



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization



COMMONWEALTH *of* LEARNING

# Open Educational Resources

## Taking OER beyond the OER Community: Policy and Capacity

Joint Initiative between the  
Division of Higher Education, UNESCO  
and the Commonwealth of Learning



## Background

The 2009 World Conference on Higher Education: The New Dynamics of Higher Education and Research For Societal Change and Development (UNESCO, Paris, 5 – 8 July 2009) noted that open and distance learning (ODL) approaches and information and communications technologies (ICT) present opportunities to widen access to quality education, particularly when OER can be readily shared by many countries and higher education institutions (Communiqué, 8 July 2009).

In 2010, UNESCO, in collaboration with COL launched the initiative: **‘Taking OER beyond the OER Community: Policy and Capacity’** in order to expand understanding of OER by educational decision makers and quality assurance experts so as to promote their wider use.

The initiative focuses in the first instance on higher education institutions – universities located in Africa, Asia and the Pacific – and is being implemented as part of a Joint Work Plan Agreement between UNESCO and COL. It builds on the results of previous and ongoing collaboration between the two organisations.

The project is financed through extra-budgetary funds provided by the Government of the United States, regular programme funds from the Division of Higher Education, UNESCO and COL.



## Objectives of the Initiative

The objectives of the initiative are to:

- Ensure greater support for the use, repurpose and reuse of OER both in developing and developed countries by educational decision makers (governmental and institutional)
- Enhance the capacity of educational practitioners in developing countries to create, repurpose and use OER

## Activities

The activities of the initiative include the following:

- The development of an OER Dossier
- Four capacity building workshops
- Three online forums
- A policy forum

This initiative will also result in two publications:

- A Basic Guide to Open Educational Resources
- Perspectives on Open Educational Resources in Higher Education

An initiative website provides information on all activities and the documents used in the workshops. These include papers, presentations, outcomes of group discussions and workshop reports. The site also provides background to and summaries of the discussions held during the 3 online forums.

<http://oerworkshop.weebly.com>

## OER Dossier

An OER Dossier has been developed to serve as a resource for the capacity building workshops and policy forum. The dossier presents evidence that the use and adaptation of existing OER raises the quality of teaching and/or reduces costs.

The dossier aims to:

- Define the concept of OER
- Give an overview of ongoing initiatives in the creation and implementation of OER worldwide
- Provide an OER economic value proposition with potential for educational transformation
- Outline some emerging challenges to the creation and implementation of OER
- Give an overview of Open Licenses

# OER Capacity Building Workshops

Four OER Capacity Building Workshops took place. The theme of the workshops was ‘**Taking OER beyond the OER Community: Policy and Capacity**’.

The workshops brought together higher education leadership and practitioners, experts in quality assurance and representatives of quality assurance agencies from both developing and developed countries.

The OER Capacity Building Workshops have identified a number of key issues that require further discussion. These include:

- Advocacy and promotion of OER
- Capacity building for the use and reuse of OER
- Quality assurance mechanisms and standardisation
- Sustainability, specifically around funding and technological issues
- Issues around “Where does one begin?” and “Which subject area does one start with?”
- Strategies for institutional OER projects
- Copyright, open licensing and the publishing industry
- Motivating faculty members and changing the nature of assessment for tenure
- Accessibility and ICT skills
- Funding

## **Cape Town, South Africa**

*28 April 2010*

This OER Capacity Building Workshop followed the ACU Conference of Executive Heads that took place from 25-27 April 2010. The intent of the workshop was to alert university leaders to the potential of OER to facilitate the expansion of quality higher education and to receive feedback from them on policy issues relating to the use of OER in universities.

The theme of the workshop was ‘Taking OER beyond the OER Community: Towards Quality in Higher Education’. This workshop brought together 34 Vice-Chancellors/representatives from both developing and developed countries to:

- Understand OER and acknowledge them as a legitimate option for higher education
- Discuss how OER can blend local and global inputs in creating graduates with the skills, knowledge and competences that the times require
- Contribute to the policy debate relating to the use of OER in universities
- Value the contribution of OER to quality teaching and learning
- Understand how OER impact on quality in higher education institutions

It furthermore gave practical examples of where OER have been used in the developed and developing world.

## Windhoek, Namibia

**3 May 2010**

This workshop coincided with the 2010 Biennial Members' Forum of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies for Higher Education (INQAAHE) that took place from 4-6 May 2010 in Windhoek, Namibia.

The theme of the workshop was also 'Taking OER beyond the OER Community: Towards Quality in Higher Education'.

The workshop aimed to bring together experts in quality assurance and quality assurance agencies from both developing and developed countries to:

- Understand OER and acknowledge them as a legitimate option for higher education
- Discuss how OER can contribute to quality teaching and learning
- Understand how do OER impact on quality assurance in higher education institutions
- Discuss how quality assurance agencies can include OER in their approaches to audits and accreditation

The workshop brought together 42 experts in quality assurance and representatives from quality assurance agencies from both developing and developed countries.

## Bamako, Mali

**4 October 2010**

The third OER workshop coincided with the Fourth International Conference on Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Africa (ICQAHEA – 2010) and the Capacity Building (Training) Workshops on Institutional Accreditation (ICQAHEA – 2010) organised by UNESCO Bamako.

The objectives of the workshop were to:

- Improve understanding of OER and recognise them as a legitimate option for higher education
- Examine how OER can influence the development of higher education institutions
- Understand how OER affect quality within higher education institutions
- Consider how quality assurance agencies may include OER in their approaches to quality assurance and accreditation
- Contribute to the policy debate on the use of OER in higher education

The workshop was attended by 36 higher education stakeholders from mainly francophone countries in Africa.

## Kochi, India

**23 November 2010**

The fourth OER workshop aimed to bring together higher education leaders, managers and practitioners in Asia and the Pacific and took place on 23 November 2010 in Kochi, India. This workshop coincided with the 6<sup>th</sup> Pan Commonwealth Forum that took place from 24-28 November 2010.

The objectives of the workshop were to:

- Introduce the concept of OER and the open licensing frameworks that make sharing of educational content possible
- Explore how open licensing can help to improve the quality of education in the Pacific and Southeast Asia
- Discuss where and how policies and practices in education need to change in order to harness the potential of OER

32 higher education institution representatives and experts, mainly from open universities, took part in the workshop.



## Online Discussion Forums

Three online discussion forums took place to raise awareness, on the one hand, and to promote informed discussion and debate, on the other amongst stakeholders in higher education. The three forums took place from September – November 2010 and were organised in sessions of a week each, each focusing on a different broad theme.

The themes discussed were:

- Taking OER beyond the OER Community: Policy and Capacity
- What works, what does not and under what conditions?
- Copyright and the development and re-use of OER

352 participants registered and participated in the online forums.



## Policy Forum

The initiative concluded with the Policy Forum that took place on 1 December 2010 in Paris, France.

The objectives of the Policy Forum were to:

- Establish a common understanding of OER and their potential to promote access to quality higher education in developing countries
- Discuss the role of OER in advancing the Millennium Development Goals
- Report on how OER can maximise the impact of investment on education
- Review progress made in the initiative ‘Taking OER beyond the OER Community: Policy and Capacity’
- Discuss and propose a way forward for UNESCO, COL and other relevant agencies to harness OER for the greatest benefit of education and explore related issues, in particular Open Licensing and their adoption in intergovernmental organisations’ policies

## Publications

### A Basic Guide to Open Educational Resources

This joint COL/UNESCO publication provides a simple user-friendly guide to OER by defining OER and identifying the key issues relating to the development and implementation of OER. It is a comprehensive guide to OER targeting developing countries, particularly those that are not completely aware of the issues and implications of OER; government education officials and related policy/decision makers; senior leaders in different education sectors and organisations; researchers; as well as faculty members, students and administrators who may have a general non-specialist interest in OER.

### Perspectives on Open Educational Resources in Higher Education

This publication marks the first collection of papers to emerge from the work of the joint initiative between UNESCO and COL: ‘Taking OER beyond the OER Community: Policy and Capacity’. It consists of a set of specialist issues papers and case studies addressing OER in a systematic way and provides links to useful references.

These papers represent a significant addition to existing work in the field, particularly at a time when higher education institutions in many parts of the world, both new and established, are placing great emphasis on quality teaching and learning and the use of quality materials in a time of scarce resources.



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**For more information:**

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