

UNESCO Chairs / UNITWIN Networks Consultation Report Form¹

Under the UNESCO World Higher Education Conference ([WHEC 2022](#))

[Section for Higher Education](#) | Division for Education 2030

Basic information

Date of consultation	20/10/2021			
Location of consultation	Online/virtual			
Hosting UNESCO Chair or UNITWIN Network (include webpage if available)	Canadian Commission for UNESCO			
Name and email address of key contact person	Isabelle Levert-Chiasson, Education Program Officer, Canadian Commission for UNESCO Isabelle.levert-chiasson@ccunesco.ca			
Complete name, title, and affiliation of moderator(s)	Bob Watts, Adjunct Professor and Fellow in the School of Policy Studies, Queen's University, Ontario, Canada			
Language of consultation	English and a variety of Indigenous languages			
Time spent in consultation (minutes)	3 hours			
Number of participants	21			
Participant profiles (please, briefly describe the composition of the group)	The group was composed primarily of Indigenous people holding a variety of academic and/or leadership positions at post-secondary education institutions, including Indigenous-owned and -governed post-secondary institutions, mainly in Canada but also in other countries. Several participants represented non-governmental organizations or councils focused on Indigenous advanced education.			
Countries represented by participants	Participants were from Canada, the United States and New Zealand. A participant from India was also invited, but was unable to attend.			
Stakeholder groups (please mark with an "x" as appropriate)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Professors/ Researchers	<input type="checkbox"/> Students/Youth	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Higher education managers/authorities	<input type="checkbox"/> Private sector
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NGOs/civil society	<input type="checkbox"/> International organisations	<input type="checkbox"/> Policy makers/government	<input type="checkbox"/> Others (please, specify):

¹ This template includes some elements used by the consultation developed by [The Futures of Education](#) initiative.

Which theme did you choose for this consultation?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Theme 1: Impact of COVID-19 on higher education | <input type="checkbox"/> Theme 7: Financing higher education |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Theme 2: Higher education and the SDGs | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Theme 8: Data and knowledge production |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Theme 3: Inclusion in higher education | <input type="checkbox"/> Theme 9: International cooperation to enhance synergies |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Theme 4: Quality and relevance of programmes | <input type="checkbox"/> Theme 10: The futures of higher education |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Theme 5: Academic mobility in higher education | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (please, specify): Indigenous perspectives on higher education; decolonizing science and knowledge |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Theme 6: Higher education governance | |

Synthesis of contributions

Kindly provide a summary, synthesising and reflecting the ideas provided by all participants. There is no need to identify participants. Consultation reports should not exceed 1,200 words, including the responses to the three questions outlined below (consider a balance of approximately 400 words per response). If necessary, add attachments. Remember that question 1 is general, but questions 2 and 3 should refer to the specific theme you have chosen (see list in **Annex 1**).

Question 1: *What should be the present and future role of higher education to favour the wellbeing of humans and sustainability of societies?*

The starting point for our consultation was that higher education in its current format emerged from a narrow settlers' perspective and continues to largely exclude the perspectives and ways of knowing of Indigenous Peoples—to its own detriment as well as theirs.

To favour the well-being of all people inclusively and the sustainability of societies overall, higher education systems must be deconstructed and co-created—with Indigenous post-secondary institutions as leaders, ensuring accountability to Indigenous nations, knowledge and languages—into new structures that respect and incorporate Indigenous knowledge and values. They should be redesigned to feel inclusive to Indigenous students. Rather than expecting students to conform to existing norms, they should explore what Indigenous wisdom and culture, developed over millennia, can offer humankind.

By changing to be more appreciative of students from diverse backgrounds and cultures, public universities will retain more of those students and, in so doing, help them to achieve higher education, equity and a means of contributing to and sharing in the socio-economic benefits of our societies.

A better structure for higher education would focus on accessibility, inclusiveness and respect for Indigenous ways of knowing. This should be validated and incorporated into curricula in recognition of the fact that, as currently practiced, Western science has often proven more harmful than beneficial to sustainability. Higher education should also evolve to include Indigenous methods of knowledge acquisition, such as land-based education. These knowledge systems and methods can benefit and help preserve the world's ecosystems and biospheres to ensure they remain habitable to humans for generations to come.

By improving equity, decolonizing knowledge, opening science, reducing or eliminating racism, and offering robust and culturally attuned supports to students to ensure they complete their studies, Indigenous higher education models support the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development

Goals. Indigenous-led higher education institutions and models should receive funding that is equal to that given to other institutions along with support for the accreditation of their programs and educational designations. Consideration should also be given to building bridges between Indigenous and Western educational models and institutions for the benefit of both.

Question 2: What are the main **challenges/problems/gaps** in relation to decolonizing institutions, science and knowledge?

Overall, participants of our consultation noted that while Indigenous higher education institutions in some parts of Canada have made significant progress in recent decades, particularly in terms of recognition and accreditation, those in certain other Canadian provinces and around the world still need help to develop and to close significant equity gaps. They identified challenges and problems in the following areas.

Equity, colonization and racism

Participants identified challenges in the areas of equity, colonization and racism. They noted that deeper discussions need to take place on these topics: at the moment, these conversations are still far too superficial. As one speaker noted, words like “Indigenization” and “decolonization” can be added to every document, but they are not useful unless deep thought has gone into the concepts and unless it’s clear what they mean, why they’re important, and how these processes will actually work in practice. Most higher education institutions have not yet stepped beyond the jargon to apply critical thought, deeper meaning and follow-up action to terms like these.

Partnerships and bridging

Participants also identified the need to validate Indigenous knowledge in post-secondary education. They discussed the requirement for partnerships and bridging between mainstream institutions and Indigenous ones to secure the accountability, validation and recognition of Indigenous knowledge in both.

Indigenous language fluency

The above challenges are intertwined with a key gap: Indigenous language fluency. Participants noted that because Indigenous knowledge is coded within Indigenous languages, language is a cornerstone of education. Greater equality between colonial languages (like English and French) and Indigenous languages is needed, along with more Indigenous teachers who are truly proficient speakers. This, in turn, speaks to the need to revitalize and reclaim Indigenous languages and to create pathways and programs for learning them so more people can become fluent. This is the domain of Indigenous Nations and institutions.

Data for evidence-informed leadership

Participants also spoke of the need to explore the role of data, particularly in terms of its connection to equity and evidence-informed leadership for parity and Indigenous outcomes in higher education. Data can support a call for public education institutions to work harder to lift Indigenous participation, retention and outcomes at both the undergraduate and graduate levels and, in so doing, grow the Indigenous higher-education workforce and develop Indigenous leaders in academia. The goal is to intentionally develop Indigenous researchers who can design and lead research for and by Indigenous communities and demonstrate how Indigenous knowledge-making is world-class, employing authentic Indigenous research methodologies.

More Indigenous faculty and leadership

A related leadership concern is the low number of Indigenous faculty members at public higher-education institutions. To literally change the face of higher education, there is a need to move beyond thinking that having a single Indigenous person on staff is sufficient. This need is connected to the requirement for better support to retain existing Indigenous faculty members. Universities should put mechanisms in place to recognize the unique responsibilities that Indigenous faculty members have to their communities and support them in carrying these out. As noted earlier, statements are not enough: structural change with specific mechanisms in place are needed. It's critical to have Indigenous faculty and staff lead, shape and govern these programs and ensure the cultural safety of students.

Accreditation

Another gap identified relates to accreditation: the need for Indigenous higher education institutions to have their own recognized programming, degrees and diplomas. This entails validating programs, recognizing the importance and value of Indigenous knowledge systems, and providing sufficient funding. It also requires developing mechanisms for Indigenous entities to review and accredit any Indigenous knowledge or language programming in public or private institutions. In most provinces, one of the greatest inequities that exists between public and Indigenous institutes is funding: where Indigenous institutes are treated similarly to private colleges, they receive only 5 to 25 percent of what public institutions do.

Support for Indigenous students

Finally, there is a gap when it comes to Indigenous students' sense of value to the world: participants noted that it is important for Indigenous young people to feel that they are important for humanity and that their knowledge and communities are scientifically valid and needed. However, the chain of knowledge transmission is currently broken. To repair it—and to ensure future Indigenous leadership in research and education—more Indigenous people must be part of higher-education institutions, and Indigenous institutes must be appropriately resourced. Achieving this will involve educating greater numbers of Indigenous people at the post-secondary level, recruiting them as faculty in universities, and retaining them.

The above challenge speaks to a final underlying one: ensuring more Indigenous people attend post-secondary education in the first place and stay for the duration. This means putting more robust student supports in place. Supporting Indigenous students (who must often travel to a different part of the country and a completely new environment and culture to pursue their studies) looks completely different from supporting non-Indigenous students.

Question 3: *What needs to **change** or be **created** to face these challenges **within** and/or **outside** of higher education institutions?*

To address the gaps and challenges listed above, participants at our consultation suggested the following solutions.

1. Higher education should **incorporate Indigenous perspectives and contexts and support Indigenous languages**. Curricula should be Indigenized. A starting point would be to bring in Elders, Chiefs, education directors and others who work in higher education to collaborate with faculty and develop better pedagogy, provided it is authenticated or accredited by Indigenous entities.

2. We need to **build bridges between Indigenous ways of being and thinking and Western ways** of gathering and processing knowledge by recognizing the differences between the two and appreciating the contributions of each. In a deeper sense, we need to build up Indigenous culture and languages to offer an important sustainability arc to Western science and culture. Part of this solution needs to be validation and accreditation of programs and degrees to provide assurance. Related, non-Indigenous schools need to work with or alongside Indigenous post-secondary institutions to ensure the latter have a role, visibility and influence and can take responsibility for the education of Indigenous people.
3. **Indigenous institutes could welcome learners from other cultures:** Part of the path forward is for people to come to Indigenous places of learning (to learn Indigenous ways of knowing) rather than expecting Indigenous teachers to go to their places, as is too often the case currently.
4. Related, we need to **better prepare teachers and provide more opportunities for education**, and as we develop these programs, we must incorporate Indigenous ways of knowing, thought and practice. We further need to recognize that Western science does not work outside of time, and can create harmful products and practices. We need more Indigenous people in the science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) fields to provide leadership and to advise on what is safe.
5. **Indigenous science needs to be recognized** for its role in protecting and respecting place and ensuring that life on Earth remains sustainable over time. For this to happen, we further need to recognize that Indigenous ways of knowing are learned not in classrooms, but on the land, and we need to find a way to bring this awareness and practice to the level of higher education. Related, we need to develop an intellectual property policy to protect Indigenous knowledge and ideas.
6. **Indigenous languages must be revitalized** in communities. For this to happen, more people who are fluent in these languages must be present and willing to teach them in communities, and curricula must be developed that can be easily administered by people who, while being fluent speakers themselves, may not have teaching experience. We also need to develop curricula that are properly accredited, delivered, accountable and publicly funded.
7. **Indigenous students and faculty need to see others who look and think like them** in their post-secondary institutions. That said, for Indigenous people in large mainstream institutions, there is a need to give thorough consideration to how to maintain Indigenous ways of knowing, thinking and understanding the world.
8. **Indigenous institutes should be sanctuaries** where learners can come for rejuvenation and encouragement. They should be places of language revitalization, community engagement, research, inclusiveness and accessibility. For this to happen, institutions must be able to go beyond simply requesting “space in the academy” and begin instead to define that space.

Which Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were particularly emphasised during this consultation?

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Goal 1: No poverty | <input type="checkbox"/> Goal 7: Affordable and clean energy | <input type="checkbox"/> Goal 12: Responsible consumption and production |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Goal 2: Zero hunger | <input type="checkbox"/> Goal 8: Decent work and economic growth | <input type="checkbox"/> Goal 13: Climate action |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Goal 3: Good health and well-being | <input type="checkbox"/> Goal 9: Industry, innovation, and infrastructure | <input type="checkbox"/> Goal 14: Life below water |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Goal 4: Quality education | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Goal 10: Reduced inequality | <input type="checkbox"/> Goal 15: Life on land |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Goal 5: Gender equality | <input type="checkbox"/> Goal 11: Sustainable cities and communities | <input type="checkbox"/> Goal 16: Peace and justice strong institutions |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Goal 6: Clean water and sanitation | | <input type="checkbox"/> Goal 17: Partnerships to achieve the goals. |

You may provide additional feedback...

Are there any other issues that should be considered in relation to higher education challenges and options in your community, your region, the world?

Since our consultation focused on Indigenous perspectives on higher education, we will answer this question from that point of view. We will focus here on the importance of dialogue in rebuilding Indigenous education.

It is important to begin by recalling that Indigenous Peoples in Canada have experienced colonization processes through forms of Western education that have tried to destroy their identities, languages, cultures, livelihoods, and land-based methods of learning and teaching. This remains problematic across the country.

However, in the Province of Ontario, there have been some improvements since the *Indigenous Institute Act* was passed in 2017. The Act recognizes Indigenous communities' control of their people's education. It recognizes First Nation community ownership and the need to assure the highest quality of education. That assurance comes from the Indigenous Advanced Education and Skills Council, a legislatively recognized organization. One of the Council's functions is to establish and implement standards and benchmarks. Its board of directors approves program capacity and quality and organizational capacity. Its board committee applies standards and benchmarks and identifies any other conditions that Indigenous institutes must meet.

Nine Indigenous institutes are now recognized under the Act and can develop and offer their own programs that have been assured through standards and benchmarks. All are part of a new Indigenous institute pillar that is, in turn, part of Ontario's overall post-secondary system. The system includes private career colleges, polytechnics, and public colleges and universities. No other province or territory in Canada has yet recognized the ability of post-secondary Indigenous institutes to do these things.

Looking beyond Ontario and Canada: Article 14 of the UN Declaration articulates that Indigenous Peoples have the right to control and establish their own education systems in a manner appropriate to their own methods of cultural learning and teaching. That article is also in the preamble of the *Indigenous Institute Act*. However, creating legislation is one thing; implementing it is another. To do its work, the Council has implemented a dialogue process with Indigenous institutes, learners and communities.

This dialogue engages experts in Indigenous education, knowledge and language, and includes the development of outcome documents. It provides the Council with evidence-based information and research and allows the Council to obtain information, direction and knowledge from Indigenous institutes and their representatives. It is an open and ongoing participatory process between the Council and the institutes, and includes learners, their teaching staff, students, community members and Knowledge Keepers. The dialogue supports the development, implementation and integrity of the quality assurance process within Ontario's Indigenous institutes pillar. It is helping to build consensus on issues that affect Indigenous institutes.

Such dialogue is a critical component of the commitment to make a change in post-secondary education. It is an approach that leaves no one behind. We recommend that other jurisdictions consider its merit as they try to address challenges and options that involve the need to integrate, recognize and accredit knowledge systems that, until now, have remained outside of the Western higher-education milieu.

Is there any other comment you wish to share with UNESCO or the organisers of the WHEC2022?

Currently, we are not on track to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The world needs to restore its relationship with the planet and learn from those who were able to maintain it: Indigenous Peoples. Indigenous world views, ways of learning and teaching can benefit not only Indigenous students, but all of humanity.

List of participants

[Please, include the moderator (s)]

Mr./Mrs.	First name	Last name	Title/organisation	Nationality	Email address (if the participant wishes to receive information about the WHEC2022)	Indicate with a "NO" if the participant DOES NOT want to be publicly identified as a participant in this consultation.
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Ms.	Sherrri	Chisan	President , University nuxethot'jne thaa?ehots'j nistameyimâkanak Blue Quills, Alberta	Canada	sherric@bluequills.ca	
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