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Organización  
de las Naciones Unidas  
para la Educación,  
la Ciencia y la Cultura

Организация  
Объединенных Наций по  
вопросам образования,  
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منظمة الأمم المتحدة  
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、  
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## Higher Education

Higher education is a pillar for sustainable development, not just for training those who maintain and promote the infrastructures of democracy and justice, but also for building capacity for critical thinking, innovation and discovery.

The World Declaration on Higher Education (1998) recalled the missions and functions of higher education, and defined a global vision of the sector for the twenty-first century. These, together with major new trends and developments in higher education worldwide continue to shape UNESCO action in this field. Underlying this action is growing recognition of the role of higher education in achieving the goals of the global agenda – EFA, MDGs and sustainable development.

The **UNITWIN Programme** is the most important downstream UNESCO activity in higher education. There are over 500 Chairs and Networks established in 123

Members States and more than 700 institutions. Its under-lying principle is to build capacity in higher education through knowledge transfer and in a spirit of solidarity among academics and researchers. The Programme has been successful *inter alia* in (a) transferring high level know how, (b) introducing academic programmes in non-traditional subject areas, (c) developing scientific innovations, (d) providing a forum for knowledge exchange, (e) responding to development needs, (f) establishing international bodies and (g) participating in reconstruction of higher education.

The launching of **Academics Across Borders** Initiative in November 2005 brought an added dimension to

UNITWIN. It is intended to improve performance of universities in the areas of research and programme development leading to the establishment of centres of excellence and to open access to innovative approaches for sustaining quality higher education across borders. Already the Africa-Asia Dialogue has been established; steps are being taken to identify centre of excellence in Africa and to undertake a mapping exercise that will facilitate Africa-Europe and Africa-North America dialogue.



Higher Education Open and Distance Learning Knowledge Base (© UNESCO)

The **Global Forum on International Quality Assurance, Accreditation and the Recognition of Qualifications** was launched as a

response to the ethical challenges and dilemmas facing higher education in an era of globalization, and as a platform for dialogue linking key higher education stake-holders. Its action plan includes the revision of **the six regional conventions on the recognition of qualifications** so that they respond better to changes in higher education. In the context of increased commercialization and cross-border provision in higher education, the conventions represent educational agreements that could provide international standards of qualifications recognition and quality assurance, based on the needs and principles put forward by the ratifying states.

# Higher Education

## Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-Border Higher Education

Developed jointly by UNESCO and the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development), and finalized in consultation with Member States and other key stakeholders in higher education, the Guidelines are an educational response to the growing commercialization of higher education and address the specific issue of cross-border higher education and its quality.

They are voluntary and non-binding. Their primary objectives are to support and encourage international cooperation and understanding in quality assurance in general, to protect students and other stakeholders from disreputable providers, and to encourage the development of quality cross-border higher education that meets human, social, economic and cultural needs.

The Guidelines will serve as a reference tool in capacity-building for the reform of higher education systems.

UNESCO is contributing to revitalizing **higher education in Iraq** by providing laboratory equipment, textbooks, short-term fellowships; facilitating the establishment of an International University Network for Iraq. This action is supported by the International Fund for Higher Education in Iraq.

Thanks to the UNESCO/Hewlett-Packard partnership on "Piloting Solutions for Alleviating **Brain Drain** in South East Europe", 7 universities in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the FYR of Macedonia and Serbia and Montenegro, received grid computing equipment. In addition, financial support allowed young researchers to undertake short-term visits abroad and establish research partnerships with co-nationals. A similar pilot project will be launched in Africa aiming to facilitate the contribution of the Diaspora to the sustainable development of the region.

The **UNESCO Forum on Higher Education, Research and Knowledge** – an intersectoral project funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) – was launched in 2001 as a global platform for knowledge generation and dissemination through an up-to-date website, publications, seminars and meetings bringing together policy-makers, academics, representatives of NGOs. Its global and regional themes include: determinants and consequences in higher education, knowledge and its production, analytic investigations in higher education in Africa and research management.

## CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

Higher education's fundamental mission for the twenty-first century includes the training of well-qualified teachers to serve in more effective education systems, the provision of quality education in responsible citizenship, lifelong learning for entrepreneurship, professional and vocational skills, research and innovation.

To fulfill this mission, the sector faces major challenges: the increasing demand for higher education, the need for closer links with the world of work, the growing commercialization of higher education, globalization and the growth of borderless education, the improvement of the use of research to inform policy-making, the use of information and communication technologies, gender equity.

Higher education is well placed to meet these challenges; this requires global understanding of and support for the critical role of higher education in developing the human capacity needed not only to achieve national development but also to meet the requirements of the global agenda.

UNESCO will continue to support Member States and higher education institutions to tackle these challenges so that higher education fully contributes to the sustainable national development process.

## Contact :

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## To Find Out More

Website:  
[www.unesco.org/education/hed](http://www.unesco.org/education/hed)