The online, open and flexible higher education conference 2015

"Transforming higher education in the 21st century; innovating pathways to learning and continuous professional education"

Hagen Message, 1 November 2015

EADTU and its members contribute to European objectives like:

- widening access to higher education, especially by open and flexible education
- regional innovation by tailor-made solutions for enterprises and professional development
- open education initiatives
- international collaboration and mobility

At a moment, when strategic decisions are to be taken on Higher education in Europe, EADTU adds a new dimension to the European Higher Education Area.

1. The changing pedagogical landscape

New modes of teaching and learning, based on ICT and new media, will change the landscape of higher education in three areas of provision:

- *Bachelor and master degree studies* change from face to face education to blended learning, combining traditional teaching formats with e-learning. With blended learning, higher education institutions expect to enhance the quality and effectiveness of education and to deal better with increasing student numbers. Degree education should be innovated by extending and strengthening the classroom with a virtual environment.
- Continuing education and continuing professional development (CPD) are important to transfer and valorise scientific knowledge for innovation in enterprises and for regional development. The internet creates flexibility, by which students can learn anytime from anywhere in the region or in the world, fit to the needs of students combining study and a professional life.
- *Open education* brings courses to the public domain as is the case with OERs (course content) and MOOCs (a complete learning experience). Online education has created the possibility of large-scale open education. Open education (OER, MOOCs) is important to as a service to society and to share knowledge with citizens as an emancipatory activity.

These are the main pillars for the next developments in higher education. By online provisions, the areas of continuing education, continuous professional development and open education will expand drastically.

All belong to the mission of 21th century universities. Higher education institutions will profile themselves in degree education, continuing education and open education.

At the system level, governments should stimulate and accelerate a balanced development in these three areas.

As a follow-up of the Changing Pedagogical Landscape study, EADTU will extend the study to other countries and report qualitative trend studies very two years.

2. Short learning programmes

As announced already on the Summit 2015 with the European Commission, EADTU has prepared a Memorandum of Understanding between the European open and distance teaching universities, confirming their intent to promote short learning programmes (SLP) in their educational provisions and to collaborate on the development and delivery of SLP's.

SLP's respond to the needs for flexible higher education in Europe, especially with regard to the area of continuous education and continuous professional development. Flexible education is the only way forward to meet sustainably the EU 2020 objectives and to improve skills and employability all over Europe.

Open and distance teaching universities will collaborate with regard to SLP's, aiming at:

- the mutual recognition of modules or courses, leading to exemptions when students register for SLP's or for degree programmes at one of the collaborating universities;
- the development of joint SLP-programmes with a joint award, certificate or diploma with integrated mobility between partner universities. Ultimately,
- SLP's can also be (alternative) tracks in joint bachelor or master programmes.

SLP's can also contain work-based learning or internships involving university-business collaboration.

3. Diversified educational pathways

Educational pathways have become more diversified. Apart from the direct path from school to university and employment, personal biographies are becoming increasingly varied, switching between employment and studies or simultaneously working and learning part-time. Modern university systems are dealing with students, completing a (short) degree in computer science or

economics at the age of 33 after vocational training and ten years of working experience; 17-years old secondary school pupils engaged in studies of mathematics parallel to school; a 62-year old student who – although chronically ill – completes two degree programmes and doctoral studies in eight year; the student engaged in street work in India who simultaneously studies at an open university in Europe; the bank clerk without Abitur or equivalent who completes his bachelor degree and subsequently his master degree in business administration and economics.

Students combining work and/or family obligations with studying is subject to other general conditions than traditional students, which requires universities to put in place a different organisational structure to offer them guidance and follow-up. Only new modes of teaching and learning can be integrated in such worlds of working and living.

The diversity of demands for education requires diversity of learning opportunities- with adequate structures.

Universities will increasingly deal with the recognition/accreditation of achievements, knowledge and skills acquired outside the university.

4. MOOCs and OpenupEd

MOOCs are courses designed for large numbers of participants, which can be accessed by participants from anywhere in the world as long as an internet connection is available to them. MOOCs are open to everyone without formal entry qualifications, and offer a full/complete course experience online for free. MOOCs contribute to core the mission of universities, sharing education with all citizens by open accessibility (open education), transferring and valorising innovative knowledge to enterprises, and formally or informally integrating MOOCs as an enriching learning experience in blended degree education.

Hence, key objectives of institutions and governments concerning MOOCs are:

- Academic knowledge sharing with citizens in society at large:
- Knowledge transfer and valorisation for innovative enterprises:
- MOOCS to enrich the learning experience in degree programmes,

Although MOOCs mainly have been conceived as a form of open education (the first objective), from an educational policy perspective these three objectives are important.

Business models for MOOCs differ according to these areas,

MOOCs were originally conceived as open courses for use in the US and worldwide, in one language only: massive means worldwide for people who read English. But, language frontiers are hindering a thorough reach-out of MOOCs to many European regions.

Hence, in European countries the development, delivery and usage of MOOCs should be stimulated by:

- Supporting the development of MOOCs in universities in each country, using innovative models of learning design
- Organising the delivery of MOOCs, through national platforms where needed,
- Activating the national and regional use of MOOCs in open education, flexible continuing education and CPD and in degree education.

Activating the usage of MOOCs by participants is a necessary condition for the future success of MOOCs-provisions. This requires that professional networks, regional development organisations, cities as well as civil society organisations close to the citizens are involved, bridging the gap between MOOCs and users of MOOCs in different contexts.

Currently, these issues are discussed in the OpenupEd.

5. EMPOWERing universities

The EMPOWER programme of EADTU is capitalizing on the assets of EADTU members with regard to new modes of teaching and learning. As suggested by the European Commission, the principal objective is to accelerate the implementation of new modes of teaching and learning in higher education institutions European-wide. The experience of EADTU members will benefit the entire tertiary education system in European countries.

Today, EADTU can report that we have installed twelve expert groups, consisting of more than 80 niche experts across the membership:

- Institutional policies and frameworks for online teaching and learning
- Student-centered online/blended curriculum and course development and design
- Knowledge resources, e-libraries, knowledge networks
- Student support and guidance online (incl. learning communities/networks)
- ICT support, learning environment and educational support services
- Assessment (incl. learning analytics), examinations, certification
- On campus online/blended teaching and learning
- Open and flexible distance education (incl. strategies, organisation, business models, marketing)
- Education and training on demand (incl. CPD, university-business collaboration, non-degree courses)
- Transnational education (incl. collaborative curricula and mobility)
- OERs and MOOCs (incl. educational design and their use)
- Governmental policies (incl. funding, incentives, quality assurance and accreditation)

These expert groups will collaborate with research and innovation groups in the membership, e.g. the Welten Institute in the Netherlands, the Institute of Educational Technology in the UK,

the National Institute for Digital Learning in Ireland and the e/Learn Centre in Spain. Some expert groups will seek cooperation with other specific centres of expertise in universities across Europe.

Also, this year preparations take place in universities for pilot actions with regard to setting up staff training and management seminars, led by the institutions concerned. The EMPOWER expert groups deliver additional niche expertise in situ, according to a prior needs analysis. Consequently, the institutions concerned prepare an innovation plan for their institution. In a later stage, the implementation of this plan will be evaluated by a small assessment team.

The EMPOWER expert pools will also operate as academic groups, exchanging innovative practice and preparing joint publications as well as course material.

EMPOWER is operating as a direct response to the new priorities of the European Commission for Europe 2020, which will be discussed later this year by the Council of Ministers, notably contributing to the achievement of benchmarks related to:

- the sustainable investment, performance and efficiency of higher education systems;
- the support of teaching staff by professional development
- open and innovative education and training
- inclusive education, equality and non-discrimination.

6. Actions for refugees

Hundreds of thousands of refugees arrive in Europe or stay in camps in neighbourhood countries. Figures about their educational background are unknown. The future of refugees is unsure, but surely it will have an impact on the future of our societies. Education is a vehicle to mutual understanding, shared citizenship and social emancipation. Access to higher education is primordial for an enhanced insertion in society, especially for social mobility and employment.

Refugees should be reached where they are, also in refugee/asylum centres, etc., irrespective of their personal future (either they stay in the EU or they return to their home country). In both cases, there is a tremendous added social, economical and political value.

Higher education institutions are challenged to provide accessible and flexible educational provisions for refugees, fit to the refugees' needs and living conditions, at different levels and areas:

- higher education/university degree courses at a distance/online for refugees, who have the competences to enter these courses

- short learning programmes (SLP's) at the university level on Europe (history, policy, politics, sociology, economics, social policies) and on subjects which increase the employability of refugee students (business, health care, teacher training).

- language courses (EU languages)

- continuing professional development in some areas, especially where

there is a need of qualifications

- open education for free (e.g. MOOCs)

Besides degree programmes, members are prepared to organise short learning programmes leading to awards (1-5 ECTS), certificates (6 to 14 ECTS) and diplomas (15 ECTS or more). All members are used to provide education for large student numbers. Some of the members have experience with partnerships in developing countries or with higher education in precarious environments with little facilities (a.o. printed material, mobile learning). EADTU has coordinated a large number of European projects (EAC) concerning distance education provisions, quality assurance, OER, MOOCs, networked curricula, mobility, entrepreneurship, innovation, etc.. EADTU is prepared to mobilize its members for large scale actions of the EC. This also corresponds with the mission of open and distance teaching universities.

The Open University (OU) already teams up with The British Council to deliver academic programmes to displaced Syrian refugees who have temporarily settled in Jordan and Lebanon. English, French and German language skills will be taught in classrooms by the British Council to approximately 3000 Syrians and disadvantaged Jordanian students, with around 300 of the highest achieving students progressing to Open University accredited online degree courses. There will also be opportunities for at least 400 students who have completed a language course to continue their studies by taking a short online course on the OU's social learning platform, FutureLearn. While not accredited, these free short courses provide learners with knowledge and skills that will help them to earn a living or find a job when they return to Syria.

The European Commission should take a cross-sectoral initiative (DG's NEAR, EAC, EPL, MARKT, DEV, etc), embracing a pragmatic step by step approach (not waiting until all DG's are on board, starting with willing universities). The general approach should not be fragmented but cohesive and aim at a long-term, large-scale policy. However, it should start in a very short term to keep the momentum (there is need now). Initiatives should respond to the direct needs of refugees and focus on:

- the delivery side (bringing courses to refugee students, printed or online facilities, learning communities, assessment facilities,...). The European Commission should support large-scale and long term strategies.

- the students' side (awareness raising, reduced fees, ICT equipment, local organisation or study centres in refugee/asylum centres).

EADTU members will make and inventory of relevant courses and programmes, Apart from their involvement in national initiatives, they are open to cooperation with the European Commission on short and long term action plans. EADTU members develop and deliver state of the art distance/online education courses in all EU languages, some of them also in Arabic. Many of the members organise MOOCs (English, French, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, Turkish, etc.). They have also experience in integrating migrant student categories in the university.

7. Research and innovation

The EADTU membership hosts the most advanced educational research and innovation centres in Europe, e.g. In the UK, Spain, the Netherlands, Germany and other member states. It is strategically important that these institutes join forces in order to develop synergies.

Of course, collaboration exists today, driven by individual researchers.

With the respective institutes, we have to evaluate what can be done more structurally with regard to:

- *Collaboration in mission-related R&I,* i.e. in the field of online, open and flexible education. This is mainly educational research (e.g. learning design), but eventually also sociological, economical and policy research.
- *Collaboration through joint international graduate schools in these fields* (example: the graduate school for OER research)
- Other instruments for collaboration like staff exchange (Erasmus+, strand one; Marie Curie actions); joint research programmes (Marie Curie), joint doctoral programmes (Marie Curie)., European R&I projects (Horizon 2020)

Specific attention should be given to part time (distance) PhD students (who might bring in their professional context)

Collaboration should strengthen the (1) (national) research agenda of the participating members; (2) synergies and new approaches in the field; (3) an international experience for all PhD students and researchers involved; (4) an increased number of international projects, publications and (joint, double) doctorates.

EADTU will publish the educational research programmes and an inventory of publications and PhD theses on its website.