



OER Guidance for Schools 1

## Open Education and the Schools Sector

The OER Guidance for Schools has been produced in partnership with Leicester City Council to introduce schools to open education and Open Educational Resources (OER). This document explains what OER are, and how school staff can use them to support teaching and learning.

### What are Open Educational Resources?

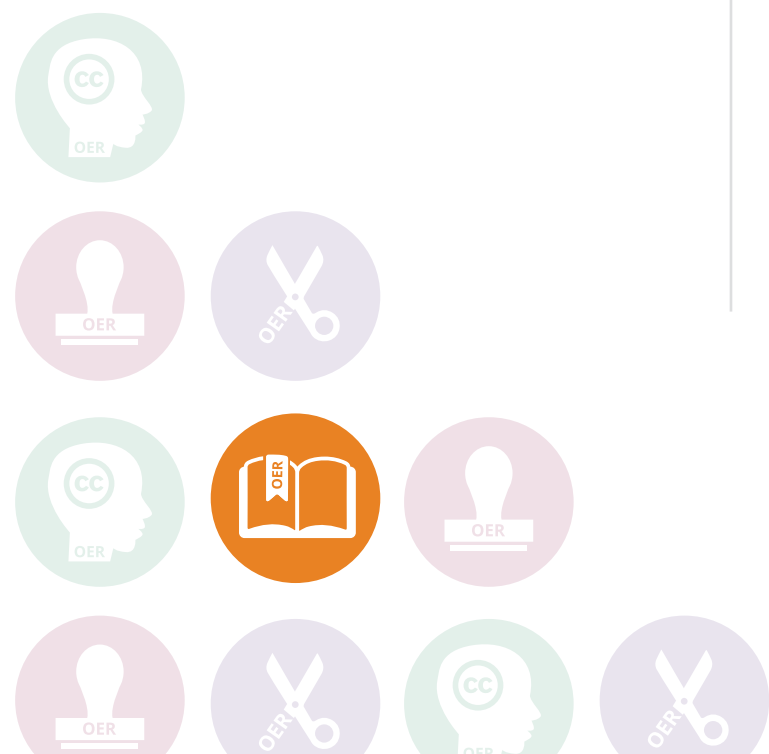
Open Educational Resources (OER) are free learning resources that have been openly licensed or are in the public domain, and can be used or reused for free.

OER formats include text (either print or digital); audio, video, or multimedia, or various combinations of these. They can support a single learning point, a lesson, a series of lessons, a whole course, or even an entire programme of study.

### What is open education?

Open education refers to educational approaches that prioritise participation in, and access to, teaching and learning. One of the defining features of open educational approaches is the creation and use of Open Educational Resources — learning resources that have been made available under an open licence. The best known open licences for OER are the Creative Commons licences.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that everyone has the right to education. Education — the development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential — is a cornerstone of our society, enshrined in the UN Convention for the Rights of the Child.



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The UNESCO 2012 Paris OER Declaration states that UNESCO member states (including the UK) should:

**Promote and use OER to widen access to education at all levels, both formal and non-formal, in a perspective of lifelong learning, thus contributing to social inclusion, gender equity and special needs education. Improve both cost-efficiency and quality of teaching and learning outcomes through greater use of OER.**

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The use and creation of open content can support many different teaching and learning approaches, but is strongly linked to, and supports, open education approaches. Globally, educators and groups are working to make, share and promote Open Educational Resources.

### Free vs. open

‘Open’ has a wider meaning than just something that is available for free. There is a wealth of free-to-view content available online, but the majority of this content is not free to reuse. For schools and teachers, being able to share and build upon resources is extremely important. This is where open comes in.

By openly licensing resources, clear permission communicated by specific licensing terms has been provided up front so that school staff, and anyone else, can reuse and, depending upon the licensing terms, edit and adapt existing works to best suit their teaching aims and the needs of their learners. These adaptations can also be freely shared with others.

The engagement with OER is a global movement, which includes many developing regions of the world, where open approaches contribute to the aim of achieving access to quality education for all. Educators all around the world create and use open educational resources, and are exploring and practising open educational approaches.



## How are Open Educational Resources different from “just sharing”?

When educators share resources informally with colleagues, their expectations and conditions for sharing may not be explicit. When sharing something with a colleague, you might just tell them that they “can use this”, without saying precisely how you are happy for them to use the resource. When sharing resources more widely, it is important to be clear about the expectations that we have.

If you share resources online with a service provider who is not your school, it’s important to always check the agreement that you are entering into.

You should always take time to read the terms and conditions before deciding which sites to share your work on. On some sites, you may find a statement that gives the site owner very comprehensive rights. That can mean that once the content is uploaded, the site operator can use your content in ways that you may not want it to be used. Sites sometimes state that you waive any moral rights you and your school may have. This means that you (and your school) do not even need to be given credit for the work. Some sites stipulate that you may not adapt or share downloaded content with others.

Open licences, including the Creative Commons licences, provide educators and everyone else with a clear, simple way to specify how resources can be used and reused, and how the work should be credited. This straightforward approach to licensing helps to explain why Creative Commons licences are most frequently used to convert “resources” to “Open Educational Resources”. Some websites (see additional documents) provide you with the ability to apply a Creative Commons licence to your work within their site, so that the ways you want to share and be credited for your work are displayed next to your resource.

Downloaded Creative Commons content can be shared by adhering to clear rules, including crediting the content creators. With most Creative Commons licences, content can also be adapted, and those adaptations can also be shared.



## Open in principle and practice

**Legal freedom**, which grants permission to use content through an open licence, is just one aspect of open. There are two other important freedoms that relate to openness: **technological freedom** (for example, ease of use and accessibility, with different kinds of devices and software), and freedom in terms of **education and participation** (inviting dialogue and adaptation, promoting flexible and inclusive approaches to teaching, making learning objectives and teaching strategies explicit). Often, legal freedom is the only freedom that is considered essential, but it is important to think about the other freedoms as well, even though it may not always be feasible to fully implement all freedoms for all resources.

Legal freedom is about permission. However, this is a permission in principle only. **Technological freedom** is about permission in practice. For example, if a resource is available in only one proprietary file format (for which expensive software is needed), then it may be available to use in principle. In practice, however, only people who can afford the software required can access it. In other words, the resource is legally free, but not technologically free. If the same resource is available in several file formats (including open file formats), then it has a greater degree of technological freedom. Imagine a resource bank that has no search facility; the content may be (legally) free, but in practice it may just be too hard to find in order to be useful. Technological freedom relates to anticipatory provision (UK Equality Act 2010) and making reasonable adjustments to ensure resources are accessible, including to users with disabilities.

There are also many resources on the internet that are technologically free, but not legally free — although you can download them, it may be illegal to do so. While legal freedom provides a basis for technological freedom, technological freedom isn't assured by legal freedom, but needs to be considered at the same time.

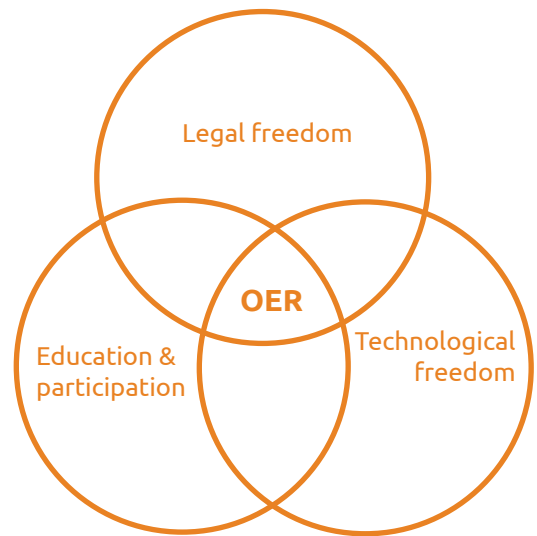
Technological freedom relates to anticipatory provision (UK Equality Act 2010) and making reasonable adjustments to ensure resources are accessible, including to users with disabilities.



The third freedom, **education and participation**, is about educational values. There are a wide range of resources available which can be used to support learning and teaching. Ideally these resources make educational uses explicit, e.g. by including learning objectives and success criteria, or by including information relevant for specific learning settings (for example, for use with younger learners, or with adults). The third freedom relates to inclusive, effective and participatory educational practice.

The three freedoms (legal, technological, education/participation) represent the key considerations for educators wanting to create open, accessible resources. Legal freedom (through an open licence) is considered essential for OER, while the second (technological) freedom incorporates certain legal requirements (such as accessibility) for institutions hosting OER.

OER provide a basis for learning resources to be produced jointly, between educators, and also between students. Collaborative learning and the co-construction of knowledge and educational resources are valuable educational approaches. The process of collaboratively working and creating resources is an important part of learning, and openly licensed resources make it possible for communities and individuals to collaborate with and develop work created by other communities and individuals.



## Why use OER in schools?

Open Educational Resources enjoy a range of social, educational and financial benefits. OER can support schools and school staff in increasing access, fostering collaboration and ensuring value for money.

By openly licensing learning materials, schools can provide additional value — making publicly funded works available for public benefit, through open and free exchange.

Education benefits from good resources, and reusing existing OER frees up time that can be spent on other aspects of teaching and learning.

At the **school level**, use of OER (instead of paid-for resources) can help reduce costs, and get the most out of existing budgets. Schools can benefit by increasing their capacity through connecting to OER networks of educators and expertise. OER (and Creative Commons licences) provide a framework on the basis of which schools can collaborate and share flexible learning materials (such as worksheets, course or textbooks) alongside innovative and effective practice. Use of OER enables schools to work together. Releasing resources under open licences promotes the often outstanding work that staff and schools are doing.

From an **educator's perspective**, OER use and creation can bring educators together and support school staff in achieving shared goals. Through sharing resources in common areas of interest, working with OER can help develop school communities. Being able to draw on multiple sources, new approaches and expertise invigorates teaching and can increase quality.

OER increases the pool of resources available for activities in the **classroom**. This can support differentiation more easily, and increase the variety of classroom activities, as well as help provide extension tasks.

OER also provide a range of benefits from a **student perspective**. They can increase the availability of free-to-access resources and supplementary materials available to learners. They can support independent and informal learning, providing educationally focused materials in areas young people are interested in learning more about, which might not be covered by the school curriculum, or might be taught on courses they aren't able to take. OER also make resources available to learners globally who may not be as well supported as UK learners.



## Further reading

This document is part of a 4-part series, available at <http://schools.leicester.gov.uk/openeducation> for download and in editable versions, alongside supplementary information sheets, workshop and classroom ideas, as well as step-by-step walk-throughs.

- For background to OER and open content: B. Haßler & T. Mays (2014). **Open Content**. An open chapter in: R. Mansell & P. Hwa (eds.), *The International encyclopedia of digital communication and society*, Wiley-Blackwell (in press).
- To find out more about Creative Commons and education (including the global context), visit <http://creativecommons.org/education>.
- The **UNESCO 2012 Paris OER Declaration** was an important milestone in the OER movement, with a number of recommendations for states to adopt, promote and collaborate on OER.

## Acknowledgements

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Our definition of an OER is based on Rory McGreal (2013), **Creating, Using and Sharing Open Educational Resources**. Inspiration for various sections came from the **Open Knowledge Open Education Handbook**, and from Butcher and Kanwar (2011), **A basic guide to open educational resources**.

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