

PROF MANDLA MAKHANYA, PRINCIPAL AND VICE-CHANCELLOR

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

LAUNCH OF THE COL CHAIR: OPEN EDUCATION

PRACTICES/RESOURCES

10 MARCH 2020

Thanks Programme Director, Prof Silindile Ngubane

- Members of Unisa's executive and extended management present
- Professor Rory McGreal : Athabasca University Chairholder of the UNESCO/International Council for Open and Distance Education Chair in Open Educational Resources and professor in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at Athabasca University
- Professor Mpine Makoe, Commonwealth of Learning Chair in OER and ODL professor at Unisa
- Ms Brenda Mallinson: Independent Learning Technologies and OER consultant and research associate at Rhodes University
- Our panellists today:
 - Ms Alice Goodwin Davey
 - Ms Hetta Pieterse
 - Dr Thuli Shandu Phetla
 - Mr Denzil Chetty
 - Mr Siphamandla Mncube
- Dr Lydia Mbatl

- Ms Kelly Young
- Our colleagues who are with us in spirit and who have sent us message of congratulations: Wayne Mackintosh OERu; Mark Weller from the Open University; Ebba Ossiannilsson - ICDE OER Advocacy Committee.
- Unisa colleagues
- Colleagues from the labour and student formations
- Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen

A very warm welcome to you all on this exciting occasion – the launch of the CoL Chair in Open Education Practices/Resources.

OER/OEP is a movement whose time has come. Those of us who have been following the movement since its inception back in 2002, will know that it has been a long and often frustrating journey – especially for champions such as Rory McGreal and Wayne Mackintosh and the late Professor Fred Mulder at the Dutch Open University, who were very much at the vanguard of the movement and whose belief, commitment and persistence is now delivering the results we had all hoped for. It is quite sobering to note that it took a full decade to get to the Unesco 2012 Paris Declaration and another 7 years to arrive at the adoption of the Unesco OER recommendations last November 2019.

I should however mention the Cape Town OER Declaration in 2007 recognised the daunting task that lay ahead, stating that *“We are on the cusp of a global revolution in teaching and learning. Educators worldwide are developing a vast pool of educational resources on the Internet, open and free for all to use. These educators are creating a world where each and every person on earth can access and contribute to the sum of all human knowledge. They are also planting the seeds of a new pedagogy where educators and learners create, shape and evolve knowledge together, deepening their skills and understanding as they go.”*

I would suggest that those seeds are now bearing fruit, evidence of which we see here today.

I am of the view colleagues, that it was the 2012 Paris Declaration that gave the movement substance, *gravitas* and direction. It provided a plan of action to:

1. Foster awareness and use of OER.
2. Facilitate enabling environments for use of Information and Communications Technologies (ICT).
- c. Reinforce the development of strategies and policies on OER.

3. Promote the understanding and use of open licensing frameworks.
4. Support capacity building for the sustainable development of quality learning materials.
5. Foster strategic alliances for OER.
6. Encourage the development and adaptation of OER in a variety of languages and cultural contexts. h. Encourage research on OER.
7. Facilitate finding, retrieving and sharing of OER.
8. Encourage the open licensing of educational materials produced with public funds.

I'd love to be able to say that we never looked back, but at a time where higher education is faced with so many contextualised challenges, OER/OEP has had to fight for its place as a viable and feasible option in a world that is undergoing fundamental transformation.

It is therefore something of a triumph that another major milestone was reached in November last year. Further to Resolution 44, of the 39th session of the UNESCO General Conference in 2017, Member States expressed their support for the development of a Recommendation on OER, which was approved by consensus by the Intergovernmental Meeting of Experts on the OER Recommendation

organized by UNESCO in May 2019, and formally adopted at the 40th Session of Unesco, In Paris, held from 12 – 27 November 2019. The on Open Educational Resources (OER) paves the way for member states to give effect to the principles with periodic reports on progress to this end. The first consolidated report is to be submitted at Unesco's 42 Session.

Concretely, the UNESCO OER Recommendation has five objectives: (i) Building capacity of stakeholders to create access, use, adapt and redistribute OER; (ii) Developing supportive policy; (iii) Encouraging inclusive and equitable quality OER; (iv) Nurturing the creation of sustainability models for OER; and (v) Facilitating international cooperation.

Colleagues, those who are deeply immersed in ODeL, and indeed, those who fully appreciate the current global higher education context with its multiplicity of challenges, will know that OER/OEP, quite simply, makes sense. And so, it is quite ironic that it has taken so long for it to have reached this stage of more generalised representation at strategically identified universities.

However, I doubt that after 18 years of blood sweat and tears, and very hard-won gains for OERs, that we can sit back and say: “job well done”. There is a massive amount of work that needs to happen to give effect to the five principles, and one suspects that inasmuch as

we may establish OER/OEP chairs and adopt OER/OEP practices, we will need a very significant cohort of OER/OEP champions to ensure the we not only keep the momentum going but that we in fact accelerate it and broaden its scope and application.

It is in this context that Unisa is pleased to be home to the UNESCO/CoL Chair in OER/OEP under the very able leadership of our own Professor Mpine Makoe. Unisa most certainly has the infrastructure, reach and capacity to ensure that this Chair will, as they say: “Make a difference” in the global OER/OEP movement, and I know that I speak on behalf of everyone when I wish her well as she goes about her duties as the Chair. Professor Makoe, we will support you in this important endeavour.

With that said, ladies and gentlemen, welcome once again and very best wishes for an inspiring launch.

I thank you.