

**UNESCO International Community of Practice:  
Global Alliance on the Science of Learning for Education  
Terms of Reference**

## **I. Background and introduction**

UNESCO organized a [meeting of experts on the ‘Learning Sciences’](#) on 25-26 October 2023 in Paris. The meeting was in response to the Call to Action from the 2022 [Transforming Education Summit](#) and to operationalize some of the recommendations in the report of the [International Commission on the Futures of Education](#), which are also reflected in the [United Nations Secretary General’s Vision Statement on Transforming Education](#). The latter articulates the importance of curriculum and pedagogy while emphasizing the need for innovations, powered by the often-neglected integration of scientific knowledge of pedagogy and how humans learn to prepare the learners of today for a rapidly changing world. The meeting also explored the role that intentional integration of scientific knowledge across disciplines and professional sectors could play to support inclusive, quality, and holistic learning and the work of the [SDG 4 High-Level Steering Committee \(HLSC\)’s Functional Area 1 on evidence-based policy formulation and implementation](#).

These Terms of Reference define the objectives, scope and modality of work for a global community of practice that gathers together scientists, policymakers and practitioners to facilitate the translation of scientific knowledge from the integrative science of learning and pedagogy (the Science of Learning) for application to education policy and practice, which this inaugural meeting leads and contributes to.

## **II. Objectives**

The overarching aim of the Global Alliance on the Science of Learning for Education (henceforth, the Alliance or Global Alliance) is to serve as an international community of practice and ‘network of networks’ to influence and inform global and national policy discourses on transforming education and learning which are currently taking place in both political and education development fora. To this end, the Alliance will work closely with the HLSC’s Functional Area 1 on evidence-based policy formulation, planning and implementation to inform these debates. The Alliance will be represented by UNESCO as its Scientific Council at global multi-stakeholder consultation and coordination mechanisms (e.g., Global Education Meeting, the High-Level Steering Committee for SDG 4, G20 meetings, the SDG 4 Technical Coordination Mechanism, UN General Assembly) and other important high-level global political decision-making events.

This objective will be achieved by improving the feedback loop from research production to policymaking (i.e., scientific knowledge to inform policymaking) and implementation (i.e., the uptake and application of scientific knowledge to improve pedagogy and teaching-learning processes), and vice versa, and to enhance communication and improve resources and tools to support the SDG 4 mission of achieving a high-quality education in formal and informal learning environments, inclusive of digital and remote learning, with respect to education policies, pedagogical practices, and teacher education and professional development. It is understood that the scientific knowledge about how people learn and about teaching-learning processes embeds scientific inquiry from all academic disciplines that study learning and pedagogy, as well as those which, working on the frontiers of knowledge, have a potential

to impact education. Another aspect of this effort is to identify the frontier areas of research, which are apparently far from education issues, but have a potential to impact them strongly in the future.

In particular, the objectives of the Global Alliance on the Science of Learning for Education as an international community of practice are as follows:

1. Foster a community of practice for brokering between scientists, policymakers and practitioners in education, and provide a platform for international cooperation, knowledge exchange, consensus, and networking, seeking synergies among the multiple existing networks working independently.
2. Broaden the understanding of what it takes to truly transform teaching and learning in scientific ways through scientist-policymaker-practitioner-community collaborative enquiries, investigations, and experimenting on the application of findings from scientific studies.
3. Develop a consensus and peer-reviewed harmonization and synthesis of scientific knowledge about how people learn and teaching-learning processes for the implementation and uptake by education policymakers and practitioners.
4. Support wide-scale implementation by promoting systems thinking, interdisciplinary approaches, and innovation in education policies and practice.
5. Provide evidence-based tools and strategies to promote improvements in teaching and learning.
6. Strengthen capacity, especially in the global south for research and action to address the multiple crises and challenges in education and learning that transcend borders and require not only local but global solutions.
7. Leverage UNESCO Chairs and UNITWIN Networks, who act as producers of 'local' knowledge, for strengthening cooperation on global activities related to SDG 4.

### III. Scope of work

The work of the Alliance is sector-wide and global by nature, covering all levels and aspects of education and learning and in sync with its core values as defined by the objectives above. The scope of work of the network is determined by those that contribute to one or all of the following:

- (i) Education policy or practice.
- (ii) The experimentation of ideas and innovations.
- (iii) The production or synthesis of sound, rigorous and impartial evidence from multiple disciplines.
- (iv) The exploration of the science-policy-practice nexus.
- (v) The implementation or uptake of scientific findings for improving learning or pedagogy.

As such, the Alliance:

- Does not fund research projects, but leverages the cross-cultural needs, research, technical expertise, resources and in-kind contribution from members.
- Does not promote the work of a particular researcher or network but serves as a clearing house for knowledge sharing, peer learning, networking and capacity strengthening.
- Supports and facilitates the open access of scientific evidence and research findings to the public, policymakers and other stakeholders.

- Supports relevant capacity-building activities in various regions of the world through responding to situational analyses of the status of education practice and policy in these regions.

#### IV. Working modality

As Global Alliance on scientific knowledge of human learning and how learning is optimized (or not) through education policies and practices, members meet regularly to identify shared systemic needs, share research findings, learn from peers, identify emerging topics of importance for collaborative enquiries, investigations, or experiments. The work will be facilitated by virtual discussion on relevant platforms, hybrid or face-to-face meetings, and in the form of informal brainstorming sessions, research seminars, information sessions, expert panels, multi-country, multi-stakeholder dialogues, webinars, conferences, and other avenues as decided by the members. Depending on the priorities, interest and demand from policymakers and practitioners, members will propose activities or project ideas for experimentation that are sensitive to and inclusive of the social, economic, and cultural diversity as well as the scope and scale of global learning challenges (e.g., inadequate acquisition of basic or foundational skills, the crises of quality, inequality, and relevance in student learning). Sub-groups (Working Groups) of members who share similar interests and goals could also be set up accordingly.

It is expected that the Alliance will have a follow-up meeting in one year's time to review the progress, decide on and plan for any follow up activities.

The initial structure for management and governance of the Alliance is as follows:

##### 1. Steering Committee

The Steering Committee is made up of representatives of recognized institutions and/or individual experts with a record of relevant contributions to human learning, pedagogy, and education. The Steering Committee members are nominated by members of the Alliance for an initial term of up to 3 years. Renewal for one or more full terms is possible on the decision of the Steering Committee. Nominations to join the Steering Committee may be submitted every two years by member institutions, by self-nomination, or by the Secretariat at UNESCO. The Steering Committee will be composed of 6 to 8 members, of which at least one member representing the following stakeholder groups:

- Scientist (e.g., an experienced researcher or academic from a university or research agency)
- Practitioner (e.g., a master teacher or teacher educator from a teacher training institute)
- Policymaker (e.g., a policy analyst in international education and at least 1 person from a Ministry of Education)
- Foundation or funder

To facilitate the research to policy connection, it is expected that at least 1 person will be an experienced policymaker from a Ministry of Education. It is also expected that from the above mix of expertise, there will be balanced representation of gender and region, with expertise working in low- and middle-income countries. To prevent the discontinuity of knowledge and operations, Steering Committee members will be renewed in cycles of at least 2 members each term.

To prepare for the first (inaugural) meeting on Learning Sciences in October 2023, an ad-hoc Advisory Group initially consisting of 4 members was established to guide UNESCO. Subject to further discussion

including that of the inaugural meeting, the role and membership of the group will be revised accordingly.

The Steering Committee plays a crucial role in making decisions that guide and facilitate the direction and operation of the network, including:

**Planning:** The Steering Committee is responsible for making critical decisions on key directions, issues, risks, and contingency plans. With support from the Secretariat, the group will review proposals from members of the Alliance submitted to the Secretariat, which then refers the proposals to the Steering Committee, and make decisions ensuring the alignment with the overall vision and objectives of the Alliance. As and where needed, the group may seek the views of relevant external experts on a particular topic. The Steering Committee will establish the criteria, timeline and procedures for selection of proposals.

**Approving new membership:** The Steering Committee reviews and approves proposals for new membership with support from the Secretariat.

**Reviewing and approving the biennial workplan:** The Steering Committee reviews and approves the biennial workplan of the Alliance based on an initial draft prepared by the Secretariat.

There are further activities that the Steering Committee can address with support from the Secretariat, including, but not limited to, fundraising, public relations, and partnerships with other networks.

## 2. Secretariat

Currently, the Secretariat of the Alliance is hosted by the UNESCO Section of Education Policy based in Paris, France. The Secretariat is responsible for coordination and communication with and among the members of the Alliance, consultation with the Steering Committee, organizing meetings, and publishing and disseminating the work and annual meeting outcomes of the Alliance.

## 3. Membership

Membership is open to universities, research institutions, networks, think tanks, civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations, multilateral organizations, intergovernmental organizations, foundations, funders, associations, academic societies and publishers (referred to as Institutional Membership), as well as individual researchers, academics, educators, teachers, and policymakers, who may be representatives of national governments (referred to as Individual Membership).

In the case of Institutional Membership, a Focal Point (and Deputy Focal Point) must be nominated who will represent the institution in the annual meetings of the Alliance and be responsible for implementing the activities in connection with its membership. It is important that the Focal Point be the person responsible for liaising and communicating with the Secretariat. In the case of Individual Membership, the Focal Point will be the individual expert.

In principle, UNESCO does not charge fees, however, the Steering Committee can decide whether to implement a payment structure and for which types of memberships.

Criteria for membership will be reviewed occasionally or as the need arises by the Steering Committee.

### *3.1 Institutional Membership*

Institutional Membership to the Alliance would be open to all institutions, based on the following criteria:

- 1) Mandate of the institution (or university, research institution, network, think tank, civil society organization, non-governmental organization, multilateral organization, intergovernmental organization, foundation, funder, association, academic society or publisher, etc.) is strongly linked to brokering, knowledge translation, or conducting scientific research on learning, teaching-learning processes, quality of education, improving student learning outcomes, and other education-related activities linked to the scope of work of the Alliance.
- 2) Track record of relevant contributions to brokering, knowledge translation, or conducting scientific research on learning, teaching-learning processes, quality of education, improving student learning outcomes, and other education-related activities linked to the scope of work of the Alliance.
- 3) Approval by a simple majority of the Steering Committee.

Applicants for Institutional Membership may submit the application form and an endorsement letter by the appropriate authority (e.g., Head, Director) explaining the motivation for joining the Alliance to the Secretariat. Institutions are also expected to nominate a Focal Point and Deputy Focal Point. These individuals will be the liaison between the institution and the Alliance and will also be the representative of the Alliance at meetings of the institution. A letter of notification will be issued to successful applicants by the Secretariat after consultation with the Steering Committee.

At their discretion, the Focal Points may choose to convene national or regional teams to coordinate the member's engagement in the activities of the Alliance. Focal Points should keep the Secretariat informed of such arrangements.

It is understood that scientific associations or scholarly societies do not work under a mandate to be representative of the diversity of academic fields covered by their members. In such cases, scholars, researchers or academics with an interest to join the Alliance may apply as individual members.

### *3.2 Individual Membership*

As a 'network of networks,' membership to the Alliance is not directed at individual members. However, Individual Membership can be granted to those who are interested in the work of the Alliance or have professional strengths in area(s) of work deemed relevant or prioritized by the Steering Committee, based on the following criteria:

- 1) Track record of relevant contributions to brokering, knowledge translation, or conducting scientific research on learning, teaching-learning processes, quality of education, improving student learning outcomes, and other education-related activities linked to the scope of work of the Alliance.
- 2) Approval by all members of the Steering Committee.

Applicants for Individual Membership may submit the application form and a letter of interest to the Secretariat. A letter of notification will be issued to successful applicants.

### 3.3 Observers

Annual meetings of the Alliance are public events. Any individual, whether self-representing or representing an institution (as defined above) can participate as Observer in meetings or other activity of the Alliance but would not be entitled to vote.

## 4. Operational model

The following operational model is suggested:

### 1. Annual meetings

Annual meetings will be held for one or more of the following purpose(s):

- Knowledge sharing, peer learning, and networking among members of the Alliance.
- Update of memberships.
- Election of the next Steering Committee and Working Group Coordinators
- Reporting on Alliance activities.
- Discussion of and consensus on the biennial workplan and renewal of Working Group activities.

### 2. Sustainability

Through the Secretariat, efforts will be made to mobilize support for meetings and activities of the Alliance, while the members are expected to fund their own participation.

Members are also invited to consider making voluntary contributions to the work of the Alliance or embark on joint fund-raising activities. As an Alliance, collegiality between members by supporting each other is highly encouraged.

### 3. Decision-making

Major decisions for the Alliance would be taken during annual meetings. Outside of annual meetings, the Secretariat will consult the Steering Committee for decisions having a direct effect on the operation of the Alliance and update all members accordingly. As and where relevant, members may be asked to contribute inputs and suggestions to inform the decision-making process.

For matters related to activities, the Secretariat will consult both the Steering Committee and the respective Working Group Coordinators. Decision-making through virtual meetings and/or discussions will be executed should in-person meetings not be financially responsible.

### 4. Working Group Coordinators

With the support of the Secretariat, the Steering Committee will propose an initial list of potential Working Groups and activities to be implemented within each working group.

Working Group Coordinators, as the name suggests, will be designated based on activities, as required. While only members of the Alliance can be considered for the role of Working Group Coordinator, Observers should feel free to lend their support. Working Group Coordinators will prepare Terms of

Reference, with the final approval of the Steering Committee, and convene meetings in consultation with the Steering Committee if the need arises. They will report on their activities informally to the Secretariat on a regular basis and officially to the Annual Meetings.

For activities initiated by the Alliance, separate Terms of Reference will be developed to specify the working arrangements and deliverables for the Working Group Coordinators.

### *5. Reporting*

With the support of the Secretariat, the Steering Committee will deliver a report of its activities at each annual meeting. The purpose of the annual report is to pull together insights from members' activities (e.g., emerging research, results of implementation studies) with the goal to aligning these insights to SDG 4 targets and global policy priorities.

Under the recommendation of the Steering Committee, this annual report could serve the foundation for a Statement to be issued by the Scientific Council (represented by UNESCO on behalf of the Alliance) at global multi-stakeholder consultation and coordination mechanisms, e.g., Global Education Meeting, the High-Level Steering Committee for SDG 4, G20 meetings, the SDG 4 Technical Coordination Mechanism, UN General Assembly, and other important high-level global political decision-making events.

The Secretariat, with the support of the Steering Committee, will prepare a summary report of annual meetings to be shared with all Alliance members.

### *6. Communications*

With the support of the Steering Committee, the Secretariat will issue semi-annual digital Newsletters to keep the Alliance mobilized and informed of progress on the established workplan. Members are encouraged to make contributions to the Newsletter.