

MESSAGE OF TALLINN, 23 NOVEMBER 2006

TOWARDS LISBON 2010: "WIDENING PARTICIPATION AND OPPORTUNITIES BY E-LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION"

- In response to the challenge of the Bologna Process and the Lisbon Strategy, EADTU has embarked on a programme of enquiry and action research designed to give leadership to the European agenda for change. By expanding the reach of its activities and intensifying collaboration between its members and cognate organisations it is seeking to transform the sense of the possible in European higher education.
- The sense expressed in the Message of Rome that too little progress is being made against key objectives is still more urgent. EADTU does not believe that growth and integration can be achieved merely by expanding current forms of provision. The European policy framework, together with the opportunities provided by new forms of pedagogy and new applications of information technology, demand a radical, evidenced-based process of enquiry and reform.
- There are three areas in which new learning technologies can be brought to the service of European higher education. Firstly the spread of web-based learning is transforming the role of intellectual property in university curricula. EADTU is preparing a major project which will take the worldwide open education resource movement a stage further by pioneering a multi-lingual programme of free learning materials. Secondly the growth of internet access promises to transform the severe limitations of physical mobility in Europe, which at its most ambitious only affects a fraction of the European student population. EADTU is pioneering various forms of virtual mobility which offer the prospect of a European-wide experience of education for the first time. Thirdly the widespread engagement with new technologies across all forms of European higher education is presenting a challenge to quality and consistency. EADTU is now rolling out the fruits of a project on benchmarking quality assurance in e-learning.
- EADTU is a body of institutions, and their capacity to deliver their missions and meet the challenge of the agenda for reform depends on the creation of sustainable business models. Its member bodies have been meeting to exchange information and develop a European-wide perspective on the possibilities and threats facing the provision of lifelong open and flexible learning. EADTU is further seeking to pool the expertise of its members to develop a coherent programme of research into their form of higher education. It will expand its current programme of working with related organisations to influence the broad direction of progress in Europe.

Appendix: Lifelong learning in the Bologna and Lisbon context

The following EADTU Task Forces and funded projects will take place in the coming year and will report to the 2007 Conference in Lisbon.

1) Open Educational Resources

Inspired by the American open source movement, EADTU universities plan to develop free and multilingual open courses to be offered to the European and global community of students, self-learners and educators. All learners will have direct access to the entire content for free. Students who enroll in one of the participating universities will benefit from tutoring, assessment and examination. A joint portal will be used, navigating students throughout higher education courses and programmes in different languages. A joint brand name will reflect the quality of the programme, guaranteed by the members. The preparation of the grant proposal is sponsored by a grant from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

This joint European open content scheme will share the approach of two important initiatives that started 2006, OpenLearn (UK Open University) and OpenER (Open Universiteit of the Netherlands) together with experiences from other members. Ten languages are envisaged so far (English, French, German, Dutch, Spanish, Italian, Turkish, Russian, Portuguese and probably Arabic). This initiative will move beyond the mere content and become a leading exemplar of the second phase of open educational resources in its provision of high quality student-centred learning modules.

The scheme will generate easy and attractive access to higher education at any place in Europe, removing thresholds of time, place, pace, financial background and prior experience of higher education. It will widen participation opportunities for those who combine work and study and for other more specific target groups such as disabled people and migrant groups. An integrated LabSpace for curriculum development will support the transfer, translation and localisation of the course material by teaching staff to enrich their curricula in any university. On a global level, EADTU is chairing the ICDE Task Force where initiatives from different continent meet. This initiative is supported by UNESCO. At the EADTU Conference 2007 in Lisbon, EADTU will present a fully elaborated proposal to be implemented in the next three years.

2) Virtual Mobility

New learning environments create the possibility of offering an international experience to students by virtual mobility between universities and between universities and enterprises. This is complementary to physical mobility schemes such as Erasmus. Multiple forms and models of virtual mobility are conceived. Students can be exchanged through an Erasmus-like virtual mobility scheme when they are not in the position to travel to another country. Also international learning communities bound to a subject or to a project can be created during a shorter or a longer period of time where international students and staff learn from each other's experiences and bring in their knowledge. Virtual internships in some areas create an opportunity for students to accept a learning project or task in an enterprise, especially in situations of continuing professional training and development. Hence, virtual mobility contributes to the quality of courses and curricula.

EADTU has established a Task Force on Virtual Mobility to explore its potential for non-mobile students, whether studying in distance teaching (off-campus) or in conventional (on-campus) programmes, that are not covered by the current Erasmus programme. During the EADTU Conference 2007 in Lisbon a coherent, operational model for the implementation of virtual mobility schemes in higher education will be

presented. It will contribute to development of European Virtual Campuses by featuring virtual mobility as an option for all curriculum builders, learners and employers. The significant impact of virtual mobility on future educational organisation will be demonstrated. The effective use of ICT in an interactive learning environment for international student-centered settings will be tested.

3) Quality benchmarking – E-xcellence

Quality assurance and accreditation are important aspects of the Bologna process. In the Bergen meeting (2005), the Council of Ministers adapted important conclusions about the implementation of quality assurance and accreditation as well as about quality agencies in European higher education. Quality systems covering the full organisational and content-related aspects of higher education are being developed. However, while e-learning becomes an integral part of most higher education systems, current quality systems have yet to develop yet a focus on the principles of quality assurance governing e-learning. In response to this challenge, an EADTU Task Force has developed the E-xcellence instrument launched at the Tallinn Conference. The instrument is a supplement to current quality assurance approaches in European higher education. It offers a European-wide set of benchmarks for e-learning and open and flexible learning. It embraces an E-xcellence Quicksan instrument which is available on the web and an E-xcellence Full Assessment, including an expert evaluation, as well as a handbook with guidelines related to the quality criteria and indicators. These cover curriculum design, course design, course delivery, student and staff support, management and institutional strategies.

During the EADTU 2007 Conference in Lisbon, the first year's use of the instruments will be reported, as well as their adoption by the national quality assurance agencies. These experiences will inform the second version of the instruments, which will be freely available under the Creative Commons agreement. A network of experts will be created.

4) New Strategies and Business Models

To serve the needs of the knowledge society, universities need non-conventional approaches and structures for reaching new target groups in society. An EADTU Task Force is exchanging good practice and will propose new concepts to be implemented on a larger scale. It has identified in what respect funding mechanisms for open and flexible learning differ in European countries and what is the balance between public funding and the funding obtained from students and other sources. It will further investigate specific issues relating to funding for the development of course material, study centres, academic staff and study support, campus facilities, educational technology and marketing and promotion.

A joint Declaration will be generated describing the need for funding in relation to the Lisbon's lifelong learning objective and the knowledge economy. Recommendations to governments for funding lifelong open and flexible learning will be formulated. The Task Force will deal with current and future institutional strategies for the next 3-5 years. Strategies will be compared and the impact of educational technology and international co-operation will be examined.

5) Lifelong learning research

Although lifelong learning is attributed a crucial role in developing Europe into a mature knowledge-based society, research into lifelong learning is not developed to the level that is needed to underpin implementation scenarios and measures. Current research is limited in its scope and is still often confined to a case study approach. These shortcomings stem from the complexity of the domain and the multidisciplinary of the scientific approaches involved, which include social, economic, didactic and technological research questions. Major issues in the lifelong learning research are: new basic skills for all, the relation between learning and the labour market, learning in various professions, the relationship between informal and formal learning, assessment and the use of prior learning, guidance and counseling, regional collaboration, integration of new technologies in lifelong learning. EADTU will propose to structure the research field along the pattern introduced by the European Commission regarding the implementation of lifelong learning. Therefore it will develop a network of various lifelong learning R&D Expertise Centres, sharing expertise, linking national achievements, and joining forces in collaborative projects.

At the Lisbon Conference EADTU will present a position paper describing the contours of a broad and coherent, interdisciplinary R&D programme on lifelong learning, addressing issues, solutions and measures that are relevant for the EU and the member state societies and economies.

6) European Co-operation

With these activities, EADTU will continue to contribute to the Bologna process and the Lisbon Strategy. Members are invited to participate wherever possible. Through globalization, EADTU is also cooperating with partners outside the European Area of Higher Education. Distance education should be worldwide treated as a public good. Barriers for trans-border access should be banished. The students should enjoy the same privileges as conventional students, including the right to get study grants and loans. EADTU is an active partner for the European Commission, the Council, the Parliament and national governments in their endeavors to create a knowledge-based society and an effective lifelong learning policy. EADTU and the members as specialised organisations will show leadership through the impact of their activities across the higher education systems as a whole. They will also represent the agenda of e-learning and widening participation and opportunities in Europe through organisations such as EUA and ICDE.

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