

The roles of libraries and information professionals in Open Educational Resources (OER) initiatives

Survey Report. Executive Summary

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This report contains the findings of a study carried out by the Centre for Academic Practice & Learning Enhancement (CAPLE) and Centre for Educational Technology and Interoperability Standards (CETIS), at the University of Strathclyde. The study focuses on the involvement of the Library as an organizational unit, and of individual librarians and other information science specialists, in open educational resources (OER) initiatives. This research study contributes to the current Open Educational Resources (OER) Programme [<http://www.jisc.ac.uk/oer>], an initiative by JISC and the HEA whose objective is to promote the creation, dissemination, access and use of OER. This programme represents a firm commitment by UK Higher Education (HE) institutions to the OER movement.

This study is based on a survey targeted to OER projects worldwide, partially based on preliminary work done by CETIS Research Fellow John Robertson (2010b). The current survey incorporates 15 questions, which make use of scaled, multiple choice, structured, and open questions. It was implemented online using SurveyGizmo, and responses were gathered during October and November 2011.

Disregarding partial, empty, duplicated, and problematic responses, the total number of usable participants was 57. However, as all of the survey questions were optional, the number of useful answers varied between different sections, questions and options. Nine of the participants (15.8%) only answered the first section providing some basic information about their OER Initiative and its objectives. These contributions were not excluded as they provide significant insights into the aims of current OER initiatives around the world.

The geographical distribution of survey participants is quite heterogeneous with contributions coming from all continents. The countries with most contributors are, in descending order, the United Kingdom, USA, Spain, South Africa, India, and Nigeria. The majority of contributions came from HE institutions (81.3%), with fewer contributions coming from research centres, publishers, international organizations, NGO, and even an e-learning private centre and a high school. The majority of respondents participate in UKOER and Open Course Ware projects.

The main objectives of these OER initiatives are: to implement a repository or a content management/publishing system for OER release (57.9%); to release existing institutional content as OER (56.1%); and, to raise awareness of OER and encourage the use of open educational content within the local academic community (52.6%).

The analysis of those survey questions regarding the involvement and roles of the library and librarians at OER initiatives shows a considerable heterogeneity of situations. Their involvement of librarians is significant: three out of four projects

teams count on at least one librarian, and most of them are based on the institutional library. In half of the projects accounted for, the library is leading or a partner of the initiative. The main areas of library's involvement are: description and classification, management, preservation, dissemination, and promotion of OER. In order to support these activities, librarians provided expertise in information science areas, especially: metadata standards, vocabularies, indexing and classification, information retrieval, information literacy, and repository technology and management. It was also found, however, that librarians needed to develop expertise in different areas, including SEO and IPR and licensing options, but mainly about e-learning and OER knowledge, technologies and standards.

OER initiatives participating in this study positively valued the libraries' and librarians' involvement. Most respondents considered the contributions made to be absolutely indispensable (36%) or very valuable (25%). However, a small, but significant percentage of projects felt that the involvement of libraries and librarians had no influence (11%) or that their impact had been insufficient (5%) to date.

The final conclusions of this study indicate that even if the library and/or librarians are well valued by projects where they are already engaged with, the participation of the library is still not widespread, and a significant lack of awareness exists both from OER initiatives with regards to library activities and from the libraries about the resources released by OER initiatives. However, most of the objectives of content-focused OER initiatives are strongly related to library and information science activities and skills and we consider that their involvement would be of great benefit to those projects not yet engaged with them.

We found a clear need to promote the role that libraries and librarians can play in OER initiatives, highlighting the expertise and competencies which libraries and librarians can offer. This active promotion is needed to build awareness among stakeholders about libraries and librarians potential contribution to the OER movement, but also, among libraries and librarians about their key role as OER advocates within and out-with their institutions.

We suggest that a further analysis of the practices of OER initiatives regarding their strategies for storing and dissemination of content, the creation and management of OER collections, and the OER lifecycle is required to effectively promote the role of libraries and information professionals. This analysis, together with an accurate identification of objectives and needs of OER initiatives, would allow for better development of best practice guidelines and recommendations, where librarians have an important role to play.

We conclude that libraries, libraries associations, and LIS education institutions should take on the development of the skills that librarians need to better support OER initiatives, designing and offering training programs and improving syllabus.



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