

Open Education Resources (OER) – Fostering Governmental Support for OER internationally

African Regional Forum

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OER- matter of public policy?

Firoz Patel: Deputy Director General: Human Resource Development, Planning and Monitoring Coordination – Department of Higher Education and Training South Africa.

Professor MS Makhanya – Principal and Vice Chancellor University of South Africa

Sir John Daniel, President and CEO, Commonwealth of Learning

Ms Uvalić-Trumbić Senior Consultant

The Hon Deputy Minister of Science and Technology – Republic of Kenya

Esteemed Chairpersons of panel discussions

Representatives of Unesco and the Commonwealth of Learning

Panel discussants

Ladies and Gentlemen

Dumelang, Sanbonani, Good Morning, Peace be upon you

It gives me great pleasure to provide the key note address today on behalf of the Ministry and Department of Higher Education and Training. But before I go onto the address, let me express the best wishes of our Minister, the Hon Blade Nzimande and the Director General Mr Gwebsinkundla Qonde. They would have loved to be here with you today, however our Parliament has just opened last week and after the President's State of the Nation Address, Ministers, supported by the Director Generals have to be in Parliament. I am sure you are aware that our Parliament sits in Cape Town and our Administration here in Pretoria. In fact I am also expected in Parliament and will be leaving later today as we are presenting our annual report to the Higher Education and Training Parliamentary Committee. I am further glad to be given this opportunity because in 1981, that is thirty years ago I got very interested in computer assisted learning, computer based learning, computer managed learning and computer based assessment.

On behalf of the Government of South Africa and the Minister of Higher Education we welcome the Commonwealth of Learning and Unesco choosing our country to host your African Regional Forum. It indeed is a pleasure to welcome you and the delegates from Africa and the world to South Africa and we hope that you will take in the sights and sounds of our beloved country. I would like to also thank the leadership of Unisa for co-hosting this event. In fact I am a product of this institution having completed my under graduate and post graduate qualifications at the only institution able to provide many of us with access to learning opportunities at that time. In fact many of our stalwarts in the fight for liberation from Apartheid could only have pursued learning because of Unisa. So if I do seem a bit biased towards

distance learning in general and open educational resources in particular you will know that it is from personal experience.

I do not want to keep you in suspense for long, so I am going to get straight to the point and answer the question: OER – matter of public policy? The answer is a big emphatic YES because education is a public good and that is the right thing to do.

In support of this I would emphasize that our government will need very little fostering to support OER. I would like to illustrate this with some evidence.

First in 2004, when we were still part of a single education department we released the White Paper on E-Education in which we declared that:

“Information and communication technologies (ICTs) are central to the changes taking place throughout the world. Digital media has revolutionized the information society and advances in ICTs have dramatically changed the learning and teaching process. This has opened up new learning opportunities and provided access to educational resources well beyond those traditionally available.”

Please not for a moment think that we believe that ICTs are the only way one can achieve open and distance learning, clearly other media can also be made open, such as the case with the learning and teaching material provided by the Department of Basic Education to the learners through print material.

Second, we as a government have committed and funded the provision of notebook computers, with connectivity and free and low cost software to every teacher employed by the state. This policy was implemented in 2009 in a phased manner.

Third, we have written into law the Universal Service Agreement applicable to telecommunications licensees a public obligation to provide low cost connectivity to public education institutions.

Fourth, we have developed a draft policy framework in July 2011, for the provision of distance education in Universities in South Africa. My colleague Dr Engela van Staden will probably share some detail with you on this aspect later today.

Fifth, we have committed funding for open resources in Teacher Education and Development.

Sixth, we are exploring the possibility of fully funding a notebook for every learner who is a recipient of state student financial aid.

Eight we have committed to establish an open and distance learning directorate in the Department of Higher Education and Training, a component to be established in the branch I head.

Ninth, the Green Paper for a post school education and training system already signals our determination for systematising open and distance education. The Minister announced in, January 2012, the launch of a consultation period, until 30

April 2012, for a new **Green Paper on Post-school Education and Training**. In this document, an argument is made for national support for the development of OER resources as a capacity-building exercise, drawing on the existing digital learning environments already available in many universities and citing mainstream national initiatives by UNESCO, the Commonwealth of Learning, and the initiatives by the governments of Brazil, New Zealand, and the US as role models.

The DHET will support efforts that invest a larger proportion of total expenditure in the design and development of high quality learning resources, as a strategy for increasing and assuring the quality of provision across the entire post schooling system. These resources should be made freely available as Open Educational Resources (OER) for use with appropriate adaptation. This would be in line with a growing international movement, supported heavily by organizations such as UNESCO and the Commonwealth of Learning (CoL) that advocate the development of OER. What is proposed is that DHET will:

- Determine ways to provide support for the production and sharing of learning materials as OER at institutions in the post schooling sector. In the first instance all material developed by the to be established South African Institute for Vocational and Continuing Education and Training will be made available as OER.
- Consider the adoption or adaptation, in accordance with national needs, of an appropriate Open Licensing Framework for use by all education stakeholders, within an overarching policy framework on intellectual property rights and copyright in higher education.

Tenth, we have committed to develop a framework for Open and Distance Learning for the post school system in South Africa. This is a strategic objective in our 2009-2014 strategic plan in which by March 2012 we should have the first cut of the framework. Therefore this process of today is not only important but timely.

Eleventh: Etcetera, ditto, dot, dot, dot.

Now let me elaborate more on some of the principles for the framework for open and distance learning in the post school system.

1. Open and Distance Learning provisioning must be part of a system.
2. There shall be government policy on open and distance learning, which in some areas will have to be legislated and regulated.
3. The objective of Open and Distance learning is not to reduce current expenditure but the provision quality open and distance learning even if it means more funding per capita than traditional learning, especially in regards to the initial set up costs and the large numbers of learners who need access to education and training both as their post school experience and for life long learning.
4. Open and Distance learning will require investment in material development and this material should not be merely an electronic form of print media, but should inherently have a built in methodology leveraging the use of ICT technologies to enhance the teaching and learning process.
5. Learning through open and distance forms should not in any way be inferior to traditional forms of learning.

6. The open and distance system should not mimic the traditional ways of being admitted to learning, of learning methodologies or assessment.
7. Open and distance learning should as far as is possible and reasonable be free of tuition fees.
8. ICT and social networking media should be used optimally.
9. The Open and Distance Learning System should allow for free access to services such as student registration, subject material, self assessment, management of student learning and so forth.
10. The Open and Distance Learning System (ODLS) should provide for the management and administration of learning and assessment.
11. The ODLS should allow for innovative learning material development and payment for the development of such material.
12. ODLS should provide for “on demand” self assessment and ample opportunities for evaluation of learning.
13. ODLS should provide for the recognition of prior learning
14. ODLS should democratise education and training.

In conclusion, this forum as part of the initiative of the Commonwealth of Learning and UNESCO to embark on an initiative that aims to encourage more governments to adopt policies that include OER is fully supported by the Department. We believe that this initiative which “seeks to advance the ideal of making educational resources developed with public funds freely available for re-use and re-purposing”. We further support a declaration to be adopted at UNESCO’s *2012 World Open Educational Resources (OER) Congress* to be held in Paris on 20-22 June 2012 “that will include

a clear definition of open licenses and encourage governments to support the principle that the products of publicly funded work should carry such licenses”.

I wish you all the best for your deliberations and look forward to a very strong input into the Paris declaration.

I thank you.