



February 2009

## **ETUCE Statement on the European Commission's Communication: "New Skills for New Jobs – Anticipating and matching labour market and skills needs"**

*Adopted by the EI/ETUCE Bureau at its meeting on 24-25 February 2009*

In relation to the European Commission's Communication "New Skills for New Jobs – Anticipating and matching labour market and skill needs" the ETUCE wishes to make the following remarks to the communication. The ETUCE supports the Commission's aim of creating more knowledge about future developments in the European labour market, but stresses the importance of recognising that education and training serve a broader purpose than answering specific labour market demands. In addition, the ETUCE underlines that while forecasting can serve as a source of information for stakeholders in education and employment, it cannot be seen as the primary basis for sustainable political decisions.

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 ETCEG.

**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

### **Making a bright use of forecasting**

The ETUCE finds it important to underline the point from the Commission's staff working paper accompanying the Communication that states that accurate and precise forecasts are not achievable and that forecasts are rarely, if ever, seen as information that can be used to plan the scale and pattern of education provision with any precision. Instead, forecasting can be used to inform all actors involved about the likely development of the labour market.<sup>1</sup> The role of forecasting should therefore be as one source of relevant information among others.

### **Addressing the growing shortage of qualified teachers**

The ETUCE has, for several years, warned the relevant EU institutions and the Member States about the risk of a severe shortage of qualified teachers in Europe in the years to come. Several countries have difficulties recruiting and retaining teachers and as the average teaching professional is relatively old<sup>2</sup>, the demand for qualified teachers is expected to rise further in the coming years.<sup>3</sup> The Commission has estimated that more than one million new qualified teachers will need to be recruited over the period 2005 to 2015, in order to replace the cohorts retiring<sup>4</sup>. In order to develop a European workforce with the skills necessary to meet the demands of the labour market, the Member States must increase their efforts to raise the attractiveness and status of the teaching profession, as well as the quality of teacher education.

<sup>1</sup> Commission staff working document SEC (2008) 3058/2, p 6-7

<sup>2</sup> OECD, Education at Glance 2008, indicator D7

<sup>3</sup> Commission's communication (2007) "Improving the Quality of Teacher Education" p.10

<sup>4</sup> Commission staff working document (2006): "Progress towards the Lisbon objectives in education and training", p. 6

## **Educate for life, not for specific and uncertain labour market needs**

The ETUCE acknowledges that forecasts of the future skill needs of the European labour market can contribute to raise awareness about future challenges. It must be stressed, however, that the primary objective of the European education and training systems is not to meet specific needs of the labour market but to *educate for life*. To reach this overall objective requires education and training systems accessible to all and acting for the development peoples' knowledge, skills and abilities in a broad range of subjects, social, civic and cultural competences, the ability to learn as well as creativity, innovation and teamwork skills. The ETUCE believes that a flexible and adaptable workforce is better developed by an education system with this broad approach than by demand-led systems with a narrow focus on the ever-changing demands of the labour market.

## **Continued focus on the Education & Training 2010 benchmarks necessary**

The ETUCE welcomes the Commissions acknowledgement of the importance of high quality early-childhood and basic education for all, prevention of early school leaving and improvement of the educational attainment of the European citizens. With regard to these objectives the ETUCE stresses the importance to develop a broader access to counselling and other types of school support activities.

The ETUCE emphasises that reaching the Education & Training 2010 Benchmarks is a critical precondition for any success in the process of upgrading the skill-level for the European workforce. Unfortunately progress towards reaching the benchmarks has been very disappointing and the ETUCE must stress that the benchmarks are worthless, unless they are accompanied by the all Member States' sincere commitment and investment.

The ETUCE strongly agrees with the Commission that costs relating to the necessary investments in education and training can be out-weighed by the economic and social benefits of a well qualified and adaptable workforce.

## **Involvement of social partners on all levels critical**

The ETUCE is pleased to notice that the Commission relies on the dialogue with the European social partners in the future work on the topic of raising the skill-level of the European workforce and looks forward to participate in this. The ETUCE also calls for involvement of the social partners at the national level in order to achieve the goals of the Education and Training 2010 process. In conclusion, the ETUCE supports the work on forecasting the needs of the future labour market in Europe, but stresses the importance of a broad approach to education and training and insists that the pursuit of common goals must not lead to a harmonisation of the European education systems or tailoring these too narrowly to the needs of the labour market, as this may jeopardize the diversity and flexibility of the systems, which the ETUCE believes to be critical assets in the endeavour of increasing the skill-level in Europe.