



Higher Education Sustainability Initiative

Terms of Reference (TOR)

Background

The Higher Education Sustainability Initiative (HESI) is an open partnership between United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), UNESCO, United Nations Environment, the Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME) initiative, United Nations University (UNU), UN-HABITAT, UNCTAD and UNITAR.

HESI provides a broad platform for the United Nations and stakeholders to learn and share how the higher education community is supporting implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and for encouraging higher education institutions (HEIs) and university networks to integrate sustainable development into teaching, research, outreach, and sustainability practices.

HESI also provides higher education institutions and its students with the opportunity to share innovations and best practices towards implementation of the SDGs. HESI, through its members, also includes an range of sustainability assessment tools to support HEIs to implement and monitor their sustainability commitments.

HESI work with a range of actors, namely its **Partners** (UN entities), **Signatories** (*i.e.* Higher Education Institutions) and **Supporters** (*i.e.* international networks, national and regional organizations and student organizations) in carrying out its activities. This open partnership provides a unique interface between higher education, science and policy making in support of the SDGs

HESI relies on an informal organizational structure, leveraging a very collaborative and dynamic set of partners, higher education institutions and networks. In this regard, HESI has been able to attract many commitments through their own network of Partners, Signatories and Supporters. While this *modus operandi* has been very successful in the past, it has also been noted by members the need to achieve a more regular and effective collaboration mechanism for engaging with HESI. It is against this background the present proposed Terms of Reference has been prepared, intended to clarify the roles and responsibilities of the various actors involved in HESI.

Terms of Reference

Members

As an open partnership, any UN entity, higher education institution and relevant organization may join the HESI partnership. This is done by communicating its intention the chair of HESI or submitting a higher education related activity into the HESI action database¹.

All new membership applications are reviewed by the Partner Committee.

Upon conformation by the Partner Committee, members are welcome to take part in the open planning calls and activities, as appropriate.

Members joining HESI should be committed to work and promote implementation of the SDGs by supporting higher education in their pursuit of integrating sustainable development into teaching, research, curricula, outreach and sustainability practices by:

- Teach sustainable development across all disciplines of study, including through online based platforms,
- Engage with students on campus and seek to represent and support their interests through the group,
- Encourage research and dissemination of sustainable development knowledge,
- Green campuses and support local sustainability efforts,
- Engage and share information with international networks,
- Outline an advocacy agenda that would see partners make contributions towards either systemic, sectoral or thematic issues relating to the SDGS with governments and other stakeholders,
- Explore innovative practices from other sectors / partners that seek to deliver transformative change around this agenda,

Partner Committee

The HESI Partner Committee consist of its UN partners, and provides overall strategic guidance to the HESI partnership by outlining a vision, set of priorities and strategic programme that would ensure that the collaboration of UN partners would deliver more value together, than in working in isolation. It would seek to map out areas of expertise and leadership in this network so that a patchwork of impact and influence could be brought together.

The Partner Committee approves the annual HESI Programme of Work, and reviews new membership applications. All decisions by the Committee is by consensus among its members.

¹ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/partnership/register/?source=4>

Chair

The chairmanship of HESI is selected among its UN partners on a voluntary, rotational and annual basis. The chairmanship is held for one year, with possibility for a second term.

The chair has the responsibility of coordinating Partner Committee meetings and open planning calls, including making any logistical arrangement for such meetings. The chair is also in charge of developing meeting agendas, moderating coordination meetings, and for developing the annual HESI Programme of Work, with input from members. The Partner Committee approves the annual Programme of Work. The aim of the work would be to process light with a focus on outcomes and impact with only the necessary bureaucracy required.

Coordination meetings

Open planning calls and coordination meetings should be organized on an ongoing basis and be open to all members. The purpose of the planning meetings is to share and plan for joint activities and of the HESI partnership and to outline the priorities and calendar of activities for the year.

The chair may also, upon own volition or by suggestion of a Partner Committee member, to organize meetings with the Committee as appropriate.

Higher Education Sustainability Initiative Global Forum

Each year, in the margins of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, UN's central forum for reviewing and assessing progress of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, a global forum of HESI is organized.

The chair, in close consultation with the Partner Committee, and with input and support from all members, has the responsibility in organizing the event, i.e. developing the programme, reaching out inviting speakers, and preparing background material, as appropriate.

HESI meetings

Any member that wishes to organize a meeting under the HESI name and/or logo needs to have written consent from the Partner Committee.
