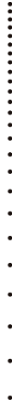




United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization



International Commission on the Futures of Education

March 2019

“When inequalities deepen, when digital, big data and artificial intelligence open new perspectives, when cognitive sciences disrupt traditional approaches to learning, [...] then it is crucial to rethink education.”

Audrey Azoulay, Director-General, UNESCO

“I call on UNESCO to take on its leadership role in the debate on the future of education.”

António Guterres, UN Secretary General

The Futures of Education project proposes the establishment of an independent International Commission of eminent personalities to rethink the future of education, knowledge and learning in a world of increasing complexity, uncertainty, and precarity. The International Commission will present its analysis and recommendations in late 2021 in the form of a report to serve as an agenda for policy debate and action at multiple levels. This proposal outlines why we need to re-vision the future of education, why UNESCO is well positioned to do this, and the way in which the work will be organized.

1. Why a global report on the Futures of Education?

The increasing uncertainty, complexity and precarity of our contemporary world must make us ask whether education can continue in a business-as-usual manner. Inequalities, violence and exclusion are bringing many societies to a point of crisis. The fragility of our planet is becoming more and more apparent. Sadly, these varied forms of insecurity are exploited by some, thus straining social cohesion and weakening trust in institutions around the world. With rapidly changing contexts and multiple possible futures, we must reexamine and reimagine how education can contribute to the global common good.

The urgency of the challenges before us potentially requires a radical transformation of mindsets and of our conceptions of human well-being, development, and how to share a planet. Knowledge, learning and education broadly considered are at the heart of this transformation. The rise of artificial intelligence, big data and machine learning also raise major ethical and governance concerns about the future, especially as the promises of innovation and technological change have an uneven record of contributing to human flourishing. Despite the promise and many successes we can expect from the 2030 agenda for sustainable development, there is still an urgent need to look beyond this horizon. Even with great advances in enrolments at all levels globally, we still must ask what education might yet become.

UNESCO's Futures of Education project is an ambitious attempt to mobilize the many rich ways of being and knowing worldwide to reflect on and generate debate on how education might need to be rethought in a world of increasing complexity, uncertainty, and precarity. UNESCO will appoint a high-level International Commission of eminent thought leaders of diverse expertise and perspectives from the worlds of politics, academia, the arts, science and business. Supported by UNESCO's collective intelligence and global observatory capacities – and through a consultative process involving policy-makers, governments, civil society, youth, educators and other stakeholders – the International Commission will prepare a report that will provide an agenda for action and discussion at multiple levels.

2. Why UNESCO?

Mobilizing collective intelligence

The complex challenges in our world today require innovative solutions beyond established sectoral approaches and disciplinary boundaries. As a global observatory of societal transformation, mobilizing collective intelligence across its global networks, UNESCO can help identify new pathways for inclusive sustainable futures.

A humanistic lens

UNESCO's humanistic lens is informed by the principles of respect for life, for human dignity and diversity at the core of human rights and by a central concern for the ethical dimensions of scientific and technological innovation. The Futures of Education report will build on UNESCO's humanistic approach to learning and the foundation laid by previous global UNESCO reports: *Rethinking Education* 2015; *Learning: The treasure within* 1996; and *Learning to Be* 1972. These previous global reports have established UNESCO as the lead in the global debate on the future of education and learning.

Learning to Become

The proposal to title the 2021 Global Report *Learning to Become* signals both a continuation of this work, and a departure from the 1972 *Learning to Be* concept. To think in terms of “becoming” invokes a line of philosophical and social thinking that emphasizes potentials, rejects determinism, and expresses a flexible openness to the new. The notion of “learning to become” also directs attention at the persistence of inequalities, continuing plagues of violence, and the increasing strains on a fragile planet – all of which demand that humanity become something it has not yet become.

3. What issues will be explored?

The International Commission report will emerge out of a range of work modalities that emphasize co-creation, a broad participatory and partnership structure, the inclusion of diverse perspectives, and the absence of pre-specified conclusions. With this in mind, the following themes and issues are presented as initial departure points needing re-thinking in a world of increasing complexity, uncertainty and precarity.

The future of sustainability

Despite what progress may be made in the next decade and a half, climate change and the fragility of the planet may necessitate disruptive transformation in human societies and institutions. What will be the role of education in fostering and actualizing the creativity, imagination, and social resolve needed to embrace the possibilities of radical reconfiguration? How can we reframe our understandings of humanism to guide such reconfiguration?

The future of knowledge

Radical changes in the ways that data, information and knowledge are created, owned, disseminated, and used raise profound questions about the future of knowledge, particularly its relation to the common good, diversity and inclusion. What are implications for the governance of knowledge? What can the contribution of indigenous knowledge systems be in our increasingly globalized world? What is the future of the humanities, the arts and creative inquiry as modes of inquiry and knowledge?

The future of learning

UNESCO has long advanced an integrated humanistic understanding of learning. Yet, technological disruption such as we see in the rise of artificial intelligence, machine learning, neuroscience, and automation raise questions about the future of learning. How we should understand learning's core elements, challenges and promises? What will reconfigurations of learning mean for both individuals and societies? What do possible futures imply for curriculum and assessment?

The future of teachers and teaching

In these changing contexts, it is also necessary to examine the future of teaching and the teaching profession. What will be the role of professional educators in advancing change and innovation? How can gender inequities and discrimination be better addressed?

The future of work, skills and competencies

Economic and technological transformations are reconfiguring the world of work at multiple levels around the globe. These changes present opportunities and challenges for the design and governance of learning systems around the world. What are the key relevant skills and competencies that will be required in a context in which automation, robotics, artificial intelligence, and big data are not only transforming the way in which we work, but also how we live, communicate and learn? What competencies will be required to contribute to technological innovation and inclusive growth and sustainable development?

The future of citizenship, democracy and social inclusion

Increasing awareness that the global and local are not different levels of social reality, but rather intimately and inextricably interlinked requires sustained attention to citizenship education and the ways that education supports political participation and social inclusion. In an increasingly interconnected and interdependent world, changing gender dynamics, the spread of e-governance, as well as migration and human mobility sharpen the need for education that integrates civic, social, cultural and economic capacities.

The future of public education

Expanded access to education at all levels, the growing diversification of the education sector, and the increasing involvement of non-state actors, raises questions about the future of public education. How does the principle of education as a public good need to be re-contextualized in a context in which the boundaries between public and private are blurring? What constitutes the "publicness" of public education and what does this imply for the role of the state in policy dialogue, provision, financing and regulation?

The future of higher education, research and innovation

With technological transformation and enrolment expansion, tertiary / higher education has emerged as one of the crucial fronts for knowledge mobilization, inclusion, community engagement, and human growth. What is the future of the public mission of the university? How can learning in higher education promote tolerance, creativity, cooperation, deliberation and cultivation of the common good? How can higher education strengthen research and innovation capacity to contribute to sustainable futures?

4. The International Commission

Composition

The Director-General of UNESCO will convene an independent International Commission to develop the global report on the Futures of Education. The Commission will comprise 10-15 eminent personalities from the world of politics, business and economics, technology and science, human rights and social activism, art and culture, as well as of philosophy and ethics. The Commission will be led by an internationally renowned personality such as a former head of state, minister, leader, Nobel Prize laureate or recognized thinker.

Mandate

The mandate of the International Commission on the Futures of Education is to collectively reflect on how education might need to be re-thought in a world of increasing complexity, uncertainty, and precarity, and to present analysis and recommendations in the form of a report which can serve as an agenda for policy dialogue and action at multiple levels. Looking at the year 2050 and beyond, the report should suggest visions and strategies for both education policy and education practice to adopt.

The Commission is to take into consideration recent geopolitical shifts, accelerated environmental degradation and climate change, changing patterns of human mobility, and the exponential pace of scientific and technological innovation. At the same time, the report should analyse the multiple possible futures of technological, social, economic, and environmental disruption and how education might both affect and be affected by these futures.

The Commission will include in its report a consideration of the longstanding UNESCO commitment to an integrated and humanistic approach to education and knowledge as public goods. The Commission is invited to challenge and re-evaluate the foundational principles laid out in previous UNESCO Global Reports. The Commission will focus on rethinking the role of education and learning in light of the tremendous challenges and opportunities of possible futures.

Timeline

The Commission and its mandate will be announced at a side event to be organized at the United Nations General Assembly in New York in September 2019. The Commission will meet three times between 2020 and the first quarter of 2021 as outlined in the proposed schedule below. The report and recommendations of the Commission will be presented and launched at the 41st session of the UNESCO General Conference in November 2021.

DATE	EVENTS	VENUE
September 2019	Side event announcing the mandate of the International Commission on the Futures of Education	United Nations General Assembly in New York
January 2020	1 st Meeting	UNESCO Paris
September 2020	2 nd Meeting	To be determined
March 2021	3 th Final Meeting	UNESCO Paris
November 2021	Launch of the report of the International Commission on the Futures of Education	41 st General Conference of UNESCO (Paris)

5. A global movement of consultation & debate

The Futures of Education report aims to generate global engagement and debate on learning and knowledge in relation to the future of humanity and of the planet. This dynamic will be encouraged through multiple processes of consultation, co-creation, and deliberation that involve multiple stakeholders including youth, teachers and educators, civil society organizations, academia, international development agencies, as well as business and technology partners. It will also help to ensure commitment from multiple stakeholders to take forward actions and continued discussions grounded in the recommendations of the report following its release in late 2021.

The following strategies will support the work of the International Commission:

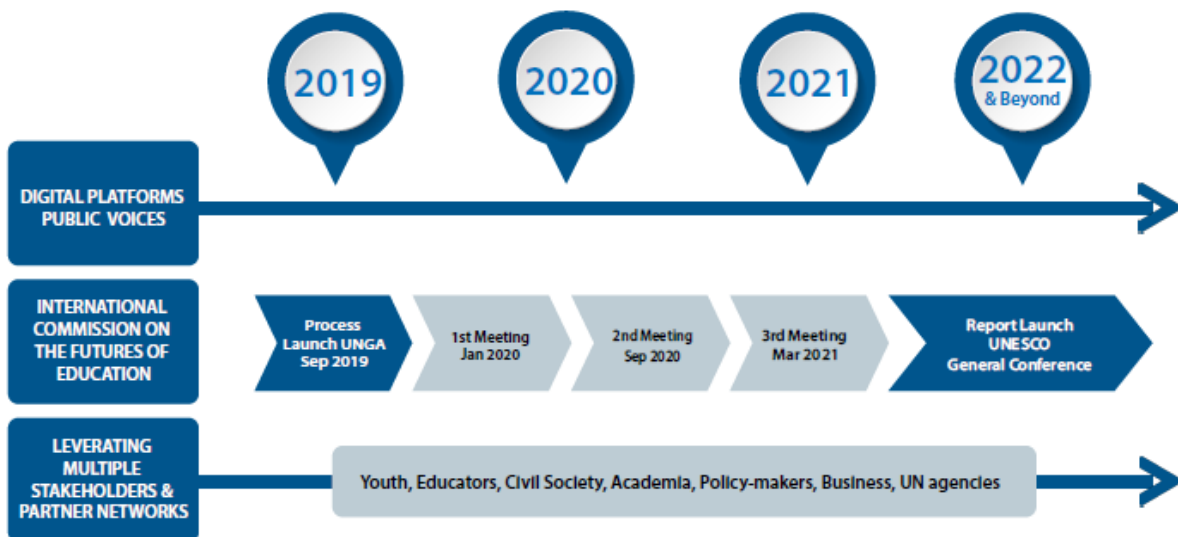
(1) Soliciting public and youth voices across digital platforms

A key supporting process for the work of the Commission will be engagement with youth and the general public through a digital campaign on social media platforms. This will include a #LearningtoBecome and

#FuturesofEducation collection of viewpoints and a competition for the best one-minute youth-produced videos on what education should look like. Additionally, we will establish an online consultation mechanism to gather input widely. The second iteration of this digital engagement will be structured around content and ideas that are pushed-out by UNESCO as provisional Commission ideas are released later in the process.

(2) Leveraging multiple stakeholder/partner networks

Using the global network of UNESCO teams, institutes, regional and field offices, the Futures of Education project will capitalize on one of the organization’s unique strategic advantages: a broad global reach and strong partnership networks. Existing planned global and regional UNESCO conferences and seminars organized by HQ teams, Institutes and Field Offices represent excellent opportunities to explore challenges and opportunities for the futures of education and knowledge among policy, research and civil society partners. A variety of formats of engagement within these already scheduled global and regional events will generate contextualized insight, collect feedback, identify opportunities, build a shared understanding and begin to align strategies for furthering the emergent Futures of Education vision and strategy. The Project will also engage with multiple partner networks and platforms as appropriate, including the international research community, teacher associations, civil society organizations and the business community.



6. Project Team

The Futures of Education project will be managed and supported by a Project Team under the supervision of the UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Education. The Project Team will organize the meetings, draft working documents for input and deliberation by the International Commission, synthesize the results of their deliberations, and undertake further analysis and consultation as needed. Using an agile implementation strategy that is at once iterative, flexible and open to change, the Project Team will both mobilize UNESCO's collective intelligence and global observatory capacity and integrate external expertise and stakeholder perspectives. The Project Team will consult with an external expert group of 8-10 advisors, in response to issues and questions raised by the International Commission. The themes and topics of these working seminars will emerge in relation to the work of the Commission and will result in briefing papers prepared for the International Commission.

Contact

For more information, please contact:

Sobhi Tawil s.tawil@unesco.org

Noah W. Sobe nw.sobe@unesco.org

Education Research and Foresight

Office of the Assistant Director-General for Education

UNESCO