

A global partnership for the higher education sector

Paris, Wednesday, 15th July 2020 | Universities are the key to healthier, greener, fairer societies. Their response to the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the critical contribution they make to their communities. None of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals can be achieved without the contribution of higher education – through research, teaching, and community engagement.

Higher education is an essential part of a strong and sustainable education ecosystem, and develops the critical thinking and skills required by engaged citizens. Internationalisation in higher education, through partnerships and mobility, is essential to the health and vitality of the sector globally.

The need for equitable quality higher education is arguably greater than ever, as is the need to advocate for the role of higher education in sustainable development at the highest levels, such as the United Nations. This requires a global response enabled by international cooperation.

That's why the [Association of Commonwealth Universities \(ACU\)](#), the [Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie \(AUF\)](#), and the [International Association of Universities \(IAU\)](#) have formalised their collaboration through a memorandum of understanding (MoU), signed during the 2020 UN High-level Political Forum.

Together, the three associations represent more than 2,000 higher education institutions across more than 140 countries – providing a strong base to advocate for higher education on a wide international scale.

The UN High-level Political Forum (HLPF) is a key platform for the three organisations, who have used this year's event to continue promote the role of higher education in sustainable development. [Read our joint statement on higher education's essential contribution to the SDGs](#) made at the 2019 HLPF.

Dr Joanna Newman, Chief Executive and Secretary General of the ACU, said 'International collaboration in higher education is more important than ever. We are delighted to have signed this MoU with our partners, the AUF and the IAU. It will enable us to build on our existing complementary activities and develop joint initiatives to engage our members and the wider higher education sector'.

Professor Slim Khalbous, Rector of the AUF, said 'The strength of the relationship between the world's three largest global academic associations lies essentially in the complementarity between our exclusive positions and our different offers on several levels – in terms of geographical presence, cultural background, institutional organisation, and priority themes. Consequently, I believe that the Memorandum of Understanding signed between our three organisations emphasises this diversity, which is necessary for a more active and more recognised role for higher education in the world'.

Dr Hilligje van't Land, IAU Secretary General underlines that 'Strong international and multicultural higher education cooperation will lead to the development of a more sustainable world. This partnership contributes to this dynamic and will foster the importance of whole of institutional and interdisciplinary approaches to issues analysed, debated and taught at universities around the world, while linking it to the 17 SDGs adopted as part of UN Agenda 2030. This will enhance the overall quality of higher education'.

The MoU outlines the associations' commitment to three priority areas for collaboration: **higher education for sustainable development; the quality and vitality of higher education systems; and internationalisation in higher education**. A joint working group, with representatives from each association, will develop a work plan, coordinate advocacy, and monitor the progress of activities developed under the MoU.