



New HESI Action Group:

University Global Coalition (UGC) University Leaders Group

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About HESI

The Higher Education Sustainability Initiative (HESI) is an inclusive partnership between multiple United Nations entities and the higher education sector, with the goal of accentuating the pivotal role that higher education plays in advancing sustainable development. HESI is currently chaired by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) 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, UN Office for Partnerships and UN Academic Impact.

Through its strong association with the United Nations, HESI aims to provide higher education with an interface between higher education, science, and policy making by raising the profile of higher education's sector in supporting sustainable development, convening multi-stakeholder discussions and action, and sharing best practices.

Each year, HESI organizes a global forum as a special event to the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF)¹ – UN's main platform for the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the global level - to highlight the critical role of higher education in achieving sustainable development.

The HESI 2023 Global Forum, held on 17 July 2023 as an in-person event at UNHQ, placed a particular focus on understanding the challenges and opportunities to accelerate the recovery from COVID-19 and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda at all levels, in line with the theme of HLPF in 2023. The Forum included a high-level panel with university leaders to discuss the role of higher education in accelerating the recovery from COVID-19 and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda at all levels.

HESI also designates various “Action Groups” to tackle topics related to higher education for sustainable development. Action Groups draw upon the full HESI community to carry out its work and is often composed of several organizations and contributors.

As of today, 4 actions groups have been established:

- SDG Publishers Compact
- Education for Green Jobs
- Ranking, Ratings and Assessments
- HESI Partner Programme

University Global Coalition

The University Global Coalition (UGC) began in 2019 as a collaboration between 15 international higher education leaders and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research to advance integration of sustainable development within universities, facilitating collaboration across siloes within higher ed and with partners.

Over the last 4 years, UGC has grown to a network of 180 participating universities that has organized annual gatherings, SDG Action and Awareness weeks, international student competitions, Decade of Action groups and numerous other activities to highlight the importance of and promote action among universities, their leadership, and student communities to expand the role of higher education in advancing the Global Agenda.

The present document outlines an agreement for the University Global Coalition to operate a new action group within the HESI framework, specifically the University Global Coalition (UGC) University Leaders Group.

¹ <https://hlpf.un.org/>

Establishing the University Global Coalition (UGC) University Leaders Group

Sustainable development is a pressing global imperative that requires urgent action from all sectors of society, and higher education institutions play a crucial role in shaping future leaders and fostering sustainable practices. Higher education can and must do even more to accelerate progress toward the 2030 agenda.

To advance this shared goal, the University Global Coalition and HESI will partner to establish the University Global Coalition (UGC) University Leaders Group to increase the engagement of Chancellors, Presidents, Rectors, Deans and Leaders of Higher Education Institutions and related organizations in advancing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Purpose

1. **Higher education leadership engagement:** Amplify the commitment and actions of higher education Chancellors, Presidents, Rectors, Deans, and Leaders of Higher Education Institutions and related organizations to promoting sustainable development on a global scale.
2. **Collective impact:** Partner with HESI to facilitate collaborative efforts across universities, enabling a collective impact that transcends what individual institutions can achieve alone. By pooling resources, knowledge, and expertise across universities and UN agencies, the initiative will help HESI identify targeted opportunities for collective impact that require the direct engagement of higher education leaders.
3. **Advocacy and influence:** Help amplify HESI's influence in advocating for sustainability in higher education on regional, national, and international levels, as well as within the UN system itself. By engaging university presidents, chancellors, and other decision makers, and working closely with the other Action Groups and the HESI community, the initiative will help to inform policies and build deeper awareness of and commitment to sustainable development in higher education and beyond., ensuring the inclusion of universities from all regions to guarantee equal representation and access.

Potential outcomes

- **Catalyzing of systemic change:** Partner with HESI to foster a systemic shift in how university leaders approach education, research, campus operations, and community engagement, emphasizing sustainability as a core value.
- **Heightened visibility of the role of higher education in the 2030 Agenda:** Help to elevate the voices of university leaders to bring greater attention to the need and role of higher education in advancing the SDGs and sustainability agenda.

Next steps

- **Kick-off:** Presentation of the initiative at the annual HESI partner meeting, 7 Nov 2023, getting feedback from partners.

- **Governance:** Current UGC steering committee will initially pilot the initiative. Current UGC members will be invited to join HESI.
- **Membership:** The Leaders Group will assist HESI in promoting membership in HESI and will identify future members of the action group, with special emphasis on ensuring equal representation from developed and less developed countries. The action group will be open to the top leadership of any relevant university, networks, associations, or movements sharing the values and goals of the 2030 Agenda following the membership criteria defined by UGC and HESI.
- **Shared Vision and Goals:** Using this document as a starting point, the newly formed Leaders Group will create a charter, vision, and goals to guide its work in alignment with HESI's mission and the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Engagement strategy: During the planning period over 2023-2024, the initiative will define an engagement strategy for the partnership with the broader UN system. This will include recommendations on existing UN engagements where presence of higher education leadership should be forefront and the higher education leaders considered as critical decision makers, specifically during the SDG Summit and Global Forum.