

Strategy 2009 - 2012

Introduction

Founded in 1938, the International Council for Open and Distance Education (ICDE) has been and will continue to be a global force for lifelong, open and flexible learning. To meet the new global challenges presented by the knowledge economy and information and communication technologies (ICTs), ICDE has developed this Strategic Plan to begin to meet its goals for the 21st century in a spirit of openness and transparency.

Values

ICDE, a non-governmental organization (NGO) in formal consultative relations with UNESCO, shares that agency's key aim – the attainment of quality education for all - as stated in the Declaration of Learner's Rights and Responsibilities¹.

ICDE, supported by the Government of Norway, and with its Secretariat in Oslo, operates under Norwegian law.

ICDE actions are guided by the following values:

- **ICDE will be member focused** – ICDE is an organization which will involve members in decision making, in cooperative action and in cooperative problem solving.
- **ICDE will be transparent** – Members will be able to follow the activities and decisions of ICDE.
- **ICDE believes that education is a universal right** and should be available to all.
- ICDE believes that in pursuing education as a universal right, **the needs of the learner must be central**.

Context

During 2008 - 2009, the world of education – in common with all sections of society - was affected by the global financial crisis. Although its long term effects are difficult to predict, ICDE will play an active role in monitoring and assessing this crisis to ensure that its members have the tools to make appropriate decisions for their own jurisdictions. The immediate consequences to date appear to be mixed, in some cases bringing increased investment in education systems, in others a reduction in funding, combined in both cases with increased enrolment.

As a global actor, ICDE recognizes the complexity of the variety of world contexts – national, regional, professional, economic and technological. To create a solid base for its strategy, an Environmental Scan which examined the key global trends in higher education and in adult and distance learning was undertaken in 2008 - 2009. This document, which was shared with its members at the Standing Conference of Presidents meeting in Shanghai, is the basic framework within which this strategic plan was developed.

The key trends identified in the Environmental Scan were:

- Increasing globalization and internationalization of higher education
- Worldwide growth and increasing demand for access to higher education
- Growth and impact of open and distance universities

¹ <http://newsite.wondertree.org/WondertreeFoundation/DeclarationLearner'sRights/>

- Diversification of distance and higher education providers
- Changing learner demographics, experience, and demands
- Increasing focus on accountability, quality, and performance
- Increasing access to information and communication technologies (ICTs)
- New developments in technology:
 - Mobile learning
 - Personalization in online learning
 - Educational social software (ESS) in distance and online education
- Changes in cost, affordability, and economic models for open and distance education

ICDE's mission

As the global membership organization in open and distance education, ICDE shall

- Foster international collaboration
- Promote intercultural cooperation and understanding
- Support and develop networks at national, regional, global and linguistic affinity groups levels
- Provide fora where individuals, corporations, institutions, governments and associations can engage in professional interaction in the field of flexible learning
- Contribute to the development of new methodologies and technologies to improve lifelong learning
- Encourage the development of good practice and standards in flexible learning

Developing the strategy

This strategy document has been developed with the involvement of ICDE members. Open consultations with members were held in July 2008 at the Commonwealth of Learning conference in London, where views on the organization and its future direction were discussed. In October of the same year at the Standing Conference of Presidents (SCOP) meeting in Shanghai, leaders of ICDE member organizations worked in groups to discuss challenges, opportunities and new strategies for open and distance education and ICDE. A draft version of the Environmental Scan mentioned above was also circulated among members for comments. A strategy document was developed by the ICDE Executive Committee on the basis of this input.

Structure and concepts

The plan that was produced as a result of these consultations followed a traditional approach that was supported in Shanghai. The structure of the ICDE Strategic Plan involved first the identification of key objectives, then the expected outcomes. This was followed by strategies to achieve the outcomes. Measureable activities were also identified on a year by year basis to ensure that there was movement to the key objectives. Simply put in diagram form:

KEY OBJECTIVES ⇄ EXPECTED OUTCOMES ⇄ **STRATEGY** ⇄ ACTIVITIES

Key objectives for ICDE 2009-2012

Through the processes described, the following objectives have been identified for 2009-2012:

- 1. To be the global arena for the discussion of distance education policies**
- 2. To promote quality in distance, flexible and ICT-based education**
- 3. To contribute to the development of new methodologies and technologies**
- 4. To foster cooperation between members**

Objective 1: To be the global arena for the discussion of distance education policies

Expected outcome: Members will recognize ICDE to be the leading forum for the discussion of global distance education policy

Strategies:

- Collaboration, events, conferences, supporting networks
- Publications and dissemination of information
- Research
- Lobbying

Objective 2: To promote quality in distance, flexible and ICT-based education

Expected outcome: To achieve a global understanding of quality within distance education

Strategy: The development of global standards for distance learning

Objective 3: To contribute to the development of new methodologies and technologies.

Expected outcomes:

1. Information about emerging technologies should be successfully communicated to members
2. Solutions should be found for countries with developing economies to enable and apply new technologies
3. Increased awareness of the digital divide and steps taken to minimize the divide

Strategies:

- Create awareness through media and conferences
- Identify key technological initiatives and become advocates of these initiatives
- Disseminate information on new technologies through the ICDE website
- Lobby key agencies to support member initiatives using new technologies
- Encourage collaboration between members in the application of new technologies
- Broker solutions and partnership agreements in order to attract funding opportunities

Objective 4: To foster cooperation between members

Expected outcomes:

1. More collaboration between institutions in the northern and southern hemispheres
2. Significant increase in cooperation between ICDE, national and regional organizations

Strategies:

- Identify opportunities for collaboration
- Insure that marginalized groups are consulted and included in policy development
- Provide appropriate tools for interaction

Activities 2009 - 2012

Introduction

A manifold of projects can be derived from the prioritized objectives and the strategies. ICDE acts as a hub for its network of members and cooperating organizations which means that rich resources are available to realize projects. The ICDE Secretariat itself has a limited budget and few employees. It is important therefore to increase the activity of the Secretariat by working together with member institutions. Further, it is imperative that the Secretariat manage present key donors to avoid a decrease in their funding. ICDE, through bringing in new members should increase its income to better support the strategies and actions defined in this document. It should deliver first class service to its existing members and strive to support member initiatives.

ICDE's links to UNESCO are of great importance and active support for the work within UNESCO should be given high priority. The Norwegian Ministry of Education is ICDE's most important donor. ICDE must ensure that annual meetings to coordinate approaches be of interest to both bodies.

An organization like ICDE must remain attractive to its existing members, while simultaneously insuring an influx of new members. Yearly activities designed to recruit new members are of crucial importance for the lifeblood of the organization.

Key actions to be the global arena for the discussion of distance education policies

To realize the ambition that members will recognize ICDE to be the leading forum for the discussion of global distance education policy, ICDE should support projects stressing collaboration between members, promote research in this area and give members access to relevant publications about policy developments.

Policy issues featured high on the agenda for discussions during the consultations with members. The discourse on ODE among policy makers in different parts of the world arrives at conflicting conclusions. While in one nation or region, ODE is looked upon as a solution to many questions related to individuals' continuing personal development, others see openness and use of technology as leading to second rate education. Working together with regional bodies, NGOs and the education sector internationally, ICDE could support the development of an understanding of the values and possibilities of distance education as an instrument for lifelong learning. When doing so it is of importance to identify regulations and rules that hinder the development of ODE.

Activities commencing 2009

- *Project in cooperation with UNESCO on the Regulatory Framework of Distance Education (2009 - 2011)*
- *Invite submission of articles on policy issues for publication in Open Praxis (2009 -)*
- *Project in cooperation with the Brazilian Association for Distance Education (ABED) and partner institutions on developing distance education statistics (2009 - 2011)*

Activities planned for 2010 - 2012

- *ICDE will together with partners organize a task force to explore the opportunities for increased exchange between regions on ODE policy and how to promote intra-regional collaboration in the provision of virtual learning (2010 - 2011)*
- *Organize a policy forum together with one of our member institutions (2010)*
- *Invite the highest levels of officials in ODE at Ministries of Education to report on findings from the task force and projects (2012)*

Key actions to promote quality in distance, flexible and ICT-based education

Issues regarding quality have without question been high on the agenda in recent years. ICDE must engage actively in promoting quality to ensure that open and distance education develops to be recognized as quality education. Individual regions and nations have varied views on these issues. It is of critical importance that ICDE engages countries with developing economies as well as nations representing north and south in work related to quality. The development of global standards for distance learning will contribute to the achievement of a global understanding of quality within distance education.

Activities commencing 2009

- *Develop a section on the ICDE website where major initiatives on quality in education are described (2009 -)*
- *Develop a section on the ICDE website where major distance education journals are presented and indexes of contents are successively updated (2009 -)*
- *Open Educational Quality Initiative (OPAL) Project together with partners, and supported by the European Union Lifelong Learning Programme (2009 - 2011)*
- *Quality auditing. Continue and further develop structures and methods for auditing of the student learning experience (2009 -)*

Activities planned for 2010 - 2012

- *ICDE will together with partners organize a task force which will explore and describe criteria for excellence and accreditation strategies. The task force should aspire to define criteria that reflect the values and interests of both developed and developing countries (2010 - 2011)*
- *Develop a template for defining quality in distance education, providing opportunities to compare educational institutions and creating a common language about distance education (2011 - 2012)*

Key actions to contribute to the development of new methodologies and technologies

Pedagogy established itself as a discipline more than 100 years ago and the contributions to pedagogical theory of the past decades have been significant, coupled with rapid advances in educational technology. At the crossroads between technology and educational theory are areas of knowledge which ICDE should acknowledge and make available to practitioners of open and distance education. Provision of evidence based best practices could be one aspect of that.

There are many specific questions related to this area. It is of particular relevance for ICDE and its members that we identify key aspects of the digital divide and possible steps towards overcoming it. Further, when methods for technology enhanced learning are applied globally, there is a real concern regarding differing cultural contexts. What works in one nation or region can be impossible elsewhere. Thus solutions should be found for countries with developing economies to apply new technologies.

Activities commencing 2009

- *Invitation to members to develop a project for the identification of key aspects of the digital divide and possible steps towards overcoming the divide (2009 -)*
- *Develop a strategy for enhancing OER in an international setting following the recommendations of the ICDE Task Force (2009 - 2012)*

Activities planned for 2010 - 2012

- *To demonstrate the successes of distance education and the opportunities it brings, ICDE should together with member institutions initiate a collection of articles describing key achievements in the field of open and distance education. The collected material could be published consecutively on the ICDE website and in one or more anthologies (2010 -)*

- *Develop an literature depository on open and distance learning on the ICDE website (2010 -)*
- *Develop Open Praxis: Set up a working group to explore the possibility of turning Open Praxis into an arena where young researchers can publish and meet under the guidance of experienced practitioners in the field (2010 -)*

Key actions to foster cooperation between members

A core function in networks is exchange of experiences and cooperation. ICDE should support these activities with the aim of increasing their number and enhancing their quality. It is of particular importance that ICDE attracts and supports diverse categories of members. It should especially ensure that otherwise marginalized groups are invited to conferences and meetings and that initiatives such as task forces and projects include participants from both the northern and southern hemispheres. Increased collaboration between public and private sector organizations is also of interest to ICDE. Meetings and conferences are important tools for the realization of this objective, as is a modern and effective website. Actions concerning these two areas have been described in an earlier section.

Since 1939, ICDE has organized conferences to support the exchange of ideas between practitioners of open and distance education. These arenas have proven to be valuable for the development of institutions and for the ongoing analysis of open and distance education policies worldwide. Three types of meetings have developed. *World conferences* organised biennially, *International conferences* with a regional focus and *SCOP meetings* organised every year for Presidents and other Executive Officers of member institutions. All these events are run by ICDE in cooperation with a member institution. The idea of organizing closed meetings like SCOP could be transferred to other audiences. ICDE could hold small policy fora for invited policy makers. Virtual conferences may also be organized. Some of the actions described below have relevance for all four of the prioritised key objectives.

When ICDE provides appropriate tools for interaction greater collaboration between institutions can occur as well as an increase in cooperation between the national and regional organizations.

Activities commencing 2009

- *Continue to hold ICDE conferences (2009 -)*
 - *SCOP meeting in Barcelona, 2009*
 - *SCOP meeting in South Africa, 2010*
 - *World conference in Indonesia (2011)*
- *Development of new website. New functionality is needed on the ICDE website if many of the projects will be possible to realize (2009 -)*
 - *Develop a section of the ICDE website where all regional and national associations and major institutions within distance education are described*
 - *Develop a section of the website allowing and supporting interaction between members*
 - *Create a forum for continual dialogue between the ICDE business bodies and ICDE representative to UNESCO*
 - *Open a specific section on the ICDE website where relevant issues in our work with UNESCO are described*
- *Organize and implement a membership campaign (2009 -)*
- *Ensure that appropriate Norwegian actors within distance education are provided with key learning opportunities*

Activities planned for 2010 - 2012

- *Planning of the 2013 World conference*
- *SCOP meetings, 2011, 2012*
- *Develop new arenas for ICDE meetings (2010 - 2012)*
 - *Develop the ICDE website so that it can host virtual conferences and test with at least one virtual seminar during (2010 -)*
 - *Give increased attention to regional (international) conferences organised by members and actively support them in this*