Transforming Higher Education in a Digital World
for the Global Common Good

Policy Statement of the

International Association of Universities (IAU)

IAU
INTERNATIONAL
ASSOCIATION OF
UNIVERSITIES
INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITIES BUREAU

Transforming Higher Education in a Digital World for the Global Common Good

IAU Policy Statement

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This IAU Policy Statement is elaborated and disseminated as a contribution to the UNESCO 3rd World Higher Education Conference (WHEC) from May 18-20, 2022, with the purpose of enhancing the contribution of higher education Institutions and systems world-wide, under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, its pledge to leave no one behind, and looking at the Futures of Education.

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Introduction

Digital transformation is one of the four strategic priorities of the International Association of Universities (IAU). The COVID-19 pandemic has - as never before - accelerated digital transformation of higher education and it is an opportune moment to reflect how we wish to shape the future of higher education in an increasingly digital world.

This document introduces a new IAU Policy Statement has developed to outline essential values and principles that must underpin the digital transformation. The work on the policy statement began in 2018 when an Expert Advisory Group[1] (EAG) was established, bringing together experts and Administrative Board members from different regions of the world. This group steered the development of the statement, with numerous exchanges on priorities to be outlined and the essential values and principles common to all, irrespective of backgrounds and local contexts. The Policy Statement presented in this document is the result of this work. It is the final draft of the Policy Statement that will be submitted for official endorsement during the upcoming IAU 16th General Conference taking place in Dublin, Ireland from 25-28 October 2022.

The Policy Statement has gone through an extensive consultative process from a Membership consultation where all IAU Members were invited to provide comments and feedback, to consultation with student leaders and associations to ensure that student perspectives were well addressed; we are grateful to all those who took part and contributed to the development of the Policy Statement. Through a series of eight meetings, the EAG considered these contributions thoroughly to ensure that they were taken into account and reflected in this final revised version of the Policy Statement.

One of the first and very interesting debates of the EAG was about the title of the Policy Statement. Following discussions, the group agreed that it was essential to convey the message that higher education is continuously transforming, as it has to adapt to, and at the same time shape, an increasingly digital world. Digital transformation is a process and a means to an end and therefore it is essential to stress that the purpose should guide actions. For the purpose of the statement, we chose to focus on the *Global Common Good* as a shared aim across countries. This reflects the will and commitment to harnessing the potential of digital transformation for the good of humanity. It is indispensable to both shape digital transformation and to ensure that it contributes to quality higher education, recognizing and addressing any associated risks and potential negative consequences.

The work on the Policy Statement began before COVID-19, and the pandemic has only further reaffirmed the importance of the Statement. At this moment in time higher education institutions in all regions of the world have become reliant - more than ever - on digital technologies for communication and exchange, for teaching and learning, for research collaboration as well as for many other services provided as part of day-to-day life of an institution.

This experience has – for better and for worse – contributed to creating a new understanding of both opportunities and challenges. We have seen an expansion in online collaboration, whether in teaching and learning or in research; new doors have been opened for international collaboration, not necessarily as a replacement of former types of collaboration, but rather as complementary alternatives, creating a more diversified range of opportunities. We have observed a larger degree of flexibility in higher education systems - systems that are often based on longstanding traditions can be very rigid and difficult to change, but to avoid disruption these systems were forced to become more agile in the face of the pandemic. This has created opportunities for innovation and possibilities for testing new approaches, or for questioning former practices. Obviously not all new initiatives prove to be better or more useful, but it has generated new knowledge and experiences that can contribute to lessons learnt and to inform decision-making about the way forward. It is also clear that no one-size-fits all - solutions have to be anchored in local contexts taking into consideration limitations and opportunities. Even within institutions, we have seen different needs arise, each one molded by the particularities of different disciplines. Despite challenges, these are examples of positive impacts of the pandemic that can contribute to shaping the conversation about the future.

The pandemic has also served as a magnifying glass, highlighting challenges, limitations and inequalities in terms of access to opportunities. Digital devices, online connection and access to data are becoming increasingly essential in order to

gain access to information, to teaching and learning and to communicate and take part in communities - this has only reaffirmed the need to scale up efforts to bridge divides. Another important aspect that must be emphasized is that universities play an essential social role in society. They enable students to meet, exchange and develop beyond formal curricula and credentials delivered by the institution. This function is less tangible than the number of degrees awarded at the end of the year, but it does not make it less important. We are set to fail, if this role is not recognized as part of the challenging quest of broadening access to higher education, often with no additional resources. These examples are highlighted to stress that it is one thing to imagine the future of higher education, it is another thing making sure that it becomes a reality. The latter is closely linked to whether adequate resources are invested, thus making it possible to pursue these ambitions.

These are merely a few examples of opportunities and challenges as seen through the lens of the digital transformation of higher education. We are undoubtedly on the road to a more integrated version of the universe and the metaverse, one that will require new terms and concepts to frame our understanding and our exchanges. The experience during the pandemic has certainly shaken the world of higher education and its cornerstones in terms of how we operate, collaborate and communicate. It has led to a reinforced digital infrastructure in most higher education institutions around the world, leading not only to new opportunities, but also to new challenges and most certainly new inequalities.

What is absolutely essential when discussing the future of higher education is the one thing that has remained stable throughout the bumpy ride through the pandemic, namely the core mission of higher education institutions in society. At IAU it was eloquently framed in the preamble to the Association's constitution in 1950:

"Conscious of the fundamental principles for which every university should stand, namely: the right to pursue knowledge for its own sake and to follow wherever the search for truth may lead; the tolerance of divergent opinion and freedom from political interference;

Conscious of their obligation as social institutions to promote, through teaching and research, the principles of freedom and justice, of human dignity and solidarity; to develop mutually material and moral aid on an international level;"

As we turn to discuss how we wish to build and continue to develop higher education in the years to come, the most important issue at stake seems to be the reaffirmation that these fundamental principles guide the universities and other institutions of higher learning around the world. Without these, any conversations would be in vain. The Policy Statement therefore also makes reference to several normative instruments of UNESCO that already demonstrates the internationally negotiated recommendations, standards, norms and principles set out as fundamental to shape the transformation that forms part of an increasingly digital world.

At IAU, we believe that it is essential to nurture a shared commitment to build a humanistic, ethical, inclusive and purpose-based digital transformation of higher education for the global common good.

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If this is a truly shared ambition, then there is a solid foundation to leverage opportunities of digital transformation; to explore the potential of different modes of learning, responding to the needs of different learners; to foster open science and strengthen international research collaboration built on the principle of academic integrity; and to foster ethical and responsible conduct across all operations whether in the physical world, or in the metaverse.

The final draft version of the IAU Policy Statement is presented in the following pages and it will guide the Association's activities in the area of digital transformation on the road towards 2030 and beyond.

IAU, together with its Members around the world, stand united as we continue to *Transform Higher Education in a Digital World for the Global Common Good*.

[1]See the members of the EAG here:
https://www.iau-aiu.net/technology? onglet=1

Transforming Higher Education in a Digital World for the Global Common Good

> Lead digital change for the global common good

> Call for international and national frameworks conducive to leverage the potential of digital transformation for the global common good

> Build bridges to counter digital divides and to pursue universal access

> Foster ethical and responsible conduct and dialogue

> Foster lifelong learning, professional success and engaged democratic citizenship

> Advance together through collaboration and exchange

Transforming Higher Education in a Digital World for the Global Common Good

1. Preamble

1. The International Association of Universities (IAU) calls for a digital transformation of higher education for the global common good. Such transformation must be humanistic, ethical, inclusive and purpose-based. This call is anchored in the mission and vision of the IAU and the fundamental values promoted by the Association [1].

2. Technology has the potential to remedy many societal problems and improve the human condition, yet it also brings new challenges. The pace of development tests human capacity for understanding, analysing and regulating new opportunities and risks. This statement encompasses essential principles and values that must underpin the digital transformation of higher education and society if we are to shape the digital world for the common good.

3. The responsibility of higher education institutions (HEIs) is twofold: continuous transformation of higher education and shaping society towards a sustainable future.

4. Existing technology and the conditions for digital transformation vary within and between countries. Building infrastructure to close the digital divide is a global responsibility. HEIs call on Governments to develop and implement international standards for fair and more sustainable technology development. Such agreements will require multiple stakeholder collaboration, including higher education, to ensure that opportunities are made available to all citizens of the world.

5. This statement supports the UN Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development: Transforming Our World and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including SDG4 on Quality Education: "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" and its target 4.3: "*By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university*"[2].

    The UNESCO Education 2030 Framework for Action stipulates that:

    "*A well-established, properly regulated tertiary education system supported by technology, open educational resources and distance education can increase access, equity, quality and relevance, and can narrow the gap between what is taught at tertiary education institutions, including universities, and what economies and societies demand. The provision of tertiary education should be made progressively free, in line with existing international agreements*"[3].

6. IAU calls on the higher education community including students, national authorities and decision-makers, and international organizations to actively shape the digital transformation of higher education and society.

7. This policy statement represents the commitment of IAU Members and its partners to pursue the outlined principles and values.

2. Lead digital change for the global common good

GOVERNANCE

8. Higher education institutions must continuously build their culture and technological capacity towards sustainability. Higher education leaders can foster an institutional culture to harness the transformative power of technology. Faculty, student and staff should be engaged and their needs and perspectives considered to effectively and appropriately use technology in teaching, learning, research and administration. These changes must be supported by dedicated capacity and related structures to lead the digital transformation within the institution.

9. The use of technology in higher education has the potential to increase equitable access to quality higher education. Higher education leaders can improve student access and success by prioritizing this issue at the executive level. To ensure and promote inclusive and equitable quality education for all, leaders should establish a framework with suitable structures and capacity, paying particular attention to the needs of vulnerable students.

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EDUCATION

11. Digital technologies, and new modes of learning can support innovative pedagogical goals with new forms of engagement and participation. Guided by commitments to quality of the learning process, such technologies can be used as a complement or alternative to face-to-face education. It is essential that training opportunities are made available to staff to explore the opportunities of different learning pedagogies and tools.

12. Digital transformation of society entails new systems, new tools, new ways of communicating, accessing, processing, extracting, and learning from data and information. Continuous curricula development is needed as these changes are intrinsically linked to our understanding of the world across the different disciplines. Established disciplines may be extended, and new ones emerge, driving further technological developments and societal impact.

13. Higher education has a responsibility for developing students' digital literacy in the context of their broader efforts to ensure they have the knowledge, skills, and ethical commitments to utilize IT and other tools to address social inequality and related problems with innovative solutions.

14. To democratize information, increase access to knowledge and develop and sustain repositories of high-quality content, higher education leaders can make a difference by encouraging the use and creation of Open Educational Resources (OERs), in line with the principles of the UNESCO 2019 recommendation on OER [4]. Through national and international collaboration, HEIs can benefit from knowledge and information sharing and OERs may be adapted to specific local needs to ensure cultural and linguistic diversity.

15. Digital technology increases opportunities for student contributions to academic discourse and education policymaking, increasing the capacities for student advocacy and improving the student experience.

RESEARCH

16. HEIs contribute to the development of new technologies. In an environment of institutional autonomy, academic freedom and social responsibility, higher education must be at the forefront of examining and analysing the potential benefits and risks on society and humanity to inform the public debate and evidence-based policymaking.

17. In an increasingly digital world, it is easier to disseminate research findings, data and pursue international collaboration to improve discovery and research. It is increasingly important to foster interdisciplinary collaboration and research to find sustainable solutions to complex social, economic, political and environmental challenges.

18. Digital technologies and infrastructure enable new opportunities to democratize access to research findings. The Open Science movement is based on the principle of openness and transparency in the whole research cycle. It fosters sharing and collaboration in accordance with principles of good data governance and stewardship, notably the FAIR (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, and Reusable) principles as outlined in the UNESCO Recommendation on Open Science [5]. HEIs must play an important role to shape the implementation of this Recommendation.

3. Call for international and national frameworks conducive to leverage the potential of digital transformation for the global common good

19. Technology transcends national borders; it is crucial to define international ethical standards for the use of technology in higher education, to commit to technological progress for good and to limit risks and negative consequences. IAU calls for multilateral collaboration and international normative and legal frameworks committing to common technology norms and values rooted in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This process requires multi-stakeholder participation, including higher education.

20. Digital technology facilitates opportunities for cooperation among countries, regions, institutions, and groups of researchers. It can strengthen international research collaboration for sharing data and information for societal development based on mutual respect and international standards for science and scientific research [6] and for Open Science [5].

21. IAU calls for dialogue and exchange between the higher education community and policymakers to jointly assess digital transformation and governance structures to identify and address weaknesses and pursue opportunities for mutually beneficial advancement.

22. Countries must enable a safe and trustworthy digital environment based on human rights, ethical conduct and the rule of law as well as a transparent and accountable digital governance system that enshrines the right to data privacy, security, neutrality, and open and equal access. Higher education has a crucial role in supporting this process and holding their government to account by demonstrating the negative consequences when this is not the case.

23. IAU calls on the States to enact necessary changes and amendments in the legislation, policies and practices to shape a human-centred, ethical, inclusive, and purpose-based digital transformation of higher education and society.

4. Build bridges to counter digital divides and to pursue universal access

24. Digital transformation offers new opportunities for higher education and beyond, but the conditions, infrastructures and possibilities are widely diverse. IAU calls for awareness of this situation and action to counter digital divides by prioritizing technology and data accessibility and affordability as human rights.

25. It is essential to recognize existing inequalities to avoid exacerbating divides. Digital transformation is not a panacea for remedying all socioeconomic differences. But it brings opportunities for HEIs to foster inclusive and democratic education and to strive for universal access. IAU calls for policies that enable social inclusion and democratic engagement, including the promotion of critical digital literacy for all citizens.

26. Through solidarity and collaboration, HEIs around the world can facilitate knowledge transfer. Higher education should play a key role in ensuring that digital spaces represent cultural, language and gender diversity, avoiding biases and underrepresentation of vulnerable or marginalized groups.

27. IAU calls on international and regional organizations, partners and states to accelerate the development of infrastructures and competencies in areas and for people at risk of lagging behind or being excluded from the potential of digital transformation.

28. HEIs should ensure that the student, staff and faculty have access to resources that allow full participation in digital transformation.

5. Foster ethical and responsible conduct and dialogue

29. Technology increasingly replaces or surpasses human capacity and activity. HEIs should take an active role in facilitating interdisciplinary debates and conversations on the impact on human-machine and human-human relationships with a view to anticipate challenges and solutions and to ensure complementarity and human well-being, as informed by UNESCO Recommendation on Ethics and AI [7].

30. Trustworthy and secure digital spaces are a prerequisite for realizing the potential of technology in higher education and in society. Digital transformation continuously challenges regulatory and legal frameworks in areas such as data protection and the right to privacy. Through research, advice and modelling of best practices through its own actions, higher education can inform policymaking on ethical, responsible and accountable conduct in cyberspace.

31. Higher education leaders, staff and students should develop and discuss ethical codes of conduct for navigating cyberspace within frameworks of academic and expressive freedoms. All higher education disciplines and programmes should incorporate modules of digital literacy and codes of ethical and responsible conduct associated with their respective domains. Higher education has an important role in promulgating ethical guidance for use of technology.

32. *Technological developments should improve the human condition and create sustainable societies for the common good. Technology is merely a means to an end. Therefore, the ethical dimensions and implications of the 'end' and 'purpose' of technological developments should be continuously questioned and challenged to ensure that they are being developed for good.*

6. Foster lifelong learning, professional success and engaged democratic citizenship

33. Higher education plays an important role in preparing students to critically evaluate the potential opportunities, risks and impacts of new technologies, and to live as engaged citizens and actively shape future society.

34. Higher education leaders can foster change and development of new methods of teaching and learning. Online, distance and blended learning can be useful tools as part of this structural change in providing new knowledge acquisition and learning opportunities throughout life.

35. Diverse viewpoints contribute important perspectives on how to leverage digital transformation in higher education. The perspectives of students and the needs of society are essential to inform discussions about change and educational transformation.

36. To create a conducive environment open to change and transformation, higher education leaders must favour a collegial and trustworthy working environment. Leadership should encourage and reward experimentation while recognizing that not all new teaching pedagogies or learning assessments will succeed. Failure is an essential part of the learning process.

7. Advance together through collaboration and exchange

37. It is time to further strengthen exchanges to shape digital transformation for the common global good and counteract negative impacts and limitations to democratization of knowledge. Collaboration and solidarity are essential for building bridges and removing barriers to make opportunities available to all.

38. Guided by the principles in this statement, the IAU provides a unique platform for exchange and collaboration beyond countries and regions as well as to create a fair higher education landscape that strives for excellence, relevance and quality for all, regardless of national contexts and the diversity of institutions.

39. The rapid emergence and diversity of digital tools may exacerbate a digital divide between institutions with varying resources. IAU encourages collaboration between institutions and nations to ensure that digital and pedagogical innovations become available and implemented across the diversity of institutions and learning communities.

40. Technological advances are human-made and human values must inform their use and shape regulatory framework for digital transformation. Guided by fundamental values and principles laid out in this statement, IAU believes that digital transformation can serve the common global good and enhance the human condition in pursuit of developing sustainable societies. Together, we will actively shape a fair and equitable digital world.

IAU Members & Partners

The Statement will be submitted for adoption at the 16th IAU General Conference (25-28 Oct. 2022)

[1] https://www.iau-aiu.net/Vision-Mission
[2] https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg4
[3] https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000245656 (paragraphe 43, page 41)
[4] https://en.unesco.org/themes/building-knowledge-societies/oer/recommendation
[5] https://en.unesco.org/themes/ethics-science-and-technology/recommendation_science
[6] https://en.unesco.org/news/unesco-sets-ambitious-international-standards-open-science
[7] https://en.unesco.org/artificial-intelligence/ethics
All links were consulted on 8 March 2022

About the International Association of Universities (IAU)

Founded in 1950, under the auspices of UNESCO, the IAU is the leading global association of higher education institutions and organizations from around the world.

IAU is an independent, non-governmental, membership organization that brings together more than 600 member institutions and organizations.

As a global forum for higher education leaders and experts, IAU convenes Members from more than 130 countries to identify, reflect and act on shared priorities. It acts as the global voice of higher education to a wide range of international and inter-governmental organizations, in particular to UNESCO to advocate for fundamental academic values and other topics of concern to the higher education community.

Members avail of a wide range of services and the Association also collaborate with other HE stakeholders, such as higher education authorities, policy and decision-makers, specialists, administrators, teachers, researchers and students. IAU is funded primarily through membership fees and depends on these to effectively carry out its global mandate and wide portfolio of activities encompassing monitoring of transformation in higher education, convening debates and exchanges at the global level, developing policy statements and organizing capacity building activities in support of its Members around the world.

Make sure you are part of this unique global network!

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