

The Social Role of Universities in a Divided World

U7+ 2026 Communiqué

PREAMBLE

At a time of global crisis, the U7+ Alliance of World Universities seeks to partner with G7 governments to strengthen our democracies, advance economic growth and innovation, and promote effective multilateral cooperation.

Universities are engines of renewal. We educate new generations of citizens and leaders; support cutting-edge research vital for the economy and society; and serve as trusted partners in our communities – local, national, and international.

In the midst of deep divisions within and across our societies, higher education institutions play a critical role in building and sharing reliable knowledge, promoting constructive debate, and working with diverse stakeholders to address policy problems.

The artificial intelligence revolution highlights the social responsibilities of universities. AI is driving educational transformation, facilitating basic and applied research, and reshaping the economy and society. Yet access to new technologies is uneven, and AI tools and social media algorithms are spreading misinformation and undermining trust in public institutions.

At this historic juncture, universities remain strongly committed to educational access and scientific excellence for the common good. We seek to partner with G7 governments to address the divides that plague our democracies, promote responsible and inclusive technological progress, and support effective cooperation on pressing global issues.

THE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES OF UNIVERSITIES

The last two decades have seen impressive growth in university enrollments around the world. Across the G7, education in the humanities, social sciences, and STEM fields has prepared generations of citizens for leadership in business, civil society, and the public sector. Scientific research and its applications have made vital contributions to economic growth and social progress, including poverty reduction, improved public health, and protection of the environment. Universities have brought together diverse communities – across social and ideological divides – in a shared enterprise that serves broader publics. And through dynamic international networks inclusive of the Global South, they have sought to address structural inequalities and promote intercultural dialogue.

Despite this record of achievement, the higher education sector faces a crisis of public trust in some parts of the world. The cost of university degrees has risen considerably for

many students and families, and some citizens view higher education as a bastion of privilege unaccountable to our wider societies. Government officials in some countries have questioned the validity of evidence-based scientific research in areas including climate change and public health. Others have sought to undermine academic freedom and the institutional autonomy of universities by imposing ideological agendas.

As we enter the AI era, dynamic, independent and inclusive university communities are well positioned to cooperate with governments, business, and civil society to drive economic growth and promote resilient societies. Universities are home to cutting-edge research on AI technology and its applications across sectors including health care, energy, and manufacturing. They seek to promote adaptive and accessible education programs that provide citizens with the skills to thrive in dynamic knowledge economies. And their productive research and educational partnerships with governments boost national competitiveness and foster global cooperation in a rapidly changing world order.

Universities have a particularly central role to play in combating the social mistrust and digital manipulation that threaten our democracies. Over the past decade, the rise of social media and the decline of trusted mainstream news have reinforced political polarization and mutual suspicion. More recently, the emergence of generative AI and deepfake images and videos have undermined faith in objective truth. Vibrant public spheres, essential for open societies, are in retreat. In this new “post-truth” environment, the higher education sector remains fully committed to critical thinking and free scientific inquiry as core social values. In recent years, universities have launched multiple initiatives to promote dialogue across difference and support research and impact programs around urgent policy issues.

In an era of rapid technological and geopolitical change, our institutions are committed to strengthening civic culture and institutions by advancing our core academic mission, bridging social divides, and promoting responsible and sustainable innovation.

COMMITMENTS BY U7+ MEMBERS

We commit to:

Educational excellence that prepares students for both successful careers and service to society. Accessible programs that combine critical thinking with the responsible use of technology will position our countries to compete and cooperate effectively into the future.

Research for impact that advances solutions to the challenges facing our societies from the grassroots to the global level. Dynamic scientific research will promote progress across a range of critical issues, from economic growth and social cohesion to public health, environmental sustainability, and ethical AI.

Advancing civil discourse and respectful disagreement through creative and intentional programs. Ongoing consultations and mutual learning across our institutions will increase our capacity to learn from one another and to engage difference in our communities and within and across our societies.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO G7 AND OTHER GOVERNMENTS

We invite G7 governments to partner with us through:

Institutional support for universities' educational and research mission that respects academic freedom as a driver of knowledge creation and economic and social innovation.

National consultations that convene higher education leaders with partners in the public and private sectors and civil society to address the challenges of the AI revolution, including threats to democracy and society posed by misinformation.

International cooperation that brings university leaders into global policy conversations about shared challenges ranging from AI and trade to climate change and security.