



**19th EAN annual conference
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Education is simply the soul of a society as it passes from one generation to another
G.K. Chesterton

From Access to Success: Closing the Knowledge Divide (Higher education for under-represented groups in the market economy)

In the last decade or so globalisation and emphasis on the market economy has put enormous pressure on higher education institutions. They are expected to change their traditional role as dispensers of knowledge and cultivators of minds to producers of highly skilled labour to meet market needs. The catch-phrase is, 'an educated workforce', and the keyword, 'employability'. It is true that globalisation, along with the revolutions in ICT have broken down many barriers – to quote President Barack Obama, "What matters, then, isn't what you do or where you live, but what you know." But at the same time, the knowledge divide has widened not just between individuals but also between countries. Who then are the 'educated' in the digital age, who will be 'employable' in the competitive market economy? How do we close the gap between those who have access to knowledge, and the form of knowledge, who learn it, master it and use it to compete, and those who do not?

Is an access mission commensurate with a free market ideology? How will access be funded in the market economy with its emphasis on profit and privatisation? Is a competency-based curriculum with transferable skills for employment appropriate for a culturally and socially diverse student body? Is an enterprise culture a threat to greater equity in higher education for under-represented groups? Are enterprise and equity compatible? What are the benefits of the market economy and what are its limitations for equity and access? How do we reconcile equity with market-oriented systems of higher education? If student success is measured by competency and employability, then how do we measure the intrinsic value of higher education?

Conference objectives:

1. Re-examine the role of higher education institutions in a knowledge-based economy and the part they play in closing the knowledge divide for under-represented groups.
2. Assess the impact of a market-oriented higher education on under-represented groups when students are regarded as customers or 'products'.
3. Debate the benefits and limitations of the market economy and explore how access professionals might interface with business to increase student success.
4. Discuss the funding mechanisms for the market-oriented, entrepreneurial university and how these might affect institutional autonomy, efficiency and quality.
5. Explore the potential of new technologies in widening access and increasing learning opportunities for under-represented groups in the digital age.

The Conference Debate:

"An enterprise culture is no threat to equity in higher education"