



Playing Catch-up: Investigating Public and Institutional Policies for OER Practices in Australia

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Abstract

This article explores some of the most well-known Open Educational Resource (OER) initiatives worldwide and then reports on OER developments in Australia. It also discusses a current research project funded by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC), including its design and methods of data collection and analysis. Although the study reported here is ongoing, a survey of the tertiary sector to establish the current ‘state of play’ of OERs in Australia has been completed. The authors examine a preliminary analysis that focuses mostly on OER policies at governmental and institutional levels. The analysis shows that the OER movement remains relatively immature in Australia. Also, according to the survey’s participants, the government and educational institutions need to give much greater consideration to a regulatory framework in which the use of OER and Open Educational Practices (OEP) can be fostered and encouraged. Isolated OER activities exist, but there appears to be a great deal of catching up required if Australia is to have coordinated initiatives to foster innovation and a culture of more OEPs.

Keywords: open educational practices; OER; open educational resources; OEP; educational policies; research in OEP

Introduction

To date, many universities around the globe have launched Open Educational Resource (OER) projects. Wiley and Gurrell (2009) claim that millions of learners have benefited from learning through OER materials, and many educational institutions, mostly distance education providers, have obtained significant rewards in terms of enhancing their reputations, increasing student enrolment, and developing innovative ways to produce distance learning materials. The movement supporting OERs and, more recently, Open Educational Practices (OEPs), continues to gain momentum at a substantial rate. The rapid global expansion in the availability of quality OERs and the development and trialling of a range of OEPs is set to change the future landscape of higher education. New conceptions of delivery, curriculum development, pedagogy, and sustainable business will soon begin to challenge institutions to quickly consider the implications or run the risk of losing competitive advantage. The philosophy behind the OER movement is “that of making educational materials a common or public good from which all, in theory, can benefit, but most especially those who receive the least benefit from current systems of educational provision, whether publicly or privately funded” (Lane, 2008, p. 149).

In Australia, it appears that the use and adoption of OERs to their full potential is still at the early stages. To some extent, this is understandable because the notion of free access to institutional curriculum and pedagogy runs counter to contemporary forms of university delivery and ownership of the content of educational programmes. Australia is still grappling with issues such as licensing, intellectual property, and copyright. Compared with the United States, United Kingdom, and New Zealand, Australia's adoption of OER is hampered by immature policy frameworks and a dearth of research. Nevertheless, there have been important institutional initiatives and government policy moves towards opening up Australia. This article starts with an overview of some of the most well-known OER initiatives in other parts of the world before reporting on OER developments in Australia. Then the authors discuss a current research project funded by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC), which surveys the tertiary sector to help establish the current state of play of OERs in Australia (Brown & Bossu, 2011). Although the study reported here is ongoing, our preliminary analysis confirms our assumption that the OER movement remains relatively immature in Australia. Isolated OER activities exist but there appears to be a great deal of catching up needed for the nation to have coordinated or state-wide initiatives to foster innovation and a culture of more OEP.

Some OER initiatives worldwide

Stimulated by funding from benefactors such as the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and UNESCO, the OER movement has been growing rapidly since 2001, providing educational content freely to learners across the world through the internet. Educational organisations such as Massachusetts Institute of Technology's (MIT) have perceived benefits, both for themselves and learners, in distributing their learning resources in this way. The MIT OpenCourseWare (OCW) initiative, which was set up in 2001, makes content available freely from most of MIT's courses and has inspired many similar institutional projects. When the MIT OCW site was officially launched in 2003, there were 500 courses available. Wiley and Gurrell (2009) report that by 2004 there were 900, and in 2007 the total reached 1800. Visitor numbers were even more impressive. By 2007, MIT's OCW site had received more than 40 million visits (Wiley & Gurrell, 2009). Today, the site total has reached 110 million visits by 78 million visitors from around the world (MIT OCW, 2011). Equally significant was the speed with which the MIT OCW site demonstrated its value to the institution. The *2009 Program Evaluation Findings Summary* reported that 35% of new MIT students had based their choice of institution, in whole or in part, on their exposure to the MIT OCW site (MIT OCW, 2009). It was also reported that "92% of students, 87% of alumni and 78% of faculty who have used the site rate it as very or somewhat valuable" (MIT OCW, 2009, p. 1). Although MIT has a degree of self-interest in publicising these statistics to justify the original funding, the OCW project provided a catalyst for other universities worldwide and led to the establishment of the OpenCourseWare Consortium (OCWC). The OCWC celebrates its 10th anniversary in 2011 with over 200 institutional members and affiliates worldwide (OCW, 2008).

By the end of 2006 there were signs that the OER movement had reached maturity and alternatives to the MIT model emerged in Europe. One of these, OpenLearn, was launched by the United Kingdom's Open University (OU) in October 2006, and was intended to publish the widest possible selection of OU course materials. It was also intended to do much more; its explicit goal was to engage and support self-directed learners using the latest Web 2.0 technologies (Shuller, 2006). The site would not only host user-generated content (material created by individuals and organisations outside the higher education sector), it would also provide social networking tools to empower users to build their own learning communities (Shuller, 2006). In the first 18 months the OpenLearn site had received 3 million unique visits, and 75,000 people had registered as users (McAndrew et al., 2009). By April 2008, over 4400 OpenLearn users had become OU students (Gourley & Lane, 2009).

At the same time, and running in parallel to these institutional initiatives, there were developments such as Wikipedia, WikiUniversity, and WikiEducator, amongst other MediaWiki platforms. WikiEducator, launched in 2006, is a dedicated global community of scholars, teachers, and trainers who are committed to the collaborative authoring and development of OERs (Wiley & Gurrell, 2009). Using these platforms, educators from across the globe are working together to build free OERs that can be used in a variety of learning environments. Importantly, unlike many earlier initiatives that focused on free access, these OERs can be re-contextualised and repackaged outside the WikiEducator development environment and according to learners' needs. One of the ambitious strategies of the WikiEducator community is to develop a free version of the educational curriculum by 2015 (WikiEducator: About, 2011). Currently, WikiEducator has over 20,000 registered users, indicating that WikiEducator is growing faster than predicted by its Community Council. In mid-2011 WikiEducator had a total of 102,852 pages (all pages in the wiki, including talk pages, redirects, etc.), 29,266 uploaded files, and 41,679,925 hits (WikiEducator: Statistics, 2011).

While these initiatives form the foundation of the OER movement, many more projects targeting different audiences and their needs have emerged recently. One such example is Flickr, a repository of "openly licensed photographs, which may be useful in a variety of educational settings" (Wiley & Gurrell, 2009, p. 16), as well as in other contexts, and is totally different from a suite of online lessons with related resources on a specific topic. A good example of the latter is the Teacher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa (TESSA) programme, which has been developed to meet the needs of teacher training in Sub-Saharan Africa. A consortium of 18 national and international organisations, including 13 institutions in Sub-Saharan Africa, TESSA is mainly funded by the Allan and Nesta Ferguson Charitable Trust and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation (Wolfenden, 2008). This initiative has produced an extensive database of learning resources available in five different languages, and aims to provide pre-service and in-service teacher training to the institutions involved (Connolly, Wilson, & Wolfenden, 2007; Wolfenden, 2008).

The growing diversity of OER initiatives, coupled with better understanding of the limitations of open content without open practices, has given rise to an important shift in thinking in the field. An early example of this shift was the Open Educational Quality Initiative, an international network to support and promote Open Educational Practices (OEP) (OPAL, 2011a). The project concluded that OEPs have the potential to lead to more open pedagogical practices and innovative cultures. In other words, a narrow focus on OERs may not be enough for educational institutions to fundamentally embrace and establish effective open pedagogical practices. The Open Learning Network (OLnet) is an interesting example of an OEP research initiative. OLnet is a 3-year research project that brings "...researchers and educators together in an intelligent social network to share knowledge on the development of Open Educational Resources" (OLnet, 2011). The aim is to gather evidence and methods about how we can research and understand ways to learn in a more open world.

Developments in open policies worldwide

It is important to highlight that the examples of OER initiatives and projects mentioned above only scratch the surface of what is presently available. Some of them reflect more than a decade of institutional and national investments and policies and guidelines developed by the institutions, countries, and funding bodies they originated from. As pointed out previously, some examples of these investments and developments have taken place in the United States, the United Kingdom and, to some extent, New Zealand. These countries, for instance, already have in place national government frameworks for open access and licensing, enabling access to government resources for re-using through Creative Commons licences, which have become the standard licences for OERs. These governments appear to believe that opening up their resources

and works for re-use will promote more open and transparent government. By their actions, they also seem to acknowledge the benefits of leveraging taxpayer-funded educational developments for the benefit of a much wider audience (Kanwar, Kodhandaraman, & Umar, 2010). In addition, it is also believed that institutional-level OER and OEP initiatives have higher chances of succeeding and expanding in countries where support is provided at the national level (Carey, 2011).

Other national policy developments in the United States and the United Kingdom have involved substantial funding to support open-access initiatives in the higher education sector, including community colleges (Carey, 2011). These investments are mostly in the form of small- and large-scale grants that are awarded to individual institutions upon submission of projects for developing OERs, and thus encouraging the establishment of OEPs (Ehlers, 2011). The United Kingdom, in particular, has invested in research that focuses on OEP, and that “constitute(s) the range of practices around the creation, use and management of open educational resources with the intent to improve quality and innovate education” (OPAL, 2011b, p. 4). These investments have resulted in a large number of resources and a growing collection of reports, journal articles, case studies, guidelines and frameworks for OER and OEP (JISC, 2011).

OER initiatives in Australia

In Australia, the willingness to share educational resources started in the Vocational Education and Training (VET), Technical and Further Education (TAFE), and the school sectors more than a decade ago (Browne, 2009). One example is the AEShareNet licensing system, which is a VET initiative. AEShareNET is a search engine that “connects people who are looking for learning materials with those who own them” (AEShareNet, 2011). Unfortunately, not all resources are free of charge or have open licences. Another initiative from the VET sector is LORN, a repository of learning objects and online resources for teacher training available for download, use and re-purpose. LORN is an initiative established by the Australian Flexible Learning Framework, but due to budget cuts and (possibly) jurisdictional issues, it was decommissioned on 31st August 2011 (LORN, 2011).

More recently, the Australian higher education sector has also shown some interest in OERs. Macquarie University, with the Macquarie E-Learning Centre of Excellence (MELCOE) in Sydney was, for example, singled out for special mention in the 2007 OECD report on worldwide OER initiatives. The authors of the report noted that MELCOE specialises in developing open-source software tools and open standards for e-learning (OECD, 2007). Although MELCOE has had some limited success in this area, Macquarie University remains on the margins of the OER movement (Suzor, 2006). The University of Southern Queensland (USQ) seems to have a clearer OER strategy in place. The university remains the only Australian member of the OCWC, which it joined in 2007 (ccClinic, 2008). At present, the USQ OCW site offers sample courses from each of the institutions’ five faculties, and courses from its Tertiary Preparation Program. USQ is currently developing a pilot project, called OER University, to offer several undergraduate courses in conjunction with other OER Foundation members, (OERU, 2011). Students will be supported through a network of academic volunteers from Academic Volunteers International, and will be offered formal assessment for a nominal (cost recovery) payment and credit transfer of these studies to a diploma or undergraduate award. Also, Queensland University of Technology has developed Australian jurisdiction-specific licences from the generic Creative Commons licences (Fitzgerald, 2009). As mentioned previously, Creative Commons licences are the standard licences for OERs, and developing different categories of licensing is a very important step toward the adoption of OERs in Australia.

Another important player in the open access movement is iTunes U, through which several Australian universities have released teaching materials. However, most of the materials consist of podcasts that are available only to students and staff of the institution, and the content is subject to licensing agreements with Apple Computer Inc. Notably, individual universities (such as Victoria University) have opted to release their iTunes U podcasts into the public domain. That said, the basic assumption of many of these initiatives is that people will use the resources in their current state rather than reworking them and producing new OERs that can, in turn, be shared and given back to the education community (Wiley, 2009). This is a key point because, at a deeper level, the OER movement is predicated on the philosophical belief that online materials should be open for repurposing and reuse.

Open policies developments in Australia

Some initiatives and policy developments at the government level have also taken place in Australia. One of the most recent initiatives is the Australian Government's Open Access and Licensing Framework (AusGOAL), which aims to provide "support and guidance to government and related sectors to facilitate open access to publicly funded information" (AusGOAL, 2011, para. 1). As with the initiatives in the United States, the United Kingdom, and New Zealand, AusGOAL is aligned with numerous open government Australian initiatives and initiatives worldwide. One could argue that AusGOAL might have been introduced as a result of the success of open-access developments in other countries, and as an attempt to catch up with them. Another initiative supported by the Australian government is the Australian National Data Service, a database that contains research resources from research institutions in Australia. The Service seeks "to enable researchers to more easily publish, discover, access and use [and re-use] research data" (ANDS, 2011, para 1). Also, in January in 2011 the Australian Government revised its *Guide to Open Source Software for Australian Government Agencies*, which was first developed in 2005. The revised policy requires that government agencies first consider open-source software options when requesting tenders (Gray, 2011).

Although the above Australian government developments seem to be on par with a number of international developments, they focus overwhelmingly on government agencies rather than on educationally based policies. The standout exception was the establishment of the ALTC, which is a national funding body with a particular focus on developing a culture of sharing effective teaching and learning in higher education. Use of Creative Commons licences is encouraged to publish resources that are developed and funded by ALTC. One successful example of this type of policy support for open access is the College of Fine Arts at the University of New South Wales. Their project, funded by ALTC in 2009, focused on the development of quality video and text resources to assist educators to teach online. The outcome of this project has produced a substantial range of digital training resources to enhance the quality of online pedagogy—these resources are freely disseminated under a Creative Commons licence (COFA, 2011). The closure of ALTC from the end of 2011 means the future of these efforts is uncertain. Instead of moving forward to catch up with developments elsewhere, this closure represents a step backwards for innovation in teaching and learning in Australian higher education. The management of remaining ALTC projects such as this one has been transferred to the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (ALTC, 2011).

Unfortunately, experience so far suggests that the full potential of the use and adoption of OERs and OEPs are a long way off in Australia's higher education sector. Despite the important initiatives previously discussed, the lack of explicit educationally oriented government policies appear to be limiting and/or slowing down the process of OER adoption. To date there have been few policy levers or enablers to support universities and other tertiary providers from pursuing OER initiatives to better support current students, attract new ones, and compete against other Australian and international institutions. The scenario above appears to demonstrate that

Australian higher education is missing an important opportunity to expand OER practices. Research conducted by UNESCO has identified that the higher education sector is the lead stakeholder for the development of OERs and, subsequently, OEPs (D'Antoni, 2008).

Study in progress

The limited number of OER and OEP initiatives, and the lack of policies at institutional and government levels to support the open educational movement in Australia, encouraged us, a group of academics and researchers across three institutions, to develop a project proposal to the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC). Recognising the need for such a project for Australian higher education institutions, the proposal was successfully funded and the \$220,000 project is currently ending its first stage. The remainder of this paper discusses this research project, titled *Adoption, Use and Management of Open Educational Resources to Enhance Teaching and Learning in Australia*, and details various aspects of the project design, methods, and the current progress of the study.

Methods

The project was designed in two stages. We are reaching the end of the first stage, which has involved a comprehensive literature review of the state of OERs internationally and nationally, the collection of institutional and national educational policies and frameworks related to OERs, and data collection (Brown & Bossu, 2011). One of the challenges in an area as dynamic as the OER movement was to develop a systematic, transparent, and replicable process for the literature review. It took several attempts and many fruitful discussions in research team meetings to finalise a trustworthy approach to conducting the review of the literature that suited the requirements of this project. A thorough approach to the literature review should allow others to assess the quality of the work done and enable future replication (Ridley, 2008). The literature review consists of work that is no more than 10 years old. Unless considered to be seminal works, preference was given to work published in the last 5 years. Resources include peer-reviewed journal articles (open and closed), books, conference papers, government websites, reports, and policies related to institutional copyright, intellectual property, and relevant resources associated with OERs. At the time of writing, an annotated bibliography of 100 key references has been compiled, and is already proving to be a valuable resource for the team members to consult, interrogate, and add references to as we progress with the project. The search has focused on the international and national literature relating to a number of key themes identified through a pilot process.

In addition, an online survey of Australian higher education institutions was undertaken to ascertain the extent of development, use, and adoption of OERs. The survey sought answers to a maximum of 33 questions. Initial survey questions focused on establishing the extent of the respondents' knowledge and experience with OERs and the extent of their institutions' current involvement in OER projects. Later questions explored opinions relating to the benefits of, and barriers to, more widespread adoption of OERs and the perceived need for both public and institutional policies to govern their development and management. The survey was followed by a series of interviews with OER stakeholders and practitioners. The interview instrument was based upon a similar framework to that of the survey but provided semi-structured questions for each topic, and probes for the interviewer to more extensively interrogate the responses of the interviewee. To protect the integrity of responses the participants in the survey and interview are under no obligation to identify themselves individually. The Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of New England approved both the survey and interview instruments.

Data analysis has been an ongoing process. NVivo9, software that assists the management, storage, and analysis of qualitative data, has been used to support the researchers during the analysis phase of this study. Digital files of recorded interviews, literature, policies, and the online survey have been stored in NVivo9. Mixed methods were adopted as the main approach for data collection and analysis. Thematic analysis has also been used to support and confirm themes and concepts identified in the literature, and those that emerged during data collection. Thematic analysis has assisted the researchers to identify patterns and reduce and refine the data into themes to facilitate interpretation “as an inductive inquiry” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 5). A preliminary data analysis summary report will be sent to the project’s reference group to collect feedback and to build stronger rapport and trust. The reference group comprises four international and national experts in the field of OERs, and will enable us to confirm data analysis. This process also builds on the validation and trustworthiness of the data, and adopts powerful instruments for community and team collaboration.

In stage two of the project, the findings of stage one will provide the basis of a National Symposium for gathering more information and collecting feedback across the higher education sector. The symposium is also a key dissemination point for this project. Representatives from each Australian university and other related government bodies will be encouraged to attend. The participants will provide feedback on the findings of the survey as well as discussing and sharing practices and experiences about OERs. One of the project outcomes is to develop a feasibility protocol for conducting a feasibility study in the interested Australian higher education institutions to consider how the adoption, management, and use of OERs might help to enhance teaching and learning in Australia. Developing a feasibility protocol will avoid duplication and, we hope, save Australian institutions resources and time. Other project outcomes are: to expand understanding of the OER trend and effects for Australia; to enhance institutional understanding of the issues, barriers, opportunities, and successes of OERs; and to inform institutional and government policies and practices for OERs within higher education in Australia.

Survey findings and discussion

In July 2011 the online survey was sent out to the mailing lists of several professional networks, particularly targeting Australian higher education stakeholders, from senior executive managers to support service personnel and educators. To date, there have been 101 valid survey responses. This number is considered acceptable because the Australian higher education sector is relatively small and the sample compares favourably with similar European studies research surveys conducted elsewhere around the world. The sample includes participants from 28 of the 39 universities in Australia, and four other tertiary institutions also responded to the survey. The high participation rates across the sector meant that all Australian states and territories were represented in this study. There is also balanced gender distribution amongst the respondents: 48% male and 51% female. The sample also has a good representation of university stakeholder groups, from senior executives (23 participants) to managers (13), educators (28), curriculum designers (14), professional developers (6), library professionals (4) and copyright officers (2).

Figure 1 depicts all groups of stakeholders that answered the survey.

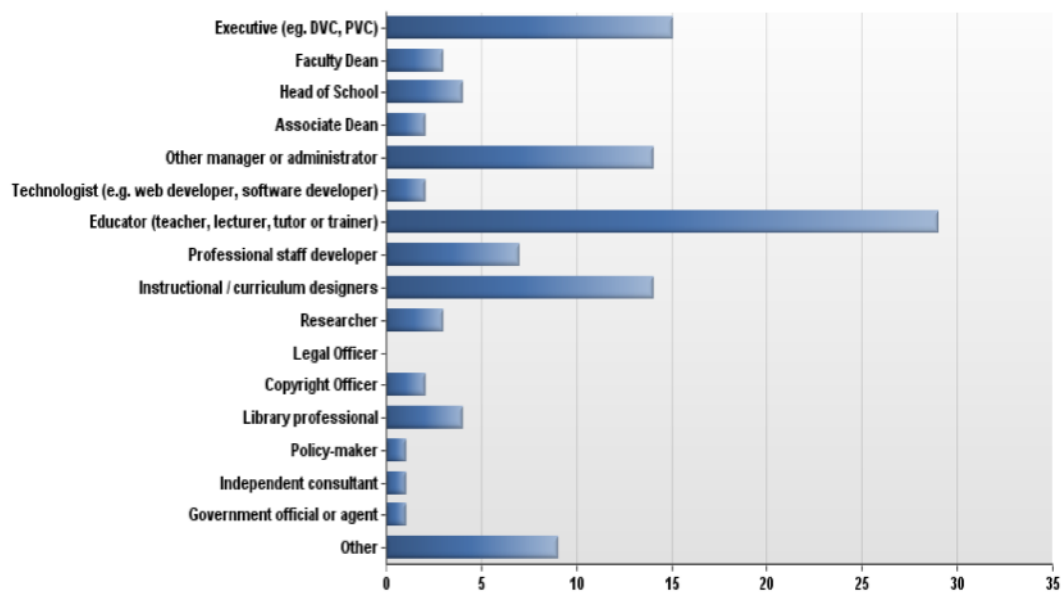


Figure 1 Stakeholders' participation

Most respondents (41%) have been aware of the OER movement for 2 to 5 years, and rated their knowledge of OERs as intermediate (51%). These are particularly high levels of awareness and OER knowledge considering that a substantial number of respondents are not aware of OERs or do not know (36), or confirmed that OER practices and initiatives are not included in the current strategic plans of their educational institution (31). One possible explanation for this could be that there have been some small and isolated initiatives occurring within individual institutions. It is interesting to note that some respondents from the universities involved in this research named this project as the OER initiative that they were aware of in Australia.

One feature of this survey is particularly relevant to this paper: When asking participants about the level of intervention from federal policies they believe would be necessary to regulate the adoption of OER in Australia, the majority agreed that there is an urgent need for public policies to promote access and availability of OERs in the higher-education sector. They also believe that there is a call for specific public policies to regulate OERs, and that these policies could encourage the growth, development, and institutional adoption of open educational resources and practices across the sector in Australia (Figure 2). It was discussed earlier in this paper that even though the efforts of some individual OER and OEP initiatives have succeeded at the institutional level, the movement has expanded faster and more effectively in countries where support was provided at the national level (Carey, 2011). Particularly in Australia, this support could come in the form of more flexible policies. For instance, the *Copyright Law of Australia* declares, “under Australian law, where an employee is the author, the first owner of copyright is the employer”. This means that all educational materials produced by teaching staff are owned by the institutions they work for (Copyright Law of Australia, 2011, para 1). As in the United Kingdom and the United States, the Australian government should also support higher educational institutions through grants or financial awards to encourage the development of OER and a culture of open practices.

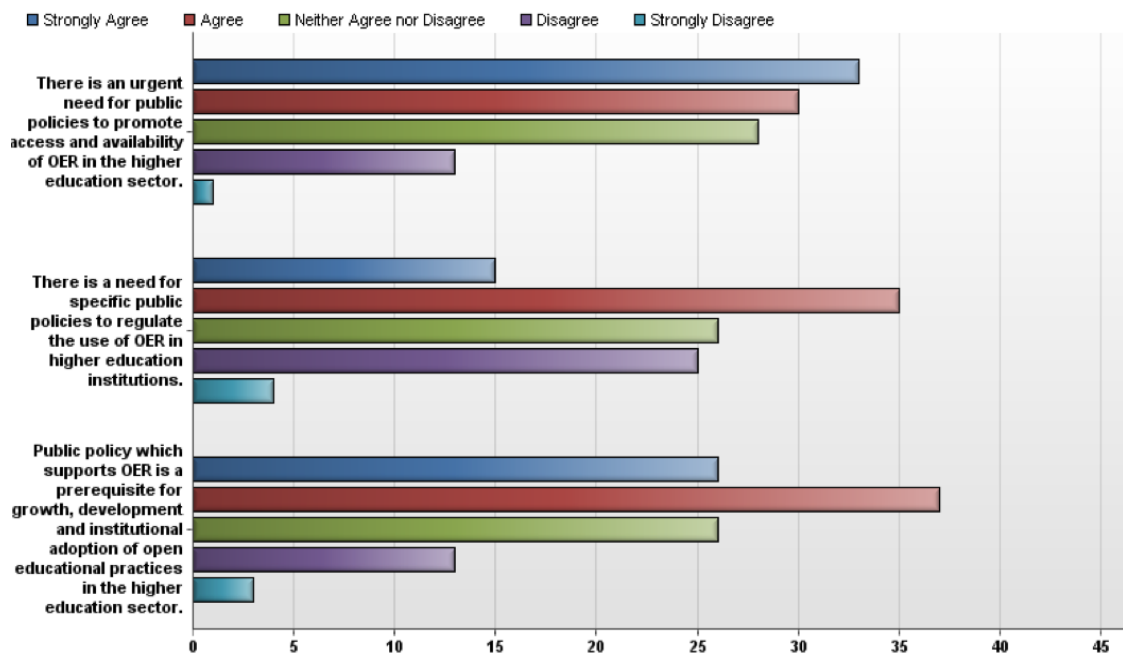


Figure 2 OER policies at government levels

Survey respondents strongly considered that developing institutional policies is also an important factor in promoting the effective use and adoption of OERs. As can be seen in Figure 3, most participants reported that institutional policies should promote OER awareness and support issues that relate to intellectual property and quality assurance. For them, it is also important that institutions promote and recognise OER initiatives, and this could also occur through financial initiatives. At institutional levels, participants also suggested that there should be appropriate technological infrastructure and guidelines for the effective creation and use of OERs. No respondents indicated that the above issues were either unimportant or very unimportant.

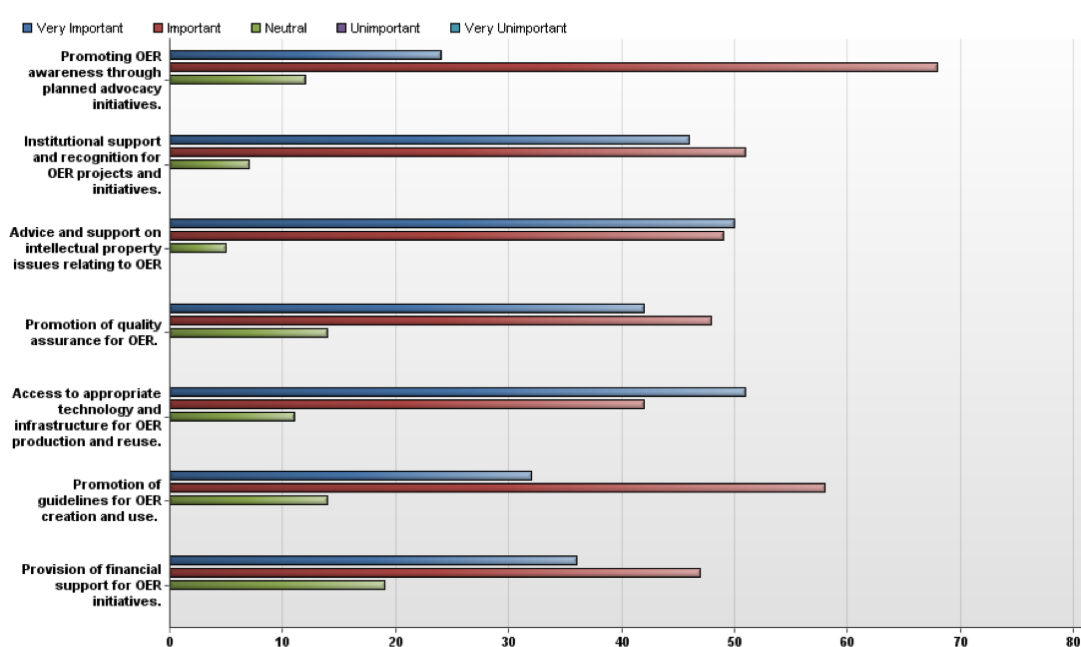


Figure 3 OER policies at institutional levels

It is interesting to note that the survey responses seem congruent with the body of literature regarding OERs and OEPs. It is argued that the lack of incentives and support from institutions, and lack of awareness regarding copyright and intellectual property matters, create institutional challenges for the use and development of OERs within mainstream higher education (Atkins, Brown, & Hammond, 2007; OECD, 2007; Wiley & Gurrell, 2009). Addressing these concerns requires institutional policy makers to commit themselves to a long-drawn-out process of consultation and review. Such processes are frequently slow and do not always provide the most desirable outcomes. It is not surprising, therefore, that there are not many OER initiatives in Australia; in fact, it is rather remarkable that there are actually so many worldwide. Decisions regarding quality control, facilitation of web access for students with disabilities, and technical issues related to the choice of metadata format, standards, and software architectures, all add to institutional overheads when launching an OER project (OECD, 2007).

Survey respondents also identified the lack of institutional policies to address OER developments as a potential barrier to facilitate the growth of the OER movement, amongst other barriers. This was also true in studies undertaken in Europe and other parts of the world (OECD, 2007; OPAL, 2011a). In fact, many have alerted institutional policy makers to the existing institutional barriers to the creation and adoption of OER, and that these barriers could be overcome through appropriate internal regulations and guidelines (Atkins, et al., 2007; Downes, 2007; Kanwar et al., 2010; OECD, 2007; OPAL, 2011). That said, there is greater recognition in the literature that some of these barriers may be much deeper and require a cultural shift towards more OEPs (Ehlers, 2011).

It is important to acknowledge that many of the respondents are likely to be inherently biased and predisposed towards the use of OERs. Although the survey was sent to professional bodies concerned with teaching and learning in higher education in Australia and, as mentioned above, reached many stakeholders, we believe that the majority of the participants who responded to the survey had some level of understanding of OERs. This problem needs to be noted when interpreting other major surveys in this area. Having said that, we were surprised to find the extent of diversity in the definition or understanding of OERs reported by participants. Such diversity suggests that even amongst a sample of pro-OER stakeholders there is a lack of clarity of understanding of OERs. This discovery underscores the potential value of this research project to educate and promote further understanding through its outcomes, and to help the sector to play catch-up, where appropriate, with the wider OER movement.

Conclusion and future directions

Although Australia has seen some recent OER and public policy developments, these developments appear to be isolated and a long way from reaching the mainstream higher education landscape. In addition, public policies have focused on government agencies and research data and outputs. There appears to be lots of catching up to do in terms of educationally based policies at governmental and institutional levels to encourage the adoption of OERs and OEPs in Australia. In fact, this gap has been identified by the first stage of this ALTC project as one of the barriers to the expansion of these movements. The need to increase and deepen the levels of understanding regarding OERs and OEPs, and the provision of institutional support for copyright and intellectual property issues, were also recognised by participants as potential challenges for OERs and OEPs in Australia.

Government and educational institutions need to give much greater consideration to a regulatory framework in which use of OERs and OEPs can be fostered and encouraged. Such a framework would no doubt benefit not only the Australian public, but also the global community—both are urgently trying to address a huge and growing demand for higher education.

In the next steps of our project we will concentrate on the final analysis of the survey, interviews, and related policies, and to organise the National Symposium, which is scheduled to take place around mid-2012. We anticipate that the outcomes of this research will raise awareness, across the Australian higher education sector and beyond, about OER and OEP trends and effects in education. It is also hoped that this research will provide resources to inform institutional and governmental policies and practices for OEPs in Australia, and to enable key stakeholders that make decisions through a deeper understanding and awareness of the barriers and opportunities of OERs and, most importantly, OEPs—thus catching up with developments already taking place around the world today.

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