

Opening Remarks: Europe OER Regional Consultation



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Honourable Ministers, Excellencies, Distinguished Colleagues, Ladies & Gentlemen

A very warm welcome to each one of you joining us for the regional consultation on OER for Europe. This is the second in the series of six consultations. The Commonwealth of Learning is organising these in partnership with UNESCO and the government of Slovenia with generous support from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

Let me begin by thanking the Hon Evarist Bartolo, Minister for Education and Employment, for hosting this meeting here in Valetta. Malta has always played a key role in the Commonwealth. I recall being here in November 2015, when the Commonwealth Heads of Government met for their biennial meeting. One important outcome of the visit was the establishment of the Commonwealth Centre for Connected Learning, a bridge between the Commonwealth and the European Union. Alex Grech the dynamic director, will take this forward.

The Commonwealth has 52 member states that span all regions of the globe, representing the rich diversity of our world. The three European members are Cyprus, Malta and the UK. But it's good to see a representation from 24 countries here today. As you know, the Commonwealth of Learning or COL is an intergovernmental organisation created by Commonwealth Heads of Government with our headquarters in Metro Vancouver and a regional office in New Delhi. Our mission is to help Commonwealth member states and institutions to use technologies for expanding access to quality education and training. COL believes that learning is the key to sustainable development.

Last year the world community adopted the 17 SDGs. SDG 4 aspires to promote equitable and quality education and lifelong learning for all by 2030. Early reports indicate that many countries will fall way behind this target. Therefore innovative approaches are needed to achieve both speed and scale. We believe that OER have tremendous potential for increasing access and lowering the costs of quality education. The theme of these consultations is 'OER for equitable and quality education: from commitment to action'.

COL was promoting the development and sharing of open content long before the term OER was coined in 2002. For example, COL worked with 140 teachers in 8 southern African countries to develop 46 teacher training modules. This content was uploaded on Afristar and could be downloaded for free use and reuse by anyone anywhere in Africa. COL's approach has been to open up education by sharing content, developing capacity and promoting collaboration. Openness has always been part of COL's DNA.

This is something that we share with our partners UNESCO. Many of you will recall the World OER Congress that we organised jointly in 2012. We share a long-standing partnership based on complementarity and clear division of labour. For example, UNESCO has a high level Competency Framework for Teachers and COL created the open educational resources to develop these competencies. These resources were then deployed for teacher training in the Caribbean. The joint UNESCO-COL publications on OER are used globally and available in a number of languages. Its good to see Indrajit Banerjee, Joe Hironaka and Lindsay Young here today.

Slovenia is a more recent partner and we are greatly inspired by the energy and enthusiasm of the Hon Minister. Gaspar, Mitya and Davor have been working closely with us in planning the regional consultations and played an active role in the Asian regional meeting. Slovenia has been an early champion of the OER movement and as the 2012 governmental survey report states 'the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and sport promotes pedagogical econtent, and since 2006 econtent has been developed under a CC licence for various subjects. The Ministry has invested significant funds for this purpose'. (p.8) Political will is absolutely critical to the success of OER!

Without the support of Hewlett, the 2012 World Congress would not have been possible. Nor would these regional consultations, if it had not been for the active support of Barbara Chow and TJ Bliss. I'm pleased to see Liz Levey representing Hewlett.

Europe has been at the forefront of the OER movement and has much to share with the rest of the world. Thanks to each one of you for being part of this important initiative. Let me once again thank our hosts, the Ministry for Education and Employment, our partners UNESCO, Slovenia and Hewlett who have all contributed generously to making this event possible.