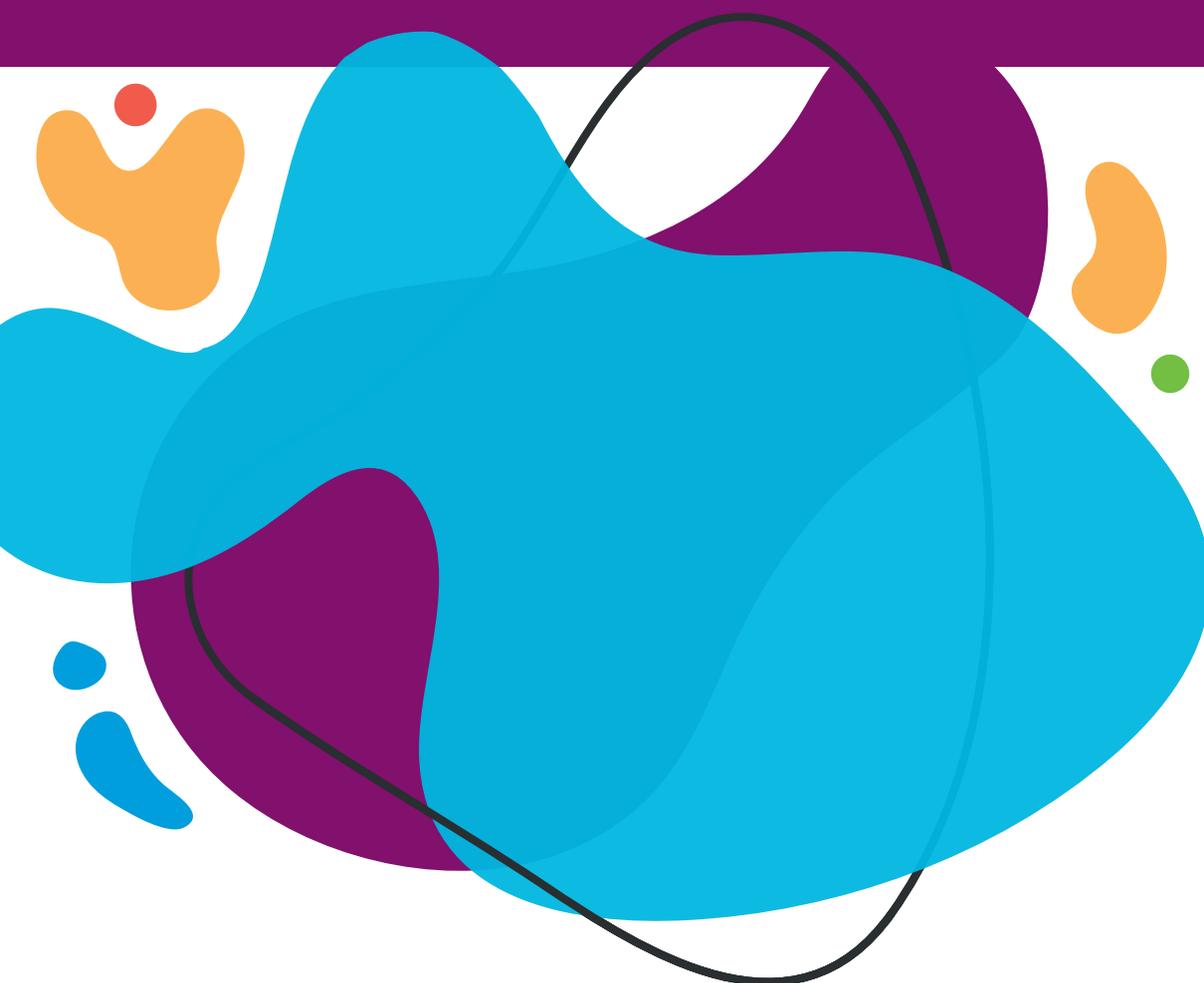


*Conference Conversation Starter*

# THE FUTURE IN FULL COLOUR





# **The future in full colour**

*Edited by Laura E. Rumbley*

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**EAIE Conference Conversation Starter**  
**The future in full colour**

**Edited by**

Laura E. Rumbley  
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# Table of Contents

- vii**    **Foreword**  
*Laura E. Rumbley, Associate Director Knowledge Development & Research EAIE*
- 09**    **Learning from the pandemic past to shape a new future**  
*Saskia Loer Hansen, Aston University, United Kingdom*
- 14**    **Students on the frontlines: the transnational  
dimension of student rights**  
*Matteo Vespa, European Students' Union (ESU)*
- 19**    **Clear skies, blue seas, green trees and us**  
*Marianne Mensah, Climate Innovation Education Lab (CIEL)*
- 25**    **About the authors**



# Foreword

What brings depth, dimension, impact and, frankly, *hope* to our work as international educators in the world today? These are some of the core questions behind the theme of the EAIE's 32nd Annual Conference and Exhibition, which took place 13–16 September 2022 in the vibrant city of Barcelona. That theme – ‘The future in full colour’ – provided the inspiration for this year's edition of the *EAIE Conference Conversation Starter*, a short series of essays designed to educate, provoke and inspire us to reflect carefully on where our field stands today and where we are headed, as individuals and as a community.

The trio of essays that comprises this year's publication cover extensive and important ground. In order to move forward, history tells us that it's often vital to first look backward. Written from the perspective of her leadership roles at Aston University in the UK, Saskia Loer Hansen's essay, ‘Learning from the pandemic past to shape a new future’, does just that. Reflecting on both the advantages and disadvantages that accrued to our institutions in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in light of online teaching and learning, she urges us to consider what all of this means to us *now*. Have we *really* changed, and in the ways that we ideally *want* to? Her call to action is clear: “Achieving a decade of progress overnight is, in many ways, a huge step forward for education. However, we need to be prepared to challenge ourselves to make sure that the huge step forward has, in its totality, taken us in the best direction for our learners and our partners across the world.”

Arguably, no one has a greater stake in the future than the young people of today. To this end, the contribution to our essay series authored by Matteo Vespa, president of the European Students' Union (ESU), gives us a direct line into some of the most pressing issues and aspirations of the generation now populating our higher education institutions. Specifically, in his piece ‘Students on the frontlines: transnational student rights’, he argues that student organisations around the world have a key role to play in ensuring “broad social well-being” on a global scale. Importantly, he stresses that close collaboration between student organisations and international educators across Europe and beyond will substantively enrich and sustain this work.

Finally, no discussion about a future in full colour can be complete without a consideration of the very health and vitality of the planet. In ‘Clear skies, blue seas, green trees and us’, Marianne Mensah reminds us that the international educators of today have both a powerful opportunity and a pressing responsibility to influence the future of the physical world around us by designing “life-changing educational experiences”. Resources, such as those developed by the Climate Action Network for International Education (CANIE), for which Mensah serves as European president, offer an exciting roadmap toward “a carbon-neutral and climate-literate international education sector by 2030”. But, of course, hard work lies ahead.

How will you contribute to a future in full colour? We hope this short collection of essays offers you new perspectives and new energy to imagine that future – and chase it.



**Laura E. Rumbley**

*Associate Director Knowledge Development & Research EAIE*



# Learning from the pandemic past to shape a new future

— *Saskia Loer Hansen*

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September 2019 saw the last in-person EAIE Conference in Helsinki. Little did we know then that the world as we knew it would change so significantly in the subsequent years. Fast forward to September 2022 and it is now possible for EAIE members to meet again in person in Barcelona. This provides a great opportunity for us to reflect on the pandemic and consider how we best build on some of the positives that have emerged from a very unsettling period of time, as we look toward a future in full(er) colour.

## NEW WAYS OF LEARNING: CULTURE SHIFT OR QUICK FIX?

If ever we needed an example of how interconnected our world is, the rapid spread of COVID-19 gave us exactly that. As we now emerge from the pandemic, it is quite breath-taking to look back at the speed at which we introduced new ways of working.

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We achieved overnight what felt like a decade of progress by being forced to change

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In early 2020, Aston University in the UK was implementing a digital strategy and developing a new education strategy which focused on blended learning. Without a pandemic, these strategies would have taken years to implement. Instead, we achieved overnight what felt like a decade of progress by being forced to change. We accelerated investments in the digital infrastructure, including a huge investment in digital hardship support to ensure that all students were able to access online learning. The rapid escalation of tools to support effective digital teaching delivery and online meetings saw all of us learning how to use chat functions, gauge audience feedback through online polls and manage virtual break-out rooms. Out of the necessity for us to work differently emerged more sophisticated use of technology and the creation of digital communities of learners and workers, as illustrated in a Universities UK (2022c) briefing.

This story of rapid change is one that is common to many universities, but now that the immediate rush is over, we should all stop and ask ourselves if we have really changed. In the rush to respond to shifting circumstances, did we make the deep cultural changes that might have occurred through a deliberate and fully-considered change of strategy, or have we simply made superficial changes for the purpose of dealing with the pandemic? Is the new blended approach to learning that we have created one that is sustainable and delivers great student experiences? Have we learnt the ‘easy’ parts of what technology offers, ignoring more sophisticated and useful functionality that might take more time and effort to learn?

Achieving a decade of progress overnight is, in many ways, a huge step forward for education. However, we need to be prepared to challenge ourselves to make sure that the huge step forward has, in its totality, taken us in the best direction for our learners and our partners across the world.

### THE WONDERS (AND CHALLENGES) OF ENGAGING THE WORLD FROM ONE ROOM

Working during the pandemic saw meetings with international partners moved online and we were able to engage in discussion positively and productively through platforms such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams. The disappointment of not meeting with people in person was balanced out by more people being able to participate in meetings than otherwise would have been the case, and this greater participation has created greater shared ownership and commitment. However, it has required genuine effort to provide opportunities for all participants to engage and to feel confident in turning on microphones and cameras in order to avoid inadvertently silencing voices.

To continue with our student recruitment, we at Aston rapidly moved to digital ways of engaging with prospective students. Our first ‘Aston Live’ conference saw students from across the world engaging in academic taster sessions and chatting with both academic and professional staff. It was exciting: none of us had run a conference like this before, and prospective students found it new and intriguing. Aston, like many other UK institutions, saw a significant increase in the number of new international students during this time (Universities UK, 2022b), and indeed also managed to deliver both physical and virtual student internships. Our alumni engagement took on a new dimension as alumni were invited to join virtual ‘public lectures’ or ‘world cafés’ and alumni also helped to provide in-country support for outbound or returning international students.

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It has required genuine effort to provide opportunities for all participants to engage and feel confident turning on microphones and cameras

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When we tried to replicate the ‘Aston Live’ experience some six months later, we heard murmurs of ‘digital fatigue’ and people being overwhelmed with online events. We had to adapt again, which became more difficult as there were fewer new ways of doing things. It would be a mistake to think that we have learnt enough about new ways of working from the pandemic; rather, our experience showed us that we can never stop innovating.

## TAKING STOCK

In my role as the Deputy Vice-Chancellor at Aston University, I have responsibility for all student-facing services, including student well-being and mental health, and all of our external activities covering international, business and alumni engagement. As I reflect on my own experience of the pandemic from that perspective, what have I learnt, and what does this mean going forward? A few key themes come to mind.

**I learnt:** Despite being isolated in my own home, I was more closely connected with colleagues, prospective students, alumni and partners across the world than pre-pandemic.

**Going forward:** We need to understand why many of us felt more connected. Was it because of the frequency of connection and just how easy it was to meet via Zoom across borders and time zones? Was it because of the time taken to speak one-on-one with many more people? By understanding why we were more connected, we can build stronger connections going forward.

**I learnt:** Virtual connections do not necessarily create friendships easily. Many students who connected online with peers in their learning journey really missed the opportunity to make friends. Our student union moved societies online, but virtual engagement in social activities was much harder to create than engagement in academic learning.

**Going forward:** Humans thrive on contact, and whilst virtual connections are great, they are not a total substitute for face-to-face meetings. We must not ignore the benefits of meeting people in person, especially when we don't know anyone to start with.

**I learnt:** Our university community has immense resilience in addressing challenges, using creativity, innovation and a genuine collective approach.

**Going forward:** We must not stop being innovative just because the immediate pressure is less. Imagine how far forward we could move if the ability to innovate as we did through the pandemic became a regular way of working.

**I learnt:** The importance of caring: colleagues looked after one another and went the extra mile in looking after the mental health and well-being of students.

**Going forward:** The pandemic gave many of us that extra impetus to care about others out of a concern for those who were struggling. As we move to a new normal, we must continue to care and be compassionate.

## THE FULL SPECTRUM OF INTERNATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Many universities have leadership positions that are focused on 'things international'. To enable the 'full colour' perspective to thrive in our institutions, perhaps we should focus on more systematically using the international lens to weave together the full range of activities that universities undertake. This would require a renewed emphasis on thinking innovatively, laterally and holistically, as well as strengthened analytical skills to spot connections and emerging trends. We cannot predict the future, but we

can articulate a vision for our institutions and our sector that builds meaningfully on the extraordinary road we have just travelled.

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How can we best mainstream 'virtual connectedness' so that it becomes a powerful mechanism to strengthen links with partners, alumni, employers and prospective students?
2. What works well in the way that our students are now learning, and what could we do better?
3. While the more 'transactional' part of partnerships might be managed online, how can we best build and sustain the friendships and close relationships that underpin successful partnerships in our new blended world?
4. How do we integrate the innovation, agility and creativity exhibited during the pandemic into 'business as usual'? What role do global partnerships and collaborations play in continuously building our resilience and ability to innovate?
5. How do we maintain the aspect of caring about one another and also showing kindness? Could future internship and mobility activities be pitched to not just support individual students in their learning, but to enable acts of kindness and support? How do we prioritise time to practice kindness?

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## Students on the frontlines: the transnational dimension of student rights

— *Matteo Vespa*

The world is navigating turbulent times. From the Russian invasion of Ukraine to China's Belt and Road Initiative, to the EU Global Gateway initiative – “a new European strategy to boost smart, clean and secure links in digital, energy and transport sectors and to strengthen health, education and research systems across the world” – geopolitics is dominating the global stage. In this context, international education and research cooperation face a rapidly shifting environment, where issues like ‘science diplomacy’ and ‘foreign interference’ are becoming the norm when discussing global higher education cooperation. At the same time, the astonishingly quick production of effective vaccines for COVID-19 is the result of collaboration across the global scientific community, and only global cooperation can succeed in avoiding that the climate crisis becomes a climate catastrophe.

Transnational engagement is arguably more important than ever before. This has clear implications for the higher education sector around the world generally, and specifically for the rights of students, who sit at the heart of both higher education systems and key movements advocating for change that are vital to the future of the planet.

### TAKING CUES FROM GLOBAL STUDENT ACTIVISM

In order to survive as a species, we need more global collaboration in education and research than ever. At the same time, we need a human rights-based approach, where educational and scientific cooperation cannot be used to violate human rights in the partner countries. We also need to tap the potential of a truly globally recognised education framework: it should not matter in which part of the world you studied, but the knowledge that you hold. This is the aim of the UNESCO Global Convention on Higher

Education (UNESCO, 2020), which as of May 2022 has been ratified by fifteen countries and needs ratification by just five additional countries to enter into force.

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The role of global civil society to ensure broad social well-being is crucial, and student organisations can and must take a prominent position in this work

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The role of global civil society to ensure broad social well-being is crucial, and student organisations can and must take a prominent position in this work. In this spirit, the Global Student Forum was established in 2020 as the first new global independent student organisation in seventy years, bringing together the major continental student organisations as well as several unaffiliated student networks from all over the world. The student-led campaigns for climate justice; the ratification of the UNESCO Global Convention on Higher Education; the international recognition of democratic, representative student organisations; as well as the strengthening of the dialogue and solidarity between student activists all across the world – all are examples of how students and student movement allies are demonstrating how civil society should evolve globally, in order to strengthen transnational collaboration for the greater good.

### STUDENT RIGHTS AND GOVERNANCE IN A EUROPEAN CONTEXT

The importance of having a common (*ie* ‘transnational’) understanding of student rights at the European level is crucial in a moment when initiatives like the European Universities promise to mainstream internationalisation, making transnationality a structural feature of the policies enacted in higher education institutions (HEIs) and in the ordinary lives of students in the decades to come. In the future, integrated, transnational universities will have to provide students with the same rights in each of the HEIs composing a European University alliance. To achieve that, the upward convergence of student rights within these alliances (and subsequently among Europe’s higher education systems) should be student-driven, and based on established frameworks.

One example of such a framework is the Student Rights Charter (European Students’ Union, 2021), first approved by the European Students’ Union (ESU) in 2008 and again in 2021, outlining what should be a minimum set of rights for all those studying in the continent. Others include the Bologna instruments such as the Principles and Guidelines for the Social Dimension, and the fundamental values of the European Higher Education Area, which are currently being defined. The success of this new transnational dimension will depend on building a truly democratic governance framework, where democratically-elected, representative students and staff members effectively influence the decision-making and the implementation of the transnational policies and initiatives.

### TRANSNATIONAL STUDENT RIGHTS AND INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

If the first dimension of transnational student rights is having a common minimum understanding at the international level, its second dimension is ensuring that international students specifically – whether undertaking credit or degree mobility

– are treated the same as their peers who are classified as ‘home students’. However, international students – especially those undertaking degree mobility – are currently subject to contrasting policies. For example, those not subject by law to the same tuition fees as national students pay higher fees to access higher education, becoming a relevant source of income especially for those HEIs which rely on tuition fees for a considerable part of their budget. Moreover, once admitted, they are rarely supported in integrating within the local society, and are sometimes seen by policy-makers as a burden.

This leads to paradoxical consequences. Where international students’ tuition fees are a relevant source of income, systems feel pressured to reduce the number of ‘less profitable’ national students, as is being discussed in the UK (Fazackerley, 2022). In less ‘market-oriented’ systems (or where EU students, who pay the same fees as national students, are a consistent share of the international student population), the trend might be to develop policies to indirectly discourage international students from applying to higher education in their country, as is the case in Denmark (Myklebust, 2021).

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An equitable approach demands that international students be treated as part of the whole community, not as a for-profit commodity

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An equitable approach to transnational student rights demands that international students be treated as part of the whole community, not as a for-profit commodity. It calls for equalising international and home student fees, and integrating international students’ cultural diversity into the body of assets of a student-centred learning experience, to the benefit of classmates. It also means developing (or supporting student organisations to develop) activities and frameworks where international and national students can meet, connect and be part of a community. An understanding of and respect for transnational student rights will foster the development of real transnational communities in our higher education systems, which in turn will create citizens and agents of change who are at ease in collaborating globally to tackle our common challenges as humans.

International educators and agents of internationalisation, in Europe and the world, have a great responsibility in the years to come. They need to navigate through a multipolar, fragmented world while preserving the openness of our societies. Further developing and enthusiastically implementing the transnational dimension of student rights – which includes treating international students as a community, not as a market – is a great tool in supporting that, and they will find a strong ally in the democratic, independent, organised student movement.

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Is your institution (HEI, government, agency) familiar with the ESU Student Rights Charter?
2. How does your institution treat international students: as a market, a burden or a part of your community?

3. In what ways does your institution work to integrate local and international communities under the framework of Internationalisation at Home?
4. Does your institution involve the academic community (including students and their representatives) in its internationalisation policies (including in possible governance frameworks)?
5. Does your institution have a strategy to foster a human rights-based approach to global educational and scientific cooperation when engaging with foreign partners?

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# Clear skies, blue seas, green trees and us

— *Marianne Mensah*

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**A**s international educators, we are passionate about giving our students the best learning experience, one they will remember in 50 years when thinking back on their studies. Ideally, it's an experience that will help them shape a better future. It's an experience that will empower them as young adults in a multi-cultural environment.

Do you remember your most salient learning experience? I will never forget a simulation of climate negotiations 20 years ago that provided me a deep dive into the global dimension of climate change. This was a wake-up call to the fact that the clear skies, blue seas and green trees that we took for granted on our beautiful campus were endangered ecosystems that needed our collective attention.

## **A BOLD AGENDA**

Today, scientists responsible for the IPCC (2022) report 'Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability' underscore the fact that climate, ecosystems, biodiversity and human societies are deeply interdependent. They call for immediate action on climate change, conservation and restoration of ecosystems: "Any further delay in concerted anticipatory global action on climate adaptation and mitigation will miss a brief and rapidly-closing window of opportunity to secure a liveable and sustainable future for all". This means changing our energy systems, our modes of transportation, our industrial processes, our construction techniques and our agricultural practices. It's a bold agenda that requires a departure from business as usual.

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The clear skies, blue seas and green trees that we take for granted are endangered ecosystems that needed our collective attention

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In 2020, the European Commission adopted an ambitious programme, the European Green Deal (European Commission, 2020), a €600bn roadmap to achieving carbon

neutrality by 2050. Rising to this challenge will deeply influence our economy and our lifestyles. By 2021, France had already adopted a climate and resilience law by which large companies must identify the new competencies needed for this ecological transition and adjust their human resources strategies accordingly. The higher education sector is thus also deeply implicated in this agenda, with important ramifications for international education specifically.

So, if we as international educators want to create experiences that students will remember in 50 years, and will also contribute to addressing these urgent climate needs now and over the next decades, then providing students with education on environmental issues makes sense. But, how best to undertake this work?

### **COLLECTIVE COMMITMENT AND PURPOSEFUL ACTION**

Operating from the premise that a sector-wide approach is vital, we need to find ways to work together purposefully and effectively. One way to do this is through organisations like the Climate Action Network for International Educators (CANIE). Launched in 2020, CANIE is striving for a carbon-neutral and climate-literate international education sector by 2030. CANIE has worked with several leaders of the international education sector to propose the CANIE Accord (CANIE, 2022a), a set of principles and commitments that guide organisations to reduce their carbon emissions, support advocacy, and foster climate literacy. The EAIE is one signatory of the Accord.

In addition to laying out these principles and commitments, the CANIE Accord contains guidelines on decarbonisation of operations and travel. One good example of these guidelines in action is the ‘Travel with CANIE’ (CANIE, 2022b) initiative which links CANIE and international education associations in encouraging sustainable travel to conferences in our field. ‘Travel with CANIE’ fosters carbon emissions reductions and carbon literacy of conference participants, as well as networking among the community of sustainable travellers. The Accord also encourages advocacy for a socially just and ecological transition to carbon neutrality. Supporting youth organisations’ advocacy to empower young people and enable effective youth-to-youth communication is another important aspect of this work. The Accord also highlights the integration of environmental literacy in education programmes as a priority.

### **OVERCOMING ECO-ANXIETY**

Integrating environmental literacy in (international) education programmes is indeed critical, as the capacity to act on climate change depends on students actually gaining a solid understanding of environmental issues through their education. Of course, students are aware of the ecological crisis and the coming changes, but they don’t necessarily have the right knowledge and skills to act on this information. In France, for example, a recent survey from IPSOS and Fondation du Collège de France (2021) showed that 79% of young people are interested in climate change, but 46% don’t know what greenhouse gasses are.

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## The gap between eco-awareness and eco-competencies opens the door to eco-anxiety

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The gap between eco-awareness and eco-competencies opens the door to eco-anxiety. ‘Eco-anxiety’ (Panu, 2020) refers to a form of anxiety related to any and all aspects of the ecological crisis around us, from climate change and deforestation to species extinction and pollution. In 2021, an international survey (Marks *et al*, 2021) in 10 countries revealed that 45% of young people said their feelings about climate change “negatively affected their daily life and functioning”. Climate psychologists recommend knowledge and action as the best therapy for eco-anxiety. Thus, empowering students to act on environmental issues becomes critical to help them build a healthy relationship with the environment.

### DESIGNING ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION PROGRAMMES

In providing climate education to students through international education, we face what I call the ‘climate education dilemma’: we need to provide this education without depressing students with the complexity of the issues. My eight years of experience in climate education and training have shown that combining science, innovative pedagogy and experiential learning helps overcome the barriers of eco-anxiety and break down complexity.

For students who aren’t specialising in earth sciences, games such as the Climate Fresk, which maps out the causes and consequences of climate change, can be a useful tool. Focusing on solutions can also help overcome doom and gloom. The Drawdown Project is a useful pedagogical tool for educators since it presents impactful climate solutions for decarbonisation.

To be meaningful to students, solutions should relate to their field of study and be based on local examples. For example, according to Monica Perez Bedmar, Seminar Director of the Marine Ecology Seminar (Syracuse University, 2022) and Instructor at the Syracuse University Madrid programme, field studies are essential to learn about marine biodiversity. Her programme offers a course on the management of the Mediterranean coastal ecosystems including field trips to assess the impact of environmental protection measures on local marine eco-systems.

### SHIFTING VALUES

Education is a vital first step, but effectively addressing the climate crisis will require changing behaviours. Behaviours are largely driven by our values and beliefs. In a sense, the current environmental crisis reveals the lack of environmental values. How can we inspire behavioural change rather than imposing it? This is where the transformative potential of international education comes into play.

International education provides opportunities for immersion in different cultural environments, in which students can discover different sets of values and beliefs. Moreover, cultural diversity fosters creative thinking about problem solving. As international educators, we can seize these opportunities to introduce students to cultural environments with embedded environmental values. For example, many indigenous

communities have preserved close relationships with nature. Matthew Aruch, Global Education Director at Earthday, studied the benefits of the Pinkaiti Partnership (Aruch, 2021), which takes students on field trips to the Amazon in Brazil while keeping the conservation of the Kayapo Forest as the principal objective of the project. In reflecting on the programme, Aruch notes that “Participants cited the social and emotional learning that comes from interacting with different cultures, languages, and environments.” He further highlights that the university participation – which included activities from researchers, instructors and students from universities from Brazil, Canada and the US – made a significant contribution to the forest protection as well as other important educational, social and economic outcomes. This type of multi-stakeholder partnership could be a source of inspiration for others undertaking international education programme design focused on similar objectives.

### OUR WORK MATTERS

In the current context, there is no room for ‘business as usual’. We as international educators have the opportunity to influence the transition to carbon neutrality through the design of life-changing educational experiences that will reduce carbon emissions and protect and restore ecosystems. To ensure clear skies, blue seas and green trees, international educators worldwide must band together in committing to a bold agenda and designing education programmes that instil the values we need to meet the challenge of our changing climate.

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How does your organisation integrate environmental issues in programme design?
2. How does your organisation take into consideration eco-anxiety and solutions to eco-anxiety in its operations and programmes?
3. What multi-stakeholder partnerships can your organisation build to foster carbon emissions reduction, conservation of biodiversity and ecosystem restoration?
4. Is your organisation interested in signing the CANIE Accord?

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# About the authors

**Saskia Loer Hansen** is Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Engagement) at Aston University with responsibility for external engagement, including internationalisation, business and civic engagement, marketing and communications, alumni relations and the student experience. She served as Aston University's Interim Vice-Chancellor from late 2021 to September 2022. Saskia's career has spanned research and innovation, policy and quality, international relations, transnational education and global engagement across Denmark, Scotland, Australia and now England. Saskia is passionate about social mobility and intercultural experiences and believes in the power of sharing good practice and solving problems through collaborative practice. Saskia has contributed to EAIE activities over the years and is engaged in various international education activities, currently serving as Chair of the Universities UK Europe Network. Saskia has degrees in Social Anthropology and Ethnography, European Studies and an MBA.

**Matteo Vespa** is the President of the European Students' Union (ESU). He has been active in the student movement at the local, national and European levels since 2016. Matteo graduated from the University of Bologna with a Master's degree in International and Diplomatic Sciences. As a member of the ESU Executive Committee, he worked extensively on issues such as academic freedom, Internationalisation at Home, and global outreach and solidarity, including on projects such as Next Generation EU, the Conference on the Future of Europe, and the proposal for a European Students At Risk scholarship scheme. His current areas of work include the European Education Area; public responsibility, governance and financing of higher education; fundamental values of the EHEA; Students at Risk schemes; and Ukraine.

**Marianne Mensah** is the founder of the Climate Innovation Education Lab (CIEL), which supports education and businesses in integrating climate action in their operations through training and consultancy. Marianne has eight years of experience in higher education on teaching climate change and sustainability. She is the coordinator of the module on smart and sustainable cities in the MSc Engineers for Smart Cities at Université Côte d'Azur. She is also the President of CANIE (the Climate Action Network for International Educators) Europe, and a founding member of Alive! Art Creativity & Climate Change. Additionally, she is one of the coordinators of the Group France of the European Education for Climate Coalition. Marianne worked for fifteen years for international organisations where she developed a comprehensive knowledge of climate strategies and a wide range of skills in assessment of sustainable development projects in Europe and Asia. She holds an MPA from Harvard Kennedy School of Government and a Master's degree in Economics from Sciences-Po Paris.

