

Maastricht Message

From the M-2009 World Conference
(23rd ICDE World Conference and the 2009 EADTU Annual Conference)

Preamble

This message reflects the key issues of the 23rd ICDE World Conference and the 2009 EADTU Annual Conference. Representatives of regional associations and members have contributed to the discussions on which this message is based.

Creativity and innovation are key to the improvement of the human social and economic condition. Innovative, flexible ways of learning, and creating and sharing knowledge are required if every one of the world's people is to have the opportunity to maximize his or her potential and to contribute to the development of their communities. Governments, NGO's, not-for-profit interests and the corporate sector must individually and collectively mobilize their imagination and resources to create flexible, accessible, and quality learning at scale.

Achievements

Over the last four decades open, flexible and distance learning has developed so that it now offers the first real means of delivering quality learning at scale. The open and distance university movement is removing barriers of geography, time and cost while maintaining quality of education. In some countries open and distance education now serves more than one third of the student population and this is growing rapidly. Also, the lives of many, including small farmers, nascent entrepreneurs, and previously marginalized communities and individuals have been changed through the learning acquired from these institutions. All of this contributes to the growth of local and national communities and economies. In the current global economic crisis ODL provides cost efficient and flexible solutions.

The Future

The future offers exciting opportunities. Several innovations, such as open educational resources, mobile devices, social software and virtual mobility will radically change the landscape of global learning and expand the global learning community. Open, flexible and distance learning can contribute productively to all education systems.

The Challenges

These innovations also present challenges that must be resolved to achieve the successful massification of education. These challenges are:

Technical Infrastructure: The potential benefits of the rapid development of ICT for enhancing the quality of open, flexible and distance learning can only be realized with adequate connectivity to the online world, which requires the availability of ICT infrastructure. In many parts of the world, this lack of infrastructure remains one of the key elements hindering the full exploitation of the opportunities afforded by networked technologies. The digital divide has not yet been removed and this contributes to marginalisation and inequality.

OER's: These have made a real contribution to the free movement of educational content. But several questions remain. How will the post secondary sector ensure the cultural appropriateness, quality and effective use of OER's? How can the sector ensure that they do not inhibit the creation, growth and renewal of intellectual capital? How will they be captured to ensure their preservation and use? How can they be made sustainable?

Quality: The growth of distance institutions with international reach and the number of their graduates have led to concerns of quality, demanding internationalization of curriculum and

learning by all distance learning institutions. Quality must be assured and demonstrated in measurable ways to ensure that learners acquire the knowledge they need and to reassure stakeholders of this.

Mobility: Internationalization is a hallmark of 21st century learning. This should ensure not only an understanding of the wider world, but also that credentials are portable and recognized across the world. Virtual mobility initiatives can increase access to educational mobility in cost effective ways.

Private/Public Responsibility: In many countries over 90% of learning is through private not for profit and/or for profit agencies. What is the appropriate mix of public and private responsibilities for learning? What are effective business models? How can national capacity be developed to ensure service to the public?

The Way Forward

There is currently an extensive range of regional and national activities addressing these challenges. ICDE will draw upon members and associations to develop specific action-oriented agendas. It is proposed that ICDE will support the coordination of the consolidation and expansion of existing UNESCO sponsored activities in Quality and OER, and the coordination and development of actions to address the additional three challenges.

ICDE Executive Committee
EADTU Executive Committee
10 June 2009