

Response to COVID 19: Lessons learned and relevance of the MCU 2020

Eva Egron-Polak,

Former Secretary General, Senior Fellow, International Association of Universities,
Former Council Member, Magna Charta Observatory, Member of MCU 2020 Drafting Group

17 June 2021

Response and key lessons learned from COVID (MCO Webinar, September 2020) and now

- ▶ Lessons continue to be learned - about interactions at all levels - individual, between groups in society, between nations
- ▶ **Pandemic initially shook up traditional dichotomies such as**
 - ▶ rich countries/poor countries; democracies/ totalitarian regimes; rich people/poor people
 - ▶ In HE student sending / student hosting nations, etc.
 - ▶ **ALL WERE / ARE EFFECTED**
- ▶ **Renewed consideration of what is essential, who in society is valuable, how we consider individual and collective rights in different cultures**
- ▶ **HEIs demonstrated their capacity to adjust rapidly, focusing on students' learning**
- ▶ **Responses (and their success) differ according to**
 - ▶ conditions at the starting point; including the presence and use of technology
 - ▶ value systems in various cultures, countries and institutions

**PRE-EXISTING GAPS ASSERTED THEMSELVES AND WERE EXACERBATED -
CAPACITY TO RESPOND EFFECTIVELY VARIED AMONG NATIONS AND HIGHER
EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS**

2

An ongoing difficult balancing

HEI decisions depend on national policy and local conditions
Flexibility and responsiveness required!

Faculty capacity and readiness to move/stay online;
Availability of and access to technology, on the part of students
Differences among disciplines



The overall state and capacity of the health care system,
Size and make up of the student body (local, international, socio-economic profile of students, etc.)
Mental health resources

The business/funding model of HEI (public, private, tuition (domestic or international fee-dependent, etc.))

Transitioning to a post-Covid 19 era

- ▶ Key message: **‘Must not waste the crisis’**
- ▶ A confluence of crisis - pandemic, Black Lives Matter movement, decolonizing HE, causal links between pandemic and unsustainable exploitation of natural resources, economic impacts and disruption in all levels of education, etc. **All leaving deep and lasting scars and raising questions about future trajectories**
- ▶ Dealing with long term impact on learning, socialization, and mental health of students, risks for academic and administrative staff of working exclusively online for extended period (burnout, disconnectedness), etc.
- ▶ Seeking optimal use of technology - recognizing its real potential and short-comings; considering the future of international mobility, adjusting resource allocations and finding new financing models
- ▶ HE stakeholders are re-assessing what and how to change, what trajectory to adopt for their institutional development

The critical issue is reducing inequalities which became both bigger and more apparent in the pandemic - within and between nations alike; the risk is they will continue to grow.

3 Key areas of relevance of MCU 2020 for post-Covid 19 era

01

Principles

- Renewed focus on fundamental principles of autonomy and academic freedom
- Spelling out new critical values of integrity, equity and fairness

02

Out-reach

- Global in scope
- Building global networks of scientific enquiry
- Linking higher education values to developments external to HE

03

Social Responsibilities

- Today and for the future
 - To society locally and globally
 - Valuing inclusivity
- Fostering sustainability

COVID-19 lessons confirm need for focus on each new aspect

01

Global scope and reach

Interconnectedness
Interdependence
Solidarity

02

Equity and Integrity

HEIs key actors in improving access and success
Instilling value of integrity and honesty

03

Community and diversity

Appreciation of diversity of voices
cooperation and mutual learning and sharing in knowledge creation

Retaining lessons for the post Covid-19 era (coming soon...)

- ▶ Recognizing how socio-economic and racial or ethnic inequities impact on education and on capacity of individuals and societies to weather a crisis
- ▶ Reflecting on how important values and principles are and how they can help find the paths to positive and lasting changes
- ▶ Acknowledging critical importance of science, international scientific cooperation and scientific evidence for policy making and planning
- ▶ Realizing that some of the priorities of HEIs are unsustainable - international mobility and recruitment for economic reasons, multiple f-to-f seminars and meetings requiring travel.
- ▶ Noting the potential but also of the limits of technology in improving and making learning more accessible
- ▶ Acknowledging the importance of social interaction and engagement for learners and HEI staff and of universities as cultural actors in the community

Acknowledging of partnerships - local, cross-sectoral and international - based on shared and commonly agreed values as central means to finding solutions and sustainable direction for future development of HE, and more generally. ⁷