

Recommendations for promoting lifelong learning in higher education

Conference on promoting lifelong learning in higher education, convened from 19 to 21 October 2023 in Shanghai, People's Republic of China

Preamble

We, the participants in the 'Conference on promoting lifelong learning in higher education', convened from 19 to 21 October 2023 in Shanghai, People's Republic of China, thank the *UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning* and *Shanghai Open University* for organizing this event.

We gather to take stock of progress made and challenges faced in advancing lifelong learning in and through higher education to support sustainable development,

recalling the vision for higher education expressed during the Third UNESCO World Higher Education Conference in 2022, stating that higher education provision 'is an activity aimed at favouring equity and the equal distribution of opportunities' for people of all ages and considering community engagement and social responsibility as an integral part of the mission of higher education, next to teaching and research;

recognizing the principles of lifelong learning as a concept which is rooted in the integration of learning and living, covering learning activities for people of all ages and backgrounds, in all life-wide contexts and through a variety of modalities that, together, meet a range of learning needs and demands;

aiming to advance policy and practice on the role of higher education in promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all and in addressing current and future sustainable development challenges;

strengthening our commitment to the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and particularly SDG 4, which enjoins countries and stakeholders to 'promote lifelong learning opportunities for all' and responds to the critical challenges that humankind faces at this time in history; and

recognizing that transforming higher education institutions – including universities, colleges, polytechnics and technical and vocational education and training institutions at tertiary level – into lifelong learning institutions that provide access to learning to diverse groups of learners – is key to realizing SDG 4.

Recommendations

Considering the need to promote lifelong learning in higher education, the following recommendations should be considered:

- Higher education institutions should **engage with national and local governments** to support the development of **regulatory frameworks and adequate funding mechanisms** that enable and support lifelong learning in and through higher education.
- Higher education institutions should develop **institution-wide approaches to lifelong learning** based on the principles of equity and inclusion. Building on the three missions of higher education, namely teaching, research and wider societal engagement, rooted in a humanistic tradition, they shall provide learning for a variety of purposes, including for personal development, well-being, work and life.
- Higher education institutions should develop a whole-institution approach to **sustainable development and climate action** in all their operations, including through research, teaching and community engagement activities.
- Higher education institutions should adapt **learning content and modalities to address diverse learning needs**, including by digital technologies and artificial intelligence.
- Higher education institutions should develop and adapt **quality assurance procedures** to ensure the relevance and effectiveness of lifelong learning programmes.
- Considering the green and digital transitions and rapidly changing labour markets, higher education institutions should provide people with opportunities to develop relevant competences for quality jobs. In this respect, they shall promote **work-based learning, reskilling and upskilling programmes**, and collaborate with private sector stakeholders and employers. Establishing **flexible learning pathways** and mechanisms for the recognition of prior learning is essential to achieve this.
- Lecturers, researchers and practitioners should contribute to community engagement and support **epistemic pluralism**, as well as the **diversification of curricula, teaching and learning practices, assessment and certification**, to make learning more relevant to all students, including vulnerable and non-traditional students.

Together, we commit to working towards a future in which higher education institutions play a vital role in developing the knowledge, skills and competencies that are needed to ensure healthy, prosperous and inclusive sustainable societies and economies.