

**Statement of Director of UNESCO New York Office to HESI's event on
Higher Education - key driver of the Sustainable Development Goals"**

*Wednesday, 19 July 2017, 3-5 p.m.
Conference room 1, UNHQ, New York*

Excellences, all protocol observed,

I am honoured to join the important discussions today and at the outset, I would like to comment HESI for their unwavering commitment around the higher education as a driver of sustainable development.

HESI has been one of UNESCO's Key Partners in implementing the Global Action Programme (GAP) on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) that was launched in 2014 as the follow-up to the ground-breaking United Nations Decade on that issue.

The implementation of the ambitious 2030 development agenda in an effort to create a more sustainable world requires a transformation of how we think and act.

Education for sustainable development or the so-called ESD empowers learners to become sustainability change-makers who take informed decisions and responsible actions for environmental integrity, economic viability and a just society.

As specified in target 4.7 with its overall focus on developing cross-cutting sustainability competencies in learners, ESD is pivotal to achieve all Sustainable Development Goals.

UNESCO has been for long focused on higher education institutions (HEIs) that major partners in advancing the progress across the SDGs through the promotion of ESD.

Providing ESD literacy to all educational professionals is paramount, and leaders of higher education institutes are in a key position by establishing sustainable development as a central academic and organizational effort.

Universities and higher education networks can conduct research and provide advice and guidance on strengthening national education systems as well as aspects of capacity building for sustainable development across different sectors.

They can provide expertise and support to local ESD initiatives as they can combine the knowledge and experience at the local level with information housed at higher level.

Higher education institutions (HEIs) can also strengthen the interface between research findings and decision-making using evidence-based data, as well as problem-based scientific research.

Over the last decade, HEIs have made significant efforts to address sustainability in campus operations, supported by the development and sharing of tools and reporting frameworks. New sustainability-related and specialized programmes and courses are on the rise.

HEIs have extended the value and impact of their teaching and research at the local level and driven community change. Many HEIs are pioneers in adopting a whole-institution approach and are expected to lead this movement.

UNESCO has been cooperating closely with HESI and other higher education networks and institutions to foster and build on these achievements. Two of the laureates of the UNESCO-Japan Prize on ESD, awarded annually for outstanding ESD programmes, have worked to anchor sustainability in universities. Notably these are the German social enterprise rootAbility was rewarded for its Green Office Model that turns universities into sustainability hubs; and the National Union of Students of the United Kingdom for its Green Impact programme that has university departments compete for the most sustainable work environment

Despite the progress and inspiring success stories, certain challenges remain. Integrating a sustainability approach requires coordinated change at multiple levels – in governance, planning, academic programmes, facility management and financial systems. Boundaries between the different disciplines and subjects continue to impede the preparation of learners to address complexity. Deeper innovation in staff development is still needed to transform curricula and pedagogy.

I thank you for your attention and look forward to a fruitful discussion.