



THE SKIM

Report: Open Education in European Libraries of Higher Education (2021 report) | Published December 2021

BACKGROUND

This SPARC Europe report summarises the results of a survey of European libraries in Higher Education and their roles in Open Education (OE) and Open Education Resources (OER). This work was done in consultation with the European Network of Open Education Librarians ([ENOEL](#)). The report is framed by the [UNESCO Recommendation on OER](#).

Launched in May 2021, the survey, which targeted academic librarians across Europe, garnered over 230 responses from 28 countries. This report is the 2021 version of the 2020 report under the same title, which was the first of its kind.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 1. Awareness:** COVID-19 has heightened awareness of the need for OER in digital learning environments. Many academic libraries are familiar with the UNESCO OER Recommendation, with about one-third of respondents taking concerted action. As more people become aware of Open Education, we see a growing number of libraries making slight changes to their services to better adapt to the needs of OE/OER. This suggests that libraries are taking more action as a result of increased awareness of OE and more are assuming greater responsibilities in this area.
- 2. OE policies:** Although there seems to be more library involvement in policymaking since last year's survey, the total number of institutional and national policies reported is still low. However, half of the libraries surveyed report that either their institution already has some kind of OE policy, that they are in the process of developing one, or that one is under consideration, which is encouraging.
- 3. DEI:** Libraries engage with diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) on an institutional level in various ways. A quarter of responding libraries address all elements of DEI in their OE work, showing that this is a strategic priority for some organisations. Of the three DEI components, twice as many libraries address improving accessibility issues for different groups. Ensuring the other two DEI aspects is more challenging and needs more attention.
- 4. Skills:** One of the main challenges for academic libraries is the need for more capacity to improve the skills of librarians and their OE teams in both openness and its application to areas closer to teaching rather than research.
- 5. Collaboration:** Many libraries are organising themselves in OE networks. Many seem to be more involved in creating, maintaining, or participating in networks that share OER (locally, regionally, or globally) than in promoting and stimulating cross-border collaboration and alliances in OER projects and programmes so far. There is more potential for collective action to make more progress in OE and OER.
- 6. Interoperability:** This year, libraries consider technology to be the area where support is needed most. The survey results highlight that creating a supportive Open Education infrastructure is a particular urgency.
- 7. Sustainability:** Very limited financial resources are still generally dedicated to OER in libraries of Higher Education. However, more institutions seem to be receiving funding for OER, showing that more funders and institutions are committing to Open Education and to funding it.

In short, to further accelerate OE and OER efforts, libraries need to join forces and collaborate – institutionally, nationally and internationally – to build a more open, creative, informed, and legally and technically sound learning environment to facilitate access to educational resources for all.

The following recommendations for academic libraries conclude the survey. Their relevance depends on where you are in the lifecycle of your OE offering.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Raise awareness** of Open Education and the UNESCO Recommendation on OER in academic libraries and their respective institutions.
- 2. Help gently change the institutional mind-set** on OE by exploring, sharing, adopting and adapting OE practices to demonstrate the value of open, and to change the culture around open.
- 3. Help initiate and develop standalone or overarching OE policies** drawing on good policy examples and practical policymaking experience from peers.
- 4. Provide guidelines and training** in open skills, OER reuse, adaptation, remixing, creation and instructional design to further develop library staff OE practices so that they can collaborate more effectively with teaching staff.
- 5. Engage in the reuse, adoption, adaptation, remixing and co-creation of OER** together with faculty such as open textbooks, tutorials, videos, etc.
- 6. Create professional development programmes on OE** for library staff, including modules on diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) to help them address DEI in OER and library services.
- 7. Create communities of practice** of different practitioners (libraries, teaching support units, students associations and ICT services) to develop OE solutions that work for multiple stakeholders and for long-lasting partnerships.
- 8. Explore sustainable models** to reuse, adapt and create OER, ranging from establishing a grant programme to collaborating with communities and membership associations.
- 9. Work on building and funding a more interoperable technical OE ecosystem** between institutional repositories and other educational platforms for longer-term sustainability.
- 10. Stimulate librarians to participate in international OE networks and projects** to gain new knowledge and work together on common goals. Collaboration on OE will achieve more.



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