



INTERNET DISCUSSION FORUM
OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES FINDINGS FROM AN OECD STUDY
13 November – 1 December 2006

OECD study of OER: forum report

ALEXA JOYCE

INTRODUCTION

In August 2005, the OECD Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) initiated a study to investigate Open Educational Resource initiatives in tertiary education, with support from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. The term, ‘Open Educational Resources’ (OER), refers to web-based materials, offered freely and openly for use and re-use in teaching, learning and research. The OER movement offers universities and colleges a considerable opportunity to share their scholarship and knowledge – but it also presents many challenges. The objective of the study was therefore to survey the range of current OER initiatives, and to clarify and analyse critical issues facing institutional providers of OER, in particular addressing four questions:

- How to develop sustainable cost/benefit models for OER initiatives? There is a need to define business models for OER. Most current initiatives rely on donor financing and are not sustainable in the long term.
- What are the Intellectual Property Rights issues linked to OER initiatives? Issues include striking a balance between ‘openness’ versus control over intellectual property, defining legal frameworks for OER initiatives, and issues connected to distribution and equity.
- What are the incentives and barriers for universities and faculty staff to deliver their material to OER initiatives? This has both an individual and organizational dimension, and significant policy implications at all levels.
- How to improve access and usefulness for the users of OER initiatives? This brings together many issues, including assessing the quality of resources, adapting resources to new contexts, and technology requirements and barriers.¹

OECD/CERI carried out an exercise to map the scale and scope of current OER initiatives. Web surveys, both open and targeted at specific institutions and individual faculty members, were also launched. The targeted survey was followed by more detailed interviews and site visits to a limited number of institutions, to gain insight into why they had become involved in the OER movement and how they had responded to the issues outlined above. Finally, an ‘expert group’ was convened periodically to discuss both the conceptual issues and the progress of the study.

¹ For more background to the OECD/CERI OER study, see “Open Educational Resources: opportunities and challenges”, available at <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/1/49/36243575.pdf>.

Throughout, OECD/CERI has worked in close co-operation with the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP), which has a complementary project on OER. Since October 2005, and also with support from the Hewlett Foundation, IIEP has been working to raise awareness of the concept of OER and to explore key issues, through online discussions. The first Internet discussion forum took place in late 2005. Discussions have continued throughout 2006 in a more informal Community of Interest.²

In late 2006, the IIEP international Community of Interest on OER was joined by members of the OECD expert group and other interested individuals to discuss the initial findings of the OECD/CERI study. The group of over 600 participants from 98 countries had the opportunity to not only preview the findings and conclusions of the report, but also to comment upon and offer input to the final version. The discussion was organized in three, week-long sessions, each focusing on a different aspect of the report:

- Week 1 (13-19 November): What do we know about users and producers of Open Educational Resources?
- Week 2 (20-26 November): Why are individuals and institutions using and producing OER?
- Week 3 (27 November – 1 December): What are the policy implications and most pressing policy issues arising from the OECD OER study?

The specific aims of the forum were to:

- identify additional OER studies and research activities, as well as initiatives and projects not included in the original draft of the report;
- obtain feedback on the motivations of institutions and individuals involved in the production of OER;
- understand institutional policies geared to remove barriers and obstacles for OER production and use;
- identify and classify responses to policy issues by level – from the institutional to the international.

MAPPING OF OER

The Background Note for the first week's discussion,³ conveyed the range of post-secondary Open Educational Resources now available around the world:

- Over 2,500 open access courses are available from over 200 universities, following the 'opencourseware' model popularized by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. They include courses from seven institutions in the USA, the 176 members of the China Open Resources for Education (CORE) consortium, the ten universities participating in the Japanese OCW Consortium and the eleven member universities of the ParisTech OCW project.
- Non course-based OER – from individual learning objects to open access textbooks and journals – are also available through an ever-growing number of online communities, portals and repositories. Notable large-scale examples include Wikipedia, Math World, Rice University Connexions, Textbook Revolution, MERLOT and ARIADNE.

² For more information about the initial forum and subsequent community discussions, see http://www.unesco.org/iiep/virtualuniversity/forumshome.php?queryforums_id=3.

³ Available at http://www.unesco.org/iiep/virtualuniversity/forumsfiche.php?queryforumspages_id=26.

