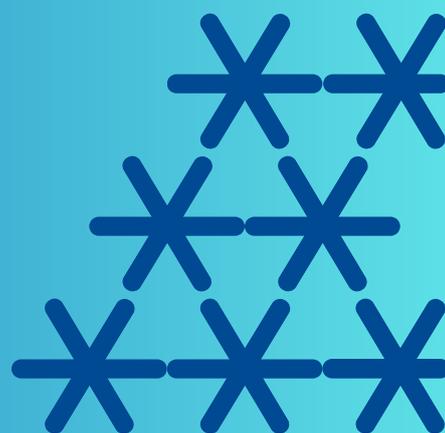


REPORT

Insights into developments in European Open Education institutional policymaking

September 2023





Insights into developments in European Open Education institutional policymaking

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Contact:
Vanessa Proudman,
SPARC Europe Director
vproudman@sparceurope.org

Report authors:
Jon Treadway,
Paola Corti,
and Vanessa Proudman

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

What role does Open Education (OE) policymaking have in advancing Open Education in European Higher Education institutions?

This report sets out to provide an answer to that question, by drawing on interviews with policymakers to gain their insights on what is driving and holding back progress. Interviewees were drawn from respondents to the 2021 and 2022 SPARC Europe Open Education surveys, and other experts and policymakers suggested in the course of interviews.

The Open Education movement and particularly the development of Open Educational Resources (OER) and Practices (OEP), has the potential to bridge the access gaps between students, educators, and academia. However, despite an increasing number of institutional policies in development and being implemented, the perception remains that progress is slow and only a limited number of papers have been developed.

This report is designed to provide an accessible summary for those who may be considering whether to develop a policy of their own, setting out some of the different approaches across Europe.

- Libraries are natural advocates and change agents for OE policy development but partnerships and the involvement of staff whose focus and expertise is technical or pedagogical can help accelerate progress and articulate policies so that they attract the support of faculty. Initial demand can arise with educators who wish to take advantage of technological developments or make their materials more widely available.
- Senior decision makers respond to framings which emphasise the return on investment to institutions, and how OERs safeguard their assets and help them deliver on its broader social and economic mission.
- National policies are accelerating progress, helping ensure expertise can be developed and retained at the institutional level. Dedicated resources and funding will accelerate this progress far further. Where a national framework does not exist, institutions can and will seek out formal or informal networks to help them progress. Those who advocate and support OE can make progress in an institution without a formal, written policy at either the national or institutional level.
- Across Europe, the development of Open Education policies, and thus OER policies, is frequently tied to Open Science. The rapid growth of Open Science, and more specifically Open Access policies, predate that of Open Education – this is true at the international, national or institutional level. The differences in incentives, expertise and maturity are leading to different approaches, however, and increasingly OER policies are being separately developed.

- Policy approaches do not need to be about control of what happens to materials or about increasing the administrative burden on staff. Policy development and implementation is most successful when framed in terms of skills development for education staff, helping them get their materials to a much wider audience, wherever that audience might be.

This report is designed to provide an accessible summary for those who may be considering whether to develop a policy of their own, setting out some of the different approaches across Europe.

We encourage you to seek out policies already in place at other institutions to fit in with your policy stack, and to work with peers within and beyond your institution, and within and beyond your national boundaries. Think about the framing that will attract support in your institution, and how to build coalitions with those around you.

SECTION 1 – CONTEXT AND OVERVIEW

The OE movement is generally marked by the Cape Town Open Education Declaration¹ in 2007, which aimed to accelerate efforts to promote open resources, technology and teaching practices in education.

The focus and drive for OER became more focused through the first World OER Congress convened in Paris on 20–22 June 2012, leading to the UNESCO 2021 Paris OER Declaration and then The Recommendation on OER, adopted by UNESCO’s General Conference at its 40th session on 25 November 2019, which was unanimously adopted by all 195 member states.²

The Sustainable Development Goals established by the United Nations in September 2015 have been vital to many universities to address key societal challenges. They include Goal 4 which sets out the commitment to *Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*. Additionally, Open Education speaks directly to other Goals, in particular Goal 10 on reducing inequality and Goal 16 on sustainable development and effective, accountable and inclusive institutions.³

In Europe, the drive for OE is grounded in the desire to make education an opportunity for all, in the most inclusive way possible, through practices and resources that promote the legitimate reuse and adaptation of learning opportunities to reach as many learners as possible. Taking advantage of new technologies, promotion of information literacy, and the growth of the broader Open movement, OE has the potential to ignite change at a large scale. North America has made great strides in OE over the years and its approach is seen as distinct due to an intrinsic link to concerns about textbook pricing and broader costs of higher education.

In the last decade, the Open policy agenda has gained much momentum in Europe amongst governments, funders, publishers and institutions, seeing policy development and funding in the areas of Open Access and Open Science and leading to widespread commitments on international, national and local levels. However, what is far less prevalent in Europe is support

¹ The Cape Town Open Education Declaration: <https://www.capetowndeclaration.org>

² UNESCO Recommendation on Open Educational Resources <https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/recommendation-open-educational-resources-oer>

³ Sustainable Development Goals: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

for Open Education, partly a victim of the drive to deliver on the Open Science or Scholarship promise. However, the costs of education, calls for more equity, the lack of access to education during Covid, the free access to educational materials on many commercial platforms; all of these and more have reframed public expectations and is seeing the willingness of educators to consider alternative models in OER. Progress is still slower than hoped in Europe, however.

Institutional commitment to OE has grown in the period, through experimentation and policy commitment, whether formal or informal. The now bi-annual OE survey⁴ conducted by SPARC Europe tracks institutional policy development in Europe on a quantitative basis.

⁴ SPARC Europe Open Education in European Libraries of Higher Education Survey 2022 – <https://zenodo.org/record/7244713>

SECTION 2 – APPROACHES TO INSTITUTIONAL POLICY DEVELOPMENT

2.1 Steps taken forward...

There are not an abundance of Open Education or Open Educational Resources policies in Higher Education Institutions across Europe.

This is especially the case if:

1. We restrict the definition of ‘policy’ to a formal written document subject to a formal approval process within an institution that sets out expectations for the institution and its staff
2. We include only policies which are dedicated to OE or OERs, rather than broader policies which incorporate limited references to OE or OERs

That said, progress has been made. Policies have been developed and launched – inspirational, transformative and innovative policies. Many more are currently under development.

For those institutions which have set out a policy, however formal or constituted, there are several driving factors. These are as follows, broadly in order of the level of influence they have:

- **Demand from teaching staff** to be able to create teaching materials which take advantage of technological developments and the growth in online education, in particular MOOCs. This drove awareness among teaching staff of Open Education and a desire to be able to share their materials.
- A desire for **clarity on what staff were permitted to do** by their institution, and whether they were able to share materials openly. This has grown as staff with research responsibilities have become familiar with the open movement through Open Access, Open Science, Open Scholarship and Open Research.
- The majority of **universities do not have extensive OER expertise** or anyone who has deep familiarity with the concept. Without such expertise or at least a dedicated interest, it is hard to get a policy off the ground, although there is no common or perfect route to development that says when a university should get involved and create an OER policy institutionally.
- A **national framework** can act as a stimulus to progress, but they require a commitment of resources to develop, and that can often come from within institutions themselves, thus perhaps delaying an institutional level policy.

National frameworks

National frameworks are driving development of OERs at institutional level in different European countries. A National Open Education policy is often intertwined with other agendas and agencies at the national level, specifically:

- reform and development of digital and online education
- Open Access and Open Scholarship/Science schemes
- initiatives to promote local language materials

The presence of a national level policy does not necessarily mean that resources will be made available, either at the national level or for institutions to use in their own policy development. Where there are resources, these can be held nationally for building networks and national capacity or for the development of platforms, or can be distributed through institutions or other structures, as in the Netherlands, through grants to disciplinary groups.

However, the presence of a national policy, with or without resources, creates incentive for institutions to develop their own policies or approach to OER. This may be a formal requirement of the national funder, as in Austria, or just through creating an environment that begins discussion around policy. Since institutional representatives are often drawn into national policy development, either via committees or formal secondments, there is also a two-way exchange of expertise that seeds policy development at the institutional level. No national framework is necessary for the development of an institutional level policy but such frameworks will accelerate efforts especially where funds are available for development, capacity building or knowledge sharing. Where no such framework does exist, institutions considering OER policies actively seek out collaboration or advice from institutions with similar pressures and priorities.

Collaboration of this type exists in more formal structures in areas like Open Science and repository management that are related to Open Education, but there is little formality around Open Education itself.

The Knowledge Equity Network ([KEN](#)) offers an example of an attempt to create this – a network of academic institutions pursuing open education, through a knowledge equity declaration. Their ambition is to galvanise activity with the network as a catalyst, encouraging the involvement of senior institutional staff.

One additional area of a cross-national collaboration would be a pan-European federated search engine, working between OERs held in institutional repositories. This is appealing for institutions that lack a formal national framework and could have particular benefits for multilingualism, but the metadata and interoperability challenges that such a project would bring may be too large to overcome given the resources available.

- The recognition that institutions can use **the provision of OERs to help to deliver their missions** and enhance their impact. This is grounded in the so-called ‘Third Mission’ of institutions – the shift beyond teaching and research to ensure a contribution to society as a whole through a broader social and economic mission. Well implemented OE policies can ensure vast troves of material become available to society at large and available for a much wider potential group of users. Furthermore, institutions are increasingly understanding the role OERs can play in delivering on their commitment to Sustainable Development Goals.
- **Equity has also been a driving factor.** The costs to institutions and students of accessing materials can be prohibitive, and teaching staff are reluctant to base a course around materials that half their class may not be able to access, or may choose not to access on value for money grounds.

Furthermore, the impact of COVID-19 is still playing out, and there are some signs that it will improve the context for developing OER policies in the long term.

Covid disruption

The COVID-19 pandemic rapidly increased the need for educational materials that could be delivered remotely. Teaching staff quickly sought to transform existing or develop new material which could be immediately delivered digitally to their students.

Many of those responsible hoped that this shift would be accompanied by a step change in the adoption of open materials. However, those interviewed consistently reported that it was a matter of crisis management, done in a hurry and not done in a way that made them ready for openness. Demand for new materials also often focused on licensed materials.

While there has been no step change, the pandemic did lead to more digital resources being made openly available. Those responsible for supporting OER development used the opportunity for additional advocacy about the value of open materials. Additionally, an ongoing need for video materials for learning has led to an increase in expenditure in the area and shifted conversations on OER to be the role that video can play in reducing costs.

2.2 ...steps taken back

Yet, progress is not uniform. It can stall or regress, even when a policy is in place or there is a strong will to develop one. The factors which cause backward movement are as follows, again broadly in order of influence:

- **Loss of key personnel.** Such an absence may be because of a change in role, a move to another institution, or sometimes temporary or permanent lack of availability for whatever reason. There are not many staff with deep knowledge or passion for OE, and so the impact of their loss will mean the loss of the loudest voice advocating change. There is unlikely to be a sufficient remaining expertise or capacity to follow through on policy development.

- A **gap between enthusiasts and advocates and the ultimate decision makers** on whether to prioritise OE or adopt a policy. This can sometimes be managed, or changed through dedication and time, but not in every case. Leadership is not always there to build on the efforts of advocates and to commit an organisation to OE.
- A **lack of incentives** to encourage teaching staff to develop or make materials openly available. Reticence about workload issues and inertia in the face of the complexity or copyright and licensing requirements can derail a policy before it has properly started.
- **Over-ambitious timelines** or plans can exist, which are not able to work pragmatically within the available capacity and decision-making timelines.
- **Changes in national strategic priorities** and policy frameworks mean that policies developed in one environment cannot be continued in a new one.

These factors can be overcome. Successful policies can be developed and approved in the face of them, but this requires refocusing and recapturing momentum, and that resources are available to achieve this. The case studies offered throughout this report are intended to provide examples and inspiration for those who seek to develop OE policy.

2.3 Location of development & responsibility

Policies are generally built collaboratively, engaging different departments, and passing through strategic committees and relevant directors. This ensures different perspectives are brought together, different points of views are considered and stakeholders affected can be heard and managed, resulting in more support for OE.

However, different flavours can be traced through the focus of different policies, how they have been developed and where responsibility for them lies.

- Information literacy focus – grounded in the institution’s library infrastructure drawing on expertise about copyright practice and legislation, the broader Open movement, thereby ensuring access to materials.
- Pedagogical focus – grounded in the teaching and education staff, and drawing on their expertise developing and using materials.
- Technology focus – drawing on the expertise of information services, although generally often based in learning and education services, drawing on resources in tools available to create, host and disseminate materials in different media.

These are not clean boundaries. Most institutions developing policy combine a mix of two or all three, and often staff have expertise and experience that crosses boundaries.

In European institutions, OE and OER policies are often begun in and supported by libraries, although they are rarely the only staff involved. Teams supporting systems and platforms and practising teachers are consistently involved, and they are often quickly engaged after the development of a policy has begun.

2.4 Policy development and approval

Policy development itself need not be a long process, at least initially. Many institutions begin the development of a policy by reviewing policies from another institution, one which had already adopted a policy. This can be an excellent stimulus to progress.

However, there can be value in a more considered approach. For example, Delft University of Technology worked on their policy for nearly four years until it was formally adopted in Oct 2021. Several drafts and new aspects were added during the process, which itself became a learning activity that fed into the policy's implementation and subsequent resourcing. This has definitely been a factor in its success.

There is significant value in having a senior project sponsor such as a Vice Chancellor or Rector who can convene the relevant multiprofessional or multidisciplinary groups to advance the policy. However, those who wish to drive policy development should consider the appropriate level at which the policy is to be adopted. While many (and indeed most) policies are at an institutional level, this need not be the case especially where it creates an impediment to progress. OERs can be advanced by a policy adopted by, say, Educational or Information services, or a policy relating to incentives and obligations of teaching staff. This may be a simpler route to approval given the complexity that can be attached to policies that are university-level or highly strategic.

UNESCO recommendation & SDGs

The UN Sustainable Development Goals are having a noticeable effect on the approach to OE policy. The promotion of OERs is a direct route to the achievement of SDG 4 – 'Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all' – and institutions also see OERs as an important mechanism and piece of the infrastructure needed to increase their impact and delivery on other SDGs.

The UNESCO Recommendation on OER and the accompanying Action Areas have, however, not been such a driver of institutional policy development amongst those interviewed. They were not cited as a motivating factor by any institutions that are currently or have recently adopted policies, despite the many advocacy efforts and commitments that Member States have formally made to progress the OE agenda through it. One reason may be that some of these policies were already underway or in place whilst the UNESCO recommendations were being developed.

However, more advanced policies are being reviewed and amended to align with the SDG action areas, and they are a point of reference in discussion for others as policies are developed.

It is reasonable to expect that they will become more influential as OER comes of age and more resources and expertise are made available.

SECTION 3 – IS A POLICY ENOUGH?

This is a question with a simple answer: of course a policy is never enough!

OER policies are not static documents; they are intended to be dynamic, living documents as developments in OER and educational literature need to be understood and accommodated. They are always subject to review, even if only as part of an institution's ongoing schedule of policy updates, and once adopted integration with other policies in an institution's policy stack need to be considered.

For example, Edinburgh's OER policy is in harmony with the following policies: Accessible and Inclusive Learning Policy, IP Commercialisation Policies, Lecture Recording Policy, Virtual Classroom Policy, Research Data Management Policy and the Research Publications & Copyright Policy. In other institutions, including Delft University of Technology, OE or OER policies are fully integrated with Open Science policies, although approaches to this differ.

Open Science relationship

The development of Open Education policies, and thus OER policies, is tied across Europe to that of Open Science policies.

Within institutions and at the national level, the rapid growth of Open Science, and more specifically Open Access policies, predate those for Open Education. Scores of nations across Europe have OS policies in place, as do large research funders and many universities. The requirement to publish research articles under open licences and the number of mechanisms to publish Open Access, has increased familiarity with the wider Open movement within libraries and among research staff who have teaching responsibilities.

OE advocates and policymakers see that the connection to Open Science has brought benefits, but the connection can have drawbacks. Open Science is evolving to focus on research data and software and does not always include education materials. Approaches to quality differ especially in relation to peer review of research articles and the lack of a similar mechanism for educational materials.

The bodies within institutions who have responsibility for Open Science often have responsibility for Open Education, but may lack the breadth of skills that they need.

The use of incentive structures to promote Open Science and Research are well established, with research funders using their mechanisms to do so. There are no funding policies in Education that are equivalent to those that explicitly attach research funding to progress on Open Access and Open Science. Inclusion of Open Education under a wider Open Science agenda or policy does not, sadly, necessarily lead to more resources being made available.

Policies need services and systems in place to underpin them. They also need a programme of advocacy and engagement to ensure they are implemented. However, there is no uniform correct approach to support a policy, nor any simple-to-define minimum level of resources which must be dedicated to implementing them. Every institution is different; its history, its mission, the politics, its infrastructure, the expertise, how well collaboration between departments work and leadership.

Those with limited resources can see substantial progress by using a targeted approach.

The rest of this section explores some different elements that underpin successful policies:

3.1 Systems and platforms

While there is a general and strong preference for open systems among those interviewed, this rarely translates into a formal procurement requirement or policy. There is widespread comfort with and acceptance of the need to use closed or proprietary systems in pursuit of broader goals when necessary.

Most institutions base an OE policy on a centrally controlled repository and some implement multiple systems depending on the nature of the materials being hosted. Some national frameworks involve the development of national platforms, some encourage local development within institutions, whilst others involve agencies that support the development of OER platforms as part of a wider strategy towards the procurement and provision of educational technologies.

The ‘correct’ system or platform is, of course, a misnomer as changes in virtual learning environments and platforms have meant rapid and shifting goalposts for institutions considering the system that works best for them, and new questions are now emerging over the opportunities that Large Language Models and other technological advances offer.

The approach taken by Edinburgh University is notable. The university has eschewed the path of an institutional repository, opting instead for a policy that encourages the sharing of materials wherever possible, by promoting where materials are most likely to be used and engaged with. The university maintains its own branded channels on popular platforms such as YouTube and Flickr and has built up resources within the Learning, Teaching & Web Services department to help teaching staff do this.

3.2 Measuring and monitoring success

Very few institutions are currently tracking the implementation of their OE policies. Many have not yet reached sufficient levels of activity to make it worthwhile and many lack sufficient resources to have the capacity to do. Some lack the facility in their platforms, or are still implementing the systems that will allow them to do so.

For others, it is still too early in the implementation phase to be meaningful, but it is anticipated that this would change as the institution moves from the development phase to the outcomes anticipated in an established policy.

There is more active tracking of the work of those providing support services – projects underway, queries answered, outreach activities – or materials shared and used on external platforms with readily available statistics. This is helpful to support advocacy efforts.

3.3 Engagement

Policy development can involve teaching staff and engage them in how a policy is framed and worded. Co-production can be important, and an important step in ensuring the policy is not seen as coming down from on-high.

However, involvement in development or even having a role in approving a policy doesn't mean staff will know about or understand a policy. Raising awareness is a necessary and important step in implementation.

In most cases, awareness-raising is tailored to persuade staff and overcome any reticence. This can involve:

- a lack of understanding, for which briefings and training are usually effectively deployed,
- workload worry, with staff feeling they have insufficient support for the extra work for which they do not have the capacity to do. In this case, policymakers seek to formulate policy requirements as a part of their regular job and draw attention to the benefits. A good practice is to piggyback something onto the planned review of courses and materials, to use this as opportunities to show how development of open materials can be done organically and without additional work.
- concern about giving materials away and their reuse in commercial settings. This leads to a desire to retain the NC element of a CC licence, which can be handled through flexibility in the policy, allowing CC BY-NC licences, or rather by advocating for open through the additional benefits that CC BY licences create.

Copyright debt

'Copyright debt' is a powerful framing around which to articulate the value of a considered approach to Open Education policy development and support at the institutional level. It emphasises the value of building digital literacy, and ensuring teaching staff think about the licensing of materials and making them open at the *earliest possible* stage in the process.

The value of OERs to an institution's 'Third Mission' and the return on investment to the institution is maximised by ensuring materials can be easily and rapidly reused in multiple contexts.

If copyright is not addressed up front and as soon as possible, the problem becomes larger and harder to resolve. Hence, a debt is built up. Like 'technical debt' in software development, copyright debt builds up and costs more to fix in the future.

People can lack capacity so may be tempted to go back and do the work later, or expertise and knowledge of sources is lost through attrition. As such, the OERs and addressing copyright debt are intimately connected. The case for doing both can and should be made at the institutional level, and addressed through digital literacy and skills development for all staff and graduate students.

The concept of 'Copyright debt' has been developed and expounded by Melissa Highton, the Director of Learning, Teaching and Web Services and Assistant Principal Online Learning at University of Edinburgh. It underpins the approach Edinburgh takes to OER development and it is present in less explicit terms in many other institutions that have developed OER policies and stances.

Awareness-raising commonly involves open consultations and events for staff, blogs and internal messaging, public advocacy, training and other routes. Finding simple opportunities and promising places to get started and get the ball rolling with interested staff are key. Student engagement can also be a fundamental aspect of this, particularly where co-creation of materials is common.

This can involve developing networks across the institutional level, as Paris Nanterre has done around innovation and developing a Community of Practice for the creation of OER. Or adopting an approach across several institutions, such as the National Approach to Digital and Open Learning Resources Statement in the Netherlands, which was signed by the Association of Universities of Applied Sciences, the Universities of the Netherlands, and SURF, and which was instrumental in encouraging more activity and engagement by institutions. Approaches like these can facilitate the development of good practices, as well as interesting and inspiring examples that can be showcased as other opportunities arise.

CASE STUDIES

“Let a thousand flowers bloom” – OE policy case study: The University of Edinburgh

Main points

- An OER policy can encourage a shift in thinking about knowledge-sharing, emphasising support and benefits, empowering the learner, teacher and researcher to share rather than control. Digital training upskills staff and builds capacity, and collaboration across services ensuring the effective implementation of the policy.
- The impact of the policy and its return on investment derive from the ability of users to find and reuse content in a variety of contexts which might be outside the university
- Addressing ‘copyright debt’ is akin to the concept of ‘technical debt’ in software development – avoids bigger problems down the line. This is done by promoting digital literacy and by considering licensing at the outset of projects.

Link

Open Educational Resources at The University of Edinburgh – <https://open.ed.ac.uk/>

Born from educational services

In 2016, the University of Edinburgh (Edinburgh) in the United Kingdom established a dedicated policy to foster the growth of Open Educational Resources (OER). This policy was approved by the then Learning & Teaching Committee, now Senate Education Committee. Edinburgh was one of the first universities in the UK and Europe to establish such a policy.

Its development was led by the Director of Learning, Teaching and Web Services & the Head of Educational Design and Engagement. The policy was influenced by the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) which managed the UK OER programme during the early and mid-2010s, supported by its Centre for Educational Technology, Interoperability and Standards (CETIS). This influenced the approach taken by many UK institutions, embedding their OER activity in learning technology and education services, rather than library-led initiatives or Open Access policies. JISC ceased most of its support for OER around 2015 and shuttered their central OER repository with the loss of a significant amount of material, but the inspiration the programme had on Edinburgh’s and other institutional policies developed at the time is clear.

The policy took around a year to develop. It received strong support from Edinburgh’s student union, where various Vice Presidents for Education offered strong support through the policy’s

development, anticipating that use of open materials would benefit the wider student body. The policy was developed by task group of the Senate Education Committee, the body which then approved the policy

The Library had no formal role to play in the policy development, but works directly with Learning, Teaching and Web Services to ensure alignment between policies maintained by both.

The policy is important to the wider work of the University and is in harmony with the following policies: Accessible and Inclusive Learning Policy, IP Commercialisation Policies, Lecture Recording Policy, Virtual Classroom Policy, Research Data Management Policy and the Research Publications & Copyright Policy.

The policy was reviewed in 2019 and again in 2021, which resulted in alignment with the UNESCO Open Education Recommendation and the adoption of the UNESCO definition of OER. Future reviews are likely to bring a closer alignment with the UN Sustainable Development Goals and a more explicit acknowledgement of the role OER will play in delivering their aims.

Abundance as a virtue

Edinburgh's approach is to 'let a thousand flowers bloom' – abundance is a virtue, and sharing of resources by teaching staff is encouraged wherever they might be sought by users.

The OER policy does not impose strict regulations or requirements, but rather serves as a guiding framework, instilling confidence in staff that they can develop and share their materials without seeking further permission from the University.

There is no single University-owned or controlled OER platform or repository. The university takes a strategic position expressed as follows:

'the Web is our repository, we put stuff where people are likely to be able to find it'

They maintains open channels on their own media hosting platforms, blog sites, open textbooks and webpages (Media.ed.ac.uk, blogs.ed.ac.uk, Edinburgh Diamond, Open.ed.ac.uk), as well as contributing OER content to YouTube and Flickr, sketchfab, wikimedia commons, TES, edx, coursera and futurelearn.

The University channels showcase material produced by the University's staff:

- *For the common good* – everyday teaching and learning resources
- *Edinburgh at its best* – highest quality media and learning materials.
- *Edinburgh's treasures* – unique teaching and learning resources from the University's collections

The University underpins this through a comprehensive digital skills development programme, focusing on enhancing copyright literacy and encouraging staff to ensure that they use

appropriate open licences from the outset when developing teaching resources. This aims to solve the problem of ‘copyright debt’ which can accrue when materials are developed without attention to copyright and licensing.

Co-creation of materials with students is another critical element of the approach, and the University seeks to ensure graduate students develop appropriate skills as a part of their courses.

The whole approach is rooted in the University’s civic social mission and ensuring materials can be seen and used by hundreds of thousands of people. The return on investment for the University comes from getting resources to the widest possible pool of users and facilitating the widest possible reuse of the University’s materials.

Implementation through dedicated resources and collaboration

The Learning, Teaching & Web Services (LTWS) directorate is responsible for the implementation of the OER policy. The team includes a dedicated policy officer and an OER Service that provides support and guidance to staff and students on creating and using OER, copyright and open licensing, and engaging with open education. The University actively tracks activity, re-use and ROI through monthly service reports and KPIs.

Quality assurance of material is done by those developing materials. The University also employs a Wikimedian In Residence. This is unusual and innovative but brings a huge return. Edinburgh see Wikimedia as the largest source of OERs in the world, and have actively become the largest contributing English-language improver in the UK affecting over 10,000 pages.

The University supports use of open source technologies, and a wide range are deployed, but the overall approach is to remain technology-neutral, favouring the most effective software to meet users needs, irrespective of whether it is open-source or commercial.

“Developing the policy is a learning activity in itself” –

OE policy case study:

Delft University of Technology

Main points

- Developing an Open Educational Resources policy is a journey of learning and evolution, and there will be many iterations along the way. Yet the work of adopting it only really begins when the policy is launched, with awareness-building and addressing staff confusion and concerns.
- Building acceptance of OER requires discussions, understanding of copyright laws and addressing the concerns of teaching staff. A pragmatic approach to embedding in course redesign can also be beneficial. This can be via engagement in each faculty. Above all, encouraging staff to see it as part of their normal routine is key.
- Equity of access to educational resources can be a primary motivator for encouraging staff to embrace OER. Teachers do not want to structure courses around materials which half of the students will not access.

Delft University of Technology Open Educational Resources (OER) Policy – <https://repository.tudelft.nl/islandora/object/uuid:68a07efc-fc4d-4a57-8e93-88a3af37465a?collection=research>

Demand-led but detailed development

After a process lasting nearly four years, the Technical University Delft (TUD) adopted a policy for Open Educational Resources (OER) in October 2021.

The policy was demand-led. The university’s faculty were already developing Open Educational Resources before any policy was in place, as part of Delft University of Technology OpenCourseware. The genesis began in 2007 when the university started publishing Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), and the interest in and use of Creative Commons licences (CC) led to their incorporation into existing educational policies. The process of policy development was a learning experience in itself, with several drafts and additions that reflected new understandings of different facets of Open Education.

The policy fosters a broad approach. It encourages and supports staff and students to use, create, and publish OER, as long as they are fit-for-purpose and align with the university’s policies and values. It seeks innovation in what constitutes educational materials. Over time, the policy will seek to make the use of Open Educational Resources the norm, not the exception, and its influence is likely to spread and be included in other policies.

The policy was developed by the then Open Education Coordinator who had been part of the TUD library since 2009 when she started developing a set of online information literacy skills courses. She worked with the legal department on IP and licensing elements of the policy, and ran multiple interviews and discussion sessions with teachers. The policy was ultimately signed off by multiple stakeholders and departments – Faculties, Central Educational Services, Library, ICT, Legal Services, Graduate schools and the Extension School for Continuing Education. It was formally signed by the executive board of the Delft University of Technology in October 2021.

Implementation is led by a new Open Education Coordinator that has been appointed within the Library & Education Services departments. The Co-ordinator role now promotes the use of OER, seeks funding for projects and community-building, and supports those who wish to make resources open. Many other staff are also involved as part of their roles, including other staff from the library, the broader education support team and those involved in the Open Science programme.

Awareness-raising & leveraging existing projects

Even though the policy was borne from demand from faculty, awareness-raising is a first step towards implementation. This has been done via engagement in each faculty, presenting OER in a way that encourages staff to start working with it as a way of doing their regular job, not as something extra they are required to do.

One key aspect of taking the policy out to faculty was the emphasis on understanding Dutch copyright law, which posits that educational materials belong to the institution, not the individual teacher. This led to widespread discussions to alleviate concerns about the potential commercial misuse of materials.

The co-ordinator and those working with him actively seek opportunities and projects where use of OER can be easily accommodated. This would generate good practice and inspiring examples. The team has sought smaller projects within an existing programme or to embed OER within existing planned course redesigns. For example, the development of materials for a Bachelor programme in Nanobiology, which did not have a set of resources available to teach the elements of biology, physics and mathematics relevant to practise in the field.

Equity has proved to be a strong motivator for academic staff and their growing support, borne as much from concerns about how individual courses can function' as a broader principle about affordability to all. Students will not pay excessive prices for expensive materials which they do not think are valuable. Teachers do not want to structure courses around materials which half of the students will not access. They would rather seek or develop open materials as a result.

The Covid-19 pandemic has also played a role in adoption. Many resources were created rapidly in that period and as such are not ready to be made open. However, the process generated new insights into how to make these resources more sustainable and accessible, building materials in a step-by-step manner and considering elements such as copyright.

SURF & the wider Dutch context

This policy is embedded in the wider and much larger TUD open policy, strategy and programme, including Open Science, although there is a broader trend in the Netherlands to pursue OE as a separate strand to OS.

SURF is a key digital service provider for IT that serves Dutch Higher Education. As part of its responsibility for supporting education, it manages education infrastructure and the procurement of digital education resources. This work has included the promotion of OER and OER policy since around 2015. SURF also has programmes supporting Open Science, which are delivered separately from Open Education.

SURF's role in establishing the national framework for OE and OER began with a Dutch government ambition stated in 2015 that all teachers in Dutch higher education would share and reuse each other's educational resources by 2025. This is an ambition that is being delivered through SURF funding programmes as well as by the nation's Higher Education institutions.

The first of these was an incentive scheme launched in 2015. This was designed to stimulate development of materials in teacher communities who were already collaborating around domain specific courses and curricula. There are 25 such projects to date, through several funding rounds, which have been developed across universities with match funding from other sources.

In 2019, Acceleration Plan was launched to maximise the possibilities digitalisation offers higher education, including a 'zone' focused on Open Educational Resources. It offered institutions the chance to learn and experiment on projects, to progress knowledge dissemination and investigate ways forward. Funding was channelled to institutions through networks which managed the schemes, with designated 'captains' and project leads. The scheme ultimately led to a National Approach to Digital and Open Learning Resources Statement, signed by the Association of Universities of Applied Sciences, the Universities of the Netherlands, and SURF. This has been instrumental in demonstrating the significance of Open Education to senior administrators and leaders across higher education in the Netherlands.

Future SURF schemes will seek to incorporate more vocational education providers into OER schemes from universities of applied sciences, for example. They will also look at how partnerships with private enterprises might lead to the development of new business models for the production and sustainability of OERs.

Systems, Openness & the need for sustainability

TUD staff continue to benefit from the SURF incentive scheme, and the university also works with SURF-developed platforms.

TUD maintains different systems for different file formats, but the main system currently used by TUD is the OpenCourseware system based on Wordpress. TUD hosts a wide range of materials – MOOCs, presentations, scripts – which can be accessed and used for self-directed learning, but most of the systems at TUD used to create materials don't facilitate publishing & sharing with an open licence which will allow more use and creation of OER. This needs to be built into future evaluations of systems which are being appraised for adoption.

TUD are seeking a solution to host all OER in a centralised location. The ideal solution would be to have a system permitting many front-ends but a back-end repository storing all resources, holding data and metadata, and ensuring downloads from a single location. The SURF Share Kit may be a solution that does this, and is being tested with different faculties and departments. SURF's involvement offers a level of security about the platform's sustainability which is a primary concern for any solution to adopt. It is also Open Source, which is a high priority.

“We think of it as pragmatism in pursuit
of utopian goals” –
OE policy case study:
Finland – TSV, Satakunta & Helsinki

Main points

- The relationship between Open Science and Open Education is important and evolving. Open Education has been made part of the Open Science vision for the country, but Open Science has long had much greater focus and resourcing. It is only recently that this has begun to change, with more consideration being given to Open Education.
- National policy can influence institutional policy, and resources are important to drive uptake and implementation. However, interest and progress can be made at the institutional level in advance of them, which can then grow and flourish as the wider environment catches up.

Links

TSV: Open Education and educational resources – National policy and executive plan by the Higher Education and research community for 2021–2025 <https://edition.fi/tsv/catalog/view/421/355/955-1>

SAMK: Open science & open education – <https://www.samk.fi/en/research-and-cooperation/open-science-and-open-education/>

UH: Open learning <https://www.helsinki.fi/en/helsinki-university-library/library-researchers/open-science-services/open-learning>

TSV – the emergence of an OER national framework

Tieteellisten Seurain Valtuuskunta (TSV, the Federation of Finnish Learned Societies) has responsibility for the development of national Open Education policy in Finland, as a part of its broader responsibility for coordination of Open Science. This is done through an Open Science secretariat (a unit in TSV); a steering group, formed of representatives from key actors of the Finnish research community, and four expert panels, including one with responsibility for Open Education. The panel has the task of promoting and discussing issues concerning Open Education by writing recommendations and policies, and holding events.

The panel has just under 100 members, about 80% of whom are from higher education institutions, mostly from libraries. The remaining representatives are teachers, from organisations in the industry and NGOs. This membership is partly driven by interest and partly by capacity. Interest in Open Education at the institutional level is mostly from libraries, and so more librarians are able to dedicate time to the panel.

Only one person at the Open Science secretariat in TSV holds responsibility for OE coordination. They currently hold responsibility for Open Science coordination as well, and so there has been little opportunity for building international connections or networks to support OE efforts.

TSV has adopted a plan for the Higher Education community, setting concrete goals for the period 2021 to 2025. The policy was developed by a working group with library, teaching and student representation. An open consultation attracted comments from universities, ministries, unions and other organisations.

Goals are split across two priorities as follows:

1. Open access to educational resources (OER) – increasing capacities in organisations for the creation of OERs, improving their quality, encouraging use and appreciation
2. Open educational practices (OEP) – making resources usable, giving learners opportunities and support, ensuring societal benefits.

There are up to 60 individual tasks identified that higher education institutions are committed to, and which will result in the introduction of policies and support services. TSV receives data on a wide range of HEI activities through regular surveys and this includes elements relating to OER.

At present, there is no funding set aside for Open Education attached to the plan, but there is an intention that existing institutional funds will be used to make education resources more open over time. Money is available for other areas of Open Science, such as Open Access publishing where there have been government policies and targets for 15 years, but it cannot currently be used for Open Education projects. Some ad hoc money is available, but it is centralised and only available on an annual basis, coming from government ministries and agencies, or institutions' own budgets. A working group is only now beginning to have discussions on possible funding models, surveying existing mechanisms and what could be done to improve them to ensure that aspirations are met. It is not yet clear whether further funds will be available or how they might be allocated.

Satakunta – seeding something new

In 2023, Satakunta University for Applied Sciences (SAMK) began the process of developing an Open Educational Resources (OER) policy. The university has a diverse student body of 6000, and a strong reputation for its technical and professional courses and its distance learning programme.

No formal mandate or specific recommendations about OER yet exists, but the university library has informally provided signposting, guidance and information related to open education to its teaching staff. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated these discussions – the need to adapt learning styles and materials has pushed OER into the spotlight.

A steering group was formed in 2023, consisting of representatives from the library, teachers involved in national open education projects, and pedagogical experts. This group is working towards the development of the policy with the support of the University leadership. The library will not take responsibility for the whole project, but will be the major driver of it.

The aim is to meet the ever-present need for open materials and to facilitate flexible learning options for both campus-based and distance learners. In parallel, work to inform and build support among teaching staff has begun. Staff are familiar with the wider Open movement, but there remains a need to explain benefits of publishing materials openly and using open resources. This includes highlighting the need to show that materials published openly and harvested into systems will be reused.

SAMK has been engaged in Open Science through the strong governmental initiatives on this topic and SAMK's library and education staff have contributed to TSV work. Staff are balancing national commitments with the desire to develop their own institutional policy, and national level activity does not translate into resources at the institutional level. Availability of and need for resources remains a point of discussion. Teachers need time and support to create high quality materials. They need support from staff to help develop materials and help ensure quality metadata is available.

Staff from SAMK have also actively participated in the national 'DigiVision 2030' project to develop e-learning materials and a national digital platform. The University does not currently maintain a system for hosting open educational resources, but it will try to use the national one under development. The Finna Discovery Service used by universities, libraries, museums, archives, etc. is a good example of how small institutions can collaborate to develop a popular service which operates across institutions and aggregates content. The National level system will be open source as this is a governmental priority and policy.

Helsinki – growing a formal structure

Despite the lack of an institutional formal policy specifically tailored to Open Education (OE), the University of Helsinki's (UH) annual library plan has consistently incorporated OER projects. OE has been integrated within the broader scope of its Open Science policy, which contains some references to Open Education, although they are not very detailed. The coordination group for Open Science, which includes the Library Director and staff from the university's Digital Learning team, has overall responsibility for Open Education at the University.

The discussions on OE and the new policy overseen by TSV have further influenced UH's OE plans. Representatives from Helsinki University have also been involved in developing the national approach to OE, cementing the university's role within the national network.

In 2023, a review and report on the current position and future prospects of OE at UH, in line with the new national guidelines, is being developed by the Libraries Collections Manager and an Information specialist. It will be presented to the Open Science Coordination group later in

the year. It is likely to direct some actions into the development of library services, and decide whether additional services are required.

The advancement of OE resources at UH is primarily handled by the library. This team consists of eight members, with three actively focused on OER from the pedagogical, collection, and open science teams. They provide essential guidance on licence usage and OER materials. The library plays a crucial role in the discovery of open materials and the management of copyright and licensing issues. Additionally, the Education Technological Services department is responsible for supporting teachers in pedagogical and technological issues relating to the digitisation and opening of teaching. As the university continues to consider its approach to OE, the involvement of various other teams across the institution is anticipated.

The university also utilises a national level platform for open educational resources, funded by the Ministry of Education and the Board of Education. The pedagogical team recommends this platform to teachers as a reliable source of materials. While the need for another platform is not evident, some teachers have expressed the desire for a publishing platform with a low entry threshold.

APPENDIX A – ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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APPENDIX B – METHODOLOGY

A total of fifteen interviews were conducted with representatives from a variety of European Universities. Interviewees were respondents to the 2021 and 2022 SPARC Europe survey on Open Education that had indicated a willingness to be interviewed as a part of further research into the topics raised by the survey. Additionally, some interviewees were contacted due to publicly available information about their institutional policy development in Open Education.

Interviews were semi-structured around a short number of key themes based on survey responses and published policies. Follow up questions varied depending on responses given and context and existing knowledge about the policies of the interviewees. Detailed case studies were drawn from interviews and follow up correspondence with interviewees, with the final text subject to review and confirmation.