



ETUCE Statement on the European Commission's Communication:

Improving the Quality of Teacher Education¹

ETUCE underlines that the Communication from the Commission on the quality of teacher education describes and analyses in a very satisfactory manner many of the issues that need to be addressed in order to improve the quality of teacher education programmes. There is no doubt that the quality of teacher education needs to be strengthened. It is all the more necessary as teachers are inevitably facing increasingly complex challenges within the classroom as well as within school communities. ETUCE welcomes the fact that the Commission refers to the professionalisation of teaching by emphasising the crucial issue of qualifications which is indeed closely linked with teacher education being fully integrated into Higher Education and Research.

Most challenges that schools are facing now are related to the status of teachers. If Europe is to recruit and maintain qualified teachers who contribute to a great extent to the knowledge society, Governments and Ministers of Education have the responsibility of sending more than positive messages to the teaching profession in Europe. Solid and appropriate steps must be taken not only in terms of qualifications but also in terms of conditions of service and salaries. Therefore it is of critical importance that the Council of Ministers meeting on 15-16 November 2007 goes beyond the general principles about teacher education that are stated in the draft conclusions of the Council.² The education and training of teachers has for some time now rightfully been recognised at EU level as a crucial element in the modernisation of European education and training systems. However, no progress will be made if there are no political initiatives or strong incentives which support the high status of the teaching profession for now and for the future.

In response to the Commission's Communication and to the draft Council Conclusions (of 8th October), ETUCE wishes to bring forward a number of comments and suggestions for future action. These relate in particular to the level of initial teacher education, teachers' continuous professional development, the induction phase, the role of mentors, the recruitment and retention of teachers, the need to strengthen the efforts to raise the status of teachers as well as the importance of securing proper working conditions and high salaries for teachers.

Teacher education at Master's level

Teachers exercise a complex profession requiring high qualifications. They have a key role to play in improving education. Teachers have to work with an increasing diversity of pupils from different social, cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Teachers take on an increasingly greater degree of responsibility in the classroom as well as in the school environment broadly perceived. As the school is functioning more and more as an open learning environment, teachers no longer work together only with their peers but collaborate also with members of the community. They maintain contacts with parents, higher education institutions and with colleagues from other schools from the same

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¹ COM (2007) 3.8.2007

² Draft Conclusions, dated 8 October. As made available on the Council's website at the following direct link: <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/07/st13/st13553.en07.pdf>

country or from abroad. In addition teachers are expected to deal with complex social and personal problems of pupils and students, the consequences of disadvantaged social backgrounds often leading not only to learning problems but also to direct criminal and violent behaviour.

ETUCE works for teacher education of high quality and thus works for research-based teacher education. The teachers have to know the latest research within their respective subject areas as well as have the pedagogical knowledge in order to perform high quality teaching. At the same time it is essential to have a connection between the theoretical elements of the teacher education and practice in the classroom. Teachers should be able to continue in postgraduate studies at university and to do research within their subject area or pedagogic research and possibly at a later stage return to teaching. Teachers should also be able to conduct research themselves into their own practice, in order to assess and improve their teaching.

ETUCE highlights that teachers' initial education must³:

- Be based upon highly qualified candidates.
- Be structured and have a length that makes it possible to provide in-depth qualifications in all relevant subjects, including in pedagogical practice. The objective should be that all teachers are educated at Master's level.
- Ensure a high academic and professional standard.
- Be rooted in the latest research.
- Be provided with the necessary resources for training in ICT.
- Include development work and research projects as part of the initial education.
- Open up the possibility for postgraduate studies.
- Provide possibilities for teacher education programmes at Doctoral level in order to allow existing teachers with a Master's qualification to develop their expertise and raise their qualifications level.
- Acknowledge and encourage mobility within and outside the teaching profession.

ETUCE stresses that, although it is not yet the practice in a number of countries, all teachers in general education should be educated at the same level. There is a prevailing misconception that the older the pupil or student, the more advanced should the education of the teacher be. But even pre-school and early primary school pupils should have well-qualified teachers. This is not least evident in the light of the growing attention in recent years to the importance and complexities of early learning.⁴

ETUCE is pleased to see that the Commission's analysis of the requirements to teacher education on many points dovetails with ETUCE's position. However, ETUCE regrets that the draft Council Conclusions remain unambitious regarding the level and the length of teacher education. The wording that the Council will "*Consider the adoption of measures aimed at raising the level of qualification and the degree of practical experience required for employment as a teacher*" seems unambitious considering that since 2002 Ministers have agreed at EU level to give priority to improve the quality of teacher education. In this light, and after several years of preparatory work, ETUCE would expect a more firm commitment from the Council of Ministers to take action to

³ Largely based on the ETUCE Statement: *Europe Needs Teachers* (2004)

⁴ Cf. the Communication from the European Commission: *Efficiency and Equity in the education and training systems in the EU* (2006).

raise the level of qualification. It seems difficult to achieve the many general intentions stated in the Conclusions if no firm commitment is made to raising the level of qualification. The general intentions in the Conclusions include that the Ministers agree to promote that teachers during initial teacher education should acquire a range of competences, namely to: teach transversal competences; create a safe and attractive school environment; teach effectively in heterogeneous classes of pupils from diverse social and cultural backgrounds and with a wide range of abilities and needs; work in close collaboration with colleagues, parents and the wider community; develop new knowledge and be innovative through engagement in reflective practice and research; become autonomous learners in their own career-long professional development.

The paragraph stating that the Council agrees to endeavour to ensure that teachers “*hold a qualification from a higher education institution – or in the case of teachers in initial vocational training, an equivalent qualification – which strikes a suitable balance between research-based studies and teaching practice*” is to a large extent confirming the status quo regarding the level of education, as it at present is only four countries in the EU who do not educate primary school teachers in higher education institutions.⁵ However, the length and the level of the education vary. In the majority of the EU countries, the length of initial teacher education for primary school teachers is 3-4 years, including the time required to undertake professional training in schools and the final ‘on-the-job’ qualifying phase where it exists. Only Estonia, France, Poland, Slovenia, Finland and the UK provides teacher education for primary school teachers of a length of about 5 years.⁶ Obviously, the length can not be singled out as an isolated factor, the content is crucial, but it seems evident that it must be difficult to prepare any new teachers to the complex task of teaching in today’s society within a 3-year education or even within a 4-year education.

In short, ETUCE stresses that the Ministers’ statement of general intentions to promote that teachers during their initial education acquire the complex competences that they need, remains ‘hot air’ if the level of qualification and the degree of practical experience is not raised and if the needed additional financial resources is not provided in support of this.

ETUCE also highlights that the issue of teacher trainers and the crucial role they are playing within schools as well as within teacher education institutions should be addressed more thoroughly in the future work.

Teachers’ continuous professional development

ETUCE welcomes the Communication’s rightful attention to the lack of continuous professional development (CPD) for teachers, the lack of investment in CPD, as well as the lack of coherence between teachers’ initial education, induction and further CPD. ETUCE is pleased that the Council in their draft Conclusions follows-up on this with an agreement to endeavour to ensure teachers’ access to early career support, access to adequate mentoring support, as well as ensure support and encouragement for teachers to review their learning needs and acquire new knowledge through CPD. ETUCE is also pleased that the Council echoes the Commission in agreeing to ensure that

⁵ Only BE, LU, AU, RO do not educate primary school teachers in university-level tertiary education (ISCED 5A). Source: Eurydice: *Key Data on Education in Europe 2005*, p. 206.

⁶ Source: Eurydice: *Key Data on Education in Europe 2005*, p. 2006. Data from 2002-2003.

“provision for teachers’ initial education, induction and further professional development is coordinated, coherent, adequately resources and quality assured”.

ETUCE would like to take the opportunity here to bring forward its viewpoints on what constitute proper conditions of continuous professional development, including specific points on the induction phase and the role of mentors.

As the Commission also highlights, teachers’ continuous professional development seems to often be fragmented and limited in scope. Although professional development is now receiving more political attention, teachers’ participation in professional development still varies widely across countries as well as within countries.

A survey carried out by ETUCE in 2006⁷ among its member organisations shows that about half of the participating organisations consider the conditions of continuous professional development unsatisfactory. Continuous professional development is an integrated part of the conditions of employment in only half of the organizations, for 35 % ‘to some extent’. Furthermore, merit awards in relation to continuous professional development are granted in half of the countries, but only 27 % note unreservedly that merit awards are a part of a collective agreement. The most typical form of reward is salary increase or possibility for career-moves. The survey also shows that 72 % of the participating organisations have developed strategies for continuous professional development, in which making CDP an individual right for the teacher is highly prioritised.

To what extent the professional development is relevant for the individual teacher and the school is an important question. The ETUCE survey shows that more than half of the organizations were dissatisfied with the quality, the quantity and the subjects offered in in-service and postgraduate training.

- ETUCE asks that all teachers, including teacher educators and mentors in the work field, are guaranteed continuous professional development and that continuous professional development is integrated systematically into the teaching profession.
- Continuous professional development of expertise and skills for teachers should be both a right and an obligation for the individual professional. Continuous professional development must be tailored to the needs of the teachers.
- All forms and patterns of development should be considered, from whole school staff development activities, personalised coaching of teaching skills and sustained sabbaticals.⁸
- The employers of teachers and teachers themselves must recognise their responsibility for ensuring that, throughout their careers, teachers are able to adapt and update their professional skills. The employers must create conditions in which, in consultation with teachers, well planned professional development policies can be agreed, so that professional development is an integral part of teachers’ career, beginning with the induction phase.⁹

⁷ *Trends in Teacher Education - a survey carried out by ETUCE in 2006* (2007).

⁸ Quoted from ETUCE 1993, page 51.

⁹ Quoted from ETUCE 1993, page 46.

- There must be a mutual understanding between teachers, their employers and the public authorities to facilitate life-long learning and the professional development of teachers. Teachers must recognise the importance of acquiring new knowledge and engage in professional renewal and updating. The authorities must launch consistent national strategies ensuring that professional development is an entitlement for teachers, in practice and not only in theory.
- A prime resource is the provision of time for teachers to prepare and to work and plan collaboratively. It must be acknowledged that the development of teaching methods and new skills require practice, feedback and training in post, as well as time available outside the classroom.
- The experience and knowledge gained through continuous professional development is officially acknowledged and given appropriate credit, according to content and level.
- Continuous professional development should be included as part of central and local collective agreements, where possible.
- Continuous professional development should be covered financially by the employer.

In summary, the intensified demands of social and educational change require continuing professional development to be an integral part of the teaching profession and not a bolt-on extra or a second rate priority. Continuous professional development must be built into teachers' careers from the outset. As stated above, ETUCE is pleased that the Commission's Communication and the draft Council Conclusions fully recognise this.

ETUCE also believes that it is vital to reinforce the relationship between research and activities in the education system. ETUCE would thus like to see that greater numbers of preschool and school teachers are afforded the opportunity to engage in development and innovation work related to their own work, in cooperation with established researchers. In addition, teachers already possessing a Master's qualification should be given the possibility to undertake a doctorate on the basis of classroom-based research.

Teachers must be encouraged to share their expertise and experience more systematically. There is a growing interest to build cumulative knowledge across the profession, for example by strengthening connections between research and practice and encouraging schools to develop as learning organisations¹⁰.

Induction

The point at which newly qualified teachers transfer from a training institution which has provided them with the necessary grounding, to a real school environment, is of vital importance. To support and systematically guide them at this stage has critical implications for their subsequent professional commitment and also in preventing newly educated teachers from leaving the teaching profession after few years only.

¹⁰ OECD: *Teachers Matter* (2005).

Thus, the induction phase must be regarded as an integral part of their professional development¹¹.

Measures introduced to ease the transition of new teachers to working life are a recent and not very widespread development. However, since the end of the 20th century, an increasing number of education authorities are recognising the importance of this transition phase, and are or have been planning programmes to enable new teachers to move more easily and successfully into professional life.¹² Still, this development is not yet widespread enough. Only half of the countries in Europe offer new teachers any systematic kind of support in their first year of teaching. Between schools systems there are very different provisions for the transfer progression from initial teacher education into teaching as a full profession. For instance, the duration of programmes varies from seven months to two years. In most countries, mentor teachers, often in cooperation with the school principal and other senior teachers, are in charge of providing teacher induction¹³.

ETUCE believes that systematic guidance and follow-up of newly qualified teachers during the first year of professional life should be both a right and an obligation for the newly qualified teacher. High quality follow-up schemes demand a *mandatory programme* for guidance and must take place in close cooperation between the newly qualified teacher, the school/work place and the teacher education institution. ETUCE believes that strong partnerships between the teacher education institutions and the schools are of vital importance for enhancing high quality and relevant guidance programmes. As mentioned above, the organisation of the induction phase varies across countries. ETUCE believes that a mandatory programme is necessary to guarantee systematic guidance for all teachers. Still, when implementing policies for the induction phase, there is of course a need to take account of differing national cultures and policies and to respect differences in educational systems. This goes for continuous professional development in general.

The mentors must support newly qualified teachers in the process of reflecting and planning their professional development. An induction model demands involvement and cooperation between several parties: the school leader, the mentor, the teacher and the teacher training institution. The school leader must be responsible for creating an environment that supports learning and professional development. The mentor should be the closest partner for the newly educated teacher and support his/her adjustment and personal growth. The teacher is responsible for his/her professional development and the teacher training institution should engage in mentor trainings and develop seminars of the support programmes for newly qualified teachers.¹⁴

The induction phase, of at least one school year duration, should enable new teachers to develop their newly acquired competences by:

- Having less than a full teaching timetable without decrease in remuneration
- Attending a mandatory programme for guidance
- Being supported by mentors and other colleagues in their day-to-day activities
- Having access to appropriate support resources in their day-to-day activities

¹¹ Eurydice 2002, ETUCE 1993, OECD 2005, Eisensmith 2007.

¹² Eurydice 2002.

¹³ OECD *Teachers Matter* (2005).

¹⁴ Eisensmidt 2007.

- Having opportunities to relate theory to practice in a systematic way

The induction phase must be seen as a measure of mutual interest and gain for the newly qualified teacher, as well as for the work place and the teacher education institution. Established teachers can both impart knowledge through the dissemination of their own experience and further develop their own qualifications in the meeting with the newly qualified teachers and the teaching institutions. Initial teacher education is improved by knowledge of the realities of everyday life of both established and newly qualified teachers. Through systematic guidance of the newly qualified, such knowledge can be acquired by the teacher educators and utilised in their ordinary teaching.

Mentors

Mentors in initial training as well as in the induction phase should be fully qualified and experienced specialist teachers. Teachers acting formally in the role as mentor in the induction of new entrants should be expected to demonstrate relevant skills, understanding and professional characteristics and be up to date, and with such knowledge of current best practice so that they can fulfil their delegated responsibilities for staff development. Employers must, therefore, provide the means by which these skills, understandings and characteristics can be established, adequately assessed and enhanced.¹⁵

With regard to mentors, ETUCE seeks to ensure:

- That appropriate incentives are available in order to recruit and retain qualified mentors
- A salary and/or time allowance corresponding with the work load following from the demands and responsibilities of the role as a mentor
- That mentors have the right and obligation to engage in continuous professional development
- That the salary policies reflect the increased work load and responsibility of mentors
- That the experience and knowledge gained through continuous professional development is acknowledged.

A strong focus needed on the problems of recruiting well-qualified teachers and on raising the status of teachers

Although the problem of recruiting and retaining new teachers to the profession is well recognised at EU level, ETUCE finds that the issues related to this problem could have been further explored in the Communication, as it is intrinsically linked to improving the quality of teacher education. At the same time, it is important to recognise that the quality of teacher education is only one aspect among others which impact on the attractiveness of the profession. ETUCE is however content that the Communication notes that the salary level have a significant impact on the attractiveness of the profession, but finds that the Council's general wording regarding their agreement to

¹⁵ The paragraph is quoted from ETUCE 1993, page 50.

“take any appropriate steps to make the teaching profession a more attractive career choice” is too inconcrete to bring any real added value to support policy development at national level.

In the future work at EU level on teachers and trainers, ETUCE calls for a continuous attention to the problems of recruitment and retention of teachers, in particular to the issue of raising the status of teachers.

The European Commission has estimated¹⁶ that within the next 10 years the EU needs to attract 1 million new qualified teachers, just to replace the retiring teachers. EU figures also indicate that the great majority of teachers retire from their profession as soon as they are offered an opportunity to do so. At the same time the trend shows that in some countries an increasing number of teachers leave the teaching job after a few years.

It is also estimated that the birth rate in the EU-27 will increase during the next 10 years and that the number of students in the education systems will increase in general if progress is made towards the aim of increasing the number young people completing an upper secondary education, cf. the EU benchmarks.¹⁷

A survey carried out by ETUCE in 2006¹⁸ shows that 57% of the participating member organisations agree that it is a problem to attract qualified candidates to teacher education. Problems of attraction are mainly reported in northern and central Europe and less often in southern and eastern parts of Europe. The survey also presents some of the reasons given for the problem of attracting qualified candidates: low salaries, low status, bad reputation/publicity, limited career possibilities, poor working conditions and unemployment within certain subjects.

In addition to the general problem of attracting and retaining qualified teachers a majority of EU/EFTA countries have difficulties attracting male students and minority students to the profession.

ETUCE also stresses that in measuring teacher shortages, all actual vacancies in schools including those positions filled with unqualified persons have to count in the statistics.

If the profession does not attract new teachers and retain the good staff who are already in the schools, many countries will suffer from a lack of teachers, and subsequent employment of untrained teachers in the schools. It is vital that the profession can recruit and retain a sufficient number of qualified teachers.

Raising the status of teachers – a priority for the future

ETUCE stresses that it is crucial that priority is given at EU level to the issue of raising the status of teachers.

¹⁶ *Progress towards the Lisbon objectives in education and training*, p. 6. Commission staff working document, 2006.

¹⁷ *Progress towards the Lisbon objectives in education and training*, p. 14. Commission staff working document, 2006.

¹⁸ *Trends in Teacher Education*, p. 8-9. ETUCE 2006 (published 2007).

It is a general problem in Europe that the teachers' status in society is declining. In the "old" EU member states many teachers experience a weakening of confidence in the professional work they carry out. Since the 1990's many countries have seen an increased centralisation and regulation of the education sector as well as an increased focus on quality assurance of the entire education sector. Many teachers see this as an inspection of their work and a lack of confidence in them as professionals. There is no doubt that any diminishing of the teachers' professional autonomy also makes the teaching career less attractive.

In recent years, the role of international surveys, such as PISA, has been increasing in the debate about the school and the teachers. The media often focus on the problems in schools and the negative stories rather than the positive ones, which can be a contributory factor in the falling interest in the teaching profession.

In this context, ETUCE calls on the European Commission and Member States to increase their efforts to raise the status of teachers, in particular by taking measures to:

- Strengthening/preserving the teachers' professional autonomy
- Increasing the confidence in the teaching profession
- Increasing the research opportunities for teachers as well as enabling more research in all areas relevant to the teaching profession.
- Diffusing the positive stories about the teaching profession
- Ensuring proper working conditions and high salary standards for teachers

Proper working conditions and high salary standards – a precondition for ensuring a high quality of teaching and for raising the status of teachers

ETUCE stresses that a good working environment and high salary standards is decisive for securing the quality of teachers' work as well as for recruiting and retaining teachers in the profession. The working environment has a substantial influence on job satisfaction, and this also goes for the school. Stories of poor working environment influence the young people, who are considering whether to apply for a teacher education, and they may as well make established teachers leave the teaching job.

The school management is important for teacher retention and for securing a good working environment. The management can contribute to creating a positive and stimulating environment by supporting the teachers and helping them to navigate in a school that is often very complex with many demands and expectations. At the same time it is essential that teachers themselves take part in the management of the school.

The possibility of participation and influence on their working environment, their representation on the governing bodies of the school and their role in the collective decision making have a positive impact on teachers' working environment and job satisfaction. This goes for pupils and students as well.

Most teachers and school leaders are enthusiastic about their profession – this is good for the job satisfaction, for the students, for the work place and, in the long term, for society. But if the teacher is to stand up to the job, there must be space for reflection

and personal development. If a person is constantly met with demands of change and new tasks, there is a risk that these changes will be seen as threats.

More and more teachers are exposed to violence in relation to their work. Violence can be physical such as hitting, kicking, biting, throwing objects etc. Violence can also be psychological such as threats, harassment, verbal bullying etc. The school has to ensure that teachers are protected as well as possible towards violence, physical as well as psychological violence and threats.

In addition, a number of countries in the EU still offer unacceptably low salaries to teachers and it is not unheard of that the real working hours by far supersede the norm set by law.

Teachers' working and employment conditions must be significantly improved, notably by raising salaries to the level of professions requiring a similar level of qualification, in comparison to which teachers' salaries are presently lacking behind. This fact is confirmed by figures from OECD which show that the proportion of GNP per person accorded to teacher salaries diminished in the majority of OECD countries between 1994 and 2003.

While recognising the limited competences of the EU with regard to working conditions, ETUCE calls on EU member states to ensure:

- That teachers are ensured a good physical and psychological working environment, support from the management and respect for the teaching job
- That the working time of teachers corresponds with the demands and resources
- A significant improvement of teachers' working and employment conditions, notably by raising salaries to the level of professions requiring a similar level of qualification
- That teachers take part in the management of schools.

In conclusion, ETUCE stresses that it is high time for governments to take new steps so that general principles become reality in the different Member States. By supporting and developing teachers' expertise and professionalisation, Member States will play an active role in ensuring that all pupils and students improve their learning experience and reach high standards in terms of curricular contents.

ETUCE looks forward to continue the cooperating with the Commission and Member States on this work in the context of the Education & Training 2010 work programme.

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