

Newsletter

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Sommaire

	Page
Editorial	1
Reconstruction and reform: back to business for Bosnia's universities	2
New perspectives on Europe's past	3
All change in higher education in central and eastern Europe	4
School-leavers – equipped for life?	5
What makes the perfect teacher	6
Five years on – end of a project (inset)	6
CIVITAS: an imaginative new Partnership for civic education	7
Teachers and Europe – putting them in touch	8
Access to higher education: overcoming the obstacles	10
Congress of Local and Regional Authorities: the city slant on education	11
Parliamentary Assembly: education and human rights	11
Non-Governmental Organisations	11
Calendar for future events	11
Publications	12
Order form	12

Editorial

The next 12 months will be a period of important change and renewal in the Council of Europe's education programme. Several major initiatives are now in their final phase, and others are in preparation.

The closing conferences of three ambitious projects – "A Secondary Education for Europe", "Language Learning for European Citizenship", and "Access to Higher Education in Europe" – will take place between September and April. Their results will be presented to the 19th Session of the Council of Europe's Standing Conference of the European Ministers of Education, which will be held in the Norwegian town of Kristiansand from 22-24 June 1997.

Another important event in the next 12 months will be the successful conclusion of the new joint Council of Europe/UNESCO Europe Region Convention on the recognition of higher education qualifications. The new convention will bring up to date, merge and eventually replace the various conventions of the Council of Europe and UNESCO's Europe Region on this subject.

We are now preparing new projects to replace those which are coming to an end. They will include projects on:

- learning and teaching about the history of Europe in the 20th Century;
- education for democratic citizenship in Europe.

The aim of the former is to interest young people in secondary schools in the recent history of our continent and help them to understand the forces, movements and events which have shaped Europe in the 20th Century.

The new project on education for democratic citizenship will cover both school and adult education, and it will seek to define the aims, contents and pedagogy of citizenship education at the beginning of the 21st Century.

The Council of Europe has long recognised the vital contribution which modern languages can make to international understanding, co-operation and mobility. We are, therefore, also preparing a new project on modern languages, which could culminate in a European Year of Languages in the Year 2001.

Maitland Stobart

Reconstruction and reform: back to business for Bosnia's universities

Since 1994, students and academics displaced or driven into exile by the Bosnian conflict have been a top priority for the Higher Education and Research Committee. With the Dayton Agreements now starting to bite, reconstruction and reform of the country's universities are next on its list.

Before the fighting started, Bosnia-Herzegovina had between 10 000 and 15 000 students, both from Bosnia itself and from other parts of the Yugoslav Federation. The difficulty of giving an exact figure is due both to this federal dimension and to the fact that many institutions locally rated as third-level would not usually be considered so in other European countries.

Be that as it may, the war which devastated Bosnia and affected parts of Croatia had serious effects on the country's four chief university centres: Banja Luka, Sarajevo with some 4 000 students, Tuzla with 3 000, and Mostar, also with 3 000, divided between East Mostar (mainly Bosnian) and West Mostar (Croats).

The hostilities drove 700-800 students to look for a haven abroad, where they could carry on their studies. Many chose Croatia for reasons of proximity and language, while historical ties took others to Austria, and most of the remainder were spread between Germany, United Kingdom, France and, to a lesser extent, the rest of Europe.

The Higher Education and Research Committee focused on this situation as early as 1994. In an emergency declaration, later confirmed by the Committee of Ministers, it urged member states to pay special attention to the problems of refugee students and treat them generously.

The first problem is finding countries willing to grant resident or refugee status to students and academics who

cannot pursue their studies or research at home. The second is making it possible for these students and academics to take up the threads where they were forced to drop them.

For that purpose, the Committee urges host countries to apply **"the greatest possible flexibility in recognising the qualifications of refugee and displaced students and academic staff from war-affected areas in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia"**, calls on universities to open their doors and insists on the need for material support. Germany has responded by providing 200 000 DM in scholarships, while Liechtenstein has set the ball rolling as first contributor to the Council of Europe's special solidarity fund. The Council itself has concentrated on putting student and faculty representatives in war zones in touch with universities, institutions and non-governmental organisations which can help them.

Now that the Dayton Agreements have opened the way to peace, reconstruction and reform of higher education in Bosnia are the Committee's new target. The Council of Europe is setting out to help the Bosnian authorities with reform of the country's universities which, under the agreements, will in future be run by local authorities, and not the government in Sarajevo. As part of this scheme, a first team of experts from the Council's legislative reform programme for higher education visited Sarajevo in mid-June.

At the same time, with the Council's moral support, contacts between

the Standing Conference of Rectors, Presidents and Vice-Presidents of European Universities (CRE) and Bosnian and Croatian universities have led to the setting-up of four or five partnership groups. These give the Bosnian side access to help in a broad range of areas: equipment, secondment and exchange of teaching staff, etc.

Concrete proposals were formulated at the Barcelona Conference, on 18 to 20 April 1996, which was attended by all the rectors of the universities in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Three areas for cooperation with the Council of Europe were agreed: the reconstruction of higher education and research; the establishment of a system for the recognition of qualifications obtained abroad; measures for rebuilding confidence between the communities.

In a later edition, Council of Europe activities in the region will be discussed in greater detail. ■

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New perspectives on Europe's past

Teaching Europe's recent history to young Europeans is the focus of a programme developed by the Council of Europe's Education Committee. The first step will be to identify the different national approaches to a century of shared history.

"History teaching has got to take advantage of the way that things have opened up in recent years", says Maitland Stobart, Head of the Council of Europe's Education Department. "We need to get away from cold war thinking and tackle all the big issues – social, economic, spiritual, cultural, artistic, technological, scientific – in ways that help people to understand the main trends, the points of disagreement and the positive influences. It's a question of encouraging open-mindedness, tolerance, curiosity and civic spirit." The aim, as he sees it, is to "take a vast, pan-European view of our history, cover all aspects of the period we're dealing with and set Europe itself in a world perspective". It is worth remembering here that the Council's Parliamentary Assembly called some years ago for "the teaching of modern history, so that young people will be better prepared to promote democracy". The programme has two basic aims: to interest young people in secondary schools in our continent's recent history and provide practical guidance for decision-makers, curriculum planners and history teachers.

The Education Committee is set to make a start by finding out exactly how European history is taught in our secondary schools. "This isn't abstract research, and we'll be working on some very specific themes: human rights and pluralist democracy, the history of women in the twentieth century, the European idea and the process of European co-operation and integration, children and young people in twentieth century Europe, population movements, immigration, refugees, minorities, nationalism and Europe in the world."

Forty-four countries are in on this programme, which has the backing of several networks – the European Standing Conference of History Teachers' Associations (EUROCLIO) and the European Educational Publishers' Group being two of them. With the Education Committee in overall charge, it will be run by a committee of experts. Things will get going in the first half of 1997, when the Georg Eckert Institute in Braunschweig will analyse textbooks from fifteen countries in different parts of Europe, pinpointing the themes, events and movements which get special emphasis, as well as shortcomings and omissions. Details of new methods and sound practices will also be collected and disseminated. In 1998 and 1999, the results of this work will be used to compile guidelines for curriculum planners and textbook authors. A major closing conference will conclude the project. An important feature of the programme in the first half of 1997 will be a large-scale role-playing exercise near Cambridge, in which young Europeans will be asked to interpret the Versailles Conference, with each participant representing a country other than his or her own.

The Education Committee will be making all this the basis of guidelines, not directives. "Different countries may have different approaches", says Maitland Stobart. "We want to broaden horizons, not impose a single vision." In practical terms, the main aim is to produce teaching materials – tested in pilot schools which have still to be selected – as a starting point for textbook authors and teachers. In the longer term, the project will also cover the training of

history teachers, the contribution of the media, activities based on the use of museums and archives, joint projects, field studies and school exchanges.

The programme will certainly benefit from coming at a time when the barriers are disappearing in Eastern Europe, and historians are at last getting access to archives off limits for years. This, too, should play a major part in filling the gaps in our knowledge of Europe's recent past. ■

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All change in higher education in Central and Eastern Europe

In 1991, with the Iron Curtain gone, the Higher Education and Research Committee set up a special programme to monitor and support the legislative reforms which the transition countries were carrying out in the fields of higher education and research.

How should the state, the universities, research and business relate to one another? How can one make the transition from rigid, centralised planning to academic autonomy and freedom of research? What are the old courses and diplomas worth now that frontiers are opening, Europe's universities are working hand in hand, and international competition is the order of the day? These were just some of the countless questions which the former socialist countries found themselves facing when they made democracy and the market economy their targets.

"It sounds exaggerated, but you've got to remember that higher education and research under socialism were governed entirely by a plan," says Peter Kwikkers. "Every industrial plant, for example, was expected to order the exact number of engineers it needed. And the central authorities passed that order on to a training establishment, which had to meet it." Kwikkers is in charge of the monitoring and assistance programme which the Council of Europe set up in 1991 to stimulate and support the development of higher education in terms of legislation and policy, with a special emphasis on central and eastern Europe.

The Council's approach is both open and pragmatic, the aim being to help, but not to impose particular solutions. This involves being available to meet all requests – for expert guidance, advice and information.

Advisory missions are the method adopted, with specialists and experts

providing on-the-spot help for countries which want it on draft legislation or any other topic. In the five years of the programme's existence, more than forty such missions have been carried out in sixteen countries. Ukraine, for example, got help on its projected Higher Education Act, while Romania was advised on funding machinery for higher education. The Baltic countries, Albania, Belarus, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Moldova, Russia, Slovakia and Slovenia were also on the list.

In addition to these advisory missions, the programme covers thematic workshops on questions of general interest, such as the development of quality standards, and the autonomy, management and funding of universities. Two were held in 1995: in Budapest, from 11 to 13 May, on the funding of higher education, and in Tallinn, from 23 to 26 October, on the financial management of institutions of higher education.

Finally, the programme organises multilateral study visits, giving specialists from central and eastern Europe a chance to see western European systems in action.

As an adjunct to all this, the Council produces a series of publications, each providing a pan-European comparative analysis of its subject. Six titles are being prepared. The first, published in March, deals with "relations between state and higher education".

Five years down the road, the programme is entering a second phase. The first, which started in 1991 and is

now ending, concentrated on laying new legislative foundations and getting reforms under way. The second, now beginning, is more concerned to help states fine-tune their legislation and research development policies.

In the last five years, some 11 million francs have been spent on helping the transition countries. The money has come from voluntary contributions by some ten member states of the Higher Education and Research Committee. In March, those same states gave the green light for the programme to continue. ■

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School-leavers – equipped for life?

A recent symposium in Bern set out to define the “key skills” needed by young people in Europe today.

Modern life, from the urban street scene to the music we hear and the TV we watch, is a permanent medley of cultures. At work and outside, technology brings us a stream of new challenges, while science itself has become so specialised that keeping pace with the latest developments and presenting them in terms the layman can grasp increasingly seems a lost cause. Complexity, in short, is what today is all about – and coping with tomorrow depends on our learning to live with it.

To meet the challenge of complexity, our educational systems have to do two things: define the skills that young people need today, and train teachers to transmit them effectively.

Are young Europeans acquiring the intellectual and practical skills they need to make sense of today’s new cultural, social, economic and political realities and find their feet in learning and work situations which are changing all the time? Jean-François Perret, a researcher in the Psychology Department at the University of Neuchâtel, made this question his opener at the symposium on “Key Competencies for Europe”, held in Bern from 27 to 30 March. More than seventy delegates from education ministries in thirty-six Council of Europe member states, as well as observers from the European Union and OECD, attended the symposium, which was chaired by Mil Jung, government adviser in the Luxembourg Ministry of Education.

These experts set out to pinpoint the knowledge and skills which young people between the ages of 15 and 20 need to meet the present and future challenges of living in Europe, and make a success of higher education,

working life and their commitments as citizens. These are “key skills”, defined by Jean-François Perret as those which allow us to master the new and cope with a whole range of different situations.

To clarify the concept of key skills and identify any common factors, participants were given a non-exhaustive list of some forty skills under seven main headings – “learning”, “searching”, “thinking”, “communicating”, “co-operating”, “getting things done” and “adapting oneself” – and asked to rank them in order of importance. The top scorers, regarded as essential for all young Europeans, were the ability to co-operate and work in a team, the ability to use new information and communication technologies, and the ability to solve problems. Predictably, perhaps, language skills were rated highest among those needed in building a united Europe, with “managing differences of opinion and conflicts” in second place.

In his speech at the symposium, Maitland Stobart, Head of the Council of Europe’s Education Department, used a five-point classification: political and social skills, skills needed in a multicultural society, literacy and communication skills, the skills required to use information technologies, and the skills essential to life-long learning.

Defining key skills was the first stage. Deciding where curricula needed changing to provide them was the next one, and the symposium focused both on the exact and on the human and social sciences. Data processing, environmental issues, the development and impact of technology, and the basics of law, sociology and psychology – these are just some of the

subjects that secondary schooling needs to cover today.

But key skills, as defined by the symposium, are not simply put across by teachers: people can also pick them up intuitively, as adolescents at school (what level?) and outside, in the family, clubs and associations, and even in later working life... This being so, we need to decide which of these skills can really be taught, where they should be taught – and who should teach them. ■

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What makes the perfect teacher?

The Council's project, "A Secondary Education for Europe", will be ending soon. In the run-up to the final conference, a recent seminar turned the spotlight on human resources.

The Estoril seminar, held from 30 May to 1 June, was the last big meeting on the "secondary education" project before the final conference, which is coming up in December (see box). Teachers themselves were the focus, and the seminar tackled three topics: ways of making sure that the training given teachers really prepares them for the job; the new demands made on teachers by society, pupils and schools themselves; ways of meeting those demands in their basic and further training, and with the help of outside specialists.

Behind these topics lie questions which turn up all the time, and the seminar tried to answer some of them. What is the function of teachers today? What should their status be? How should tasks be divided between teachers and

non-teachers (auxiliaries, counsellors, tutors, facilitators, etc.), now that schools are just one of the places where knowledge is transmitted? How can the European dimension be made a part of teacher training? Personnel management, properly applied and with none of the defects which typify its business counterpart, seems to hold the answers. As Jean-Michel Leclercq, member of the Project Group on "A Secondary Education for Europe", pointed out, teaching is no longer just a matter of subject knowledge, but of knowing how to transmit that knowledge in a way which enables learners to absorb it. Wide-ranging communication skills – all those needed to relate effectively to pupils and colleagues – are now an important part of the job. Increasingly, too, outside assistance may prove

useful. The school learning process is decisively affected, for example, by problems rooted in the pupil's background and personal development – and people other than teachers may well have more time, and be better qualified, to deal with them. ■

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Five years on – end of a project

Launched by the CDCC's Education Committee in 1991, the project, "A Secondary Education for Europe", will be winding up at a final conference in Strasbourg this year (2 - 5 December).

It had three main objectives at starting:

- to give young people the knowledge, skills and attitudes they need to meet the major challenges of European society;
- to prepare them for higher education, mobility, work and daily life in a democratic, multilingual and multicultural Europe;
- to make them aware of their common cultural heritage and of the responsibilities they share as Europeans.

The Strasbourg conference follows the seven symposia and two seminars organised as part of the project in

the last five years. The subjects covered include: the aims and objectives of secondary education, content and methods, educational reform in central and eastern Europe, teacher training, evaluation, and the educational policies of Council of Europe member states. Apart from experts and speakers, all of these meetings have attracted delegates from the CDCC's forty-four member states and, in most cases, the national civil servants directly responsible for planning, implementing and evaluating the reform of secondary education.

Practical results include specific teaching aids and a network of national correspondents responsible for schools contacts and exchanges. A guide to secondary education in all the Cultural Convention's signatory states, monographs dealing with specific experiments and files for teachers have also been published as part of the project.

CIVITAS: An imaginative new Partnership for civic education

Meeting in Prague from 2 to 6 June last year, representatives of fifty-two countries decided, with backing from the Council of Europe, to launch a new civic education scheme.

"The democratic world must realise that much will depend on bringing the next generation up to be responsible, well-informed citizens. The euphoria which accompanied the liberation of eastern Europe in 1989 (...) has largely spent itself. Serious and, in some cases, profound obstacles to the stability of democracies have appeared. Religious, political and ethnic intolerance, human rights violations, political cynicism and corruption, crime and violence, ignorance, apathy and irresponsibility all threaten the vitality of democracies."

This was the alarming diagnosis which led to the CIVITAS project, launched at the Prague conference last year. The basic idea is simple: an international network to reform civic education and promote the building of civil society in fledgling democracies. The former socialist states of central and eastern Europe are the prime targets – but not the only ones. In June this year, CIVITAS Latin America was launched at a conference in Buenos Aires (Argentina), and a similar conference with an Asian slant is scheduled for Hong Kong in July. But the "old" democracies, where waning civic commitment is also causing concern, are not being neglected either.

The Council of Europe's Directorate of Education, Culture and Sport has decided to join the United States Information Agency in giving the project its active support, pending adoption of the statute which will turn CIVITAS into an international, non-governmental organisation. The Council itself hosted the meeting of the CIVITAS Provisional Steering Committee in Strasbourg from 25 to 27 March. None of this, of course, prejudices the form that Council

involvement may take once CIVITAS emerges in its final form.

Simply put, the aim is to give civic education a higher place on the scale of international priorities, and CIVITAS will be mobilising the international community's material and intellectual resources to make this possible.

Whether it focuses on adults or children at school, civic education itself sets out to turn people into citizens who understand how a democratic, pluralist, law-governed state functions, know about human rights and civic duties, and have a sound grasp of the ways in which individuals can play an active part in the life of the community. Its purpose needs to be clearly defined since, in many countries newly freed from totalitarian rule, the term "civic education" still suggests the ideological force-feeding practised in single-party states.

A first practical example was the workshop on the role of education in building a democratic society, held in Sarajevo from 29 to 31 March. Organised by the American Federation of Teachers, the Centre for Civic Education (United States), the Council of Europe and the United States Information Agency, it was attended by some sixty teachers from all of Bosnia-Herzegovina's communities. Subjects covered included classroom approaches to the basic principles and workings of democracy, human rights, tolerance, non-violent settlement of conflicts, the citizen's role in a democratic society and participation in elections. This last point is particularly important, since the Dayton Agreements cover the holding of elections in Bosnia-Herzegovina by the end of the year.

This first workshop will be followed, from mid-July to mid-August, by a series of summer schools in the country's main towns, attended by 300-500 primary and secondary teachers.

Alongside CIVITAS itself, the CIVNET link has been launched on the Internet. This gives organisations and individuals with an interest in civic education instant access to information on CIVITAS, as well as bibliographies, "who's who" data, teaching resources and schedules of events. The Council of Europe has fed in extensive data on its work on human rights and citizenship education. The site can be accessed on <http://www.civnet.org>. ■

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Teachers and Europe – putting them in touch

Since 1969, the Council of Europe's in-service training programme has been helping to spread its message among teachers.

Teachers have a key role to play in spreading the values and ideals that Europe's young people need today – introducing them to ways of seeing and thinking that mould their perceptions as future citizens. The Council of Europe has known this from the start, and its in-service training programme for teachers (formerly the bursaries scheme) has been running since 1969. Managed by the Council for Cultural Co-operation (CDCC), which directs the Organisation's work on education and culture, the programme is aimed at educators (teachers, school principals, inspectors, education advisers and teacher trainers) in the CDCC's forty-four member states and enables them to attend further training courses organised in other countries.

There are three clear objectives:

- to broaden the participants' cultural horizons, enrich their professional experience and use them to spread the message at home;
- to promote the exchange of ideas, information and teaching materials, and forge links between educators in different countries;
- to associate educators more closely with the Council of Europe's work on education.

For the last twenty years, a very special place has been occupied in the programme by Germany, and specifically the Academy for the Further Training of Teachers at

Donaueschingen, which runs four one-week courses every year, with support from the Federal Government and the Land authorities of Baden-Württemberg. Accommodation and organisation are normally covered by the host country, and travel expenses by the Council of Europe.

While courses are organised by the host country, themes are selected in consultation with the Council, which wants to see its main concerns covered: action against racism, xenophobia and intolerance, intercultural education, civic and human rights education, history teaching, schools exchanges, the European dimension in education, environmental education, and so on. The courses give some countries a useful opportunity to face up to sensitive issues and compare their own teaching traditions with others. This year, for example, the Czech Republic ran a course on "The rise of new states in Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century", chiefly for history and civic education teachers. The aim was to trace the root-causes of historical developments in Europe, and particularly central and eastern Europe, in the twentieth century, and pinpoint ways of teaching history which make pupils feel "European", while strengthening their civic awareness and also making them more tolerant.

Recent themes at the Donaueschingen seminars have included: "The European dimension in

geography: one level among others", "The European dimension of environmental education in secondary schools" and "New approaches to history teaching in secondary schools". In 1988, the centre anticipated the bicentenary of the French Revolution with a seminar on classroom treatment of the period in Europe's secondary schools. This gave the participants (from Belgium, France, Italy, Ireland, Finland, Switzerland, Spain and other countries) a chance to look at the relative significance of the Revolution in various national curricula and compare their approaches to an event which may be interpreted in different ways, but is undeniably a part of everyone's history.

Most courses last for three to five days, but longer ones have recently been on the increase, the aim being to intensify the exchange and make it more fruitful. Both courses and seminars are usually based on working parties, led by specialists on the subjects dealt with. There is a special emphasis on new teaching methods, many of them still experimental, which incorporate the European dimension from the outset, and simulation exercises are used to illustrate them. Each country contributes its own ideas and know-how, and participants can put them to the test when they get home – and help to pass them on in the process. Interactive in conception, the courses encourage everyone to

participate, in a resolutely international spirit.

When a course or seminar ends, every participant is expected to produce a report – and the CDCC underlines the point by waiting until it arrives to foot the travel bill. These reports are used for evaluation purposes by the organising country and the Council of Europe, and most of them speak of the co-operative spirit which typifies the courses. Many of the contacts made at the centre lead to school exchanges later, an important practical extension of the theoretical work done at courses.

The CDCC also gets official reports on all the Donaueschingen seminars, and on some other courses of special interest to the Council of Europe. These are published in German, English and French, and most of them contain recommendations to the Council, to education authorities in the member states, and sometimes schools and teachers. Whenever possible, the Council feeds these suggestions into its work on education, and they are also drawn on heavily by the national authorities and, above all, the participants' own schools.

An example here is the report produced on the seminar held in May 1994 on education and tolerance in multicultural groups (itself part of the Council's 1993 project, "Democracy, human rights, minorities: educational and cultural aspects"). This urges the Council to adjust its information strategy and make information directly available to schools and teacher-training institutes. It also calls on national authorities to put children's rights on the

curriculum, on schools to make sure they reflect the school population's mixed character, and on teachers themselves to pay more attention to the implications of multiculturalism in their classroom practice.

Many reports make the point that teachers are short of information on training possibilities in their own or other countries. This suggests that people who might be interested in the Council's in-service training courses are still largely or wholly unaware, in some countries, that these courses exist. This is reflected in the participants' provenance and the uneven distribution of courses between countries.

How to get on a course? The CDCC has a network of contact persons, usually further training officials in national education ministries, who have the job of circulating the twice-yearly programmes and, more generally, publicising training opportunities (a list of contact persons and the latest programme can be obtained from the Council of Europe). As the CDCC's local go-betweens, they filter applications for courses before sending them on to their counterpart in the host country. Selection is based on the number of places available, the applicant's background and motivation, and his or her knowledge of the language in which the course is being conducted.

Course languages obviously vary with host countries, but also with the subjects covered. French, for example, was the language used at the Donaueschingen seminar on education for human rights and democratic citizenship. Courses

on teaching Spanish and German are held – logically enough – in those languages. English is the most common working language, and the only one in the United Kingdom, Greece and Scandinavia, with French to back it in Romania, and German in Slovenia and the Czech Republic.

Last year, more than 1000 teachers attended the courses, as compared with less than 350 ten years ago. More than 300 came from central and eastern Europe, and their preferred subjects were history teaching, education for democratic citizenship, intercultural education and human rights education. Because of the subjects usually chosen, secondary teachers are in a majority.

The Council of Europe's total estimated budget for the courses in 1996 is over 3,5 million francs. The number of participants has rocketed, but the Council's funds have not – which is why it is now urging host countries to cover travel as well. ■

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Access to higher education: overcoming the obstacles

Europe spends something like 100 billion dollars on higher education every year – but has no guarantee that all social, economic and cultural groups are getting the benefit equally.

Who has access to higher education and how? For the last three years, the Higher Education and Research Committee has been trying to answer this question by exploring practices and problems in the forty-four countries which have signed the European Cultural Convention.

The Council of Europe's project on access to higher education was launched at a conference which it organised with the EU Commission in Parma (Italy) in 1992.

The aim was to gain a picture of the general situation, identify the factors which make it hard or impossible for certain groups to enter higher education and, whenever possible, suggest ways of putting things right.

Most European countries are anxious to see more young people in higher education, on which Europe collectively spends some 100 billion dollars every year. After three years' enquiry, however, the Committee sadly concludes that the drop-out rate is unacceptable, even in selective systems, and is merely the tip of the iceberg, reflecting a wider underperformance of the system. The economic and personal cost of these failures is, of course, enormous.

This is an area where there is little to choose between selective and non-selective entry. Selection, of course, means limited access from the start. Flexible or rigid, it at least makes for clarity, even if some of the would-be students never get past the starting-post. Non-selective entry, on the other hand, is no guarantee of equal opportunity, and results in the failure rates pinpointed by the Council study.

Methods of access to higher education thus cannot resolve the obstacles to admission or failure rates – particularly since, as the final project report notes, the substantial growth of higher education has not solved the problem of under-representation of certain social groups, but has simply reproduced existing social differences.

It is very clear, for example, that members of ethnic and language minorities, students from low-income groups or rural areas, the handicapped, and foreign and refugee students have more trouble getting into higher education and are likelier to fail once they get there.

The one hopeful sign is that equality of the sexes seems by and large to be the rule, even if women are still behind in terms of cross-the-board access. This is particularly clear in the case of scientific and technological subjects.

All of this shows that social patterns in higher education tend to hold steady, with children of parents who have been through the process themselves getting in more easily and doing better after that. This means that higher education's role in moving people up the social ladder still needs to be confirmed and developed.

There are various measures which can help to make this possible. Improved physical access for handicapped students is an obvious example, and more attention should also be paid to students from underprivileged backgrounds, with better information and guidance services and more recognition of skills acquired outside the conventional school circuit. What this means in practice is a far more

personal approach to students and their problems. Every handicapped student, for example, is a unique case, with specific problems needing tailor-made solutions.

It also means more emphasis on making sure that the intake targets set for handicapped students and students from underprivileged or minority backgrounds are actually met.

All of these questions, and also ways of overcoming the problems inherent in belonging to certain cultural, social, ethnic or economic groups, will be explored at the final conference on the project, which will be held in Parma from 18 to 20 September 1996. ■

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Calendar of future events

17-20 JUNE (1996)

Joint annual meeting
of the ENIC and NARIC networks,
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11-15 SEPTEMBER 1996

School links and Exchanges and the
In-service Teacher Training Programme,
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13 SEPTEMBER (1996) – 6 JANUARY (1997)

24th Art Exhibition on "The dream of
happiness – the art of historicism in Europe",
Vienna AUSTRIA

18-20 SEPTEMBER (1996)

Final Conference on Access to Higher

Education in Europe,
Parma ITALY

24-25 SEPTEMBER (1996)

Education Committee,
Strasbourg FRANCE

11-16 NOVEMBER (1996)

74th European Teachers Seminar on
European Dimension and intercultural
co-operation in the classroom
Donaueschingen GERMANY

14-16 NOVEMBER (1996)

Preparation and publication
of new history textbooks
for schools in European countries
in democratic transition,
Warsaw POLAND

2-5 DECEMBER (1996)

Final Conference of the Project
"A secondary education for Europe",
Strasbourg FRANCE

14-15 DECEMBER (1996)

Second Annual Colloquy on
"Language learning and teaching
in central and eastern Europe",
Graz AUSTRIA

Congress of Local and Regional Authorities: the city slant on education

Meeting in Copenhagen on 15-16 April, the Standing Committee of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe (CLRAE) adopted a resolution on "responsibilities and initiatives of cities in respect of education". This takes up the conclusions of the Czestochowa (April 1994) and Bologna (February 1996) conferences and embodies the lessons learned from a co-operation project linking ten cities (Amsterdam, Barcelona, Bologna, Budapest, Czestochowa, Frankfurt, Liverpool, Lyon, Riga, Stockholm). It insists that cities must be recognised as full partners in the education process, and makes the point that municipal services (social, cultural, etc.), heritage (monuments, museums, institutions) and associations have a lot to give education in the broad sense. Referring to experience gained in several cities, the CLRAE stresses that these sectors, which can contribute significantly to citizen education, should work more closely together. ■

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Parliamentary Assembly: education and human rights

The Parliamentary Assembly regularly considers educational issues, at the prompting of its members. Many of the reports prepared by the Committee on Culture and Education with a view to specific recommendations deal with educational issues, either directly or indirectly, in connection with broader questions which have a bearing on education too. Human rights and fundamental freedoms are one area where this often happens.

Comparative evaluation of education, education for health, gifted children, equality of the sexes in education, the training of teachers in environment education – there have been some ten recommendations more directly concerned with education since the 1990s started. The latest, voted in January at the initiative of Spanish MP Lluís Manuel de Puig, deals with "history and the learning of history in Europe". Reports on education and human rights, diversification of modern languages and access to higher education for minorities are in the pipeline and will also lead to recommendations.

The Council of Europe's cultural co-operation programmes for sensitive areas usually cover education too. Specifically, the former Yugoslav and Middle Eastern countries have been the subject of recommendations on education, the aim being to introduce young people to the principles of democracy and tolerance. Thus, in the wake of Assembly Resolution 1013 on the peace process in the Middle East, a Youth and Education action group was set up to make practical proposals in this area – and these will be going to the Assembly in September. ■

Contact: Christopher Grayson, Secretary of the Committee on Culture and Education of the Parliamentary Assembly
Tel. (33) 88 41 21 14, Fax: (33) 88 41 27 97.

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