

The Challenge of OER to Academic Practice

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Abstract: The degree to which Open Educational Resources reflect the values of its institutional provider depends on questions of economics and the level of support amongst its academics. For project managers establishing OER repositories, the latter question - how to cultivate, nurture and maintain academic engagement - is critical. Whilst participating in the JISC-funded institutional OER programme (2009-10), the team at the University of Exeter encountered a range of academic opinions on OER, and followed many as they rode the peaks and troughs of opportunities and challenges that this kind of work entails. This paper discusses the potential motivators for academics in providing OER material, as an understanding of these is helpful when introducing the subject to new contributors, and when informing planning decisions - both procedural and financial - so that key incentives are protected. We will also look at the reasons for some academic scepticism surrounding OER and how these views can be - if not tempered - then at least understood with a view to informing future policy. The enthusiastic advocacy that some academics possess in relation to OER is borne of their vision of its use. It's important to ensure that the high priority objective of obtaining academic support does not overlook instances where there is tension between this vision, and what can be achieved with available resources. We will discuss the key information that OER managers need in order to mitigate this scenario. OER projects do not work in isolation from internal competition and project managers must be sensitive to the conflicting pressures that academics have to contend with in their work profile. We will discuss the value of establishing where an OER project sits within an institution's educational and research strategies, and its financial framework, the questions to ask and the signs to spot to obtain this information, and how managers can use this knowledge to make decisions, avoid pitfalls and garner support. Finally, we will address academic initiatives and reward schemes, including a discussion of how IPR and copyright can not only present challenges but also play an important role in motivating and demonstrating academic engagement.

Keywords: JISC, academic engagement, education strategy, IPR, copyright, teaching, project management, motivation, OER, research strategy

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