

White Paper on Business-University Cooperation



European Network for Catalysing
Open Resources in Education

Coordinator of this work:

Orna Farrell, Dublin City University, Ireland

Report Authors:

Orna Farrell, Dublin City University, Ireland

Juliane Granly, International Council for Open and Distance Education, Norway



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Introduction

This document presents draft recommendations to enhance the use of Open Educational Resources (OER) as a catalyst for business-university cooperation.

When reflecting on the interplay between open educational resources (OER) and open education practices in the context of business-university cooperation and the cultivation of entrepreneurialism, one must recognize their significant potential. These elements play a pivotal role in shaping the dynamics of collaboration between businesses and universities. Can OER serve as a catalyst for expanding, enhancing, or even establishing entirely new forms of cooperation? This question is of paramount importance when addressing the current challenges that permeate business-university partnerships and considering whether OER can contribute to their resolution.

This white paper will shed light on various dimensions of cooperation within this realm. It will delve into topics such as universities engaging in collaborative ventures with publishers and EdTech companies, dissecting legal considerations, particularly the impact of GDPR on OER, and illuminating the instrumental role that libraries and librarians assume in problem-solving and facilitating cooperative endeavours.

In summary, this white paper will explore how openness can play a significant role in fostering collaboration between businesses and universities, thereby fostering entrepreneurial culture. It will tackle questions concerning OER's potential to drive increased, improved, or novel forms of cooperation, addressing the existing challenges within business-university partnerships and how OER might offer solutions. The paper will also address various aspects of cooperation, including collaborations between universities, publishers, and EdTech firms, the legal implications of GDPR for OER, and the vital role of libraries and librarians in enabling and supporting cooperative initiatives.

Background and Context

“University-Business cooperation is progressively softening the line that has traditionally separated the isolated ivory tower and the self-sufficient industry, with greater recognition of how University-Business cooperation contributes to their respective networks”

(Galan-Muros and Davey, 2019, p.1312).

University-business cooperation encompasses various forms of collaborative interactions between higher education institutions (HEIs) and public or private organisations for mutual benefit (Davey et al., 2011, as cited in Galan-Muros & Davey, 2019, p. 1312). This cooperation has a long history and is characterised by strategic alliances that involve the exchange of theoretical and practical knowledge. Universities provide knowledge to students and businesses, which, in turn, benefit from exposure to industry practices, student employment opportunities, postgraduate recruitment, and research and development. Barriers to such cooperation include organisational cultural differences, funding constraints, and networking challenges, while drivers include resource availability and relationship building. Collaboration spans different areas, including curriculum design, lifelong learning, and student and staff mobility (Galan-Muros & Plewa, 2016). Recognizing the importance of strong university-business relationships, such partnerships are increasingly acknowledged as sources of innovation that impact economic and social development and contribute to the growth of knowledge societies (Galan-Muros & Davey, 2019).

Openness is “a premium business value that creates edupreneurship opportunities within the digital age.” (Darwish 2019, p. 3855). So far, openness has yet to be effectively leveraged by universities and businesses as a means of deepening and enhancing their collaboration. This lack of collaboration is a missed opportunity.

Awareness of Open Educational Practices (OEP) and Open Educational Resources (OER) is generally low, especially in the business world. Many companies are hesitant about the concept of OER, as it seems at odds with their profit-driven goals. However, OER and openness offer untapped market opportunities for businesses—in particular, OEP and OER can be powerful drivers for university-business cooperation (Farrell et al., 2022). In this white paper, we will explore how openness can catalyse university-business cooperation.

What is the role of OER and open education in business-university cooperation?

The role of Open Educational Resources (OER) and open education in fostering collaboration between businesses and universities encompasses several key aspects:

Partnership and Cooperation:

OER and open education facilitate partnerships and cooperation between these two domains. This cooperation involves exchanging knowledge and expertise between universities and businesses, creating a mutual support system. Academics contribute their specialised knowledge, while businesses offer real-world examples, enhancing knowledge transfer between these sectors.

Service Provider and Vendor Relationships:

OER and open education can also establish a framework for service provider and vendor relationships. There are areas of intersection and shared interests between universities and businesses, such as library and publishing initiatives, educational technology infrastructure, and procurement processes, including the acquisition of 'EdTech' solutions, books, resources, and courseware. Openness can optimise the purchasing of these resources and technologies, leading to more cost-effective and collaborative solutions.

OER and open education play a pivotal role in strengthening the ties between universities and businesses by promoting partnership and cooperation, as well as optimising service-provider relationships in areas of mutual interest. This collaboration enhances knowledge exchange and supports more efficient procurement processes, ultimately benefiting both sectors.

Can OER and open education be a driver for increased, improved or new cooperation?

Openness can serve as a catalyst for fostering increased collaboration between businesses and universities. There are several areas of intersection and common interest which feature in universities and business cooperation, such as shared interests in library and publishing, educational technology infrastructure, procurement processes, and the utilisation of open-source software and technology; both sectors can discover opportunities for collaboration. These common areas can serve as focal points for building stronger, more cooperative relationships. Openness provides the framework for these domains to intersect and facilitate productive partnerships. In essence, embracing openness can help bridge the gap between business and academia by recognizing mutual benefits and establishing a platform for shared initiatives and innovation in these intersecting fields.

Openness as a driver of strategic knowledge exchange

Promoting a culture of sharing and openness is a fundamental element in nurturing collaborative relationships between universities and businesses, as well as fostering connectivity within networks and communities. Open Educational Resources (OER) serve as a cornerstone in this effort by offering the potential to conserve both time and resources. Rather than continually reinventing the educational wheel, institutions and individuals can tap into a wealth of preexisting knowledge and resources. Inspired by figures like "Sam," this culture of sharing encourages collective learning and progress.

Furthermore, OER can facilitate seamless knowledge exchange between universities and businesses, enabling partnerships and cooperation. The application of Creative Commons (CC) licensing mechanisms further enhances knowledge sharing across diverse sectors, such as universities and journalists, supporting disseminating accurate and credible information while combatting disinformation.

These advantages also extend to the business world, as OER and Open Educational Practices (OEP) provide inclusive and accessible learning opportunities, ensuring equity of access for all users. Inclusion and accessibility are not just aspirational ideals but practical necessities, allowing a broader spectrum of learners and professionals to access and benefit from these valuable educational resources. In essence, the culture of sharing, propelled by OER and CC, enriches both educational and professional landscapes by promoting openness, collaboration, and a level playing field for all.

Furthermore, this culture of sharing bridges the expertise of academics with practical examples from the business world, supporting a more effective transfer of knowledge

between the two domains. It aligns with the core role of universities in society, emphasising the importance of openness as the default approach. Strengthening links with industry also benefits universities, allowing the development of more real-world programs, enhancing graduate readiness, fostering placement opportunities, and providing career support.

This approach serves as a driver for open standards and accessibility, such as the Norwegian Digital Learning Arena, a public entity promoting open learning resources as an advantage, while simultaneously offering them to schools. Such developments encourage collaborative production processes, ultimately spreading awareness about Creative Commons and driving open licensing.

Lastly, this culture of sharing extends to global partnerships, as companies and universities collaborate to create OER tailored to specific sectors, promoting a harmonious synergy between academia and industry.

Open collaboration plays a pivotal role in nurturing innovation and creativity. The concept of 'open' serves as a powerful catalyst for innovation and creativity, exemplified by initiatives like the Open COVID Pledge. It emphasises the need for collective efforts to address significant challenges, enabling us to work together more openly, as demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic and in our ongoing quest to combat climate change. By embracing openness, we unlock the potential to pool our resources, knowledge, and expertise, ultimately paving the way for innovative solutions and creative breakthroughs to tackle some of the most pressing global issues.

Supporting business access OER

Supporting businesses, particularly SMEs, in accessing Open Educational Resources (OER) is imperative for addressing limitations they face, such as the inability to afford access to paid journals and case studies. Open-access journals, for instance, can prove to be highly valuable resources for these companies. However, it is apparent that the education sector has not been effectively promoting the open accessibility of these resources to the business community.

To bridge this gap, we should actively promote open-access research to businesses through various channels, including business librarians, SME incubators, and even our own students, many of whom are postgraduate students already working in industry. Valuable repositories like the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) and Directory of Open Access Books offer access to a wealth of content, with over 19,000 open access journals available for free.

Moreover, equipping our staff, students, and the wider public with open science skills is vital for fostering a culture of openness and collaboration. This will not only benefit businesses but also enhance the broader ecosystem of knowledge sharing and innovation.

Collaboration with businesses is equally critical, especially in terms of mitigating the costs associated with acquiring access to resources like case studies. Leveraging existing open resources and open-source code can be an effective strategy for Edtech startups, helping them save costs and resources, as exemplified by the National Digital Learning Arena (NDLA).

Lastly, OER can play a pivotal role in addressing skills gaps in the workforce of various industries. By making open educational materials readily available, businesses can harness these resources to upskill their employees, fostering continuous learning and adaptability in an ever-evolving professional landscape.

Cost saving

Private higher education institutions in Ireland are actively advancing Open Access (OA) initiatives as a result of budget constraints. This drive toward OA is primarily motivated by the need to save money, particularly from a library perspective. Collaborating with businesses can further alleviate financial burdens, especially concerning the expense of purchasing access to resources like case studies. This emphasis on cost-efficiency underscores the imperative of embracing open and accessible educational and research materials in response to financial limitations.

Cooperation & OER: Examples of Community building and Aligned Goals

Catalyst IT & Community Sharing

[Catalyst IT](#) is an open source, fully managed hosting service for e-learning. This also includes consulting services to support teaching and learning through the platforms used. Catalyst IT partners with universities and institutions, and has established a partner network, in which open educational resources can be shared. Through its cooperation with universities, Catalyst IT is utilizing open source software, promoting open educational resources (OER) and open education practices to its partners and has built a community which facilitates adoption of OER through the community in the partner network. This model creates an environment for sharing, promotes cooperation between stakeholders, as well as increases awareness of OER.

Creative Commons & The Open COVID Pledge

Another example of business-university cooperation can be seen in the Open COVID Pledge led by [Creative Commons](#). Established during the pandemic, the Open COVID pledge calls for “universities, companies, and other holders of intellectual property rights to support the development of medicines, test kits, vaccines, and other scientific discoveries related to COVID-19 for the duration of the pandemic. The Open COVID Pledge grants the public free, temporary access to IP rights in support of solving the COVID-19 crisis, removing unnecessary obstacles to dissemination of the knowledge and inventions that could save lives and limit suffering.”¹. This is an example of how open can catalyse cooperation between universities and businesses, where stakeholders have come together to achieve common goals.

¹ [Creative Commons' Response to COVID-19](#).

What are the current challenges with business-university cooperation, and can OER be part of the solution?

Business-university cooperation is essential, but it faces several challenges, some of which can potentially be addressed with the use of OER. The challenges include:

- **Structural and Organisational Differences:** Universities and businesses often have distinct structures, cultures, and organisational systems, which can lead to difficulties in cooperation.
- **Differences in Organisational Scale:** Variations in the size and scale of universities and businesses can impact cooperation. OER can provide a common ground for educational resources, irrespective of the institution's size.
- **Differences in Decision-Making Speed:** Businesses typically have faster and more agile decision-making processes than universities.
- **Senior Management Buy-In:** Gaining support from senior management in both universities and businesses is vital for collaborative efforts. OER can be presented as a cost-effective solution, appealing to decision-makers.
- **Understanding Different Working Practices:** Universities and businesses have different working practices.
- **Disconnect in the Open Movement:** There is a disconnect between the Open Access (OA) movement, which primarily focuses on open research, and the Open Educational Resources (OER) and Open Educational Practices (OEP) initiatives, which encompass teaching and learning. Bridging this gap is crucial for promoting openness comprehensively.
- **Asymmetries:** Universities tend to be more homogeneous, while businesses are more diverse.
- **Intellectual Property Concerns:** OER licences can be tailored to address intellectual property concerns while still fostering openness. Addressing concerns and raising awareness about intellectual property is crucial for cooperation.
- **GDPR:** Compliance with data protection regulations like GDPR can be addressed within OER development, ensuring that privacy concerns are adequately managed.

Recommendations on how to leverage open to build business-university cooperation

OER can contribute to overcoming some of the challenges in business-university cooperation by providing a common platform for teaching and learning resources, aligning approaches, and addressing issues related to organisational differences, decision-making, and cultural nuances.

Recommendations and Solutions:

1. **Facilitate open access** to research for businesses by collaborating with business librarians and SME incubators.
2. Forge **partnerships with public libraries and librarians**, as they often have a strategic interest in engaging with local businesses.
3. Establish **connections with business associations** to enhance cooperation and knowledge sharing.
4. **Promote open science skills** among staff, students, and the wider public to encourage a culture of openness.
5. Engage with startup communities to **leverage pre-existing resources and code**, saving both time and money.
6. Recognize the **complementary strengths of academics and businesses**, as academics offer expertise while businesses provide real-life examples, fostering a more effective knowledge transfer between the two sectors.
7. Advocate for a **cultural shift prioritising openness and collaboration** in business-university interactions.
8. Harness the potential of **librarians and libraries as catalysts** for promoting cooperation and fostering an environment of shared learning and innovation.

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Contacts

Report coordinator

Orna Farrell, Dublin City University, Ireland

To be cited as

Project Coordinator

Juliane Granly, ICDE

granly@icde.org

Contact us

info@encoreproject.eu

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