

# Open educational resources such as MIT's OpenCourseWare are changing the way universities make impact and engage with the world

**LSE** [blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2011/06/24/open-educational-resources-mit-opencourseware/](http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2011/06/24/open-educational-resources-mit-opencourseware/)

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*With the trend for freely available online resources now growing popular at university level, [Patrick Lockley](#) notes that the impact of such material is now of increasing interest to funding bodies. Here he discusses the key issues around the debate and provides details of some great websites which can help academics get started with increasing impact through online repositories.*



The use of open educational resources (OER) is a new approach to learning that is being taken up at all levels of the education sector, allowing teaching and learning materials to be created and then used and reused by anyone with internet access. OER sites such as [OERCommons.org](#) give limited or unrestricted licensing rights through a [Creative Commons](#) license – part of the growing movement to encourage and foster reuse of otherwise copyrighted works. At the university level, MIT now releases almost all of its course material openly through its [MIT OpenCourseWare](#) site. Almost anyone can now access MIT lecture notes, exam papers and videos. This initiative has arguably boosted people's awareness of the university, raising the profile of several contributors and undoubtedly increasing the overall impact of MIT and some of their key academics.



## Simple and quick

Using OER is as simple as uploading a file. [Jorum](#) is a nationally funded e-learning repository of OER, and can be used by any UK academic. Videos can be uploaded to Youtube, lectures can be uploaded as podcasts or through [ItunesU](#), and lecture notes could be placed into [slideshare](#) or [scribd](#). All these sites provide innovative systems for distributing educational content.

There is every chance you or someone you know is already doing this – and if not, these are skills for which the associated sites are built to help you do, after all, it is their raison d'être. Some academic channels on Youtube are more popular than premiership football clubs (see [Martyn Poliakoff's Youtube pages](#) for example), and others have won their authors prestigious awards such as the [Times Higher Education Leadership & Management awards](#), and so offer distinct scope to increase academic "impact".

Additionally, sites such as the LSE Impact Blog one could submit their RSS feed to [Jorum](#) and [Xpert](#), which are the two main UK OER repositories. In the USA and the rest of the world, [OER Commons](#) and [Folksemantic](#) are great places to put your content so it can be discovered, and also great places to look for content you might use.

## Oxford research

It seems likely that the impact of freely available online scholarly resources is now of increasing interest to funding bodies, universities, and the academics originally producing the resources. As part of a JISC-funded [Usage and Impact Study](#), the [Oxford Internet Institute](#) have evaluated the usage and impact of digitised resources, aiming to improve the embedding of such resources within teaching, learning and research. The study explored whether digital resources are succeeding at reaching their intended users, whether they are having an impact on their community of users, and how this impact might be measured.



During the project, researchers carried out an impact analysis of five specific resources: the [Online Historical Population Reports \(Histpop\)](#) at the UK Data Archive; the collection of [19th Century British Newspapers](#) at the British Library; [Archival Sound Recordings](#) at the British Library; [18th Century Parliamentary Papers](#) at the British Official Publications Collaborative Reader Information Service (BOPCRIS); and [Medical Journals Backfiles Digitisation](#) at the Wellcome Trust.

The programme produced a [Toolkit for the Impact of Digitised Scholarly Resources](#), which offers content owners a flexible methodological framework within which to conduct impact analysis of digitised collections.

### **Increasing the value of resources**

There are arguments that releasing materials for free denigrates the value of educational resources. These arguments are perhaps akin to piracy and “[home taping is killing music](#)” – but for those who are seeking new and experimental ways of finding out about impact, choosing to use OER and publishing research to open journals are surely key ways to push out the impact of academic work and instead increase the value of educational resources.

**Pat Lockley** works in the field of E-learning and Open Educational Resources. Whilst at Nottingham, Pat helped to develop the [Xpert](#) and [Xpert Attributor](#). Now at Oxford, Pat is working on [Politics In Spires](#).

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