

2nd European Summit on open and online learning and the modernisation agenda for European higher education

2 April 2014

Message (Summary)

Challenges for European universities

1. All European universities are strongly affected by the developments in ICT in higher education. This is even more stimulated by the emergence of MOOCs. This will lead to a transformation of pedagogies and to new formats in higher education which better serve students and society at large.

Innovative modes of teaching and learning

2. However, the innovation in European universities is going too slow and there is a danger that it doesn't sufficiently match with the European objectives to improve participation, personalization and diversification. The reforms should focus on new modes of teaching and should keep in mind the variety of groups of learners, studying with different goals: full time degree students; part-time students, those involved in continuing professional education and take only certificates; students learning on the workplace; transnational students; students worldwide who study OERs or take a MOOC. Europe should remain a leader in quality in higher education. Universities need to develop new pedagogies and sustaining organizational models and institutional strategies. Governments should create favourable conditions and incentives to support this.

Anchoring open and flexible education

3. Europe faces a particular need for open and flexible higher education in order to facilitate the access and the success of adults in higher education. Flexible higher education should be adapted to the life situation of people who combine study and work or private activities.

Governments and institutions should think out of the box and organise pilot experiments with modular education and short courses; OERs and MOOCs; associate degrees, etc. They should valorise past learning experience at the workplace or in courses. They should envisage new funding incentives to stimulate students to register for educational activities, e.g. a voucher system for students. Governments should develop a comprehensive policy anchor open and flexible education in the higher education system.

Universities, governments and the corporate sector should think as well about joint online learning investments by employers and institutions.

Connected universities

4. Through the internet higher education institutions are more than ever connected. This creates new possibilities for students and staff to connect with partner universities and to co-organise seminars, communities, international classrooms, courses and mobility worldwide, leading to an international experience for all. These partnerships can be extended to R&D institutes, businesses, public services, and other knowledge intensive organizations.

Universities should create the environment for connectedness including knowledge centres and the stakeholders in this environment.

Open(ing up) education

5. From a student's perspective, learning in a connected world is only possible if universities and other knowledge organizations are prepared to open their knowledge to the outside world and to give open access to it. This is what open educational resources and MOOCs already are doing now. They enrich the learning experience of degree students, contribute to continuing professional education, support learners on the workplace or introduce every interested learner to a domain. As a consequence, they support the mission of universities to contribute to the knowledge society.

The OpenupEd initiative offers support to accredited institutions for publishing MOOCs that contribute to opening up education to the benefit of learners and the wider society while reflecting values such as equity, quality and diversity.

Research and innovation

6. National and European authorities should promote coordinated research and innovation actions for knowledge development in new modes of teaching and learning for the diversity of learners. Institutional, national and European R&I initiatives should be better connected in order to stimulate and motivate the adoption of new technologies and new forms of learning European-wide. Open universities have excellent research programmes in this field.

Leadership in innovation

7. Throughout last decades, EADTU members and their R&D institutes have developed leadership in educational innovation and the use of new modes of teaching and learning, based on ICT.

EADTU members are prepared to make this experience and expertise in new modes of teaching and learning available to European universities and to the entire higher education system. This should contribute to a European higher education system, which shows leadership in the world.

Empowering European higher education

8. EADTU prepares an action programme, empowering European universities in their transition to new modes of teaching and learning (EMPOWER).

Since the EADTU-EU special Summit on Opening Up Education on 2 October 2013, already several universities have shown interest in working within the EMPOWER partnership.

In 2014, further preparations will be taken, including the selection of partner universities for a first pilot phase; constituting the EMPOWER Task Force and expert pools; developing the action framework for the implementation of new modes of teaching and learning; preparing institutional procedures to analyse needs and to prioritise actions to implement innovative online or blended education; defining development activities to be jointly implemented by local staff and European experts, based on institutional priorities.

EADTU not only will gradually build a programme to strengthen online education in European universities. By the experience of the members, it also will mitigate the potential risks of large scale innovations.

Universities concerned will link with national authorities to involve them for the theme of further governmental policy development and actions.

The European agenda

9. This will contribute to the modernization agenda of the European universities as pointed out by the European Commission in recent documents preparing a programme of transformation in the education systems of Europe between now and 2020.

Concrete actions have to be implemented in the next 5 years. The European Commission should examine how universities gradually can be supported for change towards a new pedagogical landscape.