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Directorate General Education and Culture

Lifelong learning: horizontal policy issues and 2020 strategy
Skills and Qualifications

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Ad Hoc Expert Seminar on 'Open Education'
Brussels - 13 July 2012

Summary Record

I. Context

The European Commission's Directorate General for Education and Culture (DG EAC), in cooperation with other Commission services, is currently developing a new EU Initiative on 'Open Education' aiming to promote the use of open educational resources and ICT in education. The initiative will be announced next autumn 2012 in a Commission Communication on 'Rethinking Skills' and fully launched by mid-2013. In the meantime, DG EAC intends to launch a public consultation and carry out an Impact Assessment.

The aim of the meeting is to gather high level experts in the field of OER and ICT & education to have a first exchange of views on the Commission's initial plans for "open Education". Experts were also invited to identify areas where an EU intervention could bring the highest value added. The exchange was stimulated by a concept paper prepared by the Commission services and sent to participants ahead of the meeting.

II. Scope and rationale of the Initiative

The first feedback from the experts on the scope and rationale of the initiative presented in the concept paper can be summarized as follows:

- A new EU initiative is very timely and needed but it is very important to be clear about the rationale and goals: do we focus on ICT innovation processes or do we want to mainstream OER throughout Europe? Open Education is overarching principle ('strategy of being digital'). What is the problem that the Initiative is trying to solve?
- Open education includes open educational resources, learning services and teaching effort. There is not a single best model to combine these three aspects therefore

should not be promoted as a paradigm. There is no political difference in valuing the resources but differences appear immediately in valuing services; the latter is a more delicate subject.

- We should differentiate ends from means. OER is a means to an end: open access is a valuable long-term goal.
- The term Open Education is more liked than the term Open Learning as it covers more aspects. Open Education refers not to the learning process of a single learner but to an educational system that integrates ICTs and OER in its educational practices. Evolution towards open educational practices covering curricula, tutoring, assessment, etc.
- Changing attitudes and behavior is essential for any adoption uptake. A notion of up-scaling should be built into the concept paper which goes beyond the notion of multiplication. We should see up-scaling being more than the sum of 'let 1000 flowers blossom'.
- Focus on the OER processes and not just on the supply of OER. The educational practices using OER are important for any business model.
- OER is not necessarily a business value for Open Universities but it does not make any harm. It helps rising the branding; it's free marketing. A reasonable proportion of students who access websites, become then actual students in the university. There is also a philanthropic goal of social justice and equity that is sought.
- Open education should consider issues related to business models, rights and assessment. Assessment is important and is not well covered in the concept paper, in particular the formative assessment of the learning process and the progress. Technologies open up exciting opportunities here.
- The concept paper should elaborate on how to do it smarter and when. We are in times of knowledge war. Individuals now seek personalized solutions. This requires granular information, multi-channel delivery and tailored-made offer.
- We should strive for an open digital market place where everyone can play. It should not be free versus free. All actors should have their space.
- Innovation is the key term and OER should bring innovation in education. It is about innovating and modernizing education and training. Many OER implementations however are not at all innovative but replicate existing teaching practices such as lectures.
- We should define who are the potential users across the different sectors and work out the initiative from that end.
- The models have to open up education in outreaching to other kind of learners and improving excellence by supporting institutions to put a part of their excellent resources into OER.
- There is a clear market failure in terms of skills supply like in STEM. One should not only increase the number of STEM graduates but especially see that these

graduates also acquire the needed skills through innovative pedagogies such as project-based learning, and enhance their transversal skills such as critical thinking, risk taking, problem solving, collaboration, etc.

- Policy support and in particular European policy support is needed: on open licensing; rewarding mechanisms for educators; quality assurance; accreditation practices. The EU added-value is all quite clear on these aspects with clear impact and confidence rising among users and producers.
- One should assure that the initiative on Open Education is being developed through a real open policy making process. Build together the proposed Initiative through engaging all stakeholders.
- Importance of a coalition of all stakeholders around a new EU Initiative including educational publishing and technology vendors, standards communities (CEN), R&D community (e.g. geo-learning).
- Educational publishers have to be closely aligned with this Open Education Initiative in terms of exchanging ways on how to embed OER in their business models. There is scope for an EU action to involve constructively (not in a conflicting way) the educational publishers and the learning industry at large.

II Possible EU actions

The participants were asked to put forward the main three ideas where EU action could have the greatest value added. These can be grouped under the following themes:

Access, IPR and licensing

- Avoid a centralized approach for further platform development but follow rather a federated platform model.
- The Member States should be stimulated towards using Creative Commons but only for non-commercial OER.
- Creation of a European-wide institute for harmonization and validation of informal learning and OER
- Thematic network (content repositories)

Business models / costs models of OER

- Explore the range of innovative business models which can be used for OER. The access to content can be open and free but one can charge costs for accreditation.
- Fund universities specifically when universities use OER (e.g. CAREER)

Quality assurance

- Build further on the learning outcomes approach under EQF and step up the work of the national quality agencies up by creating a quality mark label.
- Create a (quality) standards community.

Pedagogical practices /teachers/communities

- Trans-national peer learning through large scale pilots like is the case under the call of Creative Classrooms is an excellent model to enhance adoption uptake of OER and ICT's. Creative classrooms could also be used to support a framework model for teachers education and professional development
- Curriculum case discovery of OER: mapping curricula and resources available
- Support major teacher education and professional development programmes; teachers are the key to any success.
- Provide proper incentives to teachers generating their own content (e.g. free time for them) and encourage them using, creating, sharing and reacting through OER
- Leverage eTwinning by creating a real community of teachers beyond pure project cooperation. Add a layer on OER community.
- Next to stimulating outreach of educational institutions, enhance the demand for OER by incentivizing communities of learners with specific learning goals (e.g. learning STEM) through e.g. a system with vouchers and proper accreditation.
- MOODS are more than only transferring knowledge but one has to assure that self-learners are sufficiently guided
- Need to invest in long term and large scale pilots such as a large scale laboratory on transformation and science using OER with a focus on educational practices and teacher professional development.

Assessment

- Quality assessment focusing on 21st century skills is core. These competences require new types of assessment. The US has advanced quite a lot into this direction but Europe is lagging behind. Credits transfer for example is nowhere in Europe.
- Explore technologies to assess learning processes e.g. learning analytics, assessment of learners' progress; etc. and encourage teachers to use these.
- Develop assessment methodologies and models for assessing learning outcomes in non-formal and informal learning.
- Create a European market place for assessment through development of an alternative to the Standard Assessment Tests of US and complementary assessment tools, pilot projects.

European policy development

- Build further on OECD and UNESCO work and take a step further to engage MS more into governmental use of OER and deepen the process of policy implications of OER.
- Evidence based policy making is essential and more has to be done.
- Idea to develop TED-like events but on educational issues.
- Open up the European actions to the rest of the world. OER is a world issue not only European.
- Emphasize the culture of sharing, evidence based policy making, and the connection with other DGs (DG EMPL and DG CNECT)
- Focus on the European specific situation of multilingualism.

IV. Next Steps

DG EAC will provide a summary record of the discussion to all participants (this document).

Following a proposal by PAU Education, currently managing the eLearning Portal, a private community to pursue the exchange of ideas between the experts will be set up (see mail on 31 July) in the Portal.

In October 2012, a more elaborated paper with the skeleton of the Initiative will be sent to experts for a new round of comments and exchanges.

A second meeting will be organised in January 2013 for a discussion on the detailed actions foreseen by the Commission services and a draft of the policy communication "Open Education" to be adopted mid-2013.