Higher education is central to the global knowledge economy as well as to both social mobility and workforce development worldwide. Vast investments are being made in higher education across the globe—developed countries spend 1.6% of GDP while emerging economies allocate somewhat less. Global enrolments approach 200 million students.

The higher education enterprise, including both institutions and systems, is growing in scope and complexity, presenting a new set of opportunities and challenges. The effective management of institutions and systems, capable of responding to the needs of stakeholders and informing wise policy initiatives, requires professional expertise, a solid knowledge base, relevant research on key issues, and effective training for professionals responsible for academic institutions and systems.

Higher education research centers and programs—within a broader ‘ecosystem’ consisting of policy makers in government, the private sector, and non-governmental organizations—are crucial for the success of the enterprise. Higher education research centers generate the data and analysis needed to make informed decisions about higher education policy and practice, while higher education training programs produce the professionals needed to carry
this work forward in practical terms in higher education institutions and related organizations.

Higher education research centers and programs serve as hubs of expertise that can and should be leveraged by all stakeholders, especially policy makers, to expand our collective understanding of good practices across all dimensions of higher education design and delivery. How can this best be achieved?

Higher education research centers and programs require:

- Adequate funding and resources.
- Effective networking, nationally and internationally.
- Active liaison with the policymaking community.

Thoughtful leadership, future-oriented planning, and a sustained commitment to the crucial mission of higher education research as a key ingredient for effective policy formulation and implementation will be needed more than ever in the coming years. All relevant stakeholders should recognize this fundamental dynamic between research, policy, and practice, and contribute substantively to the realization of its full potential. The future of higher education hangs in the balance.

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