

**Message of Zermatt**  
**Lifelong learning in higher education**  
**29 September 2010**

Lifelong learning is a major objective in the Bologna Declaration and the Lisbon Strategy, and has been recently reaffirmed by the EUA Charter on Lifelong Learning and the Leuven Communiqué of the Conference of European Ministers for Higher Education. But the gap between policy and reality is very large. According to recent Eurostat figures (September 2010), participation in lifelong learning is far below the Europe 2020 benchmark of 15 %<sup>1</sup>. In 2009, 9,3 % of the EU-27 population participated in lifelong learning, an increase of only 1,0% since 2003. There are significant differences amongst member states, where participation ranges from 1,4% to 31, 6%. We are far short of the requirements of the knowledge society that Europe aspires to.

**1. The lifelong learning challenge**

With the possible exception of the Northern part of Europe and of open and distance teaching universities in a number of European countries<sup>2</sup>, there is a lack of policy and expertise in lifelong learning in large parts of Europe. We risk a two speed Europe in this vital domain for the development of skills, access to knowledge and capacity to innovate.

Lifelong learning is recognised by Ministers as a public responsibility, so urgent governmental action is needed to embed it in higher education throughout Europe and to

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<sup>1</sup> . Eurostat defines lifelong learning as education and training received within four weeks preceding the survey by persons aged 25 to 64. It corresponds to either formal education received in schools, colleges and universities or to non-formal education and training which covers short courses followed for job or private reasons. It excludes informal learning, such as self-learning through the use of printed material, visiting libraries etc.

<sup>2</sup> Currently, open and distance teaching universities are working in the UK, Spain (Madrid, Catalunya), Germany (Nordrhein-Westfalia), Portugal, Italy, the Netherlands, Greece, Cyprus

engage all higher education institutions. The Council of Ministers of Education and the European Commission will continue to have their roles to play, but so too does the leadership of universities, where strategies and business models for lifelong learning have to be become part of the mainstream.

## 2. Good practice

The Zermatt Conference revealed good practice at all levels on which the future can be built. Excellent work, often supported by the Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Commission, already exists in relation to:

- university strategies and business models for lifelong learning
- productive relationships between formal and informal learning
- open educational resources
- learning for employability and entrepreneurship
- teaching and learning through curricula shared across institutions
- virtual mobility extending the physical teaching and learning space for students of all ages
- virtual campuses and other online developments
- quality assurance in lifelong learning online or at a distance.

On line and distance education has become an increasingly important tool for lifelong learning as recent student growth demonstrates, and is increasingly integrating lifelong learning into the mainstream of higher education. Student numbers in the 18-25 age cohort are increasing in distance teaching universities in countries such as the UK and Spain. Open universities perform in the top rank of national student satisfaction surveys (Open University UK, Open Universiteit Netherlands). On line and distance education has the capacity to combine scale and quality in ways that conventional higher education finds difficult to achieve. Not only is it scalable, but its quality is enhanced by student-centred pedagogy and technological innovation.

## 3. The triple track approach

The work of EADTU, strengthened by the evidence of Zermatt, is founded on a triple track approach to lifelong learning in higher education:

**Open knowledge sharing.** Open universities are using informal learning channels to bring together breakthrough developments in open educational resources, open innovation, and open access to research journals to create new approaches of teaching and learning that are vital for innovation and knowledge exchange.

**Open and flexible degree education.** The open university model is recognised globally as a strong European brand. It combines high quality self study content developed by multidisciplinary course teams, student-centred multimedia resources, and personal contact and tutoring in study centres. Open universities in Europe have created this pervasive, highly successful model over the last 40 years, and it is proving increasingly attractive in conventional universities.

**On-demand customised education and training.** In a world where transformation and innovation are core requirements for a successful economy, new forms of collaboration between higher education and business are required. The responsiveness and openness that characterises open universities across Europe are now being extended to meet public and private sector needs for research and development and for new flexible educational content.

#### **4. A comprehensive policy**

The innovations that underpin this triple track approach offer major opportunities on which national higher education systems in Europe can build.

Universities have crucial new roles to play in the 21st century knowledge society as centres for research and innovation in their regions and internationally. They can become critical nodes in research and innovation networks, where individuals, companies and society will seek validated knowledge and education. To secure this role, the three tracks - open knowledge sharing, open and flexible degree education, and on-demand and customised education and training – will all need continued development, regionally and nationally, within and between disciplines. In doing so, universities have profound, but often hidden value to offer to the external world in their learning environments, which are increasingly enriched by innovative educational technologies. That value needs to become more visible.

Despite country to country differences, regional and national needs have much in common. As demonstrated in European initiatives such as the Lifelong Learning Programme, and the European Institute of Innovation and Technology, international collaboration and innovation in the field of lifelong will continue to drive the creation of high quality content-rich provision.

## **5. Networking**

Learning is a personal but also a social process. Research confirms that communities nurture, sustain and enhance learning at all levels, including the highest. Learning communities can be created in any teaching and learning context, in informal as well as in formal learning.

In developing innovation and the innovative power of across Europe, universities need to connect with communities of practice and professional communities where practice-related experience and expertise is shared. Innovative knowledge that emerges from universities increases in value through transfer to and embedding in these communities, as we have seen in the knowledge-innovation communities (KICs) in The European Institute of Innovation and Technology.

Knowledge transfer benefits flow in both directions. Networking with practitioners and professionals can be integrated with student learning communities in formal higher education or in company training programmes, to the benefit of all parties.

## **6. EADTU activities for Lifelong Learning in 2010/11**

EADTU will:

- strengthen the triple track concept of lifelong learning at the European level, building on recent research and development and on expertise and good practice across Europe.
- disseminate the approach to stakeholder networks at national and institutional level.
- use networked innovation to share the approach between EADTU members, fostering innovative research and development and the exchange of good practice.

## **7. EADTU in partnership**

EADTU will collaborate with other regional organisations in the world as an associate member of ICDE, the global association for distance education.

With UNESCO, EADTU will organise a global task force for quality benchmarking of online and distance education. It will also support a global UNESCO Forum on open educational resources, which will bring together OER-initiatives for widening participation in higher education from other regions in the world.



EADTU is a partner of the European Commission for Lifelong Learning throughout Europe. It coordinates European projects in the Lifelong Learning policy, the virtual exchange of students, open educational resources, higher education for entrepreneurship and innovation, university-business interfaces, and networked education at the master and doctoral level.