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United Nations Institute for Training and Research

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Launch of the Consensus Statement of the Global Higher Education Symposium: Building Sustainable Futures: the Role of Higher Education

People



: 29 May 2026



Side Event



New York, United States of America



13 May 2026



1 Days



Other



<https://www.un.org/en/academic-impact/global-higher-education-symposium-2026-la...>



US\$0.00



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United Nations Academic Impact, , UNESCO Chair in Community-based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education, , International Science Council, , UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network, , International Association for Universities, , German Center for Research and Innovation, , Higher Education Sustainability Initiative, , Major Group for Children and Youth, , York University



On 18 July 2025, the first Global Higher Education Symposium (GHES I) was convened at the United Nations Headquarters in New York on the margins of the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF). The meeting brought together a unique group of higher education leaders, scientists, youth representatives, representatives from United Nations entities mandated or concerned with higher education, and policy partners to reflect on the evolving role of higher education in a context marked by intersecting global crises, geopolitical fragmentation, and accelerating technological and ecological change.

A key outcome of the 2025 Symposium was the development of a **Zero Draft Consensus Statement** highlighting shared priorities and principles regarding the transformative potential of higher education for societies. The draft statement served as the basis for a global consultation process conducted between October and December 2025, engaging higher education institutions, networks, and related stakeholders across all regions.

Now in 2026, the Global Higher Education Symposium II (GHES II) builds directly on this foundation. The GHES II provides an opportunity to present the outcomes of the consultation process and to advance a shared understanding of how higher education institutions can contribute to shaping just, inclusive, and sustainable futures. Organizing partners will launch the updated **Final Consensus Statement** that will inform the global discussion on the role of higher education within the SDGs and beyond. This second meeting takes place during the 2026 HLPF under the theme “Transformative, equitable, innovative and coordinated actions for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for a sustainable future for all”.

Within this context, the symposium engages with a variety of stakeholders and seeks to position higher education as a crucial actor for future-oriented policy making. It will inspire critical engagement with the existing international frameworks such as the SDGs, the Pact for the Future, the new UNESCO Higher Education Roadmap, and position the higher education community within the emerging post-2030 discussion. The symposium aims to create a shared point of reflection to be taken forward across higher education networks and towards national and regional dialogues on a world post-2030.



The GHES II has four main objectives:

- **Launch the GHES Consensus Statement:** The symposium will formally launch the consensus statement developed through conversation in advance and during the GHES I and bolstered through the global consultation process. The statement articulates shared priorities and principles on the role of higher education institutions in contributing to sustainable development and the global common good.
- **Advance discussion on the role of higher education in global agendas:** The symposium will deepen the conversation about the role of higher education in advancing the SDGs, the Pact for the Future, the UNESCO Higher Education Roadmap, and contributing to post-2030 discussions.
- **Identify challenges and opportunities for higher education institutions:** Participants will discuss the challenges and enabling factors associated with the thematic areas identified in the consensus statement. The symposium will consider how universities can engage with these themes both within their own institutions and within the broader international community.
- **Highlight the enabling role of education and partnerships:** The meeting will underline the role of SDG 4 and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) as enabling elements across all frameworks. It will also highlight the importance of partnerships between universities, international organisations, governments, youth networks, and the private sector in advancing systems transformation, while strengthening the engagement with higher education in policy and public discourse.



1. Opening Remarks

Moderator: Maher Nasser, Director of the Outreach Division, UN Department of Global Communications

- Melissa Fleming, Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications, United Nations
- H.E. Fergal Mythen, Permanent Representative of Ireland to the United Nations
- H.E. Brian Wallace, Permanent Mission of Jamaica to the United Nations
- Michelle Gyles-McDonnough, Executive Director, UNITAR

2. **Presentation of the GHES Consensus Statement:** This session introduces the Consensus Statement, developed following GHES I (2025) and refined through a global consultation process. The presentation outlines key themes emerging from the consultation and explains how they reflect a shared understanding of the role of higher education in addressing global challenges.

Moderator:

Dr. Katrin Kohl, Co-Chairholder, UNESCO Chair at York University

- Dr. Patrick Paul Walsh, Vice President of Education and Director of the SDG Academy, Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN)
- Dr. Noah W. Sobe, Chief of Section for Higher Education, UNESCO

3. **Panel I: Higher Education in a Changing Global Landscape: One Year Later**

This panel reflects on how the role of higher education institutions is evolving in a rapidly changing global landscape. It explores whether recent developments have strengthened or challenged universities' ability to contribute to the global common good, and how higher education can support evidence-informed dialogue, societal trust, and cooperation in the context of the SDGs.

Moderator:

Dr. Hilligje van't Land, Secretary General and Executive Director, International Association of Universities (IAU)

- Nudhara Yusuf, Co-Chair, Coalition for the UN We Need
- Dr. Ebru Canan-Sokullu, Deputy Director, Division for People, UNITAR
- Dr. Yash Tadimalla, Global Focal Point for the Major Group for Children and Youth (UNMGCY)

4. **Panel II: Transformation Pathways for Higher Education**

This panel explores pathways through which higher education institutions can advance the principles outlined in the Global Higher Education Consensus Statement. Particular attention is given to partnerships,

transdisciplinary collaboration, and emerging technological developments.

Moderator:

Bev Ho, Head of Business Strategy and Global Client Partnerships, The Next Practice

- Dr. Miki Sugimura, Professor, Sophia University
- Dr. David Steingard, Head of the Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME), UN Global Compact
- Dr. Phoebe Koundouri, Professor, Athens University of Economics and Business
- Dr. Justin Robinson, Pro Vice-Chancellor and Campus Principal, University of the West Indies Five Islands Campus

5. **Next Steps for the Global Higher Education Consensus Statement**

Partner representatives reflect on implementation pathways and collaborative action.

Moderator:

Aleksandra Gorisek, Head, Civil Society and Academic Impact Section, UN Department of Global Communications

Lightning Round (All Partners):

- Charles Hopkins (York University)
- Dr. Hilligje van't Land (IAU)
- Dr. Ebru Canan-Sokullu (UNITAR)
- Dr. Noah Sobe (UNESCO)
- Helen Perham (SDSN)
- Kathleen Ng (on behalf of HESI)
- Dr. Yash Tadimalla (UNMGCY)

6. **Closing Remarks**

Moderator:

Aleksandra Gorisek, Head, Civil Society and Academic Impact Section, UN Department of Global Communications

- Christian Strowa, Director of the German Center for Research and Innovation New York (DWIH New York) and Director of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) Regional Office New York
- Maher Nasser, Director of the Outreach Division, UN Department of Global Communications



The symposium will take place as a half-day, invitation-only meeting operating under Chatham House Rules to allow open and constructive dialogue.

Approximately 70 participants will be invited that include representatives from higher education institutions, Member States, international organisations, UN entities, youth networks, and private sector partners, aiming for representation of all global world regions. Participants will engage not only as speakers but also as active discussants contributing to the conversation.



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