# Potentials of open education to support inclusive learning environment

Hi, my name is Roda Garland. I'm the Commissioner for the Rights of Persons with Disability in Malta, and I'm going to give you a few of my thoughts about open education. Open education is very important for students with disabilities as it is one of the best forms of reasonable accommodation that can be provided access to education is obviously a right for all students. And it can be difficult for students in an educational setting that doesn't include these forms of open education materials and so as a result, the improvements in accessible formats on websites by being able to use Open Access modules for training is one way that students can be included. And this applies not only to formal settings but also to informal settings. It may well be that students with disabilities are unable to attend a lesson physically and so having modules online that they are able to access is very important to them. It's also important that for things like modules, also websites have to be designed in a very accessible way so that students are not struggling to be able to read or maybe their screen readers aren't working. And this is very important in formal settings but also when students are trying to learn on their own. Maybe they have been excluded from educational settings. This empowers disabled people to be able to find access to educational materials in a way that suits them in their own time and in their own space. So again it's very important that they have the ability to explore these different types of Open Access materials. And it provides the best possible way for them to be able to learn more either on their own or as part of a group. Obviously with the inclusion now after COVID, applications like Zoom and Teams this enables students who are unable to gain access to education facilities to be able to participate online and that's also very important. One of the most important things that I really feel I do need to stress is that the accessibility of websites and materials needs to be given utmost importance. It's great if teachers are able to provide open access to students in order to enable them to learn, but obviously if they can't access the materials because of the type of impairment that they have, this needs to be taken into consideration in order to be able to allow these students to access information in exactly the same way as anyone else in face-to-face situations. Where students are in classes it's very important that they are given the opportunity to speak. It may be difficult for them to

communicate and they need to be given the time and the ability to express their thoughts and offer their contributions in a way that enables them to take part fully in the session. So open access in education is very important and enables disabled people in whatever settings they find themselves in to be able to improve their educational attainment and be able to compete therefore with their peers, when they are looking for work or training opportunities.