

The Sustained Reach and Impact of Open Educational Resources

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From 2009 to 2012, De Montfort University participated in the UK Open Educational Resource (OER) programme releasing bioscience materials, with the Virtual Analytical Laboratory (VAL), the SCOOTER Project and generic materials released in Biology Courses (Rolfe 2015). VAL OER were released on a static HTML website, whilst for phases 2 and 3, the premise was to use search engine optimisation (SEO) techniques to enhance discovery by the liberal distribution of OER on the web, with hyperlinks back to project WordPress blogs to drive web traffic (Rolfe & Griffin 2011).

The goals of these projects were to maximise the 'reach and impact' of materials (Rolfe 2010). Additional strategies were adopted to enhance impact by releasing OER in multiple file formats to enhance accessibility and interoperability. Other OER were produced in collaboration with employers to provide quality, practice-based science materials. All OER were recorded in a database with over 500 OER released in total, defined as 'bite sized' chunks of learning (Video, Narrated Flash Animation, Screencasts), although this figure do not including photographs, quiz questions and raw asset files that were also released. All content was licensed under CC-BY-SA.

The aim of the present research is to review the 'reach and impact' of these science OER, and make recommendations to the community regarding the lessons learned. The methods will include an analysis of data from Google Analytics, social media sties (YouTube, Flickr, Posterous, Picassa) and OER repositories (Jorum, Merlot, OER Commons). A multivariate analysis of variance will give light to the effectiveness of the various strategies. Qualitative insights will be gained from analysing survey data gathered routinely on the sites, via email and from end-of-project reports. Salient points will be captured using Weft QDA text analysis software and clustered into themes. These will be mapped to the eleven impact hypotheses recently suggested (OER Research Hub, 2014).

This paper will report on the 'reach and impact' of three science-based OER projects, and define how sustainability is contextualised beyond the duration of funding and initial bursts of project activity. The impact of using SEO techniques to enhance discoverability will be discussed in light of present day thinking. Insights into the adoption patterns of different media formats, subjects and access routes, will also be presented.

References

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