



# OER Evaluation Report

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## Contents

- 1. Abstract/Summary .....3
- 2. Introduction.....3
- 3. Methods .....3
- 4. The OER process: .....4
- 5. Evaluation of OER at the University of Exeter .....5
  - 5.1 Staff Awareness: .....6
  - 5.2 Motivations.....7
  - 5.3 IP Issues .....8
  - 5.4 Quality and Reputation ..... 10
  - 5.5 Staff Resources ..... 10
  - 5.6 The Future of OER at Exeter ..... 12
- 6 Conclusions..... 13
- 7 References..... 14
- Appendix 1..... 15
  - Brief Workshop Summary: ..... 15

## 1. Abstract/Summary

This Open Education Resources Evaluation (OER) Report provides a succinct summary of a 1 year funded project at the University of Exeter (<http://as.exeter.ac.uk/support/educationenhancementprojects/openexeter/>), including brief details of the process and a study of the views and experiences from the people involved (via questionnaires, in-depth interviews and a simplified summary of the project blog site). The positive and negative features of the process are discussed, as are the views regarding the future of OER at the University of Exeter.

## 2. Introduction

The aim of this report is to give a sense of the overall project including any changes over time, and also openly report on views, findings, successes, failings and potential sustainability within the University of Exeter.

Open Educational Resources (OER) form a part of the University's new Education Strategy aiming to provide free course materials which can be used in learning and teaching. The University of Exeter became engaged in an externally-funded (JISC) project to develop an OER institutional infrastructure (Browne and Newcombe 2009; Academic Services 2010). This opportunity was created due to the UK Government's concerns regarding the lack of on-line innovation in HE such as high quality digital learning and teaching resources, with the UK lagging behind internationally (Cooke 2008). The project aimed to assist staff, whether involved in learning and teaching directly or indirectly, in knowing how to take full advantage of such resources. Academics within various Schools (Business; Education and Lifelong Learning; Engineering, Mathematics and Physical Sciences; Geography, Humanities and Social Sciences; and Law) have been actively participating in the project. Resources being produced by staff include: slide shows, animations, PowerPoint presentations, lecture notes and links to other resources, coursework exercises, and computer marked diagnostic tests.

## 3. Methods

The evaluation of the University of Exeter OER Project was started in November 2009. Initially this involved an assessment on the value of an OER workshop led by the Open University, via questionnaires (n = 15, 48% response rate). The full report can be found at Rodway-Dyer (2010).

Appendix 1 provides a short summary from the full report. The findings provided the basis from which the University of Exeter needed to gather further views to evaluate the potential for OER development within the University. This was achieved by interviewing various sectors of staff within the University (n = 28), including those who had attended the workshop, members of the Steering Group, contributors of resources and people within the project team (some staff had more than one role). A sense of the overall project, including the development process was studied via the changes in the perceptions of staff involved in the project and also the project blog history.

#### 4. The OER process:

A summary of the project, month by month, can be gleaned from the blog (<http://blogs.exeter.ac.uk/oer/>) which was used as a diary. A simplified overview shows that following on from the successful JISC funded bid, key event times were:

*May 2009:* Project launched.

*June 2009:* Key induction sessions were held on metadata strategy, Intellectual Property Rights were explored with legal representatives and a University Risk Manager, and a social bookmarking system (using delicious.com) was created to catalogue links which were thought of as useful and relevant to the OER project (this currently hosts 38 bookmarks). This time also saw the project website launched in readiness for the JISC/HEA OER Start-up Meeting in London. Cloudworks was explored as a potential community of practice platform for OER and the Educational Technologists drew together many of the ideas discussed in the meetings so far.

*July 2009:* Further discussions took place to handle the complex issues of Intellectual Property Rights to allow for the reuse of existing material within OER (License-In and License-Out).

*August 2009:* Full quota of 360 credits promised by academics for the project. 30 credits already completed ready for the repository.

*September 2009:* Meeting held with the University Metadata specialist to look at progress and refresh participants on the metadata strategy. It was agreed to future proof the OER material data structure (learning content) by allowing portability to other applications. A new website had to be launched because of a new University content management system. This resulted in big changes to the background and layout. The production of units slowed as the academics involved were preparing for the new academic term. 113 credits completed and cleared.

*October 2009:* Metadata schema finalised and the DSpace repository started taking shape. The hardware platform was in place and the Integration & Web Services team started working on the configuration of the DSpace software.

*November 2009:* An evaluation of the Exeter OER project started. Cloudworks and OER workshop (17/11/2009) run by Open University and University of Exeter staff. Sustainability issues raised for life after the project. The key issues raised included promotion of OER, inclusion within existing strategies, managing risk in relation to IPR, clearance of IPR for use within OER post-project, reward and recognition, staff development and quality enhancement.

The team had to learn how to use RELOAD (<http://www.reload.ac.uk/>). This is an output from a project that was funded under the [JISC](#) Exchange for Learning Programme ([X4L](#)), which focuses on the development of tools that are based on emerging learning technology interoperability specifications. Potentially this can be used to enable the packaging of material in an IMS (Information Management system) content package format in addition to the normal zip files. This would allow content packages to be used within a virtual learning environment.

*December 2009:* A slow feed of OER material from academic staff reduced progress toward the target of 360 credits. Time pressures from teaching and research commitments took precedence over the academics supplying the reusable materials required for this project. In addition, the cautious approach to IPR

considerations, in order to minimise the possibility of any infringements, impacts negatively on the speed and on occasions the ability to release material for our repository. The upside is that there will be a very full story to tell in the presentation at the OER10 conference in Cambridge in March 2010. The ascilite 2009 conference in New Zealand, attended to disseminate experiences so far, raised awareness of the JISC funded project at the University of Exeter.

*January 2010:* OER Steering Group - Progress Report confirms 136 credits cleared for use with 354 in progress. At this point the aim was to produce 360 cleared credits by mid February. Work on the DSpace repository neared completion.

*February 2010:* 281 credits cleared for use with the remaining 80 credits in the pipeline. Discussions revolved around tailoring resources to best meet the needs of target audiences. A presentation on IPR was given at the University of Nottingham in a workshop.

*March 2010:* 360 credits cleared for use. A more liberal view was then taken regarding claiming credits if a representative proportion of the credits were cleared. Cleared material is being further checked to demonstrate 'due diligence' before being deposited in the Open Exeter repository. The University lawyers have agreed to the use of an internationally recognised Creative Commons License under which to release the OERs, opting for Attribution, Non-Commercial, Share Alike (cc by-nc-sa). The following accompanying text will be used:

1. You must not remove, alter, hide or modify any copyright notices and/or acknowledgments in the Work.
2. The Licensor expressly disclaims, to the extent permitted by law, any liability with respect to the Work including but not limited to errors or omissions contained in the Work, libel, infringements of intellectual property rights or the disclosure of confidential information. You acknowledge and agree that your use of the Work is at your sole risk and the Licensor accepts no responsibility for loss suffered or incurred as a result of your reliance on the Work.

An Information Technology Infrastructure Library (ITIL) spreadsheet provides a comprehensive checklist which when completed will enable the project to become a service within the University. Additionally, a paper is in progress which will be presented to the Vice Chancellor's Executive Group (VCEG) for the end of the project.

*April 2010:* 360 credit equivalents of material and an institutional repository finalised. Evaluation of OER Project at Exeter completed and report/paper submitted to the VCEG for consideration.

## **5. Evaluation of OER at the University of Exeter**

The interview process enabled a clear open minded qualitative analysis of the OER Project to take place. Various themes continually occurred which have been used to form the basis of this report. Several staff involved in producing resources felt that there was a real lack of material, confirming the Government concerns. Some staff thought that the sustainability of OER could revolve around having a critical mass:

*"Until there is enough good quality resources to make it worthwhile looking for OER then it will be a struggle to get people engaged into producing them. It could be a valuable experience. Look at computing and open programming where huge contributions to programme development have occurred across the world. People are now prepared to invest time on this. Initial funding could kick start the project towards the critical mass."*

## 5.1 Staff Awareness:

Many staff involved in the initial funding application freely admitted that they knew little about OER at that time. Those involved in the set up of the OER project tended to be educators who believe in “better to share” policies:

*“Philosophically its time has come although strong opinions exist which make it difficult for people to give away material for free”.*

*“At first I thought ‘why publish material and information freely’, but people do not teach themselves just because information is available as they need the tools on how to use it. It could give us a competitive advantage as nothing will stop it happening eventually.”*

*“Generic awareness of a much more open move towards publishing or educational environment with sharing and collaboration ....it’s the direction we’ve been going in for a while...sharing specialist materials so that there is partnership and collaboration”.*

However, the Educational Support Staff acknowledged that academics would be less inclined to agree with an open context movement as outlined in subsequent sections of the report. This was true and staff from many sectors of the University, questioned the value of the materials that are “just being given away” and “I just don’t see how OER contributes to goals of published research”.

It was felt that OER has a significant part to play in co-created activity, getting away from the model of the University as producers and students as consumers towards students being co-producers. MIT and OU have both benefited from their involvement with OER and it was thought of as an exciting opportunity where the University of Exeter could be part of a second wave, which would give a marketing edge.

Staff expressed a feeling of general enthusiasm at the project start up, with the opportunity to “idealistically take modules and release them back to the masses...the working tax payer who helps fund the University”. Several staff thought that OER had been “talked up” and that they are going to be the next “big thing”. They were therefore interested in being involved.

Some staff admitted that even with having been involved with OER that they still knew very little about it:

*“I do not really know what it is about and have no real views on it. They just wanted my modules and I was happy to help out”.*

Some staff said that they would be happy to use OER in their teaching or academic support role but staff were not always sure how they would be able to achieve this. Additionally, some staff said that it is “too time consuming searching for things”. Typical staff comments included:

*“I need to learn to use current electronic resources better, for example WebCT so I do not want to embark on something new”.*

*“No. I can't spend the time surfing OER for resources that might exist. Far easier to create my own resources and then feel confident I understand the material. It could help beleaguered teaching fellows who have multiple courses in subjects they are not experts in.”*

The staff interviewed said they looked for established sites and had used the following OER sources: iTunes University; The Mayo Clinic; Publishers websites; BBC sites; Wiki; MIT; NOVA; UEFAP; Biz/ed; Cambridge

University; YouTube. Several staff mentioned how useful the MIT resources were: *“fantastic stuff and it enhances their reputation”*.

## 5.2 Motivations

Staff that are currently producing OER are doing so for various reasons such as personal interest, eventual time saving, to *“be part of a team”* and because they believe their resources to be of value and want to share them. One member of staff stated:

*“There are benefits from seeing alternative ways of being taught. Currently we tend to teach as if we are the gatekeeper of all knowledge. OER can be enlightening and allow student interaction as in LTHE. They can be self learning tools like blended learning where students get lecture notes and work through them at their own pace and look at material from different angles. The notes should just be one resource in conjunction with others.”*

Another said: *“It might be an advantage to be a contributor to an OER project, as a showcase of my work for example, but all I'm really interested in as a contributor is making my resources more freely available to other educators to use as they see fit. I think there is some value in my resources that I'm happy to see others take advantage of if they wish.”*

Many staff interviewed said that they focus on producing materials for their modules and seminars and would struggle to find the time to then adapt material for OER. Time was the main reason for staff saying they would have difficulties producing OER and it was mentioned by all staff who could possibly be involved in the process. It was felt that lecturing staff generally had little motivation to produce OER material and were currently struggling to fulfil teaching pressures. Some specifically said that they would not produce OER unless forced to in their contract, mainly due to time:

*“No I do not produce OER and I am not going to. Apart from time issues I would be concerned about quality. I would not want my name linked to something that has not been quality approved...peer reviewed. There is a lot of tailoring of material needed for OER and I do not have time.”*

*“I do not have the time to produce OER and it would not be viewed as a valuable use of my time by the University”*

*“It would take you away from things you should be doing”.*

*“Staff do not need extra work”.*

Another member of staff said that the thought of producing OER changed from being *“something not to worry about to suddenly questioning how other people would interpret things. Students who see a whole course get to know you and see all your comments, such as comments on all government parties but with a selection of resources it can suddenly show a different view. I had not anticipated personal style problems.”*

However, it was also mentioned that they knew that a lot of resources which they produced were passed around by students etc and were therefore ‘out there anyway’.

The general consensus from both the workshop questionnaire and subsequent interviews was that the majority of staff did not think OER would assist with career aspirations adding comments such as:

*“No - as it stands, apart from it being a pure philanthropic exercise, spending time putting my work on to OER is not going to help me in my career at Exeter. Time would be spent better doing other things that are valued by the Uni.”*

*“No but we have got to deal with it, interact with it. We cannot just ignore that issue”.*

It was suggested that if it brought in external money then it could possibly have an impact on staff careers. Ironically, only one member of staff interviewed who was producing OERs felt that it would help their career, but not at Exeter: *“it might be of use on a CV and therefore possibly help my future career elsewhere. A portfolio would show my capabilities”*. Most of the staff were not career minded and were more interested in personal challenges or found the work interesting.

*“Motivation – if the University adopts OER, it needs to put aside time for staff to produce materials. Research is the driver at this University and there are no requirements for OER in Top 10 universities. It would need to be written into contracts but will not make money and it cannot be voluntary as it will need technical staff.”*

Many staff believed that for OER to continue at the University of Exeter it would have to be due to Government policies or issues regarding tax payer funding. Some staff felt that the goalposts for the University are moving and that OER could have an important role to play in helping staff in the future, especially as there are differing staff roles, even if they are not counted as equal:

*“Having moved away from RAE to QAA it demands that lecturers place value on teaching and are qualified, more like OFSTED. Colleges will have Associate Deans of Research and Associate Deans of Education which will raise the status of education within Colleges. With the cost of fees it will be important to provide contact time. Many teaching fellows are dogs’ bodies whereas they should be equal.”*

It was suggested by several staff that the University would need to offer career rewards for staff to participate with a path forward which *“supports scholarly activity as well as research”*.

However, the immediate over-riding answer to the question of the future of OER at Exeter always came down to time and whether or not the University really valued teaching: *“Totally unrealistic at a research led University”*.

### 5.3 IP Issues

Intellectual Property Rights (IPR), confidentiality and copyright provided the over-riding theme when talking to the support staff involved in setting up the project and the academics offering OER materials. Staff interviewed had completely underestimated the complexity of this (*“as time went on we realised how big an issue this was”*) and some staff referred to the *“shocking naivety of the lecturers involved regarding IPR”* and *“we wrongly expected academic rigour”*. One senior member of staff stated:

*“Copyright could potentially kill it off or restrict the quality of what is delivered”.*

Other views expressed included: *“Most staff do not realise the issues with IPR”*.

*“We had not foreseen the depth of copyright and plagiarism issues”.*

*“Why do staff ignore plagiarism for their lectures?”.*

*“Copyright is really difficult! ... so basically you get stuck at the level of needing permission to open content up to the world. You need a really robust process for people to be able to do that”.*

*“They just don’t know copyright. There is a true knowledge gap and in some cases they are just ignoring the rules”.*

*“I was surprised a risk register had not been completed. It should have been clear what the risks were from uploading data that infringes copyright, know what to do to stop it and how to avoid it. If you look at copyright closely it ruins the spirit of it. It crosses the academic principles of publishing and puts the University at risk on a daily basis”.*

*“The problem of possibly being sued brings constraining processes in. Work needs to be checked before being uploaded or we might have to take a hit but get things down quickly. A cost – benefit analysis would show the cost of an occasional hit compared to opportunities.”*

It was acknowledged by many of the staff that Exeter has possibly been more vigilant than other institutions and very cautionary or “risk averse”, compared to other JISC funded projects: *“Other OER programmes have gone down a very different model and taken more risks. I’m not saying that in strict legal terms that that is not the right choice. The model for OER as done here means it is not possible to take it forward because of the resources that would be attached to it”.* The respondent was clearly worried by support issues. However, staff involved in the legal aspects of OER said that they were *“not surprised Exeter is taking it very seriously”* and *“there is not a pot of cash available if there is a problem. Although the chance of a hit is low each piece of material up there increases the risk. A low risk is still a risk and there have been past claims where Schools have had to pay out”.*

Technical staff were relieved to be involved in the decision to change from a strict proportional percentage of credits policy (relating to the amount of material cleared in a module) towards total credits being claimed for a representative proportion of sample materials. It had become *“easier to chop problems rather than spend the time on trying to find licences or alternatives”.* It was felt that the substantial guidance from JISC did not really address some of the institutional issues regarding the minefield of copyright which overwhelmed the project at the start. However, the staff did find the time to go back to resources and develop them to the highest standards possible.

Images, such as JPEGs, used within lectures were felt to pose large problems if used within OER but obviously this varied by subject. Within the library there is a very small team who are copyright experts. After the project, if large amounts of OER are produced the team could become overwhelmed which would be unsustainable. Staff had strong views on supporting copyright:

*“You need a complete copyright team as at OU. They work on material there for three months before it goes live. Major journals will check through the resources and there is a risk of being sued. This could be a barrier to it taking off, especially as OER does not carry weight compared to journals.”*

*“It has focused our minds and exposed that we do not adequately resource that kind of copyright area, whether we are looking at OER or other areas of activity. In looking round to see how other places deal with it we know that there are whole copyright directorates in other institutions”.*

*“I question whether we are sufficiently joined up as a University on how we deliver copyright services...we need to capture the knowledge that has come out of this project and build into our services. There has been a complete lack of knowledge on how to deal with copyright in an open educational environment”.*

These issues led many staff (support and lecturers) to believe that creating material from scratch was the only sustainable option and even then, staff would need to be educated regarding IPR. This would also have the added benefit of accommodating standardised formatting and stream-lined marketing to reflect a professional corporate image.

Staff views evolved from thinking that it could be *“an exciting resource”, “a great concept”* to a more wary or cynical viewpoint involving *“worries over legalities and being sued”, “downturns in staff motivation”,* and *“as a business case it cannot be justified”*.

One member of staff stated:

*“We had not anticipated how difficult it was. We thought it was going to be a straight forward project but in retrospect, JISC would not have been putting up thousands of pounds if it was just straight forward! We just did not think about the difficulties between written lecture materials and open access adopting materials. It has been an enjoyable project but more limited than we thought because of the legal aspects.”*

It was generally felt that the University needed to *“establish a legal framework or precedent for a certain percentage of materials to be used if it is to be taken seriously”*.

Many staff felt that it would be good to incorporate resource creation into Learning and Teaching in Higher Education practice (LTHE – HEA accredited postgraduate programme designed to meet the needs of those new to teaching). This would make OER sustainable in the long term. The costs of producing OER would then just be a part of training with getting staff to think about copyright and IPR from the very beginning: *“a basic educational need which has now been highlighted as necessary anyway”*.

## 5.4 Quality and Reputation

Many staff highlighted the marketing aspect of OER during interviews. It was generally felt that OER would be good for kudos and as PR but that there was potential for the marketing aspect to take over and distract from providing valuable educational resources. Often these staff supported the idea of *“quality not quantity”* for resources to showcase the University as *“flagship work”*, for example, *“podcast great lectures”*. It was felt that *“lesser quality”* work would reflect very badly on the University.

*“To have some kind of external open access with exemplary examples of material would be good for each College and would entice people – it would be promotional, but it should be small scale”*.

*“The University should encourage a small number of people at the top of their field or up and coming academics to generate material which would be high impact”*.

*“There is a view that we should be focusing our priority on how it can be used as a marketing tool. As a University it could be very bankable. That to me has to be the first priority at the moment which means it stops being an OER tool and is a marketing tool”*.

## 5.5 Staff Resources

Following the successful project bid, the realities then led to huge challenges getting the project off the ground, for example, employing staff, researching into copyright issues, and web development. The majority of staff worried about the resources needed in producing OER materials, especially time:

*“There needs to be much more consideration for lecturers workloads if UoE is going to push this. I have taught 5 modules in the last 6 months - free content would be useful, but there is no satisfaction in using this off the shelf material. Unless I have invested in creating course content I feel I lack the authority to teach a course. I think OER will be used as a marketing tool for the University - just as Harvard provides high quality open access material that is labelled with their logo, Exeter could go down this route. But... it is all about resources.”*

*“I think the University has to decide whether it is going to try to rival the Open University. If it does try to rival the Open University it will have to invest massive amounts of resources in supporting teachers to deliver OER material. At the moment teaching is not rewarded by the system and therefore what incentive is there to develop materials?”*

*“There are too many other pressures on academics”.*

The potential scale of OER and the resources needed caused comments: *“I went into it thinking it could be very interesting and saleable from an E-Learning perspective...to recognising the huge resource implications that may be part of doing it on a large scale, and then perhaps realising its value more as a marketing tool at this stage in development rather than the fuller vision of what OER could be”.*

*“At the start we were thinking this was a little pilot and then you could go out across the board, but we realised for all kinds of reasons that just is not possible”.*

*“It doesn’t seem scalable in any way. Not without huge resourcing of staffing and all sorts of things. At the practical level it’s just not there”.*

*“There is a whole resource gap”.*

For OER to continue to happen at the University of Exeter it was agreed by all that staffing and funding must be provided for support and that it *“could not continue if just relying on the goodwill of staff”*. Some staff believed that a clearly allocated budget is needed and that there are issues with sustainability in the long term as providing OER does not directly create obvious financial benefits. However, it was suggested by some staff that there has been a direct correlation between OER use and people then enrolling on Open University courses, showing important business connections. Other staff stated that: *“There is no current evidence in a business case to justify the funding”*. Worries regarding risk factors with copyright and IPR compounded these views. For this reason several of the staff interviewed did not believe there would be a future for OER at the University of Exeter. A static repository would be of little value and some subjects could date very quickly (e.g. business) so continual investment would be necessary by the University which would mean commitment at a high level (Senior Management) within the University: *“Being cynical, it cannot be justified as a business case, especially in this climate where staff funding is already tight”*. This also creates resource issues with keeping up to date and *“version control”* with concerns as *“you cannot stop it being out there”*. *“It will need continual funding because the resources cannot become stale as people will not go back to it. It cannot be managed with a finite budget. If it is going to happen it needs to be resourced properly”*.

Some believed that staff interest in OER had already declined, with a *“change towards a negative attitude”* and several members of staff were surprised the University wanted to be involved with OER: *“apart from the initial funding, I am unclear as to why the University wants to do it at all”*. In contrast to the *“quality not quantity”*

view, these staff tended to believe that *“just a little bit would not be good. It would need to be a substantial effort like Biz/ed (A Level resource), MIT etc which are reliable and excellent, well known”*.

MIT was often referred to as an excellent example of OER but this also led to questions regarding their policy to stop producing OER and the scale at which they worked:

*“MIT tracked their figures and they have obviously achieved what they wanted reputation wise and are moving onto their next project. What I do not understand is that we are just doing a project on what **can** be done and they are finishing, keeping ahead of the game.”*

A number of staff worried that they would fall down on technology in producing the resources, especially if there was not any support and that this could lead to quality issues.

## 5.6 The Future of OER at Exeter

Most staff interviewed believed that OER could assist with the future development of the University of Exeter, as long as it fits into the strategic aims, with reasons such as: *“more international students”, “more joined up with the wider academic community”, “enhancing an international reputation”* and *“a missed opportunity if we do not use it to fly the Exeter flag”*. However, it was felt that it would only be of use if: *“the academics are willing to use it and share ideas”* and *“the copyright laws allow greater freedom of use within an education context”*. The majority of staff stated that it is *“not fundamental to the future of the University”*.

Excellent outcomes from the project have included the all-encompassing effect on the University where it has enabled a large number of people to meet and talk to each other: *“so many players have become involved and it really has penetrated every aspect of the University”, “OER has potential to glue together so many areas of the University for a particular purpose”* and *“its skill has been to link things together – disparate parts for one common goal. Individuals have their own goals but they have needed to see their role in the bigger picture.”*

In addition, staff believed that extra benefits had occurred with *“high quality OER driving internal resources to improve”* and *“the project has been a useful tool for culture change. It is what education will look like in an increasing digital environment”*. Raising awareness internally of copyright issues was also thought to be a good thing. Several staff believed that the project had only been feasible due to the hard work of staff involved and were pleased that the JISC aims of the project had been more than fulfilled with completed commitments. Some staff believe that nationally, Exeter is now seen as a good provider of resources. The University has worked well with other external institutions such as the OU and worked well with five internal disparate teams including the lawyers, educational developers etc.

The most popular view on the future of OER was that it should involve the production of resources on a small scale (*“low key”*) with an emphasis on quality. This would allow for feedback from colleagues and students. It was generally felt that ‘hits’ were not a clear indicator of quality resources although it does provide a good idea as to what sort of resources are wanted. It was suggested that when OER takes off, that they will be self selecting *“as people will have resources to choose from and downloads would make this clear. However, there would be the tricky transition period at the start.”*

There are many potential scenarios for the future of OER at the University of Exeter. One popular scenario for a possible future according to staff interviewed would be to evolve a strategic approach within Colleges (Colleges

will replace the current School structure in August 2010). It was also suggested that the marketing aspect would help in creating College brands:

- Identify a number of phased activities
- Create a marketing agenda
- Create an OER agenda (e.g. 2 exemplar cases targeted from each College with clear expectations, deadlines, monetary rewards, career rewards etc)
- Train new staff within the LTHE context and create rewards
- Move towards an increasing resource which is sustainable

The College OER targets might be for:

- Good courses which are under-recruited or where the students are widely scattered
- Improving on distance courses
- Providing resources with a responsibility to the wider world, such as engineering water course systems which could make a real impact in helping less developed countries.

## 6 Conclusions

In summary, many staff currently use resources regarded as OER, but not necessarily the formal repositories set up by institutions, but few are involved in the production of them for the University of Exeter. It was generally felt that the production of OER would not have an impact on one’s career at Exeter unless current policies changed. This related to a general view that the University would need to decide how important OER are on the agenda and why (marketing or as educational resources in a changing IT world) and will they support staff time with rewards. Many staff could not see the benefits for the University apart from marketing and believed that it should be *“just a few show case materials for each College done by the stars of the academic world”* which would promote the University and individuals, provide marketing and publicity, keep costs to a minimum, keep time commitments to a minimum for staff and enable careful consideration of copyright issues.

Obviously this research happened throughout the final stages of the project and it has been expressed that: *“time is needed to take stock and then re-evaluate once work has bedded down. Currently it has all been happening at once”*. Ideally research would investigate whether people still have the same views and whether OER still exists at the University of Exeter in 6 months time.

Table 1 summarises the key positive and negative aspects of OER for the University of Exeter:

PROS	CONS
Kudos/PR/“Showcase” for the University <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reputation</li> <li>• Marketing</li> <li>• Public good/charitable action</li> </ul> “Showcase” for staff and Colleges with a potentially enhanced reputation	Time <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involved for already busy staff</li> <li>• Priorities for staff</li> </ul> Funding issues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technology and resources</li> <li>• Staff time</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential to share cutting edge research</li> <li>• Be ahead of publications</li> </ul> <p>Improve teaching and learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Benefits to staff in sharing resources</li> <li>• LTHE</li> <li>• Potentially reduce course development time</li> <li>• Increase staff awareness of copyright</li> </ul> <p>Benefits to students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resource availability</li> <li>• Alternative delivery styles may suit different types of learners</li> </ul> <p>Resources potentially attracting international students</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support staff</li> </ul> <p>Confidentiality/Copyright</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reduce the value of resources</li> <li>• create possible suing situations</li> </ul> <p>Staff concerns</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fears of lack of support from the University</li> <li>• Fears of criticism of work and no control over evaluation</li> <li>• Loss of ownership of work</li> <li>• Guilt at using off the peg resources</li> <li>• Worries on quality of resources</li> <li>• No obvious personal benefit</li> </ul> <p>Academic inertia</p> <p>Resources are already available to students within the University on WebCT</p>
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Table 1: Summary of positive and negative aspect of OER according to staff interviews

## 7 References

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## Appendix 1

### Brief Workshop Summary:

The full breakdown of the initial workshop (on 17<sup>th</sup> November 2009) process and questionnaire can be seen in the OER workshop report (Rodway-Dyer 2010):

[http://as.exeter.ac.uk/media/level1/academicserviceswebsite/studentandstaffdevelopment/documents/openexeter/workshop\\_questionnaire\\_report.pdf](http://as.exeter.ac.uk/media/level1/academicserviceswebsite/studentandstaffdevelopment/documents/openexeter/workshop_questionnaire_report.pdf)

Some of the key points are summarised here within this evaluation report. By the end of the workshop it was hoped that staff would be able to plan and use OER within their teaching practices, having gained hands-on experience of tools and guidelines. The OU facilitators wished to make considerable use of Cloudworks, a social networking tool which could engage co-creators.

*“Cloudworks is a social networking site for finding, sharing and discussing learning and teaching ideas and designs”. (Open University 2010)*

The detailed workshop report (Rodway-Dyer 2010) immediately highlighted prominent concerns regarding the focus of the workshop, with conflicts between peoples’ OER expectations and the focus on Cloudworks. Attendees were largely confused and frustrated by the Cloudworks promotion as opposed to their desires to be involved in OER discussions.

However, this initial research into OER views was valuable as it showed that staff were, on the whole, interested in OER and happy to take on board the future of OER with guidance, a clear strategy and time but they also had the following reservations:

- The time required to produce OERs
- No obvious personal benefit
- Copyright protection/infringement
- Quality of materials produced/available

Peoples’ motives for attending the workshop focussed on wanting to learn about Open Exeter (a JISC-funded project to release existing learning resources under a suitable license for open use and repurposing: <http://as.exeter.ac.uk/support/educationenhancementprojects/openexeter/> ) and resources for learning and teaching. This included how to develop resources, provide resources, find out how the community would use the resources and find out what resources are available, for example on the Internet.

One member of staff commented: *“I hoped to get a feel of how we could integrate the principles of OER into the LTHE course so that new lecturers and PGRs who teach can see the real benefits”.*

Issues raised included subject difficulties and confidentiality/ copyright issues. An academic member of staff stated:

*“I did not come away from the workshop feeling very positive, thinking it is a minefield. I had a vision that there was all this stuff out there to download but came away thinking it was more bother than it was worth.”*

From the workshop report the following factors were stated as reasons as could inhibit a person’s use of OER (Table 2):

<b>Reason</b>	<b>Number of respondents</b>
Time	9
Technology and resources (incl. funds)	7
Confidentiality / Copyright	6
Academic inertia	2
Criticism of work	1
Loss of ownership	1
Quality of materials	1

Table 2: Reasons inhibiting the staff use of OER according to the Workshop Questionnaire

Many staff believed OER to be of important value for newer staff and that it would enable other academic developers to look at resources, sharing such things as CPD sessions.

One important lesson learnt from the workshop was to focus on the demand for staff development and this has subsequently been incorporated into demand led LTHE sessions with very positive feedback (Browne, Holding et al. 2010):

*“I found some very useful courses which are relevant to my teaching”.*

*“It could help beleaguered teaching fellows who have multiple courses in subjects they are not experts in”.*