The Future of GPEN

December 2025

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1. Introduction

The GPEN Council has adopted this new vision on the future of the Global Protestant Education Network in its meeting on 2 December 2025[1]. The Council affirmed as its strong conviction that it is important to have this network as kind of an umbrella of other umbrellas (e.g. national associations and education departments of national churches) to connect Protestant schools and those involved in them on the global level, for the following general reasons:

- to help experience and to live out the fact that, as Christians, we are citizens of the world,
- to share our educational mission in solidarity and community with our brothers and sisters across the globe,
- to mutually inspire and support all those who are involved in Protestant education,
- to help improve the quality of Protestant education in every corner of the world,
- and to convince the outside world of the great value of Protestant education in order to ensure its freedom and the means needed for our schools to continue to flourish.

The work that has started almost ten years ago will, therefore, be carried forward into the future, albeit in a new, more focused and hopefully more effective and sustainable way.

This report starts with briefly looking back at the past of GPEN and giving a short analysis of the present state of the network. It ends with the choices that have been made with respect to fulfilling the core tasks of GPEN, that the Council regards to be essential and highly relevant for Protestant education across the globe.

2. GPEN past and present: Looking back with gratitude

In 2017 a big celebration in Germany took place around the jubilee of 500 years of the Protestant Reformation. After a few years of preparation, the official start of GPEN was marked in Wittenberg in the presence of delegations from all corners of the world.

At an earlier conference in the Netherlands (in Soesterberg, in 2016) a document was drafted by representatives from seventeen countries and five continents presenting a global vision for Protestant education.[2] In this document a theological perspective is given, stating that education in Protestant schools is built on, among other things, God's unconditional love and his good creation, global solidarity and God's option for the vulnerable, and hope for peace and justice in God's kingdom. The pedagogical perspective for Protestant schools stresses, among other things, the offer of error-friendly forgiveness, the strive for social justice, the commitment to freedom with responsibility and the support of the

[1] The decisions of the Council are based on the report '*The Future of GPEN Revisited*', written by the Revd Dr Wim Kuiper, in his capacity as a consultant to the Council in 2025.
[2] Establishing Common Ground for Protestant Schools, a position paper by Schools500Reformation (the predecessor of GPEN), Soesterberg, 2016, https://www.gpenreformation.net/wp-content/files/establishing_common_ground.pdf.

spiritual, religious and world view development of pupils and students. The vision of Protestant education was (partly) summarised as follows:

"*Protestant schools look forward, encouraging young people to take responsibility for their own lives, guiding them towards meaningful work and giving them a sense of purpose in life. They prepare them to take a positive role in society, inspiring them with a strong sense of social responsibility and encouraging them to be people of integrity wherever they go.*"[3]

In the course of time, a community was built around the GPEN website of circa 1000 educational institutions listed as participants of the network. A core group of so called ambassadors was formed consisting of, at present, 47 school leaders, education officers from churches and representatives of national associations. Meetings in Europe were followed by conferences in Rwanda (2017), Tanzania (2018) and Ghana (2023), as well as several digital meetings, such as most recently a series of webinars ('GPEN Teachers Academy') on digitalisation in Protestant education. Several materials and tools were developed to support global collaboration and exchanges (e.g. on peace education and the project called 'Seeds of Hope'). GPEN has also given voice to Protestant education in contacts with external parties such as OIDEL (a Geneva based think tank and lobby organisation around the Freedom of Education) and the Roman-Catholic sister organisation OIEC.

In these ways, GPEN has served many Protestant schools and their associations worldwide. Though the effects are hard to measure, it is safe to assume that a number of researchers, church officials, officials of school associations, school leaders, teachers and even some pupils have directly profited from the exchanges and activities that the network has offered to them or has helped to organise for them.

There is every reason to be grateful for the good work that has been done by so many, making GPEN into a blessing for those who have been touched by it in the past years. But not all that was envisioned around GPEN has come to fruition and, at this time, the network is facing a number of challenges and shortcomings that cannot be easily solved. This has made a proper rethink of the whole operation needed. GPEN as it functions at the moment is not delivering in the way it should. At present, it fails to have the following characteristics:

- a truly global outreach within the community of Protestant schools
- a stable connection with the most relevant international partners and effective representation and advocacy on the global level;
- a shared definition of the tasks it has to perform and a clear focus on them;
- a sustainable condition in terms of manpower and finances in order to fulfil these tasks.

To overcome these shortcomings the Council has decided to implement the following vision on the future of GPEN, aimed at making the network more focused, sustainable, efficient and effective.

3. The way ahead for GPEN

3.1. Essential and relevant tasks for GPEN

GPEN will focus on three essential tasks that are relevant for all those who are involved in Protestant education across the globe. Essential, because no other network or institution is naturally placed to fulfil

[3] Ibid., p. 9.

them. Relevant, because without their fulfilment Protestant schools and their national associations would clearly lack something that is useful, if not even vital, for their continued flourishing.

These three tasks can be summarised as follows: (1) representation and advocacy, (2) dissemination of relevant materials, tools and content, and (3) capacity building of national associations.

3.1.1. Representation and advocacy

The freedom of education, the possibility to have schools with a distinctive Protestant (or more general Christian) ethos is not to be taken for granted. A strong advocacy therefore continues to be needed on all levels of governance, including the global level. GPEN is the most natural and only network that can play a role in advocacy on this level for all Protestant educational institutions across the globe. It should therefore give voice to Protestant education worldwide and be its representative in contacts with other relevant global organisations, most prominently among them the Roman-Catholic sister organisation OIEC (and in Europe CEEC).

Together with OIDEL, a Geneva based think tank and lobby organisation that promotes the freedom of education, GPEN is able to influence the relevant UN-organisations and to help national (and continental[4]) associations where needed in their advocacy activities within their own societies and political institutions.

GPEN is also able to bring the importance of Protestant education to the attention of global organisations and networks of churches, such as the WCC, WCRC (Reformed), WLF (Lutheran) and the Anglican Communion, and where needed also on a continental level (e.g. in Europe the CEC and CPCE and in Africa the AACC). Focusing on national associations and education departments of national church organisations, GPEN will regularly supply relevant information on advocacy activities and developments on its website and in newsletters.

3.1.2. Dissemination

GPEN is uniquely positioned to disseminate relevant materials, tools and content for Protestant schools and those involved in them worldwide to help them to raise their quality and to link them up with each other. GPEN lacks the capacity and finances to be or to become a producer of such materials, tools and content itself, (though it has been done by GPEN in the past with the aid of temporary subsidies e.g. on peace education). Others are better placed to do so and this will, therefore, not be regarded as one of GPEN's essential tasks. GPEN continues, however, to serve as a disseminator of such products by endorsing them and highlighting them on its media and in the circle of its national correspondents (see below). These materials, tools and content are developed by reliable partners, dedicated to the flourishing of Protestant education in all its variety across the globe.

The following three programmes and projects of reliable and natural partners for GPEN are good examples of such products:

- The IMPEQ (Educational Quality in Developing Countries) programme of the University of Bamberg[5]. The team behind this programme organised the recent GPEN webinars (Teachers Academy) on Digitalisation in Protestant Education.

[4] In Europe the Council of Europe and the European Union are also, to some extend, influencing the freedom of education and European litigation may have an impact on it.
[5] See: https://www.uni-bamberg.de/en/ma-educationalquality/

- The Planet Fraternity project of the Catholic sister organisation OIEC[6], aimed at facilitating the exchange between individual schools in the global South and North, which has been advertised in the GPEN newsletter and on the website.
- The Flourishing Education project and programme of the National Society for Education of the Church of England.[7] The Consortium build around this project offers an excellent environment for inspiring exchanges between professionals and a great number of tools and materials to enhance the quality of protestant education worldwide, linked to relevant scientific research.

3.1.3. Capacity building

Establishing effective national networks or associations is first of all needed for advocacy of Protestant schools on the national level. By providing services and disseminating useful information for schools they will also help to improve the quality of protestant education. National associations are also needed in order to establish and strengthen continental or otherwise supranational networks.[8] Finally, they also provide the backbone for a proper functioning global network.

Capacity building of national associations or networks of Protestant schools in countries where they are lacking at the moment, is a task that fits naturally to GPEN as it has the oversight and the contacts needed for it. In actual practice the capacity building will have to be operated by functioning national associations as an act of solidarity (peers helping peers). In countries where churches are the main organisers of Protestant schools this capacity building will naturally start with contacting educational officers of those church organisations.

This will be a new task as GPEN is not yet active in this area. Therefore it makes sense to regard the proper fulfilment of the other two tasks mentioned above as the first priority of a reconfigured GPEN, while looking into ways how to set up the implementation of this new task in the coming years.

3.1.4. GPEN database on Protestant Education

Essential for an effective fulfilment of all of these three tasks is having a proper database on Protestant education worldwide. This database should contain detailed and updated information on:

- national and supranational associations[9] of Protestant/Christian schools;
- the state of Protestant schools and the freedom of education within every country, using a common format[10];
- the global situation of Protestant schools (numbers and percentages).

Having this GPEN database on Protestant Education will facilitate the exchange between associations as well as between individual schools. It will give them all the information needed to find exchange partners

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[6] See: https://oiecinternational.com/the-poles/pole-of-educative-and-cultural-projects/planet-oiec/
[7] [7] See: https://www.nse.org.uk/foundation-for-educational-leadership/flourishing-leaders
[8] An example of a continental network is the (European) International Association for Christian Education, IV. An example of a supranational association is ACSI, based in the US but bringing together Christian schools in the Americas, Europe, Africa and Asia.
[9] By associations are meant organisations or networks that unite Protestant schools (some of them combined with other types of Christian and/or independent schools), provide services for them, and may or may not govern or supervise them in a formal sense. These organisations may or may not be closely linked to churches (e.g. the national educational department of church organisations).
[10] For an example of such a format, see the Attachment.

elsewhere. Moreover, it will contain relevant information for all those involved in advocacy for protestant education, on national, continental and global levels. It helps to give voice to protestant education based on the actual facts and figures (e.g. the number of schools, pupils, percentages of national, continental and global educational systems, legal issues around the freedom of education etc.). GPEN will continue to present itself as the voice and global network (umbrella of umbrellas) of all those educational institutions and organisations that are taken up in its database.

For the constant actualisation of the databank a network of national correspondents is needed. These correspondents should have a proper overview of the national situation and developments concerning Protestant education, ideally from the perspective of an all-encompassing national organisation. The correspondents will therefore likely be attached to those associations or national education departments of protestant churches.

Using the database, GPEN will continue to reach out to all national associations and education departments of churches in order to make itself known as fulfilling the three tasks mentioned above. It will continue to ask all of them to also financially support the work of GPEN as a partner organisation.[11] But GPEN will refrain from institutionalising a formal membership with obligatory yearly fees, keeping the administrative burden as light as possible.

3.2. GPEN-Team and finances

In order to fulfil the tasks defined above, a team is needed consisting of the following officers:

- Database officer: Responsible for the database on Protestant education worldwide, organising and processing updates from national correspondents, and making the data available through the GPEN website.
- Communication officer: Is responsible for the quality of the website and newsletters. The primary target group is officials of associations and education departments of churches. The website has two main focuses: to convey news on advocacy and to disseminate materials (research, content, tools) that are relevant for Protestant education.
- Financial officer: Takes care of the financial administration of the GPEN Foundation[12] which will continue to be used as a vehicle to finance the out of pocket costs of the operation that are not directly financed by one of the associations. On the income side donations of national associations are administered.
- Advocacy and Representation officer: Representing GPEN externally and internally, giving voice to Protestant education on the global level and making sure that GPEN and its team function in the right way.
- Capacity building officer: Coordinating and organising capacity building.

For these officers to fulfil their tasks in the most efficient and effective way, it is advisable that most of them are employed by one of the national associations and receive their income from them, which is also the present situation. The employers should allow them to perform GPEN-tasks and duties as part of their regular job. Together they will work as a 'co-op' GPEN team or office, with persons coming together from several organisations. GPEN will, however, also need some additional means to hire externals if needed

[11] Linking GPEN to the CGFE is an important step to facilitate this, which is worked out with priority.
[12] The Foundation is the legal entity of GPEN, set up according to Dutch law and hosted by Verus.

and to pay for some ongoing expenses, such as hosting the website and membership fees for OIDEL and GCFE.

3.3. Governance

The GPEN-Council continues to meet virtually several times a year as the main governing and supervisory body of the network. The (coopted) membership consist of one or two experts on (global) Protestant education, as well as several representatives of national associations and education departments of churches from all the different continents. The board and supervisory board of the Foundation (which is a subset of the present Council) stay in place, as the Foundation continues to be used as the vehicle for all financial transactions of GPEN.

The leaders of the national organisations involved in the operational activities of the GPEN team will continue to meet on a regularly basis with the A&R officer to discuss the ongoing operation (as they have already started to do so in 2025).

As GPEN will no longer organise any activities and encounters itself, nor try to increase and deepen as a global network of school practitioners, there is no continuing role for the two present steering committees and the GPEN ambassadors. In its place, a new network of national correspondents is set up with the main task to keep the database updated with national data. Ideally these correspondents are attached to national associations/education departments of churches. This network will also be invited for (digital) meetings around global advocacy and dissemination of important new products, for which also the leaders of national associations/educational departments of churches will have a standing invitation. This network as well as the former ambassadors and members of the steering groups may be asked to help out with capacity building efforts around national associations.

4. Conclusion

In the next phase of its existence, GPEN will focus on a limited number of essential tasks that cannot be done by any other organisation and that remain highly relevant and useful for Protestant schools worldwide and all those involved in them. These tasks are summarised as follows: (1) advocacy and representation, (2) dissemination of content, tools and materials, and (3) capacity building of national associations of Protestant schools.

In order to fulfil these tasks in a proper way, a database containing information on Protestant education worldwide is set up and will be kept updated by a circle of national correspondents, coordinated by a GPEN database officer. The GPEN website is reconfigured in accordance with this new direction. The regular newsletters will focus on relevant information related to these three tasks.

The network continues to have a small team of officers, including an officer for Advocacy and Representation, and a limited budget for some yearly expenditures. As many members as possible of the GPEN team are paid for and employed by a few national associations (working together as a ‘co-op office’). They combine GPEN tasks with their national tasks in an efficient and effective way. In due time, yearly donations from the major national associations should cover the costs of the regular expenditures (i.e. hosting the website, donation to OIDEL and partnership of GCFE).