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The Global Higher Education and Research (GHEAR) Challenge applies scholarly expertise to a future-oriented body of research that focuses on improving the value of higher education to individuals, communities, nations, and the world. GHEAR is guided by a vision of inclusive universities that, by acting as both a fulcrum and a catalyst for change, are actively steering the engagement of higher education with global, 21st century challenges and contribute to the global commitment to sustainable development.

GHEAR seeks to promote through research and scholarship the ongoing development of equitable, contextually relevant, high quality and accessible higher education throughout the world; and to investigate and learn about the interactions among the drivers, policies, institutional infrastructure, human capacities, resources, and outcomes that are associated with this overall aim.

In these endeavours, it is aligned with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030 in its commitment to leaving none behind. **SDG 4** - *Quality Education - Ensure Inclusive and Quality Education for All and Promote Lifelong Learning* - identifies higher education as a key contributor to educational progress at all levels. Six of its ten targets align with GHEAR's focus on addressing the sources, mechanisms, and social structures that give rise to higher education's most pressing challenges. GHEAR also has a direct role to play in addressing SDG 10 *Reducing Inequalities,* and a facilitating role in delivering all SDGs.

Future Directions

At the core of the WUN GHEAR is a vision of **inclusive, high quality 21st century universities that contribute to the global commitment to sustainable development**. Countries with high levels of human development and post-secondary participation often struggle with how best to serve dis-enfranchised and under-represented people. These challenges are widespread in much of the 'global south', and further exacerbated in contexts of crisis and fragility. GHEAR seeks to engage with the needs of individuals and population segments whose participation in higher education is constrained by the under-development of higher education systems, particularly where those systems are of poor quality, limited relevance to the immediate needs of local stakeholders, and under resourced. It promotes the outcome of **equitable participation** and **mobility** to and through **high quality** and **contextually relevant** higher education, supported by necessary levels of public and private **financial investment.**

Priorities

GHEAR will particularly focus on these challenges in relation to **fragile states, mobile and marginalised populations (including refugees and indigenous people),** and developing **contextually responsive higher education**.

Reflecting these priorities, GHEAR encourages research and evidence-gathering around three broad, inter-related focal areas that are consistent with making progress towards the guiding vision, and
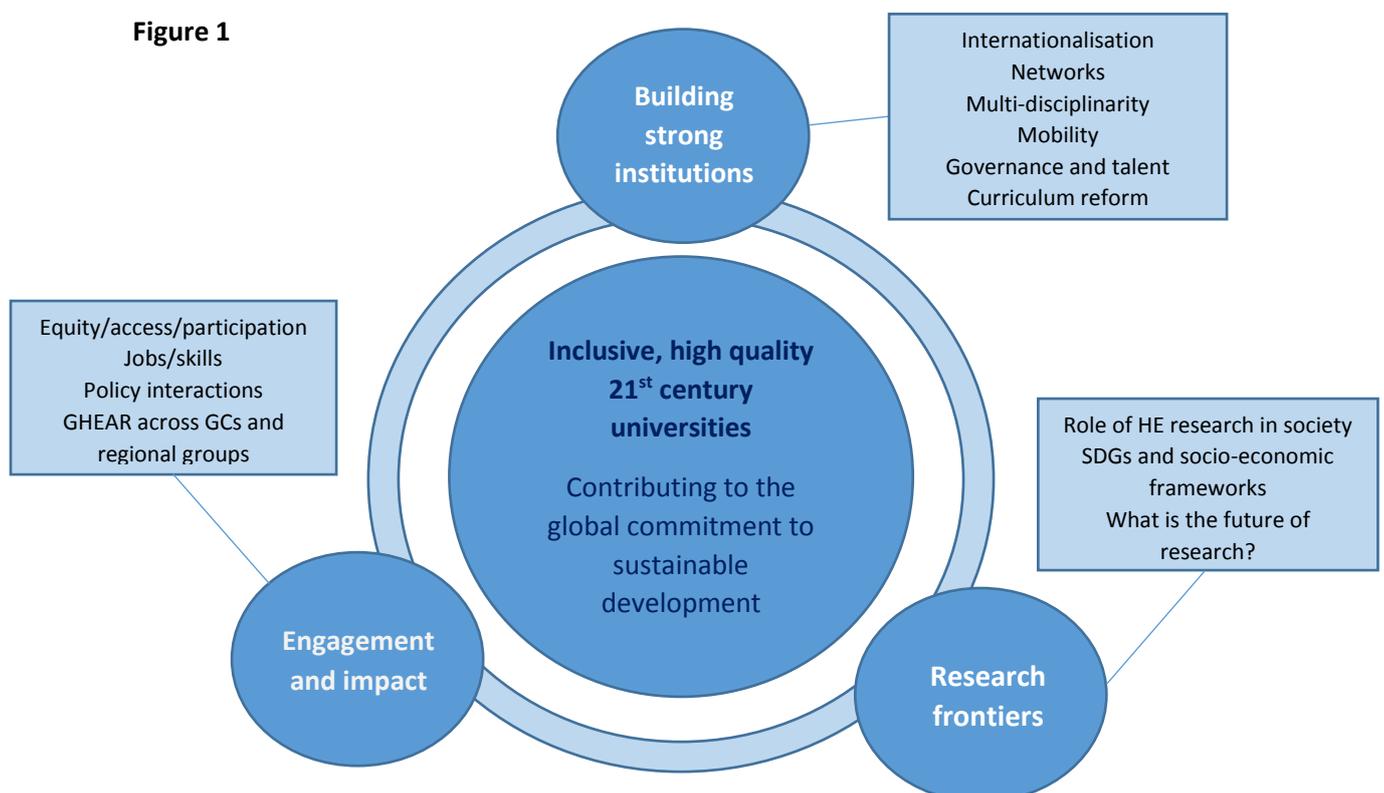
reflect the SDG commitment to sustainable development. They are (see Figure 1):

1) Building strong and inclusive institutions
2) Research frontiers
3) Engagement and impact

GHEAR promotes activities within and across these focal areas, driven by questions and concerns that include:

1. How are we **building strong and inclusive institutions** through internationalisation, networks, multi-disciplinarity, mobility, governance, nurturing talent, and curriculum reform - particularly in contexts of under-investment and fragility? Which educational policies and practices are encouraging diversity and effectively promoting equitable access, participation and success in university? What are the impacts of encouragement to reposition tertiary provision as a private rather than public good?

2. How are we identifying and responding to **research frontiers** and understanding the role of higher education research in society? What are our responses to the need for transdisciplinary, problem-led and impact-orientated research required to deliver the global Sustainable Development Goals? How are new partnership changing the nature of research production and informing debates on the nature of evidence? What effects are applications of technology and open access publishing having on knowledge generation and exchange?

3. How are we going about **engagement and impact**? How do we engage in equitable partnerships and advocacy with policy, civil society actors and communities? How can we foster active and equitable North-South and South-South partnerships? How do we expand employability and graduate preparation for opportunities across the spectrum of local, national and international contexts? How does GHEAR itself engage and have impact across the WUN Global Challenge and regional groups?

Figure 1

Building strong institutions

Internationalisation
Networks
Multi-disciplinarity
Mobility
Governance and talent
Curriculum reform

Equity/access/participation
Jobs/skills
Policy interactions
GHEAR across GCs and regional groups

Inclusive, high quality 21st century universities

Contributing to the global commitment to sustainable development

Role of HE research in society
SDGs and socio-economic frameworks
What is the future of research?

Engagement and impact

Research frontiers

Strategic Directions

Over the next three years, GHEAR aims to consolidate itself as a strong Global Challenge grouping that gains traction for its vision by implementing its strategic research agenda. In addressing this ambitious challenge and identified priorities, GHEAR seeks to enhance knowledge of how to inform improved policy and practice across its three focal areas at multiple levels:

- **Cross-national -** how can institutions and agencies work together across borders to build strong and inclusive institutions, extend research frontiers and deepen mutual engagement and impact?

- **National** - how can national policies and systems of higher education be improved in ways that build strong and inclusive institutions, extend research frontiers and deepen mutual engagement and impact?

- **Institutional** - how can institutions of higher education identify and engage in best practices that enable them to best fulfil their missions in response to societal drivers and needs, build strong and inclusive institutions, extend research frontiers and deepen mutual engagement and impact?

- **Individual** - how can the individual capacities of students, academic staff, and administrative leaders be enhanced in ways that enable all to build and benefit from strong and inclusive institutions, extended research frontiers and deepened mutual engagement and impact?

To begin utilizing this framework to guide GHEAR activities, the following next steps should be implemented through the collective efforts of the GHEAR Steering Group throughout the next year:

- Carry out a mapping exercise of those with higher education expertise and interests within WUN member universities who will actively support GHEAR.

- Review the revised strategic research agenda and agree on a process for making decisions about how best to implement it.

- Engage in more active building of partnerships within GHEAR and with other global Challenges.

- Further align GHEAR research efforts and projects in ways that a) contribute to achievement of SDG4 and SDG 10; and b) leverage the potential of higher education to support achievement of all 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

- Emphasize research projects that cultivate scholarly partnerships among WUN experts along with scholars and institutions throughout much of the 'global south' to promote the GHEAR vision of inclusive, high quality 21st century universities in the context of the global commitment to sustainable development.

- Identify an additional GHEAR priority research area that reflects the global challenges framed in the SDGs and can be submitted for significant external funding each year, and support a working group process and meeting to catalyse this effort.

- Facilitate collaborative partnerships involving WUN experts as the basis for more intentionally developing specific WUN-supported research projects that produce high impact scholarship (e.g. peer-reviewed journal articles, externally commissioned papers and briefs, externally sponsored research projects).

- Host at least two GHEAR meetings at related international research gatherings per year.

Summary of activities

Over the last two years, GHEAR has worked towards establishing a clearer sense of its unique value proposition. A new Chair was appointed in 2018 to steer this process and align GHEAR to the global sustainable development agenda

In 2017, GHEAR hosted a workshop, 'Sustainable Development Goals for Higher Education' at the University of Massachusetts over one-and-a-half days immediately preceding the 2017 Annual General Meeting of WUN.

The active groups that have been funded by WUN Research Development Funds (GHEAR focus) are listed below.

New awards (2017)

1. Health Education Access and Mobility for Musicians: A Global Approach (https://wun.ac.uk/wun/research/view/health-education-literacy-and-mobility-for-musicians-a-global-approach).
2. "The Belt and Road" Green Development: International Culture, Climate Change, Energy Investment and Environmental Protection (no webpage so far).

Ongoing (updates from project leads requested):

1. Developing and Researching the Economics and Mathematics of Selection (DREAMS): Global Perspectives (https://wun.ac.uk/wun/research/view/DREAMS)
2. Open WUN (https://wun.ac.uk/wun/research/view/open-wun)
3. Community of Learning for African PhD fellows (COLA) (https://wun.ac.uk/wun/research/view/community-of-learning-for-african-phd-fellows-cola)
4. Feasibility Study of Recommender Systems in Academia (https://wun.ac.uk/wun/research/view/feasibility-study-of-recommender-systems-in-academia)
5. World-class Universities, Publication and Research Assessment: Rethinking the Mission of Higher Education in the Global Age (https://wun.ac.uk/wun/research/view/world-class-universities)
6. Widening Participation: 'First in the Family' Students Succeeding in Universities (https://wun.ac.uk/wun/research/view/widening-participation-first-in-the-family-students-succeeding-in-universities)
7. Feasibility Study of Recommender Systems in Academia (https://wun.ac.uk/wun/research/view/feasibility-study-of-recommender-systems-in-academia)
8. World-class Universities, Publication and Research Assessment: Rethinking the Mission of Higher Education in the Global Age (https://wun.ac.uk/wun/research/view/world-class-universities)