

UNESCO Chair, Protection of Human Rights Defenders and Expansion of Political Space

Short Term Action Plan for Universities as Sites of Protection (April 2023-March 2025)

This document sets out the Action Plan for the first two years of the UNESCO Chair addressing the role of universities in the 'Protection of HRDs, and Expansion of Political Space'. The Action Plan has been collaboratively produced, and draws on the following sources: 1) The process leading to the development of the application for the UNESCO Chair; 2) Research for the Working Paper, Universities as Sites of Activism and Protection; and 3) Discussion at the March 2023 launch of the UNESCO Chair in York (UK). Some activities are labelled in the language used in the proposal to UNESCO e.g Policy Lab, Innovation Lab.

Research

Action Plan for Universities as Sites of Protection – first draft developed and circulated for discussion after the UNESCO Chair launch, March 2023.

Year 1: Finalize existing research on Universities and Protection, and Universities as Sites of Protection Relating to Gender-based Violence. Working Paper completed on the former, article submission to follow. Papers about four universities on GBV are drafted – the papers need to be completed and a comparative Working Paper and article developed.

Year 1-2: Research on pedagogical innovations, 'HRD-Educators' and Pro-Bono Law Clinics (moved from Year 3 in the UNESCO proposal as it was highlighted as a priority at the launch). Literature review and survey of university programmes/courses.

Years 1-2: Research on the mainstreaming of teaching on relevant topics. At some universities every student has to take a module on a given topic e.g. climate change at the University of Barcelona, and human rights at the University of Buenos Aires. What are the motivations behind such initiatives, and what impact do they have on student activism and attitudes, the university as a site of protection, etc.?

Year 2: Universities and Cities as Partners in Protection. In collaboration with Justice and Peace (Shelter Cities) and ICORN (hosting artists at risk).

Other research projects now under the umbrella of the UNESCO Chair

Years 1-2: Research on Indigenous Spiritual and Cultural Protection Practices in Colombia (Ritualising Protection Project), led by Piergiuseppe Parisi (CAHR), aims to understand how spiritual and cultural practices protect the Nasa indigenous people in the midst of the Colombian armed conflict. It also seeks to inform a dialogue between the (local and, potentially, national) government and the community to ensure the designing of more responsible state protection strategies. Links to the UNESCO Chair include the attempt to forge connections between the protection of people, values and different forms of knowledge.

Years 1-2: A project on Human Rights Leadership in Challenging Times, led by Eric Hoddy and John Gray at CAHR, aims to understand the role universities can play in supporting leadership in the context of current challenges, such as Covid-19 and its legacies and

attacks by governments on political space. The project will work with defenders and activist participants to support their own leadership development through training workshops, executive coaching and the creation of individual action plans that they can apply in their work.

Years 1-2: UNESCO is keen for our Chair to support research on Scientists at risk. I have been discussing with Richard Friend (Environment and Geography, University of York) how to find an entry-point to this issue and group of academics. We have discussed conducting a piece of research on climate change academics, increasing pressure for them to take more activist positions, and the implications of this stance, including negative responses by states and corporations. Initially, an RA will do a literature review, conduct some interviews (@20) and write a Working Paper.

Years 1-2: Under the auspices of the Global Higher Education and Research (GHEAR) at WUN, I am involved in a project to develop a collaborative research bid on two linked themes – academic freedom and knowledge diplomacy – in the context of ‘shrinking academic space’ (ICNL, 2019), and more generally attacks on democratic freedoms and more established approaches to multilateralism. The project will focus on knowledge diplomacy conducted by universities on issues linked to the SDGs, notably climate change and human rights. I am applying to WUN for a small grant to conduct some pilot research.

Funding bids

Bids submitted to WUN (see above) and the VolkswagenStiftung (see below)

Innovation Lab

Year 1: In the UNESCO proposal the first Innovation Lab was planned for Year 2. But Paul Gready has been working on a bid led by a German colleague (Rosario Figari-Layus) on a proposal for an event in Hannover, Germany in November, titled: ‘First They Came For...’: Human Rights Challenges and new Solidarities in the Context of Shrinking Spaces from an Intersectional Perspective. The event is comparative in two senses. First, between professional groups - civil society, journalists/the media, and academia - that have been targeted with measures that are both similar but also to some extent distinct. Second, between regions - Europe, Latin America and Africa - which illustrate global trends but also the importance of understanding context in framing any response. Across both comparative axes the focus will be on strategies to contest shrinking civic and political space, on moving from reactive to proactive responses, and on lesser explored avenues of knowledge exchange - for example, academics learning from physical and digital security measures used by NGOs, or countries in Europe learning from other parts of the world. This event will lead to further research outputs to complement those outlined above.

Year 2: focus and location of Innovation Lab to be decided.

Teaching, Capacity Building, Knowledge Exchange

Years 1-2: ‘HRD-Educators’ – knowledge exchange based on the research mentioned above, to support affiliating and embedding HRDs into universities, providing both pedagogical and protection benefits. This will be supported by online workshops and knowledge exchange.

Years 1-2: Pro-Bono Law Clinics – a CAHR member of staff has already visited the University of Witwatersrand to establish links. We will work on developing the York clinic and expanding the network of clinics, with a view to taking on relevant cases in Year 2.

Years 1-2: Early Careers Researcher (ECR) Network – two leads for this network have already been recruited: Boitumelo Papane, University of the Western Cape (UWC), and Emma Jackson (University of York). At the African Hub event at the UWC in August 2023, there will be time allocated to ERCs and to launching this network. We will ensure that ECRs are involved in and supported by mentoring, exchanges/secondments, training, co-authorship opportunities and broader leadership possibilities within the UNESCO Chair network.

Years 1-2: Capacity building and sharing of learning – exchanges/secondments (2 total, 1 for ERCs), and linked online workshops and training (2 total, 1 for ECRs) aligned to research, teaching and impact initiatives e.g. sharing learning about challenges facing scholars engaged in research on climate change, or pursuing knowledge diplomacy.

Years 1-2: Arts collaborations – these will be linked to making research findings and other outputs more accessible.

External Advocacy and Outreach

Year 1-2: Calendar of events – A calendar of events will include a mix of online and face-to-face events, and a blend of workshops, training events and conferences.

The calendar will include a workshop at the University of the Western Cape in August 2023. This will function as a Policy Lab for the research on gender-based and sexual violence, a vehicle to develop an African Hub within the network, and a vehicle to launch the ECR network.

Years 1-2: Further Policy Labs in Year 1-2 will focus on leadership, and on the responsibilities of researchers and universities in relation to the preservation of indigenous knowledge (see the research projects above), and will take place in York.

