



## ETUCE Statement in response to the 2008 review of the Lisbon Strategy

At the EU summit on 13-14 March 2008, the European Council will adopt the guidelines for implementing the next cycle of the Lisbon Strategy in 2008-2010. Based on proposals from the European Commission, the Council will among other items adopt:

- Recommendations to reaffirm the integrated economic and employment guidelines from 2005 for the next cycle (2008-2010)
- Country specific recommendations for each Member State based on the Commission's assessment of each country's national Lisbon reform programme for growth and jobs
- A new Community Lisbon Programme (2008-2010) setting out the actions to be taken at EU level to complement the national Lisbon reform programmes

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The two employment guidelines specifically related to education, adopted in 2005, remain unchanged. These call upon the Member States to “*Expand and improve investment in human capital*” and “*Adapt education and training systems in response to new competence requirements*”, and cover specific recommendations to:

- set in place inclusive education and training policies and action to facilitate significantly access to initial vocational, secondary and higher education;
- significantly reduce the number of early school leavers;
- implement efficient lifelong learning strategies;
- ensure the attractiveness, openness and quality of standards of education and training, broaden the supply of education and training opportunities and ensuring flexible learning pathways and enlarging possibilities for mobility of students and trainees;
- raise and diversify access for all to education and training and to knowledge by means of working time organisation, family support services, vocational guidance and, if appropriate, new forms of cost sharing;
- respond to new occupational needs, key competences and future skill requirements by improving the definition and transparency of qualifications, their effective recognition and the validation of non-formal and informal learning.<sup>1</sup>

Since the launch of the Lisbon Strategy, the ETUCE has welcomed the central role education and training have been given to achieve the Lisbon objectives, but from the outset the ETUCE has also emphasised the importance of recognising that education and training is not merely a tool to foster economic growth and employment. Education plays a pivotal role in that regard, but it also serves broader personal and social functions, vital to social cohesion, equality, active citizenship, cultural diversity and personal fulfilment.

It is important to stress that the specific recommendations regarding education and training in the 2008 review of the Lisbon Strategy's guidelines for growth and jobs are indeed only intended to focus on the way in which education contributes to growth and

<sup>1</sup> Commission's proposal for Integrated guidelines for growth and jobs 2008-2010, guideline 23 and 24.

jobs. They do not give a comprehensive view on the policy measures needed to improve the quality of and access to education and training. At EU level, the specific educational strand of the Lisbon Strategy – the Education & Training 2010 work programme – provides the most comprehensive view about the challenges and measures needed in education and training.

The ETUCE calls on Member States to ensure that a comprehensive view is taken at national level when setting priorities for the education sector, and that the employment-related education policies do not take precedence over the more socially related education policies.

The ETUCE sends the same message in response to the Commission's proposed country specific recommendations on education. At the Spring Summit in 2007, the European Council for the first time made use of the provisions in the Treaty's Article 99(2) and Article 128(2) to issue country-specific recommendations in relation to each country's national Lisbon reform programmes. For the Spring Summit in March 2008, the Commission proposes that the Council should fine-tune and adjust those country recommendations. A number of these include recommendations regarding education policies:

- 17 countries are recommended to enhance participation in lifelong learning;
- 14 countries are recommended to increase the responsiveness of education and training systems to labour market needs;
- 18 countries to make a coherent R&D strategy, e.g. through increasing public R&D investment and effectiveness, and/or through improving the collaboration between business, education and research;
- 11 countries are recommended to improve the employability of young people and/or facilitate school-to-work transition;
- 8 countries are to take measures to reduce early school leaving,
- 3 countries are specifically recommended to reform vocational training including increasing investments and access.<sup>2</sup>

It must be noted that although some countries are not specifically recommended to address a certain problem (e.g. early school leaving), it does not necessarily mean that this issue is not a problem in the particular country. Instead, the country may already have taken measures to address the problem.

Like the integrated guidelines, the country specific recommendations only relate to how education can contribute to enhancing economic growth and employment; they are not a comprehensive view of the policy measures needed to enable education and training to fulfil their broad purposes in society. In the opinion of the ETUCE, one of the biggest challenges facing education and training today is that education systems are still not doing well enough in combating the negative impact of pupils' socio-economic background on their school performance. Giving children truly equal opportunities regardless of their ethnic or socio-economic background is, from the point of view of the ETUCE, one of the most significant issues to address, also with a view to enhancing the economy.<sup>3</sup> It is essential that this issue continues to be given high priority in the

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<sup>2</sup> Proposal for a Council Recommendation on the 2008 up-to-date of the broad guidelines for the economic policies of the Member States and the Community and on the implementation of Member States' employment policies. 11 December 2007.

<sup>3</sup> For a full outline of the ETUCE's policy on the challenges facing schools today, see the ETUCE Statement in response to the Commission's Consultation on "*Schools for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*".

Education & Training 2010 work programme as well as in the Commission's forthcoming Social Agenda for 2008-2010.

### **Adjusting to labour market needs – but not in a narrow way**

With regard to the number of country specific recommendations related to adjusting education and training systems to labour market needs, the ETUCE stresses that this must not be narrowly interpreted. Indeed, an education system that is too narrowly tailored to the immediate needs of the labour market will not sustain the economy in the long run, but risks rather to be counter-productive. It is essential that a broad outlook on the purpose of education is maintained. A broad outlook on education entails developing pupils' knowledge, skills and abilities in a wide range of subjects, their social, civic and cultural competences, and their ability to learn, as well as fostering their creativity, innovation, team-work skills, etc. It is this broad and comprehensive base that will promote an innovative and inclusive society in the long run.

### **Promote lifelong learning from early childhood education onwards**

The ETUCE notes that in the country specific recommendations, enhancing lifelong learning is largely taken to mean increasing possibilities for adults to participate in learning. The ETUCE asserts that while this aspect of a lifelong learning policy evidently is crucial – and many challenges remain as regards access to learning for the adult population in many member states – a comprehensive lifelong learning policy must focus on the whole spectrum of education and training, from pre-school and onwards. The ETUCE welcomes in this context the references the Commission's supporting analysis to its Strategic Lisbon Report makes to the importance of early childhood education as a basis for later learning, particularly for children from less favorable socio-economic backgrounds and migrants.<sup>4</sup> However, in the 'growth and jobs' part of the Lisbon Strategy, the issue of early childhood education is most often only seen as a question of increasing the availability of childcare, with reference to the Barcelona targets to provide childcare to at least 90% of children between 3 years old and the mandatory school age and to at least 33% of children under 3 years of age. The ETUCE stresses that, although the purpose of early childhood education evidently is dual – social and educational – it must be stressed that early childhood education is first and foremost for the child and the child's opportunity to learn - to develop knowledge, skills and values. The organisation of early childhood education and care varies from country to country, but should always include both aspects: care and education. All too often, the split between education and care results in inequality, instability for children, and low quality provision. The ETUCE has thus called on the Commission – in the follow-up to the Barcelona and most notably in the forthcoming Communication on Childcare in 2008 – to take a comprehensive approach that includes the educational aspect along side the care aspect.

### **Increase efforts to reach benchmarks**

The three EU benchmarks that relate to participation in education and training continue to prove difficult to reach. Every sixth young person aged 18-24 in the EU leaves

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<sup>4</sup> Commission Communication: Strategic report on the renewed Lisbon strategy for growth and jobs: launching the new cycle (2008-2010). Part III, p. 61.

school with no more than lower secondary education (albeit reduced from 17.6% in 2000 to 15.3% in 2006), and only 77.8% complete upper secondary school (2006), showing only little progress since 2000 (76.6%) with still a significant way to go to reach the benchmark of 85%. The participation in lifelong learning of 25-64 years old have increased from 7.1% in 2000 to 9.6% in 2006 although breaks in time series for collecting the data means that the progress measured is overstated.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the proportion of 15 year-old pupils who are low achieving in reading has regrettably deteriorated since 2000, from 21.3% to 24.1% in 2006. For several years the ETUCE has been calling on Member States to increase their efforts to make progress in these important areas and, importantly, to take a broad approach to the issue of improving pupils' reading literacy. It is important to recognise that the share of pupils who fail in reading are also likely to be the ones who fail in other subject areas; and although the EU Benchmark puts the focus on reading, efforts must be made to lift the performance levels in a broad range of subjects for the pupils at risk. The Commission had proposed that all Member States commit themselves to develop national action plans for reducing the number of early school leavers and the number of low-performers in reading,<sup>6</sup> and the ETUCE regretted that the Council of Education Ministers rejected this proposal and failed to make this commitment in their 2008 Key Messages.<sup>7</sup> The ETUCE continues to call on Member States to commit themselves to set in place such national action plans and to develop them in consultation with the national social partners.

The ETUCE also reminds governments that an ambition to improve the education and training systems must go hand in hand with a willingness to provide an adequate increase in funding. The total public expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP increased in the EU from 4.7% to 5.2% between 2000 and 2003, but then decreased again to 5.1% in 2004.<sup>8</sup> There is no doubt that a number of member states need to confer significant additional public resources to the education sector. Seven countries are spending just around 4% of their GDP on education and a total of 12 countries spend below 5%. Education is a fundamental human right, and governments must fulfil their responsibility for ensuring that all citizens have the right to receive quality public education.

### **Involve social partners**

The Commission's proposal for employment guidelines for 2008-2010 clearly recommends member states to "establish a broad partnership for change by fully involving parliamentary bodies and stakeholders, including those at regional and local levels and civil society organisations. European and national social partners should play a central role."<sup>9</sup> The ETUCE highlights that this recommendation evidently also includes the sectoral social partners who should be fully involved in the consultation about reforms in their sector.

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<sup>5</sup> Draft joint Council and Commission 2008 Progress Report on Education and Training 2010, p. 17-20.

<sup>6</sup> Commission Communication: Strategic report on the renewed Lisbon strategy for growth and jobs: launching the new cycle (2008-2010). Part I, p. 12.

<sup>7</sup> Key Messages from the Education Council to the Spring European Council, adopted 14-15 February 2008.

<sup>8</sup> Commission Communication: Strategic report on the renewed Lisbon strategy for growth and jobs: launching the new cycle (2008-2010). Part III, p. 60.

<sup>9</sup> Proposal for a Council Recommendation on the 2008 up-to-date of the broad guidelines for the economic policies of the Member States and the Community and on the implementation of Member States' employment policies. 11 December 2007, p. 27-28.

## Higher Education and Research – a need for a redirection of the EU policies

The proposal for a reaffirmation of the integrated economic and employment guidelines from 2005 also includes reaffirming the two guidelines concerning Research & Development policies (guideline 7-8). These two guidelines encourage member states to “modernise the management of research institutions and universities” and ensure “more effective and efficient public expenditure on R&D and developing PPPs”. Since 2005, the Commission has in the area of higher education and research turned these guidelines into Communications that sets out what the Commission takes to be a “modernisation agenda” of the European higher education and research institutions, but which in the opinion of the ETUCE is largely a market-oriented and corporate vision of universities that will seriously hamper the success that the European university system has achieved so far, in terms of enrolments, quality and democracy.

The notion of output-based funding is for example frequently recommended by the Commission as a means to increase the efficiency of higher education institutions, but as reiterated by the ETUCE on several occasions, the Commission’s simplistic reference to the merits of output-based funding will jeopardise the quality of higher education.<sup>10</sup> The notion of output-based funding therefore needs to be examined with extreme caution, as it can give rise to a number of negative and harmful consequences. Due consideration has to be given to the considerable effort needed in identifying the relevant indicators on which such output-based funding is built, and in trying to avoid over-complication of the system. Experience has shown that systems based on numerous and complex indicators have failed, that large transaction costs are required in the reporting process, and that increased pressure on universities and academics to focus on output does not ensure better quality of higher education.<sup>11</sup>

Equally, the ETUCE has protested against the excessive emphasis that the Commission has placed in its recent Higher Education Communications on the relationship between universities and the business community in terms of funding of research, as it fails to consider a number of aspects. From the experience of academic staff in Europe, it gives rise to a number of negative consequences, the following being an indication of some of the most serious of these:

- Excessive separation between teaching and research, which is particularly problematic when research is carried out in universities;
- Restrictions placed on the use of research funds in terms of fields of research, and thus also restrictions on academic freedom;
- Restrictions on publication of research results. A frequent and very grave occurrence is that businesses often refuse to make research results public as they see them as damaging to their corporate image or identity, thus denying the dissemination of genuine knowledge. This is particularly harmful in areas linked to nutritional or health issues.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> See the statement adopted in September 2006 by the Education International Pan-European Structure’s Higher Education and Research Standing Committee on “the European Commission Communication: *Delivering on the Modernisation Agenda for Universities*”, as well as the ETUCE Statement on the European Research Area (August 2007).

<sup>11</sup> See also the statement adopted in September 2006 by the Education International Pan-European Structure’s Higher Education and Research Standing Committee on “the European Commission Communication: *Delivering on the Modernisation Agenda for Universities*”.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

Another strand in the Commission's agenda in higher education and research has been to promote autonomy for higher education and research institutions. The ETUCE agrees that universities and research institutions can only meet the challenges they face if they are given adequate autonomy, but does not agree with the Commission's interpretation of what autonomy should entail. In the opinion of the ETUCE, institutional autonomy should be a twin principle to that of academic freedom, as put forward in a recent Recommendation by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.<sup>13</sup> In the Commission's Communication on *Delivering on the Modernisation Agenda for Universities* (May 2006), institutional autonomy and accountability is taken to mean that Member States should "guide the university sector as a whole through a framework of rules, policy objectives, funding mechanisms and incentives for education, research and innovation activities"<sup>14</sup>. The ETUCE can only support overarching political frameworks referring to basic principles, but opposes more detailed and prescriptive interventions in this respect.<sup>15</sup> The ETUCE reminds that the UNESCO recommendation concerning the *Status of Higher Education Teaching Personnel* from 1997, which the ETUCE has supported, equally describes institutional autonomy as a twin principle to that of academic freedom: "Autonomy is the institutional form of academic freedom and a necessary precondition to guarantee the proper fulfilment of the functions entrusted to higher-education teaching personnel and institutions." The European Commission and the Council of Ministers must respect those standards.

In the opinion of the ETUCE there is a strong need for a redirection of the EU policies in higher education and research. In particular, there is a need to give greater attention at EU level to increasing equity in higher education. Higher education and research is a vital public good that contributes to the social, cultural and economic development of communities, regions, and nations. Consequently, universities operate according to clearly defined public service principles: equality of access, comprehensiveness, affordability, high standards of quality, and public responsibility. Universities are thus a public asset and should be funded primarily by public investment. Indeed, universities in Europe are primarily publicly-funded to ensure that they are of consistently high quality, and that they are universally accessible by all qualified students of all ages. The European Commission and the Council of Ministers should safeguard this specific European tradition in higher education.

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<sup>13</sup> On academic freedom and university autonomy - Recommendation 1762 (2006).

<sup>14</sup> Commission Communication: *Delivering on the Modernisation Agenda for Universities* (2006), p. 5.

<sup>15</sup> As also highlighted in the statement adopted in September 2006 by the Education International Pan-European Structure's Higher Education and Research Standing Committee on "the EU Commission Communication: *Delivering on the Modernisation Agenda for Universities*".