



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

UNESCO's international commission starts reflection on the futures of education – Join the global debate



Knowledge and learning are humanity's greatest renewable resources. But are our current approaches to generating knowledge and spreading learning up to today's challenges? How well do they prepare us for the challenges of tomorrow – and also to take advantage of tomorrow's opportunities?

UNESCO's [International Commission on the Futures of Education](#) held its first meeting on 28 and 29 January 2020 in Paris to take stock of the global situation in education today and what can be predicted for 2050 and beyond. The Commission also took on the harder task of imagining possible futures and beginning to explore what might need to be rethought and reinvented in the education landscape.

Headed by President Sahle-Work Zewde of Ethiopia and composed of 18 thought-leaders from education, science, business, politics, academia and the arts, the Commission also affirmed the crucial need for people from around the globe to engage in this conversation.

“UNESCO is unique in the world for its ability to bring together people from across the planet to work together to tackle problems,” said the President in her opening remarks.



The Futures of Education is the latest in a series of global reports commissioned by UNESCO every quarter a century to grapple with the challenges and opportunities that the future holds in store and to inspire change.

How to engage the future?

How to engage the future was one of the major topics of the January meeting. As Fernando Reimers, professor at Harvard University said: “There is a future that is possible if we remain on auto-pilot, and there is a future that we could build if we are intentional.”

At the meeting Badr Jafar, a business leader from the United Arab Emirates, said that “it’s clear that technology doesn’t drive change, it enables change,” adding, “time will tell whether we’ve been able to harness the power of technology to really improve the state of the world, of humanity, of our habitat, or just to exacerbate our own human flaws.”

The International Commission affirmed the need to be intentional about the future while recognizing its basic unpredictability. Justin Yifu Lin from Peking University remarked: “The future has a lot of uncertainty. It can be good or it can be bad. Education is a way to prepare us with the ability to cope with our challenges and grasp opportunities for betterment.”

Thinking about the future does not mean we forget the present and the Commission spent a considerable amount of time surveying the political, economic, social and educational crises we face at present. The key challenge was posted by Serigne Mbaye Thiam, a Minister in the government of Senegal: “How to reconcile the necessity to respond to pressing needs while assuring a reflection on the future that is more long-term?,” he asked.

Help shape the future

The Commission will be engaging with people and ideas from around the world ahead of its next meeting in September 2020.

“We will listen to the voices of the whole world, to redefine what education must be in the 21st century,” says UNESCO Director-General Audrey Azoulay.

Help shape the future by joining the conversation. Please add your views on what should be the purposes of education [through this 2-minute survey](#). You can [express your ideas in writing](#) on what key issues need to be kept in mind as we think about the future of learning. There is also the option to [submit your drawing, photographs and paintings](#) on what education, learning and knowledge might look like in the year 2050.

Find out more about UNESCO’s [Futures of Education](#) initiative and join the conversation on social media via [#FuturesOfEducation](#).