational resources, e.g. via iTunesU, specifically to promote their learning experience to prospective students. The UK OER programme has [documented significant successes](#) in achieving this. It seems likely that a similar process is at work with open research data and open access publishing initiatives: as well as showcasing specific strengths and successes, they demonstrate a forward-looking approach that is attractive to potential research staff and research partners.

Some universities are using [open access to research data](#) as part of a public outreach agenda, associated with the need to communicate with business and community stakeholders and to demonstrate research impact in the REF. Through the use of web 2.0 tools, public communication can become public engagement, with stakeholders contributing to research and knowledge banks on issues that concern them.

The [Houghton report](#) demonstrated that open access solutions to academic publishing are highly cost effective for participating institutions and for the sector. Two separate JISC

programmes – the [Virtual Research Environment](#) programme and the [Business and Community Engagement](#) programme – have both shown that collaborative environments can be built efficiently using open technologies.

Many universities are interested in extending their reach beyond the UK. Using OERs to provide course materials to students located in other countries or on partner campuses is an obvious trend. Learners in 185 different countries have downloaded material from [Oxford University's iTunesU](#) site, and universities with a lower international profile have still enhanced their global reach considerably in this way. The [OER University](#) represents a new model of international collaboration which allows study across institutions and which blurs the boundaries between informal and formal learning.

Digital literacy, capability and confidence are critical to open practices of all kinds. Universities that engage in OER projects have demonstrably built capacity – legal, technical and educational – which enhances their ability to respond to new demands and opportunities. There is also evidence from JISC-funded projects that universities continue to build on the partnerships created by open access initiatives long after they are completed.

### **Personal benefits - staff**

Most staff who engage in open practices say they do so out of a commitment to open scholarship and open access to learning opportunity. There seems little reason to doubt these motives. Academics with a passion for pedagogy can reach more learners with a single, popular open resource than with a decade of classroom teaching. Researchers can see their papers commented on and their findings taken up by people who they would never otherwise have encountered.

Showcasing is another reason for individual academics to engage in open release. We have encountered many examples of academics who have built a new digital reputation through involvement in an open release project, or who have secured a legacy of their teaching experience or scholarly activities. Reduced security in academic employment may make open release more attractive as a way of enhancing personal reputation. Academic blogs, slideshare presentations, youtube lectures, online articles and digital teaching portfolios – all increasingly part of the apparatus of scholarship – are even more valuable to individuals who are or expect to be in the job market.

Finally, staff involved in open projects funded by the JISC almost always report that they have worked across institutional or departmental boundaries in new ways. Open practices enable new kinds of collaboration to take place. Staff benefit from these new contacts and from the new ideas and skills they are exposed to.

Staff report that they also gain personally from the benefits to students and to subject communities as reported below.

### **Personal benefits – students**

The most obvious benefit of open learning resources is that students are free to study in a wide range of settings. This can help overcome problems with access, or can mean that learning in the field, the workplace, or on placement is enhanced by access to relevant content.

Use of open educational content, whether guided by teaching staff or self-directed, exposes learners to a wider range of ideas, media, representations, and conceptual approaches than a closed course can provide. We have found evidence of students being troubled by this

*Beetham, H., Falconer, I., McGill, L. and Littlejohn, A. Open practices: briefing paper. JISC, 2012*  
<https://oersynth.pbworks.com/w/page/51668352/OpenPracticesBriefing>

variety: they worry that they will be penalised if they use material not approved by their lecturer or will 'waste time' covering material that is not central to their assessments. This demonstrates that open approaches need careful introduction to students. Where teaching staff explicitly embrace and reward self-directed research, students benefit from the exposure.

Open teaching/learning practices in the curriculum allow students to develop relevant skills for living and working in an era of open knowledge. These skills are discussed in more detail in the following sections.

Releasing sample OERs as an aspect of course marketisation – a growing trend – allows students to make meaningful choices between learning opportunities, both when they are choosing what and where to study and when they are choosing options within their programme.

Open research helps to blur the boundaries between learning and original exploration. Taught students can be directed towards open access research data and publications, particularly in subject areas where these are becoming more widely available. Students can also become involved in research projects much earlier in their careers if projects are conducted in an open fashion, involving a range of expert and less expert contributors.

## **Community benefits**

Social media and networking software are allowing new practices of sharing to emerge in academic communities. Although these tend to be more powerful in research communities - perhaps because they are already closer knit – broader subject communities are emerging around an interest in teaching and shared learning materials. The [community repositories](#) developed by the Humanities, Social Sciences and Art&Design projects under UK OER funding support a number of practices that make open content more sustainable, for example open peer review, open commentary, open sharing of teaching experiences associated with content (replacing or augmenting one-time-authored educational metadata), open sharing of teaching and research profiles, and collaborative development.

This approach is decentralised, sustainable at scale, and requires lower injections of capital than institutional initiatives focused on high-value content and reputation enhancement. But however low the threshold of membership, sharing communities cannot reach out as widely as content 'in the wild' of the open web. The two approaches can be seen as complementary. Sharing communities may be a sustainable means of developing and quality assuring OERs, while a broader range of materials on the open web will continue to be discovered and brought into teaching/learning practice by members of the community. A key focus of the UK OER programme now is aggregating these available materials more effectively so that teachers and learners can discover and reuse them more easily.

Benefits to academic communities, then, include enhanced discussion and debate about academic ideas, a much wider pool of resources to draw on, and opportunities for collaboration among teaching peers.

## OERs and open learning

In our 2011 [overview of UK OER phase 2](#) projects and their findings, we noted that providing a quality learning experience was a key motive for releasing OERs. The most obvious way in which OERs influence approaches to learning is through their accessibility.

OERs were seen as particularly valuable to remote students, whether studying part time or at a distance, work-based, field-based, or on placement. [Release strand projects in phase 2](#) of the UK OER programme focused particularly on these learners and found that, where it was designed for open access situations, open content could create new conditions for engagement.

*Learners can access a curriculum which is more flexible, visible, tailored, blended and integrated with real life experience, which allows them to integrate learning and work and which can provide a bridge into university from work-based or informal learning.*  
([Learning from W/OeRK](#) )

The inherent accessibility of OERs gives learners the option to study in whatever locations they find most conducive, and these same properties make OERs accessible to non-enrolled learners. Institutions were also beginning to see the value in using OERs to provide 'taster' learning experiences, both converting informal learners to potential applicants, and raising general awareness of the university brand. But formally enrolled learners also have high expectations of content accessibility because of their own informal learning practices. *'We are driven by the students, they lead and we follow ... to Google and YouTube for example. Digital resources are superceding staff's lecture structure.'* ([ADM focus groups](#))

We know from the JISC [learners experiences of e-learning programme](#) and early baseline reports from the JISC [Developing Digital Literacies](#) programme that formally enrolled learners are engaging in a 'blend' of formal and informal learning practices. We can speculate that OERs designed to provide a bridge between informal and formal learning – crudely, to get informal learners to engage with formal learning opportunities – can also provide a bridge between different learning practices for students already engaged in study. In both cases OERs provide this bridge by being *openly and freely available*, but (unlike the vast majority of freely available content) *designed by educators to support the learning process*.

Beyond their accessibility, OERs were also seen as changing learning and teaching relationships in productive ways. Projects that had involved students in their work generally found that they were comfortable with using open educational resources:

*'In their open comments [students] were very enthusiastic and encouraging of the notion of open educational resources... In some respects, students are leading staff, departments and institutions, to the wealth of online resources'* ([SCOOTER Project](#))

However, this project and others found a lack of judgement on the part of students encountering open educational content. The 2011 [Learner Use of Online Educational Resources for Learning \(LUOER\)](#) study concluded that students had generally poor appreciation of provenance and quality when assessing online resources, while the SCOOTER project confirmed that the vast majority students could not distinguish OER (openly licensed, educationally purposed) from other freely available materials. The [Pilot Phase C-Change project](#) reported that: *[engaging with open content] provides an opportunity for introducing students to critical thinking, appreciation of copyright / IPR / plagiarism and general information literacy*. This is clearly so, but teachers should treat OERs as a starting point in developing these skills. It would be wrong to assume that 'digital natives' come ready-equipped to learn effectively from open content:

work needs to be done to not just train staff to search for and use OER but for students also, as users and potentially contributors ([SCOOTER Project](#))

We should also acknowledge that the (albeit limited) experience of UK OER projects in engaging students as collaborators in open learning have not always met with enthusiasm. The [Triton Project](#) brought academics and students together to collaborate on content creation and found that relationships were significantly altered. A focus group organised by the [C-SAP Cascade project](#) found that freely available digital resources – whether openly licensed or not – challenged assumptions about what was academically acceptable. These shifts require managing: the CSAP team suggested that where OERs are used there should be a rethinking of assessment methods and of how learning outcomes are negotiated.

Students in these cases were not struggling with the technical skills of editing, uploading and managing content but with the learning skills of trusting and exercising judgement, beyond a strategic focus on what tutors and examiners will value:

*as undergraduates, their preference is to focus upon specific and directed research, and on self-directed activities that can 'clearly' (and positively) influence the grades attained in assignments (and exams* [C-SAP Cascade project](#)

Demand for open, self-directed and participative learning is not emerging strongly from students themselves. Rather, in preparing students for a knowledge-sharing society, we may need to be proactive in expanding their digital literacies and their learning horizons.

## OERs and open pedagogies or teaching practices

The potential for OERs to change teaching practices can be implied from the evidence on learning reported in the previous section. This potential lies around changing attitudes in design of the curriculum, away from viewing content as constitutive of the curriculum and towards viewing it as an artefact of the learning, research and knowledge-sharing processes learners undertake. However, evidence that this constitutes a new pedagogy or trend in pedagogic practice is lacking in the JISC-funded projects, partly because their objectives and timing did not tie in well with the curriculum development cycle..

Several project teams worked with their host institution or subject community to develop a shared understanding of how learning and teaching might be supported by open educational resources. The C-SAP project drafted a [Pedagogical framework for OERs](#) which considers features such as how private or public a resource is, and how contextualised or decontextualised, as aspects influencing its pedagogic use.

Openness to ideas, recognition of contextual differences, negotiation of meanings and co-creation of materials are central to learning and teaching in the subject areas of Art and Design and Social Science. Arguably, what subject teachers were doing in these OER projects was rediscovering the specificity of their disciplinary pedagogy through a new lens (content sharing on the open web), rather than discovering of a new 'open' pedagogy. However, the [Learning from WOpen](#) project described how release of open resources for workplace use implied 'large paradigm shifts in how the University designs and delivers the curriculum'. These might include:

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 flexible, negotiated curricula

marketising the support of learning in organisations, rather than marketising content or on-campus learning experiences

In all of these contexts, what is made open is not 'content' but rather traces of the dialogues that have taken place between learners and mentors, or between learners and their creative productions. These traces require considerable recontextualisation if they are to have any value in reuse. Also, because of the nature of the traces involved, issues of student privacy and of student IPR (particularly in creative subjects) become problematic. And yet it is precisely these richly contextualised, personal, creative/reflective, co-constructive activities that are most engaging and developmental for learners, and arguably have the best claim to represent an 'open' pedagogy.

A robust conclusion from the [subject strand of the UK OER pilot phase](#), borne out in a more limited way here, was that different subject areas adopt those aspects of open practice that amplify their existing pedagogic practices most effectively, whether those practices be content-based, process-based, or passing on tacit knowledge. Attempts to engage students reflected this range of different pedagogic approaches, described by the C-SAP project as: 'Content approach' - existing content repackaged for open release  
'Connoisseur approach' - students as reviewers and selectors of open content  
'Creative empowerment approach' - students actively producing and publicly critiquing or contributing to OERs

## OERs and sharing learning/teaching ideas

The JISC-funded [Good Intentions report](#) concluded that informal reuse of learning and teaching materials by other teachers is fairly common. As confirmed by the [UK OER pilot phase](#) and in much greater detail by the University of Oxford TALL team in their [OER Impact Study](#), teachers make extensive use of online content, particularly when they are called on to teach an unfamiliar aspect of their subject. However, they generally do not think of this as 'sharing' or feel part of a community of subject teachers as a result. Openly licensed and explicitly educational content (i.e. OERs) may not be clearly distinguished from other types of material.

Increased awareness of OERs does lead to new practices, for example restricting searches to openly licensed content, looking for content via subject and institutional repositories first, or re-working content to get around third party copyright restrictions. However, not all these changes are regarded as positive. Some academics found that learning more about licensing and IPR actually made them more anxious about reuse.

At present, then, we see learning and teaching materials being most commonly distributed on a produce/release → reuse/consume model rather than a model of sharing and even co-construction. Projects based around subject disciplines where a collaborative ethos already existed were able to build engagement between teaching staff with facilities to comment, favourite, review and rate each other's resources. This was not always an easy process:

*A concern was also raised that making materials openly available might open oneself up to negative judgement from colleagues because of the perception of putting oneself forward as a self-appointed expert without adequate peer review. These views illustrate how the topic of licensing touches on sensitive issues of professional identity' ([C-SAP Cascade project expert group in final report](#))*

Establishing collaborative communities took time and commitment, and getting community processes recognised and embedded at institutional level was sometimes challenging.

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*[in our subject area] academics have developed their teaching materials as an individual effort whilst viewing research as a team and community endeavour. Peer review of teaching is also associated in many institutions with capability assessment and HR processes... [And] in our own institution, for example, the repository has traditionally been for research outputs. OER development, release and re-use challenges these distinctions. CPD4HE*

For enhanced sharing of learning and teaching ideas within institutions, two approaches were recommended by projects. First, OERs should be explicitly introduced to staff through workshops, training courses, and PGCert courses for new teaching staff. Second, institutional processes such as curriculum approval, VLE course approval, and staff appraisal should include consideration of OERs being developed and used. *In our institution a current initiative to take account of e-learning in quality management and enhancement processes offers an opportunity to address OER production and use. The course approval processes ask questions about resources and library support; a specific question about OER use and sources would mean that new courses must consider OERs. OER considerations could also be incorporated into VLE course approval processes (design for openness, for instance), and into events, CPD workshops and training courses. (CPD4HE project)*

There is evidence that engagement with OER release has stimulated critical reflection and reconsideration of existing practices, particularly focussing on how learning resources might be used in different contexts. Instead of developing resources for one specific cohort or programme, staff had to consider how materials would be used by learners studying in very different settings. New kinds of conversation about the learning experience took place as a result.

*When we are thinking about what works best as an OER, we are invariably asking questions about our discipline and how we think about teaching and learning. (C-SAP CASCADE project)*

*By engaging with OER creation and sharing... we effectively open a door into this hitherto secret garden of art and design educational practice. (ALTO project)*

## OERs and open technologies

UK OER projects were required to deposit records in the Jorum open repository and many also used open institutional repositories to host their original materials. Projects found that open platforms and services such as twitter, youtube and slideshare were critical to making OERs discoverable. OER practitioners are now looking for technologies of open sharing that are extremely useable by mainstream academics.

*The importance of Google and other popular commercial sites cannot be underestimated; both in terms of the resources they produce and the expectations that they provide the user. OER repositories are judged in this light and, when this is coupled with an assumption that copyright is of little significance, accounts for the low use of such repositories. (C-SAP Cascade project)*

*'It needs to be as simple as right-click, save' (PORSCHÉ project)*

## OERs and open scholarship

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The UK OER programme has to date identified few links between OER and open scholarship. However, the forms of collaborative knowledge-building described in the previous sections blur the boundaries between learning and research. From other programmes, for example the [Exeter Cascade](#) and [Vitae](#) projects in the JISC Developing Digital Literacies programme, and from the JISC [research data management programme](#), there is evidence that open scholarly practices are popular among early career researchers, and that this is filtering through into teaching approaches that make use of open data (for example to allow practice with data analysis and interpretation) and open access publications.

Digital reputation management is a skill required both by researchers seeking funding and by students seeking work. Social networking facilities such as commenting, reviewing, rating and referral are increasingly used to support scholarly exchange: it will be interesting to see whether this lowers the threshold of participation in scholarly communities for students who have acquired these habits in non-academic contexts.

## Common issues in open educational practices

There are **different cultures of openness** at different institutions and in different sectors (see the [Open practice across sectors](#) briefing paper on this site) but we can identify some common issues that arise across all the different practices we have described. Addressing these issues in a conscious and strategic fashion is likely to help institutions move towards more open practices in a managed way.

**Legal and contractual issues** (see also [Phase2 Development and Release Issues](#)): this includes managing IPR, managing consent, and open licensing. How free are members of staff to openly release research and teaching content? What policies, advice and support are in place to help them? Although many excellent resources have been developed by [JISC Legal](#) and [Web2Rights](#), and are summarised in the [OER infokit](#), we have seen that local expertise is valuable in applying these principles to specific contexts.

**Technical and data management issues** (see also [Phase2 Development and Release Issues](#)): this includes hosting and management of open research/educational resources e.g. in open repositories; access to third party services/applications to support educational and scholarly interactions; exposure of institutional data where appropriate to support interoperability and open sharing across institutional boundaries. The [OER infokit](#) and [Open Data infokit](#) describe some of the technical challenges in different areas of the open landscape. However, all agree that managing data and information systems for open access requires strategic oversight and joined up thinking.

**Cultural inertia/cultural change** (see also [Phase2 Practice change](#) and [Phase2 Cultural Considerations](#)): open practices challenge existing cultures of academic institutions and subject areas, while at the same time upholding some values that are very long-established (such as public access to knowledge, transparency of research methods, and open peer review). The JISC [round-table debate on open access](#) recently concluded that a mixed culture of open and closed practices would be a reality for some time to come. The picture is the same in open educational resources and open research. Some institutions and subject areas are embracing the open agenda wholeheartedly while others remain sceptical, for reasons that may be historical or cultural, or may simply reflect the personal views of key players. It seems likely that the benefits of 'opening up' will accelerate as the volume of available resources grows, and that there may be a tipping point beyond which open access becomes the norm and special processes will have to be applied to keep learning, research

and knowledge transfer materials in a closed environment. But we are some way off this yet, and work is still needed to define and communicate the benefits.

**Roles, responsibilities and rewards** (see also [Phase2: impacts on staff](#)): open practices demand new kinds of expertise and this expertise needs to be rewarded, whether through financing of new roles or recognition for new skills that existing staff have developed. Open practices often cross boundaries between academic and para-academic roles, and can have powerful consequences for how academics perceive and play out their identities. How are staff recognised for their contributions to open learning materials or open research? Are staff confident that the impact on their reputation and career will be positive?

These issues are strongly tied up with – indeed are manifestations of – cultural attitudes to the open agenda. After struggling to put their work on a sustainable footing, many UK OER projects concluded that for open release of educational materials to become mainstream, there would need to be significant changes in the rewards associated with teaching and learning. If this conclusion seems to pit teaching against research, there are tensions within both area of academic life between an ethos of public access to knowledge (and a history of public funding) and a requirement on institutions to make best use of their knowledge resources.

In concluding this brief review of issues, we need to note that the needs of different stakeholders in open practices can be at odds. One effect of openness is to uncouple people in time and space, making connection easier, but complex negotiation of needs, understandings and perceptions more difficult. This is true for learners and teachers, for institutions and (potential) students, for researchers and stakeholders in their research. Different stakeholders also have different priorities and motivations. While for staff personal recognition and reward is key, student motivation to engage with open materials is more about the quality of their learning experience and the relevance of the resources to their learning goals. Resources designed for HE students may not be useful to the public in general. Resources made accessible to learners in informal contexts by including pedagogic support are made less valuable to teachers who want to repurpose them in different pedagogic contexts. Open scholarship has its equivalent compromises.

## Conclusions

Questions and contradictions remain inherent the idea of openness. Is availability on the open web ('in the wild') paradigmatic of open practice, or are the participative practices of communities to be preferred because – despite requiring authentication to enter – they appear to be more sustainable? Do open pedagogies necessarily depend on open content, or might they revolve around learner-generated content, securely sequestered behind a firewall? How do the common values of public knowledge play out in research communities with very different investments in their data? Whatever the perspective, it is clear that 'open' is not a single quality that educational practices have, or lack.

In summary, although educational resources are an essential feature of the digital landscape, and one that students need to engage with, it is not clear that educational practitioners should focus primarily on producing/releasing open content if they want to enhance access to educational opportunity and public knowledge. Releasing educational content under open licence demands some confidence and expertise. The UK OER programme has highlighted legal, technical and pedagogical considerations that may seem insurmountable to individuals, particularly in the absence of strategic institutional support. OER may not, therefore, be the first sign of openness in educational practice. Other practices may have more immediate pay-offs and a lower adoption threshold, while OER

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development continues quietly as – for example – materials developed for virtual learning environments become more 'open-ready' through better practices of content design.

We believe that future funding should address open content development and management within the wider landscape of open educational practices. For some subject disciplines, for some learner markets, and for some institutional business models, OERs will prove a worthwhile investment on their own. For others there will be more significant benefits from the use of open tools and environments, open publishing models, open pedagogies, and open research/scholarship approaches. Central funding alone will not open up valued knowledge for public use, nor will it reverse the marketisation of some knowledge services, but it can provide examples of local benefit and allow knowhow to be shared.

The open education movement remains an emergent phenomenon, tragically coincident with an abrupt fall in the funding available to education across the Western economies, and in the UK with a deeper convulsion in the funding regime that makes institutions reluctant to invest in new practices that do not produce immediate returns. The benefits of open educational practices are uneven, slow to emerge, and dependent on other factors. The greatest potential benefits are communal rather than tied to the competitive advantage of individuals or institutions. It remains to be seen whether the gaps in our understanding of open practice will be filled in the coming years, and whether the emerging practices of open knowledge sharing become mainstream enough for the true benefits to be felt.