Education for Social and Environmental Justice: diversity, sustainability, responsibility

7 September (Online), 12-14 September 2023 (Oxford, UK)

Conference Committee Report

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Executive Summary

The 2023 Conference theme, '*Education for Social and Environmental Justice: diversity, sustainability, responsibility*' and six associated sub-themes proved highly popular, attracting 518 abstract submissions.

The conference was held online (7 September) and in person (12-14 September). The online day was added as a response to delegates' concerns over the issues of inclusion and decolonisation with regards to the conference being held in Oxford. Additionally, UKFIET and BAICE provided 31 bursaries to allow more delegates to join the conference in person.

Following peer review and feedback by the theme convenors, 265 proposals (51%) were accepted across the six sub-themes, including ring-fenced slots for Global Education Monitoring Report and Meet the Editors sessions. Of these, 227 proposals (44%) were for the in-person days in Oxford and 38 (7%) for the online day. The breakdown for the in-person days is as follows: 103 papers, 38 symposia, 56 quickfire presentations (short 7-minute accounts of new ideas, projects or key findings), 15 creative workshops, and 15 posters. For the online day, the breakdown is as follows: 17 papers, 2 symposia, and 19 quickfire presentations.

The biennial UKFIET conference aims to stimulate critical dialogue between actors across the globe involved in improving education, learning, and training for all. We believe that the 2023 conference fully achieved this mission. Success was reflected in the responses to the conference survey - overall reaction to the programme was positive:

- 71% felt that the hybrid approach was valuable and something UKFIET should continue with.
- The delegates used the following words to describe the conference: 'inspiring', 'enriching', 'great', 'fantastic', 'amazing', and 'impressive', amongst other similar positive feedback.
- The sessions were 'informative', 'educative' and 'stimulating' and the conference overall was 'friendly' and 'welcoming'. The opening plenary in particular received positive feedback.
- Networking was considered the most valuable part of the conference.

Programming was based on allowing 30 minutes for a paper, 15 minutes for a quick fire, and 90 minutes for a symposium or creative workshop (timing inclusive of discussion). Given the large number of submissions it was agreed to start sessions early on the Wednesday and Thursday, so the total capacity for the programme was 9 x 90-minute slots in 11 parallel sessions. It was therefore clear that we would have to reject a lot of high-quality submissions, although thanks to the online day, the rejection rate was lower than in previous years – 204 submissions (39%; compare to around 50% in previous years). Still, we had to request some presenters to present under shorter formats.

The Conference drew 793 participants, seven percent up from the record attendance in 2017 of 736. The addition of the online day contributed to this as 105 participants registered for online day only. The majority (66%) of participants were women.

Participants came from 60 countries (as compared to 50 countries in 2019 which was the last in-person conference). A little less than half (49%) were UK based (primarily from England, but also Northern Ireland and Scotland), and a further 10% from other parts of Europe. There were over 140 participants from countries across Africa, comprising 19% of all participants. Around 9% of all participants were from the USA. Countries from Asia (11%) were well represented. However, there were only 5 participants from South America

(Colombia and Peru), 5 participants from the Pacific (Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand) and 9 from the Middle East (Jordan and Lebanon). Around 30% of participants gave their primary affiliation as a member of a University, 44% as members of multilateral organisations and international non-governmental organizations, 7% as members of bilateral organisations/institutions, and the rest were from governments and other types of institutions.

ExOrdo was used for abstract submission. The cost for this was included in the conference cost which did impact conference fees (along with venue cost, etc.). Registration and accommodation booking were via Ticket Tailor and the associated transaction fees were built into the fees (for registration) and included in the nightly cost (for accommodation).

The website, email newsletter, Twitter and LinkedIn were the key means of communicating with the community in the lead up to the conference. During the conference, Twitter was used as the main social media platform – to send out key messages and photos and to engage with messages from members of the community. During the month of September, the Twitter account gained 122 new followers (compared to 286 in September 2021). The total number of Twitter followers stands at 6,279 in the middle of January 2024. This has risen by nearly 2,000 followers in two years. However, people are using X (the platform previously known as Twitter) less now. Although the figures are still positive, unfortunately, analytics are no longer available unless users have a paid account. We also engaged with LinkedIn content during this conference for the first time, although this was more in terms of engaging with posts shared by others, as well sharing photos from the conference. More people are now using LinkedIn – the number of followers increased by 677 during September 2023, with a large spike of views from mobile phones, especially during 10-14 September.

A further successful innovation was the use of a Conference App, Whova. Through this, participants were able to access an up-to-date version of the conference programme with presentation abstracts, a platform for networking and plan personal schedules. Participant response to the App was highly positive; a little over 90% downloaded the app and actively used, over 4,300 private messages were exchanged, 762 community board messages posted, 105 photos shared, 84 questions to organisers posted, and over 10,000 in-app views of the agenda (537 delegates set up a personal agenda).

The conference committee (17 members drawn from diverse institutions and organisations) were supported by a group of volunteers for the online and in-person days. Volunteers were postgraduate students from various universities who put themselves forward to help.

The full conference report offers several detailed *recommendations* for the UKFIET 2025 Conference. The following represent some of the key recommendations for consideration for UKFIET 2025.

- o Whilst only a small number of survey respondents commented negatively on the paper selection process, there seemed to be a lot of chatter around it before and during the conference. There seem to be three recurring issues: 1) A sense of a lack of objectivity in the paper selection – lack of clarity of the review criteria; how diversity and inclusion are prioritised; 2) A desire for more constructive and in-depth feedback for rejected submissions; 3) Unclear process for appeals.
    1. The selection criteria is published alongside the call for papers, and the co-convenors score the papers according to the criteria. Two co-convenors blind-review independently and then there is a process decision-making depending

on the number of papers received. There are a number of things taken into consideration: 1) Diversity and coherence of papers that tell the story of the conference and sub-theme; 2) Diversity of presenters – organisations, career points, geography, gender, ethnicity, sector; 3) Ranking (including discussions on the papers that received very different scores from the co-convenors). Therefore, the process is based on objective scoring, and then finalised more subjectively.

Recommendation: Be more transparent about this process at the time of releasing the call for proposals and in the acceptance/ rejection text.

2. Providing more detailed feedback correlates directly with the amount of work that co-convenors are required to do. With five of the six sub-themes receiving 80+ submissions, the workload is brutal. It is unrealistic to expect co-convenors to spend more time on feedback.

Recommendation: Either: manage expectations by stating that unfortunately detailed feedback is not possible; or look at a different way of running the sub-themes (more co-convenors, a co-convenor + a team of reviewers).

3. The majority of requests to relook at rejection decisions came from seasoned professionals, which is a privileged position to be in.

Recommendation: Either: Create and publish an appeals process so that everyone is aware of it and can access it; or: State that the decisions are final and no appeals will be accepted.

o Decolonisation: A number of respondents commented on decolonisation, questioning why the conference is always held in the UK and Oxford specifically and how that prohibits Global South attendance. There also seemed to be a lot of discussions around this before and during the conference. There were several mitigating factors included in the 2023 conference, namely the hybrid format and the diversity lens applied to the selection process. However, more seems to be required.
Recommendation: 1) UKFIET develops a position on decolonisation and makes it widely available as soon as possible. 2) UKFIET could look for opportunities to work with sister-networks in other regions/ locations (beyond BAICE) and do joint events/ conferences.

o Hybrid conference: The survey respondents overwhelmingly supported the hybrid design of the conference, albeit with some constructive feedback on considerations for improvement.
Recommendation: To remain relevant and to adhere to the principles of inclusion and environmental protection, UKFIET should commit to continuing with hybrid conferences. However, between now and the start of the planning for the next conference, research should be conducted into: 1) technology to increase hybrid sessions and the recording of all sessions; 2) different options for online vs in-person sequencing; 3) more high-tech conference platform to allow people to upload presentations remotely more easily.

o Safeguarding: There was a safeguarding issue raised after the conference. This was around inappropriate behaviour of some participants towards a younger, female attendee.
Recommendation: UKFIET should have a safeguarding policy and reporting process in place before the next conference.

A copy of the full conference report can be obtained from info@ukfiet.org