



## Community, Fellowship, Openness: Supporting Early Career Researchers through Open Educational Practices

*Comunidad, Becas, Apertura: Apoyando Investigadores Junior a través de Prácticas Educativas Abiertas*

 Francisco Iniesto; [francisco.iniesto@open.ac.uk](mailto:francisco.iniesto@open.ac.uk)

 Rebecca Pitt; [beck.pitt@open.ac.uk](mailto:beck.pitt@open.ac.uk)

 Carina Bossu; [carina.bossu@open.ac.uk](mailto:carina.bossu@open.ac.uk)

 Rob Farrow; [rob.farrow@open.ac.uk](mailto:rob.farrow@open.ac.uk)

 Martin Weller; [martin.weller@open.ac.uk](mailto:martin.weller@open.ac.uk)

Institute of Educational Technology, The Open University (United Kingdom)

### Abstract

Open communities are an increasingly common feature of educational spaces. This article summarises the experience of a fellowship scheme for early career researchers in open education supported by The Global OER Graduate Network (GO-GN), an international network to support doctoral candidates. Nine fellows over a three-year period were supported to conduct six-month personal projects to facilitate their academic career development post-doctoral studies. The fellowship scheme was structured into three, annual cohorts between 2020 and 2022.

Results from qualitative surveys and interviews indicate a positive and meaningful impact of the scheme. A key aspect of this type of initiative is the support given by more experienced academics and peer fellows. The fellowship scheme enabled the sharing of research among other PhD students and early career researchers through regular webinars and to broader audiences at internationally recognised conferences.

The results of this paper are of potential interest to those supporting doctoral researchers and organisations interested in running similar fellowships or other support schemes for doctoral researchers or other stakeholder groups.

**Keywords:** *fellowship, early career, open education, open educational practices*

### Resumen

*Las comunidades abiertas son un cada vez más comunes en espacios educativos. Este artículo resume la experiencia de un esquema de becas para investigadores junior en educación abierta respaldado por La Red Global de Estudiantes de Doctorado en Educación Abierta (GO-GN), una red internacional que apoya a candidatos doctorales. Nueve becados durante un período de tres años recibieron apoyo para realizar proyectos individuales de seis meses para facilitar sus estudios posdoctorales para el desarrollo de su carrera académica. El esquema de becas se estructuró en tres cohortes anuales entre 2020 y 2022.*

*Los resultados de las encuestas cualitativas y entrevistas indican un impacto positivo y significativo del plan. Los aspectos clave de estas iniciativas son el apoyo brindado por académicos y colegas más experimentados. El esquema de becas permitió compartir la investigación entre otros estudiantes doctorales e investigadores junior a través de seminarios web y con una audiencia más amplia en conferencias reconocidas internacionalmente.*

*Los resultados de este artículo son de interés potencial para aquellos que apoyan a los investigadores doctorales y a las organizaciones interesadas en administrar becas similares u otros esquemas de apoyo para investigadores doctorales u otros grupos interesados.*

**Palabras clave:** *becas, investigadores junior, educación abierta, prácticas educativas abiertas*



## 1 INTRODUCTION

In the context of education, free and open exchange increases access to knowledge for everyone, everywhere, at any time (Bozkurt, 2019). Open education aims to make it easier for learners to access knowledge. This can be achieved by providing open educational resources (OER) (Marín & Villar-Onrubia, 2022), online platforms, and services to connect communities of learners and educators. Bozkurt et al. (2019) found in their review of trends that openness can be understood as a cluster of related concepts (e.g. open education; open learning; OER; open educational practices (OEP)) where there is increasing interest. Bozkurt and Zawacki-Richter (2021) similarly found that open approaches have provided distance learning institutions with fresh purpose.

OEP can take many forms and shapes. The diversity of OEP can be understood as a strength but also entails that approaches can be diffuse and contextual. Some (e.g. Beetham et al. 2012) have described OEP as arising from the use of OER. Such practices consolidate scholarly and practical practices around OER, using them as a focal point to facilitate innovation and collaboration in learning, teaching and research beyond traditional academic boundaries (Hegarty, 2015). Increasingly, however, such open approaches seem to be broadened to include wider goals such as social justice and the expression of inclusive values (Lambert, 2018; Bali et al., 2020). OEP thus increasingly represent a move away from open content creation only to a more diverse open practice approach, which includes (but is not limited to) collaboration, design, teaching and research in openness (Bossu & Stagg, 2018; Cronin, 2018; Ehlers, 2011; Pulker & Kukulska-Hulme, 2020).

In this paper, we explore a fellowship scheme for early career researchers in open education as an example of OEP. This fellowship scheme is one of the activities supported by GO-GN. The Global OER Graduate Network (GO-GN, n.d.) is a network of doctoral candidates around the world whose research projects include a focus on open education, including OER and OEP. GO-GN started in 2013 and is funded by The Hewlett Foundation and managed by The OER Hub (a team of open education researchers) based at The Open University (UK). GO-GN currently has 145 members and alumni, with 29% of the membership based in the Global South (Weller et al. 2022). Doctoral researchers are at the core of the network; around them, experts, supervisors, mentors and interested parties connect to form a community of practice.

The GO-GN network organises and funds an annual face-to-face workshop and offers regular webinars and online events to members and the broad open education community. These activities help to showcase members' research and to provide a supportive and collegial environment for students. In addition to the events, GO-GN also produces resources and publications to support members' research in open education, including a *Research Methods Handbook* (Farrow et al., 2020); *Conceptual Frameworks Guide* (Farrow et al., 2021) and *Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in Open Education* (Bossu et al., 2023). While there are similar doctoral networks, such as the Open Research Fellows (OpenEdGroup, n.d.) and the Global Doctoral Consortium (ICDE, n.d.), GO-GN is the only example to foreground openness in practice as a core feature of the network. Respectful sharing and mutual support are encouraged within the GO-GN network, and members are encouraged to explore different forms and values associated with open practice.

While GO-GN was initially created to support doctoral students during their PhD studies, recent developments led the network to offer opportunities for those who were in transition from being a student to becoming professionals, including academics, researchers, and practitioners. This transition can bring frustration, uncertainty and insecurities to former doctoral students, as some see themselves in unstable professional circumstances, such as temporary, and part-time contracts (Ackers & Gill, 2005). The GO-GN fellowship scheme was therefore designed to assist former doctoral students who have previously engaged with the network to expand their research through activities that would benefit their careers. Nine fellows over a three-year period were supported to conduct six-month personal projects in open education to facilitate their academic career development post-doctoral studies. Here, we also present results from qualitative surveys and interviews with former fellows, which revealed the different ways in which they were supported. We also reflect on lessons learnt from running the fellowship scheme and what improvements were made to the scheme during the three-year duration.

The discussions in this paper can be of interest to those supporting similar OEP communities, including doctoral, postdoctoral and early-career researchers. We also framed the discussions using the OpenEdu framework (Inamorato dos Santos et al., 2016), which is a framework created to support higher education institutions and decision-makers to make informed decisions regarding open education and OEP. In the present paper, we employ the OpenEdu framework to propose design implications for similar OEP initiatives and future fellowship schemes.

## 2 BACKGROUND

The transition from doctoral to postdoctoral roles can add stress and uncertainty to early career researchers (Castellacci & Viñas-Bardolet, 2021). A number of challenges are reported for early career researchers, who are academics at the beginning of their careers. One of the challenges they face is that some take roles that do not reflect their research expertise and related experiences. Another challenge is that some are expected to work overtime for little or no paid hours (Allmer, 2018). Gender inequality seems also to be an issue amongst newly graduated academics because of differences in salaries and responsibilities (Casad et al., 2021). These challenges have been aggravated by the Covid-19 pandemic and its impact on Higher Education and its institutions as jobs are scarce and workloads are high (Kim & Patterson, 2022).

Evidence from studies like Fontinha et al. (2018) where authors surveyed data from 510 academics and researchers working in eight UK Universities confirmed the significant differences between permanent and temporary workers regarding tenure. Passaretta et al. (2019) examined the mid-term occupational outcomes of two cohorts of PhDs who graduated in Italy, showing that academic reforms and economic crisis coincide with decreasing employment in academia and increasing chances of having part-time contracts, being employed abroad and working in research-related occupations outside academia.

Given this context and challenges, focusing on facilitating programmes that can ease the jump from PhD to a post-doctoral position as a researcher or lecturer may be key. This appears to be the case in medicine (Beaulieu et al., 2022; Searle et al., 2006), for example, and could be extended to other disciplines including open education. In doing so, such schemes have the potential to:

1. Increase the research networks of those involved in fellowship programmes.
2. Facilitate the publication of joint research articles and submission of bids for funding.
3. Enable post-doctoral researchers to assume principal investigator roles.

The GO-GN fellowship scheme is not the only fellowship of this kind available, other open education schemes were created to support those engaging with open educational practices and related initiatives. For example, the Open Education Influencers (n.d.) at Nelson Mandela University recruit open education community voluntary mentors to support colleagues and activities within the institution itself. The annual OER Research Fellowships, managed by the OER Research Group (OpenEdGroup, n.d.), focus on increasing the range of research into the impact of OER and provision of mentorship for a broad range of successful applicants including faculty and doctoral researchers. The North West University OERs Fellowship was an opportunity for interested university staff to include new openly licensed online resources in their classes to receive support and funding for creating or adapting open learning content as well as researching the process (Olivier et al., 2022).

Although the initiatives above support practitioners to get involved in open education (research and development) and also provide opportunities to build communities of practice around open practices, the GO-GN fellowship scheme seems to be the only one that specifically focuses on supporting, including financially, early career researchers working on open education during their post-doctorate years. This also means that the findings of this research is of great significance and makes a contribution to the existing body of knowledge in open education.

### 3 METHOD

The GO-GN Fellowship scheme launched in 2020 and ran over a three-year duration (2020-2022) (Iniesto et al, 2022). GO-GN conducts an annual evaluation survey where a recurrent claim from members is to provide more support for those finishing their doctoral studies through to becoming alumni (Weller et al., 2022). The motivation for the fellowship scheme, therefore, was to provide support for, and formal recognition of, members after they have formally finished their doctoral studies. The Fellowship scheme provides visibility and a way for alumni to share their expertise openly in the network and beyond.

The scheme aimed to encourage and recognise mentoring, content production, and network activity for alumni. Therefore, the scheme intended to foster connections to other networks, promote GO-GN at strategic events and promote GO-GN equity, diversity, and inclusion guidelines (Bossu et al., 2023). Reflective of the GO-GN network's overall strategy to increase awareness and membership in the Global South, fellowships also focused on specific regions or countries, amplifying local knowledge and connections while increasing the prominence of the network. In this sense, the scheme expanded on what has worked well previously in recruiting researchers to collaborate with GO-GN, providing a means to keep alumni involved and recognise their work.

Initially, the scheme launch had to be delayed and reorganised due to the Covid-19 pandemic, to acknowledge that travelling for network promotion and face-to-face research could be limited. Consequently, suggested activities fellows could submit proposals for included:

- Undertaking a piece of targeted OER/OEP-related research.
- Producing an overview of OER activity in a region.
- Strategic events identification, fostering connections to other networks and promotion of GO-GN.
- Recruitment of new GO-GN members.

Support was provided for successful fellowship proposals in a number of ways. First, through a financial stipend to support fellowship activities. Second, via promotion of fellowship activities through the GO-GN website and social media. Third, regular check-in points were offered to fellows with the programme leader and team to discuss progress and see if any support was needed. In addition, all fellows presented their research proposals online at “fellows research special” sessions, which were regular GO-GN webinar slots dedicated to the scheme. All cohorts participated in a discussion panel to reflect on their experiences (GO-GN, n.d.). The first cohort presented the results of their fellowship projects at OER21xDomains conference, the second at OE Global 2021 and the third at OER22 where GO-GN were conference co-chairs. Those who were able to attend and present their work at these conferences received financial support from GO-GN by having their registrations covered. Fellows were requested to provide three blog posts for the GO-GN website and the production of an output review report at the end of the fellowship.

### 3.1 Sample

The fellowship scheme was a competitive process open to GO-GN alumni (within three years after completing their doctorate) to apply. The application form, reviewed by the GO-GN team, focused on two main areas:

1. Postdoctoral background. The applicant should detail research after the doctorate, networks, and research groups they have collaborated with, current role and connection with networks to expand GO-GN.
2. Fellowship. Provision of a summary of the fellowship idea, the main actions to prioritise during the fellowship, a timeline with those actions and a preliminary budget.

For the 2020 call for participation, there were five applicants, four in 2021 and three in 2022. Applicants selected were invited to an interview with the team. There were four fellows selected in the 2020 cohort, two in 2021 and three in 2022. Selected fellows were from different parts of the globe, including Africa (Kenya), North (Canada x2) and South America (Brazil and Uruguay), Europe (The UK and Ireland) and Oceania (Australia x2). One-third of the total fellows were from the Global South as made explicit in the call.

The fellows' research proposals - all of which focus on some aspect of openness in education - exemplified the range of schemes, with most of them being proposals displaying continuity with themes, conceptual frameworks and methods used in their doctoral research. Other approaches were also proposed, for example, developing OER outputs through community co-creation, and the initiation of an open knowledge network. A detailed overview of each of the GO-GN fellows' experiences can be found in Iniesto et al (2022).

### 3.2 Research method

All nine fellows and the GO-GN team attended a kick-off, a midterm, and an end-of-fellowship meeting. A feedback survey was completed as part of the midterm and end-of-fellowship meetings. Surveys were completed by fellows a few days before the meeting so the GO-GN team could prepare for the session. In all meetings at least two members of the team were present.

In both qualitative surveys, fellows were asked to identify “achievements”, “risks”, “impact”, “support needed from GO-GN” and “lessons learnt”. In the final survey, extra questions were included to prompt “dissemination” and “next steps after the fellowship”. At the end of the scheme, during July, August and September 2022, fellows were invited to participate in a 30-minute interview which covered two main topics: “the fellowship experience” and “their views as GO-GN members”. The first topic, which is of interest to this research, covered the following questions:

1. What worked well during your fellowship? What could have been improved?
2. What was the biggest takeaway from your fellowship?
3. Were there any challenges? How did you overcome these?
4. How did GO-GN support you during the fellowship?
5. Has having a GO-GN fellowship benefitted you and your work in any way?
6. What advice would you give to anyone considering a GO-GN fellowship?

All fellows signed a consent form to use their data for research purposes. Thematic analysis was the approach used to analyse data gathered through open questions (Gavin, 2008).

## 4 RESULTS

Data from the mid-term survey, final survey and interview were anonymised, following Braun and Clarke (2019). The thematic analysis process involved a deductive approach where themes were identified and clustered manually. The first two authors reviewed potential themes using references and frequencies. Finally, the themes were compared with the original data to see if they were appropriate for interpretation. The four key themes identified in the analysis were:

1. Risks and challenges. These involve all the problems identified by the fellows to design and carry over their proposal.
2. Learning process. This theme includes all the reflections on what and how fellows have learnt during their fellowship.
3. Impact and career development. Publications, sharing, public engagement and career development from the fellows during the fellowship and their future plans.
4. Support. Reflections on the help and guidance provided by the team, other fellows, and members of the open community.

The following subsections detail the four key themes with quotes. (Names from fellows have been anonymised considering their low number and potential identification.)



## 4.1 Risks and challenges

When analysing the data from both surveys and the interviews, it was clear that one of the risks considered by fellows was related to uncertainties brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic:

*“I think the main risks were in the possibility of conducting the interviews. It took me a lot of work and required a lot of persistence to do them, and the teachers attended the interviews during their working hours at the school.”* (Midterm survey)

The pandemic seems to have affected their research, including complexities in finding participants but ultimately, they received good feedback from those involved considering the complex context:

*“Amazing engagement with the current rhetoric around pedagogy and student engagement in culturally charged issues. I’m finding many students appreciate the design and interactions they afford.”* (Final survey)

*“It was done during the pandemic when everyone was busy, so that was a challenge, everyone who was involved said that it was an oasis of happiness during these difficult times.”* (Interview)

One key challenge reported by fellows was that some research plans had to be redesigned because of an underestimation of the amount of work and the limitation of six months to complete the fellowship, as exemplified in the quotes below:

*“It has been a real struggle and at some point, the task seemed to be too big and unrealistic.”* (Final survey)

*“My research project was a new project, it wasn’t something I had started before my fellowship began, the six months timeframe was somewhat short for my project (...) I think being able to have a slightly longer time to do my particular project would have been better.”* (Interview)

## 4.2 Learning process

Even with time constraints, the fellowship scheme was proven to offer flexibility:

*“I think having a better flexibility as well the touch zones, having the blogposts that worked as a diary, that was helpful to keep accountable to a broader audience but also the team was very flexible with me, taking a bit more time to collect more data and add to my analysis, that was very helpful to me.”* (Interview)

Some fellows used their fellowship as an opportunity to receive additional support and engage with new methodologies to expand their research knowledge, as explained by the participant below:

*“Another thing that worked well, is the support being able to reach out and for more skilled development support I didn’t get during my PhD, when you are doing your PhD, you focus on one methodology and one kind of analysis and I was using a new analysis I haven’t used before, this was helpful to get my head around another form of analysis.”* (Interview)

Sharing the fellowship proposal in the webinars within the GO-GN community and disseminating it at conferences was considered a good experience:

*“The fellowship was a great opportunity to reconnect with the GO-GN network and share the fellowship idea early on through an online session where we could present our half-cooked ideas and get tremendous feedback from the group, which is not something common in other contexts. We presented at a conference and also got tremendous feedback from an even broader community.”* (Interview)

As well as an opportunity to reconnect with the network, *“The fellowship brought the structure that enabled me to connect, I’d be thinking about who in the network would be useful to touch base with and to consider”* (Interview). While lessons learnt involved understanding the value and improvement of OEPs:

*“I always seek to publish open access but have been less open about sharing the early stages of a project. Through the fellowship, I’ve seen how sharing those initial research ideas, sketches, and plans can be formative and beneficial. Getting feedback from a larger population in the early stages of a project can improve the process.”* (Final survey)

Collaboration with stakeholders has not ended with the fellowship and fellows anticipate continuing their research in Open Education:

*“Throughout the fellowship, I’ve been able to identify some allies and individuals who have similar interests in bringing Open Education into teacher training programs. I hope to develop these relationships further.”* (Final survey)

Collaboration was also identified as an enabler of equity and inclusion, several fellows decided to involve more researchers in the team to support the community approach:

*“Flexible collaborative working practices provide a valuable breathing space, enable diverse voices to be heard and create room for inclusion, invention and imaginative thinking, problem-solving and expression.”* (Final survey)



*“I turned my fellowship into a collaborative project, and I was very happy that I did because it enriched the experience in the journey but also the output, the diversity of ideas helped and being open, there were disagreements, but they were used in a constructive way to learn from each other” (Interview)*

### 4.3 Impact and career development

Regarding impact, fellows considered their fellowship outputs to be useful for policy making, supporting teachers and being more in touch with other alumni:

*“I think the fellowship will have a significant impact. It will give visibility to the enormous work that teachers have done [in open education], and relevance to their voice seldom heard in the story of educational continuity during Covid-19.” (Final survey)*

As well as having an impact on their careers by improving their CV:

*“If you read my CV now and before are two different things, in this University even though I have not been promoted I am holding the ‘researcher of the year’ [award] at the University.” (Interview)*

As for including more practical experience for their career development, fellows explained:

*“It has given me a lot more practice on talking about what I do and elevating the pitch, through the fellowship the ability to gather evidence to keep centring student voices and to make that part of an open practice has helped to articulate the value of that a lot”. (Interview)*

The fellowship was also an opportunity for career development during times of uncertainty when jobs were affected due to the pandemic, *“Because I just finished my PhD the year beforehand, I was feeling I should have a post-doc lined up, nothing was going on and there was Covid” (Interview), and:*

*“The fellowship came at a very challenging time we had been through Covid and there was a lot of redundancy and uncertainty, it was very important that we come together and found ways for open education to progress and to maintain hopeful about what could be achieved within HE so for me the fellowship enabled me to stay connected to the network internationally at the time where I was feeling very isolated.” (Interview)*

### 4.4 Support

In terms of support, the flexibility of the scheme, critical feedback and having multiple conversations with GO-GN team members were reported as helpful support, as demonstrated by the quotes below:

*“The support from GO-GN was multifaceted and very important. I engaged in different types of community work, but I have never been an open education professional. (...) As a GO-GN fellow, I can share the work we are doing together with this network as an open education researcher.” (Interview)*

*“GO-GN was there through the process, we had critical conversations, we had the opportunity to share the thoughts and the product at different stages, and we got very critical feedback, but this is exactly what we needed.” (Interview)*

The level of support received was recognised to the extent that fellows recommended the fellowship scheme to future GO-GN graduated alumni:

*“The fellowship is so broad and applies to recent graduates, graduates from a few years ago, small projects, larger projects, single projects, and collaborative projects, so my advice is please consider it if you are a GO-GN graduate or soon-to-be graduate cause it is for anyone to further their work in the area of Open Education” (Interview)*

One of the reasons for this could be that the network is supportive of fellows and their proposals even if they are varied or were not in the original call:

*“Go for it, if you are considering it, you probably already know the network well, one thing I’ve always talked about with GO-GN members is how isolating is doing doctoral research in your home institution, (...). If you know all that you can do a fellowship and have so great support and motivation to reconnect with the network, the fellowship is a great place to participate and look for other opportunities to give back to the network.” (Interview)*

The fellowship also allows for creativity and different research in a research-funded project, suggestions from fellows were to apply to similar available schemes:

*“I’d tell them like any research you go with an idea but you may not get the answer to what you think you are looking for, and that is OK, the fellowship is an opportunity to explore things that you want to do, it is more like your dissertation because it is not restricted by outside forces, you get to choose what direction you want to go in so it is a really good opportunity to do something you are passionate about.” (Interview)*

## 5 DISCUSSION

This section discusses the key themes presented above, explores some of the lessons learnt, and the design implications for future offerings of fellowship schemes.

Feedback from the qualitative data has been mostly positive, as the fellowship has been a supportive experience for participants' career progress and development. Key findings from the fellowship scheme, as reported by the “risk and challenges” theme, include the need to build flexibility into the scheme so as to a) support innovative proposals that are beyond the anticipated scope of the scheme and b) enable more flexible timelines to accommodate unforeseen delays and opportunities.

The “learning process” involved the facilitation of new and innovative ideas and openly sharing those with other members to receive constructive and helpful feedback. The fellowship scheme has been proven to be a learning experience for all fellows and the GO-GN team. Being open in terms of sharing research ideas and providing feedback requires openness in communication and willingness to make changes from all parties – these are all elements of an authentic open educational practice initiative. In addition, the trusting relationships with fellows and the nature of the network itself have been essential for the success of individual fellows and their projects

For the “Impact and career development”, we need to appreciate that the fellowships are unique in context, design and impact. The metrics of success for a fellowship vary as each fellowship has had different types of impact on individuals (e.g. increased appreciation of open practices or impact on career recognition) as well as resulting in the production of specific research outputs or assets.

In terms of “support”, it is evident from the results presented that there is a clear need to provide consistent support to fellows through regular contact and meetings with the scheme lead team. This support seems to have kept them motivated and helped with their research progress. The frequent meetings between the fellows and the GO-GN team also created a collegial environment where creativity and curiosity could flourish. These are probably some of the reasons why some of the fellows recommended this fellowship scheme to future ones interested in expanding their knowledge in open education.

In order to reflect on the implications of this experience and research findings, we have mapped our findings with the core and transversal dimensions of the OpenEdu framework (Inamorato dos Santos et al., 2016) for academic career development. This framework has been selected because it offers opportunities for further reflection on our project findings and its alignment with OEP principles. The aim is to deepen reflections on improvements for design and implementation for future offerings of this or other similar OEP initiatives.

Table 1 summarises the description of core dimensions associated with making personal and network practices more “open”. Highlights include focus on fair equal access, open innovative proposals, facilitates open pedagogies, recognition, collaboration, and supports the development of open research skills.

**Table 1.**

*Core OpenEdu dimensions and design suggestions*

Dimension	Design suggestions
Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Support and facilitate access to participants of the Global South (add a quota if necessary).</li> <li>● Send tailored individual messages to possible applicants to encourage their participation/raise awareness of the call, particularly to facilitate Global South participation.</li> <li>● Make the call available through several channels and resources (i.e., not everyone uses Twitter), for example, newsletters and multiple social media.</li> <li>● Make available a repository of similar experiences for candidates to reflect on their proposals.</li> <li>● Organise informal meetings to discuss the scheme and proposals with potential candidates.</li> <li>● Include financial support.</li> </ul>
Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ensure that the scope of the fellowship is broad to support innovative proposals.</li> <li>● Support open practices and look for opportunities to suggest open approaches as part of the fellowship scheme.</li> <li>● Provide various spaces and ways for fellows to share their experiences and outputs (e.g. webinars, blog posts).</li> <li>● Outputs produced from the scheme (reports, blog posts, presentations...) should be openly licensed to enable dissemination and encourage reuse.</li> </ul>
Pedagogy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Introduce activities that allow self-reflection such as blog production or research diaries.</li> <li>● Suggest opportunities to incorporate more open approaches and practices within a fellowship.</li> </ul>
Recognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Fellows should be recognised publicly, via a website, badge or certificate that can be linked to their CV.</li> <li>● Opportunities to fast-track other aspects of the network’s activity (such as producing non-English language versions of leaflets to promote the network) may also present themselves during the fellowship and should be supported accordingly.</li> <li>● Individual fellowship expertise and experience of their context and community should be prioritised and can yield important insights for the network beyond the fellowship remit.</li> </ul>
Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Activities that promote collaboration between fellows themselves should be promoted (meetings, internal presentations, conference presentations).</li> <li>● Regular meetings between the fellowship scheme team and fellows to capture feedback and motivation should be scheduled.</li> </ul>
Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Facilitate the presentation at international conferences and journals, including the possibility to have a special issue in an open journal.</li> <li>● Enable and support the development of skills for research projects such as proposal design, project management etc. through fellowship schemes.</li> </ul>

The transversal dimensions of open education cover 'how' educational practices are opened up (Table 2). Notably, designing an OEP fellowship scheme requires strategic, technological, quality assessment and leadership aspects.

**Table 2**

Transversal OpenEdu dimensions and design suggestions

Dimension	Design suggestions
Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider aspects such as the length of the fellowships and if there are vacation periods in between that may impact initial plans/schedules</li> <li>List conferences happening during the fellowships so fellows can present and increase their networks.</li> <li>Implement equity, diversity and inclusion guidelines from the start.</li> </ul>
Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use tools that promote interaction when people are in different countries and even continents, so as to enable collaboration despite time differences and access to the Internet.</li> </ul>
Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Include mid-term and final surveys, and interviews to capture and improve the experience and act on feedback to improve further iterations of the scheme.</li> </ul>
Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Empower fellows with the ownership of their research and implications for their career development.</li> </ul>

## 6 CONCLUSIONS

Koseoglu and Bozkurt (2018) in their literature review explored two major strands of OEP research: those who discuss OEP in the context of OER, mostly in terms of their creation, adoption, and use, and those who discuss OEP concerning other areas, including open scholarship, open learning, and open teaching or pedagogy. The second strand applies to the fellowship scheme for early career researchers in open education presented. The scheme exemplified OEP considering the open research processes followed by fellows, the team, and external participants. Those involved (1) sharing research planning, data, and analysis among the stakeholders and (2) providing continuous feedback in meetings, webinars, and public presentations. Those aspects allowed reflection and critical thinking for those involved which benefits the impact of open research and career development.

Despite incorporating flexibility in the scope and duration of individual fellowships, some current limitations and improvements to consider are the six-month duration and one-call-per-year model. This implies that fellows need to have a proposal ready when the call opens; a more flexible programme could be implemented in the future with a more agile approach. It is also important to consider that some alumni may need additional support - whilst the GO-GN fellowship scheme worked with recognised GO-GN alumni with experience and who are well-established in the field, how best to support those with less experience or specific needs may also need to be considered.

As reported in the literature the transition from a doctoral degree to an academic position can be complicated for early career researchers including stressful situations (Ackers & Gill, 2005; Castellacci & Viñas-Bardolet, 2021). Opportunities to work together with peers and experts seem an appropriate approach to address inequality (Casad et al., 2021) and such schemes also develop or further hone research and project management skills. Fellowship schemes need to consider their key audience, different stakeholders and ways to support potential candidates. For that purpose, when designing the scheme, it is important to reflect on how to support equity, diversity and inclusion by considering the varied background, needs and cultures of candidates (Bossu et al., 2023).

Moreover, whether and how different stakeholder groups can provide support for each other or collaborate following OEP is also important to consider. In the instance of GO-GN, for example, there is a potential opportunity to involve our experts and friends in any future fellowship scheme as mentors. For fellowship schemes such as GO-GN, which focus on OEP, consideration of how best to encourage, support and foreground OEP values and practices in open research is core to the network's mission. In this paper, we contribute to bridging the gap in the literature regarding the impact of such schemes on postdoctoral researchers' career progression in open education and related fields. For that reason, we have proposed a set of lessons learnt and design implications that will hopefully be useful for the practical implementation of similar schemes enacting open educational practices and values in a particular context.

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