6. Educational Policy and Open Educational Practice in Australian Higher Education

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Open Educational Policy has become increasingly the subject of government attention globally, primarily with a focus on reducing educational costs for tax payers. Parallel to, yet rarely convergent with, these initiatives is an espoused sector-wide commitment to broadening participation in higher education, especially for students of low socio-economic backgrounds. Criticism of both open education and social inclusion policy highlights a deficiency in both the metrics used by policy-makers and the maturity of conceptual understanding applied to both notions. This chapter explores the possibilities afforded to social inclusion in universities by open education, and the case for an integrated approach to educational policy that recognizes the impact of a multi-causal foundation on the broader educational ecosystem.

Introduction

The scope and extent of the relationship between Open Educational Practice (OEP) and national educational policy has been subject to varying degrees of interest internationally. Whilst countries such as the UK, the US and Canada have supported open education through a range of policy initiatives (McKerlich, Ives, and McGreal, 2013), Australia lacks a consolidated approach for higher education. Recent Australian policy is underpinned by a need to build social capacity, widen participation and inclusion, and to create an educational system that is internationally competitive — goals that align ideologically with not only democratic society but also open educational systems. These open systems recognize a role in catalyzing change to meet the future demands on tertiary education foreshadowed by current trends. Despite this alignment, open educational practice has yet to be explicitly recognized in Australian educational policy due to governmental predisposition to focus on open research and open access to government information and research.

This contribution explores the conceptual underpinnings of educational systems in a democratic nation and how open educational practice supports the development of learners who are societally participative, collaborative and critical consumers of information. The dialogue focuses on the intersection of policy and social inclusion in higher education and further explores how OEP actively contributes to goals, but tempers this with the understanding that the inherent measurements for social groups are fundamentally flawed. Secondly, it recognizes that OEP is only one component in a much-needed holistic and multi-causal approach to describing Australian higher education.

Whilst an explicit integration of Australian policy and an awareness of the affordances of open education has yet to occur, foundational research has resulted in a Feasibility Protocol for higher education that explores multi-level policy implications for open education systems (Bossu, Bull and Brown, 2015). An examination of the protocol yields policy recommendations that — if pursued — can support Australian higher education to be an internationally-competitive offering founded in the principles of a democratic nation.

Defining Open Education in Context

James and Bossu (2014, p. 81) assert that open education is not a new term as it was adopted by open universities approximately 100 years ago to represent "learning "anywhere, anytime", open entry and [alternative] exit points, which were the foundations of open universities and their correspondence and distance education models". Currently, there are a wide range of open approaches and movements to "open up" education. These approaches include not only OER and OEP, but also open access (research and data), open learning design, open technologies, open policies, open governance and so forth. The implicit philosophy of open education is to reduce barriers to increase access to education. For the purpose of this chapter, open education will be used as a broad concept in which all the above will be included. For the same outcome of conceptual clarity, "open education systems" is used to describe an educational institution that authentically practices openness in not only educational terms, but in administrative, transactional, and strategic actions. A systemic adoption of open practice, therefore is a complex, multi-faceted proposition. This contribution, however, confines the scope to the relationship between open education and national educational policy.

An explicit understanding of the complexity of the OEP adoption makes this a "problematic space", compounded by a lack of evidence, especially in learning design literature. As such, it currently lacks a foundational research-led evidence base at the practitioner level and a theoretical under-pinning. Additionally, OER research has been criticized for a broad inability to generalize beyond the immediate context of individual studies. This hampers the Open Educational Resources (OER) community as there are practical issues (such as staff development, organizational policy, and business models) that need to be concurrently addressed. Furthermore, awareness of OER and issues surrounding locating, evaluating, repurposing and attributing still require attention. One critique (Glennie, Harley, Butcher, and van Wyk, 2012) points to a lack of "critical perspective", offering the explanation that it is "perhaps unsurprising when the concept of OER presents itself as such a self-evident social "good" (p. 7).

This "self-evident good" manifests in research that suggests the use of OER can allow previously disadvantaged students to engage with degree programs by lowering educational costs, reduce costs for course development, improve global-level collaboration in teaching and learning, make teaching resources readily available in a range of languages, raise educational resource quality, and act as a further catalyst for learner-centred pedagogy.

These goals seem admirable, but the weakness in open rhetoric is practicality (or a lack thereof). There is evidence to also suggest that OEP is, after ten years, neither widespread, nor well-known, and that learner and educator use of OER is far from mainstream practice (Conole, 2013).

Educational Policy and the Democratic Nation

Post-industrial educational systems need to acknowledge the macro-economic environment into which graduates must enter, and thus provide students with competitive skills for the workforce (especially life-long and life-wide learning), opportunities for social mobility, and the ability to effect social change (Chesters and Watson, 2013). As the global demand for university credentialing has (and continues to) grow at a rapid rate, current educational systems will need to change to meet the demand. Whilst the number of domestic student places available continues to grow in Australia, the higher education sector has historically sought to actively grow their international cohorts based on an inverse relationship with the value of the Australian dollar. The international demand for higher education, especially in regions with high economic growth (such as India) is even greater. The paradox faced by universities is that whilst demand continues to rise, the barriers to successfully engaging with tertiary education have not lowered (Chesters, 2015).

The notion of social inclusion has been of interest to Australian higher education for decades, and is underpinned by the conceptual understanding of the role of education in a western democracy. John Dewey (1916, p. 87) held that democracy is "characterised by a widening of the area of shared concerns and the liberation of a greater diversity of personal capacities". Democracy is therefore more than simply building a participatory society, but rather constructing a society with

decision-making based on a foundation of justice that is demonstrated by a commitment to fairness, freedom, and respect (Olsen, Codd, and O'Neill, 2004).

"Social justice" is at the heart of university policy and priorities (as a reflection of national priorities) when the focus is on social inclusion, student equity and diversity, and student support. If one takes a whole-of-life perspective of a university education then it becomes "the way in which citizens are or should be empowered to influence the education that in turn shapes the political values, attitudes, and modes of behavior of future citizens" (Gutmann, 1987, p. 14). Gutmann's point on empowerment underscores that a democratic society should not be reduced to a rule of majority. Therefore, the attitudes and priorities of the state need to be a collective expression of the society it represents (Olssen, 2012, p. 264), having a clear reciprocal relationship with the nation's educational systems.

The Challenge of Inclusion

Whilst it has already been noted that international demand for higher education has increased, the lack of equity in gender, socio-cultural and socio-economic representation continues. Internationally, governments have set targets (as has Australia) through mechanisms, studies and reports such as A Fair Chance for All (Department of Employment, Education and Training, 1990) and the Bradley Report (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, and Scales, 2008) and is reflected in the more recent Keep It Clever (Universities Australia, 2015) statement. The evidence base for the focus on target setting for various groups differs as much by country as do the targets set. Australia has made progress increasing university admission, retention, and progression for many under-represented groups, but widening access for students from rural and remote communities and low socio-economic backgrounds remains "one of the persistent and seemingly intractable equity issues in Australia" (James, 2012, p. 85).

To provide context and clarity for these terms, it is necessary to articulate the measures and indices used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) to determine whether a student is of low socio-economic status (SES), or from a rural or remote background. The Australian

definition of a low socio-economic status is reliant on a combination of four indices that examine socio-economic advantage and disadvantage, education and occupation, and economic resources based on five-yearly cycles of national census data (ABS, 2013).

These measures are not without criticism. A review of these indices conducted by Universities Australia (2008) recommended major improvements to the instrument, classification, and rigor of the data that supported this index. In particular, it highlighted that a key factor of the classification was the postcode of each student's origin (not their current residence) and that classifications were predicated on parental occupation rather than educational attainment. It also noted that the current data collection methods were inadequately provided, with evidence of causal factors influencing behaviors and attitudes to education among those categorized as low socio-economic status students.

Furthermore, there is little empirical evidence to suggest that providing access to education alone addresses social inclusion, social integration, or social mobility; rather existing studies describe a complex situation which requires a "multi-causal understanding of the factors underlying under-representation" (James, 2012, p. 99). A more mature and holistic view of the student ecology is required; one that is not solely guided by government targets at predetermined deadlines.

The available data shows that students from a low socio-economic background enrolled in university education rose from 41,457 to 70,598 between 2001 and 2014; this segment now represent 17.5% of the total student population, an increase of only 1.29% (Australian Department of Education and Training, 2015). This data is even more striking if we consider that the total number of "freshers", or first-year students, has increased by 63% over the same years. As a segment of the total number of domestic enrolments over the same period of time, the number of students of low-socioeconomic status has increased from 16.4% (2001) to 16.53% (2014).

As a percentage of total enrolled higher education students, regional student representation has risen from 15.4% (2001) to 19.3% in 2014 (*ibid*.), whilst remote students decreased from 1.3% (2001) to 0.95% (2014). Commencing remote students now comprise only 1.08% of commencing students (2014), decreasing from 1.5% in 2001.

The outcomes of widening participation across Australian society aim to lead to greater levels of social integration and social mobility, and so has both the aforementioned justice-based democracy approach, but also has national economic benefits. As such, it can potentially enable the dual outcome of economic growth and civic cohesion (Giddons, 2000). Across the Australian higher education landscape, though, institutions have diverse localized views of "social justice". Whilst a "focus on social justice may be explicit in many universities' missions (whether through implicit practice, or overt policy), the scope of initiatives will vary. The definition of "social justice" through higher education of most interest to open education practitioners, however, is "that the principle of individual social justice [means] access to higher education and success in higher education should not be determined by class, ethnicity, geographical location or other personal characteristics" (Universities Australia, 2008).

Australia has the challenge of widening participation in higher education whilst both domestic and international enrolments experience growth. The sustainability of current educational practices and systems are therefore questionable. Internationally, on-campus higher education systems will be unable to meet the demands of university placements.

Additionally, the reality is that higher education reform is more often a stratified social segregation based on university placements exacerbated by the competitive nature of university student numbers (James, 2012). Students compete to attend those universities whose credentials are most valued in the work marketplace, whilst universities compete for the students whose future achievements will reflect well on the *alma mater*. The commercial nature of the higher education sector and the ideological and philosophical underpinnings of the "university education" are apparently at cross-purposes in terms of addressing the issue of social inclusion.

Open Education, Democracy, and Social Inclusion

Current open education systems have not only had a role in widening participation as they had previously, but also a role in lowering the costs of education, providing opportunities for raising the quality of learning and teaching, and aligning with sustainable education systems. The

open education movement is ideologically aligned with the notions of democracy and social inclusion discussed previously. Potentially, Open Educational Practice could reduce the costs of higher education (especially in the provision and purchase of educational resources such as textbooks), provide opportunities for cross-institutional collaboration and peer-review of teaching materials (and a possible increase in the quality of university courses), and provide access to low- or no-cost materials that will be still be accessible to students post-graduation (unlike subscribed databases, and closed journal and data sets) (D'Antoni, 2008).

However, as resources and teacher-focused approach (sometimes exemplified by the "textbook as course" educational design) are still pervasive in the Australian higher education sector, some universities see the teaching resources — rather than the teaching presence — as the "competitive advantage". This perceived advantage is indicative of a commercialized world view of some educational institutions in Australia and a predisposition to value artefacts of teaching as tangible proof that learning is occurring.

Like social inclusion, though, setting targets for the adoption of open resources (such as percentage of open texts, or an "open first" institutional policy) rarely examines the attainment of educational and societal outcomes. There are further claims of cost-savings in reusing open content, but little empirical evidence has been found. Whilst there are *potential savings* for students demonstrated by open textbook adoption, these figures are predicated on the notion that every student in a course purchases the set text — which evidence dispels to a great extent (Senack, 2014).

In addition, Open Educational Practice requires a more rigorous evidence base to inform policy makers. In the current environment, open educational policy is hampered by a lack of awareness and evidence—which could result in an inconvenient and fruitless partnering between evidence-poor statistics and a problematic, emerging open education system. If these issues could be addressed concurrently, however, the intermingling of research-informed, empirically based decision making and national educational policy could be a catalyst for change in Australian higher education that is able to purposefully meet the demand for education in the future.

Rather, Open Educational Practice becomes one mechanism woven into the institutional ecology. It needs to align with, support, and enable institutional priorities through a mature symbiotic relationship with institutional policy that recognizes, rewards, and influences local learning and teaching culture. However, the awareness and integration of open education and open educational practices in Australia have yet to reach a level where they can effectively provide an evidence-base for national policy makers. Despite the lack of awareness and support for evidence-based research, there have been policy developments directly and indirectly related to open education in Australia. In the following section, we attempt to discuss some of these developments and their potential impact on open practices.

Open Policy: The Australian Experience

As with other developed countries such as the UK, US, Canada and some European countries, the Australian government has been investing in open access policies since 1998 through programs and initiatives designed to raise awareness, build infrastructure, metadata standards and guidelines. A more recent government initiative is the Australian National Data Service (ANDS, 2014) which was created in 2008 and is currently "the major government funded initiative to provide the infrastructure necessary to support an open data environment". ANDS is a large database containing research resources from educational and research institutions in Australia. One of the aims of ANDS is to create an Australian Research Data Commons where research information, including data and researchers' contact details, can be easily accessible to all. These and other programs have played an important role in making open access policies successful in higher education in Australia. Today, most Australian universities have an open access repository where research data and outputs from government funded projects are made available, typically using open licenses, including Creative Commons licenses, for other researchers to use and re-use (Picasso and Phelan, 2014). In addition, major research funding bodies have also responded positively to the government position on open access and have encouraged these practices through their own regulations (*ibid.*).

Still following global trends, the Australian government itself has implemented some open policies in order to make government documents available to the public under an open license, to increase transparency, and as a support for openness through informing and engaging the public with the government in a diverse range of activities (Bossu, 2016). It is interesting to note that educational policies that consider open education seems to be taken more seriously at state levels. For example, in Victoria, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development is increasingly applying licenses to educational content with a focus on OER. The government of South Australia's Department for Education has gradually been developing resources that will be distributed under Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial (CC BY-NC) licenses, and Creative Commons Attribution Share-Alike (CC BY-SA) licenses.[1] The Western Australian Department of Education has been encouraging teachers to find and use OER through their preferred search engines, and is considering applying open licenses to materials developed with public funds (Butcher and Hoosen, 2012). Despite the fact that these open policies and initiatives at federal and state levels are only in their initial phases and not widespread, and some are also not directly related to education, they certainly demonstrate the government's commitment to transparency, sharing of information, and open access to publicly funded resources. This commitment could be translated into encouragement to other publicly funded organizations, such as higher education institutions, to follow.

However, the lack of a dedicated government policy or regulation that clearly supports the adoption of open education and practices in higher education in the country has not stopped some Australian universities from getting involved in the open education movement that is gaining momentum around the world. In the last decade, advocates, practitioners and their institutions have sought funds and opportunities to undertake projects, develop national and international collaborations, conduct research, and make policy recommendations at national and institutional levels so that the open education movement in Australia can advance. These efforts seem to have been realized as several Australian universities are having their intellectual property policies currently being reviewed or re-developed. Other institutions have encouraged

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1   http://creativecommons.org.au/learn/licences

the adoption of open education through supporting documentation, such as university strategic plans or teaching performance reviews (Bossu, 2016).

The growing interest of Australian universities to develop new institutional open policies or review existing ones to include reference and elements of open education is evident in more recent studies conducted on the adoption of open educational resources across the Australian higher education system (Bossu, 2016). These studies have shown that not only are universities' intellectual property policies being revised, but also that open education is an active element of many current universities' strategic plans. One example of such a development is the Technology Enhanced Learning and Teaching White Paper 2014–18, developed by the University of Tasmania.[2] It was through this White Paper that the conceptualization and dialogue on how the University might start incorporating and implementing open education within its mainstream activities began. This was the first of a series of documents that recognized the University's willingness to engage in open education. Likewise, the University of Southern Queensland began a process of annual grants from 2015 that support, recognize, and fund open educational initiatives.[3] These include open textbooks, open courses, open technical approaches to collaborative resource authoring and open learning experiences that support the transition of students to the tertiary environment. These grants have the tri-fold purpose of raising awareness, building staff capacity, and providing an evidence base for institutional policy (Partridge and Stagg, 2016).

The development of such institutional policies has major implications for open practitioners. Firstly, research has demonstrated that Australian practitioners believe that institutional open policies could play an important role in promoting the effective use and adoption of open education (Bossu *et al.*, 2014a). In addition, by including open education within institutional strategies, practitioners would feel secured and comfortable in getting actively engaged with these activities instead of being concerned and overwhelmed regarding additional open education

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2   http://www.teaching-learning.utas.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/439014/
     Technology-Enhanced-Learning-and-Teaching-White-Paper_Background-papers-
     Academic-Senate-15-November-2013.pdf
3   https://www.usq.edu.au/learning-teaching/excellence/2017OEPgrants/2016landtgrants

activities. Practitioners also believe that institutions should invest and develop mechanisms to raise awareness and understanding regarding open licenses, intellectual property and quality assurance issues. Most importantly, institutions need to formally recognize and promote individuals' and group engagement with open education (Bossu *et al.*, 2014a). Such open policies have the potential to reconnect practitioners who often feel the divide between policy and practice, exacerbated by a feeling that policy makers rarely have the time to invest in gaining in-depth knowledge of the issue or topic (Crosnoe, 2012). The two-way relationship between policy and research is of particular interest to the Australian political landscape due to its emergent nature and the potential for establishing an empirical evidence base for policy makers and practitioners alike.

The Feasibility Protocol

As discussed previously, in despite of the limited direct developments in educational policy for open education, some of the opportunities and benefits of open education have been recognized by the Australian government through investments in open access and open government. However, it was only in 2010, almost ten years after open education — mostly through OER — emerged in other parts of the world (i.e. MIT Open Courseware Consortium in 2001), that it started getting some popularity in higher education in Australia. It was during this period that the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching (OLT), funded a two-year research project to investigate the adoption, use and management of open educational resources in Australian higher education. This was an important project for the progress of OER in Australia because it represented the recognition by the Australian government (through the OLT) that investigation in this new and underexplored field needed to be conducted in Australia. It was also a great opportunity for the researchers involved in this project to uncover the state of play about OER across the country.

The project findings were based on an online survey distributed to a wide group of stakeholders across the higher education sector in Australia including practitioners, senior executives, copyright officers, librarians and so forth, and on interviews with key stakeholders (Bossu *et al.*, 2014a). The findings revealed that most respondents were aware of

the open education movement, mostly OER, and rated their knowledge of OER as intermediate. However, the majority of participants had either rarely or never used OER. As for those who had used them, learning objects were the most preferred type of resources utilized. Encouragingly, a large number of participants stated that they would like to be more involved in OER activities. Perhaps one of the reasons why participants were not engaged with OER could have been due to the lack of institutional strategies and policies to support OER and open education projects and initiatives at that time (the project's data was collected in late 2011) (Bossu *et al.*, 2014a).

One of the main deliverables of this project was the Feasibility Protocol, a set of guiding principles that prompts questions and raises issues to be considered by educational institutions wishing to experiment with open education. The protocol attempts to assist higher education leaders and policy makers to make informed decisions about the adoption of open education at several levels within the institution, from management to practitioner levels, including academics and students (Bossu *et al.*, 2014b). The Feasibility Protocol addresses four aspects which include:

- *Opportunities* that open education could bring to institutions and broader society;
- *Challenges* associated with the adoption of open education;
- *Strategic Directions* for an effective adoption of open education; and
- *Policy Recommendations* for higher education institutions in Australia (Bossu *et al.*, 2014b).

Opportunities of open education

As discussed previously, open education can bring many opportunities to the higher education sector, educational institutions, practitioners and students. Some of these benefits have also been identified in the Feasibility Protocol. At a sector level, open education can assist to bridge the gap between formal and informal education; support the diverse student cohort across the higher education sector in Australia (for example, remote and rural students, adult and distance learners and national, international, refugee and imprisoned students) etc.; and can assist to position the Australian higher education sector on the global stage (for example, by adopting the 2012 Paris OER Declaration) (Bossu *et al.*, 2014b).

At institutional levels, open education has the potential to:

- Increase institutional reputation through showcasing of educational content and learning and teaching innovations;

- Create opportunities for national and international collaboration with other institutions;

- Increase access to education by assisting the alignment of an institution's agenda for social inclusion and widening participation;

- Create economies of scale by developing more effective ways to create, use, re-use and remix open content, and

- Promote innovations and quality in teaching and learning

The Feasibility Protocol also revealed many opportunities for practitioners. Some of them are:

- Increase collegial and subject level collaboration

- Create more opportunities for learning

- Enrich practitioners' teaching experiences

- Enhance existing pedagogical approaches to learning and provide the basis for new ones

As for the students, opportunities arising from the adoption of open education could be:

- To enhance learning through networked and collaborative learning;

- To promote richer learning experiences through access to learning resources available outside institutional boundaries;

- To meet students' different needs and learning styles; and

- To promote and enhance lifelong learning

Challenges

Despite the wide range of opportunities that can emerge from the adoption of open education, many challenges remain. According to the Feasibility Protocol, the main challenge for the Australian higher education system is perhaps the incorporation of open education into mainstream education through the national regulatory frameworks for learning and teaching (e.g. TEQSA). Perhaps one of the most significant challenges at institutional level is the persistence of a traditional academic culture and mindset that represents barriers for the adoption of open education. Such traditions are steeped in history and may be

slow to evolve and embrace a new approach to educational content creation or use re-use, re-mix and storage techniques. Other challenges faced by educational institutions are:

- The need to develop and revise current institutional business models to ensure the sustainability of open education initiatives; and

- Develop policy enablers to promote open education institution wide

The Feasibility Protocol noted that some of the challenges faced by practitioners are:

- The lack of skills and knowledge required by individuals to adopt open education;

- The lack of understand regarding copyright and intellectual property issues, which could limit and concern practitioners; and

- Increase workload (mostly in institutions where open education is not recognized and/or not incorporated into learning and teaching activities).

Some factors that might pose challenges for students to adopt open education are:

- Poorly contextualized resources;

- Inadequate access to the internet for remote and rural students;

- Limited digital literacy skills; and

- Open content that does not meet students' needs

Strategic Directions

Strategic Directions is the third and perhaps the most important element of the Feasibility Protocol. Even though it is important to recognize the opportunities and challenges that open education brings to stakeholders, it is believed that having a well thought-out plan and/or a detailed strategy are much more important elements for a successful open education initiative. Below are some questions and issues posed by the Feasibility Protocol at sector, institutional and practitioner levels. The strategic directions questions at the sector level are:

- To what extent could open education assist the revitalization of the higher education sector in Australia?

- How can government incentives, priorities and funding encourage the adoption of open education across the sector?

- How can educational policies promote and sustain open education across the sector?

At an institutional level, three main strategic directions emerged: resourcing, innovation and planning. Resourcing is an umbrella definition covering additional investments, such as infrastructure, technology, and personnel (including academic staff development) required for the implementation of an open education initiative. Innovation focuses on the adoption of open education as a way to promote an institution's "uniqueness and distinctiveness" amongst other higher education institutions. It also looks at ways in which open education can be used to meet lecturers' and students' expectations about the use of innovative technologies for learning. Under the rubric of innovation also feature ways in which open education could be integrated into institutional processes, such as Prior Learning and Assessment Recognition (PLAR). Finally, strategies related to planning include institutional consultations with stakeholder groups, investigating the scope and purpose of open education initiatives, identifying the OE champions within each institution, and developing dedicated open education policies.

Most importantly the key to success of open education initiatives is the development of strategies that chime with practitioners' needs and aspirations. In order to increase awareness and uptake of open education amongst practitioners, institutions need to increase capacity and provide the technical and human support needed for lecturers to adopt an innovative way of devising and delivering education. Another strategy to successfully engage this cohort in open education is by offer recognition and reward (e.g. via promotion and awards) to those who have included aspects of open education into their teaching.

Policies Recommendations for Higher Education Institutions

The Feasibility Protocol also looked at studies of Intellectual Property (IP) policies of Australian universities (which are publicly available online) to determine how these documents address the ownership of course content and educational resources created and developed by their employees (Scott, 2014). As a result, the Protocol highlights some

points for consideration by universities tackling the issue of intellectual property and copyright policies of open education content created by their staff:

- Extoll the value of open education as part and parcel of university policy;

- Embed in current and future employment contracts a reward mechanism to support the development of content for open education;

- Establish a mechanism to verify that university content intended for OER release is not already subject to university commercialization or other agreements;

- Develop a set of guidelines and recommendations for lecturers on the types of open licenses available for OER content; and

- Create university guidelines and procedures to ensure the quality of the open education material and its copyright compliance.

The engagement from this project also led to further initiatives, including collaboration based initiatives with national and international institutions, and institutionally based ones. Some of these initiatives are externally funded, while others are funded internally, still others have not received any funding but are progressing nonetheless. This project, its deliverables, the stakeholder engagement and network that emerged as a result of interactions during the time of this project have led to the realization that much more is needed to be done for Australian higher education to fully benefit from OER and open education. Many believe that for open educational practice to become one mechanism woven into the institutional ecology, it needs to be aligned with support and enable institutional priorities through a mature symbiotic relationship with institutional policy that recognizes, rewards, and influences innovative learning and teaching.

Final Considerations

Open education systems have no doubt played an important role in assisting higher education sectors and governments worldwide to meet their current and future educational targets of widening participation, lowering costs, improving the quality of learning and teaching and promoting social inclusion and democracy. However, contemporary

open education systems are still relatively new approaches to learning and teaching and pose many challenges to the accepted norms of the Western higher education system. In order to learn more and take full advantage of these new systems, many countries have attempted to trial, develop and implement educational policies that incorporate elements of open education (Bossu *et al.*, 2014a).

In Australia, despite some important initiatives, the absence of explicit educational policies and incentives appear to be limiting the adoption of open education. To date, there have been few internal institutional strategies and policy enablers to encourage universities to pursue open education to better support current students, attract new ones, and compete against as well as collaborate with other Australian and international institutions. Thoughtfully designed educational policies that encourage and promote innovative learning and teaching can facilitate the sector's realization of the full potential of open education and place Australia amongst the leading countries in this field.

Also discussed here was an example of a sector-wide research in open education, which led to the development of a Feasibility Protocol. Despite the fact that the Protocol was developed in late 2012, most of its recommendations are still valid today as developments in open education in Australia have been limited since then. The Feasibility Protocol still remains a valuable instrument and has the potential to assist senior executives and policy makers to make informed decisions about open education, including the issues and questions that they should consider regarding the opportunities, challenges, strategic directions and policies issues involving open education in Australia. Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that the Feasibility Protocol is not a rigid instrument. It can be adapted, changed, and further developed to meet individual university needs, as each institution has unique structures, agendas, cultures, and strategic plans for future and current activities. Ultimately, the usefulness of the Feasibility Protocol will depend on individual institutions and the way that their senior executives make use of it.

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