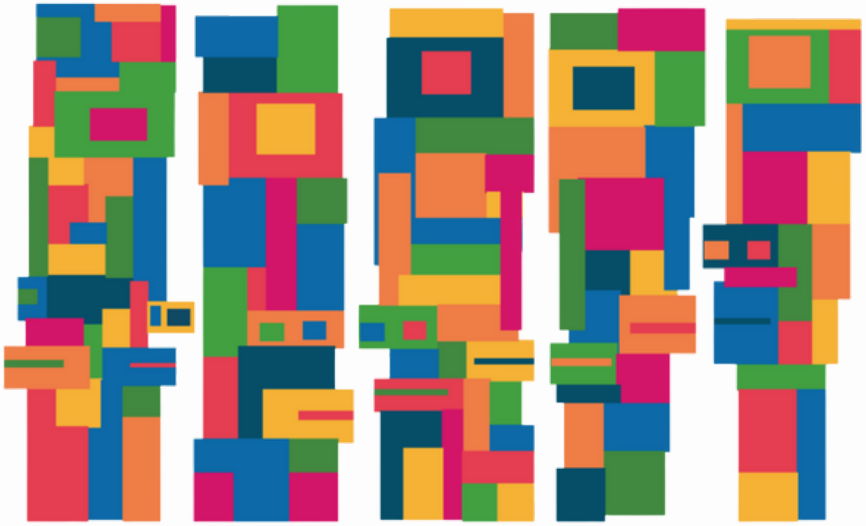
WHEC 2022

Barcelona, Spain
May



UNESCO World Higher Education Conference 2022
Global Student Declaration

Throughout 2021 and 2022, the Global Student Forum organised a series of regional consultations with the All-Africa Students' Union, the Commonwealth Students Association, the European Students' Union, the Latin-American and Caribbean Continental Student Organisation, and the Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions. The consultation effort involved over 200 national student union delegations from 90 countries in Africa, the Americas, Asia, Europe, and the Pacific.

Based on the outcomes of this intensive consultation process, a Working Committee of twenty student leaders and activists from the regional and national student unions subsequently drafted this Global Student Declaration, addressing the UNESCO World Higher Education Conference 2022. The Declaration presents the collective hopes and aspirations of the global student movement, for the future of higher education.

Nothing *about us, without us!*

OBESSU Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions

csa commonwealth students association

AASU

GLOBAL STUDENT FORUM

esu european students' union

OCLAE

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Student Participation, Institutional Democracy & Governance

1. In support of the right to education outlined in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948) and *Sustainable Development Goal 4* (SDG4), student participation in higher education should be recognised as an imperative for furthering social justice, democratisation, and sustainable development, to generate change in public policy and to strengthen educational frameworks globally.

2. A collegial approach to higher education governance must take the concerns and aspirations of all stakeholders into account, and facilitate access to relevant spaces for legitimate representation from every university body. Only when students, members of schools, departments and faculty, and general staff recognise that sharing the governance of an education institution is a common responsibility, can the vital deliberations and collaborative dialogue take place, leading to long-term and strategic decisions upholding the best collective interests for all parties involved.

3. The meaningful involvement of democratically elected student union representatives in higher education governance and policy making must be regarded as a fundamental value and pivotal building block of institutional democracy and civic participation.

4. UNESCO's education sector and the section for higher education specifically, needs to move from working with top-down selected individuals from the youth constituency to engaging in meaningful partnerships with democratic and representative student unions and their elected spokespeople.

5. Student participation can only be regarded as meaningful if it creates a tangible impact on the outcomes of decision making processes in higher education institutions (HEIs), with government officials, and wider civil society.

6. Intergovernmental organisations, states and HEIs need to make sure that student unions are able to work politically and are financially resilient; maintaining student union autonomy and political independence is essential in order to support students in successfully fulfilling their role as a civic voice in society

7. More responsive models of higher education governance and targeted support systems that accommodate diverse student participation are needed to foster a quality culture of representation and meaningful engagement.

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8. Democratic leadership training and similar capacity building efforts aimed at supporting strategic governance should be prioritised in order to increase leadership capabilities in all sectors, especially within the academic community.

9. An inclusive approach to leadership is necessary in academic environments, to allow a modern collegial institution to be intersectional and self-critical, ensuring diversity, addressing discrimination mechanisms, and identifying the barriers preventing equal participation of individuals from all backgrounds, to combat gender stereotypes and glass ceilings.

10. HEIs need to live up to their public responsibility and role model function by putting ethics committees and ethics guidelines in place to monitor academic integrity, inclusion and non-discrimination as well as considerations pertaining to sustainability and environmental impact.

Student Participation, Institutional Democracy & Governance

11. In support of the tenets of academic freedom presented in the 1997 Recommendation Concerning the Status of Higher Education Teaching Personnel, students should be recognised as recipients of HEIs autonomy, whether locally, nationally, regionally, or globally, concerning the status of academic freedom, without constriction by prescribed doctrine.

12. The functions proposed therein should be adopted as tenets of student academic freedom and included by governments and HEIs - and encouraged to be expanded for other educational institutions - in legislation, policy, and practice. This includes:

13. The freedom of discussion for students to voice controversial or unpopular opinions, and to express opinions about their educational institution or system in which they function, without placing themselves or others in jeopardy.

14. The freedom for students to carry out research, and publish results thereof, recognizing that students are members of a community of scholars preserving, disseminating and expressing freely their opinions on traditional knowledge and culture, in the pursuit of new knowledge.

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15. The freedom for students to learn and be taught in the scholarship of academic freedom regarding the proper enjoyment of academic freedom, and the rights and responsibilities for institutional autonomy to facilitate this freedom.

16. The freedom from state or institutional censorship or interference where that censorship includes a social, political, cultural, or economic imposition upon the student, that affects the exercise of the functions stated in this Declaration.

17. The freedom for students to participate in professional or representative academic or education-related bodies as respected members of these groups, who are recognised as bringing their own expertise.

18. All students should have the right to fulfill the aforementioned functions without discrimination, fear of repression, defamation, retaliatory action, wrongful detention or prosecution, and restriction of movement, by the state or any other source.

19. Non-compliance of the *1997 Recommendation* for staff, and where relevant, students, should be monitored by the specialised agencies of the United Nations, relevant government departments and ministries, and civil society organisations, to safeguard the tenets of academic freedom as far as possible.

Academic Citizenship

20. Students should be accepted as a central demographic participating in, and being engaged with, the ecosystem of academic citizenship, incorporating both learning about wider society and contributing to society in terms of learning and research.

21. The facilitation of learning and research opportunities by HEIs and the state should incorporate the proactive exercise of academic citizenship including collegial contributions to the academic community and wider society, and providing opportunity for students to exercise civic participation in research, pedagogy, and practice.

22. The exercise of academic citizenship by students should focus on ethics and integrity, facilitating fairness, equity, respect, responsibility, courage, and accountability in learning and research to support the academic community and wider society, while rewarding and incentivizing such practices.

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23. Student services, institutional services, discipline-based services, and public services related to the organisational structure of HEIs, should seek to embody the democratic values that promote and uphold academic citizenship and civic-mindedness.

Financing Higher Education as a Public Responsibility and Common Good.

24. Long-term economic planning with meaningful and sustainable public investments in HE in accordance with the 2021 Paris Declaration - which urged all governments to fulfil without delay the commitments that states agreed upon at the 2021 World Education Forum, the 2015 Incheon Conference, and the 2018/2020 Global Education Meetings, - needs to be ensured.

25. States need to allocate at least 4-6% of GDP and/or at least 15-20% of total public expenditure to education, and devote an adequate share of national stimulus packages to education, particularly towards targeted support for marginalised learners', school (re-)enrolment, learning recovery, and socio-emotional well-being, as well as skills development for employment.

26. States should increase the volume, predictability, and effectiveness of international aid to education by meeting the benchmark of 0.7% of donor gross national income for official development assistance (ODA) to developing countries.

27. An increased share of ODA to education as a percentage of total ODA is needed, to ensure that international aid to education is aligned with national education plans and consistent with aid effectiveness principles.

28. Sufficient public funding should guarantee stability and sustainability in the development of general education and HE, encouraging state decision-making to be based on wider goals, not solely on short-sighted financial benefits, and allow the participation and completion of higher education by students from a diverse range of socioeconomic backgrounds.

29. Mindful of steadily growing commodification and privatisation, the management of private sector funding should be carried out transparently by democratic bodies, either on an institutional or governmental level, or by a publicly mandated, accountable and independent body, involving the main stakeholder groups of higher education.

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30. Student unions need to be involved in the decision-making process for education funding at local, national, regional, and global levels, to ensure participation, transparency and accountability in budgets and in any decision-making process of higher education institutions, paying special attention to externally funded projects to avoid conflicts of interest and corporate influence on research outcomes.

31. Specific funding programmes supporting basic needs infrastructure, particularly around sanitation and hygiene, in eco-sustainable and digitally connected buildings should be prioritised.

32. Students' mental health needs should be addressed through specific funding tools, providing concrete, accessible services on well-being.

33. Psychosocial interventions by educators and counsellors on site and through online programs that can prevent depression, aggressive behaviours and substance abuse among students should be available and adequately financed.

34. Stable contracts and adequate salaries need to be provided to researchers, teachers and staff to ensure the dignity and attractiveness of the profession, and to cater for the social recognition of education workers based on healthy labour conditions and fair wages relevant to the local, national, regional and global contexts.

35. Public and private investments must be effective and always subject to a process of public review, social balance sheet, transparency and accountability; agents of government ministries and international organisations must always be allowed to investigate, especially in the case of private or jointly-owned foundations, the final purposes of the investments; safeguarding the independence of funding must protect higher education as an area of freedom against possible retaliation by political coercion and, at the same time, serve as a protection for public opinion against speculation and private interests.

36. Considering the general post-COVID-19 macro-economic framework, austerity policies need to be stopped and replaced with ambitious targets for tax reforms, using progressive taxes, especially on wealth and corporations, to ensure and fund major public investments in education.

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Inclusive Higher Education.

37. Higher education must be accessible to everyone regardless of disability, race, gender, sexual orientation or religious beliefs. Special consideration must be taken to eliminate barriers for students with special educational needs.

38. A rights-based approach is necessary to minimise discrimination and inequity in higher education, to equip and support vulnerable groups including political, or religious minorities, women, disabled persons, migrant or refugee communities, ethnic minorities, and indigenous and First Nations peoples.

39. All education-related stakeholders in higher education should contribute to raising awareness and creating a mind-set that values higher education from an early age, encompassing a holistic approach towards different stages of education, linking skills acquired during school years to potential career paths after completion of higher education and strengthening the opportunities for first-generation students, and ensuring social mobility that will enable vulnerable groups to enter, transit and complete higher education.

40. Affirmative action through targeted subsidies and benefits must be conducted to promote and widen access to educational pathways for marginalised communities and individuals from less privileged societal groups.

41. Curricula should be remodelled to include a more direct linkage with employment, entrepreneurship and vocational learning to attract students from less financially privileged backgrounds.

42. Higher education systems need to be decolonised and indigenised to include local sensitivities, traditions, cultures and world views in order to connect more with local communities.

43. Refugees need to be proactively enabled to participate in higher education and to continue their learning paths through fair recognition of prior qualifications and additional support services such as language and entry courses.

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44. Gender equality must be recognised as crucial in furthering inclusivity in higher education, requiring international organisations, states and education stakeholders to support the implementation of policies that speak to women and LQBTQIA+ people in tertiary institutes.

45. All HEIs should develop Gender Equality Plans to be rapidly implemented in the form of creating gender parity margins, as well as zero-tolerance sexual harrassment and gender-based violence policies with effective accountability proceedures in place.

46. HEIs must ensure systemic transformation by creating policies that speak specifically to the LGBTQIA+ community, and implement justice and safe spaces for those suffering from discrimination by other individuals within the academic community.

47. HEIs need to put in place policies that prevent minority group students from discrimination and harrassment.

Academic Mobility and Internationalisation

48. Students' rights must remain at the core of the mobility process, and strong representation of students in the development of international programmes must be ensured. Effective student representation should be established whenever new governing structures for international programmes and projects are devised.

49. HEIs need to incorporate structures that aim to uplift and support students of disadvantaged and underrepresented groups. From an internationalisation perspective, quality assurance standards and mechanisms for the bilateral, regional, or global recognition of degrees to aid the mobilisation of student bodies, must be harmonised for sustainability and inclusivity.

50. When establishing deep, structural, international collaboration between HEIs, students should have the same rights concerning access, tuition fees and student welfare. For each of these rights, the minimum benchmark should be set by the institution that has the highest standard of inclusion.

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51. The quality of learning mobilities should be at the centre of attention and not sacrificed with the excuse of an enriching intercultural experience. International students must have the same rights regardless of the type of mobility they engage in, with equal access to all educational services equivalent to domestic students.

52. The quality of international internships should be ensured, with a focus on student centred learning, adequate supervision, and workload measured through fair and agreed tools.

53. To prevent mobility from becoming the privilege of a few students with a good financial background, mobility must be sufficiently funded and support systems put in place.

54. Student grants should be high enough to cover actual living costs in the host country, grants should be portable, and additional grants should be available to cover the extra costs associated with mobility.

55. Daily transportation needs in the host country should be free for all students. In case it is not, a transportation pass should be provided for international students at the same price as for local students, covering the entire mobility period.

56. Draft bridging courses should be introduced in countries with undergraduate degrees of smaller lengths to make students eligible for graduate and postgraduate degrees in other countries.

57. Transnational education in HEIs from countries with well-developed higher education systems should export their study programmes to countries where local institutions are unable to meet the national demand for study places.

58. Sustainability standards have to be incorporated into teaching and mobility guidelines; with relevant UN-agencies including UNESCO taking a leading role in promoting an inclusive outreach and engagement strategy for students and faculty to move towards an inclusive teaching and learning environment.

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Inclusive, Fair and Democratic Digital Learning

59. The digital transformation of teaching and learning needs to partner with the development and implementation of teacher training programs and interactive learning strategies that engage students, while making it easier for students to use various educational softwares and adapt to the digital learning environment.

60. Flipped classroom style approaches, appropriate funding for digital learning tools, public and democratic governance, open platforms and control of the presence of private providers should be prioritised.

61. Asynchronous and blended learning systems consisting of both physical and online lectures should be adopted, ensuring that information is clearly transmitted and interactive sessions developed, thereby encouraging students to take an active part in the learning process.

62. Digital learning tools and mobile internet devices should be freely provided to students to enable the development of technological skills and knowledge necessary to mitigate the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, both in the immediate coping phase and in the period of economic recovery.

63. Existing digital learning environments and online training systems need to be redesigned and improved to cover more advanced technology, contributing to skills learning and the professional development of digital users.

64. Student data needs to be protected and banned from being commercially used by HEIs and educational authorities. Privacy invasive software tools for distance education need to be prohibited.

Climate Change and Environmental Justice

65. Schools and universities should uphold local, national, regional, and global sustainability in teaching, research and all their operations in order to fulfil their obligation towards creating more sustainable societies.

66. Education for sustainable development is a central aspect of quality education and students as well as teachers must be equipped to address the climate crisis and shape democratic, inclusive, and socially sustainable societies.

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67. Students should not only achieve climate literacy once they complete their education, they should also be supported to carry out sustainability initiatives throughout their educational journey.

68. The sustainable involvement of stakeholders in actions against climate change, and the implementation of quality climate education as a crosscutting priority throughout higher education, need to be ensured to combat the climate crisis.

69. HEIs have a responsibility to promote investments aimed at reducing the ecological footprint, for instance by incentivising the usage of durable and/or biodegradable materials, promoting a circular economy approach and studying ways of self-producing energy through renewable resources.

70. All HEIs should make concrete action plans for reducing their greenhouse gas emissions to net-zero, with a goal of climate neutrality by 2030 in developed countries and by 2040 in developing countries.

71. All the emissions of HEIs must be mapped and reported in accordance with the GHG-protocol, including indirect emissions from Scope 3.

72. HEIs managing assets in funds must ensure that these funds are fossil-fuel free and live up to the UN Principles for Responsible Investment and respect human rights.

73. Sustainability should be a decisive factor in ethical guidelines and procurement deals within HEIs.

74. HEIs should have strict demands of climate neutral procurements and shall not make deals with oil, gas and coal companies that involve financing of petroleum and coal research, clearly incompatible with the commitments to reach the Sustainable Development Goals.

The Impact of COVID 19 on Higher Education

75. States must make an unprecedented effort to finance educational recovery post-pandemic to prevent leaving a generation of students behind.

76. Responsibility for providing free, quality education to children who lost their parents during the pandemic must be upheld by states and international organisations.

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77. More attention must be paid to the psychological well being of students and educators in higher education. Regular dissemination of information on the importance of mental well being and psychological health should be prioritised via different means like social media, one-on-one conversations, and school counselling programs.

78. The quantity, quality and accessibility of mental health counselling services needs to be strengthened, enabling more students facing difficulties to seek professional help, combating the persisting stigma associated with mental health issues.

79. Vaccine equity and full implementation of vaccination efforts, even in the remotest areas of the world, needs to be ensured to prevent the COVID-19 pandemic from fully reemerging again and disrupting education for more years to come.

80. Holistic and timely planned vaccination campaigns, with meaningful local community involvement should be undertaken, alongside a robust multi-sectoral partnership to ensure vaccination coverage in rural areas needs to be ensured.

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The International Student Movement

United in the Demands of this Declaration

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