

## **The Future of the University: Global, Sustainable and Inclusive.**

19th Annual Conference of the Society for Higher Education Research (GfHf)  
23-25 September 2024 at the FernUniversität in Hagen, Germany

### **CALL FOR PAPERS**

The world has been dealing with multiple crises for several years – be it the now omnipresent climate crisis or the various wars around the world, economic crises, as well as the influx of refugees and displaced people. In times of such crises, higher education is expected to empower people to deal with these challenges. UNESCO's Futures of Education initiative classifies higher education as transformative because it not only responds to the changing world but transforms it (UNESCO, 2020). That's why people look to higher education to address issues such as poverty, health, climate change, job creation, economic development, social cohesion and many other social and political ills. Therefore, higher education has a powerful impact on the wellbeing of the society at large. The United Nations' Agenda 2030 (UNESCO, 2015) sees the contribution of higher education and science as critical to expanding the Sustainable Goal 4, *Quality Education*: "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all." Universities and higher education institutions are also expected to address Goal 13, *Climate Action*: "Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts." It is therefore important that the future of universities must always be orientated towards addressing questions of sustainability and inclusion in a global context. By addressing these goals, higher education is expected to contribute to a better future for all.

Studies that deal with the future of universities and higher education did not start with the onset of the coronavirus pandemic. These studies come into fashion whenever higher education institutions are confronted with societal challenges that require new approaches and forms of research, novel approaches to teaching and learning, and different forms of governance. The examination of the future can be seen in the burgeoning of research institutes at universities, research clusters or networks or alliances in regional and global initiatives. While it is important to position universities to play a critical role in shaping the future, it seems that the interest in looking at the future of universities is more a reaction to existing crises and upheaval rather than an intentional move in shaping the future of higher education. This shows that universities, more than ever before, are confronted with uncertainties and imponderables.

It is against this background that this year's conference will focus on the future of the university from a global perspective, linking it with sustainability and inclusion. These topics were chosen because they have a high impact on the future of higher education and they will be examined through three tracks that are central to the mission of universities. The first track will focus on teaching and learning; the second track will focus on higher education research; and the third track will address issues affecting university management, governance, policies, systems and structures. In order to develop future perspectives, empirically based critical analyses of the present are as welcome as contributions that rethink higher education, higher education development and higher education research.

#### **Teaching & Learning and future**

The rapid development of technology within areas that focus on Artificial Intelligence has raised a number of questions regarding teaching and assessment practices that impact student learning. Furthermore, global crises affect teaching and learning in universities in multiple ways and call for (re-)action. The papers in this track should address the following questions:

- a. What will the student body look like in the future?
- b. How can or should teaching, learning and assessment be shaped in the future? What new formats are needed?
- c. What can future-oriented and inclusive higher education didactics look like? What do these changes mean for teaching staff?
- d. What role will AI play in teaching and learning?
- e. Which topics will become more important in future curricula? Who will set them?

### Higher education research and future

The complexity of the crisis issues calls for new ways of generating knowledge and new forms of collaboration in research. Contributions in this track can critically explore this with reference to the following questions:

- a. How will technology impact new ways of research?
- b. What forms of cooperation amongst individuals and institutions can be envisioned?
- c. What types and forms of research will be more acceptable in the future and why?
- d. How can or should future-oriented research be conducted and what methods and approaches are conceivable?
- e. Which research topics will be addressed in the future? Who will set the topics?

### Governance and future

As the higher education sector is facing numerous changes, organisational systems, structures and practices are bound to transform. The questions that may be asked in response to this track are:

- a. What will universities structures, systems and practices look like? What does this mean for higher education as public good?
- b. What type of policies needs to be in place to guide these changes?
- c. What actions do universities need to put in place addressing the growing need for globalisation, inclusion and sustainability?
- d. How will inclusion and sustainability be defined and practised?
- e. What are suitable steering mechanisms, research networks and bodies that should be in place in the future?

### Open Track

Like every year, there will also be an Open Track in 2024, where current results of national and international higher education research can be presented independently of the theme of the annual conference. These should have demonstrable relevance for the discussion within higher education research.

### References

- UNESCO. (2015). *Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (Nr. A/RES/70/1). UN. <https://sdgs.un.org/publications/transforming-our-world-2030-agenda-sustainable-development-17981>
- UNESCO. (2020). *Humanistic futures of learning: Perspectives from UNESCO Chairs and UNITWIN Networks*. UNESCO. <https://doi.org/10.54675/AYFL2310>

## STRUCTURE AND FORMAT

At the conference, the future forms not only the content horizon of these topics. The structure will be in the form of interactive, open-ended forms of work such as Future Labs. In addition, empirical and theoretical contributions and the presentation of concrete examples relating to the future of the university are welcome.

Contributions can be submitted in German and English. The conference will be in a hybrid format: in-person and online.

The following formats (online and on-site) will be followed:

- **Paper presentation:** 15-minute-presentation followed by a discussion.
- **Symposium:** Several individual contributions on an overarching topic. 90-minute-slots are available for presentations and discussion.
- **FutureLab:** Laboratory in which participants work in a participatory way on a specific topic. The labs will last 90 minutes (including a reflection part).
- **Poster presentation** of a research project or practical example of a research project in the form of a poster.

In addition to these four formats, an **OpenSpace** format will also be offered at the conference. This format provides space for participants to develop a topic or work on a topic together with others on an *ad hoc* basis, either on site or online.

## SUBMISSION OF ABSTRACTS

Abstracts must be submitted via the conference management system ConfTool (<https://www.conftool.net/gfhf2024/>). The submission deadline for abstracts in all conference formats is **24 April 2024**. All submitted abstracts will undergo a peer review process. The results will be announced by the **end of May 2024**.

**Paper or poster presentation:** Please submit an abstract of max. 500 words (including references) stating the planned type of presentation (on site or online). Each author may submit a maximum of two abstracts on different thematic streams.

**Symposium:** In addition to the abstracts for the individual presentations or impulses (max. 500 words each, including references), proposals for a symposium must also include an introduction (max. 300 words) explaining the overarching theme and framing of the symposium. In addition, a moderator for the symposium needs to be nominated. Please indicate whether you would like to offer your symposium on site or online.

Abstracts in the formats **paper presentation**, **poster presentation** and **symposium** should be assigned to one or a maximum of two of the thematic streams listed in the call (incl. Open Track) and contain the following information: Research question(s) and their relevance, methodological approach and, if applicable, data basis, (expected) results. Alternatively, abstracts can be submitted that deal with the conference topic in an innovative way, present a clear and stringent argumentation and relate to a maximum of two of the thematic streams listed in the call (excl. Open Track).

**FutureLab:** Please submit an abstract of max. 500 words (including references) stating the planned type of implementation (on-site or online). In addition to a brief description of the topic and the references to one or more of the thematic streams mentioned in the call, proposals for the FutureLab must also include the planned procedure and the way in which the participants will be involved. In

addition, please nominate a moderator for the FutureLab as well as further participants (if applicable).

The abstracts of the papers included in the programme will be made available to all participants in a “Book of Abstracts” before the conference.

#### **IMPORTANT DATES AND DEADLINES**

- **24 April 2024:** Submission deadline for abstracts via ConfTool (<https://www.conftool.net/gfhf2024/>)
- **End of May 2024:** Notification of results of the reviews via ConfTool
- **Mid-June 2024:** Publication of the conference programme
- **13 September 2024:** End of the registration period for the GfHf Annual Conference
- **23–25 September 2024:** GfHf Annual Conference at the FernUniversität in Hagen; the HoFoNa Annual Meeting (meeting of young researchers) will take place on the first day of the event (23 September)

#### **FURTHER INFORMATION**

**Conference website:** <https://fernuni-hagen.de/gfhf2024/en>

**Contact:** [gfhf2024@fernuni-hagen.de](mailto:gfhf2024@fernuni-hagen.de)

**Venue:** FernUniversität in Hagen, Germany

**Programme Committee:** Prof. Eva Cendon, Elise Glaß (FernUniversität in Hagen) and Prof. Mpine Makoe (University of South Africa)

**Conference organisation:** Emilia Kasljevic

**Multimedia realisation of the conference and didactic counselling:** Center for Learning and Innovation, FernUniversität in Hagen