

**UNESCO National Commission Policy Report Template**  
Under the World Higher Education Conference (WHEC 2021)

**Higher Education Policy Report: Belgium/Flemish Community**  
**Department of Education and Training in cooperation with the Flemish UNESCO**  
**Commission in consultation of the Flemish Council of Universities and University**  
**Colleges (VLUHR)**

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### **Executive Summary**

This report was coordinated by the Flemish Department of Education and Training in cooperation with the Flemish UNESCO Commission. It is based on a consultation among the Flemish higher education institutions through the Flemish Council of Universities and University Colleges (VLHUR), which is the umbrella organization for both the Flemish Interuniversity Council (VLIR) and the Flemish Council of University Colleges (VLHORA).

After a description of the general framework of higher education in Flanders and an overview of major reforms and challenges of the last decade, the input to the WCHE was formulated under 2 challenges:

- equity/equality and inclusion; and
- rethinking the multiple missions of higher learning

as well as 3 recommendations:

- holistic approach to higher learning: the emancipatory and democratic mission of higher education
- putting the higher education community at the core of UNESCO's higher education policies
- connection between global engagement and sustainable development

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## Acronyms

BENELUX (Union): Belgium-Netherlands-Luxemburg Union

COMINT: Commissie Internationaal Onderwijs- en Vormingsbeleid [Commission International Education and Training Policies]

COMINTHO: Commissie Internationalisering Hoger Onderwijs [Commission Internationalisation of Higher Education]

EHEA: European Higher Education Area

EQAR: European Quality Assurance Register

ESU: European Students' Union

EUA: European University Association

EURASHE: European Association of Institutes in Higher Education

HE: Higher Education

HEI: Higher Education Institution(s)

NVAO: Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatieorganisatie [Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Organisation]

VLIR: Vlaamse Interuniversitaire Raad [Flemish Interuniversity Council]

VLHORA: Vlaamse Hogescholenraad [Flemish Council of University Colleges]

VLOR: Vlaamse Onderwijsraad [Flemish Education Council]

VLUHR: Vlaamse Universiteiten- en Hogescholenraad [Flemish Council of Universities and University Colleges]

VVS: Vlaamse Vereniging van Studenten [Flemish Student Association]

WCHE: World Conference on Higher Education

## Presentation

This higher education policy report was coordinated by the Flemish Department of Education and Training in cooperation with the Flemish UNESCO Commission. The report is based on a consultation among the Flemish higher education institutions through the Flemish Council of Universities and University Colleges (VLHUR), which is the umbrella organization for both the Flemish Interuniversity Council (VLIR) and the Flemish Council of University Colleges (VLHORA).

In cooperation with VLUHR a specific seminar, explaining the context and purpose of the WCHE, was held on May 31. Apart from representative from Flemish HEIs, the invitation to this seminar was also extended to the members of the Commission for International Education and Training Policies (COMINT) and the Commission for Internationalization of Higher Education (COMINTHO) of the Flemish Education Council (VLOR), the official consultative organization for stakeholders in education, as well as the UNESCO Chair holders in Flemish universities.

A first draft report was discussed with the VLUHR Governing Board on July 1, 2021.

The report was finalized through electronic consultation of all constituencies involved in the first consultations in March 2022.

## Current situation of higher education

### 1.1 Historical enrolment and graduation rates

#### Evolution of number of students

Academic year	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021
Belgian nationals	217.007	225.615	231.366	235.303	237.731	238.958	240.611	242.544	244.243	262.797	271.862
Foreign nationals	18.079	20.479	23.169	24.751	26.997	28.774	30.013	31.679	32.802	35.686	38.418
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>235.086</b>	<b>246.094</b>	<b>254.535</b>	<b>260.054</b>	<b>264.728</b>	<b>267.762</b>	<b>270.624</b>	<b>274.223</b>	<b>277.045</b>	<b>298.483</b>	<b>310.280</b>

The last decade showed a constant increase of the number of students, both for Belgian nationals and foreign nationals.

More details on enrolments (degree study contracts), see [Flemish Education in Figures 2019-2020](#). In 2019-2020 there were 250 946 such enrolments, of which 112.366 of male students and 138.580 of female students.

#### Completion rates

In OECD Education at a Glance 2019, indicator B1 provides the completion rates for the Flemish Community (reference year 2017): around 33 % graduates with a first degree within the theoretical duration of the programme, after another 3 years the percentage climbs to 70 % of the true cohort.

Link: [62cab6af-en.pdf \(oecd-ilibrary.org\)](#)

#### Higher education attainment levels of the population

In 2020 47.8 % of 30-34 olds in Belgium obtained a higher education qualification. The benchmark of 47 % of the European Union was already reached in 2018 with a percentage of 48.5. In 2020 Belgium reached 47.8 %. The gender difference is significant. 55 % of the women between 30-34 years old have a higher education qualification and only 40.2 % of the men.

The highest percentage of 30-34 year old people with higher education qualification are living in Brussels Capital Region: 58.2 %, followed by the Flemish Region: 49.3 % and the Walloon Region: 40.6 %.

Link to statistics: [Onderwijsniveau | Statbel \(fgov.be\)](#)

## 1.2 Quantity and types of higher education institutions

There are 5 research universities offering programmes leading to Bachelor (academic orientation), Master and Doctorate degrees.

There are also 13 university colleges/universities of applied science offering programmes leading to Bachelor (academic orientation) and to Master degrees in specific subjects: Art (Audio-visual/Performing) via their Schools of Art and in Nautical Sciences (Maritime Academy). University colleges also provide short-cycle education, leading to an associate degree.

Type of institution	Degree offered	Duration
University ( <i>Universiteit</i> )	Bachelor (with academic/research orientation) with possibility of extended Bachelor ( <i>BanaBa</i> )	3 years (180 ECTS)
	Master (with possibility of extension with extended Master ( <i>ManaMa</i> or teaching qualification)	1-2 years (60-120 ECTS)
	Doctorate	No fixed duration (typically between 2 and 6 years)
University College/University of Applied Science ( <i>Hogeschool</i> )	Associate degree ( <i>graduaat</i> )	1.5-2 years (90-120 ECTS)
	Bachelor (with professional orientation, including programmes for teacher education)	3 years (120 ECTS)
	Master (only for specific fields offered by Schools of Art or Maritime Academy)	1-2 years (60-120 ECTS)

Universities are represented in the Flemish Inter-University Council (VLIR): [www.vlir.be](http://www.vlir.be)

University colleges are represented in the Flemish Council of University Colleges (VLHORA): [www.vlhora.be](http://www.vlhora.be).

For common policies VLIR and VLHORA cooperate in the Flemish Council of Universities and University Colleges (VLUHR): [www.vluhr.be](http://www.vluhr.be)

All recognized higher education institutions and programmes can be found in the higher education register: [Hogeronderwijsregister](http://Hogeronderwijsregister)

## Overview

### **5 Universities**

- Katholieke Universiteit Leuven
- Universiteit Hasselt
- Universiteit Antwerpen
- Universiteit Gent
- Vrije Universiteit Brussel

### **16 University Colleges/Universities of Applied Sciences**

- Arteveldehogeschool
- Odisee
- Erasmushogeschool Brussel
- Hogere Zeevaartschool
- Artesis Plantijn Hogeschool Antwerpen
- Hogeschool Gent
- Hogeschool PXL
- Hogeschool West-Vlaanderen
- LUCA School of Arts
- Karel de Grote Hogeschool, Katholieke Hogeschool Antwerpen
- Katholieke Hogeschool Vives Noord
- Thomas More Kempen
- UC Leuven
- UC Limburg
- Thomas More Mechelen-Antwerpen
- Katholieke Hogeschool Vives Zuid

### **1 Transnational University (in cooperation with the Netherlands)**

- transnationale Universiteit Limburg

### **3 Institutions of public utility for post-initial education**

- Vlerick Business School
- Antwerp Management School
- Instituut voor Tropische Geneeskunde

### **7 Private registered institutions with at least 1 accredited higher education programme**

- Continental Theological Seminary
- College of Europe
- Flanders Business School

- Von Karman Instituut voor Stromingsdynamica
- Vesalius College
- Inno.com
- The University of Kent

#### **1 Belgian Higher education Institution with accredited programmes**

- Koninklijke Militaire School

#### **2 Protestant Higher Education Institutions**

- Evangelische Theologische Faculteit (Heverlee)
- Faculteit voor Protestantse Theologie en Religiestudies (Brussel)

#### **5 Higher Institutes for Fine Arts**

- Posthogeschool voor Podiumkunsten vzw (PoPoK)
- Hoger Instituut voor Schone Kunsten (HISK)
- International Opera Academy (IOA) (Vroeger: “Operastudio Vlaanderen”)
- Orpheus Instituut
- Performing Arts Research and Training Studios (P.A.R.T.S.)

### **1.3. Legal and institutional framework of higher education**

Since 1988 Belgium is a Federal State with complete devolution of competencies for education policies to the (linguistic) Communities:

- *3 separate systems* according to main language of instruction:
  - Flemish Community (Dutch) in Flemish Region and Brussels - “Flanders”
  - French Community (French) in Walloon Region and Brussels
  - German-speaking Community (German) in Walloon Region
- The *Belgian Constitution* guarantees coherence in qualifications frameworks through automatic mutual recognition of qualifications, common regulation on duration of study and compulsory education (13 years - age 5 to 18) and the principle of “freedom of education” (free to organise, free to choose educational institution, cost-free compulsory education, modest tuition in higher and adult education according to international standards).
- The Constitution also imposed a strict *legality principle* for all regulation concerning education, thus requiring democratically approved legislation by the Parliament for each and every Governmental action on education. This strict application of the legality principle is maintained until today and provides a partial explanation for the – in international perspective relatively lengthy - pathway of educational reforms in the Communities of Belgium, but also accounts for the stability of the - by definition consensual – decisions, once they are approved by the respective Parliaments.



- In the lengthy legislative process the consultation the Flemish Education Council (VLOR) that united all educational partners/stakeholders plays a pivotal role. Two dedicated commissions within VLOR prepare the advices on higher education policies: the Commission on Higher Education for general issues and the Commission on Internationalization of Higher Education (INTHO) for matters on international cooperation.
- All legislation on higher education is codified in one constantly updated compiled “Higher Education Codex”:  
<https://codex.vlaanderen.be/PrintDocument.ashx?id=1023887&geannoteerd=false>

#### 1.4. Major developments of the last decade

##### 1.4.1. Reshaping the Flemish higher education landscape

1. The last decade has been characterized by several waves of progressive merging of higher education in the interest of better synergies, a more comprehensive education offer and economy of scale.
2. The research component in all Master programmes has been reinforced and all Master programmes are taught at (research) universities, with the exception of Masters in the art disciplines and the Nautical Sciences that remain at the competence of university colleges/universities of applied science. Nevertheless also in these type of disciplines the research orientation was strengthened.
3. The quality assurance system also underwent reforms, with as most important innovation that institutional accreditation was introduced, in complement of the external evaluation of programmes.
4. The qualifications framework incorporated a new level (referenced as Level 5 to the European Qualifications Framework) with short-cycle professional higher education, leading to an associate degree (120 ECTS credit points) . The new type of programmes, combined with flexible modes of provision, is expected to evolve as a structural measure to widen access to higher education to a traditionally underrepresented groups, notably mature students and hence strengthening the lifelong learning mission of higher education.

##### Details

###### *Overall landscape*

In the academic year 2013-2014 the higher education sector was thoroughly reorganised. With the exception of the academically oriented arts programmes and the academically oriented programmes offered by the Maritime Academy (Hogere Zeevaartschool), the university colleges have transferred their academically oriented bachelor and master programmes to the universities. Today the university colleges continue to offer their professionally oriented programmes and, in the context of a ‘School of Arts’, also academically oriented arts

programmes. The Maritime Academy continues to organise both professionally and academically oriented programmes within the field of Nautical Sciences.

#### *Associate degree programmes*

From the academic year 2019-2020 on, associate degree programmes of higher vocational education are organised by university colleges. In this way, they form the third gateway to higher education, in addition to professional and academic bachelor's programmes. Previously, these courses could be followed at the centres for adult education. An exception to this is the HBO5 nursing course, which will still be organised by secondary schools, in a partnership with a university college. In addition to the associate degree programmes, the university colleges also offer the HBO5 courses (phasing out) for students who had already started this course at a centre for adult education. Because the associate degree programmes are now organised by the university colleges, the students in these courses can qualify for a study grant and gain access to the student facilities of the university colleges.

#### *Reform of teacher training*

From the academic year 2019-2020 on, teacher training courses in Flanders have been reformed. On the one hand, this reform strengthens existing teacher training courses in the field of subject content, teaching methodology, classroom management and dealing with diversity and the metropolitan context, and on the other hand also creates new teacher training courses. From September 2019 there are 6 teacher training courses:

- An educational associate degree in secondary education, specifically for teachers for technical and practical subjects;
- An educational bachelor's degree in pre-primary education;
- An educational bachelor's degree in primary education;
- An educational bachelor's programme in secondary education, with a choice of 2 educational subjects;
- An educational master's programme in secondary education, with a choice of one or more subject didactics;
- An educational master's programme in the arts, with a choice of one or more didactics. The specific teacher training will only be offered in phasing out from 2019-2020. Specific teacher training from adult education was transferred to Higher education.

### 1.4.2. Internationalisation

#### *1.4.2.1 International cooperation at the European level*

1. Many of the cooperation activities are deployed in European context, in a large degree via the EU cooperation and mobility programmes – Erasmus + and Horizon. Several Flemish (research) universities are partners in the Knowledge and Innovation Communities of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology and most of them joined the new EU programme on European Universities.

2. The recent developments following Brexit have an important impact on the traditionally intense cooperation with the United Kingdom and has also illustrated the vulnerability of some types of cooperation if (financial) support frameworks discontinue.
3. Flanders is also an active player in the Bologna Process (European Higher Education Area), taking coordinating role around topics like transparency of qualifications, quality assurance and recognition.
4. The BENELUX countries (Belgium, Netherlands and Luxembourg) are front-runners in terms of automatic recognition of higher education qualifications.

#### 1.4.2.2. Global level and linking up to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

1. Flemish higher education institutions are very active in international cooperation with the Global South.

In this context the Global Minds programme, administrated by the Flemish Council of Universities and funded by the Belgian Federal Government plays a pivotal role with activities such as:

- Training (PhD-)students from both developing countries as well as from Flanders
  - Integrating a development dimension in regular Flemish programmes, through i.a. case studies of scholars from the South, cases from South projects, visiting lectureships of South partners and/or development- relevant research stays or internships of Flemish students in a developing country
  - Performing research with relevance to development
2. Belgium (Flemish Department of Education and Training) has been a member of the SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee from 2016 to 2021 and in that capacity hosted the UN Global Education Meeting in December 2018 organised by UNESCO in Brussels, 3-5 December 2018.
  3. The Flemish Council of University Colleges launched a publication that makes an explicit link between new strategies of international cooperation and solidarity in higher education and the UN 2030 Agenda: *Global engagement in higher education: an inspirational framework. The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a frame for of reference of internationalisation within Higher Education*: [GM GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT E.pdf \(vlaamsehogescholenraad.be\)](https://www.vlaamsehogescholenraad.be/GM_GLOBAL_ENGAGEMENT_E.pdf)

#### 1.4.2.4. Engagement with Unesco

UNESCO's ASPnet in Flanders and Brussels counts 32 associated schools, including two teacher training colleges, with an active interaction with UNESCO's secretariat for the global ASPnet.

In addition, four Flemish higher education institutions host seven UNESCO Chairs, focusing on various fields of expertise ranging from heritage, education, and natural sciences, as well as peace studies and future literacy.

#### 1.4.2.5. Impact of Covid-19 on international mobility and cooperation

In terms of attracting foreign students for (full) degree programmes, the impact of Covid-19 seems to be relatively limited.

In 2019-2020 Flanders welcomed 35730 students with foreign nationality.

In 2020-2021 their enrolments increased to 37 348.

The strongest impact is situated in the short term mobility, which is mainly happening in the framework of the Erasmus+ programme, where physical mobility has mainly be substituted by virtual arrangements. Overall, the number of cooperation projects decreased due to the Covid situation

The figures of outgoing students dropped dramatically due to the Covid crisis as is witnessed by the figures below.

2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021
16.521	15.821	13.201	5.491

The expectation is, however, that the frequency will come back at cruise speed in the near future.

#### 1.4.2.6. Recognition of qualifications

1. On 18 May 2015 the five Ministers in charge of Higher Education in Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg agreed on a Benelux Decision on the mutual automatic generic recognition of higher education degrees in the Benelux. The Decision guarantees the legal right to each citizen to automatic degree recognition of any officially recognised Bachelor or Master degree obtained in the three countries of Benelux. On 25 January 2018 a new Benelux Decision was adopted expanding the mutual recognition to the level of doctorates and associate degrees. On the basis of the two Benelux Decisions higher education degrees are immediately recognized as of equivalent – associate degree, bachelor, master or doctorate – level, without mediation of any recognition procedure, and this in the entire Benelux territory.
2. Since the Baltic States had a similar agreement among the three countries (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), the Ministers in charge of higher education of both the Benelux Countries and the Baltic States signed a declaration of intent on 8 November 2019 launching the preparation of a multilateral treaty on the automatic generic recognition of higher education qualifications. This treaty was signed on 14 September 2021 and launched on 27 September 2021 with active participation of international organisations, including UNESCO and European stakeholders. Although first be concluded between the Benelux countries and the Baltic States the Treaty is open for further accession of other members of the European Higher Education Area provided they comply with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA, their qualifications framework is referenced to the Qualifications Framework of the EHEA and the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning and have ratified the

UNESCO/COE Lisbon Recognition Convention.

3. At the global level Belgium is preparing the ratification of the UNESCO Global Convention of Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education (2019). This implies the approval of the Parliaments of the 3 Communities of Belgium, as well as the Federal Parliament. From the Flemish side in principle approval of the Draft Decree was given by the Government of Flanders on 9 July 2021 and final approval on 4 February 2022. Adoption by vote by the Commission of International Relations in the Parliament took place on 22 March 2022. Final adoption by vote in Plenary session of the Parliament is foreseen by mid-May 2022.

#### 1.4.2. Recovering from Covid-19

Flanders has developed its own programme “Flemish Resilience” (*Vlaamse Veerkracht*) to recover from the Covid crisis and to build resilience, especially for those at risk to be left behind.

Policies are oriented around four large initiatives called “Sprong” (this is Dutch for “jump” or “leap”) for school education (*Bijsprong*), higher education (*Voorsprongsfonds*) and adult education (*Edusprong*) respectively and one specific digitalisation strategy (Digits). All are focussing on:

- (1) Accelerating and mainstreaming digitalisation of education;
- (2) Fostering innovation in education by, inter alia, structural implementation of blended learning in adult education, higher education and the last grades of secondary education;
- (3) Reinforcing and mainstreaming lifelong learning throughout all strands of education in order to enhance the resilience of learners and citizens in general;
- (4) Inclusion and re-inclusion of vulnerable groups. In this context the current learning crisis has underscored the urgency of better elaborated monitoring to keep track of the progress in remediation of learning losses. For this purpose we embarked on several new strategies for data collection, including a trajectory towards a new system of central learning assessments at different stages of the school career.

The initiatives also make efficient use of the extensive co-funding of the Recovery and Resilience Facility of the European Union and can be summarized in the overarching goal “from lagging behind to moving ahead”.

## Current challenges and in higher education

The Covid-19 crisis had magnified systemic challenges and threads but also opportunities for the future of higher learning. After discussion with the Flemish higher education institutions we cluster the issues around two main challenges.

### 2.1. Challenge 1: equity/equal opportunities/inclusion

1. The accelerated **digitalisation** of higher education has certainly revealed issues on connectivity and unequal access to online provision and digital skills, as well the necessity to design responsible and future-proof and sustainable digital policies with attention to protection of (research) data, privacy issues and cybersecurity. But it has also pointed at innovative ways to flesh out the **social dimension of higher education**, domestically and in the context of international cooperation, in teaching and learning, as well as in research.
2. The perspective should be broader than “leaving no-one behind”. The ultimate goal is **to give all learners the opportunity to develop their talents at full**. **Fair recognition of qualifications of migrants, refugees and people in refugee-like status** is an important aspect in this overall perspective and policies are to be aligned with the UNESCO/COE Lisbon Recognition Convention (art. 7) and making use of international instruments such as the **COE/ UNESCO Qualifications Passport for Refugees**.
3. The increase of non-traditional (mature) students while the offer of higher education was provided online during the Covid-19 crisis confronted us with the tendency **of blurring boundaries between higher education and adult learning**.

This does not only call for rethinking the modes of delivery to encompass the need of a non-traditional public, but also to create flexibility of learning paths and practices of partial recognition of study periods, credits. This brings us to the issue of **micro-credentials**, where a balance has to be struck between affordability, flexible certification and coherence with wider qualifications that reflect the public responsibility and macro-societal mission of higher education in advancement of the knowledge base of a society.

4. The social dimension of higher education should also inspire international mobility and cooperation with specific attention to opening up mobility to e.g. **students with disabilities**
5. In the global context where the Covid-19 crisis has posed immense challenges to **international cooperation and solidarity**, any further policies for cooperation and exchange between higher education institutions and between higher education

authorities, especially between North and South, should be designed in a spirit of mutual respect, while valuing of each other's expertise in partnerships on equal footing as a concrete contribution to "decolonising education".

## **2.2. Challenge 2: Rethinking the multiple missions of higher learning**

Apart from the nexus between teaching and research, higher education has also the mission of societal outreach and service towards society as a whole.

The Covid-19 crisis has highlighted this "**third mission**" and the fact that HEIs are more than "knowledge centres". The disruption of face-to-face learning is not only connected to individual learning loss in the narrower sense of missing out academic knowledge. The Covid-19 crisis has illustrated that campuses are meeting spaces for the academic community with all its constituencies – students, teachers, researchers... - and for collective learning and learning to live together (emancipatory/democratic mission of higher education).

How to deepen higher education into "higher learning" with attention for knowledge, skills, attitudes and values? What does the university of today stand for?

What is the role of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in this, mindful of the fact that this broad agenda encompasses different strands – social, economic and ecological ?

How to define "sustainability" in its broader sense acknowledging that democratic participation is the cornerstone of sustainable societies and that without respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law "sustainable development" remains an empty phrase?

How can university research shape the necessary transition to a more sustainable society? How to foster institutional autonomy and academic freedom of all members of the academic community (teachers, researchers and students) in taking up this multidimensional societal duty? How can campuses remain fora of dialogue and intellectual debate and knowledge advancement where all scientific "truth" is falsifiable by definition and participants master the art of agreeing to disagree?

And how to integrate both the local, as well as national, regional and global development in the mission of institutions of higher learning of the coming decade?

### **Towards 2030 and beyond: recommendations for the future**

There are several international organisations shaping European and global education policies.

The recommendations below are connected to UNESCO's own role and expertise for future work.

#### **3.1. Recommendation 1. Holistic approach to higher learning: the emancipatory and democratic mission of higher education**

UNESCO, as an “intellectual” agency can build on its research on education (Futures of Education and other projects) and its human-centred conceptualising of core elements of higher education policies. The WCHE should address the multiple missions of higher education and link it up to the rights-based UN approach. In doing so we should not ignore economic and geo-political imperatives that are both an opportunity and a challenge to institutional autonomy, academic freedom, advancement of a wide range of disciplines and the definition of core values in higher learning.

The more conceptual reflection can be complemented with legal work, e.g. on the status of higher education staff, public responsibility for quality and relevance of higher education or on a global framework for recognition of micro-credentials. The latter is to be connected to safeguarding fair and equitable recognition, coherence of qualification frameworks and on universal and affordable access to higher education.

### **3.2. Recommendation 2. Putting the higher education community at the core of UNESCO’s higher education policies**

Higher education is a very specific sector with a high degree of institutional autonomy towards national authorities but in relation to international organisations.

Public policies can only be successfully designed in co-creation with the academic community.

UNESCO should systematically involve the representative organisations of the higher education community in designing its future policies and instruments and in the monitoring of their implementation. It should encourage all Member States to follow this example at national level.

### **3.3. Recommendation 3. Connection between global engagement and sustainable development**

Higher education cooperation is a powerful enabler of multilateral cooperation. Its pivotal role in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and notably SDG 4 and the Education 2030 Framework for Action has been reiterated at several occasions, e.g. in the Brussels Declaration of 5 December 2018 concluding the Global Education Meeting.

In the current decade of action, higher education’s contribution should receive adequate political attention and the collectivity of Member States should establish a clearer link in the UNESCO work programme between higher education and reaching the goals of SDG 4/Education 2030.