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Open Educational Practice (OEP) approaches to external collaboration: the arts, charities and business

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Outline

As research around Open Educational Resources (OER) begins to shift from their provision to their use through Open Educational Practices (OEP), it is notable that such research still largely remains focused inside higher education (HE) settings. Taking a broader view, Downes (2007) forecasted that:

*The sustainability of OER – in a fashion that renders then at once both affordable and usable – requires that we think of OER as only part of a larger picture, one that includes volunteers and incentives, community and partnerships, co-production and sharing, distributed management and control.* (2007, p. 41)

More recently, JISC (2012) reflect a current UK higher education priority by expressing a business-oriented focus when identifying the scope for OEP to extend beyond HE into “communities of practice (such as subject or professional discipline, sectoral, regional)”, including “using OER for informal learning or work-based learning” adding that “workplace and employer involvement has been identified as important and deserves more consideration”.

As a response to the perspectives of Downes, JISC and others, this case study explores the use of OER in three partnerships between universities and external bodies that help illustrate the diversity of scenarios and activities that comprise the OEP landscape. The three projects included within this report are:

1) **i-impact**: a collaboration between a university and an independent film production company;
2) **CharityWise**: a collaboration between a university and voluntary sector trainers;
3) **Review and Endorsement by Graduate Recruiters of Curricular Employability OER Published in HumBox by HE Practitioners in the Arts and Humanities**.

The scale of these three projects ranged from a partnership with a single small independent film production company, through a collaboration with a national sector skills body and three umbrella organisations, to a partnership with an employers’ association and six large national/international businesses. In each it was the academics who made the initial approaches, indicating that OER and OEP are currently led by HE initiatives.

Two other significant differences between these projects were the formality of the education and the copyright environments that they took place in. Taking the range of formality first:

1) **i-impact** was aimed at both undergraduate and postgraduate students (although the resources were also used by informal enthusiasts);
2) **CharityWise** was focused on informal, bite-sized learning across a range of levels from access to postgraduate;
3) the graduate recruiters were appraising OER used in formal undergraduate teaching and assessment.

Turning to the different copyright environments and cultures:

1) the film industry that provided the context for **i-impact** operates within a complex tapestry of rights and legal issues;
2) the voluntary sector are not overly concerned with copyright, and there is no tradition of using open-source software, etc.
3) businesses prioritise and value commercially beneficial IPR, patents and trademarks.
These differences and the overall diversity of the three projects has generated a range of context-specific issues, but also a number of common themes that are discussed in the conclusion. The case studies collectively provide an exceptionally rich picture of the spectrum of opportunities that are afforded by collaborative external engagement. The diverse subject disciplines these case studies span provided opportunities to make comparisons and highlight contrasts between the creative arts, modern languages and cultures, arts and humanities, and business and management.

There are sector and institutional drivers to extend economic engagement and industry collaboration; as a result the insights that this report offers can be applied to a wide range of subject disciplines in the HE sector.

**Case study**

**i-mpact: a collaboration between a university and an independent film production company**  
Dr Sarah Atkinson, University of Brighton.

*Project overview and methodologies*

This Fellowship project explored film and media-related OER and OEP within the context of an in-depth case study of an existing resource. SP-ARK, the online interactive archive of world-renowned British filmmaker Sally Potter\(^1\) provided a unique opportunity to explore university and archival collaboration. Potter is a world-renowned film director, known for her explorations into the potential of nascent technologies to enhance audience engagement and participation in her work. Her 2009 film *Rage* was the first feature film to be launched and distributed on mobile phones. SP-ARK was conceived, developed and is managed by Adventure Pictures (AP): the independent film production company, based in East London owned by Potter, which produces all of her work. The films are predominantly publicly funded (by the BBC, BFI and National Lottery in the UK) and by equivalent international bodies.

The film industry is a notoriously closed area, and the field is dominated by close textual analysis of the final film texts, as opposed to their processes of production. There is also a lack of available resources in the field as a result of copyright inhibitors. In addition, there is a lack of resources digitised and accessible within long-established national archives. These are highlighted in recent sector reports, as Gerhardt and Kaufman (2011) have noted:

> This disconnect – perhaps we call it an ‘A/V gap’ – is largely a function of attitudes and behaviours within teaching, production, and publishing. It is also an outcome of the paucity of high quality audiovisual work now available for educators. As we note in our 2010 Film & Sound Think Tank film, Knowledge Is…, despite the leading investments of JISC and others worldwide, only 5% of our audiovisual history is digitized and available to educators and the public online. (2011, p. 3)

The recent film review undertaken by the Department of Media, Culture and Sport (DCMS) in the UK also supports this view. It concludes: “The percentage of material readily accessible by the public in National and Regional Archives remains very small in proportion to the size of the collections. Most of the film material held in archives around the UK is owned by rights-holders

\(^{1}\) See Mayer (2009) and Fowler (2009).
who understandably will only make their material available in a way that is consistent with their commercial interests” (Smith, 2012).

SP-ARK clearly provided a unique opportunity to engage with film materials to a previously unseen and unprecedented level, since AP are independent, they have full control in how their materials can be distributed and used. Over the past five years, SP-ARK has been developed to a beta-testing level, and includes the intuitive visual navigation of one of Potter’s films, Orlando (1992), and all of the related assets. All of the resources have been digitised and metadata have been added relating to the items description and association with other assets. Users are able to view clips from the film as well as a myriad of associated materials including the scripts, storyboards, still images, location and developmental paperwork, using the visual browsing interface (see Figure 1). Access to and use of the materials is facilitated via a Creative Commons licensing model (more specifically the materials are made available through a BY-NC-ND licence).

The Fellowship project tested and reported upon the educational potential of SP-ARK within the fields of media, film theory and practice in higher education. As well as compiling and consolidating the previously generated findings of user experimentations, the Fellowship also enabled the opportunity to work alongside students and staff at five universities to generate new user data and insights using questionnaires and focus groups.

This project also facilitated the collaborative generation, development and sharing of OER around

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2 Queen Mary, University of London, Bucknell University, University of Southern California and Columbia University.
the archive. The Fellow initiated ‘The Anatomy of a Film Production’ project, aiming to extend the reach of the archive into vocational and professionally based education. Potter’s latest film has just completed production, and during the process, all personnel who have been involved in the film have been interviewed and provided with cameras to record their daily activities on set (see Figure 2). These materials will extend the archive and will create a rich picture of the film production process, capturing all of the individual crew members’ contributions to the creation of the film through personal testimony. The project exposes all the roles on the production from runners and caterers to camera, sound, costume, make-up, continuity, set builders, sparks, extras to heads of all the departments. The project extends beyond the production phase into the postproduction, marketing and distribution of the film, whereby lawyers, financiers and publicists have also been interviewed. This will further develop SP-ARK as an invaluable and innovative open resource for young people and students seeking careers in the film industry, and to educators and academics teaching film production and processes.

Figure 2: A snapshot of just a fraction of the personnel involved in the production of Sally Potter’s new film (to be released in October 2012), as captured by ‘The Anatomy of a Film Production’ project

After initial communication with SP-ARK, an agreement was developed whereby the Fellow could work with the AP team at their production office to explore the specific aims of the Fellowship, which were:

- to explore the pedagogic potential of SP-ARK as an Open Educational Resource within film and media curriculum;
- to stimulate pedagogic activity and OER generation around SP-ARK;
- to evaluate the impact upon teaching, learning and assessment practices within these disciplines;
- to expand upon and inform the future development of SP-ARK as an OER.
This model of working enabled the successful realisation of outcomes that couldn’t have been achieved without such a working relationship. The key opportunity facilitated by this Fellowship was to be able to work within the AP production offices: to work alongside the production team, and to be embedded within the working culture and practices, gaining an in-depth and rich understanding that wouldn’t have been possible without such a privileged vantage point.

Results

Full explication of these areas, the questionnaire and focus group results are documented within Atkinson’s (2012) HEA/JISC Open Educational Resources case study. To summarise, the key benefits of SP-ARK as an OER are:

- the openness of the resource allowed a valued access to previously unseen and inaccessible materials;
- both staff and students embraced the opportunity to work visually and intuitively with these materials;
- SP-ARK facilitated a sense of empowerment, a deeper engagement and understanding of the archival materials and the surrounding subject area through being able to cross-reference and directly compare source materials with archival materials;
- a social learning model was facilitated through the pathways infrastructure, which stimulated the open sharing of ideas and practices.

The key areas that have been highlighted for development are:

- more content to be made available to be able to access more of Potter’s work and to expand beyond a single-author platform;
- the searching and tagging needs to be made more efficient and effective, the ability for users to tag assets needs to be considered;
- further links to other assets needs to be provided (which could be through user-generated methods);
- the facility to search and ‘mine’ the video content more efficiently and effectively;
- to be able to work with the video content more creatively and fluidly, to be able to remix and adapt content.

Conclusion

The benefits that such a resource can bring to higher education academics and students are invaluable. The pathways tool lends itself to the critical and analytical study of primary materials as intrinsic to both undergraduate and postgraduate study within numerous disciplines. The resource has the potential to enhance and enrich teaching and learning practices within film and media disciplines and beyond as well as to encourage other high-profile filmmakers and organisations to allow online access to their work in the future.

The SP-ARK resource exemplifies the successful combination of an archive and an educational resource, providing an invaluable model for social and participatory learning. The ideal would be that if this model were to be expanded to other film archives and repositories, to enable this level and engagement beyond a single-author platform. This Fellowship project demonstrates exciting opportunities for archival research and scholarship, in addition to highlighting the benefits of OEP, the project also signals a move towards a new directive, as established by this project, of Open Archival Practices (OAP). Within OAP, archival items themselves are identified as OER, in addition
to their curation, exploration and surrounding discussion. OAP has the potential to enhance the accessibility and visibility of archival resources and to generate links to other archives and repositories. OAP also captures the value of the context and provenance that can be added to assets by archival users, researchers, academics and industry personnel that in turn fosters the development of a wider and more open network of archival users.

This Fellowship highlights the need for close collaborative work such as the model here demonstrated between industry and education to be nurtured and supported. Longer-term opportunities such as these need to be harnessed, which enable researchers to immerse themselves within the industries that they study to achieve the in-depth insights and empathy required to drive the area of collaborative resource generation forwards.

CharityWise: a collaboration between a university and voluntary sector trainers
Tony Coughlan, The Open University.

Project overview and methodologies

The aim of the CharityWise project was to create a sustainable long-term relationship between The Open University in the South West and regional voluntary sector network South West Forum (http://www.southwestforum.org.uk) in developing vocational OER for the UK voluntary sector. The need for the resources has been identified by authors such as Venter and Sung:

Although there may be limited resources for training and development in many third sector organisations, resources for volunteer training are particularly scarce. (2009, p. 45)

The project began by working on resources for charity trustees, a priority of the sector skills body Skills – Third Sector (http://www.skills-thirdsector.org.uk). Ten Open University OpenLearn study units were adapted for charity trustees, mapped against Elements of the National Occupational Standards (NOS) and released through a small dedicated website.

In addition, all of the 600+ study units in OpenLearn were assessed for their relevance to the voluntary sector. This resulted in:

- 63 study units that would be useful to trustees being tagged with a ‘Trustee_Development’ tag;
- 130 study units that would be of more general use to the voluntary sector being tagged with a ‘CharityWise’ tag.

In both cases, the intention was to aid discovery by making relevant study units easier to find, and the two terms now appear prominently in the OpenLearn tag cloud.

The sector skills body became enthusiastic about the project and there were discussions about incorporating OER and Open Educational Practices into their new model for nationwide voluntary sector training. The sector skills body subsequently incorporated some OER ideas into a funding bid they submitted to the UK Government Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS).

Turning to the potential users, a survey was conducted to collect information about voluntary and community sector (VCS) trainers’ awareness of, attitudes towards and existing use of Open Educational Resources. Three national voluntary sector infrastructure organisations participated in the survey design and publicised the survey among their members. The survey was completed by 101 individual VCS trainers and training managers. The findings indicated a high level of interest in
the potential benefits of OER for the voluntary sector, with many trainers suggesting that they would consider using them if dedicated training or mentoring were made available and if using OER extended the range of subjects that they could deliver. VCS trainers were particularly interested in the potential of OER to overcome geographical obstacles (seen as beneficial by 85% of respondents) and in allowing individuals to study at their own pace, at minimal cost, as and when they need to learn about a particular subject. A more detailed summary of the survey results is available at: http://www.open.ac.uk/blogs/CharityOERs/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/Attitudes-of-VCS-trainers-to-OERs.doc.

In response to the survey findings, a training and mentoring package for voluntary sector trainers was designed that could be implemented if and when resources become available.

Lessons learned from this project

During the project there were many forums for exchanging views and developing the relationship between voluntary sector trainers, the University and policy makers. These included:

- round-table discussions between representatives of south-west charities and the University;
- ‘hands-on’ remodeling of existing resources and authoring of new resources by project partners;
- presentations and half-day workshops between policy makers, representatives of national charities and academics;
- a four-month long online discussion forum initiated by the sector skills body.

Together, these exchanges and the results of the trainers survey led to the following lessons:

1) OER offer a way to integrate education for the UK voluntary sector workforce, which is currently fragmented and confusing. OER have the particularly quality of being useable across institutional and sector boundaries: independent trainers, charities, colleges and universities can all work with them, which could lead to more coherent education for the sector.

2) The low cost of OER is attractive in a time of severe public spending cuts.

3) Some policy makers are exploring where to store knowledge and research resources that have been publicly funded, but are now being closed down due to public spending cuts. There is a view that publicly funded resources should remain in the public domain, and an OER repository offers the added attraction of also encouraging the active use and reuse of resources, rather than them just being archived.

4) The UK voluntary sector contains a wide range of how-to guides, instructions and toolkits, often assembled by committed authors, but sometimes out of date or hard to find on dormant websites. There is also a back catalogue of academic resources that is growing as universities shut down unprofitable courses. However, it is very labour-intensive to assess the value of all these diverse resources, map them against National Occupational Standards and turn the suitable ones into OER.

5) The aim was to support a community of volunteer contributors to use, create and improve the OER, but further exploration is needed into the motivation for them and how they
would be rewarded for their efforts. There was some indication that a good reputation-management system would help achieve this.

6) A recurring challenge was that while OER are at least partly established in universities, they are very poorly understood outside, so a lot of time was spent explaining what OER are and why they exist. The terminology certainly did not help. The OER movement would benefit from at least one public project succeeding to illustrate how it works.

7) Questions about assessment and accreditation were asked frequently. It is possible to point to an impressive array of learning resources at OpenLearn, but the tools to bring them together into a programme of study (e.g. OER glue (http://www.oerglue.com) and OER university (http://wikieducator.org/OER_university/Home)) were not yet so well developed.

8) The issue of a ‘digital divide’ was raised repeatedly. The UK voluntary sector works with and represents many of the poorest members of society, and many parts of the voluntary sector itself run on a shoestring without access to the latest technology or skills. Even for those in the sector with suitable access and skills, the existing software tools for editing OER are unfamiliar to the general public and not intuitive to use.

9) As people began to understand what OER were, some suspicion, scepticism and hostility was encountered, particularly from those fearing that their livelihoods would be threatened by the OER movement. At times, unlikely alliances formed to defend the status quo.

10) The launch of the free, online European School of Volunteering (http://www.ev-school.com) in Autumn 2011 demonstrated that a number of initiatives in different countries are moving in similar directions. Here in the UK, voluntary sector trainers, managers and policy makers are now more aware of Open Educational Resources (OER), and they are increasingly featuring in both strategies and training delivery.

Conclusions from this project

The original aim to create a sustainable regional relationship was overtaken by national interest in this project. Although this meant the project was not finished in the planned timescale, the change was welcome overall as it increases the likelihood of achieving the necessary critical mass of trainers that will eventually enable the community to flourish.

It must be acknowledged that the business case for OER is unproven and there is some scepticism about OER’s viability. This particularly applies to provision for the voluntary sector, which is characteristically poor and unlikely to offer the scale of return on investment for universities as more lucrative sectors such as medicine or law. The survey results from voluntary sector trainers suggest that a willing community of potential users exists, and engaging them successfully could be one way of developing a sustainable business model for OER. Another message from the UK voluntary sector seems to be that many OER (both formal and informal) already exist, but what they want from recognised universities are affordable assessment and certification packages to fit around OER. Again, this could be a component of a sustainable business model for OER.

As an alternative to the business case, there does appear to be scope for developing OER more explicitly in the arena of widening participation and as a way of meeting the obligation on most universities to deliver explicit public benefit. The public benefit obligation arises under the
Charities Act 2006 as a result of the charitable status enjoyed by 129 UK universities, and the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE, 2010) arranges its suggestions for satisfying the obligation around six themes. Of these, the first four correspond with a project like CharityWise:

- developing people to make a contribution to society;
- innovating, informing and inspiring: opening up university knowledge, expertise and resources;
- engaging communities and working in partnership: helping community problem solving;
- informing public policy and the professions: helping communities engage with public policy, support civil society and deliver responsive public services.

Finally, meeting public benefit obligations through OER has the potential to provide enhanced reputation and visibility benefits to universities, such as those derived from The Open University’s Teacher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa (TESSA) and Health Education and Training (HEAT) programmes – both based on OER.

Review and Endorsement by Graduate Recruiters of Curricular Employability OER Published in HumBox by HE Practitioners in Arts and Humanities
Antonio Martínez-Arboleda, University of Leeds.

Project overview and methodologies

In this project, employer engagement in reviewing and endorsing employability-related OER was investigated, discussed and piloted. A group of 12 arts and humanities practitioners and six graduate recruiters participated in this research. The project envisaged originally the participation of employer associations and business groups, but the methodology was modified following the advice of the Association of Graduate Recruiters (AGR), who suggested carrying out this research directly with recruiters and facilitated the process.

There is mounting evidence of the need to embed employability in the degree programmes in higher education. One excellent example of how institutions are embracing this aspect of the employability agenda is the Curriculum Enhancement Project of the University of Leeds, as part of which employability skills are embedded in the academic curriculum, as well as in learning experiences such as work placements. The need for more explicit curricular employability seems to be particularly acute in vulnerable and non-vocational subjects such as arts and humanities. Employers can be seen as allies in this respect, as their ideas on curricular employability seem to be worth considering pedagogically:

The contextualisation of subjects provides particular opportunities for skills development and reflection; team project work, case study analysis, assessment through presentation and research tasks are all established pedagogies that contribute to generic skills development whilst, in parallel, developing the mindset skills associated with the subject studied. (Wilson, 2012, p. 32)

In this context, one of the hypotheses to be tested in this research was the feasibility and educational value of a new approach to curricular employability that would allow practitioners to receive open feedback on their resources. The OER repository for arts and humanities in UK HE, HumBox, was identified as the open space where collaboration between HE practitioners and graduate recruiters could take place.

See http://curriculum.leeds.ac.uk/ and video for further details.
As part of the research, interviews with academic practitioners in HumBox were carried out in order to flesh out any issues regarding the proposed engagement. The nature and purpose of OER reviewing and endorsement, which in HumBox can be fulfilled by the comment box and collection creation facility, were discussed. Attitudes and perceptions on employer engagement, employability, OER and OER repositories as channels for engagement were all covered. For a detailed reflection on key aspects of the academics’ responses related to the educational case of employer involvement in curricular employability and OER see Martínez-Arboleda (2012).

The research was followed by the selection of OER produced by some of the participating academics, which was carried out by authors in collaboration with the researcher, for those resources to be submitted at a later stage to the participating graduate recruiters. The disciplines covered are Theology and Religious Studies, History, Cultural Studies and Modern Languages and Cultures. The selection process included a critical reflection on the employability value of the resources, documented in a form for each resource, and their subsequent adaptation for this pilot experience as appropriate.

Once the resources were ready for review, participating graduate recruiters had the opportunity to learn about the aims, objectives and methodology of the project and about OER and repositories. They then expressed their views, concerns and expectations, in the course of individual interviews, on curriculum-embedded employability, their involvement in HE and OER as

[http://humbox.ac.uk/](http://humbox.ac.uk/)
a channel for open engagement with academics. Finally, some of the participants reviewed resources, with a focus on their employability value, and analysed and evaluated the experience in a final interview. The involvement of both sets of professionals throughout the project generated enough evidence to discuss all research questions presented and to support the conclusions.

Two peer-reviewed presentations have been produced out this project so far. Some of their findings, not reported in this case study, include critical reflection upon the two best known review systems, The Connexions Lenses\textsuperscript{5} and The Merlot Peer Review\textsuperscript{6}, in contrast with HumBox. Alternative ways of approaching, theoretically and practically, the endorsement and review of OER as part of a proposed new function called ‘OER Relevance Attribution’ (Martínez-Arboleda, 2012) are also suggested. Relevance Attribution may prove crucial for sustainability of OER production and educational enhancement. In the conference paper Piloting Employer Engagement in OER Repositories: A new approach to curricular employability in HE, the second part of the research carried out during this Fellowship, including engagement with graduate recruiters, is critically discussed.

\textsuperscript{5} http://cnx.org/news/LensesIntroduced
\textsuperscript{6} http://taste.merlot.org/peerreviewprocess.html
Figure 5: The ‘Collection’ facility in HumBox allows any user to create lists of resources published by anyone in the repository and describe and evaluate them collectively if desired.

Some of the lessons learnt

1) Showcasing and dissemination of good teaching practice, whether it is done by institutions or by individual practitioners, can be more effective if the publicised learning resources have attracted positive external reviews.

2) The contribution of graduate-recruiting employers to the HE core curriculum in arts and humanities in matters related to employability is recognised as useful and even necessary. The written comments that two of the recruiters made about most of the OER they were presented with provided alternative uses and positive feedback as well as insightful reflections. Interestingly, despite the detailed forms to be completed by employers who reviewed resources, it was only in the face-to-face discussions that the researcher discovered that there can be huge differences between employers and academics as to what constitutes an employability-related learning activity. This finding evidences that more external input and mutual understanding is needed when embedding employability in the academic curriculum. Crucially, although HumBox and other repositories allow open public engagement between users through the comment box, employers and, to a lesser extent, academic users, will find it necessary for the employer and the academic to discuss face to face, by phone or by email the details of any OER engagement and the possible outcomes of any review/endorsement. Upfront written information overload and impersonality should be avoided.

3) The sample of graduate recruiters who participated in this study is relatively homogeneous and there was widespread agreement in key issues raised by this research. However,
individuals can have completely different views from their counterparts in specific questions. Also, the personal style of communication with the academic can be very different from one to another, even among people working in exactly the same sector and type of organisation.

4) Graduate recruiters tend to have a list of universities where they concentrate their recruitment efforts, as it is not practical for them to organise recruitment events or other initiatives in all the campuses (that does not mean that they do not take students from other universities). In order to improve the number of quality applicants, recruiters need the collaboration of the careers services of those institutions. Most research participants would prioritise to engage through OER with academics from universities that they have an existing recruitment relationship with or universities with which they want to improve their recruiting links.

5) For academic practitioners participating in this research, OER repositories are the ideal space to receive constructive feedback from employers on employability resources. This contrasts with the view of employers, some of which may prefer to use their own webpages to post reviews.

6) The potential for reuse and republishing of OER did attract recruiters’ curiosity, but it does not make any difference for them as initially the focus of this research was on reviewing and endorsing.

7) OER involvement through review and endorsement of employability resources generates externalities beyond the areas of graduate recruitment and educational enhancement. Marketing and recruitment departments of HEI as well as digital branding and corporate and social responsibility managers of corporations would certainly gain from the synergies generated by the engagement between the academics and graduate recruiters. Both academic and graduate-recruiting research participants recognised the spiralling potential benefits of this engagement for the reputation of both HEI and businesses.

Conclusions

Careers services have been for long the umbilical cords between HEI and businesses in matters related to non-curricular employability. It is in the context of the relationship between individual recruiters and individual careers services that any collaboration in employability, including curricular employability through OER, can best be materialised. Even though one of the final objectives of the engagement proposed in this project is to decentralise and enrich the employability relationships between HEI and businesses by giving academics a channel to communicate directly with recruiters, academics are advised to make the most of the business contacts and best endeavours of their careers services. It is worthwhile to remember that in institutions where employability committees made up of academics and employers operate, the careers services have often been instrumental in their formation.

Academics and employers will be able to benefit from engagement providing that adequate consideration is given to the need to combine oral interaction with succinct written information on the objectives of the proposed engagement and the procedures to follow. A certain degree of open-endedness and flexibility is needed as each partnership can be very different.

Many of the potential benefits of digital engagement through review and endorsement of curricular
employability OER remain unexplored. In retrospect, the scope of this project would have been more far-reaching if participation of other professionals within HEIs and within participating businesses had been envisaged. A multi-party engagement between HEIs and businesses on one side and their respective target audiences, as in Figure 1, would be one likely outcome.

![Digital engagement around OERs between HEI and Businesses](image)

**Figure 6: Mapping relationships for digital engagement**

**Conclusions**

Each project demonstrates a need to appreciate and understand the cultures and practices of potential external partners as well as their motivation for educational collaboration. Whereas in engagement within HE it can be assumed that providing learning opportunities is the main aim for all the participating institutions, in external collaboration the educational interest is, for the external partner, instrumental to the other goals that they pursue with their engagement. This is the most important reason why OER external collaboration presents more complexities than
collaboration within HE. In this respect, being able to gauge the priorities and objectives of the external organisations and of the individuals/departments within the organisation, and understanding how they will benefit from OER engagement will be advantageous when it comes to targeting partners. Identification, promotion and branding seem to be potentially valuable benefits for external organisations, but it is important to involve the individuals in the right area of each organisation for them to value and discuss the proposition. Their motives and perspectives may be very different even if they are part of the same organisation.

These three projects were conceived as a result of a lack of channels for OER engagement between universities and external partners and directly attempted to address this situation. The obvious solution was to source and create new channels; however, throughout the projects it has been demonstrated that any new lines of communication around OER with external partners can flourish much more easily as part of an existing relationship, even if this relationship is totally unrelated to OER. As the existing relationship can cover a varied range of aspects, it is easier to trade off external support to OER and OEP in return for institutional input in other area of the relationship. Therefore, practitioners should also investigate any existing links between the university and the external organisation and make an initial judgement on whether the efforts that may be required to set up any partnership with a particular organisation are justified.

There is also a significance and importance to the context within which OER are generated and hosted. In the case of Atkinson’s project, the OER were deemed by their users to be authentic and credible since they were housed within the production company’s own repository. Coughlan was lobbying for the charity sector to host the repository outside a university – apparent ‘ownership’ could be a deterrent. PSRBs (professional, statutory and regulatory bodies)⁷ might be ideal, and, for example, the NHS e-learning repository is immediately obvious as being employer-led. Martinez-Arboleda discovered that for some employers, hosting the reviews or the resources in their own websites can make a difference, as OER engagement is connected to external partners’ digital branding.

Each project encountered barriers and resistance in their quest for openness for many reasons (as Coughlan identified in point 6 on page 9). ‘OER’ and ‘OEP’ are not terms or concepts that are easily accessible or understandable outside of education, indeed they are often misunderstood within educational contexts. The notion of OER being ‘free’ can be perceived as a challenge to existing proprietary and commercial models (cf. ‘Academic Spring’ over open publishing of academic literature). The education ethic of acting altruistically for the greater good is in conflict with widespread commercial model of profit making and having a competitive advantage.

Each one of these projects represent a journey starting from a relatively simple form of educational engagement through OER to practice in open spaces, as described by Ehlers’ (2011) observation that “Educational organisations are opening up through embracing sharing cultures and networking in partnerships.”

For Coughlan, the journey went from the reuse of existing OER in the OpenLearn repository to the development an open community of practice around the resources, with an initial emphasis on the sharing of digital authoring and editing skills between academics and voluntary sector trainers,

⁷ http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/PolicyAndResearch/PolicyAreas/QualityAssurance/HowTheSystemWorks/Pages/ProfessionalBodies.aspx
and representing a clear shift of focus from the resources to Open Practices around them.

In the cases of Martínez-Arboleda and Atkinson, more complex relationships were involved in which many key aspects of the engagement were subsequently redefined. For Martínez-Arboleda's, the engagement started as an invitation to business associations and employer groups to review and endorse OER. This type of activity did not present any kind of technological, practical or legal barriers. Even before this project was conceived anyone could have opened an account in HumBox and commented on the resources or created collections. The transition to OEP occurred as the project had to concentrate on finding ways to negotiate educational, cultural and philosophical hurdles as well as on fine-tuning the relationship around the legitimate cost-benefits consideration of participants.

For Atkinson, the journey began within the context of an online archive, in which the archival objects and the discussion around them displayed the characteristics of OER: they were predominantly used by the HE community and were accessible via CC licensing. The objects were created and framed by the film company and were then used by students and academics. This dynamic very quickly evolved as Atkinson was able to collaboratively create and generate new OER as a result of her close and embedded working relationship with the organisation. These include tutorials and videos on how to access and use the archive, and extended further through the collaborative generation of resources in ‘The Anatomy of a Film Production’ project described within the case study. These examples were born from a continued open and empathetic dialogue between HE and industry and exist within a more nuanced framework of OEP.

The engagements described in this report are shaped by the different motivations and cultures of each one of the three types of external partners (small businesses showcasing their work; charities providing training; graduate recruiters supporting employability) and some general conclusions have been made for each one of them which are applicable to future cases. However, the dynamics of each individual engagement can make a huge difference, as the necessary open interaction increases the chances of departing from any previous plan. As opposed to using OER repositories as sponsorship platforms (this is one of the possibilities that external partners in OER are being offered by MIT in the Next Decade Alliance through an ‘underwriting portfolio’8), in the three cases we have considered, the external organisations engage with the educational substance of the OER and converse with the HEI practitioners about them. The research findings in the field of external engagement through OER and OEP in these case studies, therefore, contribute to a better understanding of how Open Practice with non-educational partners can be successfully facilitated.

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