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Minister of Education and Human Resources, Tertiary Education and
Scientific Research
Launching Ceremony of the “Cracking the Code” Project with Accenture
31st January 2019- 10h30
MGI Auditorium

Protocol

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure for me to be present at this launching event today, and I have to start by congratulating Accenture for this initiative of expanding programming skills in our secondary schools.

All around us, the world is changing in previously thought –to-be- impossible or unimaginable ways. Most of us carry more advanced technology in the smartphone in our pocket than the first computers that saw the light of day more than 60 years ago.

And with each new gadget, each huge leap forward, technology has expanded into new intellectual and commercial fields. Almost every field of employment now depends on technology. From radio to television, from computers and the internet, each new technological advance has changed our world and changed us too.

This technology is evolving so fast that we need to catch up with it. Because this train of IT in Education is constantly in motion and fast-moving, perhaps the best way to catch up with it rests not with the machines- rather, it rests with our young people.

Technology is already bringing about a profound transformation in education, in ways that we can see before our very eyes and, and in many more others, in ways that we haven't even dreamt of yet.

Our school system needs to prepare children for this new world. It is our responsibility to ensure that the education system prepares Mauritian students to work at the very forefront of technological change.

This is where initiatives such as this project with Accenture fit in, and we welcome this as very timely.

As you are all aware, what we are doing through such projects in coding is to train our students with the basics of becoming creative to navigate the world of tomorrow. This, as we all know, is best done in the 21st century through the provision of a base for building up the programmes that drive these wonderful computers. In a world that is in a state of constant flux, there is always a need for new programmes and Apps, all responding to the necessity to take forward steps to meet on-coming and impending transformations of tomorrow.

However, it is a challenge to continuously prepare and train our Human Resource in these skills, precisely because, for one thing, the evolution of technology is unpredictable and, for another, the future is unknowable and indecipherable. Obviously, much as we would wish to, the world of education cannot go at it alone—rather, it is important that we do it in tandem, in partnership with those private sector companies that have this as the core of their businesses.

Ladies and Gentlemen

By its very nature, programming is a disruptive force. It helps the thinker to innovate and to invent; it encourages creativity and fresh thinking, and I wish to say that this initiative is fully in line with the current NYCBE reform programme where we want teachers to have recourse to new pedagogical approaches to facilitate learning and make our students become more open thinkers in a dynamic and globalized context.

We hope that, through the training that

Accenture is giving, we will be able to make teachers feel confident about using technological tools and resources for their own and their pupils' benefit, both within and beyond the classroom. We also hope they develop the mindset to adapt to new technologies as these emerge. It is my fervent wish that our educators make an even greater use of the platforms that we are giving them to improve teaching and learning, one such platform being the Student Support Programme that is now providing digital resources to students of both Grades 7 and 8.

Such an early building of proficiency in coding comes at an appropriate time when technology is bursting with potential as never before. I invite other private institutions to follow the pathway set by Accenture, and to continue on this track to support this culture of building expertise in ICT.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Do rest assured that my Ministry is doing its fair share of the task of promoting Science and Technology in our schools. I believe that it is common knowledge that, sadly, fewer and fewer students tend to opt for the Sciences—and the reasons are often diverse. I will not go into them at this juncture. Yet, we know how significant Science is ; we know how powerful a role science and Technology are called upon to play for Innovation purposes.

Accelerating the thrust to science through technology is perhaps one answer to this thorny issue.

Hence, my Ministry is currently in the process of facilitating ICT penetration in our schools and beyond. Illustratively, this pathway of excellence in ICT that we are creating is also reflected in the recent decision to set up new scholarships at Master's level in ICT. As well, we are going to support our Universities, such as at the UdM, in coming up with specialized Master's programmes in Artificial Intelligence and Robotics. In this new Master's course at the UdM, we will give them not only a knowledge base, but also encourage them in getting professional experience in placements in local and international agencies to build their know-how.

On the other hand, advances in technology inevitably have a major impact on the broader school curriculum. One case in point is the development of Open Educational Resources Policy that my Ministry is currently undertaking in close collaboration with the Commonwealth of Learning. The new paradigm is that we are living in an open-source world. We need to show that knowledge, just like the Wikipedia, is not a curriculum that is a single and static, but one that is dynamic and is inevitable in its continuous evolution in new and exciting ways.

With our OER Policy, we will use technology in new and creative ways, embedding digital resources that are freely available on the web across the whole curriculum.

However, having Open Resources and programming in Education isn't to be seen as a finished strategy. It instead shows our ambition to better place Mauritius on the global digital map by building an open-minded educational system that is resilient to change.

Before I conclude, ladies and gentlemen, let me stress one thing: ICT and programming have entered our learning institutions in a big way – and that, too, at all levels of Education. They will make their presence felt at every stage of the curriculum.

Allow me, in this same breath, to express my appreciation to both the MIE and the National Computer Board, for also coming up with training programmes in Coding at both Primary and Secondary levels. I would wish to see this extended to Technical Institutions such as Polytechnics and the MITD.

It goes without saying that working in close collaboration and proximity with businesses and others will pave the way for devising new courses and assessment modes. Accordingly, I would like to see more universities and businesses join hands to create new high value training in Computer Science and develop curricula that would encourage larger numbers of our youth to understand and build competency in programming at a time when we need it most to remain competitive in the services sector.

The Private Sector, I am pleased to see, is keen on working with my Ministry in this field. Thank you for offering to our young people the chance to learn how to design, code and build applications for effective use and make Mauritius even better known as a reliable training and business destination in ICT.

Finally, I wish to thank the Management and Staff of Accenture and all Rectors and Managers as well as the participating schools for showing that expansion in programming can be done in our schools. I look forward to your insights and ideas, your expertise and experience, as you embed these technologies into your schools and inculcate those viable notions into your students.

I have absolutely no doubt that this project will be progressively expanded as the months go by.

I thank you for inviting me, and I wish you all a fantastic journey of exploring the exciting world of coding.

I now have great pleasure in officially launching the “Cracking the Code” Programme.

I thank you all for your kind attention.