

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	13/10/2022			
Location of consultation	Virtual/Zoom platform			
Hosting UNESCO Chair or UNITWIN Network (include webpage if available)	Canadian Commission of 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)	Julia Scott, Director, Partnerships and Programs, Universities Canada			
Language of consultation	English and French			
Time spent in consultation (minutes)	90			
Number of participants	14			
Participant profiles (please, briefly describe the composition of the group)	The group was composed of higher education partners in Canada representing Universities, colleges, CÉGEP, researchers, First Nations, Inuit perspectives.			
Countries represented by participants	Canada			
Stakeholder groups (please mark with an "x" as appropriate)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Professors/ Researchers	<input checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> Others (please, specify): Indigenous organizations

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 checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/> Other (please, specify): |
| <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?*

Higher education institutions play three significant roles:

- 1) To be agents of societal transformation that must listen to stakeholders, students, faculty and employees, and civil society.
- 2) To conduct research and ensure that scientific knowledge is disseminated to everyone.
- 3) To undertake community engagement.

One of the main purposes of higher education institutions is to convey knowledge within the context of an ever-changing society. Higher education institutions reflect and respond to emerging issues in our society. Higher education institutions should have as their *raison d'être* to be agents of positive change by ensuring that their actions contribute to a sustainable future. It is therefore critical that they align to Agenda 2030.

Higher education institutions also exist to support student learning. Participants emphasized the importance of listening to students to determine their needs and priorities. Students respond to and reflect change in our society, so we must prioritize listening to them.

Question 2: What are the main **challenges/problems/gaps** in relation to Higher Education and the SDGs, Inclusion in Higher Education and Data and Knowledge Production?

The theme of diversity and inclusion (gender equality, students' voices, inclusion, Indigenous governance, multiple languages) emerged as a central challenge in higher education.

Inclusion in a diverse context

Researchers and professors must balance freedom of expression with the notions of inclusion and diversity within their classroom. UNESCO defines inclusion as ensuring that each individual has an equal opportunity for educational progress, but this can be challenging to implement for higher education institutions with current grading systems in place. Tension can exist between a higher education institution's reputation and the focus on high academic achievement, and individual student support and learning.

Inclusion Vs. self-determination

Indigenous Peoples have experienced colonization in many ways within Western educational systems. This has led to the destruction of Indigenous identity, languages, cultures, knowledge, livelihoods, and land-based learning and teaching methods. As a result, Indigenous youth do not have access to an education that reflects Indigenous ways of being, teaching and learning. Indigenous-led higher education does not necessarily equal inclusion: it is distinct and necessary. For example, in addition to inclusion in mainstream higher education, there must be opportunities for Inuit to access Inuit knowledge and create knowledge grounded in Inuit culture. Indigenous-led higher education needs to be an essential aspect in re-imagining the future of higher education.

Access to higher education

Higher education institutions have created accessibility programs to be more inclusive, yet attendance costs remain high and are especially challenging for those from racialized and lower-income communities. In addition, having a higher education in Canada that supports research and education in both official languages (French and English) is not equally accessible, in particular in research.

With an emphasis on listening to students as change-makers, it is recognized that issues of equity, diversity and inclusion are present at all levels on campuses. Students need to see representation for women, trans, Black and Indigenous people and people of colour (BIPOC) in scholarly roles at all levels in academia, as well as within the leadership/administration of universities. There also needs to be recognition that systemic racism exists due to historical wrongs that were committed in Canada, most notably the exclusion of Indigenous peoples in higher education institutions until changes were made to the *Indian Act*. Even after that, Indigenous traditional ways of knowing continued to be marginalized.

Online learning and connectivity

Considering the impact of the pandemic on the education systems, there are advantages to using technology to provide online learning. Online learning can increase access to those who might not have been able to attend higher education institutions if they have access to connectivity. Paradoxically, online learning can have a negative impact on the mental and physical health of students and the learning experience can be more challenging.

Mental health and well-being

There is no doubt that the pandemic and online learning has had a negative impact on the mental health and well-being of students and staff at higher education institutions. Higher education institutions must ensure student and staff support for mental health and well-being.

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

Some of the solutions proposed to address the challenges listed above include:

1. Higher education institutions need to take into account everyone's individual needs within its larger educational system. Student support programs are important in ensuring that everyone is enabled to achieve their educational goals.
2. To address gender equity, national awareness campaigns are needed, as they have been successful in addressing discriminatory practices in education. They can also change community and family attitudes towards women's participation in technical and vocational educational training and STEM fields.
3. Technology and online learning tools can increase accessibility, if properly implemented. With online learning, what must not be forgotten is the importance of building a sense of community and learning with and from others.
4. Open educational resources should be promoted, along with the transfer and sharing of knowledge between different regions of the world. UNESCO, in particular the UNESCO Chairs Program, emphasizes north-south knowledge exchange and relationship-building through projects that allow free educational resources to transfer knowledge effectively. We must continue to promote open access.
5. Indigenous higher education institutions must be recognized and supported across Canada and around the world. Indigenous ways of knowing and being can benefit not only Indigenous students, but everyone. The *Indigenous Institute Act*, adopted in Ontario in 2017, is a great example of how to support and recognize Indigenous communities' control of their own education. Under the *Indigenous Institute Act*, nine Indigenous Institutes are recognized in the Ontario post-secondary system. These institutes can now offer programs that they developed from an Indigenous perspective. Currently, there are no other provinces or territories in Canada that recognize the ability of Indigenous post-secondary education institutions to create and lead their programs. Ongoing, sufficient and stable funding is essential to support quality outcomes for Indigenous learners in Ontario and the rest of Canada.
6. Inclusion in education means expanding our definitions and access to programs and services. For example, the definition of disability for accessing financial aid in Canada changed. Not only was "permanent disability," included, but "persistent" and "prolonged disability" were also recognized. This shift in definitions widens the support offered for those living with mental health disabilities and increases their access to education.
7. Inclusion and equity can only be achieved if we start understanding why people are excluded in the first place. This includes gaining a better understanding of the historical context and avoiding generalizations about marginalized groups and their experiences. For example, the educational needs of Indigenous Peoples in Canada are varied and complex and differ from nation to nation. Inuit wish to have access to Inuit knowledge and to create knowledge grounded in Inuit culture, rather than a generalized notion of "Indigenous" culture.
8. Inclusion and equity in higher education institutions also means linguistic diversity in teaching, research and publications. English currently dominates academia. Within the Canadian context, more support is needed for French-led research and publications. Indigenous knowledge and languages should also be given support and space within academia.

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> Goal 5: Gender equality | <input type="checkbox"/> Goal 11: Sustainable cities and communities | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Goal 16: Peace and justice strong institutions |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Goal 6: Clean water and sanitation | | <input checked="" 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?

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

The phrase “No one left behind” should be the measure of quality and achievement of higher education in Canada and around the globe.

List of participants

[Please, include the moderator (s)]

Mr. / Mr s.	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.
Mrs .	Isabelle	LeVert-Chiasson	Education Program Officer, CCUNESCO	Canada	Isabelle.levert-chiasson@ccunesco.ca	
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