Where do open universities think they are going?

Sir John Daniel
Three-month internship 1972
Open University HQ – Walton Hall
Where do open universities think they are going?

Sir John Daniel
Open as to:

- People
- Places
- Methods
- Ideas
How should open universities dress now that the ‘conventional’ universities have stolen our clothes?

Are we the victims of our own success?
Open Universities: A Storied Past but an Uncertain Future?

Distance Education in China
Alan Tait

Emeritus Professor of Distance Education and Development, UKOU
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October 16-19, 2017
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Organiser of ICDE 2017
World Conference on Online Learning
Roundtable of Executive Heads of Open Universities
Toronto, 16 October 2017
Planning

2016 October: Invitations sent to 50+ open university heads

2016 December: 22 replies received

2017 March: Alan Tait surveys & interviews respondents
Alan Tait

Open universities: the next phase
Planning

2016 October: Invitations sent to ~60 open university heads
2016 December: 22 replies received
2017 March: Alan Tait surveys & interviews respondents
2017 September: ~ 20 participants confirmed
2017 October 26: Nine Executive Heads in attendance
Anja Oskamp
Rector, OU Netherlands
President, EADTU
Left to right:
Alan Tait; Melinda dela Pena Bandalaria (U. of Philippines OU);
Anja Oskamp (OUNL); Ho Sinn Chye (Wawasan OU);
John Daniel; K. Seetharama Rao (BRAOU India);
Martin Noel (TELUQ); Anbahan Ariadurai (OUSL);
Mansor Fadzil (OUM); Neil Fassina (Athabasca);
Yuk-Shan Wong (OUHK)
Alan Tait

Open universities: the next phase
Roundtable of Executive Heads of Open Universities
Toronto, 16 October 2017
Where do open universities think they are going?

- Are missions evolving?
- How are student demographics changing?
- How do OUs compete to win?
- What are the implications of operating at scale?
- What opportunities for collaboration among OUs?
- How to combine flexibility, quality & scale?
Where do open universities think they are going?

- Are missions evolving?
Where do open universities think they are going?

- Are missions evolving?

- Two (smaller) OUs now offering on-campus programmes

- UN Sustainable Development Goals call for tens of millions of additional HE students in regions where OUs already under enrolment pressure
Where do open universities think they are going?

- Are missions evolving?

Is there a limit to how large an OU can become without losing effectiveness?

Are OUs becoming complacent once they become mega-universities?

Should they be more ambitious?
Where do open universities think they are going?

- Are missions evolving?
- How are student demographics changing?

- Some (e.g. Italy) seeing more older students
- Students getting younger in most cases (though not usually school leavers)
- But more focus on shorter programmes rather than undergraduate degrees
Where do open universities think they are going?

- Are missions evolving?
- How are student demographics changing?
- How do OUs compete to win?

- Some OUs entirely online
- Outside the West most still use printed materials for teaching, but increasingly use IT in administrative and student support functions (e.g. marking)
- Don’t focus the use of technology only on pedagogy!
Online Learning
Where do open universities think they are going?

- Are missions evolving?
- How are student demographics changing?
- How do OUs compete to win?
- What are the implications of operating at scale?

- Some exceptions (e.g. Philippines) to general correlation between OU numbers and population in jurisdiction
- Have the smaller OUs adopted too much of the ‘industrial model’ of the mega-universities?
Where do open universities think they are going?

- Are missions evolving?
- How are student demographics changing?
- How do OUs compete to win?
- What are the implications of operating at scale?
- What opportunities for collaboration among OUs?

- Extensive course sharing among India state OUs

- Challenges of partnership management greater offshore!
Where do open universities think they are going?

- Are missions evolving?
- How are student demographics changing?
- How do OUs compete to win?
- What are the implications of operating at scale?
- What opportunities for collaboration among OUs?
- How to combine flexibility, quality & scale

- Flexibility is good, but so are structure and pacing!
- OUs confident of quality still complain of poor reputations
- The terms ‘distance’ and ‘open’ are not always helpful
Where do open universities think they are going?

- How do OUs relate to their governments?

- Impossible to remain a government ‘darling’ for ever!

- Use OU power & reach to assist governments’ priorities

- ’Near-death’ experiences for Athabasca and TELUQ in past
Where do open universities think they are going?
Three conclusions

1. Open universities are a very diverse reality. The descriptor ‘open’ conceals great variations in size, mission and pedagogy.

2. Whether the terms ‘open’ and ‘distance’ are helpful or not, the open universities are proud of their achievements in opening up higher education and bringing it to new places.

3. Without underestimating the challenges of the wrenching changes that the OUs feel they must now make, they are confident that they have the right values and vision for the times.
Thank you!

Sir John Daniel

For text & slides:
www.sirjohn.ca