# UNESCO Chairs / UNITWIN Networks Consultation Report Form (Draft)[1]

## Under the III World Higher Education Conference (WHEC 2021)

## Basic information

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| **Date of consultation** | [13/05/2021] |
| **Location of consultation** | [Meet Jitsi] |
| **Hosting UNESCO Chair or UNITWIN Network** (include webpage if applicable) | UNESCO Chair in Data Privacy <br> [UNESCO Privacy Chair (urv.cat)](UNESCO Privacy Chair (urv.cat)) |
| **Name and email address of key contact person** | Josep Domingo-Ferrer (josep.domingo@urv.cat) |
| **Complete name, title, and affiliation of moderator(s)** | Professor Josep Domingo-Ferrer, Chairholder, UNESCO Chair in Data Privacy, Universitat Rovira i Virgili (josep.domingo@urv.cat) |
| **Language of Consultation** | Catalan |
| **Time spent in consultation** (minutes) | 130 minutes |
| **Number of participants** | 12 |
| **Participants' profiles** (please, briefly describe the composition of the group) | All participants are researchers and professors from Catalan and Balearic universities. The participants represent the UNESCO Chairs established in Catalonia and the Balearic Islands. |
| **Countries represented by participants** | Spain (Catalonia and Balearic Islands) |

| **Stakeholder groups** (please mark with a "x" as appropriate) | ☒ Professors/ Researchers | ☐ Students/Youth | ☐ Higher education managers/authorities | ☐ Private sector |
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| | ☐ NGO/civil society | ☐ International organizations | ☐ Policy makers/government | ☐ Others (please, specify): |

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

## Which theme did you choose for this consultation?

☒ Theme 1: Impact of COVID-19 on higher education

☐ Theme 2: Higher education and the SDGs

☐ Theme 7: Financing higher education

☐ Theme 3: Inclusion in higher education

☐ Theme 8: Data and knowledge production

☐ Theme 4: Quality & relevance of programmes

☐ Theme 9: International cooperation to enhance synergies

☐ Theme 5: Academic mobility in higher education

☐ Theme 10: Preparing for the future of higher learning

☐ Theme 6: Higher education governance

☐ Other (please, specify):

## Synthesis of contributions

Kindly synthesize that best summary reflecting the ideas provided by all participants. There is no need to identify participants. Responses should not exceed 1,200 **words**, including the three responses. As an average, each response would have a limit of 400 words. If necessary, add attachments. Remember that question 1 is general, but question 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 wellbeing of humans and sustainability of societies?*

The endeavour which higher education faces is great. Covid-19 – amongst other issues which have happened for a longer period – has enormously affected our society. There are gaps and inequalities which humans and societies have encountered over the years at higher education institutions. The pandemic has only raised awareness of these situations. First, the socio-economic gaps are not the same in developed and developing countries. For instance, there have been issues with students and internet contracts and problems due to the territory where they live. Higher education will need to consider this and ensure that all members of a higher education institution (regardless of whether they are professors, students, or other staff) are provided with enough resources to solve this problem. To favour the wellbeing of humans and societies, it is paramount that higher education provides equal access and opportunities to enter the educational world. This will allow more people to enter the professional world and to build careers which, in the end, will favour entire societies. Having a degree, a Master's, or a PhD will grant access to many different jobs and fill the gap in society that there is nowadays due to economic crises or poverty.

Second, there is a generational gap in the digital world. While younger generations are keen on using digital devices such as mobile phones or laptops, older generations generally find it difficult to adapt to the technological era. Higher education institutions should work on providing reasons why partially digitalising education might aid reaching the goals of providing quality education and reducing inequalities. Access to digital education might grant all generations to work and study from home without having to move from one place to another.

Third, difficulties in reconciling work-study and home and personal care tasks have arisen again lately, and this has given visibility to gender inequalities, tasks that often fall to women. Many papers have been written by male researchers, while women have found themselves in situations where they feel as though they must keep a balance between work at home and their professions. Higher education institutions ought not to endorse these situations by promoting the values of gender equality.

*Question 2*: What are the main **challenges/problems/gaps** in relation to the impact of Covid-19 on research activities, education, and international cooperation?

Luckily, higher education institutions and research groups have been able to adapt to the new situation which Covid-19 has created. Despite this, there are several downsides which have impacted research activities, education, and international cooperation. On a personal level and related to international cooperation, digitalising both education and research has prevented professionals from meeting each other in person, making the situation of giving speeches or preparing conference meetings, for instance, uncomfortable for many who would like to create strong relationships with other international institutions or professionals. Furthermore, it has been very difficult – but not impossible – to host exchange students or professors and to grant scholarships. New projects with other institutions may be negatively affected if the situation is not reversed soon – many projects in the UNESCO Chairs have been put on hold until 2022, when it is expected that the pandemic will be controlled. Nevertheless, participants in the meeting concluded that – given the chance that this may happen again – plans can be rearranged, and institutions can adapt to new situations with work and preparation.

Regarding how Covid-19 has impacted education, most on-site classes have been adapted to online teaching. A Master's Degree from one of the participant Chairs had to be cancelled, as the location where it had to be taught did not comply with the adopted measures after Covid-19 began. Despite using tablets for online teaching in one of the other participant UNESCO Chairs, for instance – which allowed professors and students to share materials more easily, participation has been low in synchronous lessons, and a solution will have to be found. Another problem which has occurred is related to the workload that working online has brought to professors and students. The quantity of work which must be done has reduced the time allotted for other activities (e.g., research). Therefore, there is a general lack of motivation which makes it more difficult to be satisfied when studying, working, or conducting research activities. If this is to be solved and avoided, some limits will have to be established.

As for research activities, most publications, PhD theses, collaborations, and projects have gone on as per usual, but only adapted to be done online. However, this has caused a reduction of the time available to conduct research and the cancellation or adjournment of some projects. Investigations from one of the Chairs – dedicated to the tourism sector – have been affected by Covid-19, as tourism has been kept to a minimum and thus, studies in which data was still to be retrieved had to be put on hold. Nevertheless, more advanced studies could be concluded satisfactorily. The issues related to the impact of Covid-19 on research activities will have to be studied further and research lines will need to be changed and adapted to this new situation.

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

One of the main changes to face the challenge which Covid-19 has presented is how education is taught. Higher education institutions will need to stop copying the in-person teaching when trying to teach digitally, mind the time given to work and study, and create a hybrid teaching model which will allow to fill the gap which has appeared due to the pandemic. As participants concluded in the meeting, adaptation of contents will be necessary. For instance, some subjects at the higher education institutions of the participants include content in line with what Covid-19 has caused and how to solve it or publishing sets of rules on how to successfully manage digital teaching.

Research-wise, the role of the woman needs to be equal to that of the man. There are many tasks wrongly attributed to women regarding the role which they have in the house, and this mostly prevents them from successfully carrying out their jobs. To reach gender equality, society needs to stop assuming and assigning old-fashioned roles to women and fight to reveal that women are also professionals trying to balance their career and their personal life. Sharing values which will allow families to redistribute and to balance the workload that men and women have in their careers and at home should be one of the utmost priorities in times like this. There will also have to be research on how the households of students, researchers, educators, and population in general have been affected by the pandemic and how this might affect their health and well-being.

This last issue is also related to how to take climate action now that people are staying more at home. We must not forget that we are in a climate emergency despite Covid-19. It has been proved that emissions were reduced during 2019 and 2020, but they were below the optimistic scenario that was presented in the Paris agreement. We will need to transform industry and go back to retrieving the resources which nature provides.

Lastly, participants concluded that although virtual meetings have prevented professionals from meeting in person, it is likely that they will need to stay, as they have procured higher rates of participation (national and international-wise), and there has also been a better and wider dissemination of the work which is being conducted in research and in education.

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

☐ Goal 1: No poverty

☐ Goal 2: Zero hunger

☒ Goal 3: Good health and well-being

☒ Goal 4: Quality education

☒ Goal 5: Gender equality

☐ Goal 6: Clean water and sanitation

☒ Goal 7: Affordable and clean energy

☐ Goal 8: Decent work and economic growth

☐ Goal 9: Industry, innovation, and infrastructure

☒ Goal 10: Reduced inequality

☐ Goal 11: Sustainable cities and communities

☐ Goal 12: Responsible consumption and production

☒ Goal 13: Climate action

☐ Goal 14: Life below water

☐ Goal 15: Life on land

☐ Goal 16: Peace and justice strong institutions

☒ 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 organizers of the WHEC2021?*

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## List of participants

[Please, include the moderator (s)]

| Mr./ Mrs. | First name | Last name | Title/organization | Email address (if the participant wishes to receive information about the WHEC2021) | Indicate with an "NO" if the participant DOES NOT want to be publicly identified as participant in this consultation. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mr. | Josep | Domingo-Ferrer | UNESCO Chair in Data Privacy (Universitat Rovira i Virgili - URV) | josep.domingo@urv.cat | |
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| Ms. | Laura | Almunia | UNESCO Chair of Numerical Methods in Engineering (Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya - UPC) | lalmunia@cimne.upc.edu | |
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