

ENGAGING; EMPLOYERS, PROFESSIONAL BODIES AND OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

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INTRODUCTION

National public sector changes raise the need for organisations to work more closely (BIS 2011, DOH 2010). Also, with the publishing of the Brown Report (Brown 2010), employability skills and understanding for graduates have been placed high on the agenda, with many employment-related new initiatives starting up in universities. As part of the HALS project, one of our aims is to explore these national needs by establishing partnerships with a range of external organisations.

At De Montfort University, our Phase 2 UKOER Project "SCOOTER" (Sickle Cell Open – Online Topics and Educational Resources) forged informal relationships with external partners, including the Sickle Cell Society and clinical biochemists within the NHS. In this project we recognised the valuable contribution that partners could bring in terms of providing high quality assets of high quality and case-studies ideas representing real-life scenarios. In HALS, part of UKOER Phase 3, our aim is to explore these relationships more systematically for the mutual benefit of all involved.

EXTERNAL PARTNERS

The external partners identified for HALS were both existing collaborators (e.g. Leicestershire Constabulary), organisations where there were links with one or two individuals (e.g. NHS), or entirely new collaborators (e.g. Oxford University Press). They were chosen to represent a range of end users and professional bodies relevant to our health and life science programmes including Biomedical Science, Medical Science and Forensic Science.

EXTERNAL PARTNER	PARTICIPATION	APPROVAL DECISION
Leicestershire Constabulary	Producers, end-users	Organisational
National Health Service	Producers, end-users	Individual / teams
Oxford University Press	End-users	Organisational
Forensic Focus	Producers	Organisational
The Fingerprint Society	Quality control	Organizational

LEVEL OF PARTICIPATION

Public sector participation generally includes the provision of assets to be developed into OER e.g. including histology photographs, laboratory data, career planning, and professional and technical advice. These organisations are also end-users of the OER; the materials developed for our science undergraduates is also relevant to their own junior staff professional development, e.g. histology resources for final year Biomedical Science students is relevant for biomedical scientists in the NHS requiring Health Professions Council registration, and junior histopathologists seeking registration with the Royal College of Pathologists registration. The participation of the local Constabulary and the Fingerprint Society ensure the forensic science resources are of high quality and meet professional body requirements, and are specifically tailored to deliver the required competencies.



APPROVAL FOR DECISIONS

All discussions with external collaborators regarding the concept of open education have been entirely positively received. Staff at all levels are all supportive of the concept and even discussions that were anticipated to be more difficult for example agreeing copyright and licensing terms, the partners have always been happy to go with the level of Creative Commons license required by the project (BY SA).

The discussions are driven by a shared goal of both parties contributing to learning materials that will then be of mutual benefit. In addition, national strategy changes have validated and given approval to this dialogue. University strategy has changed and tasked institutions with putting the undergraduate experience at the heart of educational practices including emphasis on employability, and similarly public sector organisations such as the NHS have been challenged to work more closely with education institutions to support professional development needs of staff.

The level of decision making ranged from organisational i.e. board approval, senior management sign off, senior management approval of time and commitment, through to an individual basis where individuals or small teams were happy to collaborate. In these instances, licensing permissions to release materials using Creative Commons were gained at a departmental leadership level.

MOTIVATIONS FOR INVOLVEMENT

As part of this project, further research will be conducted to understand partner motivations and perceived barriers, but the initial ideas are based on the discussions already held.

EXTERNAL PARTNER	BUSINESS MODEL
Leicestershire Constabulary	Graduate employability
National Health Service	Graduate employability / staff continual professional development (CPD)
Oxford University Press	Business development / quality supplementary information
Forensic Focus	Business development
The Fingerprint Society	Maintaining quality of professional materials

In our experience to date, the motivations for, and outcomes from these discussions are not just about OER. Particularly with the NHS, discussions about OER has catalyzed wider collaborations in terms of research opportunities, and has led to new opportunities for final year science dissertation students and post-graduate opportunities for university students. Similar experiences have come to light with the forensic science professionals which have also yielded unexpected opportunities that have outweighed the pre-conceived objectives of the project.

In conclusion, the paradox is that the external partners are understanding and buying into the concept of sharing mutually beneficial resources, whereas in the our university the benefits of such collaboration are often not as quickly recognized, and the justification and persuasion of colleagues is often a more detailed process. We conclude, that working with external partners for the production of OER is mutually beneficial, not just in terms of enhancing student educational experiences but by catalyzing dialogue around a whole range of collaborative opportunities.