



ETUCE statement on priorities for the new strategic framework for EU cooperation on education and training beyond 2010

Adopted by the EI/ETUCE Bureau meeting on 13 May 2008

In relation to the preliminary discussions of the post-Education & Training 2010 process and the European Commission's Conference for stakeholders on the post-2010 framework on 20 May 2008, the ETUCE wishes to state the following remarks regarding the future priorities for the cooperation at EU level within the area of education and training. The ETUCE believes that increased success in the cooperation on Education & Training will demand a more focused effort but at the same time also a broader and more inclusive approach to the concepts of education and training. The ETUCE therefore emphasises the following general principles and challenges for education policies in Europe today.

The European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE) represents 110 teachers' unions in the EU and EFTA countries and more than 5.5 million teachers from all levels of the education sector. As a European Social Partner in education at EU level, the ETUCE is a member of the ETCG.

Ensure a broad outlook on education

The ETUCE welcomes the prominent role given to education and training at EU level through the Lisbon process and endorses the overall goal of the Education and Training work programme of making Europe the world leader in terms of the quality of its education and training systems. However, the ETUCE has from the outset also emphasised the importance of recognising that education and training are not merely tools to foster economic growth and employment, or means to achieve the Lisbon objectives. The ETUCE stresses that the most prominent task of the education system is to *educate for life*, and underlines the need for a broad outlook on education – an outlook in which education first and foremost is organised with the aim to support the development of children and young persons' knowledge, skills and abilities in a wide range of subjects, the development of their social, civic and cultural competences, their ability to learn, as well as foster creativity, innovation and team-work skills. This approach indeed also supports the economy in the long run, as it is a broad approach to education which best prepares young persons for their future role on the labour market. Curriculum discussions should focus on what kind of citizens we wish education institutions to develop, not on the immediate skills needs of the labour market as these needs inevitably will change.

Education plays an important role in promoting the objectives of other policy areas at EU level, i.e. social policy, labour market policy and the overall economic policy. While these policy areas evidently are interrelated, the ETUCE stresses that it is crucial that the policy priorities set in education by the Council of Education Ministers (and implemented via the Open Method of Coordination - OMC) remains the comprehensive outlook on education at EU level and remains the reference point for how education is contributing to other policy areas. The ETUCE is in favor of a clear and transparent OMC in the education sector at EU level, which constitutes a comprehensive approach to education and is agenda-setting vis-à-vis other policy areas in which education plays a role at EU level. For example, the Lisbon Strategy's guidelines for growth and jobs and the procedure since 2007 of adopting annual country specific recommendations, which includes recommendations on education, are indeed only focused on the way in which education

President
Président
Ronnie Smith

Vice-Presidents
Vice-Présidents
Paul Bennett
Odile Cordelier
Kounka Damianova
Jörgen Lindholm
Ulrich Thöne

General Secretary
Secrétaire Général
Martin Rømer

Treasurer
Trésorier
Walter Dresscher

contributes to growth and jobs.¹ In the future development of the Lisbon Strategy and the EU cooperation on education beyond 2010, it must be ensured that the more narrow focus on education entailed in the EU employment guidelines or in the country specific recommendations on growth and jobs, do not take precedence at national level over a more broad and comprehensive view on education.

The importance of a high level of initial education

Life in a modern, globalised knowledge-society presupposes that education is a lifelong activity and the education system must therefore be organised in a lifelong perspective. The increased recognition of the value of lifelong learning has been supported by the ETUCE from the outset, but the ETUCE also underlines that promoting later learning opportunities must not reduce efforts to ensure that young people achieve a high level of initial education.

The diverse systems of education and training are an asset that must be maintained

The ETUCE strongly supports the diversity of the education and training systems in the EU and affirms that the diverse education systems, embedded in historical and cultural traditions, are an asset that must be maintained. The ETUCE therefore stresses that there is a need at all levels to ensure that the endeavour of common objectives and common indicators do not imply a process of harmonisation of the structure of the different national education systems.

Increase efforts to achieve the EU Benchmarks

Since the launch of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme in 2002 a range of initiatives and measures have been presented with the aim to raise the quality of the education and training systems and improve the educational attainment of the citizens in the EU. But, although progress has been made, the reality is that improvement is insufficient as regards four of the five benchmarks set up for 2010, both in an overall perspective (the EU-average) as well as for a great majority of countries. In 2006 between 19 and 21 countries score below the objective for 2010 on each of the four unachieved benchmarks. In addition to this, there has only been a slight increase in the share of female graduates in mathematics, science and technology, although an increase in the number of female students in MST was a sub-objective to the fifth benchmark.

The ETUCE has criticised that Member States have hesitated to commit to concrete plans of action in these areas, and this in a time where education becomes of increasing importance and where people without sufficient education are at risk of social and economic exclusion in society. It is essential that governments move to concrete action in order to obtain success in the areas covered by the Benchmarks.

The ETUCE has from the outset welcomed that the EU Benchmarks in education serve to promote equity in education and in society, and the lack of progress testifies to the persisting challenges as regards equity in education. This goes for participation in lifelong learning as well. The current participation patterns for lifelong learning show evident inequalities in participants' socio-economic background. As pointed out in the 2008 Joint Progress Report adults with a high level of education are more than 6 times as likely to participate in lifelong learning than people of low education, a number that is further problematic as there is a particular concentration of

¹ Cf. ETUCE Statement in response to the 2008 review of the Lisbon Strategy.

migrants among the low-skilled.² It is therefore vital that every student gets high quality initial education, also in order to achieve the benchmark of a 12,5 % participation in lifelong learning.

Teacher quality is the key to improve educational standards as a whole

Teachers and trainers are the key to improve educational standards and educational attainment levels among the European citizens. As quoted by the European Commission, research results show that teacher quality is significantly and positively correlated with pupil attainment and that it is *the* most important within-school aspect explaining student performance.³ Moreover, teacher education and teachers' skills have from the beginning of the Education & Training 2010 process repeatedly been stressed as an area of key importance for achieving the overall objectives of the Education & Training 2010 programme.⁴ However, as also pointed out in the 2008 Joint Progress Report on "Education & Training 2010", teacher education and training is an area in which progress remains insufficient.⁵ The unsatisfactory results mentioned above concerning the 2010 benchmarks confirm the need for an enhanced effort to improve teacher quality, as teachers are crucial in the endeavour to achieve the benchmarks concerning reducing early school leavers, increasing the share of young people who finish upper-secondary school, and reducing the number of 15-year-olds with poor reading skills.

The ETUCE underlines that the Commission's communication "Improving the Quality of Teacher Education" accurately identifies many of the challenges facing the teacher profession and 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. This among other things concerns: the changing demands on the teacher profession, the shortages of the teacher education systems in meeting the new demands, difficulties in updating teachers' skills, the demographic challenge of the profession, problems of recruitment and retention of teachers, the importance of competitive remuneration for keeping teachers in the profession and a need to promote the status and recognition of the profession.⁶

In order to respond to the challenges facing the teacher profession and pursue the above mentioned objectives, the ETUCE finds that the following points are of paramount importance:

- 1. To improve the quality of teacher education, teacher education in all sectors should be at Master's level**

The new demands facing teachers today in terms of in-depth subject knowledge, advanced pedagogical skills, reflective practice and ability to adapt the teaching to the needs of each individual as well as to the needs of the – increasingly heterogeneous – group of learners as a whole, requires that teachers are highly educated and equipped with the ability to integrate knowledge and handle complexity at the level which characterises studies at a Master's level.⁷

² The Council and the European Commission: "Delivering lifelong learning for knowledge, creativity and innovation", p. 12.

³ COM(2007)392final, p. 3.

⁴ The Education Council (2001): "The concrete future objectives of education and training systems", pp. 8-9; The Education Council and the Commission (2002): "Detailed work programme on the follow-up of the objectives of Education and training systems in Europe", p. 7.

⁵ The Council and the European Commission: "Delivering lifelong learning for knowledge, creativity and innovation", p. 10.

⁶ Cf. ETUCE Statement in response to the Commission's Communication on Improving the Quality of Teacher Education (2007).

⁷ Cf. ETUCE Policy Paper: Teacher Education in Europe (April 2008)

2. **The attractiveness of the teaching profession must be enhanced**

In many countries the teaching profession faces severe problems with the recruitment and retention of teachers.⁸ A survey carried out by the ETUCE in 2006⁹ 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.

Moreover, compared to other professions, a high percentage of the workers in the teaching profession are older workers and a large group of the professionals will have to be replaced in the near future. Europe is therefore at risk of having a severe lack of teachers. The European Commission has estimated that within the next 10 years the EU needs to attract 1 million new qualified teachers, just to replace the retiring teachers.¹⁰ 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 and that in some countries an increasing number of teachers leave the teaching job after a few years. The ETUCE has urged the public authorities to address these shortages, in particular by improving the attractiveness of teaching as a profession, with enhanced status, pay and conditions and improved career prospects.¹¹ In this context, the 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:

- Strengthen/preserve the teachers' professional autonomy
- Increase the confidence in the teaching profession
- Increase the research opportunities for teachers as well as enabling more research in all areas relevant to the teaching profession
- Diffuse the positive stories about the teaching profession
- Ensure proper working conditions and high salary standards for teachers

3. **A balance should be kept between quality assurance and teachers' professional autonomy**

Quality teaching is a question of giving teachers autonomy to adapt the teaching to the individual needs of each pupil. However, the tendency to expand school autonomy that we have seen in recent years across Europe also adds to the burden of tasks put on teachers¹² and brings along a trend of increased use of control mechanisms for quality assurance. This contributes to an unnecessary rise in teachers' administrative tasks and can lead to an undermining of the professional autonomy of teachers; many teachers see this as an inspection of their work and a lack of confidence in them as professionals. Furthermore, control frustrates entrepreneurship and the development of innovative teaching methods.¹³

It is the firm understanding of the ETUCE that any diminishing of the teachers' professional autonomy no doubt not only have a negative impact on the teaching done in the classrooms but that it also makes the teaching career less attractive. While

⁸ In the Commission communication "Improving the Quality of Teacher Education" the Commission recognizes that additional steps must be taken to recruit and retain a sufficient number of professionals (COM(2007)392, p. 10).

⁹ The ETUCE (2007): "Trends in Teacher Education", pp. 8-9.

¹⁰ Commission staff working document (2006): "Progress towards the Lisbon objectives in education and training", p. 6.

¹¹ According to COM(2007)392 investment in continuous training and development is low across the EU (p. 5). Moreover, remuneration is identified as an important factor in keeping teachers in the profession and if the salary is too low relatively to other profession more people are likely to leave the profession (p. 9).

¹² As also recognized in the 2008 Joint Progress Report on the implementation of the Education & Training 2010 work programme, p. 10.

¹³ See also Main policy conclusions 2005-2007 from the cluster of Teachers and Trainers, p. 10.

supporting quality assurance in schools, the ETUCE therefore underlines that it must be done in a balanced way, in which the trust in teachers' expertise and professional quality is maintained.

Early Childhood Education (ECE) should be given a prominent role in future Education & Training cooperation

Approaching education in a lifelong perspective presupposes coherence between all levels of education and therefore coherence in the education policies addressing each sector. A coherent strategy for the EU educational policy should mean greater prominence to ECE. ECE is vital for later educational attainment and therefore for the promotion of equal opportunities. The ETUCE therefore calls for improving the quality of and access to ECE as a future priority in the Education & Training cooperation and stresses the following points:

1. All children should have access to ECE

The ETUCE calls for initiatives to make sure that all children have access to ECE. As ECE is very expensive in some countries, this is not the case today. An ECE that is free of charge will prevent exclusion of children, which is especially relevant with regard to the children of other cultural or ethnic backgrounds. As stated in the 2008 Joint Progress Report on the implementation of the Education & Training work programme, ECE is vital for language learning and later prospects for successful schooling.¹⁴ The ETUCE draws attention to the Barcelona targets, set by the European Council in Barcelona in 2002, for Member States by 2010 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. In 2005 only five Member States had met or exceeded the Barcelona target of 33% for children under three and only seven countries the target of providing childcare for 90 % of children between 3 years old and the mandatory school age.¹⁵ As many countries are far from reaching the 2010 targets – some countries provide childcare for less than 10 % of the children under 3 years of age – the endeavour to achieve this target must be intensified in the period after 2010. The ETUCE awaits in this context the Commission's forthcoming communication on childcare.

2. ECE must be organised with a view of the needs of the child

Early childhood education is too often only seen as a care sector enabling parents to be active on the labour market and a means to reconcile work and family life. However, the ETUCE underlines that ECE is vital for the development of the child and it is therefore important to maintain an approach to ECE in which it is stressed that early childhood education should first and foremost be for the child and for the child's opportunities to develop and to learn, i.e. to develop knowledge, skills and values. It is essential to get rid of the split between education and care and to integrate both learning and care into ECE.

Public schools of a uniform high quality will improve progress in pupils' acquisition of key competences and in equity

The ETUCE has set out its detailed view of the challenges facing schools today in its response to the Commission's Consultation on *Schools for the 21st Century* in the autumn of 2007. The

¹⁴ 5723/08, p. 9

¹⁵ The European Commission (2005): "Reconciliation of work and private life. A comparative review of thirty European countries", pp. 34-35.

ETUCE believes that the outcome of the consultation should be the basis for setting the priorities for schools beyond 2010. In addition to the challenges outlined above, the ETUCE reminds here of some of the key challenges for ensuring that all young persons acquire the key competences needed in today's society.

1. Quality education for all is a public responsibility

To make sure that all pupils receive quality initial education, the public responsibility for this must be recognized. Education is a fundamental human right, and it must be publicly funded and publicly regulated. It is essential that all schools in a country are of uniform high quality. A comprehensive school system at the compulsory level – advancing all pupils/students, from early childhood onwards, without segregation – is vital from an educational as well as a democratic perspective. These are the first preconditions for ensuring that *all* students are provided with the key competences.

In this connection, the ETUCE stresses that the increased interest in recent years – also at EU level - for strengthening governance through diverse learning partnerships in all sectors of education, may entail some very risky developments. As for example stated in the 2006 joint progress report: *“To enhance the effectiveness and impact of reforms and to share responsibilities and costs, governance should be strengthened, involving relevant stakeholders, in particular through effective inter-ministerial synergies and diverse learning partnerships at all levels (institutions, public authorities, social partners, enterprises, sectoral, regional and local organisations)”*¹⁶ The ETUCE highlights that a positive wording of the necessity of partnerships for improving governance and policy development should in no way lead to a decrease of governments' responsibility to fund education, to ensure the quality of education, and to ensure equal access to education. Nor should public-private partnerships lead to transfer of employees from the public sector to the private sector. Moreover, public-private partnerships, e.g. long-term contracts between the private sector and the public sector, reduce the flexibility to adjust to changes in educational policies and objectives; they can indeed also be more costly than traditional funding mechanisms.

2. The focus on the social aspects of education must be maintained and strengthened

One of the biggest challenges for the education and training systems today is that we 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 and reducing early school leaving are from the point of view of the ETUCE some of the most significant issues to address. The schools system must therefore be organized in a way so that the schools do not reproduce the existing inequalities in society. In the opinion of the ETUCE this is most effectively achieved in a free, public and comprehensive school system of uniform high quality. The ETUCE has in its response to the Commission's Consultation on *Schools for the 21st Century* provided a number of recommendations on this issue. There is a need for much more research on this issue, and the ETUCE calls on the Commission to support this via its funding programmes and to support exchange of experiences across Europe via its clusters.

¹⁶ 2006 Commission and Council Joint Progress Report on Education & Training 2010, page 2.

The ETUCE stresses that, as also recognised in the 2008 joint progress report, particular attention to the specific disadvantages which pupils of migrant background face must be given – and must be a key priority in the future EU strategic framework on education. The ETUCE highlights in this context that it must be ensured that teachers exert an anti-discriminatory behaviour in the classroom. The ETUCE project: *Developing non-discriminatory quality education for Roma children*, carried out from 2004-2006 with the funding of the European Commission, was providing such training and found that there is a need for more actions of this kind. The inclusion of human rights and anti-racism in the teacher training curriculum must be ensured at all levels. Data from the Eurydice indicate that this is not done to a satisfactory extent at present.¹⁷ The ETUCE also 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.¹⁸

3. **Challenges for implementing a competence-based curriculum**

The ETUCE underlines that we support the Council and Parliament Recommendation on *Key Competences* from 2006. The Recommendation is based, rightly, on a broad outlook on education and includes not only the ‘traditional’ skills but also civic, social and cultural competences. There is a need to develop a concept of curriculum architecture which goes beyond the organisation of the school day into different subjects, and the ETUCE supports if the EU Recommendation can have a positive impact to this end. However, it is important to recognise the challenges that are entailed in moving to a competence-based national curriculum. Experiences from several countries that have moved to a competence-based curriculum show that this can be a difficult process. In particular, it must be ensured that a competence-based curriculum does not reduce the academic breadth and depth of the school subjects. It is moreover essential to ensure that teachers are involved in the curriculum development and that they are supported and receive training in how to adjust to the new curriculum. The existing challenges as regards curriculum reform moreover include how to integrate the key competences into the national curriculum without reducing teachers’ professional autonomy as well as to clarify the relation between the definition of competences and the contents of teaching. The need for more research and exchange of experience at EU level on how teacher education and other factors can be adjusted so as to positively support a competence-based curriculum has also been recognised by the Cluster on Key Competences.¹⁹ The ETUCE considers the promotion of the ‘learning-to-learn’ competence a key aspect of a quality education and is pleased that the concept is included in the EU ‘key competence’ framework. The ETUCE stresses that there are still challenges to overcome as regards how to implement this competence in the curriculum and in particular as regards how to assess the pupils’ acquisition of this. The ETUCE welcomes that the Commission’s research center CRELL is in the process of developing an EU indicator on this issue and looks forward to see the result of this process.

Ensure sufficient resources to the education sector

The ETUCE stresses in this context that significant additional resources are needed for the education system. There is a need to see greater public investments generally in the education sector in the EU Member States; the current levels of investments are too low, with seven countries spending just around 4 % of their GDP on education and a total of

¹⁷ Eurydice: *Integrating Immigrant Children into Schools in Europe* (2006). Data from 2003-2004, p. 62-65

¹⁸ Annex to the joint 2008 progress report, p. 60.

¹⁹ Annex to the draft 2008 Joint Progress Report, p. 46

12 countries spending below 5 %. The ambitious goals set for education and training systems must go hand in hand with a willingness to confer the additional resources needed.

A safe and attractive learning environment should be a key priority

The issue of promoting safe and attractive learning environments for all children and young persons should be included as a key priority in the future.

Teacher stress is the major occupational illness among teachers and teachers are moreover among the professions reporting the highest level of work-related stress.²⁰ The increasing workload, the role overload, the increased class size per teacher and an increasing number of pupils behaving in an improper way are some of the trends identified in several European countries that lead to a rise in stress-related illness. Stress can be harmful to teachers, but can also indirectly harm the pupils and put the quality and efficiency of the education provided at risk. Tackling stress at work can in turn lead to greater efficiency in education and improve occupational health and safety, which will have economic and social benefits for schools, teachers and society as a whole.

Violence is another problem in the education sector. A survey on the European working conditions²¹ underlines the seriousness of violence in the education sector. In accordance to the study, the threat of physical violence happens to 6 % of all workers, but in the education sector 11, 9 % of the workers have these kinds of threats. Physical violence, bullying and harassment are as well higher to workers in education compared to workers in general. The ETUCE highlights that violence is extremely important to tackle, as it has a lot of costs. Workers can suffer physical harm and have stress-related symptoms and it has consequences to the schools that can be affected with decreased performance and increased absenteeism. The State is also affected by possible early retirements, social insurance costs and health care costs.

The ETUCE points out that a comprehensive approach is needed to tackle the problems related to stress and violence in schools to save lost money on paid absence from work due to illness and to avoid frequent job switches and early retirements. During 2007, the ETUCE undertook a survey on teachers' work-related stress among its affiliates with a view to supporting teacher unions in implementing the European Social Partners' cross-sectoral framework agreement on work-related stress from 2005, and the ETUCE is currently in the process of conducting an EU-funded project on combatting violence in schools.

A need for a redirection of the EU policies in higher education

In the opinion of the ETUCE there is a strong need for a redirection of the EU policies in higher education and research. The Commission's policy for the higher education sector is to a large extent guided by the economic objectives of the Lisbon agenda. The two integrated economic and employment guidelines concerning research and development (guideline 7 & 8), which were adopted in 2005 and reaffirmed with the adoption of the Lisbon cycle for 2008-2010, encourage member states to "modernise the management of research institutions and universities" and to ensure "more effective and efficient public expenditure on R&D and developing PPPs".²² Since 2005, the Commission has in the area of higher education and research turned these guidelines

²⁰ Report on the ETUCE survey on teachers' work-related stress, 2008

²¹ The European Foundation for the improvement of living and working conditions

²² COM(2007)803final, pp. 14-15.

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 ETUCE believes that the quality of higher education is put at risk by the excessive reference to the merits of output-based funding, frequently recommended by the Commission as a means to increase the efficiency of higher education institutions.

There is a need for a much broader approach to higher education, which takes a much wider view than the immediate needs of the labour market. Higher education and research are vital public goods that contribute to the social, cultural and economic development of the European 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. In fact, 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. It is also important to emphasise and sustain the links between quality higher education and research, which must continue to be supported by public policy and public funds. The European Commission and the Council of Ministers should safeguard this specific European tradition in higher education.

The ETUCE stresses the following points of priority for the future policies for higher education and research at EU level:

1. Public investments in higher education and research must be increased

There is an inadequacy of funds for higher education, especially when considering the steep increase in student numbers over the past years. This affirmation has been made in the communication on “Efficiency and Equity in European education and training systems”²³ as well as in the 2008 Joint Progress Report²⁴. Moreover, as stated in the strategic report on the renewed Lisbon strategy progress as concerns EU R&D intensity is unsatisfactory and a considerable way off the 3 % R&D target. Even if all Member States should achieve their national targets, EU R&D expenditure is now forecasted to be 2.5% of GDP by 2010.²⁵ The ETUCE therefore calls for a commitment from Member States to raise investments in higher education and research. At the same time the ETUCE underlines that we cannot approve the main focus put on the need to increase private investments and strongly rejects the argument put forward in the “Efficiency and Equity” Communication which simply refers to tuition fees as a main solution in dealing with the “funding gap” in higher education. Instead the ETUCE reiterates that public funding is the most equitable and efficient way of financing higher education.

2. Academic freedom must be protected

There is a cross-European (as well as global) trend towards increasing Public-Private Partnerships and more and more private funding in higher education and research. The ETUCE is concerned that this might cause that restrictions are being placed on the use of research funds in terms of fields of research or on the publication of research results, and thus hamper the academic freedom.²⁶ In the UNESCO recommendation “*Status of*

²³ COM(2006)481final, p. 7.

²⁴ The Council and the European Commission: “Delivering lifelong learning for knowledge, creativity and innovation”, p 11.

²⁵ COM(2007)803final, Part III, pp. 30-31.

²⁶ See the ETUCE Response to the Green Paper on the European Research Area, as well as the statement by the EI Pan-European Higher Education and Research Standing Committee (HERSC) on the Commission’s Communication on *Delivering on the modernisation agenda for universities: Education, research and innovation* (2006).

Higher Education Teaching Personnel” from 1997, it is stated that the right to education, teaching and research can only be fully enjoyed in an atmosphere of academic freedom and autonomy for institutions of higher education. The principle of academic freedom is fundamental in the knowledge society and the ETUCE urges the European Commission and the Council of Ministers to follow the recommendations and respect the standards put down by UNESCO. The ETUCE stresses that universities should by no means become a support sector for companies; their purpose and responsibilities in society are much broader. Public responsibility, academic freedom, mobility, and university autonomy as perceived by the Council of Europe’s General Assembly²⁷ – i.e. as a twin principle to that of academic freedom - are all core values of higher education which must be upheld.

3. **The question of equity**

The ETUCE encourages the European Commission to take steps to promote equity in higher education. The ETUCE notes that the Council Conclusions on Modernising Universities from 2007 refers to the need to promote equity in higher education and the ETUCE calls on the Commission to take concrete steps to address this issue. Ensuring greater equity in participation and access is one of the central challenges of European education, and higher education in particular. The ETUCE calls for concrete steps to remove the barriers to participation in higher education, including financial barriers ensure and equity in higher education. As indicated in the OECD publication “Education at a Glance” loan repayments “can be a substantial burden to individuals and can have an impact on the decision to participate in higher education”.²⁸ It is the conviction of the ETUCE that tuition fees and rising student debt now constitute a serious obstacle to access, particularly for students from lower socio-economic groups. Equity in higher education must be achieved through offering equal opportunity to everybody, not only to access, but also to successful completion of studies.

4. **University staff**

In the 2008 Joint Progress Report, the Council and the European Commission state that while progress has been made in increasing the autonomy and accountability of universities, little evidence is available on the support provided to university staff and managers to handle this challenge.²⁹ The ETUCE therefore sees it as a priority for the future framework for Education & Training that measures are taken to address the consequences for university staff and how increasing university autonomy affects their work life. This issue also relates to the key principle of academic freedom, which is a preposition for researchers to perform their tasks. The ETUCE also calls for measures to be taken to address the possible needs of university staff in facing the challenge of university autonomy. Furthermore, obstacles to mobility for university staff and researchers still persist, and the EU should continue its role in promoting and funding mobility opportunities.

Clarifying the relation between the Bologna Process and the EU policies

The relation between the Bologna Process and the EU policies in higher education must be clarified in a dialogue with all the partners involved, including through the debate on the priorities of the Bologna Process beyond 2010 which as well is subject to a process of consultation at present.

²⁷ On academic freedom and university autonomy - Recommendation 1762 (2006).

²⁸ The OECD (2007): “Education at a glance”, p. 236.

²⁹ The Council and the European Commission: “Delivering lifelong learning for knowledge, creativity and innovation”, p. 11. Issue paper for the Stakeholders Conference on 20th May, p. 5.

On the concrete priorities in the new strategic framework for EU cooperation

Based on the above, the ETUCE highlights that it finds that the three strategic objectives which have been guiding the EU work in education since 2002 – quality/access/openness – should continue to be the main strategic priorities, with the notion of lifelong learning as an overarching objective and principle. The ETUCE rejects the suggestion made in the Commission's issue paper in preparation of the Stakeholders Conference on 20th May, in which the Commission suggests to organise the framework according to the three objectives: competitiveness, equity, and sustainability (with lifelong learning and quality learning for all as overarching objectives).³⁰ In the opinion of the ETUCE, the proposal to choose “competitiveness” as a goal for the education systems in Europe (and its sub-objectives: innovation and creativity; excellence; flexicurity; mobility and international exchange; the fifth freedom - the free movement of knowledge) is severely flawed. “Competitiveness” is not a goal for the education systems themselves; a society can achieve competitiveness if its education system is of a high quality and secures a high attainment level and high performance level of the population. But the role and purpose of the education systems is much broader than the term competitiveness entails; a broadness which is much better encapsulated by the notion of “quality education”. In the definition of the ETUCE, “Quality education is the education that best fits the present and future needs of the particular learners in question and the community, given the particular circumstances and prospects. The quality concept also has to embrace the development of the potential of every member of each new generation”.³¹ The term also catches that educational quality and standards are indeed *relative* matters – relative to the particular time and place and to particular learners and their circumstances. As such, the notion of quality education encapsulates the need to ensure that all pupils acquire the key competences needed in today's society, the quality of the teachers and the teaching etc.

Similarly, “innovation and creativity”, which is suggested by the Commission as a sub-objective to “competitiveness”, is a result of the successful acquisition of the range of key competences needed today, not the other way around. The suggested starting point for the strategic framework is indeed marred by not referring in a direct way to neither the importance of acquiring key competences, nor to the importance of quality teachers.

The working methods in the Open Method of Coordination (OMC)

As a new work programme for Education & Training will be launched in the near future, the ETUCE believes that a vital aspect will be that the programme is coherent with the work and the results achieved so far. At the same time, it will be important to improve aspects that are currently not working satisfactorily. Within the possibilities given in the Open Method of Coordination, the ETUCE believes that the main working methods of the Education & Training 2010 work programme, i.e. the biennial national reports, indicators and benchmarks, the ETCG and the clusters, are a useful way of organising and coordination the work within education and training. As also mentioned in the introduction, the ETUCE is in favor of a clear and transparent OMC in the education sector at EU level, which constitutes a comprehensive approach to education and is agenda-setting vis-à-vis other policy areas in which education plays a role at EU level, i.e. social policy, employment policy, economic policy etc.

However, the ETUCE highlights that there is still a need for much more transparency in the work taking place under the Open Method of Coordination and there is in particular a need for more

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³¹ See ETUCE: *Quality in Education: Presentation of ETUCE's work 1995-2001* (2002), p. 25.

involvement at national level of all the partners in the education sector in the implementation of the Education & Training 2010 objectives.

The ETUCE recommends that the following points are taken into consideration for the organisation of the working methods for the Education & Training framework beyond 2010:

1. Improving implementation: a more coordinated involvement of the national social partners and stakeholders

In the opinion of the ETUCE, there is a need to improve national ownership of the common objectives and to increase governance, in particular as regards closer involvement of all the partners in the education sector.

Social partners and other stakeholders at national level play an important role in the realisation of the common objectives within education and training, and there is a need for a much more coordinated involvement of these parties at national level. Both the 2006 and the 2008 Joint Progress Reports recommend that mechanisms for the implementation of the Education and Training 2010 work programme and lifelong learning strategies should be in place.³² Improved governance was also identified in the 2008 Joint Progress Report as a way of optimizing the outcome of the Education & Training 2010 work programme³³. It is a principle that should be strengthened for the process post-2010. As referred to in the 2006 Joint Progress Report, such coordination mechanisms should involve stakeholders, in particular the social partners.³⁴

The future work programme should emphasise the need to involve stakeholders and social partners at national level, as indeed it also is recommended in the Council Conclusions accommodating the overall Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs. Involvement of these parties include consultation on the elaboration of the national progress reports and on the various proposals for EU recommendations, consultations prior to meetings in the Council of Education Ministers, participation in EU peer learning activities either in the home country or abroad (as a non-governmental expert), and a structured dialogue on the results from the Peer Learning Activities.

2. Keeping coherence: the ETCG should be strengthened as coordinating body

The ETCG coordinates the overall implementation of the Education & Training 2010 Work Programme. Prior to 2005, the ETUCE had for several years been calling for the establishment of a coordinating body and has welcomed the set up of the ETCG. The function of the ETCG is vital, especially as one of the main challenges for the coming years will be to improve the implementation and efficiency of the education and training policy measures. The ETCG must be maintained in order to keep coherence in the overall coordination of the work programmes, and the ETUCE calls on the Commission to strengthen the role that the ETCG plays in monitoring the process and advising the Commission on the direction of the process.

3. Continuing the work towards achieving the benchmarks and improving national reporting

A centre point in the OMC method are the statistical monitoring done via indicators and benchmarks as well as the biennial national reports in which Member States report on

³² The Council and the European Commission: "Delivering lifelong learning for knowledge, creativity and innovation", p. 18.

³³ The Council and the European Commission: "Delivering lifelong learning for knowledge, creativity and innovation", p 17.

³⁴ 2006/C79/01, p. 9

their performance in relation to the joint objectives. This allows for comparison and sharing of knowledge between Member States. As stated above, the ETUCE recommends that the five benchmarks are maintained in the future framework for Education & Training.

As regards the method of reporting biennially on progress via national reports, the ETUCE stresses that it is crucial that the reports in particular reflect the results of policies and the current challenges, not only the good intentions. As noted by the Commission, many national reports describe initiatives that will be implemented and not their results.³⁵ A structured consultation of social partners and other stakeholders in the elaboration of the national reports, as called for above, would significantly enhance the reports in terms of describing the current challenges as seen from the practitioners and other partners in education.

4. **Increasing efficiency: the Clusters should be given a clear mandate**

The ETUCE is a member of three clusters (Teachers and Trainers, Key Competences, and Higher Education). The ETUCE believes that the use of the clusters and Peer Learning Activities can be a good way of exchanging experiences via the cross-EU cooperation in education and training. However, in the opinion of the ETUCE, as the clusters are currently organised, their work and outcome is too uneven in terms of the outcome it produces. The ETUCE therefore recommends that the clusters are given a clear mandate, including a timeframe for its work, in order for the cluster activities to be arranged in a more focused way with a clear aim. This would ensure a closer link between the activities in the clusters and the political level.

Furthermore, there is a need to enhance the dissemination of the outcome of the PLAs as of other cluster activities. There should be systems of support that can extend the learning benefits of the two participants from each country in a PLA to other stakeholders on a national or a local level. For the moment, the effectiveness of the Clusters depends on the ability of these two participants to extend their knowledge and information to other parties of interest. The 2008 Joint Progress Report also stresses that it must be ensured that the results of peer-learning activities reach policy makers and ministers.³⁶ The ETUCE strongly supports this, however the ETUCE underlines that it is important that the gained knowledge of the Peer Learning Activities not only reaches the ministries but that it is passed on *all* stakeholders in the education sector.

Furthermore, there should be a structured evaluation of how the outcomes of the clusters' work is used by the Member States.

5. **Towards a sectoral social dialogue committee in education at EU level**

The ETUCE has for several years – with the financial support of the European Commission – been working towards establishing a Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee in the Education Sector at EU level, as possible under article 138-139 of the Treaty. Such a committee has the possibility of gathering a total of 54 employer representatives and teacher trade unionists from all EU countries to develop joint positions, surveys, or adopt voluntary European framework agreements to be implemented via the national social dialogue. The great challenge so far has been that the employers within the education sector until now have not been organised at EU level in a European organisation. However, on the initiative of the ETUCE and its affiliates, the employers in

³⁵ Annex to the draft 2008 Joint Progress Report, pp. 61-62.

³⁶ The Council and the European Commission: "Delivering lifelong learning for knowledge, creativity and innovation", p. 18.

the education sector are now in the process of working towards being organised at EU level, and the ETUCE foresees that within a reasonable timeframe it will be possible to move ahead and establish a Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee in Education at EU level. This committee will allow the social partners within the education sector to jointly contribute and work proactively with the EU institutions in the work of the Education & Training process post-2010.