WORLD DECLARATION ON HIGHER EDUCATION
FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY: VISION AND
ACTION

AND

FRAMEWORK FOR PRIORITY ACTION FOR CHANGE
AND DEVELOPMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

adopted by the

WORLD CONFERENCE ON HIGHER EDUCATION\(^1\)

Higher Education in the Twenty-First Century:
Vision and Action

9 October 1998

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PREAMBLE

On the eve of a new century, there is an unprecedented demand for and a great diversification in higher education, as well as an increased awareness of its vital importance for sociocultural and economic development, and for building the future, for which the younger generations will need to be equipped with new skills, knowledge and ideals. Higher education includes ‘all types of studies, training or training for research at the post-secondary level, provided by universities or other educational establishments that are approved as institutions of higher education by the competent State authorities’. Everywhere higher education is faced with great challenges and difficulties related to financing, equity of conditions at access into and during the course of studies, improved staff development, skills-based training, enhancement and preservation of quality in teaching, research and services, relevance of programmes, employability of graduates, establishment of efficient co-operation agreements and equitable access to the benefits of international co-operation. At the same time, higher education is being challenged by new opportunities relating to technologies that are improving the ways in which knowledge can be produced, managed, disseminated, accessed and controlled. Equitable access to these technologies should be ensured at all levels of education systems.

The second half of this century will go down in the history of higher education as the period of its most spectacular expansion: an over sixfold increase in student enrolments worldwide, from 13 million in 1960 to 82 million in 1995. But it is also the period which has seen the gap between industrially developed, the developing countries and in particular the least developed countries with regard to access and resources for higher learning and research, already enormous, becoming even wider. It has also been a period of increased socio-economic stratification and greater difference in educational opportunity within countries, including in some of the most developed and wealthiest nations. Without adequate higher education and research institutions providing a critical mass of skilled and educated people, no country can ensure genuine endogenous and sustainable development and, in particular, developing countries and least developed countries cannot reduce the gap separating them from the industrially developed ones. Sharing knowledge, international co-operation and new technologies can offer new opportunities to reduce this gap.

\(^1\) Complete text at [http://www.unesco.org/education/educprog/wche/declaration_eng.htm](http://www.unesco.org/education/educprog/wche/declaration_eng.htm)
[http://www.unesco.org/education/educprog/wche/declaration_spa.htm#declaracion](http://www.unesco.org/education/educprog/wche/declaration_spa.htm#declaracion)
Higher education has given ample proof of its viability over the centuries and of its ability to change and to induce change and progress in society. Owing to the scope and pace of change, society has become increasingly knowledge-based so that higher learning and research now act as essential components of cultural, socio-economic and environmentally sustainable development of individuals, communities and nations. Higher education itself is confronted therefore with formidable challenges and must proceed to the most radical change and renewal it has ever been required to undertake, so that our society, which is currently undergoing a profound crisis of values, can transcend mere economic considerations and incorporate deeper dimensions of morality and spirituality.

It is with the aim of providing solutions to these challenges and of setting in motion a process of in-depth reform in higher education worldwide that UNESCO has convened a World Conference on Higher Education in the Twenty-First Century: Vision and Action. In preparation for the Conference, UNESCO issued, in 1995, its Policy Paper for Change and Development in Higher Education. Five regional consultations (Havana, November 1996; Dakar, April 1997; Tokyo, July 1997; Palermo, September 1997; and Beirut, March 1998) were subsequently held. The Declarations and Plans of Action adopted by them, each preserving its own specificity, are duly taken into account in the present Declaration - as is the whole process of reflection undertaken by the preparation of the World Conference - and are annexed to it.

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We, participants in the World Conference on Higher Education, assembled at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris, from 5 to 9 October 1998,

Recalling the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,

Recalling also the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which states in Article 26, paragraph 1, that ‘Everyone has the right to education’ and that ‘higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit’, and endorsing the basic principles of the Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960), which, by Article 4, commits the States Parties to it to ‘make higher education equally accessible to all on the basis of individual capacity’,

Taking into account the recommendations concerning higher education of major commissions and conferences, inter alia, the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century, the World Commission on Culture and Development, the 44th and 45th sessions of the International Conference on Education (Geneva, 1994 and 1996), the decisions taken at the 27th and 29th sessions of UNESCO’s General Conference, in particular regarding the Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel, the World Conference on Education for All (Jomtien, Thailand, 1990), the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Rio de Janeiro, 1992), the Conference on Academic Freedom and University Autonomy (Sinaia, 1992), the World Conference on Human Rights (Vienna, 1993), the World Summit for Social Development (Copenhagen, 1995), the fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995), the International Congress on Education and Informatics (Moscow, 1996), the World Congress on Higher Education and Human Resources Development for the Twenty-First Century (Manila, 1997), the fifth International Conference on Adult Education (Hamburg, 1997) and especially the Agenda for the Future under Theme 2 (Improving the conditions and quality of learning) stating: ‘We commit ourselves to ... opening schools, colleges and universities to adult learners ... by calling upon the World Conference on Higher Education (Paris, 1998) to promote the transformation of post-secondary institutions into lifelong learning institutions and to define the role of universities accordingly’,
Convinced that education is a fundamental pillar of human rights, democracy, sustainable development and peace, and shall therefore become accessible to all throughout life and that measures are required to ensure co-ordination and co-operation across and between the various sectors, particularly between general, technical and professional secondary and post-secondary education as well as between universities, colleges and technical institutions,

Believing that, in this context, the solution of the problems faced on the eve of the twenty-first century will be determined by the vision of the future society and by the role that is assigned to education in general and to higher education in particular,

Aware that on the threshold of a new millennium it is the duty of higher education to ensure that the values and ideals of a culture of peace prevail and that the intellectual community should be mobilized to that end,

Considering that a substantial change and development of higher education, the enhancement of its quality and relevance, and the solution to the major challenges it faces, require the strong involvement not only of governments and of higher education institutions, but also of all stakeholders, including students and their families, teachers, business and industry, the public and private sectors of the economy, parliaments, the media, the community, professional associations and society as well as a greater responsibility of higher education institutions towards society and accountability in the use of public and private, national or international resources,

Emphasizing that higher education systems should enhance their capacity to live with uncertainty, to change and bring about change, and to address social needs and to promote solidarity and equity; should preserve and exercise scientific rigor and originality, in a spirit of impartiality, as a basic prerequisite for attaining and sustaining an indispensable level of quality; and should place students at the center of their concerns, within a lifelong perspective, so as to allow their full integration into the global knowledge society of the coming century,

Also believing that international co-operation and exchange are major avenues for advancing higher education throughout the world,

Proclaim the following:

**MISSIONS AND FUNCTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

**Article 1** - Mission to educate, to train and to undertake research (...)

**Article 2** - Ethical role, autonomy, responsibility and anticipatory function

**SHAPING A NEW VISION OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

**Article 3** - Equity of access

**Article 4** - Enhancing participation and promoting the role of women
Article 5 - Advancing knowledge through research in science, the arts and humanities and the dissemination of its results

Article 6 - Long-term orientation based on relevance

Article 7 - Strengthening co-operation with the world of work and analyzing and anticipating societal needs

Article 8 - Diversification for enhanced equity of opportunity

Article 9 - Innovative educational approaches: critical thinking and creativity

Article 10 - Higher education personnel and students as major actors

FROM VISION TO ACTION

Article 11 - Qualitative evaluation

Article 12 - The potential and the challenge of technology

Article 13 - Strengthening higher education management and financing

Article 14 - Financing of higher education as a public service

Article 15 - Sharing knowledge and know-how across borders and continents

Article 16 - From ‘brain drain’ to ‘brain gain’

Article 17 - Partnership and alliances

FRAMEWORK FOR PRIORITY ACTION FOR CHANGE AND DEVELOPMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION

I. PRIORITY ACTIONS AT NATIONAL LEVEL

1. States, including their governments, parliaments and other decision-makers should (...)

2. States in which enrolment in higher education is low by internationally accepted comparative standards should (...)

3. The interface with general, technical and professional secondary education should (...)

4. Concrete steps should (...)


II. PRIORITY ACTIONS AT THE LEVEL OF SYSTEMS AND INSTITUTIONS

5. Each higher education institution should (...)

6. In establishing priorities in their programs and structures, higher education institutions should (...)

7. While the need for closer links between higher education and the world of work is important worldwide, it is particularly vital for the developing countries and especially the least developed countries (...)

8. The use of new technologies should be generalized to the greatest extent possible (...)

9. Institutions of higher education should be open to adult learners (...)

III. ACTIONS TO BE TAKEN AT INTERNATIONAL LEVEL AND, IN PARTICULAR, TO BE INITIATED BY UNESCO

10. Co-operation should be conceived of as an integral part of the institutional missions of higher education institutions and systems. (...)

11. UNESCO, and other intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations active in higher education, the states through their bilateral and multilateral co-operation programmes, the academic community and all concerned partners in society should further promote international academic mobility (...)

12. Institutions of higher education in industrialized countries should strive to make arrangements for international co-operation with sister institutions in developing countries (...)

13. UNESCO, together with all concerned parts of society, should also undertake action in order to alleviate the negative effects of ‘brain drain’ and to shift to a dynamic process of ‘brain gain’. (...)

14. Within this framework, UNESCO should (...)