JOURNEYS TO OPEN EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE: MODELS & APPROACHES

UKOER/SCORE Review Final Report

A CUMULATIVE EVALUATION AND SYNTHESIS OF THE ENTIRE HEFCE FUNDED INTERVENTION IN OER

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2. II. MODELS AND APPROACHES

In this section we illustrate some of the pathways taken by the HEFCE-funded initiatives on their Open Educational Practice (OEP) journeys, highlighting how specific contexts impact on the approaches and models adopted. As we discussed in the previous section on motivation there is not one model for OER release but many and these are shaped by original motivations, emerging benefits and stakeholder needs. The UKOER Programme provided an excellent opportunity for the HE and FE community to test different approaches in a variety of contexts, to be experimental in relation to release and use of content but also in transforming traditional practice at institutional, community and individual levels. The SCORE research strand of activities also allowed the community to take a deeper look at the models and their implications for long term impact on practice.

It is of note that the UK approach to view and investigate OER within the broader context of OEP and culture change, stood out against those of other countries which appeared to have a clear focus on content. Even today, with the rise of open courses at a massive scale, there appears to be little cohesion between open courses and OER. By adopting an approach which attempted to evaluate the impact of the HEFCE funding on practices and culture the programme took on a challenge. It is much harder to measure such impact and whatever conclusions are made need to acknowledge that the national and global landscape is always shifting and impacting on practice.

The first iteration of the UKOER Evaluation and Synthesis Framework attempted to identify the range of possible questions that the UK HE and FE community needed to explore. It identified questions around OER release processes; developing, managing and sharing OER; guidance and support mechanisms; business cases and benefits realisation; cultural issues; institutional issues; legal, technical and quality issues; pedagogy and end use issues. This list clearly illustrates where the community was at the beginning of the programme, and was informed by a lot of previous work (identified in the introduction). There was a clear need to investigate different models for OER release which was also demonstrated by the three strands in the pilot phase: individual strand, subject strand and institutional strand. This phase generated a significant amount of evidence for each strand and this was drawn together in the pilot phase synthesis report. Subsequent phases of UKOER continued to investigate issues around models for release, notably models that involved a wide range of stakeholders outside the education sector. Throughout all phases there was an emphasis on identifying the technical, legal and cultural aspects; barriers, enablers and benefits; and also issues around sustainability of models.

Whilst the nature of the three strands in the pilot programme - institutional, individual and subject consortia release implies three different models, there was an interesting overlap across the strands in relation to choices of where and how to deposit and manage OER. However all three strands had different ideas, expectations and needs regarding discoverability. By the end of phase three, UKOER projects revealed a more sophisticated understanding around hosting and discoverability that reflected a desire to increase accessibility. The UKOER Synthesis and Evaluation reports for each phase include much detail about the technical choices and challenges. For an overview of technical aspects of UKOER across the three years see Into the wild: Technology for Open Educational Resources Reflections on three years of the UK OER Programmes JISC CETIS, October 2012.

2.II.A. RANGE OF OER RELEASED

SUBJECT DISCIPLINE

Whilst the journeys travelled and lessons learned by those involved are undoubtedly the most significant outcomes of the HEFCE funding into OER there was also an inherent intention to increase the corpus of OER within the UK. The UKOER programme funded over 80 projects, involving hundreds of different bodies from a range of sectors and covered a very wide range of subject disciplines. SCORE research activities also spanned several disciplines and have been incorporated into the same subject discipline page as the UKOER projects.

A number of projects in all phases pointed out that introductory or generalist level materials benefit from a wider number of potential users and this can be a very strong motivator for institutions as is implies cost savings and efficiency through sharing potential. In contrast, however, advanced materials can add more value because of their scarcity and specialist nature. One project in the pilot phase (ChemistryFM) noted that videos relating to theoretical concepts received the highest number of views, but were less highly rated than those showing how to perform calculations.

More research is required around how feedback and assessment relate to OER and open practice. This aspect was not widely investigated during the UKOER programme although a SCORE Research project investigated this issue[1]. The openSpace project, in phase 2, explicitly built peer assessment and critique into its dynamic materials, providing guidelines for users.

FORMATS

OER released through all phases of the programme included a variety of content types and formats: podcast lectures, lecture notes, audio files, powerpoint slides, worksheets, Open source software; tutorial materials, videos, lectures, notes, reading lists, online assessment tools, student stories, learning outcomes and objectives; course outlines; workshops; web resources; self test quizzes; essay revision; exam materials, questions/answers, multiple choice questions, self-study assignments, guidance, Re-usable Learning Objects, simulations and whole modules. There were international materials, commercially published materials, authentic learning and teaching activities, and legacy materials. Some formats presented significant challenges (newspaper articles, photographs, patient data, journal articles, materials previously published commercially). Existing resources containing images, particularly of children, sports people or patients, raised issues around data protection and hampered release. During phase 3 open textbooks/eBooks emerged as a popular format offering personalisation opportunities for users, publishing opportunities for authors and tapping into interest from commercial publishers and students.

As is evident from this list the OER released ranged from individual assets to complete modules. As phases progressed UKOER projects began to release OER at both levels of granularity to improve accessibility and re-usability. It became evident that students often required contextual information surrounding their OER and teachers also often wanted to include pedagogical context. The notion of adding 'pedagogical wrappers' became fairly widespread across projects. However, it was also widely acknowledged that smaller assets would be easier to re-use and re-purpose.

The pedagogical wrap-around materials were developed to provide sufficient background information about the resources. TIGER provided information about how the OER is being used and how it could be used, the aims of the OER, the outcomes, who the target audience is, how previous tutors had set up the learning activities and how they had structured student interaction. Guidance on how the users can reuse and repurpose the OERs was also important since this would allow them to modify materials as needed within their own environment. (TIGER Project Final Report, 2010)

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Designing OER for use on mobile devices is still challenging due to different fluidity, resolution, graphic quality and general working compatibility, however this is an area which needs further investigation.

Decisions around which type of OER to release had an impact on the kinds of skills required within the project teams, and the levels of complexity that they had to engage with. Some project teams focused on releasing a particular resource format such as podcasts for release on iTunesU (Oxford University) , or 3D models (Doncaster College) which resulted in them developing very strong skills and workflows for that type of resource. Other teams engaged with a range of different formats and had to respond to different challenges that each format brought.

RELEASING EXISTING MATERIALS

Many projects released a mixture of existing (often re-purposed) and newly created resources. It was difficult to tease out how far the subject area impacted on these choices, apart from projects with an obvious focus on legacy material. We concluded at the end of the pilot phase that it was more cost efficient to release new materials, mainly due to challenges around time taken to track provenance and clear copyright for open release.

Legal issues were expected to present some barriers for projects but most underestimated the amount of time this would take up. Projects across all three strands agreed that the costs and effort involved in clearing rights for existing materials was not viable, especially where third party rights are involved, and that it would be preferable to concentrate on ensuring that new content should be designed and developed with openness in mind. (UKOER Pilot Phase Synthesis & Evaluation Report, 2010)

During phase 3, projects with previous OER experience may have understood the complexities and time implications of releasing existing resources and instead focused on new materials. Decisions like this are impacted by several issues, for example, the availability of new technologies can so transform the pedagogic potential that it makes sense to develop new resources rather then re-purpose existing ones - simulations are a good example of this. Other aspects that can impact on these decisions relate to funding and resourcing, particularly as changing economic conditions might affect how resources are developed. The following excerpt comes from a phase 2 project working with the NHS which highlights challenges of working outside the education sector:

There is a strong compliance culture, with fewer resources for innovative development. However, developing a sharing culture was seen as being possible, thanks to initiatives such as 'content clubs' and the national repository (NeLR) and PORSCHE itself. This move is still tentative, with a worry that transition to Foundation Trusts might result in a further monetising of content and the commissioning of more materials from commercial suppliers. (PORSCHE Project Evaluation report, 2012)

One challenge to emerge was that there were not many existing "open" resources available to be re-purposed. Projects tended to conclude that it would be remiss to ignore very good resources that are publicly available but not under a cc licence and so many included materials that did not have an open licence in an effort to increase the critical mass of resources available. These projects all adopted some means of making clear to users which resources were CC-licensed and which were not. This does highlight a problem that was evidenced by some of the phase 3 projects that were keen to demonstrate re-purposing of previously released UKOER. Many of the previously released UKOER and OER released globally are not actually easily re-purposable, either technically or pedagogically.

2.II.B. MODELS FOR OER RELEASE

Approaches adopted by UKOER projects for releasing OER were influenced by multiple, and sometimes complex, factors including stakeholders and their requirements, sustainability, existing institutional policies and practices, practical issues around technical infrastructure, and staff skills and understanding. Issues such as institutional branding of individual OER, version control and metadata/resource description all affected decisions around approaches for release. In fact, OER release models are often complex and are shaped by a range of factors including:

- funding sources
- intentions behind release (strongly linked to anticipated benefits)
- stakeholders involved

There are many 'models' involved in OER release. Which one we focus on depends on the specific context, motivation and intended outcomes. This highlights the complexity and inherent dangers of trying to pin down one model and ascribe specific benefits to it. For example we could look at OER release from the perspective of any of the following models or even a combination of these:

- funding models
- pedagogic models
- development models (big OER/little OER[2])
- hosting models (repository/content management/open web)
- distribution models (limited openness/global/institutional)
- sharing models
- institutional models (mandated/not mandated, central/distributed)
- community/partnership models
- individual models
- publishing models
- licensing models
- Consumer/production/Supply models

Choices made in relation to one model or aspect of release often impacts on other models and there is a lot of crossover. This can result in confusion in both describing and understanding which models are being adopted. All UKOER projects had to consider institutional factors affecting and supporting OER release, because individuals and subject consortia members were also connected with an educational institution. This was beneficial to projects where institutions were already engaged with the concept of opening educational content, particularly if their own institution had, or were in the process of developing, an institutional repository. However some of the individual and consortia projects encountered more barriers where institutions had not embraced the notion of OER or had taken a particularly risk averse approach to OER release.

INDIVIDUAL APPROACHES

Innovative individuals have in many ways led the uptake and release of OER across the globe. Often individual champions lead an institution down the path of engagement or may introduce awareness in a community. Although individuals rarely act in isolation one compelling model for release is the individual teacher making their materials openly available for others on the web. This model is, however, not as simple or straightforward as it initially appears to be. Individuals still need to ensure that open content does not contain any materials that have restrictive licences, and need to manage version control, accuracy, accessibility and to some extent quality, if they have any element of reputational motive. If an individual is a member of an institution they may have to consider institutional restrictions in relation to risk management, technical limitations, hosting, metadata,

tracking and branding. In many ways individuals may have been able to operate 'under the radar' before institutional awareness of OER and their implications increased.

An interesting aspect of individual OER release is the developing notion of the digital scholar - where academics may see release of learning materials as part of their scholarly publishing activities. This is also strongly related to their relationship with their institution/s and potentially the REF process.

COMMUNITY APPROACHES

There is evidence that an open sharing approach – addressing issues of release, hosting and re-use in tandem – can be more effective and sustainable, particularly where communities share clear common interests. However, even within close-knit communities such as sub-disciplinary consortia, sharing is problematised by the impact of different institutional quality processes, different levels of institutional commitment to OER use and OER production, and different levels of institutional support and expertise.

During the first two phases of UKOER, Higher Education Academy Subject Centres were involved in many community and collection-led projects, making excellent use of existing community networks and technologies. Whilst initially a strong factor to support sustainability, this was later challenged by the closure of the Centres, although the communities are likely to continue in some format (for example see the Centre for Medicine, Dentistry and Veterinary Medicine MEDEV and the Centre for Language Linguistics and Area Studies LLAS). This does highlight a vulnerability for community-led approaches if, for example, technical systems and support are maintained by a body reliant on long term funding. However the fact that some of the subject centres have been developed into self sustaining communities is testament to community-led approaches to sharing practice and resources.

UKOER projects adopting subject discipline approaches focused on change within a community of pedagogic practice by creating opportunities for open resource development, open sharing, critical reflection, and discussion. They noted that this takes time and commitment, and is easier to achieve if the scholarship of teaching as reflected in OER production is institutionally recognised. This was particularly relevant for projects in the HE Academy-led strand which went across phases 2 and 3 - Open Materials for Accredited Courses Strand (OMAC).

Traditionally, academics have developed their teaching materials as an individual effort whilst viewing research as a team and community endeavour. Peer review of teaching is also associated in many institutions with capability assessment and HR processes, even when it is documented as a development and enhancement mechanism. In our own institution, for example, the repository has traditionally been for research outputs. OER development, release and re-use challenges these distinctions. (CPD4HE Project Final report, 2011)

Subject-discipline-led initiatives throughout the funded period offered some fascinating insights into perceived challenges inherent within their discipline and there was significant evidence that practice change and pedagogical transformation occurred through this kind of engagement with OER. Our detailed survey with the UKOER and SCORE communities also provide similar evidence that their activities had introduced new ways of teaching in the disciplines, particular sub-disciplines (e.g. media, photography), with an undercurrent of re-purposing ideas or producing bespoke versions. Although there remain concerns and challenges, some felt OER was gaining acceptance and influencing course development processes with greater sharing across traditional boundaries.

INSTITUTIONAL APPROACHES

Institutional models for OER release were often led by central learning technology or resource teams which acted as the hub for OER activity which reached out to different faculty and departments. This kind of model often incorporated activities around centrally managed institutional repositories, content management systems (CMS) or virtual learning environments (VLE). There can be a focus on detailed workflows and guidance in this kind of model, which are designed to take some of the effort out of stepping up to a more strategic approach and support ongoing sustainability. In the spirit of re-usability some institutions adapted frameworks developed during the pilot phase such as the University of Leicester OTTER Project CORRE framework. Integrating OER development into the workflow of existing academic support teams proved highly successful as a change strategy.

In contrast devolved institutional models, where teaching staff take the lead in developing OER, were identified by several projects as an ideal model to aim for. This model is harder to achieve as it involves significant change in practice and tended to need strong central teams to move things forward in the early stages of development. The following excerpt highlights how this kind of model integrates OER activity into standard academic practice:

we have sought to embed all aspects of OER creation, submission, retrieval and use as part of the fabric of the institution. What we have been able to implement is an institutional approach which embeds the content collection, quality checking and ownership of the process within already established networks within the institution. Alongside this we encouraged ownership of OER development and use from within the Faculties and areas at a "grass roots" level.' (Unicycle Project Final report, 2010)

Institutional models are much more likely to succeed when supported by institution-wide strategy and policy. These indicate a commitment from senior managers and provide a basis for the cross-institutional conversations needed to support and embed practice change. Projects developed a range of mechanisms to enable staff to participate and change practice, but saw the provision of long term institutional support through an appropriate infrastructure as crucial to embed these changes in practice and culture. For example, time constraints always emerge as a significant barrier for staff struggling to fit new practices into existing duties, but can be even more significant for particular groups such as part-time, hourly paid tutors. Institutional support is required to enable this group to engage, particularly during the more time intensive first stages of opening up practice.

Institutional support for skills and digital literacies of both staff and students was cited as an important enabler and linking OER activities to digital literacy activities and strategies provided a useful mechanism to continue OER work after the funded period and to ensure sustainability. This was also linked to providing conceptual frameworks for staff to relate to:

teachers in our target groups needed assistance with digital skills and confidence in relation to OER creation and also needed some sort of conceptual and practical framework to operate within. (ALTO UK Final Report)

Strategy, policy, institutional infrastructure and staff development activities are all discussed further in the chapter on Critical factors to support open practice.

STUDENT INVOLVEMENT

Across all phases of UKOER students contributed towards the creation, release, testing and evaluation of resources resulting in OER that closely reflect their specific needs. The survey with HEFCE funded OER initiatives specifically asked about the capacity in which students had been involved. There was evidence (reflecting findings of UKOER synthesis reports) of students' involvement at multiple points: creating OER (22%), evaluating OER (41%) or simply as recipients of OER (32%). A smaller set of

responses indicated students were part of the project team (16%), students as researchers (11%) and/or students on open (or partially open) courses (9%). 30% of respondents answered N/A, indicating that students had had no involvement in their OER activities. This latter finding probably reflects initiatives that did not release OER for a specific group of students.

It is important that the needs of students be balanced against other stakeholder requirements, but evidence has shown that student engagement in OER initiatives has helped to raise awareness and increase demand. Linking OER use to student learning opportunities (often through digital literacy activities) resulted in students developing an awareness of OER and how to make the best of them for their own studies.

Working with students and teachers as co-designers of OER results in final resources that are highly relevant to the curriculum, with a focus on usability. Students respond positively to being included in this way, increasing a sense of ownership of the OER and increased potential for end use. (ReACTOR Final report)

Involving students as producers and users of OER has been a particular success of the project. It provided a simple framework to allow them to communicate and publish, increasing their digital literacy and introducing them to the benefits of open academic practice. By recruiting graduate students the project was assured of academic-level content from contributors who were closer to the target audience. (Great Writers Final Report)

An interesting tension emerges around ethical concerns about expecting fee-paying students to contribute their outputs for free. This also relates to student concerns about paying for a course where content is freely available to others, as discussed in the previous chapter.

Where project activities impacted on exiting courses the implications for long term sustainability within that institution were increased. Once student expectations are raised, and positive impact on the student experience is demonstrated, it is unlikely that activities will not continue to be supported. There are, however, tensions around developing OER to match specific individual courses which are discussed below.

Overall, we have seen some evidence of a shift in mindsets of academics towards 'open pedagogy' where students can set learning pathways and be the producers of content. However, progress in this area maybe inhibited by focus on educational content rather than learning activities. We discuss this further in the section below on open courses.

Our wide short poll around OEP in July 2012 revealed that OEP appears to be more prevalent for OER users and learners than for OER producers, even among the HEFCE funded OER community respondents. The most common practice as a producer was "I consider myself to be an open scholar (making content openly available and collaborating openly to further research)". It might therefore seem surprising, and says a great deal about prevailing hierarchical culture in HE of teachers relationships with students/learners, that by far the smallest category (30%) is "I design courses where learners contribute to public knowledge resources". This was echoed in the more detailed survey where design of courses where learners contribute to public knowledge resources remains low and is, indeed, slightly lower than for respondents as a whole.

Similarly, our detailed interview study noted that despite changes in the ways in which academics collaborate they predominantly focus on teaching activity, rather than considering learner-initiated, open engagement in learning. Although OER activity may have had an impact on the way individuals think about 'openness', there was a view that this activity had limited impact on changing the nature of learning and teaching in universities. These findings appear to indicate that this is a deep rooted

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facet of UK HE teaching culture and existing perceptions of learners/students in the UK. We consider the impact on staff and learners in the following section Impact of OER on open practices.

OPEN COURSES

The COMC Project at the University of Coventry in phase three took a unique approach in the UKOER programme by opening-up existing courses and transforming the way students were involved in their own learning, through collaborative content development and connection to far reaching professional networks.

Overall the outcome of the Open Classes project has been an excellent student response. Students have been hugely engaged with the classes and the projects they have undertaken within them. It is right to acknowledge that this may not be the same thing as being highly engaged with the Open Class ethos - or with OER/OEP per se. In all three classes students were very engaged with the projects undertaken within them, they achieved good results and recorded high levels of student satisfaction. (COMC Project Final Report, 2013)

Open courses, and the rise in interest in this area through the MOOC (Massive Open Online Courses) phenomenon, are bringing a disruptive element to the educational landscape. Opening up existing courses can provide an excellent opportunity to investigate these aspects and transform existing practice. Experimental approaches like this could lead to the development of alternative models to MOOCs.

The COMC open course approach is an interesting alternative to a focus on releasing OER outside the context of a course. Interestingly, results of the short poll around open educational practices revealed that for those who had received SCORE or UKOER funding (24 respondents) use of OER ("I use open content freely available on the web for my learning") was lower than for respondents as a whole, as was participation in open courses (slightly). Production of OER appears to be higher than any usage of OER, as might be expected since much of the UKOER funding was for OER release. Along with production of OER, facilitation of open courses was also significantly higher for this group than for respondents as a whole.

In the more detailed survey with funded initiatives, OEP appeared to be fairly well established in institutions in both documentation and institutional commitment, even though we only really started talking about open 'practices' in phase 2. This therefore appears to be a real move forward from thinking specifically about content (OER), although it may simply be a term picked up by the community, because of involvement with OER funded programmes using it. However, there is evidence also of growing interest in open assessment and open courses. This momentum is also evident in the number of institutions currently investigating open courses as a result of high profile MOOCs.

SKILLS/ROLES REQUIRED

Release of OER requires the development of new expertise and emphasises changing roles, particularly for teachers engaging in OEP who, for example, may have to become curators of OER generated during teaching activities. It may also require, or act as a catalyst for, the creation of new roles within an institution. This can be supported by individual workshops (perhaps focusing on specific aspects such as open licensing and Copyright) or might be embedded into generic staff development and training. The range of specialist skills and expertise identified during the funded period are listed below:

- adopting emerging open learning approaches which are sometimes at odds with current mainstream academic practices

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- creating and using resources in open networks and with multiple (sometimes unknown) associates (resource users and/or collaborators)
- evaluation and Quality Assurance of OER
- designing content in different media and for different platforms e.g. mobile
- using a range of technical and hosting solutions, ranging from enterprise solutions (eg university repository) to social media sites (eg YouTube)
- using and managing openly licensed metadata and para-data (other conextualising information) (comments etc)
- making content easily discoverable e.g. promoting through Google, twitter, Facebook and other social networks
- applying new copyright and IPR rules
- understanding the marketing potential associated with OER

2.II.C. SUMMARY/DISCUSSION

EMBEDDING OPEN EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE

It is useful to consider why we need to describe models of OER release. Discussion of models often emerges in relation to business process foci such as funding and sustainability. It can be helpful to think about OER release models in a broader sense as part of open educational practice as this focuses strongly on intention and anticipated use/re-use.

Emerging OEP, if shared and taken up at institutional or community level are likely to impact on long term use and sustainability of processes to release OER. During the pilot phase we did not talk about 'open educational practice' (as this term emerged during phase 2) but we did see how much the activities around releasing OER had the potential to question existing pedagogic practice and transform this for individuals, communities and educational institutions. Project activities encouraged new conversations amongst different groups across institutions and saw the need for new roles and practices for individuals. These new practices appear challenging at several levels and a significant element of project work was focused on supporting people, communities and institutions to take their first steps in their own OER and OEP journeys.

Engaging with the concept of openness and considering some of the benefits and challenges was the inevitable first step and a range of approaches emerged to support this:

- events and workshops around OER as a concept (increasing awareness)
- producing support and guidance materials
- developing and maintaining Communities of Practice
- cross-team collaboration (input from different professionals/services leading to increased understanding)

From this then followed steps to support changes in existing practice

1. providing new conceptual frameworks to support open practice
2. capacity building across a wide range of roles and departments (technical, curriculum design with OER, IPR, digital literacy, open practice)
3. creating a culture of openness across the institution (encouraging sharing)
4. securing senior management support
5. linking OER activities to institutional vision, strategy and policies
6. ensuring that institutional infrastructure supports open practices (including adequate resourcing - particularly acknowledgement that time is a significant factor, technologies to support open release)

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7. cascading good practice through champions
8. developing mechanisms for recognition and reward (such as inclusion in performance review and appraisal mechanism)
9. embedding OEP within Continuing Professional Development (CPD) activities)teacher training, staff development)
10. creating new roles or changing existing roles and responsibilities

These two lists provide an interesting mix of introductory activities to *increase awareness and engagement,* through activities to *support existing practice change* to institutionally supported approaches that can *embed and sustain ongoing changes in practice*. UKOER and SCORE participants turned their attention to sustainability at an early stage of the funding period, probably led by both the funding calls and programme officers. A workshop held by SCORE brought together pilot phase UKOER projects to discuss their experiences around sustainability which led to the development of a manifesto for sustainability (May 2010). Sustaining such practice change requires a reconsideration of existing strategies, policies and operational procedures and workflows. Throughout the three phases of UKOER attention was paid to strategies and policies

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Footnotes

1. SCORE fellowship project: SCORE Higher: using OERs to explore self-assessment for first year postgraduate researchers http://www.open.ac.uk/score/score-higher-using-oers-explore-self-assessment-first-year-postgraduate-researchers
2. see blog post by Martin Weller from the Open University, 2009 http://nogoodreason.typepad.co.uk/no_good_reason/2009/12/the-politics-of-oer.html

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ON THE WIKI: HTTP://BIT.LY/HEFCE-REVIEW-MODELS
BACK TO: MOTIVATIONS
FORWARD TO IMPACT

The UKOER/SCORE Review report is available on the UKOER Evaluation and Synthesis wiki, supported

by supplementary pages containing evidence and detailed analysis.