Message of Sorbonne, Paris

25 October 2013

1. *Today, most higher education institutions and the majority of their programmes increasingly embrace a form of blended teaching and learning, integrating face to face and online learning. Increasingly, online learning solutions are enhancing the quality of mainstream higher education. Online teaching and learning methods and resources also are at the core of lifelong learning developments, enabling students to join work and study without the need for physical presence at the university. Ultimately, online technologies have the potential to transform the concept of teaching and learning itself. This requires a new educational culture and new mindsets, responding to the pedagogical opportunities of new technologies in education.*

2. *Online education incorporates the promise of cost effectiveness while student numbers in the mainstream are drastically growing and higher education has to be made accessible and flexible for 25 plus non mainstream students. The implementation of online teaching and learning requires new organisational and business models for both categories of students. The reach-out to non-mainstream students requires different organisational models, hosting these students at the university by balancing student activities online, in study centres and at work or at home.*

3. *The members of the European Association of Distance Teaching Universities are keen to take leadership in pedagogy-led European developments in this area and to work with the wider sector, using the expertise they have acquired in student-centred teaching and learning through online and other means, to ensure that teaching and learning in all European universities will reach the highest quality standards.*

4. *EADTU members strongly welcome the Opening up Education initiative as a positive contribution to the European Commission's Modernisation Agenda in Higher Education. EADTU is a key partner representing the online and distance higher education sector with the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers in support of this initiative.*

5. *EADTU embraces MOOCs as important tool to enhance the use of online education but more importantly to promote Open Education and to contribute to a flexible higher educational system. In the OpenupEd platform, launched by EADTU,, both traditional and distance/online universities work together on making higher education more open and flexible. EADTU will release a quality label for MOOCs that contributes to online, open and flexible higher education.*

6. *Most European institutions have yet to develop a clear policy framework for the development and the implementation of new modes of learning. Approaches remain partial and fragmented. So there is now an urgent need in many institutions for an institutional strategy and a coherent*

framework for the optimal exploitation of online technologies and for the development of innovative teaching and learning formats, that will enhance the quality of teaching and learning.

7. *Quality assurance and accreditation of online teaching and learning is not yet integrated in quality assurance systems either at the institutional level or in the work of national quality assurance and accreditation agencies. The problem of quality criteria designed for face to face teaching which are applied inappropriately to online learning should now be regarded as urgent. Over the past 8 years, supported by the European Commission, EADTU has gained experience and expertise in quality benchmarking for e-learning that is recognised worldwide through the E-xcellence family of projects in their engagement. This will be further strengthened in a joint project with ENQA and EFQUEL next year, aiming at the integration of standards for online teaching and learning.*

8. *An even greater challenge we all face is the prospect of new systems academic accreditation over which higher education has less control. There is intense interest in new certification options and badging systems linked to OER, open courses and MOOCs.*

9. *Today, there is an intolerable inequality between different European nations in access to open and flexible higher education. We therefore call on national governments to develop and implement policies to ensure that open and flexible provision for citizens aged 25 becomes a vital and natural part of their higher education systems, so that the talents of all citizens develop throughout their lifetimes, so that employability is secured through skilling and re-skilling, and citizens have the opportunity to enhance their knowledge and understanding, anytime and anywhere they need.*

10. *Particularly in a knowledge society, universities of tomorrow should also care about students they don't have today and reach out to people who have the potential to learn in higher education, but perhaps didn't access it until now.*

European developments in online and blended education

Most students in Europe experience in their universities already at least in part online education. Today, most higher education institutions and the majority of their programmes increasingly embrace a form of blended teaching and learning, integrating face to face and online learning. The particular blend varies according to the particular mission, cultural and educational context of institutions, the motivation and educational skills of teaching staff, the technological resources available and so on. Institutional learning environments support the optimization of the blend.

Increasingly, online learning solutions, provide collaborative courses covering virtual seminars, learning communities, live videoconferencing , and asynchronous web applications. Multi-campus and transnational education is growing rapidly. Online teaching and learning methods and resources also are at the core of lifelong learning developments, enabling students to join work and study without the need for physical presence at the university.*New pedagogies and the transformation of teaching and learning*

On the other hand, there are probably very few students whose learning experience has been transformed and whose success has been stimulated by the full educational potential of online technologies. A learning management system or a virtual learning environment is no guarantee of effective online pedagogy. Yet ultimately, online technologies have the potential to transform the concept of teaching and learning itself. Effectively deployed, new technologies stimulate accessibility, interactivity, flexibility, personalisation and the ubiquity of teaching and learning, opening up education for students at home or at work, and for international students. Teaching staff and students can jointly become designers and beneficiaries of the learning process. What goes through the network from teacher to student is probably not more important than what comes back from student to teacher, and what we do with that rich source of pedagogic data through learning analytics.

New pedagogies have to prevail on new technologies. The solutions that hold out most potential are designing the learning process around learning activities, exploiting what students already know and their search and discovery skills, using the interaction between students and staff and between students in learning communities as a way to construct knowledge jointly. The innovation is bound to continue, if not accelerate.

This requires a new educational culture and new mindsets, responding to the pedagogical opportunities of new technologies in education. Teaching staff has to be (re)skilled and also new types of educational careers related to course development, tutoring and assessment are to be implemented. This pedagogical and organisational transformation, where teaching is conceived as a design science should be systematically implemented in all countries.

New business models and cost effectiveness

Online education incorporates the promise of cost effectiveness while student numbers in the mainstream are drastically growing and higher education has to be made accessible and flexible for 25 plus non mainstream students.

The implementation of online teaching and learning requires new organisational and business models for both categories of students. High quality educational models meet the requirements of mass/personalisation. Institutional policies have to define new blends between face to face and online education and to implement organisational models, establishing collaborative curriculum and course development, valorising the complementarity of teaching staff. Also, new roles with regard to the delivery of courses have to be defined, including tutoring and assessment of students, individually or in learning communities.

The reach-out to non-mainstream students requires different organisational models, hosting these students at the university by balancing student activities online, in study centres and at work or at home.

European leadership to reach impact on education and the highest quality standards

The members of the European Association of Distance Teaching Universities are keen to take leadership in pedagogy-led European developments in this area and to work with the wider sector, using the expertise they have acquired in student-centred teaching and learning through online and other means, to ensure that teaching and learning in all European universities will reach the highest quality standards. To this end, they are willing to pool their expertise with others in a European-wide action plan to enhance the quality and impact of online and blended teaching and learning in all member states. By creating this shared pool of experience and expertise, we will drive forward excellence in teaching and learning in European higher education and enhance the competitive position of European universities in the rest of the world. EADTU at the European level and its members in their respective countries already serve a network for experimentation, collaboration and innovation in online teaching and learning, and the development of organisational and business models for open and flexible education reaching out to non-mainstream students. We seek to extend that network in partnership with the wider higher education sector.

Opening up Education

EADTU members strongly welcome the Opening up Education initiative as a positive contribution to the European Commission's Modernisation Agenda in Higher Education. EADTU is a key partner representing the online and distance higher education sector with the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers in support of this initiative. We share the objective to create a European Learning Space of universities, accessible for all in all countries and from anywhere in Europe, and responding to the educational needs of the population, whether that be for formal qualifications or for non-formal and informal learning.

In this rapidly evolving climate, we are beginning to see open education making its appearance in the mainstream. Open educational resources (OERs) were a first step to enable the re-use and remixing of study material and learning resources for students. MOOCs now dominate the agenda. From their north American origins they are now rapidly expanding in Europe as well.

MOOCs

In the Message of Paphos, a key element was that 'we need to do European MOOCs' as a response to a predominantly US movement. MOOCs increase the awareness of universities with regard to the relevance of online teaching and learning. By the large scale use of online new technologies, online and blended education will take a rapid expansion in the next years. Dual mode becomes more and more common and important. In addition, MOOCs are perceived as important for opening up education giving access to higher education at no cost for many learners. Hence, MOOCs can create a momentum for innovation.

Immediately after the Paphos Conference, several actions to develop the European OpenupEd portal were taken and on the 25th of April 2013, the OpenupEd initiative was launched in an online international press event with the support of the European Commission. At launch, 40 MOOCs by 11 partners in 12 different languages were available, in October 80 MOOCs. About 25 courses provide students with opportunities to get a formal certificate (ECTS). By now 10 additional institutions decided to join OpenupEd and 20 more institutions show serious interest in becoming partner of OpenupEd.

OpenupEd is a quality brand and partners are collaborating on those MOOCs that really focus on opening up education. Although there's a clear diversity of institutional approaches, the partnership has agreed on a framework of eight features for the MOOCs in order to open up education to a maximum level. The MOOCs are open as to access to all learners and they are digitally open, eg. open for re-use or re-mix. The courses are designed according to a learner-centered approach and suitable for independent learning. Within the courses, media-supported interaction with students is provided. The courses are recognized by the institutions and a certificate is delivered. All institutions and courses have to meet strict quality criteria, based on a conceptual quality framework for MOOCs and on earlier EADTU work with regard to the e-xcellence instrument. In OpenupEd, there is room for diversity according to the institutions delivering them, the study domains and the degree level.

OpenupEd uses a decentralized model for the operation of MOOCs. I.e. each institution is fully responsible for its own MOOCs operation including its quality assurance. As a consequence OpenupEd is not offering any LMS/CMS system for MOOCs. Most OpenupEd partners do already have stable learning environments that support students with online education on a massive scale.

MOOCs create an opportunity for widening access, they are appetizers for more education, they facilitate easier international exchange, they perhaps will be a tool for tackling global problems in education, fighting poverty with education in developing countries. At this stage, universities deal with them in a pragmatic way, but in the future they will be certainly part of a broader institutional policy. EADTU and the members will be at the inner circle of discussion and implementation.

EADTU embraces MOOCs as important tool to enhance the use of online education but more importantly to promote Open Education and to contribute to a flexible higher educational system. In OpenupEd, both traditional and distance/online universities work together on making higher education more open and flexible. The number of MOOCs offered through OpenupEd will increase significantly soon. EADTU will release a quality label for MOOCs that contributes to online, open and flexible higher education. OpenupEd partners will continuously develop showcases that MOOCs can

indeed contribute to new pedagogies and to the transformation of teaching and learning and will introduce new business models, while keeping highest quality standards.

A need for institutional strategies

But we should beware of undue optimism, and even more aware of the dangers of complacency. For teaching staff in many European universities, e-learning is still a strange and brave new world and they will need support to come to terms with it. Most European institutions have yet to develop a clear policy framework for the development and the implementation of new modes of learning. Approaches remain partial and fragmented. So there is now an urgent need in many institutions for an institutional strategy and a coherent framework for the optimal exploitation of online technologies and for the development of innovative teaching and learning formats, that will enhance the quality of teaching and learning.

Nonetheless, there are pioneer institutions developing leading edge learning solutions and advanced techniques for designing and monitoring learning, which have been captured by the Innovating Pedagogy reports from the Institute of Educational Technology of the British Open University and by the Institute for Prospective Technological Studies in Sevilla. Key trends that have been identified include MOOCs, open badges to accredit learning, learning analytics, seamless learning, crowd learning, digital scholarship, geo-learning, gamification, maker culture and citizen inquiry.

Quality assurance and accreditation issues

As online pedagogy expands within the mainstream, an issue that distance teaching institutions have faced for many years will be become better known. Quality assurance and accreditation of online teaching and learning is not yet integrated in quality assurance systems either at the institutional level or in the work of national quality assurance and accreditation agencies. The problem of quality criteria designed for face to face teaching which are applied inappropriately to online learning should now be regarded as urgent.

The European Association of Distance Teaching Universities and its members adhere to high quality standards in online and distance teaching and learning. Excellence in teaching and learning is fundamental to our mission, and is assured through rigorous structures and processes combined with peer review throughout the life cycle of courses.

Over the past 8 years, supported by the European Commission, EADTU has gained experience and expertise in quality benchmarking for e-learning that is recognised worldwide through the e-xcellence family of projects in their engagement. This will be further strengthened in a joint project with ENQA and EFQUEL next year, aiming at the integration of standards for online teaching and learning. Standards address the totality of the online learning environment and support services, including strategic management, curriculum design, course design, course delivery, staff support and student support. In this project, we will further capitalize on this experience.

Gradually, we need to move away from separate standards and procedures for the evaluation of online teaching and learning. E-learning is becoming part of the mainstream, so mainstream quality systems need to embrace it, both at the institutional level as at the level of quality assurance and accreditation agencies.

New certification options and badging systems

But an even greater challenge we all face is the prospect of new systems academic accreditation over which higher education has less control. There is intense interest in new certification options and badging systems linked to OER, open courses and MOOCs. Perhaps the most critical issue will be how employers react to these developments, and the prospect that this could lead to challenges from the private providers to the role of universities in awarding credits, certificates and degrees. Higher education will need new strategies for co-existence in this increasingly complex market place for certification.

National policies for open and flexible provisions

EADTU confirms the position that underpins its new strategy, and declares its wish to play a wider and increasingly active role in shaping the future of European higher education.

Higher education that encompasses open and flexible provision is essential to meet the social, economic and cultural needs of the citizens and nations of Europe. Today, there is an intolerable inequality between different European nations in access to open and flexible higher education. We therefore call on national governments to develop and implement policies to ensure that open and flexible provision for citizens aged 25 becomes a vital and natural part of their higher education systems, so that the talents of all citizens develop throughout their lifetimes, so that employability is secured through skilling and re-skilling, and citizens have the opportunity to enhance their knowledge and understanding, anytime and anywhere they need. National strategies should embrace at least smaller scale institutional provisions in open and distance learning in countries where no open universities were created.

Particularly in a knowledge society, universities of tomorrow should also care about students they don't have today and reach out to people who have the potential to learn in higher education, but perhaps didn't access it until now. This is needed for their participation in the labour market and for to harness our economies, but also to live enriched lives in a rapidly evolving society and to strengthen society.