



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization



International Institute
for Educational
Planning

OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES THE WAY FORWARD

DELIBERATIONS OF AN INTERNATIONAL
COMMUNITY OF INTEREST

SUSAN D'ANTONI
UNESCO





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FOREWORD

Between 2005 and 2007, a large Community of Interest of more than 600 members from more than half of the 192 Member States of UNESCO took part in online discussions on Open Educational Resources (OER) – open content for education.

The Internet and the web offer opportunities for interaction that have tremendous potential for an organization such as UNESCO, with a mandate for advice and action worldwide. International meetings, workshops and consultations are all means used by the organization to carry out its work in collaboration with Member States, but they have limitations in their capacity to include all those interested in the topic or activity at hand. The Internet offers an opportunity to reach further and faster than ever before. The tool is not yet perfect for the purpose – there are many who cannot connect, but their numbers are diminishing, as are the costs associated with technology and connectivity. Over the period that the OER community has been in existence, we have been able to link many more people and institutions than would have been feasible through other means. Experts and neophytes alike have come together to learn from one another, share information and deliberate on related issues. Finally, after two years of intensive interaction, members expressed their opinion on the priority issues and the stakeholders that should take action to advance and support the growing movement.

This document is a testament to the power of group deliberation in a vibrant virtual community. It presents the way forward for OER based upon the informed opinion of an international community, and sets out priorities for future action. It will be of interest to many readers – from decision and policy makers at the national level to teachers and academics at the local level.

Initiated by the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning, the project has benefited from the support of many. First, the energy and interaction of the community itself was maintained by a large and diverse number of individuals. A Consultative Committee of seventeen members acted as a sounding board and provided helpful input at important points over the two years. My colleague, Catriona Savage, contributed unstintingly her very considerable energy and competence to ensure that the OER

community interaction and resource building activities were well supported. She was also responsible for the analysis of the data presented in this report. The format and presentation of this document owes its elegance to another colleague, Philippe Abbou. And all of these activities benefited from the support of the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. With its vision of promoting equal access to knowledge worldwide, it has played the very significant role of champion of the OER movement.

The OER community has a very special character: its composition, as well as the nature and shape of its exchanges give it that character, which is every bit as distinct as that of a colleague or friend. From a personal perspective, I find this community wonderful in its thoroughly energetic thought and action, as colleagues can be – and cherished in the way that friends may be. I feel privileged to accompany it.

Susan D'Antoni
February 2008

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OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES: A CULTURE OF SHARING

The term Open Educational Resources (OER) was adopted at a UNESCO meeting in 2002 to refer to the open provision of educational resources, enabled by information and communication technologies, for consultation, use and adaptation by a community of users for non-commercial purposes. The participants expressed "their wish to develop together a universal educational resource available for the whole of humanity... they hope that this open resource for the future mobilizes the whole of the worldwide community of educators".¹

This sentiment is in the spirit of the UNESCO support of knowledge societies. In his preface to the first UNESCO World Report, *Towards Knowledge Societies*, the Director-General, Koïchiro Matsuura, states, "To remain human and liveable, knowledge societies will have to be societies of shared knowledge."² This relates to the primary objective of the Open Educational Resources movement, the sharing of knowledge worldwide.

Information and communication technology has already had an impact on many sectors, including education. However, while various new technologies have shown promise for education in the past, few have delivered on that promise, and many have disappointed. One reason for this may have been a lack of available and appropriate content for the technology in question. Now, there is what may prove to be a fruitful convergence:

- connectivity to the Internet is increasing;
- low cost computers and enhanced mobile phones are being developed;
- the body of open content in digital format is expanding.

The academic community has always shared knowledge, and the scientific method and peer review processes are based upon this approach. However, the availability of content in digital format facilitates significantly its sharing and the ease of adaptation, localization and translation, should it have an open license. It means that educational materials can be made widely available. The OECD study, *Giving Knowledge for Free: the emergence of Open Educational Resources*, found that more than 3,000 courses were available in 2007 from more than 300 universities worldwide.³ While MIT OpenCourseWare and the OpenCourseWare Consortium, with over 100 institutions, may be among the most well-known examples, there are many others around the world and many models. Although currently

most initiatives have been undertaken by traditional institutions, open universities with their well-designed instructional materials have also begun to explore OER. The UK Open University has created OpenLearn to give open access to some of its materials, and the Dutch Open University is making content available for independent study. And governments are recognizing the potential of OER for expanding access to knowledge and learning opportunities. In India the National Knowledge Commission has called for a "national e-content and curriculum initiative" to stimulate the creation, adaptation and utilization of OER by Indian institutions.⁴

The growing number of initiatives has led to the emergence of an Open Educational Resources movement – a movement that aims to increase access to knowledge and educational opportunities worldwide through sharing educational content. If knowledge is to be shared as OER, there must be change – in institutional policies and procedures, in teaching and learning. The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation Open Educational Resources Initiative has designed its support around a change strategy that aims to equalize access to knowledge through:

- sponsoring high quality open content;
- understanding and stimulating use;
- removing barriers.

In 2005 the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) took up the challenge of addressing one of the major barriers to making use of OER – lack of information. Without adequate and accessible information about an option, it cannot be taken into consideration for planning, and it cannot be explored and assessed for its potential utility to any of the education stakeholders.

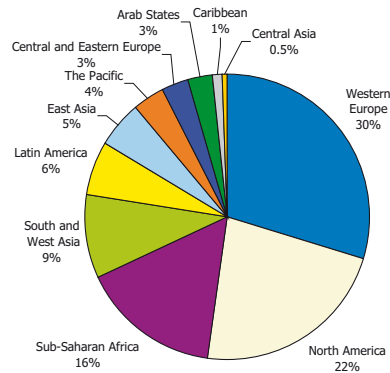
2

AWARENESS RAISING: AN INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

The initial focus of UNESCO action related to OER was concentrated on awareness raising in Member States of the potential of sharing educational material as Open Educational Resources. As a first step, IIEP assembled over 500 people in an international Internet forum. Through a discussion that was designed as a virtual seminar, participants heard about a number of experiences in developing and using OER, and about related issues such as copyright, and language and cultural concerns. Much information and intelligence was shared and the discussion of the examples and issues was lively.⁵

Altogether, the community that has been formed unites a wide range of individuals and organizations, as well as geographic regions – over 620 members representing 98 UNESCO Member States, of which 67 are developing countries (Figure 1). Although the geographic balance is not perfect, more than half of the members are from developing countries, and this is important as the community reflects upon a concept that seeks to equalize access to knowledge worldwide.

Figure 1. OER community members



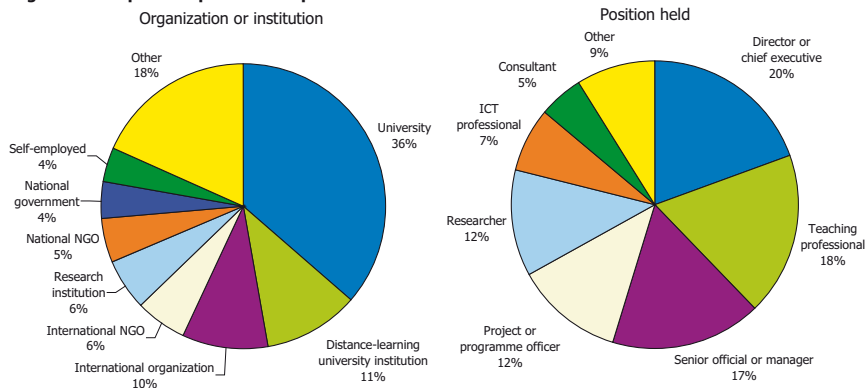
3 THE COMMUNITY DELIBERATES

After a period of intense discussion on OER, it could be expected that the community would have formed an opinion on which constitute the priority issues for advancing the OER movement, and on which stakeholders should take the lead.

At the end of their first interaction in 2005, participants were invited to specify the three most important issues to promote and enable the OER movement. Their input resulted in a comprehensive list of fourteen issues (Appendix 1). In early 2007, the community was asked first to rank the top five priorities from that list, and then to identify the main stakeholders who should play a leadership role for each issue they selected.

More than 50 per cent of the community members took the time to reflect on the list of issues and to specify their own priorities. Those who responded mirror almost exactly the geographic representation of the full community. They represent a fairly wide range of organizations, although over half come from universities and distance learning institutions. Many hold high-level positions in their organizations, either as head or senior official or manager. Teachers, researchers and project officers also constitute an important number (Figure 2). This profile means that this collective priority-setting exercise largely reflects the perspective of the educator and the institution.

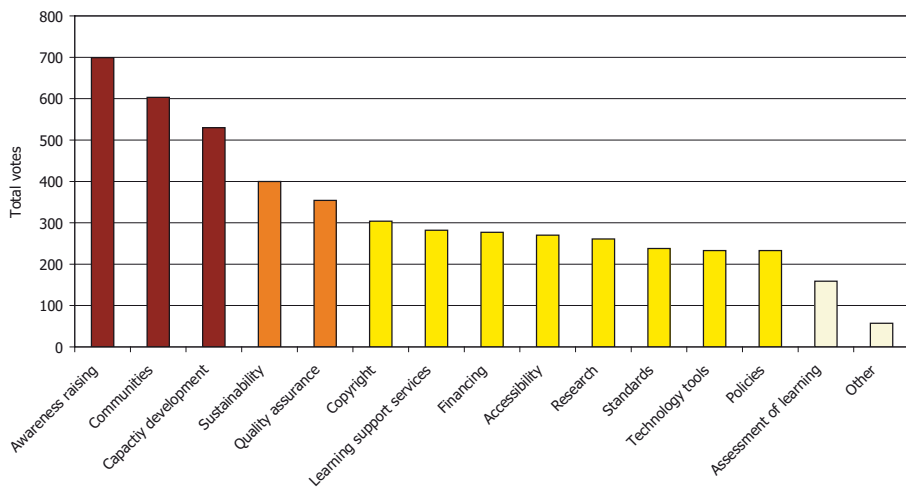
Figure 2. Occupational profile of respondents



4 THE PRIORITY ISSUES

The five most important issues⁶ stand out clearly, with a sixth that deserves attention (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Priority issues in rank order



Awareness raising and promotion and *communities and networking*, emerge as the main priorities for promoting the advancement of the OER movement. Third-ranked *capacity development* is essential to enabling creation and reuse of OER, while the fourth issue, *sustainability*, points to the importance of ensuring that OER initiatives find their way into existing and new approaches to extending flexible learning opportunities and knowledge sharing. The flagging of *quality assurance* raises a concern, one that reflects the broader issue of accessing information on the web. Without the control processes of the publishing industry and the selection process of the library or resource centre, users may be on their own in determining the quality of a resource. The very openness of access to OER means that the traditional structures of education systems which support and protect the learner may be absent.

The sixth issue, **copyright and licensing**, is of growing concern. Resources intended for release as OER, but which contain copyrighted material, pose a problem. Either copyright clearance must be obtained, or the material must be replaced or eliminated. Furthermore, the license assigned to educational resources determines the degree to which they may be openly and freely used. Alternate open licenses have been developed (such as those from Creative Commons), and their use is growing. Developers and users would benefit from guidance to help them better understand the implications of the license they select for their materials or that has been applied to the materials they wish to use.

Priorities of developed and developing country respondents

Since different countries have different situations and face different challenges in considering creation and reuse or adaptation of OER, the information collected was broken down in several ways. First, developed and developing countries were separated,⁷ which revealed differences in priorities, as can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Priority issues for developed and developing country respondents

Developed countries		Developing countries	
1	Awareness raising and promotion	1	Awareness raising and promotion
2	Communities and networking	2	Capacity development
3	Sustainability	3	Communities and networking
4	Quality assurance	4	Technology tools
5	Copyright and licensing	5	Learning support services
6	Capacity development	5	Research
7	Accessibility	7	Policies
8	Financing	8	Quality assurance
9	Standards	9	Financing
10	Learning support services	10	Sustainability
11	Research	11	Accessibility
12	Policies	12	Copyright and licensing
13	Technology tools	13	Standards
14	Assessment of learning	14	Assessment of learning

While *awareness raising* remains the highest priority for both groups, issues such as *sustainability*, *accessibility* and *copyright*, for example, are ranked quite differently. Some of the differences might be explained by current levels of creation and availability of OER in developed and developing countries. For instance, *sustainability* – in common with *copyright* and *standards* – becomes a priority when there is a critical mass of OER initiatives. On the other hand, *capacity development*, *technology tools* and *learning support services* are a priority in countries where there is currently a low level of OER development and use. Also identified as of higher priority in developing countries are *research* and *policy*. This may reflect the importance of a supportive environment for OER development in countries with very limited resources. Ensuring that OER development is an appropriate strategy for a particular country – one which suits its needs – might necessitate research; and facilitating such OER development might require an enabling policy framework.

Priorities of different regions

Just as there are differences in priorities between developed and developing countries, there are different ranking patterns among regions (see Appendix 2). Note, however, that these patterns should be taken only as indicative, since the number of respondents from some regions was very small.

While *awareness raising* appears as a high priority for those in all regions, the ranking of *policies* varies quite a bit – from the fourth priority in Latin America and the Caribbean to the lowest priority of respondents from South and West Asia, the Pacific and the Arab States. The diversity in the ranking of issues underlines the importance of developing regional and local communities and initiatives that will focus on local needs and conditions.

Priorities of those involved or not in an OER initiative

More than half of the respondents indicated that they were involved in an OER initiative. Overall, their priorities reflect fairly closely those of the whole group of respondents, with the top three issues remaining *awareness raising*, *communities and networking*, and *capacity development*. The ranking for those involved in an OER initiative also supports the supposition that *copyright and licensing*, *sustainability* and *financing* will all move up the agenda of priority issues as OER development and use become more widespread.

Those not involved in an OER activity ranked *capacity development* as a high priority, which points to the need for 'how to' resources for those with no prior experience with OER.

5 THE LEAD STAKEHOLDERS

For each issue ranked as a priority, respondents identified the stakeholders they felt should assume a leadership role. And, just as several priority issues stood out, so did the lead stakeholders. Four of these were assigned significant roles, with multiple issues to take up in advancing the OER movement (see Appendix 3 for details).

Higher education institutions

Given the topic under discussion, and the profile of respondents, one could have predicted that higher education institutions would be identified as the lead organization for OER. And it was the university's primary functions – *research and supporting learning* – that were cited most frequently. Yet, *awareness raising* and *capacity development* were also seen as priorities. More surprisingly, two issues that relate to the creation of OER – *copyright* and *financing* – and which demand a decision at the institutional level, were not considered to be of priority to higher education institutions. It should be noted, however, that, throughout the discussions, participants stressed the need for expert legal guidance on copyright. As for the low ranking of *financing*, it may reflect that, currently, most OER initiatives are donor-financed.

International organizations

International organizations were also judged to have an important role. *Copyright*, *financing* and *standards* join *awareness raising* as the issues that should be addressed by international bodies. Standard setting is a function often undertaken at the international level. However, financing OER is a less obvious role for international organizations, and its being cited underlines the importance of the discussion of sustainable models for OER.

National governments

National governments were seen as the most important stakeholder for *policy support* for OER, and for ensuring *accessibility*, which is often promoted through education policy on the one hand, and through investments on

technology and infrastructure on the other. Along with international organizations, national governments were identified as the stakeholder best placed to take up the challenges of *copyright* and *financing* of OER.

Academics

Academics were identified as the stakeholder group that should take responsibility for those issues related to their various roles and functions in the educational institution: namely, *research*, *learning assessment*, *quality assurance* and *learning support*.

Other stakeholders

The remaining stakeholders are assigned leadership in those issues most clearly related to their missions and functions. For example, grant-making organizations and higher education funding bodies could take up the challenge of *funding* initiatives, while regulatory bodies could take responsibility for *quality assurance* of OER.

Finally, it should be noted that an important role for stakeholders was identified – that of championing OER. Clearly, any or all of the stakeholders could decide to champion OER (as has the Hewlett Foundation). What is important is that effective champions continue to step forward for OER. For, every movement, in order to succeed, must have its champions – and this is particularly so at the beginning.

6 THE WAY FORWARD

Through its deliberation on the key issues and the lead stakeholders, the international community on OER has sketched out a way forward for the movement, as well as for its own actions.

Advancing the movement...

First priority

Awareness raising

If OER is to contribute to increasing access to knowledge worldwide, it is crucial that actors – from policy- and decision-makers at all levels, to teachers and academics – be made aware of its potential, so that they will be able to make informed decisions on if, and how, it can be used in their local situation. Raising awareness of OER and its attendant issues has been the primary goal of the UNESCO IIEP community, and it is clear that continuing and concerted awareness raising actions must be a priority.

Awareness raising at the international level among UNESCO Member States will continue. However, this must also be complemented by awareness-raising actions at other levels. A strategy is needed, as well as useful resources for activities such as workshops.

Second priority

Communities and networking

The strength of the OER community and the continuing adherence of its members underline the importance of this type of international forum for discussion and information sharing. Building and supporting such a community is congruent with the main functions of UNESCO: as a laboratory of ideas and a clearinghouse, a standard setter, a capacity builder in Member States and a catalyst for international cooperation. Nonetheless, an international community functions under certain constraints, such as operating in one language and necessarily focusing on topics of general concern. Both awareness raising and capacity development would be

strengthened by decentralized activities complementary to those of the international community.

Regional, linguistic and topic-specific communities will complement and extend the initial activities of the international OER community. UNESCO will promote the development of a loose network of regional, linguistic or topic nodes that can support appropriate regional or local action, while maintaining contact at the international level through the community on OER.

Enabling creation and use...

Third priority

Developing capacity

Individuals and institutions interested in creating or adapting and re-using OER need support to help them develop their own capacity to do so. One of the interactions of the community focussed on the elaboration of a 'Do-It-Yourself/Do-It-Together' resource that would serve this function. Such a resource was seen as particularly important to promote OER creation and use in developing countries.

The Do-It-Yourself/Do-It-Together resource should be developed to enable active engagement in the OER movement.

Fourth priority

Quality assurance

If the OER movement is to take hold widely, the resources must be – and be seen to be – of high quality. When information is taken from websites worldwide, the user often lacks a frame of reference for determining the quality of the information being accessed. The OER movement would benefit from an exploration of current international quality-assurance mechanisms and general guidelines and, potentially, from linking with existing quality-assurance agencies.

UNESCO could establish a connection with the lead agencies for quality assurance in education on behalf of the members of the international community on OER, and promote the development of guidelines for OER quality assurance.

Removing barriers...

Fifth priority

Sustainability

If the movement is to flourish, approaches and models are needed that will ensure the viability of OER initiatives. Currently, the majority of OER development is undertaken on a project basis, and often with donor support. If it is to be sustainable, OER must be integrated into the policies and procedures – as well as the regular budgets – of organizations.

The discussion that has already begun to identify and consider all the options for sustainability must continue. Models must be articulated, tested and evaluated, and the lessons learned shared widely.

Sixth priority

Copyright and licensing

Copyright and licensing is an issue that permeates the discussion and debate on creation and reuse of OER. It is an issue with important implications for both creators and users, and for their institutions. It might be expected to move up the agenda of key issues as more and more OER development takes place.

Copyright and its implications for OER need to be explored by the OER community, and the situation clarified for the institution, the creator and the user. UNESCO will hold a discussion on the topic, with input from a panel of experts.

NOTES

1. UNESCO. 2002. *Forum on the impact of open courseware for higher education in developing countries: final report*. Paris: UNESCO. Retrieved from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001285/128515e.pdf>.
2. UNESCO. 2005. *Towards knowledge societies. UNESCO world report*. Paris: UNESCO, p.5. Retrieved from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001418/141843e.pdf>.
3. OECD. 2007. *Giving knowledge for free: the emergence of Open Educational Resources*. Paris: OECD, p.40. Retrieved from <http://www.oecdbookshop.org/oecd/display.asp?SF1=DI&CID=&LANG=EN&ST1=5L4S6TNG3F9X>].
4. National Knowledge Commission Working Group on Open and Distance Education. 2007. *Report of the working group on Open Access and Open Educational Resources*. New Delhi: National Knowledge Commission, Government of India, p.3. Retrieved from http://knowledgecommission.gov.in/downloads/documents/wg_open_course.pdf.
5. All background documents and discussion reports are available on the IIEP website and wiki, <http://www.unesco.org/iiep/virtualuniversity/forums.php> and <http://oerwiki.iiep-unesco.org>.
6. Weighted by priority assigned by respondent, that is an issue ranked as first priority was weighted 5, second priority as 4, third as 3, fourth as 2 and fifth as 1.
7. Developed and developing country classifications are taken from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics *Global education digest 2006*, <http://www.uis.unesco.org/TEMPLATE/pdf/ged/2006/GED2006.pdf>.

APPENDIX 1. Classification of priority issues for promoting the OER movement

Advancing the OER movement

Awareness raising and promotion	Increasing awareness of OER through all appropriate channels and among all stakeholders, and explaining its potential and benefits.
Communities and networking	Linking individuals and organizations in Communities of Interest or Practice, for the exchange of information or collaborative development of resources.
Research	Investigation and inquiry into OER. Any new development deserves investigation so that it is better understood.

Enabling creation and re-use of OER

Policies	New approaches may demand new policies to support the creation and re-use of OER, and those who are implicated, such as teachers and learners.
Standards	An agreed set of criteria, some of which may be mandatory. For instance, standards for licensing and metadata are needed to ensure interoperability of OER.
Technology tools	Software tools to facilitate the development, access and sharing of OER.
Quality assurance	The systematic review of OER to ensure that acceptable standards of education, scholarship and infrastructure are being maintained.
Capacity development	Increasing the capability of individuals, institutions and organizations to create and use OER.

Enabling learning with OER

Learning support services	Online services, including forums and communities, to support and enhance learning with OER.
Assessment of learning	The process of evaluating knowledge, skills and competencies gained through learning with OER.

Removing barriers to OER

Accessibility	The degree to which people can access and use information and communication technologies and, through them, access OER.
Copyright and licensing	The difficulties to creating and re-using OER constituted by copyright (which grants the exclusive right for a certain term of years to an author to print, publish and sell copies of the original work).
Financing	Securing financial resources for OER initiatives.
Sustainability	Designing and applying models that ensure the ongoing viability of OER initiatives.

APPENDIX 2. Issues ranked by order of priority: regional breakdowns

Western Europe		North America	
<i>No. of respondents = 97</i>		<i>No. of respondents = 72</i>	
1	Awareness raising	1	Communities
2	Communities	2	Awareness raising
3	Sustainability	3	Sustainability
4	Copyright	4	Capacity development
5	Quality assurance	5	Quality assurance
6	Accessibility	6	Financing
7	Learning support services	7	Copyright
8	Capacity development	8	Research
8	Financing	9	Standards
10	Standards	10	Accessibility
11	Policies	11	Learning support services
12	Technology tools	12	Technology tools
13	Research	12	Assessment of learning
14	Assessment of learning	14	Policies
15	Other	15	Other
Sub-Saharan Africa		Latin America & Caribbean	
<i>No. of respondents = 54</i>		<i>No. of respondents = 28</i>	
1	Awareness raising	1	Capacity development
2	Capacity development	1	Communities
3	Communities	3	Awareness raising
4	Research	4	Policies
5	Policies	5	Research
6	Financing	6	Quality assurance
7	Accessibility	7	Financing
8	Learning support services	8	Sustainability
9	Technology tools	8	Learning support services
10	Sustainability	8	Assessment of learning
11	Quality assurance	11	Technology tools
12	Standards	11	Standards
13	Other	13	Copyright
14	Copyright	14	Accessibility
15	Assessment of learning		

Note: Issues in shaded boxes were identified as priorities by more than half of the respondents in the region.

South & West Asia

No. of respondents = 27

- 1 Capacity development
- 2 Awareness raising
- 3 Learning support services
- 4 Communities
- 4 Technology tools
- 4 Accessibility
- 7 Quality assurance
- 8 Research
- 9 Sustainability
- 10 Assessment of learning
- 10 Financing
- 12 Copyright
- 13 Standards
- 14 Policies

East Asia

No. of respondents = 15

- 1 Awareness raising
- 2 Copyright
- 3 Sustainability
- 4 Communities
- 5 Quality assurance
- 5 Capacity development
- 7 Policies
- 8 Learning support services
- 9 Accessibility
- 10 Technology tools
- 10 Financing
- 12 Standards
- 13 Assessment of learning
- 14 Research
- 15 Other

The Pacific

No. of respondents = 14

- 1 Awareness raising
- 2 Capacity development
- 3 Quality assurance
- 4 Communities
- 5 Copyright
- 5 Sustainability
- 7 Accessibility
- 8 Research
- 8 Standards
- 10 Financing
- 11 Technology tools
- 12 Learning support services
- 13 Assessment of learning
- 14 Policies

Central & Eastern Europe

No. of respondents = 10

- 1 Awareness raising
- 2 Communities
- 3 Research
- 4 Standards
- 5 Policies
- 5 Quality assurance
- 7 Capacity development
- 8 Sustainability
- 9 Learning support services
- 9 Accessibility
- 9 Financing
- 12 Copyright
- 13 Technology tools
- 13 Assessment of learning

Arab States

No. of respondents = 8

1	Technology tools
2	Awareness raising
3	Capacity development
4	Communities
5	Quality assurance
5	Standards
5	Learning support services
8	Research
8	Financing
10	Accessibility
11	Assessment of learning
12	Sustainability
13	Policies

APPENDIX 3. Priority issues for stakeholders

Stakeholder	Priority issues	% of respondents
Higher education institutions	1 Research	81
	2 Learning support services	74
	3 Awareness raising and promotion	71
	4 Assessment of learning	70
	5 Capacity development	69
	6 Quality assurance	66
	7 Sustainability	60
	7 Policies	60
	9 Standards	57
	10 Accessibility	55
	11 Communities and networking	54
	12 Copyright	51
International organizations	1 Awareness raising and promotion	75
	2 Copyright	69
	3 Financing	66
	3 Standards	66
	5 Communities and networking	60
	6 Capacity development	58
	7 Policies	54
	8 Sustainability	51
	9 Research	50
National government	1 Policies	87
	2 Copyright	68
	3 Financing	66
	4 Awareness raising	61
	5 Accessibility	56
	6 Sustainability	55
	7 Capacity development	50
Academics	1 Research	71
	2 Assessment of learning	66
	3 Quality assurance	59
	4 Learning support services	53
	4 Communities and networking	53
	6 Awareness raising and promotion	52
OER associations	1 Communities and networking	66
	2 Awareness raising and promotion	61
	3 Standards	60

Professional and academic associations	1 2 3	Assessment of learning Awareness raising and promotion Communities and networking	56 55 54
Technology companies	-	Technology tools	73
Foundations or other grant-making organizations	-	Financing	71
Higher education funding bodies	-	Financing	56
Regional or local government	-	Policies	54
Publishing and media companies	-	Copyright	52
Regulatory and accreditation bodies	-	Quality assurance	51
Non-Governmental Organizations	-	Awareness raising	51

*Note:*The order of the issues in the table relates to the number of times that the stakeholder was selected for each issue – only issues that were assigned to a stakeholder by more than half of the respondents are shown. The percentages are indicative of the degree of consensus that a certain issue should be taken up by a certain stakeholder.





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