



HEERLEN MESSAGE

Mass-individualisation of higher education for the knowledge-based society

was the theme of the 2004 EADTU Conference, an annual event of the European Association of Distance Teaching Universities, that took place on October 21-23, 2004 in Heerlen (Open Universiteit Nederland). The Heerlen Message is a result of the 2004 EADTU Conference. EADTU wants to use this message to inform policy makers and all those involved in creating an European Learning Space.

COMPACT MESSAGE

- 1 *The Lisbon agenda urgently requires the launch of an unorthodox EU action plan, as well as national action plans, for developing a mature knowledge-based society through a significant jump in the participation in higher education throughout Europe.*
- 2 *The flexibilization of learning tracks goes beyond the Bologna two cycle bachelor - master structure in terms of access(ibility), diversification and personalization.*
- 3 *The mobility case in 'Bologna' needs much more focus on virtual mobility besides physical mobility, which should be reflected in the EU subsidy and grant programmes.*
- 4 *The European Learning Space should be spanned through collaborations and alliances among European universities.*
- 5 *Adequate implementation of lifelong learning in higher education depends on a major joint effort of three stakeholders: universities, the corporate sector and the government, which requires new arrangements of collaboration.*
- 6 *In order to meet the significantly increasing demand for Lifelong Open and Flexible (LOF) learning the EADTU members should seek effectiveness and efficiency by joining forces over their areas of operation and by stimulating and co-founding new LOF learning initiatives among the EU member states, especially in the new EU countries.*
- 7 *A strong impetus is required for R&D in the area of Lifelong Open and Flexible (LOF) learning, supported by dedicated EU and national subsidy programmes as well as by industrial initiatives.*
- 8 *In line with the ambition of 'Europe' to play a leading role, worldwide, in sustainable development, the EU and its member states as well as the European educational institutions and associations are urged to take on a leading role in the development of all learning, including lifelong learning, for sustainable development. The decade of Education for Sustainable Development provides an excellent opportunity to show this leading role.*

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CONTEXT

The 2004 EADTU Conference was acknowledged the label of the Dutch Presidency of the European Union and brought together a variety of higher education experts working in educational practice and innovation, research and development, policy and strategy and management. Participants from universities, colleges, industry, government and support organizations have discussed and worked together in six thematic areas: educational and professional profiles, accessibility and interoperability, mobility, personalization, lifelong learning, learning communities, and a special track on the decade of education for sustainable development (DESD).

The conference theme draws its inspiration from both the *Bologna Declaration* and the *Lisbon Strategy*. 'Bologna' has set a change agenda for the delivery of university education according to a two-cycle system (bachelor/master) and has emphasized the importance of mobility and lifelong learning throughout Europe. 'Lisbon' views the EU to be the world leading knowledge-based economy by 2010, a far-reaching ambition which challenges the higher education system to boost its performance to levels never witnessed before. 'Bologna' and 'Lisbon' imply major innovations, unconventional approaches and widespread implementation will and power in order to make significant progress, even though we must be aware of the great barriers to meet the ultimate ambitions.

The 2004 EADTU Conference underlines the vision that so-called open education should become mainstream, in combination with a far-reaching flexibilization of learning tracks and products, and in a context of lifelong learning. The model of *Lifelong Open and Flexible (LOF) learning* embraces the characteristics of: open learning, distance learning, e-learning, online learning, open accessibility, multimedia support, virtual mobility, learning communities, dual mode (earn&learn) approaches, and the like.

The Heerlen message will be distributed for further *consideration* and (joint) *action* to: the EADTU community, the eLIG (e-Learning Industry Group) community, the EUA (European University Association) community, national associations in higher education, employer's organizations, trade unions, national authorities, EU authorities, press and other media.

EADTU

The European Association of Distance Teaching Universities - EADTU - is the representative organisation of both the European open and distance learning universities and of the national consortia of higher education institutions active in the field of distance education and e-learning, in total 20 national members from 19 countries serving over 900,000 students. Therefore it is the main voice of the community for open and distance higher education and e-learning in Europe.

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ELABORATED MESSAGE

1 *The Lisbon agenda urgently requires the launch of an unorthodox EU action plan, as well as national action plans, for developing a mature knowledge-based society through a significant jump in the participation in higher education throughout Europe.*

According to the Lisbon strategy the EU wants to be the world leading knowledge-based economy by 2010. This far-reaching ambition implies that the EU member states must achieve a substantial increase and widening of participation in higher education.

The educational system is challenged to boost its performance to levels never witnessed before. We therefore must further extend the powerful existing open and distance learning model for mass education to more flexible and personalized modes. This can be facilitated by the use of ICT and a well-chosen mix of media, ranging from printed material, AV components and (digital) television as mass media to tutoring elements, ICT supported components and (broadband) internet as individualized media.

It is also evident that we have to consider unconventional educational tracks. In many countries the regular inflow from secondary education into higher education does not give much comfort since this inflow is more or less stable over the years. This means that alternatives must be explored and exploited on a large scale. They may include a much stronger appeal to under-represented target groups, tempting the significant group of earlier drop-outs from higher education to re-enter the educational system, offering different modes of combining work and learning, and providing a range of shorter courses and programmes that can be stacked. In other words, full and large-scale use must be made of typical 'lifelong learning' tracks.

2 *The flexibilization of learning tracks goes beyond the Bologna two cycle bachelor - master structure in terms of access(ibility), diversification and personalization.*

The accessibility to higher education must increase drastically. Students of all ages should be easily connected online from home and from the workplace. As a complement to regular education, Lifelong Open and Flexible (LOF) higher education must be organized in order to facilitate access and participation of all ages in higher education.

Moreover, a broad spectrum of learning tracks, programmes and qualifications should be available, responsive to the diversity in student needs and profiles. Universities should develop their niches, emerging from their mission, profile and specific expertise. In line with the Lisbon Strategy, diversification includes shorter courses for specific target groups. This is especially the case for continuing education.

Finally, the degree of personalization in higher education should grow. Only the integration of new technologies and new services, allowing for new kinds of learning content management, services to students, interactivity with staff and between peer students, can make education more flexible and adapted to the personal needs of students. As a result, learning tracks can be more personalized for learners of all ages, which can become manifest in so-called personal portfolios.



Overall, this process of flexibilization will lead to an educational structure in which the present mainstream bachelor and master programmes (plus the doctorate programmes) will be injected with a variety of smaller components and specific products.

3 *The mobility case in ‘Bologna’ needs much more focus on virtual mobility besides physical mobility, which should be reflected in the EU subsidy and grant programmes.*

Mobility is a major European objective: the EU wants to triple the mobility of students in a short term. Physical mobility contributes to the personal development of students, the acquirement of a foreign language and intercultural skills. Sometimes this can be prepared and supported by virtual mobility.

But universities should make more use of the specific added value of virtual mobility. In the European Learning Space, students will be more mobile and self-directed, in search for courses that correspond to their needs and to their conditions of life. Virtual mobility will enable students to study at any university, at any moment, at any place. Moreover it levels financial or situational barriers, that many students may face with physical mobility. And of course it is less damaging for the natural environment.

Beyond this, virtual mobility creates the possibility of building learning communities at whatever scale (national, European, worldwide), integrating staff and services from different universities that offer a joint course, seminar, project or programme, if necessary combined with face-to-face sessions. In this case the full potential of both e-learning and group learning is combined.

4 *The European Learning Space should be spanned through collaborations and alliances among European universities.*

In the future, universities should collaborate within educational networks or alliances in order to deliver large-scale Lifelong Open and Flexible (LOF) learning for all ages in a cost-effective way. They may participate in multiple networks to serve different purposes, for example in an international framework or in a regional context.

As a consequence, universities will be nodes in multiple networks in the European Learning Space. This European Learning Space is supposed to grow organically. Universities dedicated to LOF learning, such as the EADTU members, should take the lead in this Europe-wide process where it may be expected that other European universities eventually also will become engaged.

Although this will be basically a bottom-up development, it is important that national governments create working frameworks for this purpose. At the European level the conditions must be created to stimulate and to integrate national and institutional policies into a coherent and operational European Learning Space.



5 Adequate implementation of lifelong learning in higher education depends on a major joint effort of three stakeholders: universities, the corporate sector and the government, which requires new arrangements of collaboration.

Universities should not only collaborate among themselves but also with the corporate sector, especially with the e-learning industry. This certainly holds for lifelong learning where - by the way - the government also should be a partner. New collaborative arrangements are needed to suit the European context, to match the ambitions of universities regarding lifelong learning, and to improve the accessibility of higher education to learners. Therefore, EADTU has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with eLIG, the European e-Learning Industry Group. Actions will be taken half-yearly and will reflect priority interests of both groups. Actions are foreseen for sharing information and for participation in joint projects and task forces.

Undoubtedly, this collaboration will contribute to a better transfer between in-company training and the European Learning Space and will improve flexibility in the provision of content and services from universities to industry and vice versa.

6 In order to meet the significantly increasing demand for Lifelong Open and Flexible (LOF) learning the EADTU members should seek effectiveness and efficiency by joining forces over their areas of operation and by stimulating and co-founding new LOF learning initiatives among the EU member states, especially in the new EU countries.

EADTU and its members, certainly the universities dedicated to LOF learning, will further explore the potential of e-learning and virtual mobility for developing and delivering joint programmes and for operating short courses and international learning communities. This implies specific attention for the use of large-scale learning content management systems and e-learning services which allow for better access to higher education and more personalized learning. Effectiveness and efficiency are explicitly targeted.

It is EADTU's ambition to have members adopting and operating LOF learning on a national scale in all EU countries, whether it be modern LOF learning dedicated universities or new national consortia for LOF learning. EADTU and - under request - its members are prepared to stimulate, support or possibly co-found new initiatives and to process documented membership requests of existing organizations. Quality standards have to be met in order to maintain the quality profile of the EADTU brand.

7 A strong impetus is required for R&D in the area of Lifelong Open and Flexible (LOF) learning, supported by dedicated EU and national subsidy programmes as well as by industrial initiatives.

EADTU and its members have developed the longer term vision of the European Learning Space as a reference for their LOF learning activities and strategic planning. R&D should drive and underpin the organic development towards the European Learning Space in successive steps (roadmap), in order to meet the success requirements for serving more students in a flexible way (mass-individualization of higher education), in a lifelong learning context.



The implications are technical (e.g. interoperability), pedagogical (learning design), organizational (e.g. combining learning units to certificates), economical (re-usability issues, sharing materials and services), guidance and assessment issues, etc.

R&D strategies can be conceived of in three fields. A first field refers to the imminent need for the harmonization of standards and the development of prototypes for e-learning, resulting in more sustainable paradigms. A second field concerns the way in which universities can be better networked and learning communities have to be built, as a basic condition for rich virtual mobility and for innovative educational co-operation. The third field refers to individualization, matching contents, methods and services to the needs and profiles of students.

Because of the high relevance of Lifelong Open and Flexible (LOF) learning for the Lisbon and Bologna processes and the open R&D questions that still matter, high priority should be given to this type of R&D with corresponding funding (from EU, national and industrial funds). Ideally industry would put their expertise into R&D, rather than just fund some projects.

8 In line with the ambition of 'Europe' to play a leading role, worldwide, in sustainable development, the EU and its member states as well as the European educational institutions and associations are urged to take on a leading role in the development of all learning, including lifelong learning, for sustainable development. The decade of Education for Sustainable Development provides an excellent opportunity to show this leading role.

In order to achieve this goal it will be essential to develop national plans for Education for Sustainable Development (EfSD) and make EfSD a major element in all quality assessments for learning at all levels. The creation of regional centers of expertise, which will bring together the best research and learning opportunities at all different levels in both formal and non-formal education will be essential for the success of EfSD. Modern ICT will be crucial for the proper functioning of these regional centers of expertise as well as for linking those different centers to constitute a European and a Global Learning Space for sustainable development.