



2009 ICDE Standing Conference of Presidents Declaration

The 2009 ICDE Standing Conference of Presidents was held on 20-21 November in Barcelona, Spain, hosted by Universitat Oberta de Catalunya.

The meeting was attended by eighty Presidents, Rectors and Executives from open, online and distance universities worldwide and dealt with a crucial theme high on the agenda of every educational institution today: how to maintain quality in the context of the global financial crisis.

The 2009 ICDE Standing Conference of Presidents Declaration combines four key strands, which were the subject of working group deliberations during the meeting; leading innovative approaches to the financial crisis, quality upgrading, employability and lifelong learning, and new entrepreneurship.

In its deliberations, the meeting concluded that:

1. Current national and global education needs far exceed the capacity of traditional educational institutions. Students need access to learning, not always a place of learning.
2. Lifelong, open and flexible learning is a powerful approach that is able to meet the demands of society at a time of financial crisis, and able to spur economic growth and sustainable development.
3. Investments in education lead to innovation which in turn gives rise to economic growth; there is a clear link between an educated workforce and economic development.
4. There is a clear need for closer integration of lifelong learning requirements in universities with the needs of the community and with business.
5. Open, online and distance-teaching institutions have a responsibility to focus on outcomes and the success of students, and not merely on providing them with access to higher and professional education.
6. Student audiences are highly diverse in terms of age, educational goals, previous levels of preparation, technological sophistication and points of student entry.
7. Open, online and distance teaching institutions have a responsibility to develop technologies and appropriate infrastructures to facilitate and stimulate lifelong learning.
8. There is great heterogeneity of quality management and quality assurance around the world which provides an excellent foundation for the future.
9. Open, online and distance teaching universities are by their very nature receptive to new social demands.
10. The use of internet technologies is an opportunity to create cooperative networks for mobilizing knowledge, ideas and information about best practices among universities, their students, faculty members and researchers.
11. Expertise in social science research, in network organization and in innovative learning methodologies make open, online and distance teaching universities leaders in providing the specialized support needed by digital generation students, social entrepreneurs, businesses, governments and non-governmental organizations.



Consequently, it is recommended that the open, online and distance education community take the following steps to contribute to and to reshape the global economy:

Leading innovative approaches to the financial crisis

Proponents of open, online and distance education must use the current economic crisis as an opportunity both to influence policy and to drive forward innovation in teaching.

1. Governments and educational policy makers must recognize the need for lifelong, open and flexible learning as part of the solution to national and global educational needs, and to help prevent future financial crises.
2. Governments and educational authorities must recognize the leadership of the open, online and distance education community in the innovation of teaching and learning using information and communication technologies, and the importance of collaboration both within the academic and corporate worlds.

Quality

The open, online and distance education community must strive to meet the highest expectations with regard to effectiveness, transparency and accountability, and make the following commitments:

1. Quality management and quality assurance through accreditation and evaluation assessment will take into consideration the unique characteristics of open, online and distance education.
2. Guidelines for quality in education will take into account expected and assessed learning outcomes, the need for well designed learning materials, and an equal need for learner support including tutoring. The context in which students live and learn, their future employability and their social environment should also be taken into account.
3. Examples of good practice in internal quality systems will be gathered to help define common ground for quality measures that allow institutions to learn from one another.
4. Internal institutional quality systems will be transparent to students, staff, funding bodies and other external parties.

Employability and lifelong learning

Institutions commit themselves to a deeper understanding of the aspirations of individual students within the needs of the global economy.

1. A clear view of seamless progression from school to lifelong learning will be created to avoid student frustration and to ensure measureable progression in lifelong learning.
2. Institutions will promote policies that provide higher rates of retention and higher graduation rates, as well as increased access to learning.
3. Institutions will find creative, pro-active ways of integrating support for distance education learners, help them to develop competencies for employability, and promote guided or facilitated self learning.
4. Investment in employability will address the need for national and global responsibility for determining the skills and competencies that are required for the future.



5. Universities will enable lifelong learners to develop and adapt their knowledge and skills to their jobs, and to adapt to changing circumstances.
6. Close interaction between universities and employers will be necessary to ensure that universities appropriately educate the workers of the future.
7. ICDE will undertake a study of discrimination experienced by both students and graduates of distance learning programmes.

New entrepreneurship

Open, online and distance universities will nurture and encourage entrepreneurship to lessen the impact of future economic crises.

1. The open, online and distance education community will promote appropriate government policy frameworks to foster innovation and entrepreneurship within and by open, online and distance education institutions.
2. Institutions will integrate entrepreneurship in their curricula, to actively promote a culture of entrepreneurship in society.
3. Best practices will be disseminated in maximizing the social and financial returns on university and faculty intellectual property, in enabling faculty mobility, and in facilitating innovation and entrepreneurship.
4. Alumni will be engaged in the learning enterprise, through sharing experiences in innovation and entrepreneurship, and providing opportunities for internships.

Barcelona, 21 December 2009