GUIDE ASSOCIATION DRIVES THE CHANGE WITH NEW INITIATIVES

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The Association GUIDE - Global Universities in Distance Learning continues to be at the forefront of higher education modernization by implementing new initiatives for supporting innovation in all of its aspects. Thanks to its huge network made up of more than 120 members coming from all over the world, GUIDE stays up to date on international issues, new ideas and potential problems especially related to the future of open and distance learning.

Being aware of its role of innovation driver, the Association is lately converging its activities on promoting the centrality of higher education within the national agendas, emphasizing its impact on the global crisis and the individual national economies. The VI GUIDE International Conference, which will be held in Athens - Greece, on 3-4 October 2013, aims to offer an overview of the common problems and prospects faced by different countries, comparing the effects and results of new training and governmental policies adopted after the global finance system collapse. More specifically, the topics to be addressed will be the analysis of regional and macro-regional higher education systems and their adaptation to local and national needs as well as the study of the role played by distance learning methods and technologies in designing new cost-effective higher education systems. It is worth considering that the education system, only for university training, costs each of the major OECD countries, on average, over 1% of the GDP. In this setting of crisis, these resources are likely to be further reduced, becoming insufficient for the achievement of the desired results in terms of efficiency. As a consequence, the recognition of the role of digital technologies in providing the necessary skills for professional success and in assuring cost-effective equal learning opportunities to the vast audience has to be emphasized. Hence, the event will be the occasion to acquire relevant information on higher education systems in different geographical contexts in order to provide recommendations and strategies for a suitable renewal of HE at a global level.

In this perspective and in order to support the innovation in education on a global scale, the Association has also joined the OpenCourseWare Consortium, a worldwide community of hundreds of higher education institutions and associated

organizations committed to advancing open learning and its impact on global education. This new partnership will lead to an even broader network of academic institutions that will better support the transformation and the reform of obsolete higher education systems throughout the world.

Strictly related to this objective is the creation of the Platform Open Excellence that GUIDE intends to launch for providing international institutions with a tool to share and design innovative learning contents. Its main purpose is to supply higher education students with postgraduate courses and programs able to meet the challenges and the evolution of the current global labour market. In such a way it responds to the accelerating shift to high-technology and information economy that forces the higher education system to prepare a competent workforce to meet changing demands for labour. GUIDE's Open Excellence provides, on the one hand, a common space for circulating educational best practices and research findings and on the other, a place for creating innovative and multidisciplinary postgraduate curricula that are internationally recognized. In such a way, it aims to offer participant institutions the opportunity to increase their visibility showcasing their educational offer at an international level, strengthen the link with enterprises by being more attractive to students and draw the attention of policy-makers in investing in their educational activities. Thus, at a larger extent, the platform is expected to reach and impact on a large range of stakeholders that consist of universities, research centres, scientific communities, students, companies etc. in order to create a high-quality virtuous circle and promote the knowledge triangle Education-Innovation-Research.

Finally, as quality remains one of the core topics of the research activities carried out by the Association, GUIDE has also established a Quality Observatory for open and distance learning. The Observatory is a central structure for developers, managers, administrators, decision makers and end-users to find a suitable approach to quality in technology-mediated education. It analyzes international practices and principles for quality in e-learning dealing with existing standards, methodologies and accreditation mechanisms implemented by higher education institutions worldwide. In such a way, GUIDE Quality Observatory gives the opportunity to participate in major international research and development projects in the field of quality and the chance

of accessing a range of specific tools and services to benchmark and analyze local, national and regional initiatives. More specifically, it aims to provide a conceptual framework for the description and harmonization of quality approaches, offer an online-based repository for quality assurance in distance education and examine international quality labels and certifications on e-learning courses design, implementation and delivery.

All these initiatives prove how GUIDE Association is constantly engaged in pursuing its mission to encourage networking and exchange opportunities for promoting quality, innovation and excellence in research, development and use of e-learning.

References

International GUIDE Conference 2013 (http://www.guideassociation. org/guide_2013/index.php/en);

GUIDE Quality Observatory on Open and Distance Learning (www. guideassociation.org/qualityobservatory).