



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

# Futures of Education: Learning to Become

## CONSULTATION GUIDELINES FOR STAKEHOLDER FOCUS GROUPS (September 2019 – August 2020)

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UNESCO invites organizations and networks to mobilize their stakeholders and partners to conduct focus group consultation sessions on the futures of education. The insights gained through focus group discussions will be synthesized for UNESCO's International Commission on the Futures of Education and will help to shape the global debate.

This document and the accompanying annexes provide general guidelines and materials for the organizers and facilitators. They are designed to provide a structure for in-person focus group discussions. Guidance is also provided for summarizing the results of stakeholder focus group consultations and submitting them to UNESCO.

For more information, please see <http://unesco.org/futuresofeducation>

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### *What is the Futures of Education initiative?*

UNESCO's *Futures of Education* initiative is an ambitious attempt to rethink education and help shape the future. The initiative is catalyzing a global debate on how education, learning and knowledge need to be re-imagined in a world of increasing complexity, uncertainty, and precarity. As part of this initiative, UNESCO has appointed a high-level International Commission of thought leaders with diverse expertise and perspectives from the worlds of politics, academia, the arts, science and business. The International Commission will prepare a report, to be released in November 2021, that will provide an agenda for action and discussion by policymakers and practitioners.

### *Why a consultative process?*

The report of the International Commission 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. Towards this end, UNESCO is encouraging consultations around the globe, inputs from which will feed into to the Commission's work. In the initial 12 months of the project (September 2019 – August 2020), the objective of consultations is to generate a set of diverse

perspectives on the challenges and opportunities for education and learning that can be both anticipated/predicted and imagined/envisioned when looking towards the year 2050.

## Why organize a focus group consultation?

Focus group discussions are one of several modalities of engagement with the *Futures of Education* initiative. A series of online consultation modules, as well as targeted inputs from the deliberations of national, regional and global conferences and events are also core to the strategy of broad global consultations.

Leading a focus group consultation on the futures of education presents a unique opportunity for your organization to mobilize stakeholders, partners and networks to contribute to the global conversation and ensure that no perspectives and viewpoints are overlooked.

The open-ended nature of this consultation is well-served by a group discussion that allows people to explore and clarify their views. Group interaction is key to the focus group methodology. Oftentimes, a focus group conversation can lead in new and unexpected directions as participants reflect on their own and others' ideas. Focus groups also allow for participants to become an active part of the process of visioning the futures of education. They grant agency to individuals as well as the larger stakeholder group, thereby facilitating ownership and co-construction of ideas.

In order to ensure breadth and diversity in the consultation process, UNESCO particularly encourages that focus-group discussions be held with stakeholder groups composed of youth, parents, educators, civil society, policy-makers, business, or technology representatives. Whenever possible, UNESCO recommends homogeneity within individual stakeholder sessions in order to capitalize on shared experiences.

## When to organize a consultation?

The *Futures of Education* initiative is organized into several phases (see below). UNESCO welcomes the organization of stakeholder focus group consultations between September 2019 and August 2020. In the second iteration of consultations (September 2020-March 2021) input will be sought on the visions and strategies preliminarily presented by the International Commission (separate guidelines will be disseminated).



## How to organize a focus group consultation?

UNESCO recommends conducting focus group consultations with groups of 10-15 individuals, to allow for discussion and interaction among participants. Typically one hour is the appropriate length of time for the focus group, but this can be contracted or expanded, depending on practical considerations. In many instances, focus group consultations can be incorporated within already-scheduled events. Kindly note that funding is not available for the organization of consultation events.

Stakeholder focus group consultations may be organized jointly or in partnership with UNESCO. Kindly note that UNESCO's name and logo cannot be used without prior written authorization. Please contact UNESCO for further information and guidance at [futuresofeducation@unesco.org](mailto:futuresofeducation@unesco.org).

Advice for facilitators:

1. We recommend that focus group sessions have a relaxed atmosphere and be conducted in a comfortable setting with participants sitting in a circle. The purpose is for participants to talk with one another and the facilitator should take a back-seat role as much as possible, steering and redirecting the conversation only minimally. The facilitator should be accompanied by a note-taker who records significant comments to aid the preparation of the short summary report.
2. While not required, UNESCO requests that *Futures of Education* consultations be announced in advance to the Education Research and Foresight (ERF) coordinating team ([futuresofeducation@unesco.org](mailto:futuresofeducation@unesco.org)). Each consultation should:
  - involve a clearly defined set of stakeholders;
  - center on the proposed discussion questions in this document [See: Facilitator's Guide]; and
  - allow for exchange and deliberation among participants to the greatest degree possible.
3. Every two months beginning the first week of December 2019 UNESCO will organize an online webinar for Futures of Education focus group facilitators to share best-practices and problem-solve collectively. Please contact the UNESCO coordinating team ([futuresofeducation@unesco.org](mailto:futuresofeducation@unesco.org)) to sign-up to attend one of these sessions.

## FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

### Welcome and introduction (10 minutes)

The consultation session will start with a short **3-5 minute introductory presentation** on the *Futures of Education* initiative. This presentation provide a context for the consultation and explains how the participants' ideas and perspectives will be used and how the session will contribute to the initiative. If circumstances allow, the Futures of Education introductory [video](#) should be shown. The *Futures of Education* **brochure** can also be distributed (note that UNESCO can provide copies upon request).

In order to capture the discussion, the facilitator should **assign a note-taker** to capture the main ideas raised in the discussion – preferably an observer who is not participating in the discussion.

Three main topics will be discussed. To stay within the one hour time window, the facilitator should plan to **limit the discussion to 15 minutes per topic**.

Following the introductory presentation and the viewing of the video, the facilitator can respond to a few questions from the participants on the purpose of the consultation and the process. The facilitator can mention that participants will be acknowledged if they wish or can participate anonymously.

### Topic 1: Our changing world: How do you view the future? (15 minutes)

The first questions asks participants to imagine the future in broad terms.

When you think about 2050 ...

What are you most hopeful about?

What are you most concerned about?

### Topic 2: Broad Purposes of Education (15 minutes)

The second question focuses on the 'why' of education (note that 'education' should be understood as all forms of organized learning for people of all ages).

Considering the visions of 2050 that you just described ...

What should be the collective purposes of education in 2050?

### Topic 3: Implications for Learning (15 minutes)

The third and final question is more specifically focused on learning and what should change in the future.

With the visions of 2050 and the collective purposes of education that you just described ...

How should *what* we learn, *how* we learn and *where* we learn change in the future?

### Wrap-up and thank you (5 minutes)

Thank the participants for their time and contributions to the *Futures of Education* consultation and discussions. Explain that the inputs gathered will be synthesized and shared with UNESCO and the International Commission steering the Futures of Education report to be released in 2021.

Kindly ensure that participants have registered their names and indicated if they wish to be acknowledged as contributors. Participants should also share their email addresses if they wish to receive updates on the project as well as participate in future consultation exercises.

Please encourage participants to participate in the Futures of Education online platforms. These are on the UNESCO website (<https://en.unesco.org/futuresofeducation/>) and range from answering a short survey, to writing a 1000 word essay, and submitting original artwork to illustrate a vision of the future of education.

Facilitators should offer to guide participants in accessing the online platforms on their laptops / smartphones, when and if possible.

### Supporting materials

- Introductory presentation and talking points (available in Arabic, English, Chinese, French, Russian and Spanish) – in Annex
- Questions that are likely to come up from participants of focus group discussions – in Annex.
- Video on the Futures of Education initiative (available in Arabic, English, Chinese, French, Russian and Spanish)
- *Futures of Education* initiative brochure (available in Arabic, English, Chinese, French, Russian and Spanish) – in Annex

### How to submit the consultation deliberations?

Kindly submit a completed Focus Group Consultation Reporting Form (Annex) to [futuresofeducation@unesco.org](mailto:futuresofeducation@unesco.org) preferably within two weeks of the consultation. Please note that we are requesting the organizers to **synthesize the central inputs within a space of two pages**. However, this can be accompanied by a separate long-form account (including photos, videos, or other creative content), if desired. Please be sure to complete all sections of the Consultation Reporting Form, including a list of participants and their affiliations to ensure that they can be properly acknowledged. Note that Consultation Reporting forms can be prepared in any of the six UN languages (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, Spanish). The consultation itself may be held in any preferred language.

### For more information

Kindly contact the Education Research and Foresight coordination team for more information at [futuresofeducation@unesco.org](mailto:futuresofeducation@unesco.org).

## Annex: Focus Group Consultation Reporting Form

Please provide the following information about your consultation.

### I. Basic information

<b>Date of Consultation:</b>				
<b>Location:</b>				
<b>Hosting Organization:</b>				
<b>Name, Title, and Affiliation of Facilitator(s):</b>				
<b>Name and Email Address of Key Contact Person:</b>				
<b>Language of Consultation:</b>				
<b>Time Spent in Consultation:</b>				
<b>Number of Participants:</b>				
<b>Participants' profiles: (please describe briefly the composition of the group)</b>	e.g. diverse group of individuals working on issues of climate change			
<b>Stakeholder groups: (please tick as appropriate)</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Youth	NGOs	Civil Society	UN
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Academia	Private businesses	Government	Other (please specify):

### II. Synthesis of inputs

Kindly limit your responses here to the following two pages. If desired, you may accompany this form with a separate long-form account. Please summarize your discussion in the boxes below.

<p><b>Topic 1: Our changing world: How do you view the future?</b></p> <p>When you think <u>about 2050</u> ...</p> <p>What are you most hopeful about?</p> <p>What are you most concerned about?</p>

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**Topic 2: Broad Purposes of Education**

Considering the visions of 2050 that you just described ...  
What should be the collective purposes of education in 2050?

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**Topic 3: Implications for Learning**

With the visions of 2050 and the collective purposes of education that you just described ...  
How should *what* we learn, *how* we learn and *where* we learn change in the future?

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**III. Feedback on Consultation**

<b>Are there any other questions that should be posed in the context of the <i>Futures of Education</i> consultations?</b>	
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**Is there anything else you wish to relay to UNESCO and/or the International Commission?**



## Questions that are likely to be posed during focus group discussions

### **Why does the project use Futures (in the plural)?**

The concept of futures in the plural is used to recognize that there is a rich diversity of ways of knowing and being around the world. The plural form also acknowledges that there are multiple dimensions to the future and that there will likely be various desirable and undesirable futures – all of which will vary greatly depending on who you are and where you stand. Rather than attempting to chart a single future, looking at futures in the plural validates multiple possible and desirable futures of humanity on our shared planet.

UNESCO's Futures of Education initiative also approaches the future as a space for democratic design that is connected to, but not limited by, past and present. It builds on dedicated evidence-based trend analysis that can help shine light on anticipated challenges and opportunities. This is complemented by participatory mechanisms for envisioning new possible futures of education. Consultations across world regions will tap the visions and aspirations of a wide range of stakeholders under the understanding that innovation and ownership of the future need to be locally anchored as well as globally discussed.

The project embraces a fluid, iterative, and collective approach to futures-making. The goal is to generate discussion and action on the role of education, knowledge and learning in view of the predicted, possible and preferred futures of humanity and the planet.

### **Why "Learning to become"?**

The concept of Learning to Become points to a philosophy of education and an approach to pedagogy that views learning as a process of continual unfolding that is ongoing and life-long. To think in terms of "becoming" is to invoke a line of thought that emphasizes potentials, rejects determinism and expresses a flexible openness to the new.

Learning to Become also invokes the need to develop the capacity to imagine a good and fulfilling life. Around the globe, for the many that live in conditions of poverty, exclusion, displacement and violence, the future can appear more as a set of shrinking possibilities than a world of hope and promise. When human aspiration is wasted, the world suffers.

As we come to terms with human-caused changes to the planet and face the possibilities of fundamental transformations in social organization, human consciousness and human identity, humanity needs to devote attention to the question: what do we want to become? Knowledge and learning are at the core of transformations in human minds and societies. Learning to Become invites us to become something we have not yet become.

### **Why look beyond the 2030 agenda?**

Education is a key piece of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Despite the scope of these global commitments and the expected achievements, there is still an urgent need to look beyond this fast-approaching horizon. While the Education 2030 Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action lays out a roadmap for the transformation of education systems and affirms a central commitment to inclusion and equity, we must still ask what education might yet become – and what education might yet enable us to become. UNESCO's Futures of Education initiative uses the horizon of 2050 and beyond in order to anticipate and shape both nearer and more distant futures.

### **Why should we participate in the consultation process and how will our perspectives be taken into account?**

In the visioning and research phase of the consultation process, which will run through September 2020, we will focus on discussing the educational challenges and opportunities envisioned for 2050 and beyond. Consultations will center on three topics: (1) How do you view 2050?; (2) What should be the collective purposes of education in 2050?; (3) How will learning need to change in the future?

These inputs will be analyzed and synthesized for presentation to the International Commission on the Futures of Education and also publicly released (in a variety of ways) to help further the global debate on the futures of education. These channels and associated documents/webpages will be developed in all 6 official UN languages.

In a second phase of consultation between October 2020 and April 2021, deliberations on initial visions and strategies proposed by the International Commission will also be the subject of consultation.

### **Why should I participate in a focus group discussion when I can complete the online modules?**

The open-ended nature of focus group consultation allows for people to explore and clarify their views. Group interaction is key to the focus group methodology. Oftentimes, a focus group conversation can lead in new and unexpected directions as participants reflect on their own and others' ideas. Focus groups also allow for participants to become an active part of the process of visioning the futures of education. They will share ownership and be a part of co-construction the futures of education.

Participants of focus group discussions are also encouraged to undertake one or more of the online consultations which range from answering a short question, to providing a 1000 word essay with their views on a topic related to the futures of education, and even submitting a drawing, sketch or painting to illustrate their vision on the futures of education.