Chapter 19
Collaborating over Rich Media: The Open University and BBC Partnership

Andy Lane
The Open University, UK

Andrew Law
The Open University, UK

ABSTRACT
Open Educational Resources comprise many types of assets, including rich media. However, dynamic rich media offer different opportunities and challenges for learners, teachers, and higher education institutions alike than do more static items such as text. The Open University in the UK (OUUK) has been extensively developing and using rich media in collaboration with the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) for its distance teaching and outreach programmes since it was established in 1969. As new media technologies have arrived, so have the capabilities of the OUUK and the BBC to create rich media in partnership and make them openly accessible. This chapter describes these developments and then discusses the approaches and evidence required to guide them in a way that both serves the BBC, the OUUK, the higher education sector, and the wider community. It concludes that rich media are an essential part of the developing OER landscape and that openly sharing them brings defined benefits to an HEI beyond their traditional student body.

INTRODUCTION
Open educational resources (OER) comprise many types of assets including dynamic rich media (audio or video tracks, animations, and podcasts) with channels such as iTunesU and YouTube EDU partly dedicated to such media. However dynamic rich media offer different opportunities and challenges for learners, teachers and higher education institutions alike than do more static items such as text, slides and graphics. They offer technical and pedagogical challenges to teachers and learning challenges to students. They are relatively easy to use ‘as-is’ but more
difficult to re-purpose. They can be more costly in money and effort to produce than more static media and in principle would benefit from being shared with others or collaboratively developed to save on such costs. So what value do rich media provide to higher education institutions and how should they use them as OER?

The Open University in the UK (OUUK) has been extensively developing and using rich media in its distance teaching programmes since it was established in 1969. It has particularly benefitted from a longstanding partnership with the public service British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) who have helped both in the development of certain rich media but also provided free to air broadcasting slots for radio and television programmes, originally aimed only at students (but with a wider drop-in viewing audience) and latterly with a more explicit public engagement remit. As new media technologies have arrived so that relationship has developed, as has the capabilities of the OUUK itself to create rich media in other ways and with other partners. In 1999 the OUUK and the BBC collaborated on a UK focussed website (Open2.net) that supported the broadcast programmes. In 2006 the university entered the formal OER world with the launch of OpenLearn. In 2008 it began its iTunesU and YouTube channels. In 2010 it has brought all this activity under the OpenLearn brand and continues to develop its ‘broadcast strategy’ in a multiplatform world, where interaction with ‘viewers’ is more two-way than ever before.

While the initial start up costs for OpenLearn were mostly covered by an external grant from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation most of this 40 or so years of activity has been funded through the University’s internal resources gained from teaching grant and student fee income. The OUUK has therefore always looked strategically at what this involvement with public facing rich media does to further the mission of the University. This chapter first outlines the major characteristics of the University and the BBC, gives a brief history of their joint work on public broadcasting and use of new technologies, particularly ICTs, then describes these strategic considerations and finally discusses the approaches and evidence required to guide and shape strategy in a way that both serves the University, the BBC and the wider higher education community. It concludes that rich media are an essential part of the developing OER landscape and that openly sharing them brings defined benefits to an HEI beyond their traditional student body, but that media organisations, whether public or private have yet to face up to the challenges of an OER world.

THE OPEN UNIVERSITY’S EDUCATIONAL COMPETENCIES

The Open University in the UK is open to people, places, methods and ideas. It promotes educational opportunity and social justice by providing high quality education to all those who wish to realize their ambitions and fulfil their potential. Through academic research, pedagogic innovation and collaborative partnership it seeks to be a world leader in the design, content and delivery of supported open and distance learning (see http://www.open.ac.uk/about/ou/p2.shtml for more details about the OUUK).

As the UK’s only university dedicated to using open and distance learning for its taught programmes, and the first ‘open university’ to be created in the world, the OUUK has pioneered methods for large-scale delivery of educational opportunities through what it calls ‘supported open learning’, whereby it adds a wide range of support services (for example information, advice and guidance, tuition, assessment, credit rating, credit transfer, specialized hardware and software for disabled students) around the specially developed educational materials that students need to study:

- It services more than a quarter of a million students each year;
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