



The Association
of Commonwealth
Universities

THE ROAD TO 2030

**BUILDING A BETTER WORLD
THROUGH HIGHER EDUCATION**

Strategy 2019-2025
2020 update



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CHAIR'S MESSAGE



In universities around the world today, we find the innovators, researchers, and creative thinkers who hold the keys to solving the great issues of our time. Universities are places where ideas can grow and flourish, where curious minds are nurtured and given freedom to explore, and where diverse perspectives and voices are a vital part of learning and growing.

Universities are also undergoing rapid transformation themselves – and this has been accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The higher education sector's response to the crisis has been exemplary, and universities are embracing change and experimenting with new ways of doing things.

In an age where the world is ever more connected and complex, we must work together to find solutions to the challenges we face, both within the sector and in wider society. International networks have an important role to play in sharing knowledge and experience. By forging connections between individuals and institutions all over the world, we can learn from each other and pool our resources for the greater good. This is, of course, the core mission of the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU).

I am proud to be part of an organisation which promotes the vital role of higher education, and shows that positive change can happen when we work together across borders and cultures. The ACU has a key role to play in convening the higher education sector to reimagine what our 'new normal' will look like after the pandemic, as we work towards a brighter future for us all.

Professor Sir Edward Byrne AC
Chair of the ACU Council

FOREWORD



Higher education is the key to realising the potential of individuals, communities, and nations. With more than two thirds of the Commonwealth under the age of 30, access to higher education is essential for a healthier, greener, and fairer future.

But this is a world still divided by geography and wealth. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed longstanding inequalities in our society and made them more evident than ever. The challenges we face in providing access to equitable quality higher education are stark.

Universities have proven their value to society during the coronavirus crisis, through groundbreaking medical research, informing public policy, and supporting their local communities. As we continue to grapple with the immediate impacts of the pandemic, there are longer-term issues that also need to be addressed. There are real inequalities in students' ability to access virtual learning, both within and between countries. Campus closures will have a lasting impact on student outcomes and research outputs. And there is the risk that economic downturn will lead to funding cuts.

The Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) believes that international collaboration is the key to tackling global challenges – and that, in these extraordinary times, it matters more than ever. Our network enables knowledge and insights to be shared across borders, supports new partnerships and collaborations, and provides a platform for collective advocacy and action to address the past and campaign for the future.

Our strategic plan, 'The road to 2030', is now in its second year of operation and is proving a powerful guide and framework for our organisational vision. Our mission, vision, values, and strategic priorities are underpinned by a robust operational plan and key performance indicators that are reviewed annually by our governing Council. Our strategy is also a manifesto for how the ACU works with its members and partners to shape policy, strengthen capacity, convene the sector, and seed change.

It underpins our commitment to ensuring that our vibrant global network continues to thrive. Through our VC roundtables and Champions Summits, we remain in touch with the needs and concerns of our members and continue to offer opportunities to collaborate. Our first virtual Summer School created an online international classroom for students from 15 countries. Our Regional Committees are enhancing links between universities in different Commonwealth countries. And we have continued to make the case for higher education at the highest levels internationally, including at the UN.

Universities transform lives. Through international collaboration, we can foster stronger, more vibrant higher education systems, and create opportunities for individuals and societies. We look forward to continuing to work together to build a better world through higher education.

Dr Joanna Newman MBE FRSA
Chief Executive and Secretary General

OUR CONTEXT: WHY HIGHER EDUCATION MATTERS

Higher education is integral to building healthier, happier, and wealthier societies. Universities equip people with the skills they need to take up or to create jobs, and drive innovation, progress, and prosperity through cutting-edge research.

The crucial role of higher education in economic and social development was acknowledged by its inclusion in the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – the internationally-agreed set of targets that form the core of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Universities train teachers and create pedagogical content for primary and secondary schools, and support lifelong learning – they are a critical part of the education ecosystem underpinning Goal 4 on quality education.

Universities are also living laboratories, developing solutions for local, national, and global challenges. Higher education underpins all development targets, from poverty reduction to employability, health to environmental sustainability. Meeting these targets depends upon skilled graduates and research evidence.

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Key facts

From 1990 to 2017, the global Gross Tertiary Enrolment Rate (GTER) rose from 14% to 38%.

If the GTER continues to grow at this rate, by 2030 or soon after, half of all young people across the world will enter tertiary education.

The global GTER conceals wide regional variation: it is 77% in Europe and North America, but only 9% in sub-Saharan Africa.

Globally, only 55% of households are connected to the internet.

Women are a majority of university graduates but a minority of STEM graduates.

In OECD countries, the majority of primary and secondary-level teachers are women, but fewer than one in two teachers at tertiary level is a woman.

Only 11% of countries have a comprehensive tertiary education equity strategy.

Priorities for higher education in the Commonwealth

Higher education's contribution to meeting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Access and inclusion, including gender equity

International mobility and recognition of qualifications

Employability and the fourth industrial revolution

Growing research capacity through partnerships

The role of universities in fostering respect and understanding

The Commonwealth is a uniquely diverse network of 54 countries – including some of the world's largest, smallest, richest, and poorest nations – united by shared values, heritage, and language.

Its combined population is 2.4 billion, of which more than 60% is aged 29 or under.

32 Commonwealth member countries are small states (usually with a population under 1.5 million), and 25 members are small island developing states.

One in three young people aged between 15 and 29 live in Commonwealth countries: about 640 million out of 1.8 billion.

Sources:

Changing Higher Education for a Changing World, eds. C. Callender, W. Locke, S. Marginson (2020); Commonwealth Secretariat, 'Fact Facts: The Commonwealth' (2020); ITU/UNESCO Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development, *The State of Broadband 2019* (2019); OECD, *Education at a Glance 2019* (2019); UNESCO, *Global Education Monitoring Report 2020* (2020); UNESCO Institute for Statistics



THE ASSOCIATION OF COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITIES



The ACU is an international organisation dedicated to building a better world through higher education.

We believe that international collaboration is central to this ambition. By bringing universities together from around the world – and crucially the people who study and work within them – we help to advance knowledge, promote understanding, broaden minds, and improve lives.

We champion higher education as a cornerstone of stronger societies, supporting our members, partners, and stakeholders as they adapt to a changing world.

ACU Digital Now

Digital Now is our commitment to ensuring that our vibrant global network continues to thrive not just in the short-term, while COVID-19 restricts global mobility and ways of working, but longer term too.

Through ACU Digital Now, we are using digital solutions to cross borders, narrow divides, and create access and opportunity to foster change. Our vision is inclusive, participatory and wholly informed by our members.

We want people to experience the benefits of international 'travel' and hear new perspectives, even while sitting in front of a screen.

At heart, we remain the same: the ACU still believes in the power of higher education to lift lives. With Digital Now, we are merely reflecting the new needs of our times – more connected, more flexible, more responsive. For the foreseeable future, more digital now.

The world's first international university network, established in 1913

More than 500 member universities in 50 countries

66% of member universities are based in low and middle income countries

Accredited by the Commonwealth and the United Nations

Around GBP 650,000 awarded in grants and scholarships annually

3,500 students on an ACU-administered scholarship at any one time – nearly 90,000 alumni over the past 60 years

Governed by member universities through an elected Council

OUR MISSION

To build a better world
through higher education.

OUR VISION

A world in which higher education transcends
borders, strengthens societies, fosters
innovation, and lifts the lives of people
throughout the Commonwealth and beyond.

OUR VALUES

Quality

We strive to excel in all we do, and continuously reflect on our work to find new ways forward.

Collaboration

We believe that cooperation and sharing ideas makes us stronger.

Innovation

We encourage people to think differently, be curious, and explore new ideas.

Respect

We treat others in the way we would like to be treated – with fairness, integrity, and generosity.

Inclusion

We value difference, and encourage and celebrate the diverse voices of our colleagues and partners.



OUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

1

To champion the power of higher education to improve lives

SHAPING POLICY

We will:

- Promote, at the highest levels, the value of universities to society, and their role in sustainable development
- Present a powerful collective voice for universities, large and small, on a global stage
- Lead debate and dialogue around key issues in international higher education

We will do this by:

- Using our accredited status and strategic partnerships to influence policy agendas regularly at international, regional, and national levels, including Commonwealth ministerial meetings (such as the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings) and at the United Nations High-level Political Forum
- Providing thought leadership within the higher education sector and engaging with international, regional, and national platforms, including Going Global, Times Higher Education Summits, and UN forums
- Raising the profile of universities' contribution to sustainable development within the sector and with governments and donors, in order to influence higher education policy

2

To support the long-term vitality of universities

STRENGTHENING CAPACITY

We will:

- Support the development of the core human and institutional resources that underpin the university mission
- Improve equity, inclusion, and access, which are critical to the future of higher education
- Share learning from local and regional initiatives to deliver wider impact

We will do this by:

- Managing innovative projects and platforms that connect universities across borders to help meet demand, enable vital research, improve performance, and develop higher education systems
- Awarding grants to build institutional capacity
- Hosting organisations that promote innovation and best practice in teaching and learning

3

To engage and connect universities across borders, and promote collaboration among them

CONVENING THE SECTOR

We will:

- Strengthen and grow our international network of universities to extend our global reach
- Create forums through which institutional knowledge and resources can be shared and multiplied
- Deepen our engagement with member universities to identify areas of shared interest and remain responsive to their needs

We will do this by:

- Enhancing member engagement at institutional and regional levels
- Growing our policy networks to enable universities to share best practice, create new programmes and shared curricula, and influence policy agendas within and outside the sector
- Facilitating new global partnerships, especially north-south and south-south linkages

4

To deliver educational opportunities that make a positive and lasting difference

SEEDING CHANGE

We will:

- Run prestigious scholarship schemes that build enduring international connections, understanding, and engagement
- Seek to create and expand educational opportunities
- Demonstrate the impact of international educational experiences and initiatives

We will do this by:

- Managing the UK government's three major scholarship schemes: Chevening, Commonwealth, and Marshall Scholarships
- Growing the Queen Elizabeth Commonwealth Scholarships scheme to increase the number of scholarships available to study in developing countries, which directly addresses Sustainable Development Goal target 4b
- Funding grants and fellowships to support international mobility

5

To uphold the ACU's reputation for excellence and demonstrate its impact

BEING A WORLD-CLASS ORGANISATION

We will:

- Create and sustain a high-performance culture by delivering efficient core services to support our people
- Tell our story in compelling new ways and show evidence of our impact
- Forge alliances with strategic partners to further our mission and achieve our objectives

We will do this by:

- Enhancing our standing as an employer of choice to attract, develop, and retain the best talent
- Building our brand to connect with new and existing audiences and inspire engagement with our mission
- Demonstrating our impact through annual reports on our performance, mapped against the operational plan that underpins our strategic priorities



OUR GOVERNANCE

The ACU is a UK-registered charity incorporated by Royal Charter. Our Patron is The Duchess of Sussex.

We are governed by our members through the ACU Council, which is responsible for overseeing the organisation's activities and determining its future strategic direction. Council members – vice-chancellors of ACU member universities from across the Commonwealth, elected by their peers – also act as our Trustees.

CHAIR

Professor Sir Edward Byrne AC – President and Principal, King's College London, UK

HONORARY TREASURER

Professor Stuart Corbridge – Vice-Chancellor and Warden, Durham University, UK

COUNCIL

Professor Dr Francis W O Aduol – Vice-Chancellor, Technical University of Kenya

Professor Pal Ahluwalia – Vice-Chancellor and President, University of the South Pacific

Professor Dr Md Akhtaruzzaman – Vice-Chancellor, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh

Professor S A Ariadurai – Vice-Chancellor, Open University of Sri Lanka

Engr Ahmed Farooq Bazai – Vice-Chancellor, Balochistan University of Information Technology, Engineering and Management Sciences, Pakistan

Professor Shalini Bharat – Vice-Chancellor and Director, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, India

Professor Amanda Broderick – Vice-Chancellor and President, University of East London, UK

Professor Cheryl de la Rey – Vice-Chancellor, University of Canterbury, New Zealand

Professor Wim de Villiers – Rector and Vice-Chancellor, Stellenbosch University, South Africa

Professor Dhanjay Jhurry – Vice-Chancellor, University of Mauritius

Professor Tawana Kupe – Vice-Chancellor and Principal, University of Pretoria, South Africa

Dr Rhonda L Lenton – President and Vice-Chancellor, York University, Canada

Professor Barnabas Nawangwe – Vice-Chancellor, Makerere University, Uganda

Professor Suhas Pednekar – Vice-Chancellor, University of Mumbai, India

Professor Mamokgethi Phakeng – Vice-Chancellor, University of Cape Town, South Africa

Professor Colin Riordan – President and Vice-Chancellor, Cardiff University, UK

Dr Sandeep Sancheti – Vice-Chancellor, SRM Institute of Science and Technology, India

Professor Gabriel Ayum Teye – Vice-Chancellor, University for Development Studies, Ghana



Students at an ACU Summer School held at the University of Nottingham Malaysia Campus, on the theme 'Global food security: can we feed a growing world?'



Participants at a Partnership for Enhanced and Blended Learning (PEBL) network meeting, held in Kigali, Rwanda



Students and academics from ACU member universities working on issues related to gender equality, during The Duchess of Sussex's first official visit as Patron of the ACU



Students at an ACU Summer School hosted by the University of Mauritius, on the theme 'Public health: from a small island state to the global community'





For the lives we can lead

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