Building open capabilities: A national approach

Abstract

Since March 2020, when every teacher became an online teacher and every student a distance learner, interest in using open educational resources (OER) and open educational practices (OEP) in teaching and learning has increased noticeably. Ample evidence, over many years, has shown the potential value of OER and OEP for designing authentic assessments, building/adapting textbooks, developing digital/data literacies, fostering student-staff partnership, and furthering equity. However, as the UNESCO (2019) ‘Recommendation on OER’ makes clear, supporting the creation, use and adaptation of inclusive and quality OER requires coordinated action in multiple areas.

Ireland's National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education has, since its inception in 2013, supported open education principles, practices and policies in Irish higher education – recognising that this requires the development of open capabilities at multiple levels: individual, programme, institutional and national. Inspired by the UNESCO OER recommendation, and following publication of national OER/OEP guides in 2019 and 2020, the National Forum published a new national resource in 2021: ‘Using OER and OEP for Teaching and Learning’. The aim of the resource is to be relevant to those who teach and those who learn in Irish higher education and to complement and support open education initiatives already in place within institutions. Through consultation across the sector, diverse representation on the development team, a staged development process, and using a permissive open license (CC BY), it is hoped that the resource will be useful to all who learn, teach, support and lead in Irish higher education, and beyond. This session will share the new resource and Ireland's national approach to building open capabilities, as well as invite feedback and suggestions.

‘Using OER and OEP for Teaching & Learning’: description and objectives

Inspired by the UNESCO OER recommendation, and following publication of national OER/OEP guides in 2019 and 2020, Ireland's National Forum published a new national resource in 2021: ‘Using OER and OEP for Teaching and Learning’. The resource (itself an OER) begins with a section on 'Understanding Open', highlighting the main aims of open education, i.e. expanding access, advancing equity and enhancing pedagogy. Three further sections explore Using OER, Creating OER, and Using OEP. The resource curates and attributes a wide variety of Irish and international OER/OEP work. This session will share the new resource and Ireland's national approach to building open capabilities, as well as invite feedback and suggestions.

The objective of the ‘Using OER and OEP for Teaching and Learning’ resource is to provide a locally relevant OER/OEP resource for those who teach and those who learn in Irish higher education and to complement and support open education initiatives already in place within institutions. Through consultation across the sector, diverse representation on the development team, a staged development process, and using a permissive open license (CC BY), it is hoped that the resource will be useful to all who learn, teach, support and lead in Irish higher education, and beyond.

The next stage of development will be to develop an open course in this area, adding to the suite of open courses (see OpenCourses.ie) developed within Ireland’s National
Professional Development Framework. Following the National Forum’s Open Courses model, this course will be designed to be offered in multiple modalities (online, blended, face-to-face), either facilitated or self-paced.

How this initiative addresses the UNESCO OER Recommendation

As the UNESCO Recommendation on OER makes clear, supporting the creation, use and adaptation of inclusive and quality OER requires coordinated action in multiple areas: building capacity of stakeholders, developing supportive open policy, encouraging inclusive and equitable quality OER, nurturing sustainability models, and fostering international cooperation. While the OER/OEP resource described here predominantly addresses the first of these (i.e. building capacity), it was undertaken with a focus on a broader approach. Other related work by the National Forum focuses on building enabling policies for digital and open education, fostering equity, and building for sustainability.

The approach taken in developing this national OER/OEP resource both addresses and seeks to build on the UNESCO OER Recommendation. In particular, the National Forum has taken a capabilities approach, drawing specifically on Martha Nussbaum’s work in the area of human development. Nussbaum’s (2011) “capabilities approach” conceives of capabilities as opportunities created by a combination of a person’s abilities together with their social, economic and political environment. We noted the productive insights and opportunities enabled through use of the “digital capabilities” model (Beetham, 2017), and we have sought to address the development of “open capabilities” in a similar way. This will be described in additional detail in the session.

Lessons learned

The OER/OEP resource described here was launched just a few weeks ago. We will have additional feedback from across the Irish higher education sector by late September. However, lessons already learned are that incremental, staged development of national resources is key. Early feedback from staff engaged in open education was for the National Forum to develop small-scale resources to support OER/OEP and to gather feedback following each. This has proved to be a productive approach, with small, targeted resources helping us to build specific open capabilities across the sector, and enabling us to move to address specific areas of interest (e.g. choosing an open licence).

If this submission is accepted, we look forward to sharing additional feedback and reflections on lessons learned at the OEGlobal Conference.

References


