

Press release

Open Universities provide support to UNESCO

Open Universities of 70 countries will join forces to support UNESCO in the development and dissemination of open educational resources to achieve the goal of 'Education for all'. With this offer the M-2009 World Conference on open and flexible education, organised by the Open Universiteit Nederland, was closed on Wednesday June 10. 'It is very special what has been happening here in these last few days,' Fred Mulder, Rector of the Open Universiteit Nederland and chair of the M-2009 programme committee, said.

Right to education

Worldwide, millions of people hardly have any or no access to education. The increased demand for higher education cannot be supplied by the traditional teaching institutions. Therefore UNESCO has been striving for years, to improve access to education through open educational resources, the free provision of learning materials through the internet.

During the M-2009 conference, participants of 70 countries from all continents demonstrated their willingness to combine the power of open and distance learning with the potential of open educational resources.

Fred Mulder: 'Thanks to the high quality of our self-study learning materials and the scale on which we are used to operate, open universities can give a large contribution to increase access to knowledge globally.'

Millions of students

In recent decades, open, flexible and distance learning has developed strongly, enabling it to provide quality education on a large scale. In some countries already a third of all students graduate from a distance teaching university and this number is still growing. The world's largest universities are open universities, sometimes with more than a million students. For many people, including small farmers and people in deprived areas, studying at an institution for distance learning has changed their lives drastically, often resulting in economic growth of their region or nation. In addition, in the current global economic crisis, open and distance learning offers cost-effective and flexible solutions.

Maastricht Message

The Maastricht Message of the M-2009 World Conference addresses five challenges we are faced with.

In addition to open educational resources these are technical infrastructure, quality, mobility and private/ public responsibility.

M-2009 has been a one-time merger of the biannual conference of the world organisation ICDE (International Council for Open and Distance Education) and the annual conference of the EADTU (European Association of Distance Teaching Universities). The Maastricht Message is published on www.ou.nl/icde2009. The conference provides input for the UNESCO World Conference 'The New Dynamics of Higher Education', in Paris, 5-8 July 2009.

Note to the editors

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