

# Learning for Open Innovation

Video Presentation

7<sup>th</sup> EFQUEL Innovation Forum  
5 - 7 September 2012  
Granada

**Learning for Open Innovation**  
*The 2012 Paris OER Declaration and Beyond*

by  
[Professor Asha Kanwar](#)  
Commonwealth of Learning

Greetings to everyone at the EFQUEL Forum from the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) in Vancouver. I am very grateful to Ulf-Daniel Ehlers for giving me this opportunity to be virtually present to speak about the 2012 Paris OER Declaration.

As you know, COL and UNESCO have been working for several years now to promote the development and use of OER.

The most recent joint initiative has been the Paris OER Declaration, that we have completed under the leadership of our former President Sir John Daniel.

The 2012 Paris OER Declaration marks the tenth anniversary of the term OER, which was first coined at a conference held in UNESCO in 2002. COL and UNESCO came together to work on a project 'Fostering Governmental Awareness Internationally' funded by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

Both partners carried out a worldwide survey on the use of OER. The questionnaire for the survey, based on a similar survey conducted a year earlier by OECD, was sent to all member states and responses were received from nearly a 100 countries. The report shows that 'there appears to be a great interest in OER across all regions of the world with several countries embarking on notable OER initiatives'. The report also signals the need for continued advocacy, as there is still a great deal of confusion regarding the 'concept and potential of OER'.

In addition to the survey, policy forums were convened in the six regions of the world that brought together policy makers and practitioners to draft the Paris OER Declaration. What were the trends that emerged from the various regional policy forums?

The first forum was held in the Caribbean. Most Caribbean countries are introducing computers in schools and new learning materials are needed. Participants believed that this was one area in which OER could support the development and adoption of quality learning materials.

The next policy forum was held in Africa. While the majority of the 17 countries represented were active in OER, only South Africa had a policy on OER. The issues prominent in this region related to electricity, connectivity, availability of OER in languages other than English and the need to make a case for the cost efficiencies in using OER.

The Latin American forum showed that 10 countries in the region had some strategy or policy related to OER. Most countries had educational portals and policy on open and distance learning or ICT in Education, which include OER. The main issue that emerged was on open licenses—the licenses should have restrictions if necessary.

The forum for Europe was held in Cambridge. Eighteen countries had responded to the survey. Austria, Finland, Hungary, the Netherlands, Poland and Slovenia were most active in harnessing the potential of OER. The governments have invested substantially in the development of OER. The consensus was that private providers and non-governmental organisations should also contribute to the OER movement.

Nineteen countries from the Asia-Pacific region responded to the survey. Five governments have OER policies in place. The ministry of education, China has an OER policy and supports several OER initiatives. At the regional forum held in Bangkok, discussions focused on capacity building, incentives for teachers, promoting respect for indigenous knowledge and open licenses.

The government of Oman hosted the regional forum for the Arab States in Muscat. Of the 11 countries that reported on the status of OER, five had a strategy related to elearning which included OER. The participants stressed the need for governments to develop OER policies and strategies.

The Paris OER Declaration underwent several revisions and redrafts during the six policy forums. An International Advisory Group supported the entire process. The draft was presented at the World OER Congress held in Paris during 20-22 June 2012. The Paris Declaration makes 10 recommendations. Let me just refer to three key recommendations

- Foster strategic alliances for OER
- Encourage the development and adaptation of OER in a variety of languages and cultural contexts
- Encourage the open licensing of educational materials produced with public funds

What have we learnt so far from this initiative and what do we need to focus on as we go forward? It is clear that we need to gather more evidence on how OER have actually widened access, improved quality and reduced costs. Research on OER will be critical to the sustainability of the OER movement. Currently, such research is done in isolated pockets and will need to be scaled up to generate the evidence needed. Current availability of software tools to search for, locate and retrieve OER is a limiting factor in the wider use of OER. There is a need to foster innovation and adaptive research in this area. An alliance of international partners can make such global research more effective in terms of delivering value for money. Policy makers need to know how OER adaptation brings the costs down in the delivery of learning services to a much larger constituency.

Open licensing as an approach to foster the spread of global public goods is here to stay. Extending copyrights for wider use without compromising the moral and intellectual rights of the creators is a sensitive task that has to be relevant to specific contexts. Creative Commons appears to be the most significant licensing framework but licensing options can vary in different countries.

The discussions at the Regional Policy Forums have tended to position Open Licensing as an extension of author ownership of intellectual property rather than antithetical to it. This is an important development for policy makers who can be assured that the public ownership of OER will in no way diminish the individual's rights.

Finally and more specifically what will the Commonwealth of Learning do next? COL will continue its partnership with UNESCO and other like-minded organisations to focus on four areas: one, advocacy and awareness generation regarding the benefits and availability of OER; two, policy development on OER at the national and institutional levels; three, capacity building so that more governments, institutions and individuals are able to effectively harness the potential of OER and four, promote research through its publications on OER and its Chairs programme.

Thank you for your kind attention. And let me wish you all a very memorable conference.