

## General Consultation Report Form<sup>1</sup>

Under the UNESCO World Higher Education Conference ([WHEC2022](#))

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

### Basic information

<b>Date of consultation</b>	14/12/2021			
<b>Location of consultation</b>	Online on Zoom			
<b>Hosting organisation(s)</b> (include webpage if available)	UNIMED – Mediterranean Universities Union ( <a href="http://www.uni-med.net">www.uni-med.net</a> ) within the FRAMES project ( <a href="http://www.frames-project.eu">www.frames-project.eu</a> )			
<b>Name and email address of key contact person</b>	Cristina Stefanelli, <a href="mailto:c.stefanelli@uni-med.net">c.stefanelli@uni-med.net</a>			
<b>Complete name, title, and affiliation of moderator(s)</b>	<p><b>Alicia Betts</b>, Strategic International Projects, Universitat de Girona, Spain</p> <p><b>Ana Beaven</b>, Language Teacher, University of Bologna and UNICollaboration, Italy</p> <p><b>Marta Giralt</b>, Lecturer in Applied Linguistics and Spanish, University of Limerick, Ireland</p> <p><b>Francesca Torlone</b>, Member of the European Research Network on Vocational Education and Training VETNET, University of Siena, Italy</p>			
<b>Language of consultation</b>	English			
<b>Time spent in consultation</b> (minutes)	90 minutes			
<b>Number of participants</b>	12			
<b>Participant profiles</b> (please, briefly describe the composition of the group)	Expert practitioners of Virtual Exchange from different areas of the world (South and North America, Europe, Africa, Middle and Far East).			
<b>Countries represented by participants</b>	11			
<b>Stakeholder groups</b> (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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private sector
	<input type="checkbox"/> NGOs/civil society	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Policy makers/government	<input type="checkbox"/> Others (please, specify):

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

		International organisations		
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### 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 type="checkbox"/> Theme 8: Data and knowledge production                  |
| <input 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 checked="" 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 is key for the transformation of societies and to create a sustainable way forward that respects the planet and fosters the peaceful coexistence of communities. Education in general should support humans to adapt to and integrate changes in society and build respectful relations between communities and with the environment. Higher Education has the potential to trigger change and to empower the future generations to live more responsibly and thrive in a global world despite pressing social and environmental challenges, and take. The current local/global dynamics require open mindsets and leaders who appreciate the local and understand the global. The experts gathered in this consultation, representing views from across the globe, share the conviction that Virtual Exchange (VE) is a powerful and innovative approach and that VE should be included in global policies as a tool to shape the future of Education in general, and of Higher Education institutions in particular.

Virtual Exchange is understood as “technology-enabled, sustained, people-to-people education program”, as defined by the Virtual Exchange Coalition, and most commonly takes place between institutions in different parts of the world, thus providing an international and intercultural experience to the participants, both students and academics.

Pressing global challenges - such as inclusion, equality, social innovation and sustainable wellbeing - can be addressed with VE projects. VE creates innovative, inclusive and equitable learning environments by providing access to innovation and knowledge, while helping participants develop leadership skills and agency, digital competences and flexible mindsets in an intercultural environment.

The international collaboration that stems from VE programmes can contribute to breaching the gap between communities in conflict, and can help build links between communities and people

who, in a traditional teaching model, might never meet. By connecting students and academics from different local settings, VE becomes an experiential, borderless learning activity.

The future of (Higher) Education needs to go beyond the acquisition of knowledge, and include a better understanding of how knowledge is created. This needs to go hand in hand with the development of crucial skills, values and flexible mindsets. Digital competences and critical digital literacies, for example, are becoming essential to live and work in today's world and VE can contribute to closing the digital divide. Acquiring intercultural competences is also necessary for the consolidation of human wellbeing and peaceful living in a shared world. Understanding global challenges such as climate change is key to achieving more sustainable and fairer societies. The global experts participating in this consultation believe that VE can contribute to all of the above in a relatively simple and cost-efficient way, and that it therefore has the potential to play a pivotal role in the future of Higher Education.

**Question 2:** What are the main challenges in relation to the integration and accreditation of Virtual Exchange in Higher Education?

Challenges to the full integration of VE in Higher Education relate to a number of different issues.

The introduction of new pedagogical approaches always creates resistance. Changing one's teaching practices takes time and energy, and needs to happen both as a top-down but also as a bottom-up process. VE is a tool to transform minds, not simply a new teaching tool. It has the potential to push students and teachers out of their comfort zone, and lead to a deep transformation of Higher Education.

Equally, it is essential to reach a critical mass of instructors involved in VE if this pedagogical practice is to be available to the majority of students. However, a lack of recognition for the additional time and energy spent in the development of such projects can be a deterrent for many professors. It is very important, also, to support instructors traditionally less involved VE programmes (such as those in STEM disciplines) in order to ensure that all the disciplines benefit from innovative collaborative projects. This may require Continuous Professional Development in this field.

Another challenge comes from the need to adapt approaches to assessment that focus not only on the acquisition of knowledge but also on skills and competences (e.g. digital, intercultural). Experts involved in VE have developed approaches to assessment and recognition of these aspects of learning.

A further challenge when implementing new pedagogical methodologies such as VE is the need for collaboration of different units within the university. The development of successful VE projects can only happen if instructors can count on their Teaching and Learning Support Units, E-learning experts, ICT support (in order to use open-source platforms and tools) etc.

In order to make VE sustainable as a pedagogical approach, it needs to be embedded into the institutional strategies of universities, as strategy leads to structure. This means involving and engaging Leadership, as the integration of VE should not only be a bottom up process.

Finally, regarding accreditation and recognition of Virtual Exchange, there is a need to start conversations across units inside Higher Education Institutions. Also, Ministries of Education play an important role in defining what is valued in Higher Education. The process of providing recognition

and therefore accreditation for the teachers and students can be facilitated by engaging national (Ministries and Governments) and international (European Commission) institutions.

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

Virtual Exchange as an innovative pedagogy is still often misunderstood. The term “virtual” is often understood as synonymous with “unreal”, rather than simply “online”. HE institutions also need to go beyond paying lip service to principles such as internationalisation, sustainability, or inclusiveness, and put into practice their claims. Clearly conveying the defining principles of VE is therefore the first step towards addressing some of the challenges mentioned.

There is also the need to make the benefits of VE more clearly visible to all. The impact of VE on students and teachers alike has already been evidenced in the scientific literature, but there is still the need to engage all stakeholders in the process, and create communities of practice and communities of leadership around VE. A strategy could be to build alliances that go beyond HE and involve businesses and civil society, to influence policy at local, national and international level.

HE institutions are called upon to prepare graduates that are work-ready, but VE has the potential to make them world-ready, by preparing students that are sensitive to both global and local issues. Thus, it is important to create opportunities for transnational collaboration based on reciprocity that can open up the classrooms, and at the same time dispel the fears that some academics have of being overburdened with new initiatives that might not work.

The Covid-19 pandemic has given impetus to the implementation of VE, seen as a response to the need to find alternatives to physical mobility. It is now necessary to gather momentum and push for the necessary changes to ensure all students around the globe can benefit from an international experience as part of their university studies.

### 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 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?*

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

## 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.
Mrs.	Maha	Bali	Associate Professor of Practice, Center for Learning and Teaching, The American University in Cairo; Co-founder of Equity Unbound & Virtually Connecting	Egypt	bali@aucegypt.edu	
Mr.	Marco	Cappellini	Associate Professor, Aix-Marseille Université and Laboratoire Parole & Langage (UMR 7309 CNRS). Head of the Centre de Formation et Autoformation en Langues at Aix Marseille University. Vice-president delegated to research for the French association of language centres in higher education (RANACLES)	France	marco.cappellini@univ-amu.fr	
Mr.	Jose Celso	Freire	Associate provost for international affairs at Universidade Estadual Paulista (UNESP)	Brazil	jose-celso.freire@unesp.br	
Mrs.	Waidehi	Gokhale	Chief Executive Officer, Soliya	USA	waidehi@soliya.net	
Mrs.	Sarah	Guth	President, UNICollaboration; Language Teacher, University of Padova	Italy	sarah.guth@unipd.it	
Mrs.	Keiko	Ikeda	Vice-Director, IIGE Kansai University Professor, Division of International Affairs, Kansai University	Japan	keikoike@kansai-u.ac.jp	
Mr.	Lavern	Samuels	Director:International Education and Partnerships Durban University of Technology	South Africa	samuelsl@dut.ac.za	

			Vice President and Past President- International Education Association of South Africa ( IEASA)			
Mr.	Tareq	Layka	Virtual Exchange participant, ambassador and facilitator	Syria	tareq.layka@gmail.com	
Mrs.	Gabriela	Méndez	International Online Programs Specialist, Global Classroom Coordinator, and COIL Coordinator for the Vice-Rector for International Affairs at Tecnológico de Monterrey	Mexico	gaby.mendez@tec.mx	
Mr.	Jon	Rubin	Director, COIL Virtual Exchange Foundation, Inc., COIL Connect for Virtual Exchange, and COIL Consulting	USA	jon@coilconsult.com	
Mr.	Casper	van der Heijden	Executive Director, Sharing Perspective Foundation	Netherlands	casper@sharingperspectivesfoundation.com	
Mrs.	Margarita	Vinagre	Professor, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid	Spain	margarita.vinagre@uam.es	
<b>Moderators</b>						
Mrs.	Alicia	Betts	Strategic International Projects, Universitat de Girona	Spain	alicia.betts@udg.edu	
Mrs.	Ana	Beaven	Language Teacher, University of Bologna; UNICollaboration	Italy	ana.beaven@unibo.it	
Mrs.	Marta	Giralt	Lecturer in Applied Linguistics and Spanish, University of Limerick	Ireland	marta.giralt@ul.ie	
Mrs.	Francesca	Torlone	Member of the European Research Network on Vocational Education and Training VETNET, University of Siena	Italy	francesca.torlone@unisi.it	