



WORLD  
CONGRESS  
ON ACCESS TO POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

Connecting the Unconnected

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## Congress Strands – October 2013

### **Learning labs – Linking social and economic development to access strategies in cities and regions**

In a world in which knowledge and skills are the new currency, cities and regions around the world are seeking to attract and retain highly skilled workers while they simultaneously work to raise the educational achievement levels of their local populations. Place-based education strategies are being championed by mayors and cities, colleges and universities, local employers and governments and, increasingly, through the collaboration of all these stakeholders with community-based groups.

Social innovation is thriving in new community learning models in which populations work collaboratively with their local (and sometimes not so local) institutions to address community challenges together and, in the process, define their own learning needs and co-create their own learning solutions.

This strand will look at a wide variety of established and emerging place-based development models, their lessons and challenges, and begin to develop a global learning community of those for whom broadening access to post-secondary studies and social and economic development are mutually supportive strategies.

It will *inter alia* consider: initiatives to widen access to higher education that involve co-operation among multiple partners in cities and regions; projects that are directly targeted to particular imperatives of city and regional authorities to provide enhanced provision for targeted groups (e.g. low-income, minorities, disabled and the geographically isolated); and initiatives that seek to stimulate economic development through providing access opportunities for those already in employment.

## **Students as change agents - Harnessing the creative energy of students to accelerate global access efforts**

Both within the student movement internationally and in student-led community projects and organizations around the world, students are taking on new leadership roles in developing and promoting policies and programs to broaden access to post-secondary education. Yet, as the student movement begins to shape an international agenda around access, many students are still working in isolation with minimal resources to open up their own and others' pathways to higher education, to alter the life chances of their friends and neighbors and offer new hope to their struggling communities.

This strand will give voice to students from the student movement and beyond, connect student efforts to promote access around the world, bring students into local, regional and international access networks and partnerships, and contribute to building a platform for sharing tools, practices and resources that will strengthen student work in all countries.

## **Financing educational opportunities**

Completion of tertiary education is the best predictor of success in the workplace and the avoidance of poverty. Adequate public and private finance are needed if we are to extend the reach of tertiary education. The case for providing the finance needed is supported by evidence that increasing the skill levels of the disadvantaged will lead to their increased participation in the labour force, increased GDP and hence to private benefits and to tax revenues which far exceed the extra costs.

Financial issues for the less advantaged are highlighted by the recent hikes in tertiary fees in public education in many countries. The impact of such fee increases has to be assessed in the context of the various forms of public loans and grants and private finance which will be considered in this strand along with topics such as: the possibilities that online learning and MOOCs may provide for less advantaged learners; the conditions that will lead public and private sectors to provide more equitable opportunities to quality education; and the costs of alternative forms of finance relative to the benefits in increased production and social inclusion.

The strand is seeking a range of contributions and participants to bring out the key issues and feasible ways of reforming finance recognizing the diversity in economies and governments.

## **Re-thinking access – De-constructing traditional assumptions about higher learning systems and the implications for access policies and programs**

Efforts to ensure stronger post-secondary pathways at all levels of education systems as a means of broadening access and success beyond high school are leading to much experimentation and rethinking of what constitutes the education system. Technology is playing a key role in this process, opening up opportunities for education delivery unimagined even a decade ago, both in the classroom and beyond, while changing the very nature of the relationship between teacher and learner. While international student migration continues to accelerate, at the same time, countries such as India, China and within the Middle East, are investing heavily in their own institutions of higher learning – sometimes in partnership with the West, rapidly changing the supply dynamic. The longer-term implications of this shift hold important consequences for learning institutions worldwide.

In many countries, the system challenges turn around issues of gender, urban versus rural opportunities and other systemic biases, and the basic infrastructure and economic development concerns that reflect national objectives that may include the creation of greater opportunities for primary and secondary educational attainment in the short-term at the expense of post-secondary investments.

Post-secondary institutions are increasingly reaching beyond traditional models in their external relationships, developing their third mission – that of community engagement and community research- and opening up their institutions to both community learning models and increased engagement in local, national and international economic and social development strategies – particularly in relation to more holistic interpretations of access and participation. Such initiatives recognize the need to take a long-term view of connecting the unconnected and contributing to progression pathways from diverse directions that may have to span several generations. Institutional collaboration models are also becoming more prevalent as colleges, universities and technology institutes look to find complementary rather than competitive roles to meet both their own and society's development objectives.

This strand will begin to examine these important trends and the policies and practices that are developing to take account of them. Participants will explore the short-, medium-, and long-term implications for the work of broadening access and success and begin to shape an agenda for future collaborative research and the development of a collaborative platform.

## **All hands on deck – Education for and at work in the global economy**

While access pathways to and through educational systems are in flux, discussions about how best to attract less academically inclined students to continue their studies, how best to prepare students for future work and careers and how to address the need for lifelong learning and skills upgrading are a growing focus of this discussion, notably in the context of difficult economic conditions worldwide and skills shortages in many western economies.

This strand embraces topics ranging from international mobility and the implications for learning systems and lifelong learning options; to adult education and so-called “second chances”; to the role of employers and corporations in rethinking their role in the supply and demand for qualified workers. Increasingly, major international companies are creating their own campuses, independently or in partnership with education institutions, and – in some cases – linking their corporate missions to the creation of “shared value” systems through their reach into local and international communities.

This strand will seek to highlight innovative new strategies and practices found within companies and workplaces, as well as industry partnerships with schools, technology institutes, higher learning institutions, governments and local communities. By modeling innovative approaches, it will aspire to seed new partnerships among access policymakers and practitioners, institutions and the private sector while developing an agenda for an emerging community of practice looking to scale and replicate successful approaches.

## **Teaching and learning for success and inclusion at the post-secondary level**

While western countries have had growing success in securing post-secondary education opportunities for under-represented groups of students, those challenges remain for many communities across the globe. The success of some under-represented groups at higher levels of education is to be celebrated, but there is still much to be developed in continents with systemic educational under achievement, where many students do not complete their programs. Teaching, learning and the associated pedagogic practices, curriculum and epistemic access and the continued development of those who teach in post compulsory education, are all arenas for critical scrutiny if we are to secure educational inclusion and success at higher levels for under represented groups.

How are institutions and their faculty, communities and governments approaching questions of pedagogic, curricula and epistemic access? How are they supporting and exploiting technological changes to harness greater inclusion and success? How are all stakeholders and communities securing effective retention, attainment, and success for under-represented students? In a world in which information is ubiquitous, but not everyone has access to electronic technologies, how can we harness the opportunities

for creating a globally connected world for learners? How can we harness the power of other students as partners in this enterprise?

These are some of the questions that this strand will explore. Approaches aimed at inclusion of specific groups will be shared, as will policies and methodologies designed to embrace diversity in general and build the sense of belonging and identity of those for whom the path to post-secondary education is newly trodden in their families and communities.

The strand will share the research, policies and practices that are leading the way and, like other strands, develop an action plan for a community of practice that will stay connected through and between the Congress series and beyond.

### **Special focus: First Nation, Aboriginal and other Indigenous populations**

As a special focus of the 1st EAN World Congress, participants will have an opportunity to learn about access, challenges and success of the world's Indigenous communities. This focus will also provide a specific opportunity to look at the Canadian Indigenous experience and to understand and engage with the growing efforts of First Nations, Metis and Inuit to shape and control their own pathways and scale up their successes to close educational achievement gaps. To accomplish this work, Indigenous groups are working to change the framework of higher education. Indigenous work to close educational gaps is being achieved through the indigenization of higher education either through indigenous controlled institutes of higher learning or the indigenization of public post-secondary institutions. The experiences, success and challenges of Indigenous populations will be shared. The strand will look at successes and lessons from policy and practice approaches around the world, look to connect up Indigenous and non-Indigenous networks, and aim to spark new partnerships and collaborations with a collaborative platform.