

# IFHE Position Statement



INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION  
FOR HOME ECONOMICS

## Home Economics in the 21st Century

*Prepared by the Think Tank Committee of IFHE in consultation with internationally prominent home economics scholars and members of the Federation 2005-2007, under the leadership of Dr Donna Pendergast. This is an organic document developed for the next decade with the intention of ongoing review and providing a foundation for the work of the Federation, its individual and organizational members.*

### Preamble

The International Federation for Home Economics (IFHE) was established in 1908 following the conception of the profession over a period of more than a decade, informed by various initiatives around the world at that time. This Position Statement acknowledges these historical origins and subsequent Declarations, Glossaries and Definitions adopted by IFHE, yet insists on locating the profession in the contemporary context, looking ahead to viable and progressive visions of home economics for the twenty-first century and beyond.

This IFHE Position Statement - *Home Economics in the 21st Century* - serves as a platform to achieve this goal. It intends to encapsulate the diverse nature of the field and hence throws a broad net to embrace its multiplicity and the various ways in which it has adapted to meet specific requirements, in terms of educational, business, social, economic, spiritual, cultural, technological, geographic and political contexts.

This Position Statement can be used to situate Home Economics in contemporary society, and may serve the purpose of providing defensible arguments for individuals and professional groups requiring such support.

### Home Economics

Home Economics is a field of study and a profession, situated in the human sciences that draws from a range of disciplines to achieve optimal and sustainable living for individuals, families and communities. Its historical origins place Home Economics in the context of the home and household, and this is extended in the 21st century to

include the wider living environments as we better understand that the capacities, choices and priorities of individuals and families impact at all levels, ranging from the household, to the local and also the global (glocal) community. Home Economists are concerned with the empowerment and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities, and of facilitating the development of attributes for lifelong learning for paid, unpaid and voluntary work; and living situations. Home Economics professionals are advocates for individuals, families and communities.

Home Economics content draws from multiple disciplines, synthesizing these through interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary inquiry. This coalescing of disciplinary knowledge is essential because the phenomena and challenges of everyday life are not typically one-dimensional. The content (disciplinary bases) from which studies of home economics draw is dependent upon the context, but might include: food, nutrition and health; textiles and clothing; shelter and housing; consumerism and consumer science; household management; design and technology; food science and hospitality; human development and family studies; education and community services and much more. The capacity to draw from such disciplinary diversity is a strength of the profession, allowing for the development of specific interpretations of the field, as relevant to the context. This disciplinary diversity coupled with the aim of achieving optimal and sustainable living means that home economics has the potential to be influential in all sectors of society by intervening and transforming political, social, cultural, ecological, economic and technological systems, at glocal levels. This is driven by the ethics of the profession, based on

the values of caring, sharing, justice, responsibility, communicating, reflection and visionary foresight.

Home Economics can be clarified by four dimensions or areas of practice:

- as an *academic discipline* to educate new scholars, to conduct research and to create new knowledge and ways of thinking for professionals and for society
- as an arena for *everyday living* in households, families and communities for developing human growth potential and human necessities or basic needs to be met
- as a *curriculum area* that facilitates students to discover and further develop their own resources and capabilities to be used in their personal life, by directing their professional decisions and actions or preparing them for life
- as a *societal arena to influence and develop policy* to advocate for individuals, families and communities to achieve empowerment and wellbeing, to utilise transformative practices, and to facilitate sustainable futures.

To be successful in these four dimensions of practice means that the profession is constantly evolving, and there will always be new ways of performing the profession. This is an important characteristic of the profession, linking with the twenty-first century requirement for all people to be 'expert novices', that is, good at learning new things, given that society is constantly and rapidly changing with new and emergent issues and challenges.

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## Essential Dimensions of Home Economics

The thread or essential ingredient that all subjects, courses of study and professionals identifying as home economists must exhibit has at least three essential dimensions:

- a focus on fundamental needs and practical concerns of individuals and family in everyday life and their importance both at the individual and near community levels, and also at societal and global levels so that wellbeing can be enhanced in an ever changing and ever challenging environment;
- the integration of knowledge, processes and practical skills from multiple disciplines synthesised through interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary inquiry and pertinent paradigms; AND
- demonstrated capacity to take critical/transformational/ emancipatory action to enhance wellbeing and to advocate for individuals, families and communities at all levels and sectors of society.
- Ensuring the interplay of these dimensions of Home Economics is the basis upon which the profession can be sustained into the future. Because of these attributes, Home Economics is distinctively positioned to collaborate with other professionals.

## The name 'Home Economics'

The preferred name of the field of study and profession is 'Home Economics'. Historical records of the Federation document the challenges various names, titles and terminology have posed for IFHE, including the complexity of translation. Internationally, the field of study has consistently retained the name Home Economics and is recognised both within and beyond the boundaries of the profession. The Federation is committed to re-branding and repositioning, not renaming the profession.

## Impact of the profession

Home Economics is a vital profession currently enjoying renewed attention in the present era. Our contemporary world is characterised as one of unprecedented transition from industrial to knowledge-based culture and globalised economy, with all encompassing effects on society and

culture. The information age is complex, diverse and unpredictable, yet has a strong commitment to retaining those elements of society that are valued, while looking ahead to the imperative of improving the world in which we all live such that sustainable development is possible. Herein lies the potential for Home Economics and the reason for renewed attention to the field of study, as this is the key imperative of the profession.

Examples of enacting the transformative powers of Home Economics professionals include:

- Home Economics professionals were instrumental to instituting the 1994 International Year of the Family which centred 'family' as a political issue and has impacted on family life in many countries of the world
- Poverty alleviation, gender equality and social justice concerns are a priority of Home Economics professionals, with many projects and initiatives conducted in such areas
- IFHE is an International Non Governmental Organization (INGO), having consultative status with the United Nations (ECOSOC, FAO, UNESCO, UNISEF) and with the Council of Europe
- Home Economists partner with other Non-Governmental Organisations to improve the lot of families world wide. Specific areas of collaboration/cooperation include: Peace Education, gender issues/ women's empowerment, women's reproductive issues, HIV/AIDS, intervention projects for families in distress and other human rights issues
- Home Economists are active in lobbying for issues that will improve the well-being of a diversity of families and households
- Home Economists serve as consultants in major businesses and organizations dealing with personal home economics, care and consumer services. They are also active entrepreneurs in their own rights
- The current four-year theme on Sustainable Development for World Home Economics Day is a strong stand that impacts on family life positively
- Home Economists are strong advocates for individual and family wellbeing worldwide, evident in for example the

development of relevant curriculum for schools and universities.

## Directions for the Decade

The focus on the decade ahead is on future proofing, which describes the elusive process of trying to anticipate future developments, so that action can be taken to minimise possible negative consequences, and to seize opportunities. Future proofing the Home Economics profession and the Federation is a challenging task but one which is necessary to ensure a sustainable vision both for the profession, and for individual members. The International Federation of Home Economics has commenced its future-proofing strategy by focussing on questions of sustainability, advocacy and the active creation of preferred futures for Home Economics, relevant disciplinary fields, and the profession itself, while critically reflecting upon and being informed by its historical roots. The 2008 IFHE World Congress *Home Economics: Reflecting on the past; Creating the future*, is a future oriented first step towards this strategy, as is the development of this Position Statement, *Home Economics in the 21st Century*.

## Keyword Glossary

Expert Novice - a person or profession good at learning new things; also known as adaptive experts

Family - self definition

Future-proofing - anticipating future developments to minimize negative impacts and optimize opportunities

Glocal - global and local contexts taken together

Lifelong Learning - the need for continual learning and on the sets of generic skills and capacities that will equip individuals and societies to embrace the expanded notion of learning

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