

[UNESCO Chairs / UNITWIN Networks](#) **Consultation Report Form**<sup>1</sup>  
Under the UNESCO World Higher Education Conference ([WHEC 2022](#))  
[Section for Higher Education](#) | Division for Education 2030

**.Basic information**

	Dec 21, 2021 to Feb 7, 2022		
<b>Location of consultation</b>	Online via Web conference		
<b>Hosting UNESCO Chair or UNITWIN Network</b> (include webpage if available)	UNESCO Chair in OER <a href="https://unescochair.athabascau.ca/team/chairholder">https://unescochair.athabascau.ca/team/chairholder</a>		
<b>Name and email address of key contact person</b>	Rory McGreal rory@athabascau.ca		
<b>Complete name, title, and affiliation of moderator(s)</b>	Professor Rory McGreal, UNESCO/ICDE Chair in OER, Athabasca University, Canada Dr. Wayne Mackintosh, UNESCO Chair in OER, Open Education Foundation/Otago Polytechnic, New Zealand Dr. Glenda Cox, UNESCO Chair in OER & Social Justice/U of Cape Town		
<b>Language of consultation</b>	English		
<b>Time spent in consultation (minutes)</b>	Over six weeks with virtual communications over the internet		
<b>Number of participants</b>	12		
<b>Participant profiles</b> (please, briefly describe the composition of the group)	This is an international group of UNESCO, ICDE and Commonwealth of Learning Chairs related to Open Education and OER		
<b>Countries represented by participants</b>	Brazil, Canada, France, Lebanon, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nigeria, South Africa, Spain		
<b>Gender of participants</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Professors/	<input type="checkbox"/> Students/Youth	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Higher education

### .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 3: Inclusion in higher education  
 Theme 4: Quality and relevance of programmes  
 Theme 5: Academic mobility in higher education  
 Theme 6: Higher education governance
- Theme 7: Financing higher education  
 Theme 8: Data and knowledge production  
 Theme 9: International cooperation to enhance synergies  
 Theme 10: The futures of higher education  
 Other (please, specify):

### .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 must become more responsive to the needs of local communities and lead in the formation of independent responsible citizens with the knowledge and skills needed for the 21st century workforce. To this end higher education should be open to all, flexible, and multimodal to accommodate large numbers of students. This includes both universities and training colleges (TVETS). HE must embrace social justice principles to enable minorities and other students to negotiate the complexities of higher education. It is important for us to aspire to multiple futures for digital education that will be more open, inclusive, personalized and collaborative.

The COVID 19 pandemic has extended the already widening inequality of access to HE. Like any crisis, it has opened up opportunities for new digital learning environments, tools and teaching approaches, which can support wide ranging accessibility. In the case of the pandemic, it became apparent very early that traditional institutions needed to shift quickly to incorporate online learning. The content used at the time was trapped in commercial content with restrictive licensing, so that texts and other learning materials could not be adapted for digital use without requiring further permissions and additional costs. This has made Open Educational Resources (OER) very attractive, because institutions can make the transition to digital without complications and the need for special licences. OER can be legally and technically adopted and adapted for immediate use, and so, have become even more valuable in addressing institutional and student needs. The UNESCO Recommendation on OER, from 2019, refers not just to the tremendous cost-savings to students of pivoting to OER, but also the added convenience of using learning content that can be adapted to serve local needs. OER provide communities with the legal, technical and pedagogical flexibility that they need to meet their learning goals, for example, having the legal right and technical capacity (no digital locks) allow both instructors and students to use the content in different formats in print and on a wide range of devices.

Also, there is a need in higher education for an international scalable credit recognition system based on micro-credentials, which are becoming popular, as one means of expanding the ability of learners, especially those in disadvantaged populations, to have their earned skills and competencies formally recognised, increasing their job prospects. Micro-credentials can be important in addressing a significant problem, especially for disadvantaged learners: Those who access digital learning content on the web and acquire knowledge and skills either formally or informally cannot readily receive appropriate formal recognition for

their efforts. Micro-credentials can be granted using a variety of different delivery methods, including MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses), which offer mini-courses to large student cohorts, and frequently register hundreds and even thousands of participants.

**Question 2:** What are the main **challenges/problems/gaps** in relation to... [rephrase content relative to the main theme you have selected]?

There are several fundamental structural and economic concerns facing HE. There is widespread poverty across the world and people need to be lifted out of poverty for them to even be able to consider higher education. The lack of access to resources, especially for learners in poor, remote, rural communities, and refugees; there are few schools and libraries for students to access. OER materials can provide access to no/low-cost resources at all levels of education.

Although 90% of the world's population are now within range of Wifi, there are still huge gaps, caused by the cost of connections. There remain isolated regions, even in developed countries. These problems of accessibility including service quality, bandwidth and costs all impact access to HE. Strengthening the commitment to public education is essential. Tuition fees are unaffordable for too many learners. OER (in the form of lessons and even full courses), micro-credentials, and MOOCs can play a significant role in reducing per student costs.

Cultural misrecognition continues at many universities where there is a lack of localization of curricula. The cost of creating local content can be prohibitive for small communities. The adaptability of OER can empower local communities to localise, adapt and/or translate available content without legal or technical constraints. Second language proficiency is becoming essential in higher education. Linguistic diversity is essential to make knowledge accessible to all. OER should also as far as possible, support multilingual content. Local and student voices can also be included in materials and course production to address issues of political misrepresentation.

There is still a lack of awareness of OER and micro-credentials. This is still a problem and the benefits of OER need to be spread more widely to raise the awareness of institutional administrators, teachers and students.

There are several other broad scale considerations. The neoliberalist control of universities can be regarded as a mode of coloniality, in that the focus on human capital subordinates people to the pure logic of the market. Today the prevailing institutional culture at many universities continues the production of colonial bureaucracies, control, classification, and commodification of HE. The marketisation and unbundling of HE places emphasis on economics and competition for gain.

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

High level policy and support for HE should occur at a level above individual institutions where regional and national policies are adopted that support strategies for action (e.g., OER, open practices, micro-credentials). Large scale support grants are needed for more international cooperation: Higher education institutions currently serve c. 200 million students; partnering in research and learning offer great opportunities for all to work for the common good.

Collaborative work among institutions should be supported to foster actions with openness for education as a common good. There are concerns around knowledge obsolescence, where new knowledge is accelerating, while other knowledge is becoming obsolete. To address this, systemic and organizational design changes are needed at all educational levels; this includes new multidisciplinary curricular and pedagogical approaches addressing social problems.

Policies to standardise credits are important. They can be used to support student mobility using credit recognition and transfer between institutions, with the additional implementation of micro-credentials. Micro-courses, based on OER can prepare learners for the workplace, providing verified job-specific training for high demand jobs. Micro-credentials can co-exist with traditional certificates and diplomas to challenging existing higher education models.

Administrators and academics can work towards rethinking the curriculum providing more strategies for changes in the workplace. The pandemic forced new forms of work; remoteness promoted changes in labour laws, culture and infrastructure, etc. supporting outcome- and competency-based learning-centred teaching.

More courses and structured educational materials, including MOOCs based on OER should be supported. The MOOC phenomenon has demonstrated that large number of students from all over the world can be educated online. Research is needed to find how we can turn MOOCs and other formats into effective learning environments

Courses need to be designed for the future, with increased focus on multimodal digital learning including online, hybrid and blended formats. More research should be conducted on the impact of game-based learning. More emphasis should be placed on learning design to ensure diversity and equality in the content used and in the approaches to teaching. Standards for inclusivity for those with physical and learning disabilities should be embraced. HE educators should work towards including students as partners in learning design. And wherever possible educators should embrace open educational resources (OER) and open education practices (OEP) in teaching and open access for research. There is also a need for more diverse, co-operative and inclusive educational ecosystems, models and infrastructure, especially for technical and vocational education and training (TVET).

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

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

**.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?*

Great emphasis should be placed on supporting the dissemination of OER and the increased use of micro-credentials in support of SDG4: Education for All

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

Promote UNESCO-style events with simultaneous translation in different regions to support international collaborations and exchanges of knowledge.

**.List of participants**

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