



United Nations  
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Education  
Sector

# Futures of Education

LEARNING TO BECOME

**Joint Meeting of International Commission and Advisory Board  
18 September 2020 (online)**

## Meeting Notes

### Participants

H.E. President Sahle-Work Zewde (International Commission Chair), Stefania Giannini (Assistant Director-General for Education, UNESCO). Commission members: Abdel Basset Ben Hassen, Elisa Guerra, Evgeny Morozov, Karen Mundy, António Novoa, Fernando Reimers, Doh-Yeon Kim, Justin Yifu Lin, Maha Yahya, Cristovam Buarque, Patrick Awuah. Advisory Board members: Alice Albright (GPE), Tariq Al Gurg (Dubai Cares), Susan Hopgood (Education International), Matías Rodríguez Inciarte (Santander Universities), Robert Jenkins (UNICEF), Oliver Liang (ILU for Alette van Leur), Carlos Moedas (former EU Commissioner), Jaime Saavedra (World Bank), Refat Sabbah (Global Campaign for Education), Jeffrey Sachs (Columbia University), Andreas Schleicher (OECD), Cecilia Sharp (Sweden/SIDA), Liesbet Steer (Education Commission), Hilligje Van't Land (International Association of Universities), Yume Yamaguchi (UNU).

### Opening

In opening the meeting **ADG Stefania Giannini** welcomed the many UNESCO partners around the table. She applauded the many coordinated initiatives underway to address the urgent needs of the present moment, and also reminded those present of the importance of longer-term vision, the reason for the convening today. A message from UNESCO **DG Audrey Azoulay** referred to the launch of the initiative at the 2019 UN General Assembly, noting that reflection on the futures of education, which was important a year ago, had become vital today.

**H.E. President Sahle-Work Zewde** then offered opening remarks welcoming all those assembled. She reviewed the outputs of the International Commission to-date and expressed her appreciation to members of the Advisory Board for their contributions in two previous meetings. She put forward the goal of the session as gathering substantive input on key considerations that should be included in the forthcoming report and discussing how best to maximize the ongoing impact of the report beyond its release. H.E. President Sahle-Work explained that the frequent reference to 2050 and beyond in the Futures of Education initiative is not to model or predict 2050 but instead to envision challenges and opportunities, to take a longer-term perspective and simultaneously ensure that the report produced puts forth a vision that inspires and informs actions today.



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Before handing the floor over to members of the International Commission to offer their reflections on some of the work currently being developed by the Commission, H.E. President Sahle-Work highlighted three important commitments that are envisioned as weaving across and uniting the report. The first is to a commitment to the “commons” and to considering what it means to treat education and knowledge as global common goods. The second is to think about the ways education needs to be thought about as occurring across life and in all areas of life – in other words, as “interlaced” and connecting individuals, communities, and societies. The third is to prioritize “learning to live with the Earth”. In closing she again thanked those assembled and welcomed the exchange of ideas.

### Remarks from Commission members

Ambassador **António Nóvoa** discussed the work being done on rethinking the social contract for education. In doing so, he put forth the question of whether or not we have reached the end of a historical cycle of organizing schooling as an institution charged with performing a set of specific functions and enacting a set of specific responsibilities in the relationship between public authorities and families. He suggested that it is necessary to re-examine how those functions, responsibilities and relationships need to be structured in the future.

**Fernando Reimers** discussed the plans of a Commission work group that is examining the necessary transformation of the schooling model and the teaching profession. He explained that the text being prepared in this area is discussing the ways that the learning crisis has been aggravated by COVID-19 and is identifying the range of competencies necessary in a post-COVID world. This is being complemented by an examination of what is known about learning experiences and about the role of curriculum as an important driver, supported by pedagogies and organization of schools and teaching.

**Evgeny Morozov** offered an overview of ways that the Commission is developing its work on technology, access to information and the production and governance of knowledge. He noted that whether we are speaking of Artificial Intelligence or issues related to digital communication, both opportunities and questions emerge. Privacy, the political economy of knowledge, the ways that indigenous and other knowledges are, or are not, represented are important considerations. Morozov noted that the group was working on how a spirit of humanism can be preserved in a world that is highly technological.

**Abdel Basset Ben Hassen** discussed the work he is leading on civic participation and the protection of social and cultural rights. He noted that education needed to be transformed to support a new humanism and that human rights and citizenship values should be at the heart of learning and knowledge.

**Patrick Awuah** spoke to demographic change in Africa and the importance of job preparedness and skills for jobs needed in Africa. He listed ethics, civic engagement, critical thinking, analytical thinking, communication skills, the ability to listen to others, the ability to work in teams as key to innovation and



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technological competence, especially when we acknowledge that we do not know exactly what the jobs of the future will look like.

**Karen Mundy** discussed the work she is leading on revisiting the landscape of international cooperation, financing and development models. She underscored the importance of creating public utilities to support education systems as laboratories of learning.

### Remarks from Advisory Board members

**Jaime Saavedra** spoke on the importance of treating education as an enabling right for all the other rights and playing special attention to making education systems more efficient, resilient and equitable.

**Jeffrey Sachs** offered the view that COVID had worsened an already-existing educational crisis. He suggested strong linkages to the SDG goal of universal secondary completion and called for increased funding to adequately address the crisis of quality. Mr. Sachs discussed the importance of connectivity and emphasized the importance of learning to live with one another decently and learning to live with the earth.

**Alice Albright** discussed the importance of system transformation to address vulnerabilities in education. She called for governments, parent and teacher organizations, and civil society to all collaborate on this.

**Andreas Schleicher** cautioned against too much extrapolation from the current situation. He suggested that we cannot act as if we know what the future holds, but instead need to admit that we don't know the future. Schleicher suggested that the Commission explore out-of-the-box thinking that asks what is possible if the traditional schooling systems we know well fundamentally transform.

**Robert Jenkins** noted that everyone on the call so far seemed very aligned on vision, on the need for additional financing, and on the need to leverage best practices. He suggested that one major challenge is to ensure that countries are able to transform at the pace that is required.

**Liesbet Steer** put forth the question of what will make this time different – as many concepts have been presented before. She spoke about the White Paper on financing that is being prepared as well as the need to link to climate issues.

**Carlos Moedas** emphasized the importance of the social value and prestige accorded to teachers. He also argued that in shaping the futures of education there is an important role to be played by philanthropic foundations since they have funding and an ability to cover some of the distance between the public and the private sectors.

**Tariq Al Gurg** urged the Commission to remember that technology and connectivity are two distinct things, with connectivity as a basis for other uses of technology. He noted that a global declaration on connectivity is in preparation and invited UNESCO to release the Futures of Education report in December 2021 during the RewirED Summit taking place in Dubai at Expo 2020.



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**Susan Hopgood** stressed that the Commission must give due attention to teachers and teaching profession, particularly as we have seen teachers sidelined in much decision-making related to COVID disruptions.

**Oliver Liang** argued that the Commission shall pay adequate attention to the education that takes place outside schools. He also suggested that alongside the discussion of the 'learning crisis' it was important to also consider (a) the youth mental health crisis that has become increasingly prevalent in test-driven school systems, and (b) the crisis in highly resourced countries where we find a gravitation towards conspiracy theories and authoritarian solutions even among highly educated people.

**Cecilia Sharp** raised the importance of gender equality and suggested that the Commission think about what is needed to ensure an equal education system. She noted that gender equality is about both girls and boys, their values and future opportunities.

**Refat Sabbah** discussed the importance of education as a human right and the responsibility of states to ensure it. He also stressed the importance of taking the voices of teachers into account.

**Matias Rodriguez Inciarte** proposed that private sector involvement and international cooperation are important in solving the current crisis.

**Hilligje van't Land** recommended that the Commission remember to treat higher education as an important social actor. She argued for the importance of strengthening higher education systems at the national level and higher education institutions themselves. Van't Land suggested that ways should be found to further involve the Advisory Board in developing the substance of the report.

**Yume Yamaguchi** spoke about the severity of biodiversity loss and the ways that climate change forces new ways of thinking and acting. She offered her support of the importance of systems thinking and the importance of education for action.

## Closing

In her final comments H.E. President Sahle-Work noted her appreciation of the contributions, particularly of the members of the International Commission who are facilitating the work in these areas. She expressed her appreciation of the reactions and concrete proposals from Advisory Board members. On linking the work of the Commission with the SDGs, she noted that it is important not to re-invent the wheel. She noted her appreciation of the suggestion to pay attention to the dimension of gender, to the role of governments and to the education of those underserved. She expressed her support for continued engagement of the Advisory Board and pledged to ensure further opportunities for exchange.