Discussion paper on open education

1. Purpose

This document was produced by the *Open Education Working Group* at La Trobe University in response to the [Radical Learning Group](#) findings and recommendations.

The working group consists of representatives across three faculties, the library and central teaching and learning unit. Members are: Donna Bisset (Humanities and Social Sciences), Leigh Blackall (Health Sciences), John Hannon (Curriculum, Teaching and Learning Centre), Simon Huggard (Digital Infrastructure), Ruth Jelley (Business, Economics and Law), Mungo Jones (Humanities and Social Sciences), Annabel Orchard (Business, Economics and Law), Roderick Sadler (Digital Infrastructure), Emily Krisenthal (Curriculum, Teaching and Learning Centre).

The working group convened a one-day conference at La Trobe University on 12 March 2013 in order to gauge interest, experience and capability around open education. The event was attended by more than 50 teaching, administration and support staff as well as external guests. The planning and outcomes of that conference were thoroughly documented, and the findings inform this paper and are also summarised in Appendix 1.[1]

We present this discussion paper to encourage the La Trobe University to develop capacity and capability for open educational resources and practices within the timeframe of the current strategic plan. Open education contributes to measurable improvement to learning outcomes and teaching efficacy. The increasing clarity of agenda in state and federal public service agencies, along with significant international trends in educational institutions suggests that it would be prudent for La Trobe University to invest in the development of open educational practices.

La Trobe has the opportunity to develop policies that enable and encourage openness in educational practices and remove barriers (these are explicitly discussed in UNESCO, see Joyce 2006; Bossu et al 2012; D'Antoni 2009; Rolfe 2012). Policies and procedures that provide recognition, resources and support for open educational practices will support and contribute to the university's research culture of knowledge-sharing and knowledge-creation for staff and students.

---

[1] http://en.wikiversity.org/wiki/Open_Education_Week_2013/La_Trobe_University_Open_Conference

2. Defining open education

Open education does not simply refer to access to freely available content; it includes non-restrictive terms and conditions and transparent development processes. Open education practices use collaborative methods and frameworks to develop content, curriculum, assessment, research, policies, projects, budgets and so on.

The word "open" means unrestricted online access, radical transparency, maximum reusability and participatory collaboration. This meaning is informed by the principles and methods of free software espoused by Richard Stallman since 1983 (Williams 2002). These principles were first appropriated into educational contexts by David Wiley in 1998 (Wiley & Gurrell 2009), and have continued to grow. Hence, not all accessible content is open in this sense and there are limitations on (re)usability and transparency (Wiley 2012).

Openness and open education and research practices now hold political significance, attract development funding and enjoy wide international infrastructure and volunteer support and guidance (The Interview 2012; McGreal 2012).

2.1 Open education characteristics

Open education has the following characteristics:

2.1.1 Open educational resources

- Public online teaching content that is freely licensed and archived in open standard formats.
- Production processes that use and contribute to open educational resource standards.
- Development of resources and processes aimed at reducing costs to students and improving educational outcomes.

2.1.2 Open research and education practices

- Publicly transparent planning, documentation and reporting of research, teaching and assessment.
- Public online access to publications of research outcomes and the data that informs it.
- Recognised and rewarded engagement with communities of open research and open education resource production and practice.

2.1.3 Transparent governance and open data

- Public online access to planning, reviews, reports, policies and procedures.
- Open participatory collaboration in reviews, reports, deliberation and planning.
- Public online documentation of governing procedures.

3. Adopting open education practices

The Radical Learning Group recommends that La Trobe engage with contemporary professional and pedagogical practices that are based on open access, participation, transparency and verifiable quality assurances. These practices are in keeping with La Trobe's objectives of the advancement of knowledge for the public good, and the Radical Learning Project report that calls for the university to "position itself as an adaptive, innovative and creative institution" (Radical Learning Group 2012, p.3).

Open education approaches offer La Trobe University the opportunity to improve teaching practices. Adopting open education practices involves a wide range of people and functions across the university, including library, faculty and central teaching and learning staff.

3.1 Improved educational outcomes

Adopting open educational practices will help improve student choices, experience, retention and completion, as well as the likelihood of return to study (Wiley 2013).

3.1.1 Reducing cost to students increases enrolment and completion

Wiley (2013) provides the example of Florida Virtual Campus, in which a large survey of students in 2012 revealed that the cost of textbooks was having a significant impact on student retention, completion of studies and academic performance. According to the study, 64% elected not to buy their textbooks due to cost, 30% decided not to enrol due to costs, 14% dropped courses/subjects due to the high cost of textbooks.

Developing capacity to use open educational resources will reduce the cost of course materials and thus improve the student experience by reducing barriers to education. This goal and its outcomes align to Future Ready strategies to provide a high-quality student experience and nurture a diverse student body, including students from disadvantaged backgrounds (La Trobe University 2012, p. 5).

3.1.2 Continued access to up-to-date content improves lifelong professional learning

According to the Florida study, 70% of the 20 000 students surveyed valued having lifetime access to always up-to-date textbooks as important to very important. In a report on an OECD forum about OER, Joyce (2006) outlines the benefits of adopting an institutional approach to open education practices. Reporting on the forum, Joyce found that:

> Participants reflected on these and suggested a number of reasons for engaging in OER production at the institutional level, based upon issues such as continuing education for alumni, student course selection, attracting future students, cost reduction, alternatives to commercial materials, quality enhancement, interaction with a wider public, encouraging innovation, moral and ethical concerns, and legal requirements (page 8).

This supports the case that the use of OERs at La Trobe can help establish and maintain ongoing contact with graduates, currently enrolled students, future students and professional associations.

3.1.3 Open access and transparency gives people a more informed choice

McAndrew et al (2010) note that the large increase in demand for higher education witnessed from the late 20th century onwards coincided with a wide proliferation of information and communication technologies that have enabled new models of education. Pedagogical models that provide transparency offer alternative modes of learning to the traditional, individualised teacher-student focus. These include open forms of assessment, authentic learning and student-generated knowledge. For example, a pedagogical model that provides transparency about learning objectives and progression is the Open University's Supported Open Learning Model, which empowers learners and has proven to be effective (Conole 2013). Baltzersen (2010) also discusses the pedagogical potential for transparent learning communities.

3.1.4 Closing the gap between formal and informal learning

Open education practices can provide the opportunity for universities to close the gap between formal and informal learning by moving education practice into informal learning environments and learning communities (Kanwar, Kodhandaraman & Umar 2010). The flexibility that open educational resources and practices bring to the learning process help give value to informal learning (McAndrew et al 2010). Using open educational practices and resources can promote and enable lifelong learning.

3.2 Building capacity for OER

Building capacity for open education involves strategies for staff development, raising awareness and developing support structures for the adoption and creation of open educational resources.

By enabling greater access to the university's teaching resources and encouraging academic staff to incorporate open resources into their teaching, open educational practices can improve quality and foster innovation in education (Bossu, Brown & Bull 2012).

Openness is a key trend in education and La Trobe needs to keep pace with this trend if it is to adopt the "21st century-focused teaching and learning models" recommended in the Radical Learning Group report (2012). The 2013 Horizon Report on higher education discusses the importance of the trend towards openness in education (Johnson et al 2013). The Horizon Report identifies openness as a value; it is becoming a way of doing things across the university sector. Conole (2013) discusses the importance of adopting open education practices in modern curriculum design and teaching practice. The potential for OER to increase student engagement presents an opportunity to evaluate the effect of such practices on student retention.

Rolfe (2012) notes the importance of collaboration among colleagues and the provision of technical assistance. Bueno-de-la-Fuente et al (2012) highlight the significance of library

staff in the "description and classification, management, preservation, dissemination, and promotion of OER" (p. 7).

3.2.1 Content up-to-date, peer reviewed, accessible and reusable

Publishing reusable digital content and artefacts online can reduce the time and cost associated with traditional publishing, as well as revision and republishing of teaching materials and resources (Baraniuk & Burrus 2008, p.31). This would allow La Trobe University to provide relevant and useful content to current students, as well as alumni and professional associations in the wider community.

3.2.2 Copyright diligence and open standard formats

Engaging in the use and reuse of open educational resources necessitates substantial understanding of copyright and open standard formats. One of the main topics of discussion at the open education conference at La Trobe University (see Appendix 1) was that there existed inconsistent levels of understanding and use of resources, including unacknowledged and unapproved uses. The university can contribute to addressing this issue through engagement with open educational resources and practices.

3.2.3 Use of content without expensive contract negotiations and maintenance

The ability of faculties to source and use educational content and resources without the need to negotiate, enter into and maintain contracts with third-party providers presents a significant cost saving opportunity. This goes for content that is used by university staff as well as content produced by university staff. The university and its staff will need to understand their rights and responsibilities regarding the use and production of open educational resources.

3.2.4 Connecting the learning management system (LMS) to OER

Building capacity for OER requires developing interoperability of existing systems. One example is setting up a search and discovery environment for OER. This may involve reconfiguration and redevelopment of existing systems such as the LMS, Library eRepository, CMS and Intranet, as well as other systems.

An approach that La Trobe could adopt is to make a connection between the learning management system (LMS) and OER. This would reconfigure the LMS as a gateway between the university and knowledge in open and collaborative online environments. This may involve packages or plugins that facilitate the automatic upload of OER generated by La Trobe staff into the La Trobe Library eRepository and external OER systems. Automatic upload of OERs to the Library eRepository will provide a consistent internal (and open) archival environment for materials produced by La Trobe University.

Establishing these connections enables the university to recognise students' existing use of social media for learning. Designing systems that "prioritize the creation of identities for students at third-party sites, rather than bringing those sites within the learning system" (Allen & Long 2010) will extend learning at La Trobe beyond centrally managed enterprise systems. This will support new learning approaches and pedagogies, following the Radical Learning

Group recommendation 2.

3.3 Consistency with national and international developments

The trend towards open content is growing in strength and reach. Openness has been mandated in research and development funding in the UK, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the USA. Openness is extending into government, universities in Australia are starting to engage in OER.

3.3.1 Government-supported open education and data initiatives

The Office of Teaching and Learning is providing funding for research into open education in Australia through projects such as the "Adoption, use and management of OER to enhance teaching and learning in Australia" project (Bossu, Brown & Bull, forthcoming). Moves that La Trobe makes into open educational practices will be in line with federal government initiatives. Evaluation of any moves into open education can contribute much-needed evidence on the impact of OER on teaching and learning. Bossu et al's OLT-funded project has the potential to guide cross-institutional development of OER and connect interested parties.

3.3.2 Australian public service copyright benchmark

The Department of Finance and Deregulation and the Attorney General's Office now require public service agencies to make information accessible and reusable online, assigning the Creative Commons Attribution copyright license (Australian Government Intellectual Property Rules). This signifies a wider move towards open standards for publicly funded projects.

3.3.3 Australian university intellectual property (IP) policies that respect individual ownership and promote Creative Commons licensing

The Australian Council for University Librarians' overview of university policies on intellectual property shows that a number of universities are already engaging in open educational practices. A range of Australian universities allow staff and students to retain ownership of their IP while working or studying at their university, such as University of New South Wales, University of Technology Sydney, University of Western Australia, University of Wollongong, James Cook University and Australian National University. The Australian National University is expressly supporting the use of Creative Commons copyright licensing. La Trobe University's IP policy statement in support of making teaching and learning materials publicly and freely available is the most progressive position in Australia, in that it supports individual ownership of IP and promotes academics to adopt open educational practices by allowing them greater autonomy over the copyright licensing of their work. Of the range of Creative Commons copyright license available, only two align to open education: the Attribution license and the Share Alike license.

3.3.4 Australian universities are actively engaged in open education

The University of Southern Queensland and the University of Wollongong are both founding anchors of the Open Educational Resources University (University of Southern Queensland 2012). The University of Tasmania is sponsoring the Adapt project to share teaching

materials and develop teaching and scholarship. These activities are part of a wider movement that includes international organisations such as the Higher Education Academy (UK) and Open Courseware Consortium, some of which have received substantial funding from groups the likes of the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

Removing restrictions on access to learning content and communities has enabled more people to engage in collaborative online learning. As other institutions adopt stronger policies of openness, adopting open practices ensures structures for effective collaboration with these organisations. In order to keep pace with this trend and demand and to take a leading role in its development, La Trobe University should begin investment in the capacity to build effective practices.

4. Recommendations

The Open Education Working Group makes the following recommendations regarding open educational practices at La Trobe University.

4.1 Development of policies and practices to support OER

Develop policies and practices to support institutional and individual capacity to produce, source, curate and use open educational resources in teaching and learning.

Policies and practices to develop institutional capacity to support OER may encompass the library, information technology, media production, marketing, and faculty and central teaching and learning staff. The university will need to allocate resources for the development of open education practices and professional development programs to enable the production and (re)use of OER.

In doing this, La Trobe can foster a culture that is wholly supportive of open education practices. Possible ways to do this include developing procedures to recognise OER engagement and creation.

4.2 Review of intellectual property (IP) policy

Review the La Trobe IP Policy to reduce barriers to open education practices.

The current intellectual property policy was due for review in 2011. Revising the policy with a focus on open education practices will help clarify the university's position on open copyright licence options and the circumstances under which staff may elect to opt out of such processes. Ideally, a separate policy should be created for teaching and learning materials which clearly outlines what constitutes "teaching and learning materials" and distinguishes them from exploitable IP. Revising the policy provides an opportunity to clarify whether attribution for teaching and learning materials should remain with individuals or the university.

This revision can be accompanied by guidance for staff on making their materials available with a recommended Creative Commons licence.

4.3 Integrate open education practices with teaching and learning practices

Incorporate open education practices into the learning environment.

The integration of open education practices into the learning environment aligns with the Radical Learning Project recommendation 2. This calls for the extension of teaching approaches beyond institutional boundaries and creation of opportunities for collaborative and experiential learning, as discussed in 3.2.4.

4.4. Partnerships

Explore strategic partnerships with external agencies and platforms to help build an open educational practice community at La Trobe University.

Engagement with external projects and initiatives will assist La Trobe to implement effective policies and practices. These may include partnerships with universities or cross-organisational projects to develop national discipline-based OER. Participation in strategic and collaborative projects will develop sustainable knowledge resources with relevance and currency, and with potential impact for the university.

References

Allen, M., Long, J. (2009) Learning as knowledge networking: conceptual foundations for revised uses of the Internet in high education, Proceedings *of the World Congress on Engineering and Computer Science*, from http://www.iaeng.org/publication/WCECS2009/WCECS2009_pp652-657.pdf

Baltzersen, R. (2010) Radical transparency: Open access as a key concept in wiki pedagogy. Australasian Journal of Educational Technology 26(6), 791-809. http://www.ascilite.org.au/ajet/ajet26/baltzersen.html

Baranuik, R., Burrus, C. (2008) Viewpoint: Global Warming Toward Open Educational Resources, *Communications of the ACM*, 51.9, 30-32.

Bossu, C., Brown, M., & Bull, D. (forthcoming) Feasibility Protocol: An instrument to assist institutional adoption of OER. Australian Government Office of Learning & Teaching. http://wikiresearcher.org/OER_in_Australia/Planning

Bossu, C., Brown, M., & Bull, D. (2012). Do Open Educational Resrouces represent assitional challenges or advantages to the current climate of change in the Australian higher education sector, *Proceedings Ascilite 2012 Conference*, Retrieved from http://www.ascilite.org.au/conferences/wellington12/2012/images/custom/bossu%2c_carina_-_do_open.pdf

Bueno-de-la-Fuente, G., Robertson, R.J., Boon, S. (2012) The roles of libraries and information professionals in Open Educational Resources (OER) initiatives: Survey Report.

CAPLE/JISC CETIS. http://publications.cetis.ac.uk/2012/492

Conole, G. (2013) *Designing for Learning in an Open World*. New York: Springer.

D'Antoni, S (2009). Open Educational Resources: reviewing initiatives and issues, Open Learning: The Journal of Open, Distance and e-Learning, 24:1, 3-10

Florida Virtual Campus. (2012) *2012 Florida Student Textbook Survey.* Tallahassee, Florida. http://www.openaccesstextbooks.org/pdf/2012_Exec_Sum_Student_Txtbk_Survey.pdf

The Interview. (2012). Sir John Daniel, former President and CEO, Commonwealth of Learning. *France 24*. http://www.france24.com/en/20120712-john-daniel-open-educational-resources-movement last accessed 10 May 2013.

Johnson, L., Adams Becker, S., Cummins, M., Estrada, V., Freeman, A. and Ludgate, H. (2013) *NMC Horizon Report: 2013 Higher Education Edition*. Austin, Texas: The New Media Consortium.

Joyce, A. (2006) OECD study of OER: Forum Report *Internet discussion forum: Open educational resources – Findings from an OECD study*, UNESCO.

Kanwar, A., Kodhandaraman, B., & Unmar, A. (2010). Toward Sustainable Open Education Resources: A Perspective from the Global South, *American Journal of Distance Education*, 24 (2), pp 65-80. doi:10.1080/08923641003696588

La Trobe University (2012). *Future Ready: Strategic Plan 2013-2017*.

Littlejohn, A., Beetham, H. and McGill, L. (2012). Learning at the digital frontier: a review of digital literacies in theory and practice. Journal of Computer Assisted Learning, 28: 547–556. doi: 10.1111/j.1365-2729.2011.00474.x

McGreal, R. (2012). The need for Open Educational Resources for Ubiquitous Learning. *8th IEEE International Workshop on Pervasive Learning, Life and Leisure 2012* (pp. 679–684). Lugano.

Radical Learning Group, La Trobe University. (2012) http://www.radicallearninggroup.blogspot.com.au/

University of Southern Queensland. (2012) *Orion: Open Education Resources and Open Education Practices in Higher Education*, http://adfi.usq.edu.au/projects/orion/2012/09/17/about/.

Wiley, D. & Gurrell, S. (2009). A decade of development... *Open Learning: The Journal of Open and Distance Learning*, 24(1), 11-21.

Wiley, D. (2012). The MOOC Misnomer. *Open Content*.

Wiley, D. & Thanos, K. 2013. *Getting Started with OER? Lumen Can Help!* Webinar 18 April 2013 <http://meet60543915.adobeconnect.com/p4so0obhcf1/> last accessed 31 May 2013.

Williams, S. (2002). Free as in Freedom: Richard Stallman's Crusade for Free Software.

O'Reilly Media, Inc.

Appendix 1

La Trobe University Conference on open education

The Open Education Working Group came together in early 2013 to organise a one-day conference to mark Open Education Week. The group noted a lack of acknowledgement of the worldwide open education event at other institutions in the region.

The working group was subsequently tasked by the PVC Future Learning, Claire Macken, to provide recommendations on how to engage in the open education arena, following the Radical Learning Group's recommendation in its report of November 2012.

The open education conference was intended to be a platform to discuss a wide range of issues related to open education, and to draw the conversation away from recent industry and media focus on MOOCs (Massively Open Online Courses). The group intended to highlight the lack of open education activity in our region and to change this by creating greater awareness within La Trobe. External guests were invited from a range of organisations outside La Trobe, as well as an extended network of colleagues from within La Trobe.

Conference findings

The one-day conference explored a range of issues relating to open educational practices, including distinctions between free access and open access. A full program, as well as summaries and recordings of all sessions, can be found on the [wiki](#).

Development of capacity

Currently there is a lack of support and recognition structures in place for staff to adopt and create OER. Lack of skills (and awareness) in using and developing open resources is a barrier to adoption of open educational practices within La Trobe. If open teaching practices are to be valued, this needs to be demonstrated through practical measures such as recognition of contribution to open teaching resources, rather than current structure of recognising research publications only. Conference discussions demonstrated a need to develop capacity (institutional and individual) to produce, source and use open educational resources in teaching and learning.

The "Who's Doing What" session of the conference discussed Wikimedia Medicine project as an example of a project that is positioned and resourced to support our professional development and capacity building.

Flexibility in IP policy and procedures

There is a need for La Trobe's IP policy and copyright procedures to be clear and more

flexible. This issue was raised in nearly all sessions of the conference. There was a specific suggestion to use 'Copyleft' as an organising principle and there was debate about individual vs. institutional ownership of intellectual property. A proposed IP Policy was tabled, which was [drafted for the University of Canberra](#) and endorsed by the NTEU and others.

The conference discussions gave support for individual ownership of work produced while working at La Trobe, as is the case in institutions such as the University of New South Wales, University of Technology Sydney, University of Western Australia, University of Wollongong, James Cook University and Australian National University.

The conference also noted that while the Australian Department of Finance and Deregulation in 2010 advised the adoption of Creative Commons Attribution licence, in practice other Creative Commons licences have been applied to departmental content. The discussion concluded that for policy to flow through into practice, adequate explanation of the reasons for adopting a particular default Creative Commons licence must be given.

Existing open education projects around La Trobe University

A range of open education activities already in operation at La Trobe was discussed at the conference, from the centrally sanctioned iTunes U activities to faculty-driven efforts to provide educational materials on open access websites such as Wikipedia and Wikiversity. Conference attendees expressed a desire to have flexibility in their adoption of open education practices and use of open education platforms; that their options not be limited to one method such as through iTunes U. Discussions centred around how methods of engagement might change across disciplines and thus singular, stringent policies and guidelines would not be appropriate.

Conference attendees also discussed their individual use and experience of open educational resources, citing difficulties in finding re-usable materials.

The conference supported the development of open education practices in higher education in Australia. By opening up education, higher education institutions can build and develop strong connections and involvement with communities.