

International Council for Open and Distance Education
(ICDE) – UNESCO

Policy Forum

(Bali, Indonesia, November 20, 2014)

“Ensure Equitable Quality Education and Lifelong Learning for All by 2030: The Contribution of Open, Online and Flexible Higher Education to the Post-2015 Global Education Agenda”

The ICDE - UNESCO Policy Forum brought together decision-makers in government and senior management in higher education institutions. The objectives of the Forum were twofold: (i) to inform participants about the ongoing consultation process regarding the post-2015 global education agenda; and (ii) to discuss the contribution of technology-enhanced Higher Education to the future education agenda and to the development of 21st century sustainable societies.

Background

Presidents, rectors and vice-chancellors, representing higher education institutions from all regions of the world, participated in the International Council for Open and Distance Education Standing Committee of Presidents (ICDE SCOP) in Bali, Indonesia in November 2014. The theme of the meeting was **“Leadership Challenges: Approaches towards Successful Open Education Models”**. These leaders, representing a variety of higher education institutions, from campus-based universities, bi-modal universities, distance teaching universities to online and smart universities, focused on two key areas during their discussions:

- 1) They took stock of the presently changing higher education landscape and the emergence of new Open Education approaches and practices, enabled by digital technologies, and discussed the future, in terms of the opportunities that these technologies offer for enhancing students’ engagement and success, as well as access to quality higher education provision.

- 2) They focused on pursuing affordable quality higher education and lifelong learning through open, online, flexible and technology-enhanced education.

One afternoon of the meeting was dedicated to an ICDE - UNESCO Policy Forum at which the participants endorsed UNESCO's position on education post-2015 and the recommendation to its Member States that the overarching education goal of the post-2015 education agenda be to "ensure equitable and inclusive quality education and lifelong learning for all by 2030". The higher education leaders also acknowledged that *access, equity and quality* should be the guiding principles of the post-2015 global education agenda at all levels and in all forms.

The Policy Forum attendees issued the following message centered around ***Equity – Access - Quality: Learner Success.***

It is not only having equal access that leads to equity, it is having equal access to success, regardless of learning difficulties, social backgrounds and other barriers.

The Challenges

Harnessing the potential of digital technologies to foster inclusive and more relevant lifelong learning systems constitutes a policy goal for all countries worldwide. Access to, and success in, Open, Online and Flexible Learning provide both good opportunities and viable solutions to the pressing development challenges and needs that 21st century societies are increasingly confronted with.

Past approaches focused mainly on the challenges of access and digital divide. New, more flexible approaches are needed to ensure access leads to relevant knowledge and skills, as well as to increased success through quality education programs. It is success in learning that enables social and economic development, as well as individual fulfilment in societies.

Access to and success in Open, Online and Flexible Learning are major tools in the response to the diverse development needs of societies.

Higher education institutions are faced with three major challenges:

- To improve participation in and quality of higher education with particular emphasis on developing countries;
- To prepare a new generation of students who is demanding a higher education experience that is relevant, accessible, flexible, innovative and employment-oriented; and
- To respond to the massive unsatisfied demand for higher education.

Strategies

The growing demand for accessible, affordable quality higher education can only be met through the adoption of open education strategies, supported by commitments to open educational resources, research and educational innovation. Addressing the broader socio-economic development challenges that affect developed and developing countries alike in a globalized, interconnected world and their implications for education require new approaches to the design, development, deployment and delivery of higher learning.

Quality is the essential foundation for all work in higher education, as well as for the latter's transformation in the future in a lifelong learning perspective.

The ICDE - UNESCO Policy Forum participants therefore call on governments, quality assurance agencies, higher education institutions and academic staff to adopt policies and practices that lead to the expansion of open educational opportunities.

The participants underscore the **open policy principle** of the **2012 Paris OER Declaration** that educational resources financed from public funds should be released under open licenses for the benefit of society and all learners served by our higher education institutions. They underpin the adoption and use of open educational resources, where appropriate, to support the learners. The aim should be to create schools, colleges and universities that provide openly accessible resources to all so that a growing number of individuals can achieve success. Given the increased cross-border mobility of students, governments need to provide an enabling environment that fosters learner mobility and recognizes formal and non-formal learning across national and regional boundaries, for example, through the adoption and modification of the regionally appropriate transnational qualifications frameworks.

Specific Actions

More specifically, the Policy Forum participants call on ICDE and UNESCO to continue their efforts to support and encourage:

Governments to:

- a) Accept responsibility to fund and provide enabling and effective policy and regulatory frameworks and conditions for higher education and lifelong learning based on equity principles.
- b) Create favorable frameworks and comprehensive policies, which enable and encourage open, online and distance education, technology-enhanced learning and the needed incentives for modernizing education, in particular for opening up education, the use of open educational resources and for open access.

- c) Expand the number of schools, colleges and universities, which have open admissions and make use of open educational resources to enable those historically excluded from learning to have access to formal education.
- d) Contribute to the creation of clear frameworks and measurable outcomes for schools, colleges and universities for student success, as it is success in learning that enables development.
- e) Support capacity building for the more extensive use of open and distance learning and open educational resources.
- f) Encourage the development and adaptation of open and distance learning resources across a variety of languages and cultural contexts.
- g) Invest in research in open, online, flexible and distance learning, as well as innovative approaches to achieving learning outcomes.
- h) Support global initiatives for knowledge creation, exchange and sharing to meet the ever-growing challenges facing higher education.

Quality Assurance Agencies to:

- a) Foster quality assurance systems that are flexible and able to be adapted to changing environments.
- b) Encourage the adoption of quality standards, guidelines and benchmarks for open, online and distance learning into mainstream quality frameworks and protocols.

Higher Education Institutions to:

- a) Actively support policies and practices within schools, colleges and universities, which enable openness, flexibility and innovation.
- b) Create systematic approaches to open, online, flexible and technology-enhanced learning, which engage students and support personalized learning.
- c) Rethink approaches to assessment so as to assess learning outcomes from formal and non-formal education, prior and work-based learning, and the self-taught student.
- d) Create a broad range of actions and measures to enable student success.

- e) Strengthen professional development opportunities for academic staff through the use of open, online and distance learning, new approaches to assessment and the use of open educational resources.
- f) Encourage research in open, online and distance education, especially in new forms of assessment and the use of open education resources.
- g) Support senior management, encouraging innovation from within by positioning faculty as innovative leaders in opening up education.

Academic staff to:

- a) Adopt approaches to assessment for learning and assessment of learning, which enable more flexible approaches to learning and the integration of both formal and non-formal learning into programs and qualifications.
- b) Engage in professional development intended to enable the creation and effective use of open educational resources and the enhanced support of learners through personalized learning approaches.
- c) Undertake research and development in open, online and distance learning, flexible learning and innovative approaches to achieving learning outcomes.

Ultimately it is outcomes that matter.