



ETUCE Statement on the European Commission's Communication: Improving competences for the 21st Century an Agenda for European Cooperation on Schools¹

*adopted by the ETUCE Executive Board
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Président**
Ronnie Smith

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Vice-Présidents**
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Kounka Damianova
Jörgen Lindholm
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**Treasurer
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Walter Dresscher

The ETUCE's response is based on the former statement in response to the European Commission's Consultation on Schools for 21st century.² The former statement already presented the most important issues that in the opinion of ETUCE are crucial for enabling schools to meet the numerous challenges they are facing today. However using the Communication as a point of departure, there are still some the issues that the ETUCE would like to address.

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.

Firstly, the ETUCE welcomes the Commission's initiative to launch a Europe-wide cooperation process between Member States to strengthen the different school systems in the field of school education.

Secondly, the ETUCE considers that school education being as a key priority for the next cycle of the Lisbon strategy is a positive message. Nevertheless, the ETUCE stresses that education must be used to support of the development of people's knowledge, skills, abilities, and social, civic and cultural competences. When discussing curriculum strategies the focus has to be on creating abilities for future life in broad sense, not only immediate skills for labour market. Education must be seen in a broad outlook and not only in an economic and employment perspective.

Early childhood Education

The ETUCE supports the fact that the European Commission gives importance to a general access to high quality early childhood education to reach the Lisbon goals with the principle that a childhood education should integrate both learning and care. However, the ETUCE advocates that the wording is kept on early childhood education and that the term pre-school education is excluded from the Communication. This is due to the fact that not all Member States have early pre-school education.

Competences

The ETUCE agrees with the European Commission putting the emphasis on the use of the European Framework on *Key Competences* in school and in vocational training. However, individual learning methods are important but must be balanced with subject-based learning and measures promoting personal and social skills.

¹ "Schools" refers to pre-primary, lower and upper secondary institutions and also to institutions of vocational training and pre-school institutions.

² Adopted by the ETUCE Executive Board in their meeting on 28-29 November 2007

The ETUCE supports the Commission's focus on assessment of learning outcomes as a means of helping the pupils improve their competences and not as a simple instrument of ranking students, and agrees with the Commission that this requires a more extensive use of formative assessments of learning.

The ETUCE welcomes the Commission's proposal to focus future cooperation on developing action plans on how to increase literacy and numeracy, on reinforcing transversal, as well as subject-based competences and on adopting comprehensive approaches to competence development. Like the Commission, the ETUCE stresses that learning-to-learn is particularly important in this regard.

Teacher education at Master's level

The Commission has repeatedly named teacher quality as the most important within-school factor to explain student performance.³ Teacher quality is undoubtedly an essential key to improve educational standards and outcomes as a whole. Accordingly the ETUCE supports the necessity of ensuring high-quality of teacher education and continuous professional development for teachers throughout their career. The ETUCE underlines that in order to improve the quality of teacher education, teacher education should be at Master's level. Teachers must be well educated and equipped. High level studies should integrate knowledge and skills in theory and practice. Thus, teachers will be able to handle and to face complexity of the current and future demands. Requirements include research based competences in subject knowledge, advanced pedagogical skills, reflective practice and ability to adapt teaching to the needs of each individual as well as to the needs of the – increasingly heterogeneous – group of learners as a whole.⁴ Demands also expressed in the Communication⁵.

As stated by the Commission the attractiveness of the teaching profession is an issue that needs to be addressed immediately. There are various reasons for problems with attracting qualified candidates, such as low salaries, low status, bad reputation/publicity, limited career possibilities, poor working conditions and unemployment within certain subjects. The improvement of the attractiveness of the teaching profession should not be addressed through means of effective recruitment systems alone. It is highly important that the Commission urges that Member States should make efforts in order to raise the status of teachers in particular by taking measures to:

- Promote Master's level initial education and good opportunities for professional development
- Ensure proper working conditions and high salary standards for teachers.
- 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.⁶

³ European Commission Communication: Improving competences for the 21st Century, p. 11 European Commission Communication: Improving the quality of teacher education, p. 3 The Education Council (2001): The concrete objective of education and training systems, pp 8-9

⁴ ETUCE statement on priorities for the new strategic framework for cooperation on education and training beyond 2010, p. 3 ETUCE statement in response to the European Commission's Consultation on Schools for the 21st century, p. 12.

⁵ European Commission Communication: Improving competences for the 21st Century, p.

⁶ See ETUCE statement on priorities for the new strategic framework for EU cooperation on education and training beyond 2010, p. 4

School leaders

Strong guidance to Member States is essential when emphasising the importance of improving the recruitment processes of school leaders. Recruitment procedures should go beyond traditional job interviews. Raising the quality of school leaders and making the profession attractive is quite essential. Therefore the ETUCE stresses that school leaders must receive various forms of support from professional organisations and also from their superiors.⁷ Career possibilities of school leaders must be enhanced and it is essential to emphasise the importance of a flexible and mobile profession allowing horizontal and vertical career changes.⁸ Salary raise of school teachers influences the attractiveness of the profession and can attract candidates with a strong educational teaching background.

The ETUCE supports that the recruitment of school leaders should be improved and that they should be equipped to re-focus on tasks most effective in improving student learning and developing school staff. It is important to have a more detailed definition of the concept “re-focus”. For example school leadership for improved student learning requires abilities to adapt the teaching programme to local needs, promote teamwork among teachers and engage in teacher monitoring, evaluation and professional development.⁹ In accordance, the ETUCE stresses that school leaders should be competent, with pedagogical, financial and personnel education, schooled in recruitment and management and skilled in pedagogical leadership.¹⁰ It is important to emphasise that a background in teaching and teacher qualifications is a key element.

Concerning the management of schools, the ETUCE highlights the following three points:

- It is essential when emphasising autonomy, to distinguish between school autonomy and school leaders’ autonomy. When advocating school autonomy, it is important to remember that this is not a goal in itself, but that autonomy may support schools to carry out their key missions. The degree of autonomy in each country depends on the administrative and historical context. General messages concerning the importance of school autonomy can be dangerous given the reason that what might work in one country may not be successful transferred to other countries. Decentralisation processes often proves difficult because of lack of expertise at the level to which powers are delegated. It is essential to underline that school autonomy must not lead to a competition between schools. A uniformly high quality must be ensured for all schools, to achieve this. Cooperation between schools is essential, and prize competitions, science projects e.g. should only be used in a positive spirit and as a motivating factor for schools. When evaluating schools, it is necessary to keep a balance between internal and external evaluation systems. The ETUCE emphasises that evaluations should be seen as a tool for school development and not as a control mechanism. It is essential that school leaders, teachers and pupils are involved in the evaluation process of defining the methods for internal and external evaluations.

- Distributing school leadership is important for school leaders to gain more time for tasks related to educational leadership and not only to improve efficiency in an economic perspective. However the responsibilities for school leaders are often

⁷ With financial support from the European Commission ETUCE has been working on establishing a Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee. See also OECD Improving School Leadership, Executive summaries p. 3, section 2; Distribute school leadership for the same emphasis.

⁸ OECD improving School leadership p. 5

⁹ OECD Improving School Leadership, Executive summaries p. 3, section 1; Redefine school leadership

¹⁰ See ETUCE statement in response to the European Commission’s Consultation on Schools for the 21st Century p.

unclear. Therefore it is vital to broaden the concept of school leadership and adjust policy and working conditions accordingly.¹¹ When power is delegated, it is necessary to emphasise that the required expertise is present at local level.¹² It is crucial to emphasise the involvement of other actors such as teachers and school boards in the decision-making process.

- The ETUCE stresses that the management of schools is best done through the democratic bodies where teachers, representatives of pupils and parents participate. Thus, the ETUCE welcomes the emphasis in the communication on a holistic approach involving teachers, learners and other relevant actors fully in the development of a competence-based curriculum. It is essential that all relevant actors are involved in the policy development in education. The successful outcome of any reform is dependent on the understanding and support from teachers and their trade union representatives, as they are the key persons in the implementation. To reduce the teaching workload, it is important to let teachers and their representatives engage in the planning, preparation and collaboration intrinsic to curriculum developments which require active learning methodologies.

Quality education: a public responsibility

The ETUCE reasserts that quality education for all is a public responsibility to make sure that all pupils receive quality 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 a vital from an educational as well as democratic perspective. These are the first preconditions for ensuring that all students are provided with the key competences.

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.

¹¹ OECD, Improving School leadership, executive summaries p. 3

¹² Former Statement p. 13 See also OECD, Improving School leadership, executive summaries p. 3.