

**Speech of Hon VPM-**

**Launching of the Technology Enabled Learning initiative & Open Educational Resources Training**

**Henessy Park Hotel**

**03 April 2024 @ 09:30**

**Chairperson and Board members of the Higher Education Commission**

**Prof Peter Scott, CEO and President of the Commonwealth of Learning**

**Prof Romeela Mohee, Commissioner of the Higher Education Commission**

**Prof Kiran Bhujun, Director, Tertiary Education & Scientific Research of my Ministry**

**Heads of Higher Education Institutions**

**Senior Officials of my Ministry and other Regulatory Bodies**

**Distinguished Guests**

**Ladies and Gentlemen**

Good morning, esteemed guests, and a heartfelt welcome to each of you attending our workshop on Technology-Enabled Learning in Higher Education and Training on Open Educational Resources.

This gathering marks a pivotal moment and is part of a larger series of capacity building ventures orchestrated by the Higher Education Commission, with the invaluable support of the Commonwealth of Learning.

I seize today's opportunity to extend our warmest congratulations to Prof Peter Scott, the newly appointed CEO and President of COL, who is with us today participating in this workshop remotely. We hope to welcome you physically to Mauritius, Prof Scott, for forthcoming workshops and to strengthen further the long and successful relationship that Mauritius shares with the Commonwealth of Learning.

Transitioning seamlessly into our agenda for today, let me remind you, ladies and gentlemen, that the initial phase of this project laid the groundwork, establishing a robust vision for and raising awareness about Technology-Enabled Learning. As

we now venture into the second phase, our focus shifts towards building capacity and empowering stakeholders within the Higher Education Sector.

I would here like to commend all the higher education institutions for crafting their institutional TEL policies and thus now embarking on a reflective journey towards the future of teaching and learning in a digital environment. This journey champions the adoption of TEL while also embracing pedagogical shifts.

Lest we forget, it takes a more transformational pedagogical approach to unlock the potential of EdTech.

As we gather today, it's imperative to assess our progress, celebrate our successes, and identify areas for refinement. Through encouraging the sharing of best practices, our aim is to inspire and guide institutions on the cusp of this transformative journey.

The realm of higher education is in a constant state of flux, with the digital world encroaching ever more on our traditional learning landscapes. Today, we stand at a crossroads, ready to leverage technology to redefine the educational experience for our students.

This workshop embodies our collective effort to navigate these changes, embracing the digital age with open arms.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen**

Today, more and more, we find ourselves educating a generation of digital natives, adept at navigating the vast seas of information technology. To this technology-savvy generation, the world of e-learning should posit no major challenge.

It's therefore no more a question of focusing on their acquisition of digital skills: rather, our efforts should be directed and extended towards preparing them to critically analyse information, innovate, and pursue lifelong learning.

As somebody quite rightly put it, training for a 'job for life' is out and for lifelong learning is in.

In short, it is a move beyond traditional education.

Evidently, traditional, lecture-based learning models cannot be thrown overboard and jettisoned overnight—but it is safe to aver that they no longer suffice in today’s dynamic world. Our goal should zero in on fostering a more engaging, technology-driven educational environment.

True, there are issues that arise and that merit being highlighted as a crucial aspect of Technology Enabled Learning.

Indeed, while we recognize that a complete absence of technology could hinder the development of critical 21st-century skills, we should nevertheless also come to terms with the fact that an overreliance on technology, to the exclusion of human interaction, could equally impair learning. The challenge thus lies in integrating technology in a way that enriches the learning experience without sacrificing the development of empathy and interpersonal skills.

As well, we should create the right framework to ensure that technology supports and integrates seamlessly in the teaching, learning and assessment process.

Needless also for me to point out what has become the hot subject of conversation today: the narrative about the ethical aspects, especially when we are integrating emerging and invasive technologies such as AI.

Embracing a robust Policy on Technology- Enabled Learning at both national and institutional levels will create a structured environment where student and academic interactions flourish, with a relentless an obvious focus on quality education. Within such a framework, technology-enabled learning can offer unparalleled benefits-- from increased accessibility and improved collaboration to fostering a deep, personal engagement with learning.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

My Ministry is wholeheartedly committed to supporting initiatives that integrate technology into higher education.

Incidentally, this is indisputably equally valid at the lower levels of education. My Ministry has embarked on the digitalisation of textbooks at primary and lower secondary levels and also provides digital devices to primary school students under the Early Digital Learning Programme. As for the secondary school students, they can avail themselves of the resource facilities offered by the Student Support Portal.

You are by now also conversant with the fact that we have also developed a National Open Education Resources Policy and provided funding for the:

- Development and curation of high-quality OERs.
- Development of training programs for faculty to integrate technology and OERs in their courses, and
- Building a national repository of OERs to facilitate easy access and sharing.

Many of you are aware that, as part of the OER readiness programme, my Ministry hosted a series of training sessions last year for OER trainers and IT professionals to enable them to set up a National Repository. As we saw earlier, this Repository is now online and waiting to be populated with courses and OER materials. A National Steering Committee has also been set up to ensure the implementation of the National OER Policy across all levels of the education sector in Mauritius.

Allow me here to make an urgent call for all Steering Committee members to ensure the respective sector under their responsibility is well prepared to embrace the need to create and share OERs.

Be re-assured that the Tertiary Education & Scientific Research Division of my Ministry has already made a request to COL, through Dr Mishra, for further capacity building of local resources, both in the creation of OERs, their quality assurance, as well as in training IT professionals to manage the National OER Repository.

As Mauritius commits more and more funds to the creation of OERs, we look forward to these requests being favourably considered at the earliest such that we could then work on scheduling mutually-agreed-upon and suitable dates.

Ladies and Gentlemen, such a heavy investment clearly demonstrates our deep conviction that Open Educational Resources stand at the forefront of this educational revolution. OERs, with their open-access philosophy, offer educators and students globally a wealth of high-quality materials that can be openly accessed, used, and adapted by educators and students worldwide.

One aspect of OER that I would like to express today is its potential for innovation; indeed, OERs allow for continuous improvement and customization of learning

materials, keeping pace with an ever-evolving knowledge base. The new technologies allow teachers to modify, improve, adapt, customise and reuse OER materials so that the resources and knowledge are continually improved.

Following the line of thought we have been exploring, I would encourage all academics to engage selflessly in contributing to the creation and sharing of OERs and to tap into the huge resources available in the different OER repositories around the world. The world over, The Commonwealth of Learning has been the forerunner as far as OER is concerned, and I am sure that you, participants, will have the opportunity to discover, *if need be*, the potential of OER in improving the quality of your delivery.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Allow me to conclude by quoting George Couros, the worldwide leader in the area of innovative teaching and learning

*“Technology will never replace great teachers, but in the hands of great teachers, it’s transformational.”*

Dear participants, together, we can transform education by creating a vibrant and inclusive learning environment for students in higher education, preparing them to thrive in the 21st century.

Today, let ‘collaboration’ and ‘knowledge exchange’ be our guiding principles as I encourage you all to engage fully, share insights, and explore the effective implementation of technology and OERs.

With these words, I thank you for your kind attention.

I now have the immense pleasure of declaring the workshop open.