The X International GUIDE Conference Optimizing Higher Education for the Professional Student: A balance of flexibility, quality and cultural sensitivity, was held on 16-18 September 2015 at the University of Applied Sciences Technikum Wien, Austria’s largest technical university of applied sciences that offers both traditional and distance degree programs. The conference had participants from many well-known universities coming from numerous countries across the globe. Attendees came from Austria, Ukraine, China, United States, Italy, United Kingdom, Argentina, Philippines, Canada, Spain, Germany, Brazil, Great Britain, Algeria, Poland, Denmark, Israel, Slovenia, The Netherlands, and Bulgaria.

Digital Universities: International best practices and applications, in this winter issue and in the next spring issue, presents a selection of contributions from GUIDE Conference; the abstracts of all the Conference papers are available on GUIDE official website.

The conference aimed to promote discussion on improving higher education, bringing to light the needs of the evolving 21st century student and proposing new pedagogical strategies and technologies for meeting those needs. Particular attention was also given to the continuing education and training of the working professional student, as well as the essential role of international collaboration and cultural sensitivity in the advancement of higher education research and technology.

Throughout the three days, the conference featured 50 presentations. They reflected the latest worldwide trends in e-learning, addressing topics such as the evolution and transformation of MOOCs, the creation and implementation of virtual laboratories in teaching and learning and the importance to develop distance education programs that can effectively respond to corporate training needs. Significant attention was also given to gamification, with its crucial role in making the learning experience more attractive and stimulating through the use of simulation, animations and narrative-based learning and to BYOD policies that are becoming an overwhelming trend both in the academic field and in the business world where they are having a significant impact on day-to-day operations. Finally, a major focus was placed on the always relevant aspects related to quality assurance and on its crucial role in the rapid development of methodologies applied to formal, non-formal and informal learning. The demand for standards and accreditation is growing globally as well as the need to define international quality criteria for comparing the diverse educational systems.

We would like to thank all speakers and participants for coming to Vienna and making the conference a great success!