

EU-StORe

Research on Open Learning Material and OERs

Creating European standards for open education and open learning resources- EU-StORe

Partner 5: Meath Partnership

<i>Project Title</i>	<i>Creating European standards for open education and open learning resources</i>
<i>Project Acronym</i>	<i>EU-StORe</i>
<i>Reference Number</i>	<i>2014-1-RO01-KA202-002985</i>
<i>Project Duration</i>	<i>01.09.2014 – 31.08.2016</i>
<i>Project Partners</i>	<i>P1 Universitatea Lucian Blaga Din Sibiu (Romania) P2 University Paderborn – UPB (Germany) P3 Ingenious Knowledge – IK (Germany) P4 European Learning Network – ELN (United Kingdom) P5 Meath Partnership – MCRSDP (Ireland) P6 Libera Università Maria Ss. Assunta (Italy) P7 Università ta Malta (Malta)</i>

Title of the task: Research on Existing Criteria for Open Education

Activity Code: O1-A3

Partner: Partner 5 – Meath Partnership

Overview of Open Education in Ireland

With the rising global demand for further and higher education, Open Education Resources and courseware are seen as the future in education provision, as they offer an effective means of delivering quality education to an unlimited number of learners at once. However in Ireland development in this area has been slow. This is largely due to funding constraints on universities who are unable to financially support off-campus learning. Due to the monies received for providing face-to-face, on-campus curricula, universities also have no monetary resources for developing their own bespoke Open Education Resources (Brown, 2014). In general, Online Education in Ireland can be characterised as fee-paying courses, with little accreditation offered and a general perception by the academic industry and employers that qualifications awarded from online universities and training providers are not as well regarded as those which are attained through traditional, classroom-based training delivery and from reputable institutions. There is a lack of reputation in Ireland where Online Education providers are concerned and so these programmes are largely undervalued. This is evident when we consider that Higher Education in Ireland is heavily subsidised by the Government, with the majority of the Irish student body qualifying for the 'Free Fees Scheme', and many qualifying for a maintenance grant of up to €12,500 per annum per student to attend university. Despite this support for students to attend Higher Education, there are currently no current government grants, subsidies or free-fee schemes for students wishing to complete courses online. As a result, less than 3% of students throughout Ireland currently study by distance or through online platforms, and comparatively few are registered as part-time learners (Higher Education Authority, 2014).

Online Education in Ireland is still hampered by funding constraints, for both students and institutions, and as a result there has been a lack of development in Online and Open Education Resources. Accreditation of online content is also a major concern amongst the academic community and student body of Ireland, with many fearful that qualifications obtained through online institutions, or courses completed which are not formally accredited, will not be recognised or appreciated by employers;

and so these concerns have had adverse effects on the proliferation of OERs in Ireland (Irish Independent, 2013)

A report by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) in 2012, *'Part-time and Flexible Higher Education in Ireland'*, has addressed the underdevelopment of Online and Open Education in Ireland by recommending that “by 2016, full equality of provision and support will have been achieved in higher education for all students, regardless of time, place or pace of study” (HEA, 2012). Further to this, a report by the High Level Group on the Modernisation of Higher Education in 2014 recommended that “national funding frameworks should create incentives, especially in the context of new forms of performance-based funding, for higher education institutions to open up education, develop more flexible modes of delivery and diversify their student population” (High Level Group on the Modernisation of Higher Education, 2014). Despite these aims, and recommendations from Europe, there has been minimal progress in Ireland.

While the benefits of OERs are numerous, educationalists in Ireland are currently debating the true value of these open resources which are free of charge and unaccredited. Education in Ireland is dominated by traditional learning formats, mostly classroom-based and fee-paying. As a result, there is a degree of uneasiness amongst the academic community about the loss of earnings for universities and colleges if free-of-charge OERs prevail (Casey. 2014). Despite these reservations, some universities and colleges in Ireland, namely the Institute of Technology Sligo, Trinity College Dublin and Dublin Institute of Technology, have adopted policies of open education by publishing Ireland’s first MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses), in response to this new demand for open, free, online training programmes.

From a policy perspective, Government policy is lagging behind the work of private companies, such as ALISON.com, and traditional universities such as Trinity, DIT and IT Sligo (mentioned above), as well as fully online institutions such as the Open University, which has recently opened to an Irish audience with the domain, openuniversity.ie, and Hibernia College which offers initial and continual teacher education at postgraduate and doctoral levels. These courses are usually fully online, with some practical teaching experience required to fulfil accreditation criteria.

Overview of Existing Criteria for Open Education

With the advent of social networking, it is second nature to new generations of learners to create their own content and share it with contacts, colleagues and friends online across a variety of platforms. While the proliferation of Open Education is seen as a positive step in extending access to education to a larger cohort of people, there are some who have concerns over the quality of these Open Education Resources (Wiley & Gurrell, 2009). With this new wave of Open Education, it is widely accepted that all educational resources which are developed and funded with public monies are to be made available for learners to adapt, add-to and re-purpose under a Creative Commons license, or similar, as stated in the Paris OER Declaration, 2012 (Mishra & Kanwar, 2015). Considering that this effectively means that all learners who have access to OERs can now become creators of content, the issue of who is responsible for the quality of these OERs is becoming increasingly topical (Mishra & Kanwar, 2015). In a position paper by the Higher Education Authority of Ireland, this issue is raised and concern is voiced: “the widespread availability of communications technology threatens to undermine the elevated status historically enjoyed by higher education institutions in their role as the ultimate sources of knowledge, truth and discovery” (Higher Education Authority of Ireland, 2009). In this statement, it is clear that traditional universities and creators of educational content are seeing their influence wain in the realm of quality assurance, and there is also a fear that the content they produce and release online is open to interpretation, adaptation and re-circulation by unknown online content creators. However, this ethos is in keeping with OERs, with existing criteria for OERs stipulating that they should be; free and freely available, suitable for all levels of education, modular, reusable and online (Bonk, Lee, Reeves & Reynolds, 2015).

The main issue facing the adoption of quality guidelines for OER development is that the term ‘quality’ can be subjective in relation to OERs (Kawachi, 2013). Some OER supporters believe that due to the open nature of OERs, users should feel free

to create and share content which is unaccredited, informal and takes the form of short learning resources which are free of the constrictions of quality assurance and accreditation, only adhering to the standards which are specific to Open Education, namely that resources developed are 'open' and 'reusable' (Mishra & Kanwar, 2015).

However, as a tool for bringing quality education to the masses, some institutions and bodies have taken to draft some quality guidelines for OER creators and distributors to follow. One such example of this is the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA), who drafted guidelines to govern standards and quality of OERs in 2009, Quality Assurance of Multimedia Learning Materials (QAMLM). The CEMCA quality guidelines are based on the ADDIE model of instructional design, namely, Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation and Evaluation. Following this model, the CEMCA guidelines include recommendations for the following aspects of OER design and development:

1. Analysis

- a. Identify the learning need to be addresses
- b. Collect data in contextual variables
- c. Profile the target audience
- d. State the purpose of the OER
- e. Create a content outline
- f. Generate raw content
- g. Classify content into fact, concepts, principles, processes, etc.

2. Design

- a. Instructional Design Strategy
 - i. State learning objectives
 - ii. Structure content logically
 - iii. Specify learning strategies
 - iv. Select suitable media
 - v. Plan interactivity
- b. Visual Design

- i. Design Graphical User Interface
 - ii. Decide on Fonts
 - iii. Plan Layouts
 - c. Technical Design
 - i. Prepare technical design
 - ii. Test the prototype
3. Development
 - a. Write storyboard
 - b. Produce multimedia elements
 - c. Process documentation
 - d. Test the product
 - e. Ensure compliance with all available standard and requirements
 - f. Ensure product is certified by one or more authorized agencies
4. Delivery Considerations
 - a. Consider delivery mechanisms in terms of hardware and software requirements
 - b. Durability of the OER
 - c. Reusability of the OER
5. Feedback
 - a. Develop an evaluation framework
 - b. Develop a strategy to utilize feedback

(CEMCA, 2009)

A more recent study by CEMCA highlights other quality frameworks for Open Education Resources developed and advocated by other experts in the field (Kawachi, 2013). While many of these frameworks relate to the evaluation of OERs in terms of quality, they can also be used a guideline for creating OERs as the rubrics highlighted in these evaluation frameworks act as a matrix for designing quality OER content. One such example is from Achieve, a non-profit education reform organisation. The

Achieve Rubrics measure the potential effectiveness of OERs, and the framework focuses on the following:

1. Rubric I. Degree of Alignment to Standards
2. Rubric II. Quality of Explanation of the Subject Matter
3. Rubric III. Utility of Materials Designed to Support Teaching
4. Rubric IV. Quality of Assessment
5. Rubric V. Quality of Technological Interactivity
6. Rubric VI. Quality of Instructional Tasks and Practice Exercises
7. Rubric VII. Opportunities for Deeper Learning
8. Rubric VIII. Assurance of Accessibility

(Achieve, 2011).

Another framework developed by Nimer Baya'a, Hanadi Mia'ari Shehade and Amal Roby Baya'a includes 4 parameters for measuring quality in OERs and Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs): these include: usability (how easily readable is the resource); content (including relevance, appropriateness, accessibility, credibility of author); educational value (learning design, pedagogic process, learning activities, assessment, communication, feedback) and vividness (relates to how up-to-date the content is and how often links are renewed with new information) (Baya'a, Shehade, Baya'a, 2008).

Based on these frameworks, as a sample of existing criteria governing the design, development and delivery of OERs, it is important that content creators remember to first set appropriate learning objectives, identify their target group, use appropriate media and language for this target group and ensure that these elements are kept in mind throughout the process of creating, publishing and, critically, evaluating OERs.

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