

Memorandum of Understanding

on the establishment and functioning of the Liaison Committee of the European Open and Distance Learning Networks

The undersigned representatives of the following organisations:

Association of European Correspondence Schools (AECS),
Coimbra Group,
EuroPACE 2000,
European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU),
European Distance Education Network (EDEN),
European Federation of Open and Distance Learning (EFODL),
European Universities Continuing Education Network (EUCEN),
International Council of Open and Distance Learning (ICDE),
Network of Academics and Professionals (NAP)

agreed as follows:

Preamble

European organisations and institutions in the field of open and distance learning have been developing and extending their activities and created networks to fully benefit from the European dimension potential in their activities and to respond to an increasing demand in this area. Each individual network is based on criteria for membership that enable a recognisable and constructive common operation, in the meantime networks have identified that they also have many interests in common.

The representatives of the European distance learning networks, on the initiative of EDEN have been organising meetings beginning with Poitiers in June 1996, followed by Budapest in June 1997, Brussels March 1998 and Bologna June 1998. Participants of the meetings also included representatives of the European Commission and occasionally the Council of Europe.

The representatives of the European ODL organisations at their meeting of 25 June 1998 in Bologna agreed to establish the Liaison Committee of the European Open and Distance Learning Networks in order to meet on a regular basis and to create a common platform that would be an added value for the networks. The Liaison Committee at their first formal meeting of 20 October 1998 decided to launch a "Memorandum of Understanding", to establish a jointly agreed basis for the co-operation.

Aims

The present agreement forms on behalf of the organisations represented in the Liaison Committee part of their European strategy, which strategies involve the co-operation

with other relevant European and international institutions and networks in the field of open and distance learning.

The “Network of Networks” brings together a sufficient number of members to be considered as representative for the area and for the countries of the European Union and, increasingly, for countries of Central and Eastern Europe. It has a structure that enables to mobilise opinions and expressions of needs.

It is understood by the participating networks that the aim of the Liaison Committee is to create a forum for the exchange of views in the field of open and distance learning, express common opinions and goals of the European ODL organisations and improve communication between the networks.

In the framework of the Liaison Committee, co-operation between the participating networks should be developed in order to promote and enrich the activities of each organisation and through this to enhance the development of open and distance learning. The basis for the co-operation is joint benefit and multilateral reciprocity.

Members of the Liaison Committee

The founder members of the Liaison Committee are the Association of European Correspondence Schools (AECS), the Coimbra Group, EuroPACE 2000, the European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU), the European Distance Education Network (EDEN), the European Federation of Open and Distance Learning (EFODL), the European Universities Continuing Education Network (EUCEN), the International Council of Open and Distance Learning (ICDE) and the Network of Academics and Professionals (NAP).

The Committee is open towards involving further organisations. New members may be invited to the Liaison Committee on the basis of unanimous agreement of the member organisations.

Observers from the European Commission, the Council of Europe, and other relevant European or international bodies may be invited to attend meetings of the Liaison Committee and to participate in activities resulting from these meetings.

General Mandate and principles of functioning

The signatories of this agreement welcome and endorse the opportunity for co-operation through the Liaison Committee of the European Open and Distance Learning Networks.

They give their representatives in the Liaison Committee mandate to participate in its meetings and speak and decide on behalf of their organisations, observing the following principles:

- Standpoints and decisions of the Liaison Committee will be taken on the basis of consensus.

- Proposals for more than incidental decisions should be circulated at least two weeks before Liaison Committee meetings in order to allow representatives consultation of their governing bodies before the meetings
- Representatives of member organisations have the right to ask for agreement with a draft decision of the Liaison Committee by the governing bodies of their organisations before the decision is made public.

The Liaison Committee works as a voluntary agreement for co-ordination and stronger co-operation, in a light framework, without a permanent administrative structure.

The Liaison Committee shall meet at least twice a year. Meetings otherwise may be held according to demands of issues to be discussed.

Chairmanship of the Liaison Committee will rotate between the members.

The Liaison Committee may agree upon the provision of organisational support for the functioning of the Committee, offered by a volunteering member institution of the Committee.

This Memorandum of Understanding shall come into force on the date when it is signed by all the organisations represented. Any organisation may withdraw by giving three month's notice.

Done at Brussels, on 21 January, 1999.

Signed by:

the Association of European Correspondence Schools (AECS)

the Coimbra Group

EuroPACE 2000, Jef Van der Braden

the European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU), Pietr Hendrikx

the European Distance Education Network (EDEN), Andras Szucs

the European Federation of Open and Distance Learning (EFODL),

the European Universities Continuing Education Network (EUCEN), Alfredo Soeiro

the International Council of Open and Distance Learning (ICDE), Reidar Roll

the Network of Academics and Professionals (NAP)