**ONLINE, OPEN AND FLEXIBLE HIGHER EDUCATION FOR THE FUTURE WE WANT.
FROM STATEMENTS TO ACTION: EQUITY, ACCESS, AND QUALITY LEARNING
OUTCOMES**
(9-11 June 2015, UNESCO, Paris)

PARIS MESSAGE

Preamble

Some 150 policy-makers, leading practitioners and stakeholders, including rectors/vice chancellors/presidents of universities, academic staff, students, UNESCO Chairs in ICT and OER, ICDE Chairs in OER, members of international nongovernmental organizations, from all over the world and from more than 55 countries gathered at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris from 9 to 11 June 2015 in the Global High-Level Forum organized by UNESCO in partnership with the International Council for Open and Distance Education (ICDE).

Addressing the issues of a*ccess, equity* and *quality learning outcomes* as key features shaping the new vision for the post-2015 education agenda, the participants highlighted the contribution of Higher Education to the future global sustainable development agenda and to helping countries, particularly developing ones, achieve "equitable, quality education and lifelong learning for all by 2030".

In spite of progress made, there are still inequalities in higher education worldwide, multiple digital divides still present in many countries, particularly in developing and least developed ones. The rising costs, ongoing massification and rising student expectations pose ever more complex challenges to the higher education sector.

Building on the Incheon and Qingdao Declarations, the global education community has a new point of departure to respond to the scale and urgency of demand for accessible, affordable and quality higher education in the period 2015 to 2030. Globally, the number of students enrolled in higher education by 2030 is forecast to rise from 99.4 million in 2000 to above 414 million in 2030. The need to increase enrolment will be particularly great in the South. Online, Open and Flexible education represents a core range of strategies within a variety of contexts, utilising media and information and communication technologies (ICT), to contribute to meeting this growing demand, while ensuring equity, access, and quality learning outcomes.

Teaching, Research and Innovation are critical to the mission of higher education institutions. Education has a vital contribution to make to the overall Sustainable Development Goals, supporting the capacity of a well-educated population for citizenship, personal development and economic growth. The suggested Sustainable Development Goal 4 proposes 'to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all by 2030'. Online, Open and Flexible education systems provide capacity for Higher Education, supported by robust quality assurance and regulation, to provide routes for student success delivering large-scale and cost-effective pathways for certificates, diplomas, degrees, and higher level qualifications, and a range of non-formal learning activities such as Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs).

A Call To Action

To achieve the desired impact declared in Incheon and Qingdao, we call on Higher Education to be transformed in order to be able to deliver change in scale and speed of response, realising the potential of the digital technologies within a humanistic framework. Online, Open and Flexible programmes represent an essential component of the global response, recognising the systemic and cultural diversity in Higher Education systems.

There is no time to lose. Now is the time for **action**.

We call on Governments to:

1. Recognise the important contribution of Online, Open and Flexible systems to meet the challenge of scale and quality in the provision of Higher Education and Lifelong Learning for the period 2015-2030.
2. Create effective policies and enable regulations for Online, Open and Flexible systems at all levels based on equity principles. These should include contributions from both public and private initiatives (not for profit and for profit) for the next 15 year-period.
3. Recognise that funding is critical, and needs to include both initial and ongoing investment in high-capacity network infrastructure, faculty development, quality assurance and regulation and to encourage multistakeholder co-operation, including the business community, in order to provide adequate technology infrastructure as well as equitable and affordable access to quality education.

Governments and Higher Education Institutions should:

4. Put in place policies for teaching that foster a culture of excellence, supporting and motivating teachers' engagement in professional learning and competence development in Higher Education, in particular with regard to the adoption of Online, Open and Flexible systems practice; and to support funding of research in enhancing teacher ICT competencies in higher education in order to ensure continuing innovation and quality enhancement. We note that Higher Education has a particular responsibility to engage in building competencies and capacities for initial and continuing teacher education for schools.
5. Promote Higher Education policies that encompass Lifelong Learning, learner-centred flexible approaches and inclusive quality assurance and accreditation mechanisms.
6. Give priority to the use of new pedagogical approaches, utilising digital affordances; to prequalification courses to improve access; to recognition of prior learning; and to guidance and student support.
7. Reform the curriculum to ensure student engagement and success, lifelong learning in order to generate better employment and life outcomes. The curriculum should be informed by content supported by digital access, including quality Open Educational Resources (OER), and in support of local languages and diversity of cultures.
8. Recognise skills and qualifications on the basis of demonstrated learning outcomes, not mode of study.
9. Create a supportive environment for the development of leadership in Higher Education to assure high quality institutional performance in the practice of Online, Open and Flexible systems.
10. Support funding of research in Online, Open and Flexible education methods.

With support of Higher Education institutions, academic staff should:

11. Be empowered with technology-enhanced pedagogical skills and supported to engage with Online, Open and Flexible education practice.
12. Be supported to take on new roles, such as learning coaches or mentors, dedicated to teaching students how to learn in a digital environment, as opposed to teaching them content.
13. Be encouraged to create, develop, adapt and share high-quality accessible digital resources, taking into account local needs and diversity of learners. Continued and enhanced access to a growing inventory of quality OER represents a cornerstone for online, open and flexible learning worldwide.

Students should:

14. Be supported in ways to engage effectively with Online, Open, and Flexible education practice, particular attention being given to students with learning challenges, to new groups of learners, and to building skills for lifelong learning, not just initial education.
15. Be empowered with knowledge and skills enabling them not only to be successful online learners but also successful employment creators and entrepreneurs.

International Cooperation

We call on Governments and Intergovernmental Organisations to:

16. Undertake continuous monitoring and evaluation, including uptake and outcomes of Online, Open and Flexible systems.
17. Promote North-South-South collaboration in Online, Open, Flexible Higher Education to support development in the developing and least developed countries. Financial support will be needed for seed money to engage in collaborative initiatives.
18. Give consideration to:
    - Initiatives for quality summits setting policy directions in the world regions.
    - Promotion of doctoral student programmes to create opportunities for collaboration, networking and support for participation and visibility in events, networks and projects.
    - Strengthening global collaboration on R&D relevant to online, open and flexible higher education.

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Participants in the Paris High-Level Policy Forum:

Urge governments and stakeholders in regions and nations to address existing challenges related to the adoption of Online, Open and Flexible learning and take concrete and urgent action.

Invite UNESCO to carry forward and advocate this message to international fora relevant for such actions.

Commit to advocating for and taking this message to their governments, institutions, organizations, companies and associations.

Call upon UNESCO and ICDE to collect, share, disseminate and network for good practices in Online, Open and Flexible education.