

# HIGHER EDUCATION WHAT IF...



These questions were collated across social media platforms in response to a request for 'What if...' questions to inform the writing of a book chapter on the future of higher education through an equity lens. The responses came from a global audience with multiple perspectives. They have been collated into a series of themes as shown below.

## **EQUITY**

- What if we accept that until we have an equal and just society, any action to ensure higher education is equal and just, is likely to fail?
- What if we accepted that the current model of education is elitist, money driven and redundant which should be redesigned from the bottom up?
- What if "what if" is not the question to be asking but "why"?
- What if education structures can be reframed through dialogue and there is no expectation of documentation?
- What if scholarships were only awarded to low income students?
- What if there was an understanding of cultures that place families first, and thus enabling greater flexibility around learning?
- What if you considered the plight of the most vulnerable in the Ambazonia liberation struggle?
- What if education focussed on our collective needs rather than individual ROI?
- What if we didn't call it higher education?
- What if there were affirmative action policies in place that couldn't be challenged to ensure diverse lecturer recruitment to take place and similarly for diverse students from communities that need more representation in society?
- What if students at Reefton Area School could get the same choice of subjects as Burnside High School?
- What if "the system" listened to learners and their families?
- What if "the system" really allowed us to implement what we heard from our learners and their families?
- What if higher education was accessible to all?
- What if all courses and microcredentials were easily transferrable?
- What if next gen Treaty partnership could be the bridge to equity?

## **INCLUSION**

- What if our institutional academic system was truly set-up for inclusiveness?
- Are policies too stringent to aid in supporting access for diverse applicants from inequitable backgrounds?
- What if support systems were in place to truly empower those who are studying at that level?
- What if assessments were designed using UDL principles and practices?
- What if universities didn't rely on promoting certain discourses that elevate certain people's points?

## **FUTURE**

What if we then (really) reframe our thinking and assumptions about higher education and its assumed place in the future?

What if we first collectively agreed on the purpose of education and what is essential for people, planet and our future prosperity?

What if we identified new actions to take today that start to build a just and equal world and higher education industry as a result?

What if our only deliverable was setting young people up not for life as it is today, but rather life as it will be tomorrow?

What if universities were in service to the flourishing of people, places and the planet?

What if tertiary institutions had a compulsory course on co-design in the final undergrad year?

What if you can learn as you go through life and you can access learning as and when you needed?

What if qualifications are less or no longer valued compared to experience, what you can do, how you can show up and demonstrate your knowledge and skills with the impact you can make?

## **CHANGE**

What if the topic of equity and access to tertiary education is a red herring and simply a fashionable bandwagon to jump on for politicians, consultants, the privileged with guilt?

What if we stripped away the term 'higher education' ?

What if we didn't start with 'education' and its current divisions (primary/secondary/tertiary etc.)?

What if tertiary education is irrelevant?

What if knowledge wasn't put into hierarchies?

What if the university system was overhauled?

What if decision making happened bottom-up, instead of top-down?

## **LOCAL**

What if the ME to WE movement is set as [Otāutahi](#)'s shared goal for the next decade - what would the total impact be?

What if equity means people of indigenous cultures have to interact with colonialist education structures which negates their world view?

What if [Takere](#) became the national approach to close the tertiary equity gap?

What if academic freedom had a deeper [Te Tiriti](#) caveat?

What if [Aotearoa](#) in tertiary education recognised fully that we are a Pacific country, and that we have constitutional responsibilities to Realm of NZ countries Niue and Cook Islands which are in free association with us & dependent territory (aka colony) Tokelau?

What if tertiary could not make decisions without minimum levels of student participation, and Māori student participation in them?

What if Tertiary boards & organisations had to truly honour Te Tiriti & had at least half of members from mana whenua?

What if tertiary providers, Ministry of Education MoE) & the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) adapted the [Pacific PowerUp](#) model for this cohort - what new outcomes could grow?

What if indigenous knowledge was highly valued?

What if we prioritised indigenous knowledges?

What if next gen Treaty partnership could be the bridge to equity?

**GLOBAL**

What if the global perspective flattens diversity and makes the concept of equity impotent?  
What if education didn't perpetuate the forces that drive climate breakdown?  
What if we start with the World and its opportunities and then focus on what one needs to learn, unlearn and re-learn successfully participate in it?  
What if schools were designed to liberate our humanity and creativity instead of manage our magic for the benefit of capital or country?

**YOUTH**

What if we better prepared our youth to play the future and interrogate the unknown for answers rather relying on institutions that teach and perpetuate approaches, attitudes and myths of the world that have fostered many of the problems we face?  
What if students could choose to spend one year of study working on a passion project with like-minded students from around the world?  
What if we stopped telling people what they could learn, when & where & let them decide based on their passion & strengths, not their education history, from age 16 – 18?  
What if we really listened to our learners and their families?

**WELLBEING**

What if we started with 'How do we enable wellbeing for all in the next era?' and "How does learning happen to best support wellbeing for all?"  
What if universities were in service to the flourishing of people, places and the planet?

**RELATIONSHIPS**

What if all the checks and balances, form filling and percentage chasing, were taken away and replaced with a culture of trust?

**COMMUNITY**

What if every undergrad degree required students to spend one day a week working on a community project, in their 2nd year?

## Conversation Catalysts

Which 'What if...' questions resonate most with you?

Take one of the questions and brainstorm possibilities that could arise from the question.

### The Simultaneity Principle

When we ask positive and powerful questions, the questions themselves set direction.

*This is one of the five principles of Appreciative Inquiry.*

*Check out the blogpost on [Reframing the Future](#) for more information.*