

# OECS Education Forum Meeting Report

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Saint Lucia (Virtual Session)

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## About this document

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The OECS Commission through its Education Development Management Unit declared 2021 the year of learning. That decision manifests a renewed attention to and emphasis on learning, particularly in light of the challenges that have been created by the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, the 2021 Education Series is convened under the theme: OECS Education – Towards a Learning Crescendo. The three-part meeting series started with the virtual education forum that featured renowned critical pedagogical theorist, Dr Gloria Ladson-Billings. Part 2 featured a stellar panel during the OECS Sustainable Development Movement 2021 in September. The series closed with a two-day education forum that synthesised key learning points from the various education activities, particularly Parts 1 and 2. This included the discussion of the draft OECS Declaration on Education Statement, which will be finalized in February 2022. This meeting report summarises the key discussion points from Part 3 of the series.

## DAY 1

AGENDA ITEM	SUMMARY NOTES/ RECOMMENDATIONS/DECISIONS
<p><b>Introduction</b></p>	<p><b><i>The forum convened at 9:15 a.m. after sound checks.</i></b>                      Ms. Tahira Carter, OECS Communications Specialist and Forum host, welcomed forum participants and explained the theme “Towards a Learning Crescendo”- where the crescendo represents the build up of efforts thus far, acknowledging previous accomplishments and the awareness that much more is still needed to achieve optimal output from education systems. Ms. Carter also gave an overview of the day’s agenda  <a href="https://www.canva.com/design/DAEurhdyUCk/Qv6PXu-6MXto3LMH5ANdhA/view?website#4:day-one">https://www.canva.com/design/DAEurhdyUCk/Qv6PXu-6MXto3LMH5ANdhA/view?website#4:day-one</a>; Live interpretation in French was also made available for those tuning in from the French associated states.</p>
<p><b>Item 1: Welcome and Minister Remarks</b></p>	<p><b><i>Welcome Remarks by Dr. Didacus Jules, Director General, OECS Commission</i></b></p> <p>The Director General reminded participants that reshaping education is no longer an option but a requirement for the survival of the system. He further observed that the territories of the OECS are bounded by more than a treaty, but by circumstance and a will to succeed and exceed expectations usually associated with small island developing states. The Director General also expressed that achieving the established mandate for education requires leveraging collaborative efforts and resources. The challenge of education goes beyond just students and should include the entire society. He encouraged all community members to be lifelong learners so that students themselves could be lifelong learners. Learners need to be consistently protected, challenged, guided and supported. The education system we want is focused on learning of all and learning for all.</p> <p><b><i>Opening statement by Hon. Shawn Edward, Minister for Education, Sustainable Development, Innovation, Science, Technology and Vocational training (Chairman of the Council of Ministers for Education)</i></b></p>

	<p>The Honourable Minister reminded participants that in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, we must not just restructure educational delivery but reimagine and reshape the education landscape. He highlighted three key areas for action in his statement:</p> <p><i>1. Instruction and learning</i></p> <p>The delivery of instruction through a teacher standing at the front of a class is a thing of the past, and a new mode of delivery that is teacher facilitated and uses embedded technology must be embraced. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent investments of governments in better infrastructure to support virtual learning, reiterate the point that technology in education is here to stay. Face-to-face instruction is still needed at key developmental stages and for particular subjects, but educators of the future will need to adapt and innovate. Teachers will become content developers and students co-creators of learning.</p> <p><i>2. Curriculum development</i></p> <p>We lament lack of critical thinking and other skills, but need to reflect on what we are teaching and how we are teaching. The curriculum that supports the future of education should facilitate both asynchronous and synchronous learning. Education must be seen as a pathway to attain lifelong learning, satisfaction, happiness, well-being, opportunity and contribution to humanity. Our curriculum must respond to these needs and focus on adaptability, critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Curriculum should encourage students to follow their passions and use their talents. Future focus for curriculum should emphasize: sustainability, enterprise and civics and regional needs e.g. TVET promotion as a contribution to economic development. Our curriculum must be a roadmap / compass that points us in the direction we desire to be.</p> <p><i>3. Human capacity</i></p> <p>During the pandemic, the ability of school leaders and teachers to respond, adapt and innovate was evident and many commendable initiatives were born. This shows that in the Caribbean there is a large population of educators and administrators willing to learn to do things differently. The future of education hinges on collaborations, interactions among parents, administrators, teachers, and students. As these relationships grow, the teacher's role expands and teachers should prepare to develop and share content, collect data and become active researchers. This will require the strengthening of human capacity through training.</p>
<p><b>Item 2: OECS Visioning [Sisera Simon, OECS Commission]</b></p>	<p>Ms. Sisera Simon opened by reiterating the strength in unity of OECS Member States, using the analogy of the ease of tearing a single sheet of paper compared to a stack of sheets. The power of the collective was highlighted as a major strength of the economic union. The mandate of the Commission and Member States is to accelerate the development of education for all citizens. The OECS Education Sector Strategy 2012-2021 serves as the regional framework to put this mandate into action through collaboration with member States. The revised treaty of Basseterre allows for the free movement of students, teachers and others through common education policy and curriculum and assessment standards. Through collaborations with stakeholders at all levels, the EMDU and Member States work to meet every individual need of our fledgling economic union. Inherent in the theme is the same concept of togetherness- a crescendo as a</p>

	<p>wave or a musical piece, we need collective action. In the face of recent challenges, the spirit of togetherness and commitment to collective action are alive. Programs such as PEARL, the augmented virtual reality initiative funded by GPE and World Bank respectively as some examples of this action. Currently, pursuing the development of a digital curriculum and resources, working on school mapping and connectivity. Video interventions from policymakers across Member States were also included to give examples of these initiatives.</p>
<p><b>Item 4: Raise your hand for education</b></p>	<p>A Raise Your hand For Education video was introduced highlighting how stakeholders can support students through guidance and funding as part of the OECS GPE "Raise Your Hand" initiative.</p>
<p><b>Item 3: Keynote speaker: Dr Linda Darling Hammond</b></p>	<p><b><i>Building back better as we recover for learning: How the science of learning and development can help us reinvent education</i></b></p> <p>Dr. Darling Hammond expressed her enthusiasm to be able to take part in the conference and contribute to the discussion about responding to recent environmental and economic shocks. A recent confluence of global crises (public health, economic, climate, civil rights) have highlighted the inequalities and flawed and fractured nature of education systems. However, similar crises over the course of history have often led to important social changes, and it is important to reflect at this moment how such change can take place. The Learning Policy Institute has developed <a href="#">a set of resources</a> on how to use the current moment to support systemic change.</p> <p><i>Why reinvent schools?</i></p> <p>Schools as they are currently conceptualized are not designed to support whole child development or critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Reinventing school means catering to these needs.</p> <p>Reinventing schools means emphasizing authentic and equitable learning experiences and leveraging human knowledge produced in the last century and that which is needed for the next century.</p> <p><i>The Science of Learning Development</i></p> <p>Dr. Darling Hammond and her team published a paper on <a href="#">the implications of science of learning research on educational practice</a>. Similarly, <a href="#">other resources</a> have shown the importance of these research findings for transforming education.</p> <p><i>Principles from the Science of Learning Development</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The brain is always developing as a product of relationships and experience</li> <li>● Supportive environments reduce anxiety and enhance trust</li> <li>● Learning is social, emotional, and academic.</li> <li>● Children actively construct knowledge based on their cultural context.</li> <li>● Students perceptions of their ability influences learning.</li> <li>● Trauma and adversity affect learning.</li> <li>● Close relationships are the most effective antidote to trauma.</li> </ul> <p><a href="#">The power of relationships in school</a></p>

	<p>The Science of Learning and Development has also challenged long-held 20th century assumptions such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● genes determine intelligence,</li> <li>● potential is knowable in advance,</li> <li>● talent is scarce,</li> <li>● the standardized factory model is best to educate children.</li> </ul> <p>Schools should be designed to support personalisation, and smaller groups can accommodate this. Staff should be given time to plan communication with parents, engagement with students. Teachers must be the curriculum to the child and the child to the curriculum.</p> <p><a href="#">Putting the Science of Learning and Development into practice [executive summary]</a></p> <p><a href="#">Putting the Science of Learning and Development into practice [full report]</a></p>
<p><b>Item 4: Discussion session: MOE - St. Lucia &amp; Kamalie Mannix [Teacher, Chair of the OECS Youth Advisory Network, Antigua &amp; Barbuda]</b></p>	<p><b><i>Kamalie Mannix (Teacher, Chair of the OECS Youth Advisory Network, Antigua &amp; Barbuda) led a panel discussion on Dr. Darling Hammond's presentation.</i></b></p> <p>Minister Edward (St. Lucia) commended the focus on Dr. Darling Hammond's talk on the child. He questioned the extent to which we assess children's emotional school readiness as they return to school, and encouraged stakeholders to ensure students are comfortable again. The minister further elaborated that children should have a burning desire to learn and be in school and that unless this happens, all efforts to modernize school and the curriculum will be in vain. Effectiveness of curriculum is dependent on quality of students - the extent to which students are comfortable in the school environment.</p> <p>Minister King (SVG) focused his intervention on the kind of education we want to achieve. He agreed that while we want quality and inclusive education and lifelong learning as the broad goal, more must be done to educate all stakeholders on the true meaning of these words as practical applications. He further suggested that at times, students and the wider society receive mixed signals because we are still preoccupied with the quantitative (assessment) result. Your success as a student is measured by exam qualifications.</p> <p>Dr. Cheryl Bishop commended the format of Dr. Darling Hammond's presentation and its focus on the classroom. She agreed that we are aware of what is needed to support students but questioned the existing political will among stakeholders necessary to make education transformation a reality.</p> <p>The OECS Director General highlighted the importance of formative assessment and the CXC CPEA exam for encouraging individualized assessment and learning.</p> <p>Hon. Jonel Powell (St. Kitts &amp; Nevis) also voiced his support for the other comments that highlighted an over-emphasis on high-stakes examinations and regurgitation. He advocated for new approaches to learning and</p>

	assessment, such as peer learning and the integration of technology for the current generation of students.
<b>Item 5: Mr. Rafer Gordon, Project Manager, OECS Commission</b>	A video presentation giving an overview of the development of the OECS Declaration on Education.
<b>Item 6: Presentation of draft OECS Declaration on Education</b>	<p><b><i>Sarah-Lee Gonsalves Open Development &amp; Education</i></b>  <i>Theme 1: The OECS vision for education</i>  <u>Article 1. The purpose of education</u>            1.1. The purpose of education in the OECS            1.2. The core values of empowerment through self-knowledge and commitment to regional kinship above self-interest            1.3. A much-needed redefinition, not refinement, of the purpose of an OECS education must expand notions of what it means to be educated.</p> <p><u>Article 2. Enhancing resilience</u>            2.1. Environmental vulnerability.            2.2. Mitigate risks, plan for crises, and build in flexibility.            2.3 Economic vulnerability.</p> <p><u>Article 3. Quality and equity</u>            3.1. Every person has an inalienable right to a basic and secondary education.            3.2. Eliminating discrimination.            3.3. Quality education.</p>
<b>Discussion moderated by [Mrs. Celeste Burton, OECS Commission]</b>	<p>One participant commended the focus on the lack of skills attained by graduates after the completion of secondary education and the concerns about the education of boys in the declaration statement. The need for male figures in the education system was highlighted as one possible solution to curb the observed disengagement of males as they progress through the education system.</p> <p>Another participant raised concerns about provisions for the mental well-being of students, given the emotional and social impacts of the pandemic on the society. Mrs. Burton affirmed this statement and also expressed concerns for the mental health of other education stakeholders, including teachers.</p> <p>Others suggested actions that might help to make the ideals of the statement a reality, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the establishment of a network for teachers to interact and share content, instructional strategies, classroom management and discuss global best practices</li> <li>- highlighting teachers already doing the initiatives we want to implement at full scale so that we can encourage more stakeholders to take action in implementing transformation across the education system</li> <li>- developing more sports programs; more diverse programs for students from an early age</li> </ul>
<b>Item 7: Artistic</b>	<b><i>Isman Lovence, Teacher, St. Lucia</i></b>

<p><b>presentation</b></p>	
<p><b>Item 8: Presentation of draft OECS Declaration on Education: Theme 2</b></p>	<p><b><i>Mrs. Callista Regis, Open Development &amp; Education</i></b>  <i>Theme 2: Harmonization of education policy</i>  <u>Article 4. Digital transformation</u>            4.1. The harmonization of education policy.            4.2. Hybrid learning beyond the pandemic.            4.3. Emphasis on improving technological infrastructure.</p> <p><u>Article 5. Data-driven curriculum and assessment reform</u>            5.1. A curriculum that reflects the purpose of an OECS education.            5.2 Teacher training.            5.3. Assessment.</p> <p><u>Article 6. Expanded learning pathways</u>            6.1. Differentiated learning.            6.2. Sports, the creative and performing arts.</p>
<p><b>Discussion moderated by Mr. Germain Anthony, OECS Commission</b></p>	<p>Minister King (SVG) suggested the inclusion of TVET in place of skills training in Article 5 of the declaration. Mrs. Regis welcomed this suggestion and highlighted data from the interviews that would also support this amendment.</p> <p>Another participant raised concerns about article 5 and the extent to which data is used to drive decision-making, to develop school improvement plans, to guide instruction and the use of resources. She further elaborated that article 5 should outline how such data would be captured and used. Again, Mrs. Regis welcomed this suggestion and recommended that data could also include attendance, classroom behaviour.</p> <p>The following points were also raised by participants:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- a need to focus on differentiated assessment as well as differentiated learning</li> <li>- the expansion of the use of diagnostic assessment</li> <li>- the need for a database with student profiles which could keep student records such as performance on diagnostic and national assessments so that individualized interventions could be planned for students; such a database would also facilitate the sharing of relevant data between schools and ministries and prevent isolated data collection, which some have observed is the current state of affairs.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Playback of Day 1 available here: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ge_1W-5C9cw">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ge_1W-5C9cw</a></b></p>	



## DAY 2

AGENDA ITEM	SUMMARY NOTES/ RECOMMENDATIONS/DECISIONS
<p><b>Item 1: Welcome &amp; Recap Ms. Tahira Carter Communications Specialist OECS Commission</b></p>	<p>Ms. Carter presented highlights from Day 1 of the forum. A video presentation introduced Marika Baptiste, junior feature speaker for Day 2.</p>
<p><b>Item 1: Feature speaker Marika Baptiste [St. Vincent &amp; the Grenadines]</b></p>	<p>Marika highlighted her Garifuna heritage and explained how that heritage has led to marginalization of people from her community. She also indicated that her grandmother has always been her biggest supporter and how she encouraged her to use education to better her circumstances. She further explained how her excellent performance in the CPEA exam and her entry into the Girls' High School meant that she would have to leave her grandmother and community, to live closer to her secondary school in the capital, Kingstown. Marika also related how her athletic abilities helped her to gain respect among peers, despite some ostracization for being from a rural community. Teachers also supported Marika, and she was able to get counselling.</p> <p>She recounted her how parents' separation and a new living situation affected her emotional wellbeing and academic performance. However, a placement in her school's mentorship programme provided a new source of support and motivation which allowed her to maximize her potential. Marika also described her experiences with online learning during school closures in the COVID-19 pandemic, and how being overlooked for student offices gave her the motivation and drive that led to her winning the Lions Club Public Speaking Competition and the US Embassy Black History Month Speech competition. Marika credits these wins with opening doors that led to her selection as an anchor for the OECS YES-I news and as the junior speaker for today's conference.</p> <p>With the eruption of the La Soufrière volcano in St. Vincent and the displacement of her family, Marika once again found herself facing challenging circumstances with CSEC exams approaching. She credits her ability to turn setbacks into stepping stones and her drive to survive to Garifuna heritage.</p> <p>Turning to the theme of the forum, Marika expressed concern that not all students have a strong support system as they transition from one level of education to another and some unfortunately fall through the cracks. Reiterating that no child should be left behind and that all should be valued for their unique contributions, she called on the education authority to create equity in education. She further explained that ensuring that all students have the necessary resources and access to trained staff could be one way of making education more equitable.</p> <p>She also suggested that big-sister-little-sister and mentorship programs could be implemented to help offer peer support for students who may feel isolated or are struggling with mental health. In closing, she</p>

	<p>encouraged other students to dream and to put in the work required to achieve their dreams and to know when to ask for help.</p>
<p><b>Item 2: Conversation with Marika and Asif Collin Dover [Ministry of Education, St. Vincent &amp; the Grenadines]</b></p>	<p>Mr Dover expressed his enthusiasm to be able to have this conversation with Marika. In his first question, he asked Marika to share how she prepared for the public speaking competitions that she won. Marika related that her passion for public speaking stemmed from primary school and that she has been participating in similar competitions since Grade 3. Given this background, she tried out to represent GHS at the Lions Club competition and described the preparation process as gruelling but worth it in the end.</p> <p>Mr. Dover asked Marika to elaborate on her experiences as the only child from her community to enter GHS. Marika credits her grandmother as being her motivation for wanting to study at GHS, and recounted the sacrifices she had to make to move closer to capital to attend the school.</p> <p>Asked about how her school’s mentorship programme played a role in her success, Marika shared that she was hesitant about the programme initially because of the stigma associated with such programmes. It is often thought that they are for troubled students; however, Marika attributes much of her success and drive to the influence of her mentor. She also shared that often, youths feel they have no one to turn to for guidance. Marika also explained that origin does not determine destination, since she believes that we all get to choose our path. She urged policymakers to pay more attention to the allocation of school resources and to ensure that more students have the required access to facilities such as laboratories. She encouraged students to have faith in God, ask for help, believe in yourself, set your goals and work towards them.</p>
<p><b>Item 3: Partner Engagement for Advancing OECS Education [Dr Bjorn Hassler, Open Development &amp; Education]</b></p>	<p><i>Theme 3: Partnership and collaboration</i>  <u>Article 7. Strengthening stakeholder participation and accountability</u>            7.1. Parental involvement.            7.2. Student involvement — national and regional student councils.            7.3. Accountability and leadership.</p> <p><u>Article 8. Intersectoral support for the most vulnerable</u>            8.1. Improving social safety nets.            8.2. Learners with Special Educational Needs.            8.3. Learners in conflict with the law.</p> <p><u>Article 9. Expansion of public- and private-sector relationships</u>            9.1. Public-private partnerships.            9.2. Education programmes.</p>
<p><b>Discussion on theme 3 moderated by Dr. Carlene Radix [OECS]</b></p>	<p>Participants expressed concerns about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- streaming of students according to perceived ability for specific subjects and how this affects the subject choices offered; it was suggested that a programme is needed that allows students to study what they are interested in.</li> </ul>

<p><b>Commission]</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- expanding article 7 organizational learning and accountability</li> <li>- the need to involve church groups and community groups as stakeholders in article 7</li> </ul> <p>Responding to these concerns, Dr. Hassler highlighted his own educational trajectory, and he recommended that we keep options open for students as much as possible. He also supported the idea that organizational learning is needed for transformation and that all stakeholders should be considered learners and spaces for ongoing professional development created.</p> <p><i>How can we teach children how to learn?</i></p> <p>Dr. Hassler asked participants to reflect on the system constraints that might be preventing this, such as the structure of the curriculum and assessment routines, and also asked how prepared education systems were to make the radical choices required to achieve this.</p> <p><i>How can we ensure the vulnerable and identified and adequately catered for?</i></p> <p>Dr. Radix shared that instead of a social safety net, she proposes the idea of a social protection floor that has a wider reach. Dr. Hassler highlighted the social networks that exist around a school as the best way to reach students in need - however defined, and he cautioned against expanding the roles of teachers further to give them additional responsibilities for extended student pastoral care. He also suggested that other professionals such as educational psychologists can be brought into schools. It was also recommended that such approaches be used for gifted students as well in article 8.2.</p> <p>Dr. Radix also raised the need to have sign language interpretation at future OECS events.</p> <p><i>What to enhance private sector engagement?</i></p> <p>Dr. Hassler recommended that private sector engagement should go beyond fundraising. Cooperation with the private sector, especially for TVET, should be two-way engagement between the world of work and the education system. Facilitating internships for students could be one way of enhancing this engagement. Dr Jules requested that the draft declaration statement remain open to parents, students, and teachers among other stakeholders as a living document to capture more suggestions for how to elaborate the ideas further and develop a plan of action.</p> <p><i>How to make education more values based?</i></p> <p>Dr. Bishop highlighted the need to make education more values based. Dr. Hassler again called on participants to reflect on what this would mean regarding the necessary structural changes required for implementation. Dr. Mayer echoed these ideas and indicated that the accountability and leadership articles stood out to her, and asked how we can make sure that the declaration changes the status quo. Dr. Hassler outlined how the OECS ARP and OECS/CARICOM/CDB Let's REAP programmes can help to address some of these concerns. The need to have the implementation of each article in the proposed declaration guided by research and tested best practices was also raised.</p>
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<p><b>Item 4: Teacher Voices moderated by Lisa Sargusingh Terrance [OECS Commission]</b></p>	<p><i>Participants in this session:</i> Bernice Lewis (St. Lucia) Frankson Marshall (Grenada) Samantha Blondel (St. Kitts &amp; Nevis) Jannita Harrigan (Dominica)</p> <p>To open this session, a pre-recorded conversation with participants highlighted the following barriers to education:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● lack of teacher licensing</li> <li>● overloading of teaching role with administrative tasks</li> <li>● lack of strategic planning and policy</li> <li>● lack of engagement in the classroom</li> <li>● inadequate family support for students</li> <li>● education quality and equity</li> <li>● lack of dynamic leadership</li> <li>● lack of teacher collaboration</li> <li>● need to improve collaboration</li> </ul> <p>In the live discussion, Mrs. Sargusingh-Terrance asked the teachers to further elaborate on the concerns they highlighted in the recording. The following points were also raised:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● the willingness of teachers to take advantage of opportunities to improve teaching quality;</li> <li>● the extent to which increased remuneration could be an incentive for teachers to seek ongoing training and professional development</li> <li>● how ongoing needs assessments of teacher skills could be implemented</li> <li>● concerns about Early Childhood Education as a focus of declaration articles; suggestion made for more emphasis in declaration</li> <li>● the need for teachers to be more introspective and reflective to promote equity and accessibility of materials for students</li> </ul> <p>Practical suggestions for overcoming barriers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Governments can make structured collaboration possible, or an unstructured work space can foster organic networking</li> <li>● Incorporation of the OECS PD model into national teacher appraisal instruments</li> <li>● Catalogue best practices from across Member States so that they can be shared across the member states through another forum, such as a teacher conference</li> </ul>
<p><b>Item 6: Youth Panel Discussion</b></p>	<p><i>Participants:</i> Marc Odion Hillocks (SVG) Britney McDonald (Antigua &amp; Barbuda) Anthonia Larichere (Martinique) Rahym Augustin Joseph (St. Lucia)</p> <p><i>What vision do you have for the future of education in the OECS?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Access to education and environments within which students can thrive, supported by the necessary resources</li> <li>- Opportunities for further inclusion of second language</li> <li>- Further integration of technology and curriculum reform that equips students with certifications and skills</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- More learning pathways and internships for students</li></ul> <p><i>What are some opportunities available now for students to learn French and have access to more opportunities for higher learning?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Students in the OECS learning French could open additional opportunities to study at universities in Martinique and Guadeloupe with scholarships; there is also a special tuition rate for OECS students</li></ul> <p>The following points were also raised in the discussion with interventions from other participants:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Fostering different abilities leads to innovation in the workplace</li><li>- Need for stakeholder, institutional and ministerial cooperation and support</li></ul>
<p><b>Playback of Day 2 available here: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IS8rJjTZpW8">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IS8rJjTZpW8</a></b></p>	