

EADTU conference 2016 “European higher education in the digital age: opportunities and impact of new modes of teaching”

Student Message of Rome

The Student Council for Open and Distance Learning

Three years ago in the Students Message of Paris we asked for the development of strategies to ensure that distance learning stays a flexible and affordable instrument for lifelong learning.

We formulated this message because we as students recognized some changes in the way distance learning was seen at the universities.

The high drop-out rates and the long time and high effort learners need to complete their studies were discussed in politics and as a result in our universities and here at the EADTU.

Back then we tried to remind the attendants of the conference, that the community of lifelong learners is heterogeneous and has other needs and challenges than younger students and the aims of the Agenda EU2020 were about to be missed.

Some of the changes discussed at that time - for example cutting back flexibility - were aiming at shortening the study time of distance learners.

We were concerned that it would keep older people or for example people with disabilities from enrolling into distance learning courses right away as it might not fit into their life planning.

We are glad to see that as stated in this conference (and in the Message of Rome) there were a lot of ideas and strategies to specialize in the needs of lifelong learners again.

We support the idea of developing Short Learning Programmes that fit in the lives of working people. But as the recipient of these plans we have to remind you every year and we have to do that this year again: Please do not consider the SLPs as an easy way to earn money. We like the SLPs because they are offering us better access to the education we need and more flexibility. We as Students need flexibility during our studies and we appreciate it when our Degrees and Diplomas are accepted and worthy.

In Paris we stated that especially the lifelong learners will cope with a changing world and we think this is still true in every way. We are glad to see, that the Open and Distance Universities are now focussing on the needs of lifelong learners again.

We as students also discussed the situation of the refugees in the world. Many young people in the world had to put a hold to their careers and their whole life in order to save themselves and their families from unbelievable threats.

Many would like to start or continue their studies right after reaching a safe place in Europe or elsewhere in the world. In many countries they have to wait for a long time until they can return to a normal life and gain access to education.

Although we think it is utterly important for the integration of refugees to help them to connect to people with face to face social contacts - the University for Refugees is an excellent tool to bridge the time until they gain a residence permit, enrol into a local language course and maybe enrol into a normal university. Please do try to push for further cooperation between your universities and the University for Refugees. Don't let the time of all these young people be wasted anymore. In Fact thank you for taking action and thank you for your work once again for us students in general.