



CHER 36th Annual Conference

Higher Education and Science Future(s): Trends, Imaginaries, and Alternatives

Wednesday–Friday, 4–6 September 2024

Department of Social Sciences, University of Luxembourg, Esch-Belval, Luxembourg

<https://cher2024.uni.lu>

Call for Proposals

Conference Theme

The past, present, and future of higher education and science is a complex and multifaceted topic that is subject to various trends, developmental patterns, and uncertainties. As the past significantly shapes the present, this perspective is widely discussed and analyzed across the social sciences. Yet the notion that the present contains as much “future” as “past” is less well understood, despite its impact on social and scientific practices across various domains. Thus, the theme of the CHER 2024 conference encourages participants to reflect on their perspectives on time, perhaps viewing **the future(s)** not only as a temporal dimension but also as a socially constructed analytical category and governance tool. We invite explorations of **how conceptualizations of the future shape and (re)define higher education and science** in the short, medium, and long terms. While challenging to (correctly) anticipate future developments, we identify several key themes and potential directions that deserve discussion:

The expanding influence of **digitalization**, coupled with the continuous growth of **technological advancements** across various societal sectors, brings about profound changes to higher education and labor markets. Consequently, there is a pressing need to **redefine teaching and learning** models to adjust and broaden students’ skills portfolios and offer more flexible learning options to cater to **diverse learner needs**. As higher education enrollments and international student mobility continue to rise, challenges of **widening participation, sustainable funding models, and quality assurance mechanisms** will continue to reshape higher education alongside the potential to deepen global disparities and inequalities across systems, despite the persistence of **diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives** at various levels.

The emergence of **big data, data sharing, and open access** will continue to shape collaboration and competition patterns as well as democratize access to scientific research and educational resources, alongside global stratification. As the **funding of higher education and science** has grown to limits in numerous contexts, emergent models of cooperation across levels will reinforce regionalization and globalization developments. As populist and new nationalist movements question science’s legitimacy and authority, challenges to academic freedom escalate. The **climate crisis** urges the development of alternative solutions, with universities occupying a central position in shaping educational content for **sustainability** and climate change mitigation and adaptation as well as in supplying critical **evidence to inform and orient**

social and political action. These examples emphasize some of the current trends and anticipated challenges that place (intense) pressure on higher education and demand resolutions from within, even though, as we have learned from recent financial crises, the COVID-19 pandemic, and wars, the future is always uncertain.

Moreover, **the idea of future(s) has permeated policymaking**, as witnessed in (supra)national action plans for the upcoming years or decades, the establishment of (inter)national organizations to ponder and predict the future, or even international meetings to **redefine agendas** and steer the directions of policymaking and practice to **achieve identified goals**.

Looking at the **future as a temporal dimension, a social category, and a governance tool** that shapes current politics and society also opens up opportunities to imagine not only one best pathway but a **multitude of possible futures**. Although hard to break free of path dependencies and institutionalized global, national, and local scripts of action, understanding the “future” as such a category also **facilitates critical questioning**. Attempts to certify what is ontologically uncertain provide opportunities for imaginaries—and concrete alternatives.

We invite both theoretical and empirical contributions that offer insights into the future(s) across key **domains: higher education, research and innovation, third mission and impact, as well as governance and internationalization**. While we offer some guiding questions below, these are certainly not exhaustive, and we encourage the exploration of other research questions or topics.

Conference Format

As in previous years, the conference will be organized in distinct streams, each focusing on specific thematic areas, including an open stream dedicated to research questions or topics less aligned with the overarching conference theme. We welcome participants to engage in enriching interactions and knowledge sharing, by participating in poster sessions and workshops. Further details about opportunities to contribute will be accessible via our conference website.

Stream 1: Education

- How do big data and predictive models in anticipating societal trends influence the design and delivery of higher education programs?
- As the labor market undergoes significant transformations due to digitalization and automation, how are higher education organizations redefining their teaching and learning models?
- How is the reinforcement of nationalism and regionalization shaping current and creating new educational models and curricular offerings?
- How does the (imagined) future influence curriculum development and pedagogical approaches in higher education (e.g., preparing students for uncertainty)?
- What imagined alternatives exist to make teaching and learning in higher education more responsive to contemporary challenges?
- How could quality assurance be reshaped to better address the needs of present and future educational offers (e.g., joint degrees; micro-credentials)?

Stream 2: Research & Innovation

- How does the notion of future(s) shape research agendas and steer (supra-)national research funding priorities?
- How do data sharing and open access facilitate scientific discoveries and innovation?
- What kind of research incentives are needed in the present and future to promote breakthrough long-term research rather than short-term, publish-or-perish research dynamics?
- How can research flexibility and resilience support multidisciplinary teams to quickly address crises resulting from natural and social disasters?

- How can research ethics and integrity in the future be ensured, when pressures to publish and the potential use of AI may create unforeseen scientific challenges and dilemmas?
- What forms of research and investments, such as infrastructure and/or collaborations, are likely to determine future research policies?

Stream 3: Third Mission and Impact

- How can teaching and research initiatives associated with social innovation and entrepreneurship be made more sustainable and beneficial to communities over the long term?
- How can higher education institutions and organizations contribute more effectively to meet the UN Sustainable Development Goals, such as quality and inclusive (higher) education?
- How can higher education actors on various levels imagine alternative societal futures?
- What mechanisms would ensure that myriad third mission activities are of high quality, sustainable, and relevant?
- How can higher education stakeholders more fully address inequalities on local, national, and global levels?
- What multidisciplinary perspectives would need to be harnessed and translated to improve the societal impact of research and teaching?

Stream 4: Governance and Internationalisation

- In which ways will geopolitics influence the governance and internationalization of universities as the future becomes increasingly multi-polar?
- What opportunities and threats do new technologies (e.g., AI and other digital technologies) pose for the governance and management of higher education?
- As regional funding incentives (e.g., European Universities Initiative) expand, how can their sustainability be ensured?
- To what extent is higher education autonomy at risk in various contexts? How are (supra)national and local trends being translated into organizational missions and governance models?
- How can universities and university leadership achieve diversity, equity, and inclusion (e.g., accessibility, inclusive curricula) in the future?
- What ongoing and future developments are likely to reshape the academic profession? What alternatives can we imagine for the future(s) of higher education and research?
- How can universities better prepare for future crises—and leverage good practices from different world regions?

Open Stream: Current Topics in Higher Education Research

- In addition to the four main thematic areas, as in past conferences, we offer an open stream for contributions that may not align precisely with the overarching theme(s) of the conference or the above-delineated topics. This stream is of equal significance, inviting submissions that delve into various contemporary topics within higher education research and science studies.

Submission of Proposals

Participants are invited to submit a proposal for a **paper**, a **poster**, or a **panel** on a topic that is relevant to the conference theme or the open stream. A paper refers to a presentation delivered by one or several authors or collaborators on a particular research topic. A poster presentation is generally suitable for preliminary studies or early-stage research projects. A panel generally comprises a series of 3-4 presentations on a common research topic delivered by a group of authors facilitated by a moderator (for this format, a joint proposal is expected). More detailed instructions on what is expected for each submission format are provided in the templates. Abstracts for all three formats need to follow the structure provided in the **templates** and should not exceed 1000 words. Please submit your structured abstracts by **Friday, 23 February 2024** on the conference website (ConfTool registration required). All abstracts will be peer-reviewed, and applicants will be informed on the results of the review process by early April 2024. Authors are expected to **submit their full papers** by 31 July 2024, giving session chairs and other contributors in the session sufficient time to read in advance.

Selected conference papers will be nominated for inclusion in the CHER special issue of the **European Journal of Higher Education** corresponding to the conference theme. Initial peer review will be provided by the special issue editors, followed by the journal's regular peer review process.

Important Dates

Abstract Submission Deadline: 29 February 2024

Notification of Acceptance: early April 2024

Early Bird Registration: 1 May 2024

Conference Registration Deadline: 15 July 2024

Submission of Full Papers: 31 July 2024

Conference in Luxembourg: 4–6 September 2024

Program Committee

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Organizers

Justin Powell, University of Luxembourg; CHER Board of Directors

Marcelo Marques, University of Luxembourg

Conference Fees

The conference fees comprise an all-inclusive package that covers participation in the 3-day conference, lunches and coffee breaks, the welcome reception, and the gala dinner including cultural activities.

Early Bird (until May 1)

Member €350

Non-member €500

Doctoral student €200

Academics at risk €100

Regular (after May 1)

Member €450

Non-member €600

Doctoral student €250

Academics at risk €150

Further information on registration, the conference program, and travel and accommodation options in Luxembourg will be provided on the conference website.

Contact Information

Conference website: <https://cher2024.uni.lu>

For any conference-related questions, please contact us at cher2024@uni.lu