

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Strasbourg, April 8, 2021

BOLOGNA FOLLOW UP GROUP

Online, April 15 – 16, 2021

THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE CONTRIBUTION TO THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA 2021 - 24

INTRODUCTION

The Council of Europe is a consultative member of the BFUG and Board. It has been an active contributor to the Bologna Process since the outset, including as Chair or Co-Chair of Working Groups on Structural Reforms (2012 – 15) and Qualifications Frameworks (2007 – 09 and 2009 – 12) and a member of several other working or advisory groups.

For the 2021 – 24 work program, the Council of Europe has volunteered to chair and coordinate the Network of National Correspondents for Qualifications Frameworks as well as for membership of the Working Groups on fundamental values, the social dimension of higher education, and the San Marino Roadmap and the Thematic Peer Groups on recognition and qualification frameworks. The BFUG will decide whether these indications of interest will be accepted.

With UNESCO, the Council of Europe is the co-depository of the [Lisbon Recognition Convention](#), the only legally binding text of the EHEA, which has been ratified by all EHEA member States except Greece as well as by several non-EHEA countries.

FRAMEWORK

The Council of Europe's [Education program](#) is overseen by the [Steering Committee on Educational Policy and Practice](#) (CDPPE), made up of the representatives of all 50 States Party to the [European Cultural Convention](#), including all 49 EHEA members.

The CDPPE meets twice a year, normally in March and October. Since April 2020, the CDPPE has held two extraordinary and two ordinary plenary sessions online. Whether the plenary session planned for October 13 – 15, 2021 will be held online or face to face will hopefully be decided in June 2021.

Maria Fassari (Greece) and Maija Innola (Finland) - a member of the BFUG – are respectively Chair and Vice Chair of the CDPPE.

The CDPPE plenary session held on March 24 – 26, 2021 considered the proposed new Education program as well as priorities for the Council's work on [Competences for Democratic Culture](#). While not yet decided, it is likely the Council of Europe will move from a two year to a four-year budget cycle, so that the new intergovernmental Education program will run from 2022 through 2025.

With specific reference to higher education, the CDPPE considered the priorities for the Council of Europe's contribution to the EHEA in the 2021 – 24 work period. The debate was introduced by Linda Pustina, Vice Chair of the BFUG. The CDPPE also approved a proposal for a project on the local democratic mission of higher education, see a separate entry below.

The Education Department is part of the Directorate of Democratic Participation, encompassing Education, Culture and Youth, with Matjaž Gruden as Director.

The Head of the Education Department is Sjur Bergan. The [Education Policy](#) Division is headed by Michael Remmert, the Division for [Cooperation and Capacity Building](#) by Sarah Keating and the [European Centre for Modern Languages](#), located in Graz, by Sarah Breslin. As of April 1, 2021, Aurora Ailincai was appointed Executive Director of the recently established [Observatory on History Teaching in Europe](#). On December 1, 2020, Katia Dolgova-Dreyer (Education Policy Division) took over as Secretary to the CDPPE; she succeeded Stefania Kruger. Katia Dolgova-Dreyer is also co-secretary to the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee and the ENIC Network.

THE EDUCATION AND HIGHER EDUCATION RESPONSE TO COVID-19

In response to the unforeseeable challenges with which the whole education sector was faced in spring 2020, the CDPPE held two extraordinary online sessions, on April 24 and on June 10 – 11. While the first was largely devoted to an exchange of experiences between delegations, the second session focused on what action European countries could take together. Out of this debate grew a [political declaration](#) adopted by the CDPPE and then endorsed by an [informal Conference of Ministers of Education](#) organized – online – as part of the program of the Greek Presidency of the Committee of Ministers. This conference also took note of the accompanying [Roadmap for Action](#), which had previously been endorsed by the CDPPE.

At the outset of the pandemic, the Council of Europe joined partners in its cooperation on the [Democratic Mission of Higher Education](#) in calling on [universities to play a key role in shaping the post-COVID world](#). Shortly after this article, the idea was born to focus on the higher education response to COVID-19 through a volume in the [Council of Europe Higher Education Series](#). *Higher education's response to the COVID-19 pandemic - Building a more sustainable and democratic future* was published at the end of February 2021 and describes the various ways in which higher education is facing the COVID-19 pandemic.

The [book](#) is designed to help universities as well as their staff and students contribute to a more sustainable and democratic future. The book explores the various responses of higher education to the pandemic across Europe and North America, with contributions also from Africa, Asia and South America. The contributors – who include members and former members of the BFUG - write from the perspective of higher education leaders with institutional responsibility, as well as from that of public authorities or specialists in specific aspects of higher education policy and practice. Some contributions analyze how specific higher education institutions reacted, while others reflect on the impact of COVID-19 on key issues such as internationalization, finance, academic freedom and institutional autonomy, inclusion and equality and public responsibility.

The book was launched at a [webinar](#) organized with the International Association of Universities on March 16. It will also be presented at a webinar aimed at audiences in Ireland and in Latin America (in Spanish) on April 21. There will also be a webinar aimed at a US audience later in spring.

THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE EDUCATION PROGRAM

The Education program¹ aims to strengthen the contribution of Education to the Council of Europe's overarching goals of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. In the 2020 – 21 program, adopted by the Committee of Ministers at the end of November 2019, all education projects are incorporated into the overall program on Education for Democracy.

[Higher education](#) is a policy area within the program as well as part of several transversal projects, in particular:

- [Competences for Democratic Culture](#)
- [Ethics, Transparency, and Integrity in Education \(ETINED\)](#)
- [Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education](#)

The specific higher education program covers:

- [The democratic mission of higher education](#)
- [Qualifications](#), including recognition
- The [European Higher Education Area](#).

Global Forum on the Democratic Mission of Higher Education

Academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and the future of democracy

Since the late 1990s, the Council of Europe has cooperated with the [International Consortium for Higher Education, Civic Responsibility and Democracy](#) on furthering the [democratic mission](#) of higher education. The [Organization of American States](#) and [the International Association of Universities](#) have now also joined this cooperation, which is focused around Global Fora every two – three years as well as a series of publications.

The [2019 Global Forum](#) was held in Strasbourg on June 20 – 21 and focused on academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and the future of democracy. It adopted a [declaration](#) and gave rise to a [publication](#) in the Council of Europe Higher Education Series.

It was intended to organize a new Global Forum in June 2021, but this Forum has been postponed until June 2022 in view of the COVID pandemic. This Global Forum will focus on sustainability, democracy, and social justice. The pandemic has laid bare the fragility of democratic systems in several parts of the world with the continuing erosion of participatory democracy as inequality and poverty deepen. The Global Forum will focus on the link between democracy, the democratic mission of higher education, and sustainable development. The Global Forum will address the implications of the COVID pandemic in this context.

¹ For an overview, see <https://www.coe.int/en/web/education>.

The local democratic mission of higher education

As noted above, the CDPPE in March 2021 approved the proposal for a project on the local democratic mission of higher education. Developed by an *ad hoc* group chaired by Maija Innola, the Vice Chair of the CDPPE and also a member of the BFUG, the project will be based on a vision of the local democratic mission of higher education as

- values based,
- referring in most cases to the institution's proximate geographic community, such as the city or community in which it is located,
- higher education institutions working not only *in*, but *with* their community in a spirit of mutuality.

The project refers to the local democratic *mission* rather than to, for example, local *engagement* in order to underline the link to the Council's overall work on the democratic mission of higher education. The intention is to establish a European initiative encompassing all 50 States Parties to the European Cultural Convention and aiming to establish a framework for longer term cooperation to further the local democratic mission of higher education.

This framework is conceived of as a Platform established and developed within the next Council of Europe intergovernmental program for Education. The Platform could be seen as addressing universal issues and examining how these can be dealt with in a local context. Thus, it should address contemporary concerns of preserving the values based on knowledge creation, informed citizenship, and civil society. It should also address the need to build higher education – and society more broadly – on a solid ethical base. Issues of social inclusion, including access to higher education in diverse communities and relations to the local communities and civil societies, also need to be addressed in a local context.

While the list of possible topics is long, it will be important to define a clear focus for the Platform, in particular in its early stages. This focus will need to take account of the specific role that the Council of Europe, as a European intergovernmental organization, is particularly well placed to fulfill. The Platform will therefore have four main remits:

- (i) advocacy;
- (ii) policy development;
- (iii) providing overviews of activities of relevance to the local democratic mission carried out in various contexts and identifying examples of good practice;
- (iv) conducting studies or other work on specific issues.

In the first phase, the Platform will focus mainly on organizations and networks with an interest in and experience of working on the local democratic mission of higher education and through these also reach out to individual institutions, which could then become more involved in a second phase. It may also include a few institutions already engaged in this work. Initial

discussions have been held with the International Association of Universities, EUA, and EURASHE with a view to their participation in the Platform.

Recognition of qualifications

With UNESCO, the Council of Europe is co-depository of the [Lisbon Recognition Convention](#). It serves as co-secretariat to the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee as well as to the [ENIC Network](#), which cooperates closely with the NARIC Network of the European Commission. Katia Dolgova-Dreyer is co-secretary to both bodies.

Because of the COVID pandemic, the 2020 and 2021 meetings of the ENIC and NARIC Networks were moved online; the 2021 edition will be held on June 9. Both annual meetings are being complemented by a series of thematic webinars.

The next ordinary meeting of the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee will be held in 2022.

The [European Qualifications Passport for Refugees](#) aims to provide a methodology for assessing refugees' qualifications even when they cannot be fully documents as well as for describing the assessment in such a way that it can be accepted across borders. Of the 627 refugees whose qualification had been assessed at the time of writing, 525 obtained the EQPR. In other words, the success rate is about 83 per cent, and this rate has been stable in the current phase of the project as well as between candidates interviewed face to face and those interviewed online. 11 ENICs now participate in this project.

As part of the [Council of Europe's response](#) to the COVID pandemic, and in cooperation with the UNHCR, the potential use of the EQPR to [identify refugees with health-related qualifications](#) has been highlighted through work in France and Italy. Most health-related professions are regulated and therefore require a professional license. The [EQPR cannot replace this professional license but may help identify candidates for licensing procedures as well as qualified persons who may help meet the challenges of the COVID crisis](#) under the supervision of duly licensed health professionals. Some 10 per cent of EQPR holders have health related qualifications.

Qualifications frameworks

The Council of Europe coordinates the Network of national correspondents for qualifications frameworks, established to exchange experience in the development and self-certification of national qualifications frameworks within and against the Overarching Framework of Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA) as well as to ensure coherence between the QF-EHEA and the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF).

The Network met in Strasbourg on September 5, 2019, end-on with a meeting of the QF peer group, and online in September 2020. The 2021 meeting will also be held in September, very possibly online.

Capacity building and advice to new members

The Council of Europe has traditionally played an important role in advising and assisting newer and prospective members of the EHEA. In addition to individual requests for advice, which tend to focus on structural reforms, several [capacity building](#) projects may be of interest to higher education, possibly in particular the [regional joint programs with the EU](#).

The Council of Europe was a member of the Belarus Roadmap Advisory Group in the 2015 – 18 work program and member of the *ad hoc* group established to provide advice to the BFUG on San Marino's application for accession to the EHEA. It has volunteered to participate in the Working Group on the San Marino Roadmap.

Publications

The [Council of Europe Higher Education Series](#) comprises books on topical higher education issues, in particular the democratic mission of higher education and recognition and qualifications. 25 volumes have been published since late 2004. The latest volumes – on academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and the future of democracy and on the higher education response to COVID-19 - are presented elsewhere in this report.

The three publications on the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture may also be of interest to higher education policy makers and practitioners. Volume 1 covers [context, concepts, and the model](#), Volume 2 [descriptors](#), and Volume 3 [Guidance for implementation](#). A [Guidance document for higher education](#) was published in 2020.

The [publications of the ETINED Platform](#) (Ethics, Transparency and integrity) may likewise be of interest. So far, these cover ethical principles, ethical behavior of all actors in education, codes of conduct for teachers in Europe; a background study, and a study on policies for academic integrity in South East Europe in addition to a publication based on the launching conference of the ETINED Platform. On October 16, 2019 the Committee of Ministers adopted a [Recommendation to member States on fostering a culture of ethics in the teaching profession](#).

A draft Recommendation on countering education fraud and promoting ethics, transparency and integrity in education was considered by an [online meeting](#) of the [ETINED Platform](#) on February 5, 2021. This meeting also included a round table debate on the ethical consequences of COVID-19 in education. The draft Recommendation will be further developed on the basis of suggestions by ETINED delegations, and it is intended to submit the draft to the CDPPE in October 2021. A Best Practice Program in Promoting Academic Integrity intended to highlight examples of good practice is being launched. The Steering Group for this program will hold its first meeting on April 13.