OEPS | Opening Educational Practices in Scotland

Year One update on the OEPS Project

Executive Summary

- The project is on track to meet expected outputs and on budget for a projected end-date of 31st July 2017
- The OEPS project website www.oepscotland.org now has a significant following
- High profile deliverables including the online hub for open educational practice and exemplar OER and OEP sub-projects will launch throughout the autumn
- Successful engagement with informal learning partners has exceeded expectations, engagement with partners in the college and university sectors has been more challenging but a strategy is being developed to redress this balance over the next twelve months
- There is a high level of active partnership work, which is providing invaluable insight into the barriers to effective use of OER and practices that enable large-scale use
- The loss of the project manager, who played an important and highly effective role in the project, has presented challenges, however, we expect to have a replacement in place by October

1. Overview

OEPS is tasked to have a focus on the use of OER and the development of OEP in the context of transitions from informal to formal education and between educational stages and into employment. The project aims to build on existing knowledge and expertise to bring the benefits of large-scale use and improved understanding of open education to Scotland. Overall the project is in good health and we are on track to deliver against all the outputs set out in the project plan agreed with the Scottish Funding Council. Activity with partners outside the formal education sector has been a strong theme of the project's work to date. We have found that the Scottish HEIs are less aware of the issues relating to open education. In general while there are areas of good practice and engaged staff, there are relatively few links between HEI staff engaged in open practice and WP practitioners. Since the summer of 2014 we have had active engagement with 49 organisations in Scotland of which 20 are in the formal education sectors. We have worked hard to open

avenues to developing work in the formal sector and over the autumn of 2015 we will continue to develop awareness through workshops, forums and other means and we are initiating a small number of new collaborations targeted in this area.

The remainder of our partnerships are concerned variously with informal education, training, workplace and professional learning. We maintain a status log of this partnership work in order to monitor activity, share progress and prioritise against the project objectives and required outputs. Some activities are completed, and a small number on hold, as a result of changes in staffing or short-term priorities for the partner; the majority of partnerships are active. While the range and diversity of partners has been an invaluable source of information about OEP in Scotland, we are conscious that the OEPS partnership work involves a large number of organisations. We manage this by careful prioritisation with OEPS as a catalyst for action that is partner led. This has enabled us to manage workloads.

Autumn 2015 will see the launch of the hub for Open Educational Practice. This will include a small number of online communities of practice and there are plans to add to these in the following months. Feedback from partners on the design and purpose of the hub has been very positive. In December we will launch two new OER courses created in partnership with Parkinsons UK and with a major Wellcome Trust funded project on End Of Life Care at Glasgow University.

2. Update on specific outcomes

Scottish hub for open educational practice

This significant development has benefited from intensive feedback on the needs of sector partners. The launch is a month behind our original schedule but it should go live towards the end of September. It will launch with significant support for practice embedded in both the generic OEPS community and the two prototype specialist communities. It will have custom OER search, blog and forum facilities and will point to OpenLearn Works as a platform for creating, developing and hosting OER and modelling good OEP.

Understanding the level of development of OER and OEP in Scotland

Through a process of evaluation and reflection of practice-based engagement with partners we have accumulated substantial qualitative data. Some of this is documented in the reports (4), peer-reviewed papers (6), presentations (14) and blog posts (40) produced by the project. Over the autumn we plan to produce a range of briefing papers to share these insights more widely. Also over the autumn, plans are

on target to run two large-scale surveys of teaching staff in the Scottish university and Scottish college sectors. The findings from this research will be available by the end of 2015.

Events and dissemination

To date we have organised and held twenty-three half-day workshops and two full day advisory forums. Twenty-nine organisations and 135 individuals from the formal education sector have been involved in eight events, principally universities and colleges, but also pan-sector organisations like the SQA, HEA and QAA Scotland. Twenty-seven organisations from outwith the formal education sectors have been involved in nineteen events, these include unions, third sector organisations and quangos.

Exemplar OER and OEP

Two new OERs are in production and will be launched in December 2015. The first results from a partnership with Parkinsons UK and is aimed at the very large numbers of professionals working in Health and Social Care who need to have some understanding of the condition. This will be a badged online course. We are in discussions with the SQA about the option of the course being recognised for credit. The second is the first component of a suite of globally focused, cutting edge, End of Life Care modules created in partnership with a Wellcome Foundation funded specialist team from the Dumfries based School of Interdisciplinary studies based on the Dumfries campus of Glasgow University.

Badges

We have supported the OU in Scotland with the development of badges for the Reflection Toolkit, Caring Counts and Caring Counts in the workplace. We are also promoting the use and the development of effective practice to support the use of the new OU BOCs. Taken together these developments mark the first large-scale implementation of badged online courses in Scotland and the first significant use in supporting widening participation and transitions.

Open Learning Champions

The project is working closely with the OU in Scotland over the development of Open Pathways. These new materials have proved invaluable in developing a strategic approach to the use of open learning with Scottish Union Learning. The project has developed the idea of Open Learning Champions and has trained 85 Union Learning

Representatives (URLs) in the skills required to support their colleagues in accessing open learning in a workplace setting.

OpenLearn Works

The OU is a world leader in providing OpenLearn Works; a rare, truly open OER platform - allowing users not just to freely use OERs but also to build and distribute their own OERs.

Much needed improvements have now been made to the user guidance to help external users in particular create OER using the platform and early feedback is positive. A work plan has been established for significantly upgrading the functionality of OpenLearn Works and is on schedule. The aim is to expose the tools and functions for rapid and easy creation and delivery of open educational content in OpenLearn Works, making them easier to use. The impact of this work will ensure the OU can claim to continue to be a world leader in providing not just access to OERs but also easy to use tools to build and distribute OERs (allowing us to work more flexibly with partners and other third parties). This work may also help the OU (internally) exploit some of these easy to use tools to allow academics develop module materials more independently and rapidly.

Business models

The project has been assembling data and evidence on business models. We intend to produce a small number of briefing notes over the autumn and a more extensive report in spring 2016.

3. Emerging Issues

The OEPS Project Manager left the project in July 2015 in anticipation of taking voluntary severance from the substantive role from which she had been seconded. We are in the process of appointing a replacement and hope to have someone in place by the start of September. The project manager role is critical to the success of what is a complex and multi-stranded project. We are fortunate that Caroline Anderson, the former manager, left the project budget and administration in such a healthy state.

Currently contracts for project team members run until the end of 2016. However, the three-year project funding was not in place until early summer 2014. Since spending against the budget started in August 2104 there are adequate funds to

extend the formal end date of the project until July 31st 2017. We have consulted with relevant units internally and obtained agreement on this course of action. We have also spoken to the funding council who are in agreement with the proposal.

Future Plans

- Many of our partnerships involve developing practice over extended periods and we will continue to support, encourage, observe, evaluate and disseminate emerging good practice.

- We are conscious that the project has collected evidence that our initial focus on proactive partnership has not given us time to disseminate. Over the autumn and into 2016 we will prioritise the regular production of short briefing papers that share this experience. These will include an analysis of the learning analytics associated with OER produced in partnership, a report on barriers to engagement and effective practice to break down barriers, an overview of the partnership approach to developing OEP, a description of the open learning champions model and a summary of the opportunities and challenges involved in the use of digital badges.

- The hub for open educational practice is designed to be flexible, easy to modify and to be open to developing needs and user generated content. We expect to add new communities on a continuing basis and revise the site in response to feedback.

- Over the course of autumn 2015 we will conduct two major surveys into awareness and use of OER and OEP In Scotland. The first will be directed at staff in the university sector, one that focuses on colleges will follow it. In early 2015 we will conduct a survey of staff involved in encouraging digital participation. Results form these surveys will be widely disseminated.

- The current phase of OER development will be complete by the end of 2015. We have plans in place to follow up the End of Life Care resource with a small suite of linked OER courses and we have agreed to support the development of a new Scots Language resource. During the autumn, however, we plan to hold a number of conversations with a view to meeting project objectives through the development of exemplar OER and OEP with HE partners that have a particular focus on STEM. Through the improved tools on the OpenLearnWorks site we will also encourage partners to pilot putting up their own content and to reuse and reversion existing materials. We are commissioning a number of small-scale developments of curated and reversioned resources to illustrate the value of this approach.

- We have been collecting and collating information and evidence of business models for the creation and use of OER and OEP and we will produce a report on these findings in early 2016.
- As the project matures we are looking closely at sustainability. Following the discussion at this meeting we will prepare an interim report that looks at the evidence accumulated by OEPS in the context of national and international developments in open education and makes provisional recommendations.

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