Call for proposals
Relevance and value of universities to future society

The International Association of Universities (IAU) is pleased to launch the call for proposals for the IAU 16th General Conference, which will be hosted at University College Dublin (UCD), Ireland from 3-6 November 2020. It will be dedicated to the theme *relevance and value of universities to future society*.

2020 is a special year for the International Association of Universities (IAU) as it celebrates its **70th anniversary.** Reaching this milestone is an occasion to look back on the role of higher education and its development over time, to understand and put into perspective the various changes, and to discuss how universities can contribute to the shaping of the future.

This conference will discuss how universities can evolve to ensure their relevance and value to future society. IAU is therefore pleased to invite you to respond to the call for proposals by addressing one of the following questions which will be discussed during the conference:

1. Do the fundamental principles thought to underpin higher education in 1950 remain relevant today? What are the challenges facing **university autonomy, academic freedom** and **scientific integrity**, and how can they be addressed?

2. How can universities contribute to the creation of a **sustainable global society**?

3. How do we ensure that universities provide individuals with the **knowledge and skills** necessary to become the leaders, critical thinkers, decision-makers, innovators, specialists, researchers and responsible citizens who will build a better future society?

4. What does the **digital transformation** of society mean for how universities function as organisations and how they educate their students?

5. How does **internationalization** support the relevance of universities to society?

6. What responsibility do universities have to enhance **health and well-being**, and how can this responsibility be fulfilled?

7. What is the role of universities with respect to **innovation ecosystems** nationally, regionally and globally?

Practical information

Abstract & bionote*:* To submit your proposal, you need to prepare an abstract (max. 500 words) for your presentation highlighting what you wish to present and how it will contribute to the topic selected. In addition, you will also need to submit a short bio-note (max 200 words).

Target audience: Higher education experts, leaders, academics, researchers and other HEI representatives.

Deadline: The call for proposal will close on 15 April 2020. The Conference Programme Committee will review submissions and the selected proposals will be announced in the beginning of June 2020.

Selected presentations: The authors of the retained proposals will be invited to make a 15 minutes presentation during the IAU 16th General Conference and will benefit from a conference registration fee waiver. The cost of travel and accommodation are borne by the speakers.

Submission: Please complete the following form in order to submit your proposal:
https://forms.gle/FMokkK8oaSgRJYiZ7

Contact:
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Concept note
Relevance and value of universities to future society

Relevance and value of universities to future society is the theme of the IAU 16th General Conference. This conference is an opportunity to envision a new role for higher education in building a sustainable, healthy, just and inclusive future society of which we can all be proud, as well as it is an opportunity for reflection on the contributions universities have made in the past and the changes that have occurred in the sector over time.

2020 is a special year as the International Association of Universities (IAU) celebrates its 70th anniversary. Reaching this milestone is an occasion to look back on the role of higher education and its development over time, to understand and put into perspective the various changes, and to discuss how universities can contribute to the shaping of the future.

The world has changed since the creation of IAU. The human population has increased from 2.6 billion in 1950 to 7.7 billion, while the boundaries between people have shifted drastically due to advances in human knowledge, technological progress and societal change. Today, citizens around the world can connect together online, and can access and disseminate vast amounts of knowledge and information quickly and easily, challenging part of the traditional role of universities as generators and disseminators of knowledge.

The participation rate in higher education has significantly increased since 1950, and there has been an exponential growth in scientific publications. Universities have become more globally connected, with mobility of students and faculty growing significantly, and the emergence of global rankings has created fiercer competition between institutions and has increased the focus of universities on research. These are merely a few of the important developments in the higher education sector that have occurred over the last 70 years. Despite these changes, the underlying principles of universities, as stated in the preamble of the IAU Constitution, have stood the test of time, but are now under strong challenge and need to be advocated for.

> *Preamble to the **IAU Constitution** adopted in 1950*
>
> *Conscious of their high responsibility as guardians of the intellectual life;*
>
> *Conscious of the fundamental principles for which every university should stand, namely: the right to pursue knowledge for its own sake and to follow wherever the search for truth may lead; the tolerance of divergent opinion and freedom from political interference;*
>
> *Conscious of their obligation as social institutions to promote, through teaching and research, the principles of freedom and justice, of human dignity and solidarity; to develop mutually material and moral aid on an international level;*
>
> *The universities of the world, through their representatives assembled in conference at Nice, hereby decide to create an international association of universities.*

At the same time, the increasing availability of information and openness between countries has allowed greater understanding of the challenges facing our future society. While the

human population has tripled between 1950 and 2020, consumption of fossil fuels has increased seven-fold. Society is now generating more than 50 kg of plastic per year for every man, woman and child alive, while in 1950 this figure was less than 0.2 kg. Similarly, while significant advances have been made in reducing deaths caused by communicable diseases, hunger, accidents and violence since 1950, deaths caused by non-communicable diseases with connections to lifestyle and diet have increased significantly. In the last 20 years alone the number of obesity related deaths globally has increased from 2.2 million to 4.7 million. These are just a few examples of the societal changes and issues that we are facing today and it is therefore crucial to discuss how universities can respond to these challenges.

The advent of social media has coincided with or contributed to rising populism, nationalism and terrorism, with populations appearing to be increasingly fragmented along social, economic and political lines, while suicide rates in young people are a matter of increasing concern. On top of these challenges, digital technology continues to advance at pace, particularly in the areas of machine learning and artificial intelligence, enabled by both advances in computing power and the increasing availability of large sets of data. Many commentators are predicting that artificial intelligence will dramatically change the workplace of the future and the skillsets required by future graduates.

Given these challenges, this conference will discuss how universities can evolve to ensure their relevance and value to future society. The conference will, amongst other topics, address the following questions:

- Do the fundamental principles thought to underpin higher education in 1950 remain relevant today? What are the challenges facing university autonomy, academic freedom and scientific integrity, and how can they be addressed?
- How can universities contribute to the creation of a sustainable global society?
- How do we ensure that universities provide individuals with the knowledge and skills necessary to become the leaders, critical thinkers, decision-makers, innovators, specialists, researchers and responsible citizens who will build a better future society?
- What does the digital transformation of society mean for how universities function as organisations and how they educate their students?
- How does internationalization support the relevance of universities to society?
- What responsibility do universities have to enhance health and well-being, and how can this responsibility be fulfilled?
- What is the role of universities with respect to innovation ecosystems nationally, regionally and globally?

Join the General Conference in Dublin and contribute to these exciting debates on the relevance and value of higher education in order to shape the future!