

Message of Madrid

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Key developments in European higher education

We witness key developments in European higher education which affect and even transform teaching and learning in degree education, continuing education and professional development, and open education (OERs and MOOCs).

EADTU and the members – a community of ten open universities and more than 200 front-runner universities in blended and online flexible education for adult citizens - play a key role in supporting each of these developments sharing their best experience and expertise, contributing to excellence, innovation and inclusion which are the core values in EU policies for higher education and for the European Education Area.

The European universities initiative

In December 2017, the Heads of State of the EU have taken the European Universities Initiative. The ambition is immense: against 2025 some 30 university alliances will be mobilized all over Europe to which hundreds of universities belong, with a spread all over Europe.

The universities involved organize close educational collaborations and innovative pedagogies in main fields of studies. Within these new educational eco-systems, students can build their own curriculum benefiting from new formats for physical, blended or virtual mobility.

Although the main focus of these alliances is on mainstream degree education, they take also initiatives in continuing education and open education. They explore the field, e.g. by short postgraduate programs, MOOC-based micro-credential programs and other innovative formats as well as sharing open educational resources. However, for most institutions, lifelong learning is still an unexplored world and therefore more of a challenge.

This needs further reflection in view of the European society, its economy and citizens facing longer and changing careers. European flexible distance universities can be inspirational in this respect as they have developed pedagogies, innovative courses and student services for a large-scale approach to the wide educational needs of adult learners, not only in terms of students' numbers but also of personalisation at scale.

Next to this, flexible distance education institutions will continuously adapt their strategies to the new challenges faced by European learners. They seek even a closer collaboration with each other and with the entire field of lifelong learning in Europe in order to meet their needs. This also will lead to multidisciplinary, problem-oriented programs awarding micro-credentials and to (blended/virtual) mobility between institutions.

The EU.University hub

EADTU and the members are already supporting the European Universities initiative as they are involved in building the eU.University hub in the OpenU project, developing with others the educational framework for educational innovation, blended and online collaboration and mobility for it.

The hub will serve as a one stop-shop for digital higher education. It will establish a single point of access for online learning in Europe, putting online courses and resources at the fingertips of students. It will also provide models and guidelines for collaborative courses and mobility, supporting the European

Universities alliances. Finally, it will create a digital infrastructure for streamlining administrative processes for collaboration and mobility.

This will bring EU added value to digital developments taking place in higher education across Europe.

Continuing education / CPD

Fact sheets of the European Commission show that neither the EU participation levels for higher education nor for lifelong learning are achieved and that there still are dramatic differences between member states.

The employment rates of recent graduates in tertiary education are still below 90% and even below 80% in many European countries¹. But, according to most recent European statistics, the participation rates to lifelong learning in European countries varied from below 3% to plus 25%².

Appropriate educational provisions such as flexible short learning programs (blended or online) can keep innovative knowledge and skills of the workforce up to date European-wide. They can more rapidly and at a large scale respond to needs in the wider economy and they can anticipate on careers of tomorrow. The lifelong journey of learning is not yet supported by universities as institutional policies and strategies are not in place. Services to working learners and flexible delivery models are to be implemented through extension schemes for continuing education.

If no new continuing higher education provisions at scale are created, employers will keep facing problems with recruiting workforce with the right qualifications. All eight EU key competences for lifelong learning should be envisaged: science, technology, engineering, mathematical skills; languages; literacy; cultural awareness and expression; sense of initiative and entrepreneurship; social and civic competence; personal, social and learning competences; and digital competences³.

Universities are aware of this. But the median age of students is not far away from 19 years, almost in all European countries. They should also act. There are signs that some front-runner universities

¹ Employment rates of recent graduates (aged 20–34) not in education and training, by educational attainment level, 2018 (%).png

[https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:Employment rates of recent graduates \(aged 20–34\) not in education and training, by educational attainment level, 2018 \(%25\).png](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:Employment_rates_of_recent_graduates_(aged_20–34)_not_in_education_and_training,_by_educational_attainment_level,_2018_(%25).png)

² Adult participation in learning, 2013 and 2018 (¹) (% of the population aged 25 to 64 in the last 4 weeks).png. See:

https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/images/2/20/Adult_participation_in_learning%2C_2013_and_2018_%28¹%29_%28%25_of_the_population_aged_25_to_64_in_the_last_4_weeks%29.png

³ See: Proposal for a Council recommendations on key competences for lifelong learning. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52018SC0014&from=EN>

See also: A. Ferrari, Y. Punie and B. Brecko, Digcomp: a framework for developing and understanding digital competence in Europe, Publication Office of the EU, 2013.

<https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/publication/digcomp-framework-developing-and-understanding-digital-competence-europe>

develop strategies for continuing education and MOOCs, which should rapidly be followed by universities in all European countries. In general, governments don't follow yet, not seeing the opportunities from an educational and employment perspective.

Support of the European Social Fund should be envisaged in some countries, certainly in countries with low participation rates.

Open education: from MOOCs to MOOC programs

In 2017, the European MOOC Consortium (EMC) was established associating the main European MOOC platforms: Futurelearn (the Open University), France Université Numérique (FUN – agency of the French government), Miriadax (Telefonica in collaboration with Spanish Rectors' Conference and Ibero-American universities) and EduOpen (16 Italian universities) and the OpenupEd partnership (EADTU). The EMC represents most of the MOOC development work in Europe by offering together more than 1000 MOOCs. The European MOOC platforms cover networks of in total 280 universities in a variety of European countries and languages areas.

MOOCs are there to stay. We see even new developments. MOOC-based programs are created, leading to a variety of qualifications like MicroMasters, nanodegrees, graduate certificates, graduate diplomas, etc. Inconsistency in these qualifications and in other continuing education programs leads to confusion. Clarity about this is of utmost importance for learners, universities and employers. Therefore, the European MOOC Consortium developed a Common Micro- Credential Framework.

In this framework, a common approach is agreed by which micro-credentials have a total study time of no less than 100 hours and no more than 150 hours (4-6 ECTS). They are levelled at level 6 or Level 8 in the European Qualification Framework (bachelor or master level).

It provides a transcript that sets out the course content, learning outcomes, total study hours, EQF level and number of credit points (ECTS) earned.

The purpose is to make qualifications more readable and understandable across different countries and systems by learners, universities and employers.

EADTU and these developments

EADTU and the members have always been at the edge of educational progress.

The guiding principle of open universities has been mass-personalisation: excellence and inclusion in innovative teaching and learning environments.

Open and distance teaching universities have had a large impact on national higher education systems by developing new modes of teaching and learning along with new technologies for education as they came up.

During the long existence, EADTU contributed to educational developments through European projects with a transnational impact. Also today, we contribute the European challenges just mentioned. EADTU keeps cooperating with the entire community of European universities to make European higher education accessible and high quality for all.