



**Higher  
Education  
Sustainability  
Initiative**

**HESI+10**  
Celebrating 10 years  
with Higher Education  
Sustainability Impact

**HESI+10  
GLOBAL FORUM**  
6 July 2022

## **HESI+10 Communique - transforming, integrating, and advancing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and building back better from the COVID-19 pandemic**

We, the community of the Higher Education for Sustainability Initiative (HESI), having convened at the HESI+10 Global Forum, held virtually on 6 July 2022 as a special event to the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLFP), submit this HESI Communique to representatives gathered at the 2022 HLFP, held under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council, and to the Transforming Education Summit, convened by the United Nations Secretary-General during the 77th UN General Assembly.

### **The 2030 Agenda and building back better from the COVID-19 pandemic**

The disruptions that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused to societies, including in the education sector, is unprecedented. Higher education institutions have had to quickly adapt to new ways of learning, to reach and engage students, and be met with challenges and inequalities for those that lack capacities for rapid digital transformations and online learning.

The most recent assessment on the progress towards the SDGs shows that years or even decades of development progress have been halted or reversed. The HESI partnership provides a broad and unique platform to highlight the critical role higher education plays in achieving sustainable development, to find solutions for positive impacts, and to convene an evolving and action-oriented conversation on the critical role of higher education in achieving sustainable development.

The HESI+10 Global Forum has provided a unique opportunity to focus on the challenges and opportunities encountered by the higher education community to support efforts to build back better from the COVID-19 pandemic, while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

### **HESI+10**

It was in 2012, in the lead-up to the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20 Conference), that HESI was established as an open partnership between several United Nations entities and the higher education community. Today, HESI comprises several UN entities and hundreds of networks, higher education institutions and student organizations.

Three open webinars on topics related to the theme of 2022 High-level Political Forum were held in the lead-up to the Forum as part of the HESI+10 celebrations. The following key messages and trends have emerged through the HESI+10 process:

- The pandemic posed significant challenges, as well as opportunities for higher education, including the difficulties to nurture a sense of community and belonging, and the benefits of work-life balance resulting from remote practices. The pandemic has catalyzed significant innovations that were long due, most notably a rapid transition from traditional to more “agile” and adaptive modes of teaching and learning, including maximizing the use of existing digital learning management systems. At the same time, it requires an enhanced focus on human rights and equity issues, the social-emotional aspects of learning and its connection with mental health and inclusion efforts.
- Higher education needs to break silos and embrace holistic approaches to sustainability to produce research and curriculum development that addresses real world issues, including the climate change crisis, sustainable development, and the SDGs more broadly. Lifelong learning becomes extremely important to advance the SDGs and the need to implement innovative solutions at scale. Higher education must focus on developing the current and next generation of leaders with a sustainable mindset, that is reflected in the way to be, think and act.
- Higher education is well placed to champion innovative solutions for positive system change at scale. Collaboration and partnerships across sectors become an integral part of this endeavor.

## HESI Action Groups

In order to provide a multi-stakeholder system-change response to a number of higher education and SDG challenges and opportunities, HESI has launched several Action Groups to tackle issues related to higher education for sustainable development.

- **Rankings, ratings and assessment:** Rankings, ratings, and assessment (RRA) organizations (RRAOs) have significant influence - and thus significant responsibility - to guide the academic sector. As we approach the threshold of irreversible climate change, many of these have recognised the need to change their criteria for assessment of the performance of higher education institutions to include contributions to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. From 2019-2021, this international multistakeholder HESI Action Group focused on co-creation and launch of three Guidance documents, targeting 1) creators of RRAs, 2) HEIs participating in RRAs and 3) readers of RRAs. International RRAOs were invited to commit to the Guidance (Volume 1), and an inaugural Roundtable of ten global RRAO leaders was launched in Fall 2021, resulting in a work plan that ranges from establishing common standards for reporting, to collaboration with other partners/networks to effect systemic change (e.g. working with the SDG Publishers Compact, accreditation agencies, etc.).
- **Education for Green Jobs:** The Education for Green Jobs initiative focuses on the following outcomes through a series of Solutions Summits and a Green Learning Network platform: supporting curricular updates to build the workforce we need for a sustainable and inclusive future; improving recruitment, pedagogies, career advising and job placement processes to promote green and sustainability careers; enhancing communication processes between employers and educators around workforce needs for ongoing improvements.

- **SDG Publishers Compact Fellows:** The SDG Publishers Compact, launched by the International Publishers Association and the United Nations back in 2020 to align education and research with the SDGs, has continued to gather momentum for the wider publishing sector and is a focus area amplified by this Action Group. The group has multiple work teams, created recommended action tips and a textbook rubric, and is organizing an event series and collaboration opportunities for publishers, researchers, journal editors, SDG practitioners and related stakeholders.

A new HESI Action Group on “**Integrating SDGs into higher education**” is today established, led by UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, to act as an advisory service for higher education institutions mainly in developing countries, and to curate and develop tools and guidance for integrating and mainstreaming the global goals into curricula, research, and programmes of higher education institutions. The group will leverage the broad HESI community of UN partners, universities, and other institutions of higher education in carrying out its objectives. Other groups might be formed in the follow up to the Forum.

## Call to Action

We call on all governments, UN entities, higher education institutions and other relevant stakeholders to support higher education in transforming, integrating, and advancing the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and building back better from the COVID-19 pandemic:

- **Higher education institutions and networks:** to integrate SDGs into higher education with a “whole-institution approach” —beyond operational considerations such as construction, energy, waste, water and climate initiatives, but encompassing research, education, governance, community engagement, and innovation through the lens of diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging for its stakeholders—; to inform themselves of how to better understand and decide whether to participate in ratings, rankings and assessments of their higher education institution through a sustainability lens (such as the HESI Guidance Vol. II); to ensure that decisions at all levels are made with sustainability in mind, with the appropriate performance incentive structures in place (e.g. inclusion of sustainability in performance objectives, tenure consideration, etc.); to advocate for Open Access of research that contributes knowledge and solutions for a more sustainable world; to work with other societal stakeholders to co-create, build and scale SDG solutions and innovations; and engage faculty and staff as well as its students to be change agents for a sustainable future for all, through education, training, and experiential learning/community engagement opportunities.
- **Faculties:** to continue to develop their SDG knowledge and support the alignment of research, curriculum and organizational practices to the SDGs, including an equity lens; integrating and advocating for inter- and trans-disciplinary and holistic approaches to sustainable development; to reflect on innovative and effective resources, methodologies and learning environments that help expand access to education for the SDGs; to help instill and encourage global responsibility, and a sustainable mindset to students so they can become global citizens and change agents for a sustainable world; to act as a expert facilitator to support and scale up multi-stakeholder collaboration and partnership on SDG related efforts at the local and international level, and to provide substantive input into community initiatives and political processes; to advocate for sustainable rankings, journals and

accreditations that help drive sustainability across the higher education landscape.

- **Students of higher education:** to demand SDG education and learning; to inform themselves of how to better understand ratings, rankings and assessments of their higher education institution through a sustainability lens (using the HESI Guidance Vol. III); to be a steadfast advocate for sustainable development and commit to become a responsible leader who advances sustainable development with an equity focus.
- **Rankings, ratings, and assessment organizations:** to at minimum consider implementation of the HESI Guidance (Vol. I) regarding assessment of the performance of higher education institutions; and consider joining the Global Leaders Roundtable to work closely with HESI for systemic change.
- **Private and public sector organizations:** to engage with HESI to foster dialogue and collaboration with the higher education sector on sustainability initiatives where relevant - for example, applied research while remaining cognisant of the need to maintain academic freedom; resources for education/training opportunities for staff; mentorship/experiential learning opportunities for students; implementation of community projects; etc.
- **Governments:** to foster an environment that explicitly supports integrating SDGs into higher education (from research to technical and vocational training) through policies, strategies and funding; recognising higher education contributions to achieving the SDGs in their reporting (Voluntary National Review, ACE Dialogue, etc.); and ensuring that all government staff are aware of the SDGs as well as their role as an employee in SDG implementation through training/lifelong learning programmes (education/training that can be supported by HESI partners, the Sulitest, etc.) to ensure that decisions are made with sustainability (social, environmental, economic and cultural considerations) in mind.
- **United Nations entities:** to work more proactively to engage HESI towards ensuring that higher education contributions are actively considered and included in UN entities' strategies, programmes and funding in achievement of the SDGs, given that HEIs play a key role in research and education that in turn can catalyze change in the private, plural and public sectors
- **All relevant stakeholders involved in higher education** continue to engage in appropriate national as well as international frameworks, including the Higher Education Sustainability Initiative, to share their experiences and report regularly on progress and challenges.

*The Higher Education Sustainability Initiative (HESI) is an open partnership between several United Nations entities and the higher education community. HESI is currently chaired by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the Sulitest Association - a non-profit organization and online platform aimed at improving sustainability literacy for all. Other UN partners include UNESCO, UN Environment Programme, UN Global Compact's Principles for Responsible Management Education initiative, UN University, UN-HABITAT, UNCTAD, UNITAR, and the UN Office for Partnerships.*

*To see the full membership of the HESI Community and how to join, please visit <https://sdgs.un.org/HESI>*