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From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Permanent Representatives Committee (Part1) / Council
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Subject:	Open Educational Resources and digital learning - <i>Policy debate</i> (Public debate pursuant to Article 8(2) CRP [proposed by the Presidency])

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Following consultation of the Education Committee meeting, the Presidency has drawn up the attached discussion paper as the basis for the policy debate at the EYCS Council meeting on 25-26 November 2013.

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## **Presidency Discussion Paper**

### **Open Educational Resources and digital learning**

#### **Introduction**

Just as globalisation and technology are transforming the way the global economy works, so increasingly easy and rapid access to the Internet - including via ever more sophisticated mobile devices - is having a significant impact on education and is beginning to challenge more traditional modes of teaching and learning. In addition to being a source of information, the Internet is regarded more and more as a vast educational tool, providing access to exceptionally rich teaching materials as well as offering simple, cheap and effective ways of linking students to one another and to teachers, free of time and location constraints.

Recent years have witnessed the rapid development of digital distance learning tools such as Open Educational Resources (OERs) and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), all of which present traditional education systems and structures with exciting new opportunities, but also some challenges.

The opportunities brought to education by technology are unprecedented. With only one MOOC, a teacher is capable of reaching an audience larger and more diversified than would be possible during an entire 'traditional' teaching career. Moreover, these new online tools and resources enable learners to be active co-creators of knowledge and to collaborate with their peers, wherever in the world they may be. They can access knowledge from any place and at their own pace, whether studying full-time or combining study with work or any other activity.

Properly exploited, these new resources thus have a huge amount to offer: they can promote knowledge-sharing and intercultural communication; they can broaden access to education, by enabling teaching and learning to take place virtually anywhere; and in their ability to reach large numbers of learners, including by creating virtual communities of common interest, they can increase cost-efficiency. Furthermore, by their very nature they can promote innovation in education and new methodologies.

On the other hand, as with anything new, OERs pose challenges too. How can they best be exploited? Can they be combined with more traditional forms of teaching and learning, and if so, how? What are the implications for teacher education? Should resources be devoted to ensuring that more such resources are produced in Europe and in other languages? How do we assess and validate any knowledge, skills and competences acquired through them? And not least of all, how can their quality be evaluated?

Whatever the answers to such questions, change seems inevitable. OERs exist and indeed are expanding at an exponential rate, with considerable implications for all levels of education, in particular the higher education sector. For example, a recent research paper commissioned by the UK's Department for Business, Innovation and Skills stated that: *“At their most benign, MOOCs may drive innovation and experimentation, leading to improved learning and lower costs and a managed restructuring. At their most ferocious, MOOCs will force many higher education players to radically transform themselves, or die if they fail to adapt, and a chaotic rout of the sector is in prospect.”*

At a broader level, the EU is in danger of lagging behind other regions of the world in this field. Already much of the supply of digital content comes from players outside Europe, a factor which may not be to its advantage. Many would agree that there is an urgent need for policymakers to consider how best to manage the potential which OERs represent and what kind of accompanying measures might be needed.

Against this background, and in the light of the European Commission's recent communication on *Opening up education*<sup>1</sup>, the Lithuanian Presidency believes the time is ripe for a debate at European level on the opportunities and challenges which Open Educational Resources will undoubtedly bring.

### **Ministerial interventions**

The rapid emergence and expansion of digital distance learning tools such as Open Educational Resources (OERs) and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) present considerable opportunities, but also major challenges, at all levels of education and training, in particular higher education.

From the policy-making perspective, this development raises important issues at both national and European level, relating to issues such as quality assurance, recognition and accreditation, the promotion of innovative teaching and learning alongside more traditional forms, language versions, infrastructure and technical requirements and the added value that EU level actions could bring.

**With a view to enabling education and training systems, in particular the higher education sector, to take full advantage of the potential of new technologies in meeting the ever-increasing demand for high quality education, Ministers are invited to outline the overall approach being adopted at national level towards Open Educational Resources and MOOCs, and to share their ideas on how issues such as quality assessment and the recognition of skills and competences acquired by such means might be addressed.**

**Ministers are also invited to indicate how action at EU level might provide added value in this process.**

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<sup>1</sup> 14116/13 + ADD1 : *Opening up education: Innovative teaching and learning for all through new technologies and Open Educational Resources*

In order to promote an interactive, free-flowing debate, the Presidency will be inviting two external speakers to give their perspectives on this issue:

- **Ms Uschi SCHREIBER** , who is based in Hong Kong as the Global Government and Public Sector Leader for Ernst and Young.
- **Professor Giovanni AZZONE**, who is Rector at the Politecnico di Milano.

In their interventions, Ministers should be guided by the indications in the text box above and by the presentations of the external speakers. Ministers will be encouraged to intervene freely and spontaneously in response to the speakers. The Presidency will also invite the external speakers to respond to the debate as it unfolds, and reflect on points made by Ministers.

In order to give all Ministers an opportunity to contribute, as well as to foster a more interactive discussion, interventions should be as brief and concise as possible. In this way, Ministers will have the option of intervening more than once.

The Presidency's aim is that each Minister leaves the discussion with one or two practical ideas which they can take back to their capitals for further discussion.

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