

Global Student Statement

To the UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education +10

Education for All!

At a time of global financial and ecological instability, decision makers face a fundamental question: how will they ensure that future and current generations are equally and adequately equipped with the skills, knowledge and intellectual virtue to rise to the global challenges that we face in the 21st century?

Our answer is education. Not for the few, but for all.

As a body of student leaders, we are calling for a deep investment in the higher education of students globally. The only way to ensure the success of our future, higher education needs to be a priority and made a fundamental right for all.

We are dedicated to the advancement of the students' situation through student rights, accessibility, affordability, partnerships, mobility, learning experience and social justice.

Access and success

We call for the greater accessibility of higher education so that everyone can access and succeed in learning and research regardless of their background. Access to higher education should be based on one's willingness to learn and not the ability to pay.

Access is not simply about providing entry to higher education; it is also about completing studies. High drop-out rates are still a severe problem. Progression through higher education must be facilitated by adequate support measures, specifically designed to adapt to the needs of the individual learner.

Student income support is a crucial element in supporting students during their studies.

We demand that governments increase their commitment to students. Doing so would recognise education as a public good which also enables greater accessibility, leads to a quality student experience and greater potential for learning and engagement.

We call upon UNESCO to start a global research study into national studying costs, while taking into consideration both tuition fees and living costs, as well as the support systems in place.

We urge governments to implement far more flexible visa procedures for students and improve information sharing between countries.

We call upon governments to stop using trans-national education programmes as a way of gaining access to educational markets in developing countries.

We call for a better and more transparent mechanism for degree, subject and

qualification recognition, so that students are not discouraged from going abroad because their qualifications are not recognised when they come home.

Quality in higher education

Quality is a distinguishing characteristic that provides a guide for students and higher education institutions. High quality and accessibility should be two sides of the same coin. Accessible higher education that is not high quality is worthless and high quality education that is not widely accessible is meaningless.

We welcome the further development of international co-operation to improve the quality, transparency, comparability and compatibility of degrees and studies. In addition, we respect the diversity of quality assurance models around the world, while strongly arguing for stakeholder involvement in each quality assurance exercise at every level.

In our vision, higher education needs to simultaneously fulfill all its missions: improving graduate career prospects, democracy building and ensuring active citizenship.

We call upon governments to further disseminate and promote the UNESCO Guidelines on "Quality provision in cross-border higher education", as an essential tool to protect students from disreputable higher education providers.

Students' rights

We demand that higher education institutions see the robust protection and propagation of student rights as key to the maintenance of universities and democracies. This includes both transparent formalised governance structures and the right to freely speak out and criticise teachers, rectors, ministers or other actors in higher education, without fear of retribution. The human right to free association is too often breached in the higher education sphere.

We propose that a worldwide ombudsperson office for students is established under the umbrella of UNESCO.

Students as partners

We call for higher education institutions to proactively encourage students to participate in all levels of governance and reform, be it at the regional, national, institutional or programme level. We emphasise that study programme coordinators must consult students in the development of the programmes and ensure that systematic ways allowing students to give feedback on how to improve their studies exist. Governance bodies must ensure that feedback mechanisms are effective and that their results and effects are made public.

We urge governments to recognise student voices in national and international policy and budget debates.

The learning experience and critical thinking

On all continents, students are often encouraged to “chew, pass and forget” their curriculum and exams rather than to engage critically with their course content and teachers.

A student-centred approach across the board ensures critical thinking and active participation in the improvement of the quality of higher education. This can only be successful if higher education institutions rethink the way teaching is performed and courses constructed, so that the students are in the centre of the institutions’ strategies.

The inadequate link between certain higher education programs and the labour market is an obstacle to the development of the full potential of students in their subsequent professional activities. We therefore encourage universities to further develop the concept of learning by doing as much as possible to support and recognise informal learning within student organisations so as to encourage entrepreneurial and value-based mindsets.

Higher education and social justice

We strongly condemn all forms of discrimination. Higher education must be a key enabler of emancipation and never a reproduction of the existing systemic inequalities and discrimination in society.

Higher education must be accessible to all, regardless of race, religion gender, culture, sexuality or socio-economic background.

UNESCO’s role in global higher education

We recommend that UNESCO should play a major role in the debates on global higher education.

We urge UNESCO to consult with students on a regular basis, and to facilitate dialogue between the students of the world.

Future cooperation of students

We, the undersigned organisations, commit ourselves to regular communication both before and after the world conference, and to explore and map out a plan for the possibilities of future global student cooperation.

We, as representative student organisations from across the globe, consider it our

responsibility to fight for quality higher education for all and for student rights and participation, while being fully aware of our role in preparing students to become active citizens in the current and future global society.

This statement was adopted in Paris on January 23, 2009, by

AASU – All–Africa Students Union

AEGEE – Association des Etats Généraux des Etudiants de l'Europe

ASA – Asian Pacific Students and Youth Association

EDS – European Democrat Students

ESU – European Students' Union

FEUQ - Fédération étudiante universitaire du Québec

IAAS – International Association of Students in Agriculture & Related Sciences

IADS – International Association of Dental Students

IFMSA – International Federation of Medical Students' Associations

IYCS–JECI – Jeunesse Etudiante Catholique Internationale

JADE – European Confederation of Junior Enterprises

NUS – National Unions of Students of Australia

NZUSA - New Zealand Union of Students' Associations

USSA – United States Student Association