Strasbourg, January 6, 2015

**BOLOGNA FOLLOW UP GROUP**

Rīga, January 26 – 27, 2015

**REPORT BY THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE**

**INTRODUCTION**

As an active consultative member, the Council of Europe believes it has made and continues to make a substantial contribution to the development of the European Higher Education Area, in particular through:

* Its commitment to democracy, human rights and the rule of law;
* Its insistence that all education systems need to address the full range of purposes of education[[1]](#footnote-1):
  + Preparation for employment;
  + Preparation for life as active citizens in democratic societies;
  + Personal development;
  + The development and maintenance of a broad, advanced knowledge base.
* Its commitment to quality education, as defined and outlined in Recommendation CM/Rec(2012)13 on ensuring quality education. Among other things, this recommendation underlines that quality must be assessed in relation to the purposes of education, that it must be considered at the level of education systems as well as of individual institutions, and that it must be inclusive: no education system can be of high quality unless it offers adequate opportunities for all students and learners.
* Its work on defining the public responsibility for and the role of public authorities in higher education, as exemplified in particular though recommendations CM/Rec(2007)6 on the public responsibility for higher education and research and CM/Rec(2012)6 on the public responsibility for academic freedom and institutional autonomy.
* Its work on establishing a platform for ethics and transparency, covering all kinds and levels of education and including higher education, see below.

Within the EHEA, the Council of Europe is:

* A consultative member of the BFUG and Board;
* Co-chair and coordinator of the Working Group on Structural Reforms; the BFUG adopted its report in November 2014;
* Chair of the Network of national correspondents for qualifications frameworks. In this area, the Council of Europe cooperates very closely with the European Commission, through the EQF Advisory Group and the National Coordination Points (referred to in the report by the Structural Reforms Working Group);
* Member of the Working Group on Mobility and Internationalization
* Through regional and bilateral cooperation, including through regional networks for qualifications frameworks for South East Europe and Joint Programs with the European Commission;
* With UNESCO, the custodian of the only legal treaty of the EHEA, the Council of Europe/UNESCO Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in the European Region (Lisbon Recognition Convention). The Council of Europe and UNESCO provide the Secretariat for the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee and the ENIC Network of national information centers on academic mobility and recognition; the latter cooperates very closely with the NARIC Network of the European Commission.

**The Council of Europe’s 2014 – 15 program for education**

The focus of the Council of Europe’s Education program for 2014 – 15 is:

* Democratic governance and innovation
* Diversity
* Participation

The Council of Europe’s activities in and of relevance to higher education are located within these three broad priorities. In addition to the direct contribution to the EHEA, these include following up the Recommendation on ensuring quality education. In 2014, particular emphasis will be focused on establishing a platform of exchange of information and best practices on ethics and integrity in education and on competences (see below). While the danger of corruption is real at all levels of education, it is particularly great in higher education. The proposal for a platform on ethics and integrity will be one of the main issues at the annual meeting of the Steering Committee on educational policy and practice (CDPPE) in Strasbourg on March 17 – 19, 2015, and it is hoped to launch the platform at the Prague Forum on October 1 – 2, 2015. It is also expected that the platform will be an important part of the 2016 – 17 Education program, which is currently being developed. The Council of Europe’s program budget for 2016 -17 will be adopted by the Committee of Ministers in November – December 2015.

***Competences for democratic culture and intercultural dialogue***

The Council of Europe has recently launched work on developing guidelines and descriptors for competences for a culture of democracy and intercultural dialogue. This initiative arises from the Chairmanship conference organized by Andorra in February 2013 and it acts on the Council of Europe’s conviction that preparation for life as active citizens in democratic societies is one of the major purposes of education.

The kinds of competences our education systems provide say something about the priorities of our societies. If we are serious about ensuring that preparation for democracy is and remains a major purpose of education, we need to go beyond rhetoric and identify the kind of competences our education systems need to provide students with at different levels and in different strands of education. This does not mean that such competences can be obtained through formal education alone but it does mean we need to relate competences for democratic culture and intercultural dialogue to the different parts and strands of the formal education system. If we were unable to do this, we would risk sending the message that formal education is for employability and non-formal and informal education is for citizenship, whereas of course all kinds of competences can and should be developed through formal as well as non-formal and informal education. Intercultural dialogue and democracy are not one and the same but it is difficult to imagine how intercultural dialogue could be carried out satisfactorily in non-democratic societies and it is equally difficult to imagine that democratic societies could be unwilling and unable to dialogue with those whose cultural background differs from the majority of the members of society. This project will therefore play an important role in the 2014 – 15 Education program and has implications for all levels of education, including higher education. It will be a major issue at the 2015 plenary session of the CDPPE and it is expected that a second phase of this project will be included in the 2016 – 17 Education program.

***The democratic mission of higher education***

A conference on Higher Education for Democratic Innovation was organized jointly by the Council of Europe, the US Steering Committee of the International Consortium for Higher Education, Civic Responsibility and Democracy; Queen’s University; the European Wergeland Centre; and ESU at Queen’s University Belfast on June 25 – 27, 2014. Centre; and ESU, and invitations have been sent out to, among others, BFUG members. The conference underlined and explored the commitment of higher education to democracy, human rights and the rule of law, as well as to social cohesion and intercultural dialogue. In particular, the conference focused on the need to rethink and innovate the way we approach and practice democracy in modern, complex societies. Few venues in Europe would have be better suited to illustrate this theme than Queen’s University Belfast, in view of its role in building bridges across communal divides in Belfast and, more broadly, Northern Ireland.

Further information, including videos of most sessions, may be found at <http://www.qub.ac.uk/sites/HigherEducationforDemocraticInnovationConference/>. A book on the basis of the conference is currently being prepared for publication in the Council of Europe Higher Education Series, probably in early 2016.

**The Steering Committee for Educational Policy and Practice (CDPPE)**

The CDPPE held an informal session in Bruxelles/Brussel on December 18, 2015 at the invitation of the Belgian authorities. This session focused on the platform for ethics and integrity in education, competences for democratic culture and intercultural dialogue, and the Council of Europe’s 2016 – 17 Education program.

The informal meeting of CDPPE was followed by a celebration of the 60th anniversary of the European Cultural Convention on December 19, as part of the program of the Belgian Chairmanship of the Committee of Minsters. The reason for the choice of the date was that the Cultural Convention was adopted and opened for ratification on December 19, 1954. The Cultural Convention, membership of which is one of two accession criteria for the EHEA, has now been ratified by 50 States.

The CDPPE has established a new ad hoc group on higher education policy, which will advise the Bureau and the Committee on higher education issues. This ad hoc group will meet for the first time on January 13, 2015.

As noted above, the 2015 plenary session will be held in Strasbourg on March 17 - 19.

In 2014 – 15, the Germain Dondelinger (Luxembourg) has been Chair and Jindřich Fryč (Czech Republic) Vice Chair of the CDPPE; Jindřich Fryč has been acting Chair during Germain Dondelinger’s medical leave. The Secretary to the CDPPE is Stefania Kruger of the Council of Europe’s Education Department; Christopher Reynolds was acting secretary during Stefania Kruger’s maternity leave May – December 2014.

**Secretariat**

Jean-Christophe Bas took up his post as Director of Democratic Citizenship and Participation (encompassing Education and Youth) on June 16, 2014. He succeeds Ólöf Ólafsdóttir, who retired on October 1, 2013.

The Education Department is still headed by Sjur Bergan and the Education Policy Division by Villano Qiriazi.

**Council of Europe Higher Education Series**

*Recognizing qualifications in the European region. The Lisbon Recognition Convention at 15*, edited by Sjur Bergan and Carita Blomqvist, was published in spring 2014 as volume 19 of the Council of Europe Higher Education [Series](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/Resources/HEseries_en.asp).

A volume on *Student engagement in Europe: society, higher education and student governance*, edited by Manja Klemenčič, Sjur Bergan and Rok Primožič, is now in its second round of proof reading and will be published in spring 2015.

As noted above, work on a volume on Higher Education for Democratic Innovation, edited by Sjur Bergan, Tony Gallagher, and Ira Harkavy, has been launched, and it is hoped that this book will be issued in early 2016.

1. Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)6 on the public responsibility for higher education and research and Recommendation CM/Rec(2012)13 on ensuring quality education. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)