

**EUROPEAN TRADE UNION COMMITTEE FOR EDUCATION**  
**General Assembly 2001**

Ref: 7719

ETUCE Briefing document

June 2000

<h2 style="margin:0"><b>INDICATORS AND BENCHMARKS ON QUALITY OF SCHOOL EDUCATION</b></h2>
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### **1. Background**

The European Union is supposed to play a clearly defined role in the area of education. One of its tasks according to the Treaty is to help and support the member states in their efforts to improve the quality of education. *“The Community shall contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging cooperation between Member States and, if necessary, by supporting and supplementing their actions, while fully respecting the responsibility of the Member States for the content of teaching and the organisation of education systems and their cultural and linguistic diversity.”* (The Treaty, Article 149).

Since 1995, the evaluation of quality has been a priority action. A number of studies and research projects have been launched under the action *“Exchange of information and experiences on systems and policies of education”* of the SOCRATES I programme.

#### **1.1. The EU Pilot Project on Quality Evaluation in School Education**

A result of the initiatives related to the evaluation of quality was the Pilot Project on Quality Evaluation in School Education. The project was launched at the beginning of the school year 1997, with the approval and support of the Council of Ministers of Education and involved 101 secondary schools in 18 countries. The principal aims of the projects were to raise awareness of the need to evaluate secondary education in Europe, to enhance existing national procedures, to give a European dimension to quality evaluation and to support the exchange of information and experiences.

A final conference was held in Vienna in November 1998 to gather together the schools which had taken part in the project, the experts linked to the project and different stakeholders. The participants at the conference concluded that the project had raised the awareness of quality issues in the schools. It was also noted that the project had helped to improve the quality of education during the project period.

A final report (MacBeath, J., Meuret, D., Schratz, M. & Jakobsen, L.B. **Evaluating quality in school education. A European pilot project. Final report.** European Commission 1999) was published in June 1999. Answering the question as to whether the

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pilot project met the objectives, the authors of the report conclude: “*There is no doubt that evaluation has become more important in most of the participating countries during the 1990s. The political discussion in many countries centres on the balance between external accountability-oriented evaluation, and internal (self-) evaluation focussing on school development. In the whole array of strategies that countries employ to focus on the issue of quality in school education, the European pilot project served as an inspiration and as a forum for the exchange of information and experiences. The project helped strengthen the case for evaluation in the individual country, and often provided impetus to national projects within the same field and offered concrete support for school-based work.*” (p. 1, MacBeath, J., Meuret, D., Schratz, M. & Jakobsen, L.B. **Evaluating quality in school education. A European pilot project. Final report.** European Commission 1999)

Based on the experiences from the *EU Pilot Project on Quality Evaluation in School Education*, the EU Commission has produced a proposal for a *Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on European co-operation in quality evaluation in school education*.

**1.2. EU’s project on “Indicators and benchmarks of quality of school education”**

The Ministers of Education of the EU and the accession countries met in Prague, in June 1998. The final communiqué of the conference invited the Commission to set up a Working Committee of national experts with the objective of identifying a small number of key indicators or benchmarks to assist national evaluation of systems in the area of school standards. Experts from the 26 countries involved sit on this Committee. A first progress report on the work of the Committee was presented to the Ministers of Education of these countries in Budapest in June 1999.

A second progress report, the result of the selection of indicators by the Working Committee, has been presented. A limited number of 16 indicators were proposed covering the areas of:

- attainment (mathematics, reading, science, foreign languages, learning to learn, ICT, and civics);
- success and transition (dropout rates, completion of upper secondary education, participation rates in tertiary education);
- monitoring of school education (parental participation, evaluation and steering of school education);
- resources and structures (educational expenditure per student, education and training of teachers, participation rates in pre-primary education, number of students per computer).

The indicators were selected on the basis of three selection criteria: political relevance of the area, comparability and validity of the data. Special attention has been paid to areas covered by data which already exists. The choice of indicators will consequently be

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subject to change over time, in the light of the political agenda in the field of school standards, both of the Member States and of the Union, and the availability of new valid and comparative data.

On the basis of the first list of indicators, it was decided to prepare a *European report on quality of education* for the meeting of Ministers of Education of the EU and the accession countries in Bucharest in June 2000.

### 1.3. ETUCE's work on quality in education

ETUCE has taken several initiatives in the field of quality in education. One of the first was to organise a colloquium on quality in higher education in Bruges in 1995. Since 1995, a working group operating within the framework of ETUCE has dealt with matters related to quality in education. As a result of the work of the group, a colloquium was organised in Rome in March 1996 to discuss the subject. During 1998, the group was converted into an Advisory Panel on Quality, with its main task being to follow developments in the *EU Pilot Project on Quality Evaluation in School Education*. An ETUCE Round Table was organised in November 1998 to discuss matters related to the EU project, mainly school-based evaluation. A third ETUCE Round Table was organised in November 1999 to discuss the EU initiative concerning indicators and benchmarks on quality of school education.

### 1.4 ETUCE's response to the European report on quality of education

This response to the *European report on quality of education* contains four parts;

- general principles supported by teacher organisations in relation to quality and evaluation,
- comments related to the indicators used in the *European report on quality of education*
- comments related to the conclusions reached in the *European report on quality of education*
- some proposals on how the work at European level on quality can be developed

## 2. Principles

In the context of the EU project on indicators and benchmarks on quality of school education, it is important to express some general principles related to quality, indicators and benchmarking which have been discussed among teacher organisations in Europe.

### 2.1. Quality and resources

It has to be made clear that quality does not come by itself. To improve quality, investment in education has to be made. There can be discussion about which investments are best, but there is no escape from the fact quality costs something. Low

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achievement and bad results are in many cases, though not all, a result of insufficient or wrongly-used resources.

From this perspective, it is important to find evaluation methods which do not merely indicate student achievement or other results. The relationship between different types of investment in education and the results must be made clear. This is relevant for a discussion concerning the European situation, national situations and the situation at the individual school.

## **2.2. The role of the teacher in evaluation**

It has to be recognised that education is a complex process in which the interaction of several parts of the system influences the final outcome; but it has also to be recognised that the work of the teacher in the classroom plays a crucial role in this whole system. What is happening in the classroom is “the moments of truth” in the education system. There are very few measures which could be taken to really improve education which would not involve the teacher and practice in the classroom. One of the problems with far too many educational reforms is that this has not been considered. Reforms are proclaimed without involving the teachers. Such an approach seldom brings any positive results, and in many cases, teachers are then accused of not following the reforms they have never been involved in.

It is of crucial importance that teachers become more active in evaluating their own work. If there is to be some development in schools, it has to be the result of the work teachers do to improve quality. School improvement will occur when teachers are fully involved and when teachers have an ownership of ideas for improvement and evaluation. In the long term, this is very important for the future and development of the teaching profession

When the schools that participated in the EU Pilot Project were asked about the value of internal and external evaluation, 36% of the schools responded that external evaluation “improves management” and 63% responded that internal evaluation “improves management” (p. 5 in MacBeath, J., Meuret, D., Schratz, M. & Jakobsen, L.B. **Evaluating quality in school education. A European pilot project. Final report.** European Commission 1999).

In this context is also important to remember that school management and head teachers can play a very important role in the evaluation process of schools. They could initiate different types of evaluation projects and facilitate such activities. The management is also, of course, a potential subject for evaluation.

Evaluation can obviously take many forms. In the report to the ETUCE Round Table in Luxembourg on “The Evaluation of Quality in the Education System” in November 1998, it was shown that there are broadly three general types of evaluation; evaluation through different types of standardised national tests, evaluation through school inspection and

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evaluation through self-evaluation methods. Obviously there are occasions to combine all three methods, but it is also important to recognise that the first two methods partly reduce the teacher to an object, while the teacher in the third method can be both object and subject in the process. In order to develop teacher professionalism and to give teachers themselves the tools to improve quality, it is important to develop those evaluation methods which will include teachers.

### **2.3. To give the “whole picture”**

Teachers often feel that different evaluation projects offer too narrow a picture of what is going on in education and in schools. When TIMSS results were presented, the whole public discussion on education centred around knowledge in Science and Mathematics and, when the IEA Reading Literacy project was presented, the discussion was about reading. Even if reading and arithmetic are considered as key skills, the totality of achievements produced as a result of education is much more complex and cannot be reduced to only one or two subjects. From this perspective, it is important to develop evaluation methods which will make it possible to present a more complex picture and, in that sense, a picture that is closer to the reality.

When the schools which participated in the Pilot project were asked about the value of internal and external evaluation 49% of the schools responded that external evaluation “tells us a lot” and 76% responded that internal evaluation “tells us a lot” (p. 5 in MacBeath, J., Meuret, D., Schratz, M. & Jakobsen, L.B. **Evaluating quality in school education. A European pilot project. Final report.** European Commission 1999).

This would imply a need to further develop a type of evaluation which not only considers traditionally defined achievements, but a method which allows for discussion on student participation, school democracy, school climate, school ambience etc. It is important to promote non-quantitative measures and criteria for quality (including equal opportunities, inclusivity and public accountability), and to press for a holistic approach to quality.

### **2.4. Evaluation and the workload of teachers**

There is a feeling among many teachers that the workload has increased continuously during recent years, often without any compensation for the teachers in respect of salary increases and restructured working hours. These questions were raised in the report to the ETUCE Round Table in Luxembourg in November 1998. It was noted that, to some extent, all types of evaluation would be the concern of the teachers. Even if teachers are not involved at all in certain evaluation projects, they are the ones who have to distribute tests, collect tests and, in many cases, mark the tests. Evaluation has implications for the total workload of teachers. These matters were also stressed in the discussion which took place at the Round Table.

The final report of the pilot project also recognised this problem. In response to the questionnaire from the Steering Committee “*nearly two-thirds of the schools regarded*

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*both internal and external evaluation as time consuming*" (p. 5 in MacBeath, J., Meuret, D., Schratz, M. & Jakobsen, L.B. **Evaluating quality in school education. A European pilot project. Final report.** European Commission 1999).

From this perspective, consideration must be given as to how evaluation methods can be developed which can be easily incorporated into the "normal work" of teachers without adding to the existing workload. Alternatively, organisational models should be sought which allow schools to organise evaluation without increasing teachers workload. This can be done within the framework of collective agreements or other types of regulations covering teachers' working hours and workload.

### **2.5. To provide alternatives**

In the literature on evaluation, a distinction is often made between *external evaluation* and *internal evaluation*. External evaluation is when someone from outside undertakes the evaluation and internal evaluation is when persons in the school make the evaluation. Another distinction is between *normative assessment*, *formative assessment*, *summative assessment*, and *diagnostic assessment*. A distinction can also be made between *quantitative methods* and *qualitative methods*. From the overview of trends related to evaluation made in the report to the ETUCE Round Table in Luxembourg in November 1998, it can be concluded that many governments and school authorities have a tendency to orient themselves towards approaches in evaluation which are external, summative and quantitative. There are fewer initiatives in the area of approaches that are internal, formative and qualitative. Results from the Pilot project indicates that, out of the 101 participating schools, 98 believe that school self-evaluation should have more importance than it now has in their country.

The discussion about different evaluation methods is not a question of "either/or". Obviously there is a need to have and to develop different approaches and different methods, but there seems to have been less interest in some methods than in others. In order to achieve a more balanced approach, we must look for alternative methods; not replace other methods, but offer complementary approaches. It is important to promote non-quantitative measures and criteria for quality.

## **3. EU's 16 indicators**

### **3.1. Will the indicators catch the "whole picture"?**

As was pointed out in 2.3 above, quality of education is a complex matter. The second progress report on Indicators and benchmarks on quality of school education also pointed to this view. It was said that it is "*necessary to avoid simplistic conceptions of quality*" (p. 6, The second progress report on Indicators and benchmarks on quality of school education). From that perspective it is a risky business to select a limited number of indicators. It becomes especially difficult when a selection of subjects is made. Among

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the 16 indicators chosen, seven deal with attainment. Information has been collected about student attainment in mathematics (indicator 1), reading (indicator 2), sciences (indicator 3), ICT(indicator 4), foreign languages (indicator 5), learning to learn (indicator 6) and civics (indicator 7). Certainly, these subjects are important, but there are also several other subjects which have been left out. For example history, geography, philosophy, sport, music and home economics are not covered by the indicators. How should this be interpreted? Are these subjects less important?

To give the “whole” picture is difficult, especially if the intention is not to produce a voluminous report. However this is a real and important problem. There are basically two ways to deal with it, and they are not mutually exclusive. It has been announced that European reports on quality of education will be produced regularly by the European Commission. It could be possible to cover different subjects on different occasions. That will make it possible to keep the reports reasonably short and at the same time cover several subjects, over a period of time.

Another approach is to develop the cross curricular approach, in the sense that what should be covered is not only traditional school subjects, but skills and knowledge which is of crucial importance for several subjects. Learning to learn, which is already mentioned as an indicator, is a good example of such an cross curricular skill. Other skills and types of knowledge which could be considered in this context are critical thinking and creativity.

There is a risk that discussions on attainment only deal with school achievement, but it is also important to recognise that, if there is a wish to give the “whole” picture, there is also a need to consider issues such as the students’ self-esteem, openness, honesty etc. It is doubtful if an educational system could be considered to be of high quality if it produces students with excellent scientific knowledge, but with very low self-esteem. A simple fact, such as whether the students feel comfortable in school and if they do, whether their parents and teachers are reasonably happy with their education, might in many cases give almost as much information as facts about attainment.

Another important question related to attainment and giving the “whole picture” is when students attainment should be tested and compared. This is illustrated directly in “European Report on Quality of School Education”. The report uses the TIMSS studies for information about students’ attainment in mathematics and science. The TIMSS studies tested students at three different ages; students in the third and fourth grades, students in seventh and eighth grades and students in the final year of secondary school. The report only refers to the studies dealing with the students in the seventh and eighth grades. Why have not all the TIMSS studies been used?

It can also be argued that the real attainment is not what the students might know or not know when they are in school, but what knowledge has remained later on in life. From that perspective, the IALS (International Adult Literacy Study) is of interest. This study has not been referred to in the “European Report on Quality of School Education” .

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Most crucial in this discussion about giving the “whole” picture is probably the need to be modest. Not even a report with 100 indicators would be able to claim that the “whole” picture has been given. In order to avoid simplification of complex matters this has to be clearly stated in the report and kept in mind when reading the report.

### **3.2. How are resources used?**

The point was made in section 2.1. that the relationship between quality and available resources must be taken into consideration. Among the 16 indicators is one directly dealing with available resources, the educational expenditure per student (indicator 16). That indicator will give some idea of the amount of resources used for education, but it is still a rather simple measure. In order to really get an idea of the amount of resources used for education there is a need to scrutinise in more detail how resources are used. High expenditure per student does not necessarily mean that educational resources are available in the classroom. High expenditure could reflect a large and inefficient bureaucracy. High expenditure per student on average could also correspond to large differences between regions and/or big differences between sectors within the education system.

To get a relevant picture of the relationship between quality and resources, it is necessary to examine how much resources are actually transferred to the classroom. The indicator number of students per computer reflects this to some extent, but educational resources must be much more than computers.

One approach concerning educational resources which could be used, but which is not used in the report is to apply the recommendation from The International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century (often referred to as the Delors Commission) that every country should allocate at least 6 % of its Gross National Product (GNP) to education. This recommendation could easily be used as a benchmark.

### **3.3. Teacher education**

Teachers are only dealt with directly in one of the sixteen indicators, the one on education and training of teachers (indicator 13). Information is only presented about the education of teachers for lower general secondary education. Obviously, it is necessary to include information about the education of all categories of teachers.

Information is given about the length of teacher education and a distinction is made between general subject-based education and pedagogic and practical training. This analysis of the content of teacher education could be developed further. There might be reasons also to make a distinction between on the one hand pedagogy and psychology and on the other hand practical training in schools during periods of practice and guided support. Information about entry requirements to teacher education institutions would also be of importance to get a good picture of the quality of teacher education.

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Teacher education also has to be seen in a broader perspective. Teacher education is not only pre-service education, but also in-service training. It would certainly be of interest to develop an indicator covering the number of days of in-service training offered to teachers.

#### **3.4. Participation**

The participation of parents is covered by indicator 12 in the report, but there is no indicator referring to teachers' participation in the development of educational policy. It is stated in the report (p. 9, European Report on Quality of School Education) that "stakeholder participation" needs to be further elaborated. The teacher must be regarded as one of the main stakeholders in education. It is obviously important to see teachers not only as a tool for implementation of a policy already made, but also as an important participant in the process of developing education policies. There are strong arguments for the participation of teachers and their organisations. It should be borne in mind that teachers as stakeholders have specific interests as well as specific qualifications to judge these matters;

- The working conditions of teachers correspond highly to the education policy.
- Teachers have far-reaching knowledge and experience of the needs stemming from the situation and life of educational institutions.
- No educational change can be effective without the agreement and active partnership of the personnel who will ultimately be responsible for its implementation.

Teachers participation can be organised in two ways which are complementary; possibilities to influence and participate as a part of the professional responsibility of the teacher and organised consultations with the representative organisations of the teachers. Both these elements ought to be covered by the indicators.

#### **3.5. Early childhood education**

Early childhood education is covered by indicator 14 and referred to as pre-primary education. The term early childhood education covers the different types of educational activities and initiatives for young children better than the term pre-primary education.

The report makes a distinction between early childhood education as an activity allowing children to play as much as possible and as an activity facilitating a child's transition to primary school. It is correct that this distinction has often been made in discussion, and that this discussion has resulted in a more integrated approach realising that early childhood education must provide a sound basis for learning and helps to develop skills, knowledge, personal competence and confidence and a sense of social responsibility. The play of the child can support this development. When the spontaneous play of the child, combined with organised activities appropriate for the relevant age of the child, are integrated into early childhood education, this education can establish a good foundation for future learning (language, motor, graphic, mathematics, and relational skills) and give

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children an opportunity to develop fully all of their potential, not only in the cognitive area, but also socially, emotionally and physically.

The report gives figures for the average duration of early childhood education in a number of countries, but of equal interest is the actual enrolment into institutions of early childhood education in those countries.

### 3.6. Quality and equality

In the discussion concerning science (indicator 3) the report makes the following comment: “*It is important to consider the distribution of the results around each national average*” (p. 18, European Report on Quality of School Education). This is indeed important, but is not followed-up in the discussion on any of the indicators.

If quality is to be regarded as something more significant than only good average results of an education system, it would be important also to have information about the differences between boys and girls, students from the majority population and students with immigrant background, students from different regions etc. Huge gaps between different groups in the education system could be an important signal that serious problems exist in the systems.

### 3.7. Lifelong learning

Although lifelong learning has been very much in the centre of the educational debate during recent years this is not really covered in the 16 indicators. Participation in tertiary education is only measured through the participation rate of students in the age range from 18 to 29, but it would certainly be of interest to also have information about the participation rate of older students. General figures on the educational status of the whole population might also be useful to illustrate the role of education in society, as well as information about adults’ participation in different types of education. The information collected in the IALS project on the actual level of knowledge and skills of the adult population might also be of interest in this context (see section 3.1 above).

## 4. The conclusions in the EU report

### 4.1 Instrument to improve education or a European championship?

It is important to be clear about the purpose of the whole exercise. From a teacher point of view the reason behind the development of indicators and evaluation instruments must be to provide a tool for improving education. This has also been expressed in the second progress report on indicators and benchmarks of quality of school education: “*Indicators should relate to the objectives of the education system and be designed to lead to development of quality in the school system by providing clear analytical links to those areas which can be influenced by policy makers*” (p. 6, Second progress report on indicators and benchmarks of quality of school education).

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In the “European Report on Quality of School Education”, it is stated several times that some caution should be exercised with the data presented (p. 6, European Report on Quality of School Education) and that the indicators in the report lack sufficient data to support a policy discussion and to enable identification of good practices.

There are good reasons to be prudent when indicators are used comparing the situation in different countries. Such comparisons are often used by media, and even by some politicians, in the same way as a result from a football tournament or other types of sport events. If the *European report on quality of education* were to be regarded as a kind of educational European championship, this would be a major failure of the whole exercise and would seriously reduce the usefulness of the report from a teacher perspective.

#### 4.2. What is quality?

The title of the report is “European Report on Quality of School Education”, but nowhere in the report is an attempt made to define what is to be understood by the term “quality of school education”. Is “quality of school education” the sum of the 16 indicators; how are we supposed to understand the concept?

Obviously “quality of school education” is not an easy concept to define and it is fully understood that part of the exercise, in which the “European Report on Quality of School Education” is an element, is to discuss what we do understand by quality. Taking this into consideration, it is still important to reflect on the concept of quality before one starts to find indicators. Such a discussion has probably taken place within the expert group which has produced “European Report on Quality of School Education”. It might be helpful to have some references to this discussion.

Related to discussion on the concept of quality is also the discussion on the purpose of school education. In the report, *the essential purpose of school education* is mentioned (p. 6, European Report on Quality of School Education) in relation to the world of work, social life and lifelong learning are mentioned. When the role of education is discussed, it is important to recognise the role of education both in relation to the individual and to society. The quality concept embraces the development of the potential of *every* member of each new generation. A quality education system must manage to provide all children and young people, without distinction of any kind, with a comprehensive education and with an appropriate preparation for working life, life in society and private life in the form of further education within vocational schools, colleges, universities or other educational institutions.

#### 4.3. Drop-out and school failures

Drop-out and school failures are discussed in the report. They are some of the most crucial problems facing education systems today. School failure is certainly not the only reason for social exclusion, but is a part of a vicious process. There is an obvious risk that

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we will face a situation where a growing minority of citizens are excluded from several essential parts of public life, as well as from the labour market. There is a need to make sure that the future development of European societies will be a development in the direction of social justice.

Taking into consideration the seriousness of this problem, it is notable that the different measures mentioned in the report are far from enough. This area is obviously an area where there is an urgent need to find good practice and new ideas.

#### 4.4. Resources

It should be noted that at several points the report mentions the need to make further investment in education. For example, it is noted in the discussion on reading (indicator 2) that the number and quality of books available to students through school libraries and in other ways are important for the development of reading skills. In the discussion on ICT (indicator 4) the need to see that teachers get training in using the new technologies is mentioned. In the discussion on the number of students per computer (indicator 15), it can be noted that, in spite of improvements made in recent years, there is still a need to increase the number of computers in schools.

When the report discussed what is referred to as “*The resource challenge*” (p. 8, European Report on Quality of School Education) terms such as “*cost effective alternatives*” and “*intelligent and cost effective use*” are used. Certainly there is a need to use resources in the best and most effective way possible but, if education really should be regarded as an investment, as also suggested in the report, it has to be realised that new needs and the necessity to improve quality cannot be met only by reallocating existing resources. A long term investment in education must be made through long term plans to increase such investment.

In this context it might also be important to object to the description of teachers as one of the obstacles to the development of ICT in schools. The report talks about teacher resistance to ICT (p. 20, European Report on Quality of School Education). There is no reason to believe that teachers resist these types of changes and more than other groups in society, but what is certainly true is that teachers feel insecure and hesitant when they are expected to use methods and equipment for which they have not received any training. Lack of government initiatives to organise in-service training for teachers should not be used against teachers.

#### 4.5. Teachers’ pay and promotion

In the discussion on education and training of teachers (indicator 13), a question concerning teacher pay and promotion suddenly occurs: “*What can be done to reward and retain particularly effective teachers?*”. This is an area of deep concern to teachers and their organisations. If there is a wish from governments to seriously discuss this

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matter with teachers, then such a discussion must be carefully prepared and with the full participation of all parties concerned. To include references to these matters almost 'en passant' is not a good method to introduce and organise that discussion

#### 4.6. The role of the private sector

Another controversial topic which is also referred to more or less 'en passant' is the role of the private sector. In the discussion on educational expenditure per student (indicator 16), a reference is made to the role which the private sector could play. Again this is a big question which should either be discussed openly or not be included in this context. If an increased role of the private sector is to be discussed in relation to the quality of school education, it is of paramount importance to relate this to the matters mentioned earlier in sections 3.7 and 4.3. What do we understand by quality? Do governments wish to increase the gap in quality between different groups of students and how will this affect the objectives of social inclusion? Privatisation is a far too serious matter to be regarded as only a method of getting some additional funding.

The role of the private sector is also hinted at in the discussion about the number of students per computer (indicator 15). The report talks about a "partnership approach" which could help schools to increase the availability of computers. It is certainly good if models for co-operation with other institutions, organisations and even companies can be found which will provide more computers, but it is also extremely important that the use of computers in schools and computer education is based on the needs of students and society and not the interest of computer companies. The reason to use computers in schools must be to improve the quality of education and not to encourage students to use certain programmes or certain brands of computers.

#### 4.7. Decentralisation

Decentralisation is mentioned as one of key challenges in the report. It is certainly true that decentralisation has been one of the main tendencies observed in the education sector during recent years, but to regard it as inevitable, which is hinted at in the report (p. 7, European Report on Quality of School Education), is to draw an incorrect conclusion. Decentralisation is a policy favoured today by many politicians. Politicians are not forced to decentralise, but they have decided to various degrees to take these steps.

Decentralisation has to be judged, like all other measures in this context, on its merits. The report notes that it has been "*argued that those most concerned with the outcome of decisions are in the best position to take decisions which most directly affect them*" (p. 7, European Report on Quality of School Education). If decentralisation contributes to strengthening the professional role of teachers it would be regarded by teachers as a step in the right direction, but unfortunately decentralisation does not always lead to such developments. Under the umbrella of the concept of decentralisation a large number of different types of measures are gathered. They cannot be judged together, but have to be

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carefully evaluated separately, each one considered from its own advantages and disadvantages.

## **5. Proposals**

### **5.1. Involve the teachers and their organisations**

If the work on quality of school education continues, teachers have to be involved actively in this work through their organisations. This involvement has to take place at several levels. There has to be an involvement of teacher organisations at national level as well as at European level. Further development of the indicators has to be done in discussions where the teacher organisations are represented. In working groups related to the indicators, their development and the interpretation of the results, teacher organisations should be automatic participants.

Quality in education can only be developed through partnership. References are often made to different types of partnership, but the first and most fundamental partnership in the whole process of improving quality in education must be the partnership between governments and politicians on one side and the teachers and their organisations on the other.

### **5.2. Improve the information on teachers**

Teachers play a key role in the work to improve the quality of education. This fact must also be mirrored in the indicators. To get a picture of the quality development of European educational systems, there is a need to have accurate information about the role teachers can play and are allowed to play. The indicator on teacher education has to be elaborated further in order to reflect this. There is also a need to develop an indicator dealing with the participation of teachers in the development of education policies and curricular matters in order to get a picture of the extent to which teachers' knowledge and expertise are used and to what extent teachers are regarded as resource in the development and not only as a tool for implementation.

### **5.3. Provide resources for the development and use of alternative methods of evaluation**

In order to get more information about school development and quality improvement, there is a need to further develop methods of school-based evaluation. Resources should be made available, both through national governments and through the EU programmes, to support and stimulate schools in these efforts. The experiences from the pilot project have to be used to stimulate more schools to develop their own instruments for quality improvement. Support to schools and networks of schools working with these matters will give examples of good practice which will provide a good focus for policy development in the education sector.

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## **6. Summary**

This response to the *European report on quality of education* contains four parts with;

- 5 general principles supported by teacher organisations in relation to quality and evaluation,
- 7 comments related to the indicators used in the *European report on quality of education*
- 7 comments related to the conclusions reached in the *European report on quality of education*
- 3 proposals on how the work on quality at European level can be developed

### **6.1. General principles supported by teacher organisations in relation to quality and evaluation**

#### **Principle 1: Quality and resources**

Indicators have to link results and achievements in the education system to the available resources.

#### **Principle 2: The role of the teacher in evaluation**

Indicators must be of a type which makes it possible for schools and teachers themselves to find ways and tools for improving quality.

#### **Principle 3: Evaluation and the workload of teachers**

Indicators have to be developed which could easily be incorporated into the “normal work” of teachers, without increasing their general workload.

#### **Principle 4: The “whole picture”**

Indicators have to be developed which give a “full picture” of quality in education, with all the complexity this implies.

#### **Principle 5: Provide alternatives**

There is a need to find indicators which promote new methods of evaluation and which are internal, formative and qualitative in their approach.

### **6.2. Comments related to the indicators**

#### **Comment 1 on indicators: Will the indicators catch the “whole picture”?**

The present indicators will not cover all the subjects and cross-curricular knowledge of relevance for getting a good picture of the quality of schools. One way of widening the perspective could be to regularly change the subjects and other types of knowledge included in future reports.

#### **Comment 2 on indicators: How are resources used?**

It would be of great interest not only to get a general impression of the level of resources, but also a measure on how much of the resources are actually transferred to the

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classroom. A possible benchmark in relation to resources could also be how many countries spend at least 6% of GNP on education.

**Comment 3 on indicators: Teacher education**

The indicator on teacher education has to be elaborated and contain information about the education of all categories of teachers. A distinction should be made between pedagogy/psychology and practical training in schools during periods of practice when the content of teacher education is described. It might also be useful to include information about entry requirements to teacher education. It would be of crucial interest to have information about teachers' in-service training.

**Comment 4 on indicators: Participation**

It is important to develop an indicator on the participation of teachers in the development of educational policies and curriculum. Such an indicator should cover both the participation of teachers in these processes as professionals and the consultations between government and educational authorities on the one hand and the representative organisations of teachers on the other.

**Comment 5 on indicators: Early childhood education**

Instead of pre-school education, the term early childhood education covers better the variety of types of education in this field. Early childhood education must be regarded as an education including both play in a pedagogical setting and preparation for the further schooling of the child. In this context, it is interesting not only to have information about the duration of early childhood education, but also the actual enrolment.

**Comment 6 on indicators : Quality and equality**

To get a more elaborated picture of the quality of education, it is important to have information about the differences in attainment between boys and girls, students from the majority population and students with immigrant backgrounds, students from different regions etc.

**Comment 7 on indicators: Lifelong learning**

To obtain an idea about the present status of lifelong learning, figures on the participation in education by adults and information about the knowledge and skills in the adult population would be useful.

**6.3. Comments on conclusions**

**Comment 1 on conclusions: Instrument to improve education or a European championship?**

It has to be clearly stressed that the purpose of the "European report on quality of school education" is to improve education.

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**Comment 2 on conclusions: What is quality?**

Although it is difficult to define quality of school education, it might be helpful for the discussion to make an attempt and state that the purpose of education is to provide every child and young person with an appropriate preparation for working life, life in society and private life.

**Comment 3 on conclusions: Drop-out and school failures**

The problems related to drop-outs and school failures are very serious and the work to improve education in these respects should be given high priority.

**Comment 4 on conclusions: Resources**

The need to get more resources for education is implicitly stated in the report. Schools need improved access to well provided libraries and access to computers. Teachers need to get training to use ICT. These needs and others cannot be met only through reallocations of resources. There is a need for a long term investment programme in education.

**Comment 5 on conclusions: Teachers' pay and promotion**

Questions concerning teachers' pay and promotion should be discussed in an appropriate order between the social partners and not be vaguely referred to in a report on measures to improve the quality of school education.

**Comment 6 on conclusions: The role of the private sector**

If the role of the private sector is discussed in a report on how to improve the quality of school education, it should be done in an appropriate context where the full impact of such measures is taken into consideration, specifically including effects on gaps between different groups of students.

**Comment 7 on conclusions: Decentralisation**

Decentralisation is not an inevitable process, but a result of political decisions. Whether decentralisation measures are bad or good depends on the specific circumstances and the extent to which it will actually help teachers to strengthen their professional role.

**6.4. Proposals**

**Proposal 1:**

Involve the teachers and their organisations.

**Proposal 2:**

Improve the information on teachers.

**Proposal 3:**

Provide resources for the development and use of alternative methods of evaluation.