



WEBINAR  
UNICA EduLAB

**UNICA EduLAB webinar**

**“University-based Schools of Education  
serving capital cities in Europe”**

**Promoted by King's College London**

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## **Opening remarks**

by

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Good morning,

I would like to welcome all participants to this webinar.

In particular, I would like to welcome and thank the members of the panel, deputy mayors and university leaders from three European capital cities.

This event is hosted by UNICA, the network of universities from the capital cities of Europe. I would like to thank most warmly the UNICA President and the secretariat for all their support and dedicated work in organizing the event.

Personally, I am not aware of any other platform for dialogue or consultation, at least not recently, that brought together local authorities and schools of education to discuss about how these schools serve their capital cities.

Since the idea originated with us at the School of Education, Communication and Society of King's College, I thought I would say a few words about the webinar and the topic.

As we all know, this island has a convoluted history of relationships with the rest of the continent, with what starts being called now “mainland Europe”.

But fact is that, with all its specificities, the UK is part of Europe, of the European culture. In education, the UK has contributed models that have been borrowed and adapted, used by other European countries, whether they were pedagogical, organisational or regulatory models. The UK has also contributed to defining educational standards and standards of scholarship, including in the scholarship of education. The UK remains a powerhouse in educational research, globally.

Until recently, many students from the continent came to study in our universities, which have trained significant cohorts of European professionals, including in education. Some, although a lot fewer, still come.

My mentor back in Romania, many years ago, one of the most influential educationalists in the country during several decades, in particular throughout the times of post-communist reforms, studied education here in London.

But this relationship has been two-way or multiple-way: the UK has also learned from developments and experiences in continental European countries, including in education.

Collaboration between UK and continental European academics and, to a lesser extent, between policy makers and regulators in the field of education, continues today, although the parameters of this collaboration are going through a process of realignment.

Horrific recent developments in Eastern Europe are symptomatic for a broader realignment - that of geopolitical tectonic plaques, with an impact on education as well. These events mark the end of any remaining post-Cold War exuberance in Europe, including in education. For quite a while after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dismantling of the Iron Curtain, many in Europe and perhaps in the world expected, or believed, that what was coming was an unstoppable march toward more and more democracy, uninterrupted peace, more Europe, unrelenting economic growth based on an ever-growing growing corpus of knowledge, and more and more education at all levels, including international education, supporting a larger and better qualified workforce. These narratives were severely corroded already during the great recession of 2007-2009. Russia's invasion of Ukraine is in a way the final act. We realized that if not an Iron Curtain, then at least a new Iron Veil, or Iron Shroud, has fallen over certain parts of the world. And it became rapidly clear where the UK wishes to be positioned, on which side of this new political but also cultural, intellectual and educational divide.

The project of this webinar is very limited in scope, obviously. But, in that way, it is a European project. Not a political one, but touching on intellectual, professional and policy dimensions.

It is what we sometimes call a peer learning exercise. More precisely, we thought that it would be useful to learn from each other in contemporary Europe about challenges and positive experiences regarding the work of university-based departments and schools of education in capital cities.

There are a few assumptions we suggest testing in our discussion today, and maybe a few more pointed questions to address:

- 1.** Operating as a school of education in a capital city often brings about different challenges compared to other cities or regions of the same country. If this is true, what are these specific challenges? Also, are there specific contributions required from the schools of education in capital cities?
- 2.** Schools of education from capital cities, even when they also serve broader national or international constituencies, have a particular obligation towards their cities. Again, if this is true, what does it mean exactly? And who must play what role in articulating modalities to pursue and fulfil this obligation?

3. If both the schools of education and local or municipal authorities in capital cities have an interest in and obligation to serve the respective capital cities, do they need to work together in this? In what ways?
4. In England, local authorities in general, including in London, have very limited prerogatives with regard to education, whether it is about policy or regulations, support (including funding) or control. This has not always been like that. Is this the case in other countries as well? Is it a justified or a productive model of organisation?

I would like to acknowledge that, beyond these broader considerations, the original impetus for organizing the event came from everyday experiences and work. Like myself, many of my colleagues at King's and at the School of Education, Communication and Society are not from London or the UK and our School has a genuinely global reputation of excellence. But whether locals or coming from elsewhere, and knowing that we work in an international school and university, we are all keenly aware that we are in London and, as a school promoting research and practice based-education, and advanced scholarship of education broadly conceived as a situated social practice, we have an obligation to this amazing capital city.

The School has a long tradition of doing just that. Many colleagues continue to do it today.

There are questions, however, regarding how to best calibrate this contribution at the present time, a time of major but somewhat uncertain evolutions in geopolitics and national politics alike, that have an impact on education; in education trends at home and abroad; or in student enrolment.

We thought that a particular variable in this complex equation, which is most often ignored, is the dialogue between schools of education and the local/municipal authorities.

We are very keen to contribute to this dialogue and, even more, learn from it.