

**Executive summary  
of the 8<sup>th</sup> GUNi Report  
of the Higher Education  
in the World series**

**New Visions  
for Higher  
Education  
towards 2030**

The complete contents of the  
Report are available on the website:  
[www.guni-call4action.org](http://www.guni-call4action.org)

# Introduction to the Global University Network for Innovation (GUNI)

Twenty-three years after its creation, the mission and the objectives of the GUNI global network are still entirely valid. Our mission, now shared with 268 institutions in 85 countries, is to promote the role of higher education in society, supporting the renewal of its global visions and policies in terms of public service, relevance, social responsibility and innovation.

Moreover, our objectives inspire us to:

- Generate and share knowledge on higher education policies and management around the world
- Promote a knowledge society by strengthening higher education systems and institutions for progress, culture and wellbeing.
- Support institutions and governments all over the world for the progress of higher education, scientific research and innovation
- Promote the development of the Agenda 2030 and Sustainable Development Goals
- Encourage academic and scientific diplomacy to promote multilateralism and international cooperation.

Despite difficulties and lack of structural finance, the GUNI is still a global benchmark in higher education and university management. We are happy to see how initiatives and projects connect with institutions worldwide and that we are benchmarks in the deployment of the Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals. At the same time, we are pioneers in the introduction of new issues in the field of higher education and share all our knowledge following responsible research and open science principles. Moreover, we are honoured to have been chosen by UNESCO as a strategic partner to organise the UNESCO World Higher Education Conference (WHEC2022) in Barcelona. A mandate of great responsibility that we have shared with our members and around the world. In this context, we promoted the Global Week of higher education for the first time (Barcelona, 16-22 May 2022), an event that has brought together some fifteen internationally relevant seminars and events regarding higher education policies and management.

With the Global Report you have in your hands, we have begun a new long-term strategic activity. We hope that it can be a starting point —for analysis and serious debate— that will be enriched in the next few years through a web portal. A project that brings together a significant number of universities that belong to the network to work together to transform HEIs (Higher Education Institutions). An exciting project that combines efforts and enables our members to grow in order to become relevant, inclusive, sustainable, innovative and socially responsible institutions.

I would like to finish by thanking all the institutions that have placed their trust in us and have enabled the Report to become a reality: the Generalitat de Catalunya (Government of Catalonia), the Ministry of Universities of the Spanish Government, the Agència Catalana de Cooperació pel Desenvolupament (Catalan Agency for Cooperation and Development) and the Fundació la Caixa. Our thanks to UNESCO for its permanent support. We would also like to highlight the collaboration of all the experts from around the world, as well as the technical staff of the GUNI, a small number of people but with excellent professionalism and dedication. Thank you all very much; with the new Report, we have started a fascinating strategic project we would like to share with you.

**Josep M. Vilalta**  
 Director  
 Global University Network for Innovation

# Introduction to the Catalan Association of Public Universities

We are living in fast-changing times: moving towards a digital-human future, seeing significant changes in the sphere of work and the economy, in our perception of the individual, citizenship and society, with movements that challenge our democracies and are evidence of a social crisis, changes in the ways knowledge is created and disseminated, in international relationships and, doubtlessly, with an ecological and systemic imbalance of our planet. Given these significant challenges, education, science and innovation need, more than ever, key areas to build progressive, sustainable and engaged societies at local and global levels.

In this context, it is necessary to rethink the university to make it a lever for social transformation. But we cannot do this alone; we must advance together, embracing local, regional and international inter-university cooperation, as well as public institutions and social agents. The Covid-19 pandemic crisis has proven how cooperation enables better response to the transformative moments we are experiencing at the local and global levels. In this respect, the *Associació Catalana d'Universitats Públiques* (Catalan Association of Public Universities) (ACUP) regards cooperation as an essential emblem and mission. The ACUP, created in 2002, is formed by the universities in Barcelona (UB), Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB), Politècnica de Catalunya (UPC), Pompeu Fabra (UPF), Girona (UdG), Lleida (UdL), Rovira i Virgili (URV) and Oberta de Catalunya (UOC). In the ACUP, these eight public Catalan universities have forged cooperative ties to gain relevance, quality and efficiency on the individual level as well as in the Catalan higher education system as a whole.

Moreover, through the Global University Network for Innovation (GUNi), our Association has a firm international outlook, promoted with UNESCO. The GUNi subscribes to the values and principles of UNESCO, as well as adopting the Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals as a motor and horizon for improving and transforming higher education institutions.

The flagship project of the GUNi is the *Higher Education in the World Reports* (HEIW), which has consolidated as an internationally acknowledged higher education publication. The Reports analyse emerging issues in

the university sphere in-depth and encourage rigorous debate and the generation of policies and programmes for the progress of HEIs worldwide. This Report, officially presented in the framework of the UNESCO World Higher Education Conference (WHEC2022, Barcelona), intends to reflect on the future challenges of university institutions and present ways to rethink HEIs in a changing context such as the current. In this respect, it has been designed to be a living document that will be enriched in the next four years by means of an open portal with new articles, interviews, videos and podcasts. I hope this new GUNi report is a helpful instrument for reflection and to strengthen the systems and HEIs worldwide.

**Jaume Puy**

President

*Associació Catalana d'Universitats Públiques*  
(Catalan Association of Public Universities)

## About the report

This report: *New Visions for Higher Education towards 2030*, analyses the situation of higher education in the world and intends to offer answers to the need to transform HEIs in an important moment of profound global changes. Three main questions guide the approach of the report:

- If we were to create an HEI from scratch today, what would it be like?
- If we had to reform HEIs, what changes would we have to implement, and, above all, how would they be implemented?
- How should HEIs be in the near future?

Its approach and the search for answers are based on experience accumulated by the GUNi in the last few years, the global reports published, and the different topics and lines of action developed. An in-depth study of the current context is proposed, recording the principal debates in higher education, always in compliance with the values and the objectives of the GUNi, to forge a path towards the future. In other words, the present is studied in detail to continue steering HEIs towards the desired horizon in 2030 and beyond.

## Why is it time for a special edition?

There are three reasons why the publication of a special edition of the series is appropriate now.

Firstly, the GUNi very recently celebrated its 20th anniversary. Two decades have passed since the network was created after the UNESCO's 1st World Higher Education Conference. Although systems and higher education institutions and our societies have changed considerably during this period, our mission and values are now more important than ever: promoting the role of higher education in society and offering support to the renovation of their visions and policies all around the world in terms of public service, relevance, social responsibility and innovation. More than ever, it is necessary to reaffirm the social value, role and contribution of higher education institutions, as well as the need for these institutions to build a new vision and strategy for the future.

Secondly, in the last few decades, our world has been undergoing significant transformations and crises such as climate change and environmental degradation, demographic pressure, forced migrations, increased inequality, political pressures and transformation of the labour market. Some of these transformations could have a devastating effect on our society and planet, and some could be irreversible if urgent measures are not taken. In any case, they have crucial implications for HEIs in their societal role, making it essential to address them. Moreover, the Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted urgent problems in higher education, and society and has boosted rapid and undeniable transformations such as digitalisation.

In recent years, an unprecedented need and will to connect and cooperate has arisen. Although also accompanied by the emergence of narrow-minded visions and ideologies based on nationalism and "us first" policies. The context requires us to think and develop new visions for higher education and its institutions, missions and values regarding public benefit and social responsibility.

It is doubtlessly necessary to rethink the role of higher education institutions and their contribution to society, considering current trends and the significant transformations that are taking place. HEIs have their own specificity according to their operational culture and location. Nevertheless, they are subject to an interconnected global system that follows similar patterns.

In the third place, in addition to this period of changes and transformations, holding the 3rd World Higher Education Conference of the UNESCO (WHEC2022) in Barcelona in May 2022, in collaboration with the GUNi, is a unique venue and a roadmap to promote the transformation of higher education in the next few years. The WHEC2022 has established new guidelines regarding policies, creation of capacities, agreements and regional and international commitments. A wide range of stakeholders have participated, such as political actors, senior university management, professors, the UNESCO, teachers, students, staff, civil society groups, companies and network representatives. The official launch and presentation of the report in the framework of the WHEC2022 was an additional reason for the special name to encourage symbiosis and boost HEI transformation.

## General issues, premises and values of the Report

The GUNi's Global Reports have always intended to analyse and generate new shared knowledge in higher education around the world while at the same time intending to be valuable instruments for institutional action and public policy. This is the new orientation of the Report: to place knowledge and analysis at the service of decision-making and public policy in the broadest sense.

Thus, the Report is descriptive, analytic and intends to impact on HEIs. A will to anticipate the future and prepare for adaptation to changes, establish routes towards the desired future without forgetting the uncertainty around us and our limitations to forecast the future. Nevertheless, this does not stop us from imagining possible future scenarios.

The report focuses on HEIs as institutions relevant to society but from a systemic point of view. We are referring to higher education institutions (HEIs) rather than universities, so we can include a broad range of tertiary education suppliers without trying to formalise a specific model of institution.

Observed globally, the Report acknowledges and values diversity and the different realities in the world of higher education. It is essential to highlight that, in considering a new vision of HEIs, we should not intend to formalise a single model of institution. We believe in the need and the wealth of diversity, and in our vision, there is room for many types of HEIs.

Beyond the studies and generic analysis, we understand that it is necessary to bear in mind the reality of higher education in different countries and regions worldwide. Each country and territory has its particular challenges and development priorities. The specific design of the routes for transformation will depend on each context; few solutions will work the same everywhere. By contrast, we must strive to combine different collections of transformation tools according to the needs and conditions of the environment in question. At the same time, high-level harmonised efforts are necessary to direct the interactions between the routes chosen and the aggregate results, to achieve universal progress toward Agenda 2030.

Finally, the Report is based on the need for continuity and coherence between the different stages of education: from primary up to higher education and learning throughout life, which is often analysed in a disjointed manner. Within the framework of the defence of lifelong education, these differences are senseless.

## Contents and structure of the Report

After the introduction, the report is structured into three parts. The first part, titled "New Context, New Visions", contains fundamental considerations on higher education through selected current debates. The second part, "Transitions: Key Topics, Key Voices", offers an in-depth analysis of the challenges of each area and suggests lines of work and proposals for transforming HEIs from the regional perspectives, presenting contexts and visions of each of the six regions of the world, including their similarities and particular aspects.

Under the title "New Contexts, New Visions", the first part of the Report on higher education in the world contains key considerations in eight fundamental areas for transforming higher education institutions toward the desired goals for 2030 and beyond.

The themes have been chosen for their relevance, as they reflect the current situation of higher education as a whole. The eight topics are the following: the impact of Covid-19 on higher education, the future of work, citizenship, knowledge, the digital-human future, sustainability, internationalisation, HEI governance and the professionals.

This first part begins by addressing the impact of Covid-19 on higher education as a transversal issue, with consequences and effects on other areas that will be dealt with. An initial chapter has been dedicated to this issue due to its unexpected and strong impact, boosting transformations such as digitalisation, and has meant a paradigm change in multiple aspects of society and HEIs.

Then, the main themes of the Report are analysed. Although they developed separately, the approach is from a global point of view, and they have many connec-

tion points. This interdependence is a holistic approach to the transformation, the same as the Agenda 2030 and the ODS are conceived as a single agenda of sustainable development.

The first part of the report gives way to a section titled “The Vision of the Global University Network for Innovation”. Going one step further, in this section, the Report offers a proposal document that presents a new vision for HEIs regarding how higher education institutions must be configured to respond to the state of affairs. The vision aspires to be an inspiration that enables, by observation, to outline institutional strategies, objectives, and action plans to achieve them.

The second part of the report, called “Transitions: key topics, key voices”, intends to analyse and describe how they could advance toward this new vision addressing fundamental issues and themes of higher education. As indicated in its title, this second part intends to explain how they can move from where they currently are to our vision of HE, addressing the key issues of part 1 and giving voice to HEI experts and key actors.

In particular, this part 2, “Transitions”, includes a real-time view of what is being currently done, focusing on what HEIs around the world are doing to respond to the needs, challenges, crises and transformations analysed in the previous part. With this objective, the following seven key issues have been selected:

1. HEIs governance and public service. Between autonomy and community engagement
2. Skills and competencies. A humanist vision for a changing professional world
3. Research and Innovation. Towards open, ethical and responsible research and innovation
4. Sustainability. Reinventing the role and place of HEIs for a sustainable future
5. ICTs and digitalization. A digital-human future towards more inclusive and accessible HEIs
6. International Higher Education. From competition to collaboration
7. Higher Education Management. Promoting new leaderships and innovation

Each topic is addressed with a series of articles where collaborators present the challenges, actions and findings, as well as inspirational examples of HEIs that are

working on initiatives, new developments, changes and innovations to adapt to the new context.

Experts from around the world build the content of these chapters by addressing the issues from their specific research experiences. Therefore, the contributors’ perspectives are unique and individual, as they have originated from a particular combination of ontological, professional and geographical principles. The choice of their approaches, expressions and terms does not imply a specific preference or inclination on the part of the GUNi for one or another orientation.

The third and last part of the report deals with the debates and realities of HEIs with the contexts and visions of each of the six regions of the world.

Therefore, this third part intends to offer a regional approach based on comprehension, as, despite the contexts and the global forces, each region has certain patterns that must be dealt with from a particular perspective. Acknowledging that there are global similarities but also different proposals, organisational cultures, objectives or strategies, the following questions guide the six regional chapters included in this Report:

- How do the regions in the world think the higher education institutions should be in the future?
- What are the similarities and the differences?

In this respect, different experts in each region have contributed to the Report from their specific field of research, country and continent or regional experience. The result is a part with six chapters comprising the following regions: The Middle East and Northern Africa, North America, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean.

## Continuity of the Report

The report creates a space for active transformation and will constitute the conceptual basis of a more ambitious project called “GUNi International Call for Action (2022-2025 “Rethinking HEIs for Sustainable and Inclusive Societies”. This initiative aims to encourage HEIs worldwide to deploy the actions and changes necessary to adapt and be more relevant, inclusive, effective, innovative and socially responsible.

In this respect, a new format has been developed, which not only presents a printed version and a downloadable file version, as had been done before, but it is also launched on a live website, open to new creations where the entire content is deployed and which offers continuity to this special edition of the series of *Higher Education in the World Reports*.

What makes this report unique is its vitality, as it will be complemented with new contributions (articles, videos, interviews and podcasts), which during 2022-2025 will give a voice and testimony of the development of the reflections, contributions and actions in the institutions and the higher education system towards the horizon established by the Agenda 2030 and the route set out in the GUNi vision. The general objective is that the Report website and *International Call for Action* become a reference space open to the process of transforming HEIs around the world.

# New Visions for Higher Education towards 2030

The series of *Higher Education in the World* (HEIW) reports is a collective project of the GUNi, which has become a benchmark in the higher education sector after seven editions. This series of reports examine the principal challenges faced by higher education and its institutions (HEIs) worldwide. On this occasion, the current context of profound social changes and transformations required a special number. The new edition of the Report establishes a renewed and broader view of higher education for the 2030 horizon and beyond. Titled *New Visions for Higher Education towards 2030*, the new Report analyses the status of higher education globally and intends to address the need for HEIs to change in a time of significant global changes.

With contributions from more than 90 experts from around the world, this report covers a wide range of issues: from the digital-human future to HEI governance and their public service, while at the same time addressing sustainability, work and citizenship, among other aspects. As a distinctive characteristic, the report focuses mainly on the institutions and introduces regional perspectives to improve the applicability of the horizons dealt with. We hope it will be of interest to political and other actors in the sector.

In this regard, the Report is conceived as a living document that will evolve in the next few years. All the materials are published on a website which will add new articles, interviews, videos and podcasts in the next four years. The Report will be a platform open both to thought about and transformative action on HEIs.

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