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CULTURE AND EDUCATION

RESEARCH FOR CULT COMMITTEE - ADULT EDUCATION AND OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Abstract

This study reviews the current use of Open Educational Resources in Adult Education, assesses its potential and makes recommendations for policy interventions, taking account of the European Commission's policy frameworks. It incorporates new research on over 12 Member States, leveraging on a synthesis of existing research from a range of projects including POERUP (Policies for OER Uptake) and a 2014-15 study on Shared OER for the Joint Research Centre, augmented by two more recent studies for JRC and LLP.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overview

Adult Education is a subject of great interest to the European Union. Alarming, one in five adults have low literacy and numeracy skills, one in four have completed lower secondary education at most and one in three have very low or no ICT skills. While progress is being steadily made, considerably more work needs to be done.

The use of Open Educational Resources has been developing fast in Europe, despite the recession. A few Member States have taken leading positions in open education. It is clear that OER can offer many benefits, including, longer term, the possibility of delivering education in a more effective fashion while keeping a close eye on cost.

This study is about Adult Education in the context of OER. For up to date thinking on Adult Education more generally, the reader is referred to the February 2015 Eurydice report *Adult Education and Training in Europe: Widening Access to Learning Opportunities*.

Structure

The study is structured into five chapters.

Chapter 1 is a brief introduction.

Chapter 2 provides policy background.

Chapter 3 details the Research Plan. It restates the two general questions: (1) availability/feasibility of OER in adult learning, and (2) actions that might be taken to enhance this. It lists the eight specific questions also to be answered. The chapter finishes with a structural description of the adult education sector and a brief summary of the UNESCO definition of OER.

Chapter 4 is a long chapter answering in detail the majority of the questions. It minimally deals with one (on OER to aid the knowledge base), regarding it as marginal, and defers part of another (on policy tools) to the policy chapter (Chapter 5). Otherwise it takes the questions as asked; however, in order to provide a 'red thread' it uses a scheme of benchmarking and change management, informed by MIT90s considerations, to link the questions to 10 strategic topics. There are thorough answers on quality, cost, licensing (Creative Commons is recommended), accreditation of informal learning, and on the changing role of educational establishments. The chapter ends with consideration of barriers to OER, MOOCs and other kinds of flexible learning, as a link into the policy chapter. There is a strong theme throughout the chapter on what institutions need to do in order to change to cope with the new challenges raised by OER for adult education. Staff and student skills (and attitudes), two of the key benchmark themes, are repeatedly covered from different angles.

Chapter 5 integrates the answers to the questions in Chapter 4 with ongoing policy work on OER, open and flexible learning, to produce a policy synthesis. It reworks the 13 'Calls' of the Council Resolution on a renewed European agenda for adult learning into OER-friendly format and integrates the formerly separate HE and VET policy documents of POERUP into a new synthesis repositioned directly towards adult education. The next section moves the agenda onwards to the non-formal and informal learning sectors. A final section recommends a link between these, via Accreditation Gateways, building on

earlier work on Accreditation of Prior Learning (in HE) and 'one-stop shops' in VET and adult education.

The study closes with a short set of Acknowledgements, followed by a Glossary (of over 80 items) and comprehensive bibliography (with over 410 entries) of papers and reports consulted. The bibliography aims to have a focus on peer-reviewed research and official reports (Eurydice, Eurostat, OECD, UNESCO, etc) but the fast-moving and fragmentary nature of the evidence base means that a number of more transient lower-quality artefacts needed to be considered, along with a growing pile of policy pronouncements from the European Parliament along with those from the European Commission and its subsidiary agencies.

Key outputs from Chapter 4: the questions and their answers

There is sufficient OER activity under way related to Adult Education that we felt confident in drawing conclusions; however, some conclusions are tentative and for others the evidence base (especially in terms of case studies) is weak.

The topic of OER is most usefully considered within the wider topic of the use of ICT in Adult Education.

Issues of quality and accreditation are in our view soluble, but we encourage European and national agencies to move faster to solve them.

The issue of recognition of prior learning is again in our view soluble, but requires an element of specialised attention and faster progress in EQF, ECTS and credit transfer generally.

The much-hoped cost savings are potentially achievable, but case study information is limited. Furthermore, the cost savings may be achievable only by making changes to the educational system which may be challenging in some Member States as an infringement on the role of institutions or the teachers within them. Trade-offs will be needed. Smaller states, and smaller autonomous regions within states (especially those with their own languages), may have difficulty in making these trade-offs.

A range of actions is also possible with bilateral or language-specific multilateral collaborations between Member States.

Key outputs from Chapter 5: recommendations and policies

Quality and accreditation

- National quality agencies, with support from ENQA (for HE) and EQAVET (for VET) should develop their understanding of new modes of learning (including online, distance, OER and MOOCs) and ensure that there is no implicit non-evidence-based bias against these new modes.
- The Commission and related national and international authorities developing the European Higher Education Area and the European Area of Skills and Qualifications should work towards reducing the regulatory barriers against new non-study-time-based modes of provision.
- Member States should more strongly encourage HE and VET providers to improve and proceduralise their activity on Accreditation of Prior Learning.
- Larger Member States should set up an Open Accreditor to accredit students for HE studies and a parallel model, perhaps via 'one stop shops', to accredit vocational competences.

Staff development

- Member States, with support from the Commission, should support the development of online initial and continuous professional development programmes for teachers/trainers/lecturers, focussing on online learning and IPR.
- Member States should consider the use of incentive schemes for teachers/trainers/lecturers engaged in online professional development of their pedagogic skills including online learning.

OER and IPR

- The Commission and Member States should adopt and recommend a standard Creative Commons license for all openly available educational and vocational training material they are involved in funding.
- Member States should phase out use of the 'NonCommercial' restriction on content.

Costing and other research

- Member States should increase their scrutiny of the cost basis for university teaching and vocational training and consider the benefits of different modes of funding for their institutions

Focus on students

- Member States should promote (within the context of their sovereign educational aims and objectives) to adult learners the availability and accessibility of open resources created through their respective cultural sector and schools programmes.
- Specific funding should be devoted to building OER corpora of material in key topic areas of interest to adults. The corpora should be designed ideally for independent self-study, guided self-study (in both the formal and informal sector) and as resources to support lecturers teaching such courses. This maximises the investment in them. Rather than just 'silent' textual materials, the materials should contain audio-visual elements and, for hard to learn concepts, interactive components and quizzes. This to some extent will overcome the barriers that can be found to studying textual material by those whose reading skills in the national language(s) may be less adequate.

Funding

- The scarce funding for supporting adult learners should increasingly be targeted in an output-based fashion to reward adult learners for progression through the EQF. The accreditation gateways (one stop shops) could play a key role in this process. It is recognised that for this to work well, it needs a more developed and pervasive EQF than currently exists.