



## **ETUCE Statement on the draft joint 2008 Council and Commission Progress Report on the Implementation of the “Education & Training 2010 work programme”: Delivering lifelong learning for knowledge, creativity and innovation**

**Adopted by the ETUCE Executive Board  
in their meeting on 28-29 November 2007**

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The draft joint Council and Commission 2008 progress report is the second biennial progress report which is based on national progress reports submitted by Member States to the European Commission. The draft report, to be adopted by the Council in February 2008, sets out the following priority areas of action for the Education & Training 2010 process in the next two years:

- Implementing lifelong learning to achieve efficiency and equity
- Innovation and creativity: education as a key element of the knowledge triangle
- Improved governance: making best use of the results of Education & Training 2010

### **Promoting equal opportunities for all in education – a key issue**

In relation to the first priority area, ETUCE is pleased to see the clear message concerning that “ensuring equity of access, participation, treatment and outcomes must...remain a priority”, as it has been from the outset of Education & Training 2010. The education and training systems are still not performing well enough in combating the negative impact of pupils’ socio-economic background. ETUCE is also pleased that the report in this relation also calls for particular attention to the specific disadvantages which pupils of migrant background face, and that it recognises that there indeed seems to be factors within the education system that are contributing to the problem. ETUCE highlights in this context that it must be ensured that teachers exert an anti-discriminatory behaviour in the classroom and that specific training must be provided to teachers in this. The inclusion of human rights and anti-racism in the teacher training curriculum must be ensured at all levels.<sup>1</sup> ETUCE notes in this context that the EU *Cluster on Teachers and Trainers* has identified a widespread concern amongst teachers and other educational professionals who feel that they have not been adequately prepared to deal with heterogeneous classes.<sup>2</sup>

The issue of how to promote equal opportunities for all in education is a key challenge for the education and training systems in Europe, and ETUCE has in its response to the Commission’s Consultation on *Schools for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* provided a number of recommendations on this issue. ETUCE notes that the draft 2008 report itself provides little by way of suggestions for combating socio-economic disadvantage, indeed the report only lists the “complementary messages” such as extra-curricular activities (p.

<sup>1</sup> The European Commission’s annual report against Racism and Intolerance is following-up on this latter aspect.

<sup>2</sup> Annex, p. 60.

6), but ETUCE presumes that the issue will be dealt with in-depth in the Communication which will follow on from the EU-wide consultation on schools.

In this context, ETUCE regrets that the national progress reports, when providing information on their initiatives to promote equity in participation, treatment and outcomes, in the words of the Commission, “have provided little detail on the extent to which the initiatives have improved individuals’ opportunities, participation, treatment and outcomes”.<sup>3</sup> As a general observation on the method of reporting biennially on progress via national reports, ETUCE stresses that it is crucial that the reports also reflect the results of policies, not only the good intentions.

With regard to the attention put in the report on the need to raise the skills level, ETUCE regrets that the focus in the report is put too narrowly on raising skills levels with a view to meeting the needs of the labour market. Education and training evidently plays a quintessential role in preparing young people to enter the labour market, but in order to do so it is crucial that a broad outlook on the purpose of education is maintained. Only by developing a broad range of competences in young people – including social, civic, personal and cultural competences – can schools contribute in the long run to the social and economic progress of society and to the well-being of each individual.

### **High-quality teaching and involvement of teachers and trainers in reforms**

ETUCE welcomes that the draft joint progress report includes as one of the key messages of the report the need to give teachers better professional preparation and continuing development. ETUCE is also pleased to note that the importance of involving teachers and trainers in reforms is highlighted (p. 9). ETUCE stresses in this context that this entails consulting representatives of teachers and trainers in the preparation of new policy reforms at all levels. No major reforms should take place without the active involvement and understanding of the teachers; it is the teachers who are the ones who will implement the reforms in practice, and no reforms will be successful if teachers are not properly prepared for and understands the benefit of the reform.

The report rightly refers to research showing that the quality of teacher education is the most important in-school aspect influencing the student performance (p. 6). The report also indicates the current challenges facing teachers such as a growing heterogeneity of classes, a demand for new competences, the need to pay close attention to individual learning needs, the lack of continuing professional development, and the general need to make the profession more attractive. The messages of the draft report is in line with the Commission’s recent Communication on *Improving the Quality of Teacher Education*, which also highlights that “many countries report shortfalls in teaching skills, and difficulties in updating teachers’ skills”.<sup>4</sup> As stressed in the recent statement on the Commission’s Communication, the message from ETUCE in response to the challenges facing teachers today is clear: given the complex task teachers are undertaking today, the objective should be that all teachers are educated at Master’s level.

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<sup>3</sup> Annex, p. 44.

<sup>4</sup> Annex, p. 52

## **Welcomes message on the need for sustainable funding of education but rejects the call for private investments:**

Given the challenges which the draft joint 2008 progress reports outlines with regard to combating the socio-economic disadvantage, especially for migrant pupils, the need to upgrade teachers' skills, the need to increase investments in pre-primary education, including through capacity building of the pre-school teachers, etc, it is all the more regrettable that the draft report on the issue of funding sets out the following message:

*“The level, efficiency and sustainability of funding remain critical. Many countries are experimenting with new instruments and with incentives for private investment. This includes targeting individuals, households and employers”.* (p. 8).

ETUCE firmly rejects that private investments are the solution to the challenges facing the education system today. It is regrettable to note that, overall, total public expenditure on education has decreased between 2003 and 2004, from 5.2% of GDP in 2003 to 5.1% of GDP in 2004 (latest data available). (p. 5). In the annex to the draft report, the Commission admits that “no data is available on the relative importance of private investment” in school education.<sup>5</sup> It is the State's responsibility to ensure quality education for all, and in the European Union we should treasure and safeguard the proud tradition that has remained in most member states of providing education free of charge for all. If we want to seriously address the issue of combating the negative impact of pupils' socio-economic background, it is simply essential that the education system allows everyone to study as long as they wish, irrespective of their financial circumstances. This also includes that teaching materials are free of charge or kept at an absolute minimum. To give an unacceptable example: in Hungary, the price of teaching materials for a pupil in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade is 33.000 Ft; in comparison the Hungarian minimum wage is 65.000 Ft. In the higher education sector, the draft joint progress report states that seven countries have recently either introduced or increased tuition or registration fees. As highlighted by ETUCE in response to the Communication on *Efficiency and Equity*, ETUCE “*rejects the argument put forward in the Communication which simply refers to tuition fees as a main solution in dealing with the “funding gap” in higher education. ETUCE is convinced that equity in higher education must be achieved through offering equal opportunity to everybody, not only to access, but also to successful completion of studies, and governments must do more to eliminate all barriers to participation in higher education, including financial barriers. It is ETUCE's conviction that tuition fees and rising student debt now constitute a serious obstacle to access, particularly for students from lower socio-economic groups. ETUCE reiterates that public funding is the most equitable and efficient way of financing higher education.*”

## **Improved coordination with all partners needed**

ETUCE agrees with the Commission's call for an improved governance of the implementation of Education & Training 2010, in particular as regards closer involvement of all the partners in the education sector. In this context, ETUCE stresses that the specific recommendation on “ensuring that the results of peer-learning activities reach policy makers and ministers” should also include that an insurance that the results reach social partners and other stakeholders in the education sector.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 65.

Moreover, the recommendation on putting in place mechanisms at national level for the implementation of the Education & Training 2010 work programme and lifelong learning strategies should, as in the joint 2006 Progress Report, specifically refer to the involvement of stakeholders, in particular the social partners, in such coordination mechanisms. Teacher unions and other stakeholders should be closely involved, i.e. through being consulted on the elaboration of the national progress reports, taking part in the Peer Learning Activities, being consulted prior to meetings in the Council of Education Ministers, etc.