



INTERNATIONAL
COUNCIL FOR OPEN AND
DISTANCE EDUCATION

International Council for Open and
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Why Learning Together is More Important Than Ever Before

The outbreak of the coronavirus COVID-19 was officially announced as a global pandemic by The World Health Organization (WHO) on 12 March and is now spreading quickly across borders and continents. It affects lives, societies and industries worldwide with severe impact on health, economy and business as well as the right to move, engage and interact with others. As many countries now implement the strictest regulations in order to prevent further spreading of the virus, industries are suffering huge economic losses and an unprecedented number of employees are facing temporary or permanent unemployment. UNESCO data shows that by the middle of March, 100 countries' governments announced or implemented closure of schools and universities, resulting in the immediate shift to online and distance modalities.

ICDE is the leading global membership organization for open, online and distance education. We have more than 80 years' experience from developing distance and flexible learning provision and possess a unique network of individual experts and institutional members already providing quality, inclusive, online and distance education. So why is the headline of this letter not: "Why online and distance learning is more important than ever before"?

In short, it is. However, a more important message in this context would be what we have known for more than 80 years; that all educational provision requires leadership, knowledge of the target groups including learners and teachers, regional, cultural and linguistic adaption, inclusive pedagogical design and quality assurance mechanisms for continuous development. Technology is used as a basis when developing the pedagogical design, however, the types of technologies have shifted over time; from letters of correspondence via telecommunication, textbooks, video cassettes, broadcasting to blended, online, and mobile learning. In many parts of the world, several of these technologies are still in use, either alone or as a mix. It requires a continuous development of knowledge and competencies, which is what unifies ICDEs broad membership and extended community.

The coronavirus pandemic has forced many schools and universities to shift to online and distance provisions more quickly than envisaged. ICDE collects and distributes valuable knowledge, best practices, resources, tips and tricks in order to support as many educators as we can in this endeavour. At the same time, we will stress this: it is not only about transmitting lectures from auditoriums to be distributed online. It is not only about purchasing the right technology or equipment and to then expect that teaching will continue in a virtual parallel to the physical classroom, especially if the appropriate infrastructure is not in place.

Distance and online education requires specific competencies, resources and multidisciplinary knowledge from educational leaders, teachers, IT and administrative staff. It requires collaboration, openness, and trust within the institution. When it works at its best, teachers manage to engage not only each individual learner but the learners as a community

through transparent and open learning spaces. When we learn together, collectively, we learn more. We also develop the ability to adapt more to each and every individual's needs and to increase the access and inclusiveness of tools and resources. The collective knowledge grows at a much faster speed for everyone when we learn together.

That is why learning together now is more important than ever before.

ICDE now launches its campaign *#learningtogether* and invites experts, learners, teachers and leaders to contribute. Sign up for our taskforce if you would like to contribute to one of our webinars, translate material to other languages or share resources and knowledge that might be useful to others.

Thank you in advance for your contributions. By *#learningtogether* we all learn more.

Sincerely,



Torunn Gjelsvik
Secretary General

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