

OEL Case Study:

University of Southern Queensland (USQ)



The University of Southern Queensland (USQ) is a medium-sized, regional university, having its main campus in Toowoomba, and two others in Springfield and Ipswich. USQ currently has 17,284 online students. This accounts for almost two-thirds of its enrolments, a proportion second highest across all Australian Universities.¹ USQ became a university in 1992 and now has two faculties: Business, Education, Law and Arts (BELA); and Health, Engineering and Sciences (HES).

The USQ positions itself as an institution that combines access with excellence in online and blended learning, offering open and flexible higher education opportunities to the communities in which it is embedded. In less than fifty years the institution has created a distinct profile of community-embedded collegiality, committed to interconnected multidisciplinary endeavours.²

1. Institutional Practices and Policies around OER

There is a high awareness of the potential of open resources and practices at USQ. This stems from the university's commitment to and experiences in the provision of flexible online learning opportunities, including personalised learning that accommodates the needs of its diverse student cohort.³

USQ's Educational Experience Plan includes a commitment to 'open and agile design and the attendant benefits of reuse, creation of derivative works, open licensing, and open standards'. The Plan seeks to adopt organisational 'policies, procedures, guidelines, and practices that assume openness as a core principle of education'. Its strategies include the development of 'a culture (artefacts, patterns, norms, and behaviours) conducive to open and agile practice and open educational practice'.⁴

1. <http://www.universityrankings.com.au/distance-education-numbers.html>

2. <https://www.usq.edu.au/about-usq/about-us/plans-reports/annual-report>

3. <http://www.usq.edu.au/open-practice/open-education/using-oer>

4. <https://www.usq.edu.au/~media/USQ/About-USQ/super-widgets/USQ%20Educational%20Experience%20Plan%20091215.ashx?la=en>

5. <http://www.oecconsortium.org/members/view/113/>

OEL Case Study: University of Southern Queensland (USQ)

2. Current (or planned) OER Initiatives

USQ is a member of the Open Education Consortium and makes its material available under a CC BY-NC-SA licence.⁵

USQ has a range of OER initiatives across various faculties, schools and services. These include:

- Support for use of OER by Learning and Teaching Services and the Library, and professional development sessions for academic and professional staff on OER and OEP⁶
- Learning Object Repository which offers options to make content openly accessible, or closed for institutional use.
- Repurposing Open Educational Resources: An Introduction, a professional development micro Open Online Course (mOOC)⁷
- Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic Services) & Chief Information Officer serve on editorial board of MOOCs Forum;
- OERu Partner and Open Education Consortium member since 2007⁸
- 2015 Learning and Teaching Grants to support open textbooks⁹
- 2016 and 2017 Learning and Teaching Grants to support Open Educational Practice
- The institution is also the only Australian university to be a member of the Open Source Initiative (OSI)¹⁰
- Development of an open source software elective that will be offered at USQ and also as an open course in collaboration with the OSI and OERu
- Active membership in the EDUCAUSE Open Constituents Group

Staff at USQ demonstrate commitment to open educational resources in the following ways:

- using openly licensed images, videos, textbooks, journal articles, and music to support student learning
- creating micro-courses (short, focused courses) that allow learners to build existing skills or pursue an academic interest area
- licencing their own work with Creative Commons licences
- repurposing professional development courses or online student support tools from other universities with a focus on contextualising for USQ courses

6. <http://www.usq.edu.au/open-practice/open-education/support-for-oer>

7. <https://open.usq.edu.au/course/view.php?id=208>

8. <http://oeru.org/oeru-partners/university-of-southern-queensland/>

9. <http://www.usq.edu.au/open-practice/open-education/using-oer>

10. <http://www.usq.edu.au/open-practice/open-education/using-oer>

OEL Case Study: University of Southern Queensland (USQ)

- providing open access to USQ research
- using open data sets for learning activities and assessment¹¹
- using Open Source Software (OSS) for the Learning Management System (LMS); namely Moodle, and the exploration and use of OSS to reduce barriers to student learning in coursework.

3. Interpretation of 'openness'

USQ subscribes to an interpretation of 'open education' wherein educational resources are freely accessible to learners within traditionally structured courses, as part of professional development courses, for personal study, or for students to share and repurpose.¹²

The university is committed to OER and Open Educational Practice (OEP). OER are defined as digitised materials offered freely and openly for educators, students and self-learners to use and reuse for teaching, learning and research.¹³ OEP are understood as teaching techniques that draw upon open technologies and high-quality OER to facilitate collaborative and flexible learning.¹⁴

USQ has been active in the 'open' arena for some time as a contributor to the OERu (a global open education consortium), EDUCAUSE Openness Constituent Group (a global network of open education and technology practitioners), the Open Education Consortium and the Open Source Initiative. It has an active cohort in the development of Open Textbooks and participates in many other openness activities in education and research. In its Open practice, USQ exercises what it describes as four important rights of open resources: reuse; revise; remix; and redistribute.¹⁵ Access to USQ OER is via its Learning Object Repository (LOR), which allows both academic and professional USQ staff the opportunity to openly licence and share their teaching and learning materials. Some of these materials have already been repurposed and reused by other Australian and US universities, Australian TAFE Colleges, and open courses.¹⁶

11. <https://www.usq.edu.au/open-practice/open-education>

12. <http://oeru.org/oeru-partners/university-of-canberra/>

13. <https://www.canvas.net/>

14. <http://guides.ou.edu/oer>

15. <https://info.canvas.net/terms-of-use#payment-and-refund-policy?seen=yy?seen=yy>

16. <http://www.usq.edu.au/open-practice/open-education/OEW2016>

OEL Case Study: University of Southern Queensland (USQ)

4. Motivations and/or barriers to engage with OER

OER are seen as a natural extension of USQ's extensive and historical investment in delivering flexible online course content, and is aligned with the institutions cohort demographic. USQ students tend to be mature age, currently employed, and are often 'first in family' to attend university. As such, lowering barriers to accessing and participating in higher education is an institutional commitment to student equity. Support for open education and OER is strong at all levels of governance, including academic and professional staff.¹⁷ It's long standing commitment in the open education space is demonstrated in USQ's 10 open courses offered in 2007 as part of the Open Education Consortium (the then MIT OpenCourseWare Consortium).¹⁸ It is also a founding anchor partner of OERu (OER universitas) in Australia. USQ continues to contribute open courses for credit.

Access to USQ OER is via the Learning Object Repository (LOR). This password protected platform allows both USQ academic and professional staff the opportunity to openly licence and share their teaching and learning materials. These materials have been repurposed and reused by other Australian and US universities, Australian TAFE Colleges, and open courses.¹⁹ The university subscribes to the aims of the open education global movement to bring education to students and teachers everywhere through quality learning materials on the internet that anyone can access for free, anytime, anywhere.

5. Envisaged outcomes of involvement with OER

Use of OER and OEP will enable USQ to provide even more flexible and personalised learning experiences for its non-traditional student cohort. Open courses for credit (offered through OERu) offer a very easy, low-commitment entry option into formal studies, another feature that benefits USQ's non-traditional student cohort in particular.

To support staff, the USQ Intellectual Property Policy is under review and revision to more effectively enable both academic and professional staff to licence and share educational materials.

OER also support the institutions reputation as a world leader in online and distance education and their re-use by other institutions is regarded as recognition of USQ's high educational standards.

17. <http://www.usq.edu.au/open-practice/open-education/OEW2016>

18. <http://www.usq.edu.au/open-practice/open-education/using-oer>

19. <http://www.usq.edu.au/open-practice/open-education/using-oer>

OEL Case Study: University of Southern Queensland (USQ)

6. Insights and Recommendations for other institutions

USQ has actively sought partnerships with other organisations and institutions to learn from, and share, open practice. OEP has become more visible since 2012, as staff are offered professional development opportunities, internal grant funding, learning and teaching support (through librarians, copyright staff, learning developers and designers), and freely and openly sharing knowledge and expertise (through the Moodle Community, for example).

Many universities have taken a rapidly visible approach to 'openness' over the last three years, especially in relation to the development and promotion of MOOCs. These platforms have been free and only narrowly open, with most lacking any formal credentialing model. USQ by contrast has been more strategic, providing a definition of openness for initiatives and then purposefully applying those principles to work with partners such as the OERu, and the OSS. The results have been a smaller number of mOOCs (micro Open Online Courses) that authentically use open resources and open licencing to create reusable learning and teaching opportunities. In some cases, (such as the OERu), these are transferable as direct credit to a university degree.

In addition to financial and already significant human resources that support openness, USQ has recently appointed a Manager (Open Educational Practice) to co-ordinate and lead operational and strategic initiatives as an institutionally consolidated approach to OEP. There is, however, already a core of expertise across the Academic Division and the Academic Services Division to support OEP.

The OEL Project is a joint research and development project between Swinburne University of Technology and the University of Tasmania. Supported by the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching.

