



**KULTUSMINISTER  
KONFERENZ**

# Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany

# History

## **Inaugural meeting**

“Conference of German Ministers of Education” – the only Conference of Ministers of Education and Culture to represent the whole of the country until reunification in 1990

1948

## **Federal State**

**Agreement** on the Secretariat of the Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs

1959



1949

**Bernkastel Declaration** on the cultural sovereignty of the federal states



**Standing Conference  
of the Ministers of  
Education and Cultural  
Affairs of the Länder  
in the Federal Republic  
of Germany**

## Foreword

### Dear readers

Thank you very much for your interest in the work of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany.

The Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs is the oldest conference of ministers in Germany and plays a significant role as an instrument for the coordination and development of education in the country. It is a consortium of ministers responsible for education and schooling, institutes of higher education and research and cultural affairs, and in this capacity formulates the joint interests and objectives of all 16 federal states. Its core remit is to ensure comparability and mobility within the educational system, facilitate networking and create consensus in thematic areas that extend across the federal states.

Against the background of wide-ranging societal developments, the broad spectrum of activities undertaken by the Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs enables it to act as an initiator and guarantor for the securing of quality standards in schools, vocational education and training and higher education, for the recognition of vocational qualifications and for the fostering of cooperation between institutions involved in education, research and culture. The Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs uses new initiatives and tried and tested measures to meet the national and international challenges created by today's knowledge society and by modern culture. Within this context, it views itself as a forum for educational policy debate. The Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs is based in both Berlin and Bonn, from where it coordinates forward-looking educational cooperation between the 16 federal states and assumes national responsibility for the shaping of educational processes.

This brochure aims to provide an insight into the tasks and fields of activity covered by the Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs and its Secretariat. I hope you find it informative.



Udo Michallik  
*General Secretary of the  
Conference of the Ministers  
of Education and Cultural*



## Establishment and composition

The Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany (referred to in abbreviated form as the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs) is a consortium of the ministers or senators of the federal states responsible for education and schooling, institutes of higher education and research and cultural affairs.

The Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs was founded in 1948, the year before the Federal Republic of Germany came into being. On 19 and 20 February 1948, a Conference of German Ministers of Education was staged in the Hohenheim district of Stuttgart. Although this was attended by representatives from all the zones of occupation existing at the time, the ministers from the Soviet zone of occupation were subsequently prohibited from taking any further part. Before the end of the year, the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs from the three western zones of occupation agreed that their Conference should become a permanent institution. They constituted themselves as the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany and established a Secretariat to conduct their cooperation.

Following the reunification of Germany and the re-establishment of the federal states on the territory of the former German Democratic Republic, the states of Brandenburg, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt and Thuringia formally acceded to the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs on 7 December 1990. The whole of the City of Berlin, including its former East and West parts, has been represented in the Conference since reunification.

## Tasks

### Cultural sovereignty of the federal states

The Basic Law of the Federal Republic of Germany promulgated on 23 May 1949 essentially places responsibility for education and cultural affairs with the federal states.

The agenda of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs is to address “educational, higher education, research and cultural policy issues of supraregional significance with the aim of forming a joint view and intention and of providing representation for common objectives”.

### Securing mobility, setting quality standards – guaranteeing comparability of qualifications

Within the scope of their Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs, the federal states assume self-coordinating responsibility for the country as a whole. They ensure the necessary measure of commonality in educational, research and cultural issues of cross-state significance.

One of the essential duties of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs is to use consensus and cooperation as a vehicle for securing the highest achievable level of mobility for learners, students, teachers and those involved in academic research. It is also charged with the tasks of helping create equal living conditions across Germany and of representing and promoting the joint interests of the federal states in the field of culture.

The following remits are derived from this function:

- ▶ establishing the prerequisites for mutual recognition by agreeing standardisation and comparability of certificates and qualifications;
- ▶ working towards the securing of quality standards in schools, vocational education and training and higher education;
- ▶ encouraging cooperation between institutions in the fields of education, research and culture.



The necessary coordination takes place via resolutions, recommendations, agreements and also via state treaties which set out a binding framework. In the interests of achieving the desired amount of diversity within the educational system, there is a conscious approach not to seek to put detailed regulations in place.

### **The Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs represents the educational policy interests of the federal states.**

It is an important instrument for asserting the joint interests of the federal states vis-à-vis the Federal Government, the European Union, the Council of Europe, the OECD and the United Nations. The Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs also has the task of presenting and advocating the common positions of the federal states in the fields of education, research and culture.

### **Working together with the Federal Government**

The Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs cooperates with the Federal Government in a spirit of partnership. This particularly applies to the important common task of ascertaining the effectiveness of the educational system in international comparative terms. Cooperation also encompasses international and European collaboration in education, research and cultural affairs. Whereas the Federal Government is responsible for foreign relations, the areas of education, research and culture all fundamentally fall within the remit of the federal states. Cooperation and coordination also take place in matters relating to vocational education and training. Regulation of training in companies is governed by the Federal Government, whereas school-based vocational education and training is the responsibility of the federal states.

# Organs and committees of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs

The organs of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs are the Plenum, the Presidium and the President.

## Plenum

The Plenum is made up of the ministers or senators responsible for educational and cultural affairs in the 16 federal states. Each federal state has one vote in the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs. Unanimity is required for resolutions that have a financial impact, that aim to achieve the necessary standardisation and mobility or that affect the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs itself. Procedural resolutions are passed via a simple majority. All other resolutions require a majority of at least 13 votes. The Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs usually convenes for a plenary session four times per year.

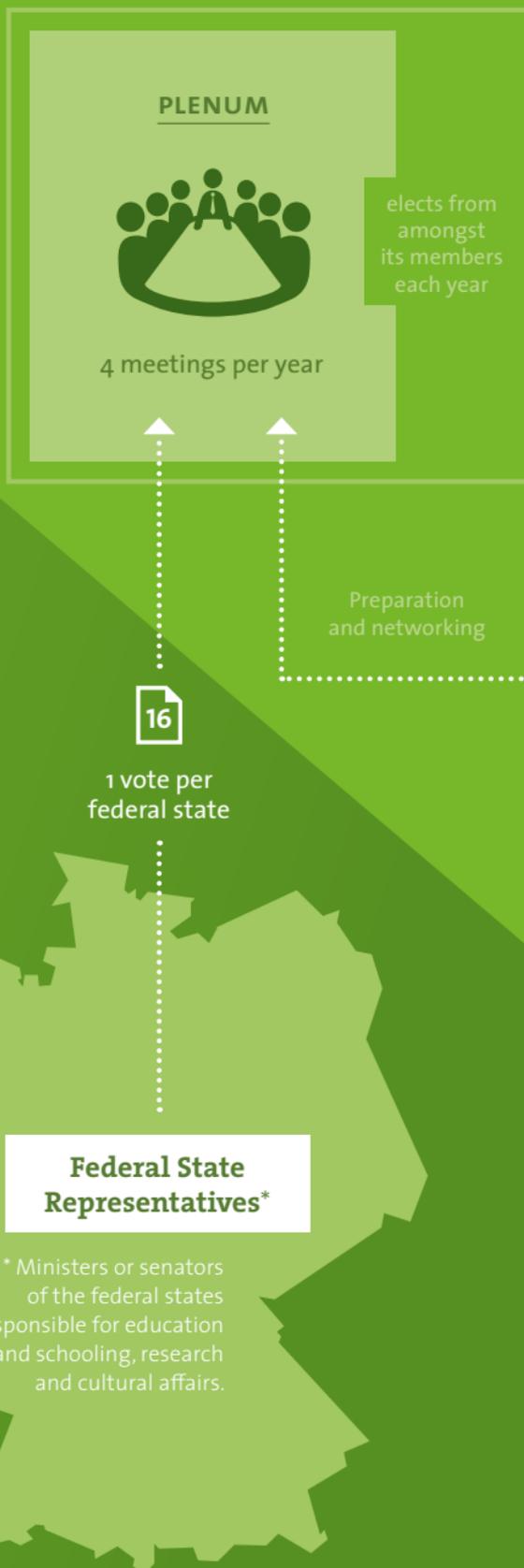
## The Presidium and the President

The Plenum elects a Presidium from amongst its members for each calendar year. The Presidium comprises the President, three Vice Presidents and up to two further (co-opted) members.

The President chairs the plenary sessions and acts as the external representative of the Conference.

The presidium prepares important plenary issues. In urgent cases and in questions which do not need to be addressed by the Plenum, it may take decisions on behalf of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs by adopting unanimous resolutions.

## Summary of the structure of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs



# Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (KMK)

## PRESIDIUM

1 year



Prepares plenary issues, may adopt resolutions in urgent cases

## PRESIDENCY

1 year



Official representative of the Standing Conference of the KMK / chairs plenary sessions



## CHIEFS OF STAFF CONFERENCE

Preparation and networking



## COMMITTEES AND COMMISSIONS

## Secretariat of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs

Permanent representation / organisation

**BERLIN**  
LOCATION

approx. 40  
staff members

**BONN**  
LOCATION

approx. 180  
staff members

**CENTRAL OFFICE FOR  
FOREIGN EDUCATION**  
(ZAB)

**EDUCATIONAL  
EXCHANGE SERVICE**  
(PAD)

## Chiefs of Staff Conference

Alongside the ministers, the Chiefs of Staff from the ministries involved also hold regular meetings. These are referred to as Chiefs of Staff Conferences. These conferences prepare for the deliberations to be undertaken by the Plenum and deal with matters that do not require discussion by the Plenum of Ministers. The Chiefs of Staff Conference is chaired by the Chief of Staff from the federal state (ministry) that provides the President of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs.

## Committees and commissions

The main committees of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs and commissions set up to deal with important individual areas carry out preparatory work for decisions to be taken by the Plenum and the Chiefs of Staff Conference. The committees and commissions also facilitate the exchange of information and networking between the representatives of the federal states.

### MAIN COMMITTEES

- ▶ School Committee and Sub-committee for Vocational Education and Training and Continuing Education and Training
- ▶ Higher Education Committee and Sub-committee for Medicine at Institutions of Higher Education
- ▶ Cultural Affairs Committee
- ▶ Federal Government-Federal States Committee for Schools Abroad

### STANDING COMMISSIONS

- ▶ Chiefs of Staff Commission for Quality Assurance in Schools
- ▶ Chiefs of Staff Commission for Quality Assurance at Institutes of Higher Education
- ▶ Commission for European and International Affairs
- ▶ Commission for Statistics
- ▶ Commission for Teacher Training
- ▶ Sports Commission

## The Secretariat of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs

The Secretariat carries out the day-to-day work of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs. It focuses in particular on preparations for the meetings held by the Plenum, the committees and the commissions and deals with the evaluation and implementation of the results of the deliberations conducted by these bodies. The federal states concluded an agreement regarding the establishment of the Secretariat on 20 June 1959, to which the new federal states of the former East Germany acceded on 25 October 1991. The Berlin Law on the Secretariat of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs, which entered into force on 20 February 2014, accords the Secretariat the status of a Berlin city government authority.

The Secretariat of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs has offices in Berlin and Bonn and is headed by a General Secretary, who also has a Permanent Representative.

The further tasks of the Secretariat include ongoing notification of the organs and committees of plans and measures instigated by federal agencies and national organisations. For the ministries of education and cultural affairs of the federal states, it acts as a joint point of contact with Federal Government authorities, the European Union and national institutions and associations. The Secretariat also performs international tasks for the federal states in areas such as schools abroad, international school exchanges, cooperation with international bodies such as the EU, UNESCO and the OECD and evaluation of foreign educational qualifications.

The expenditure of the Secretariat is financed by all 16 federal states in accordance with the Königsstein Formula. Joint federal state funding of national institutions also takes place via the Secretariat of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs.

## Educational Exchange Service

The Educational Exchange Service (Pädagogischer Austauschdienst – PAD) is the only state institution that undertakes activities in connection with school exchanges on behalf of the federal states. Funded by the Federal Foreign Office, it acts within the scope of foreign cultural and educational policy in conducting school partnership programmes, visits and language courses for pupils from all over the world. It also offers continuing training courses for teaching staff who teach German abroad. In its capacity as a longstanding partner of the Federal Foreign Office, the Educational Exchange Service also participates in the “Schools – Partners for the Future” Initiative (PASCH) and in the “kulturweit” voluntary service. It acts as the National Agency for the EU educational programme Erasmus+ (2014–2020) in the schools area and as the National Coordinating Body for the European schools network eTwinning.

## Central Office for Foreign Education

The Central Office for Foreign Education at the Secretariat of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs is the Centre of Excellence of the federal states for the assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications in Germany. Its services are mainly used by institutes of higher education and government authorities for academic and vocational recognition procedures. Private individuals can also arrange for their higher education qualifications to be certified by the Central Office for Foreign Education, which issues notices of equivalence for certain non-academic occupations. The “anabin” database documents information on the foreign educational systems of 180 countries.

Within the international context, the Central Office for Foreign Education works in close conjunction with national equivalence centres in the countries of the European Union (NARIC), the Council of Europe and UNESCO (ENIC). Foreign recognition agencies are able to obtain information on the German educational system from the Central Office for Foreign Education for the purpose of evaluating German qualifications.

Publisher

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*Enlarged detail of a historic  
photograph of the inaugural  
meeting of 1948*



