



**ETUCE statement on the European Commission's Communication  
"An updated strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training"**

*Adopted by the EI/ETUCE Bureau on 11 February 2009*

Firstly, the ETUCE considers it is of the utmost importance for both the EU and the national level policy-makers to acknowledge that, regarding the education and training objectives, very little has been delivered almost 10 years after the adoption of the Education and Training 2010 work programme. The Commission's review of the current policy 'Co-operation in Education and Training at EU Level' are loosely based on the same perspective as the current work programme. However, the review includes two new challenges which are *migration* and *sustainability*. The overall objective is the development of lifelong learning and learner mobility, the updated framework sets out the following guidelines for future co-operation in education.

- Implementing lifelong learning strategies and make learner mobility a reality
- Improving the quality and efficiency of provision and outcomes
- Promoting equity and active citizenship
- Enhancing innovation and creativity at all levels of education and training

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. The ETUCE is a member of the Education and Training Co-ordination Group (ETCG).

In the opinion of the ETUCE, the definition of a new strategic framework for EU cooperation should be based on a broader and more inclusive approach to the concept of education and training, which are not merely a tool to foster economic growth and employment. The ETUCE considers that the most essential task of the education system is to *educate for life*<sup>1</sup> and to ensure a broad outlook on education which serves also other purposes such as social cohesion, equality, active citizenship etc. Therefore, the ETUCE emphasizes the following principles and challenges for education policies in Europe today and beyond 2010.

- *Educating for life and emphasising learner mobility*
- *Ensuring high quality education and training*
- *Promoting equal opportunities for all in education*

### **Educating for life and enhancing learner mobility**

The ETUCE agrees with the Communication's main approach "*lifelong learning comprises learning at all ages ... and in all contexts...*"<sup>2</sup>. Making lifelong learning (LLL) and learner mobility a reality should mean that the European goal is to give all Europeans access as well as the right to education and training, both as children and throughout adulthood. Putting LLL into practice requires better co-ordination and co-operation between different sectors and all relevant stakeholders. Though progress has been made in achieving *adult participation in lifelong learning* (aged 25-64), it has been inadequate and alternative measures, in addition to benchmarking, should be considered. For LLL to succeed, an essential feature is mobility from work place to training and back into employment. Examples of

<sup>1</sup> *Learning: the Treasure Within*, the report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the twenty first century (1996). The Commission felt that education throughout life is based upon four pillars: **learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be.**

<sup>2</sup> European Commission Communication: "An updated strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training" p. 6

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practical tools for making LLL a reality are funding schemes to ensure participation; public investment in education provision; development and implementation of coherent systems of recognition and validation of informal learning. The ETUCE recommends that more focus should be given to reducing the gap between Member States as well as between low and high skilled adults participating in lifelong learning.

The ETUCE considers that the objective of improving the mobility of teachers and learners is a core pre-condition for quality in education. Mobility should be understood as a wider concept than just cross-national mobility of learners within EU-programmes. The ETUCE supports the emphasis in the Communication on enhancing *Mobility*. However, increasing the transparency and recognition of qualifications, (the EQF and the NQF) is not the only means to reach this goal. Other obstacles to student mobility, such as the close link between mobility and socio-economic and cultural background, must be taken into consideration. The Commission should define more clearly the term “broadly-based funding”, to prevent that private funding prevails over public funding.

### **Ensuring high quality education and training**

The demographic changes which Europe is facing in the coming years will require a great influx of young teachers into the profession. Additional efforts must be made to ensure that not only an adequate number of youngsters are encouraged to take up teaching, high priority must be given to ensuring the quality of the educators. Often stop gap measures threaten to affect the quality of teaching and thereby the skills of children and young people. Nevertheless, the focus must remain on the quality, not the quantity, of teachers in education. Recently, the ETUCE has adopted a Policy Paper entitled *Teacher Education in Europe*, which presents ETUCE’s view on teacher education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. *The aim must be that all teachers are educated at Master’s level.* The demands that teachers face today in terms of in-depth subject knowledge, advanced pedagogical skills, reflective practice and the ability to adapt teaching to the individual need as well as to the needs of the 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 the Master’s level.<sup>3</sup> Initial education, and continuing professional development of teachers, trainers and staff are crucial, but other key factors, such as efforts to raise the status of teachers and improve teachers’ working conditions and environment, should also be underlined.

In particular, the ETUCE stresses that;

- The comprehensive view on the acquisition of *key competences* for all students, which covers not only traditional skills, but also civic, social and cultural competences, is important. It must be noted that competence-based curriculum discussions, which focus exclusively on outcomes, are difficult to assess and can harm the academic breadth and depth in school subjects, and limit teacher autonomy. The ETUCE believes that it is crucial that teachers be involved in the development of the curriculum and receives appropriate education and training to adjust teaching to new curricula.
- With regard to the benchmarks on *Languages*, the Barcelona target that at least 80% of pupils in lower secondary education should be taught at least two foreign languages in addition to their mother tongue should be included.

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. ETUCE Policy Paper: Teacher Education in Europe (April 2008) p. 8

- The updated benchmark for low-achieving 15-year olds in basic skills (reading, mathematics and science) is more adequate, since pupils who fail in reading are also more likely to fail in other subjects. However, the ETUCE believes that initiatives other than providing focus on critical issues, through benchmarking, must be made to raise the general performance of pupils at risk. The ETUCE strongly supports the proposal that the Commission should invite Member States to commit themselves to the development of national action plans.
- The focus on enforcing competences in *Creativity and Innovation* in the Communication must cover an economic as well as a social and cultural perspective.
- The simplistic reference to greater autonomy in education and training systems in the Communication is not adequate. On several occasions, the ETUCE has emphasised the importance of defining the word “autonomy” and distinguishing between different levels of autonomy. In the opinion of the ETUCE, institutional autonomy should be a twin principle with academic freedom.<sup>4</sup>

There is a need for a much broader approach to higher education, which takes a much wider view than the immediate demands 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 that public investments in higher education and research must be increased. The current funds for higher education have been inadequate, especially when considering the steep increase in the numbers of students over the past years. This affirmation has already been made in the communication on “Efficiency and Equity in European education and training systems”<sup>5</sup> as well as in the 2008 Joint Progress Report<sup>6</sup>. The benchmark of public and private investment in higher education reaching at least 2% of GDP by 2020 is unsatisfactory. The current public and private investments are 1.3 % of the national GDP. The ETUCE calls for more decisive action than the introduction of yet another benchmark in order to commit Member States to raise investments in higher education and research. At the same time, the ETUCE underlines that it cannot approve the main focus being put on the need to increase private investments and strongly rejects to tuition fees as a solution in dealing with the “funding gap” in higher education. Private funding and enhancement of business partnership between different levels and sectors of education, stressed through benchmarks, must not lead to a decrease in the public

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<sup>4</sup> See ETUCE statement in response to the European Commission consultation on Schools for the 21<sup>st</sup> century (December 2007) Cf. also ETUCE Statement on the European Commission’s Communication: Improving competences for the 21st Century an Agenda for European Cooperation on Schools (November 2008)

<sup>5</sup> COM(2006)481final, p 7

<sup>6</sup> The Council and the European Commission: “Delivering lifelong learning for knowledge, creativity and innovation p 11

responsibility of ensuring the quality of education. The ETUCE considers that public funding is the most equitable and efficient way of financing higher education.<sup>7</sup>

### **Promoting equal opportunities for all in education**

The ETUCE stresses the fact that “equal opportunities for all”, without segregation in education, remains a key challenge. The ETUCE agrees with the Commission’s emphasis on early school leaving as well as with its proposal to maintain the existing benchmark of *early school leavers*. It is of vital importance to keep focus on early school leavers, yet in the light of the slight improvements achieved in this area, alternative methods, other than benchmarking, might be relevant. To reduce early school leaving, the ETUCE believes that it is necessary to allocate more financial resources to creating new and inspiring learning environments that foster creativity and incentives to further learning. In addition, counselling and other support measures are vital to make the learning environment more attractive and to retain pupils in schools. The ETUCE proposes that the Commission underlines the need for Member States to make a stronger commitment to the development of national action plans to reduce early school leaving.

As early school leaving is often caused by the negative impact of pupil’s socio-economic background, particular attention should be paid to those in a disadvantaged situation. . The ETUCE supports a holistic focus on all children at risk: pupils with special needs, those having a migrant, a minority or a weak socio-economic background. The use of target-setting directed at the individual learners’ needs is to be adopted. However, addressing this issue relies on more than just school policies and it must include innovative and flexible teaching methods, support measures, and cooperation between schools, home and the local community. The ETUCE stresses the need for a cooperation frame on migrant children to enhance their opportunities in education. This requires more suitable means to motivate national governments to become further proactive on migrant and other socio-disadvantaged children’s integration in the education system. The relevance of establishing indicators on educational integration of migrant student should be explored by the OMC.<sup>8</sup>

The ETUCE supports that Early Childhood Education (ECE)<sup>9</sup> is highlighted as a crucial factor for successful educational achievements and lifelong learning of all pupils. The ETUCE advocates that the wording is kept on early childhood education and that the term pre-school education is excluded from the Communication, due to the fact that not all Member States have early pre-school education. A new benchmark on participation in *Pre-primary education* for at least 90% of young children (from 4 years old) with reference to the Barcelona Targets must not be seen as a question of increasing the availability of childcare only. In the opinion of the ETUCE, a high quality ECE is vital and it must be characterised by a balance between education and care. The accessibility to an ECE free of charge should be emphasised and should concern all young children rather than only children from 4 years old.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> See ETUCE statement on “the EU Commission Communication: *Delivering on the Modernisation Agenda for Universities*”: Education, research and innovation

<sup>8</sup> See ETUCE Statement on the European Commission’s Green Paper “Migration and Mobility: challenges and opportunities for EU education systems” (November 2008) p. 6

<sup>9</sup> ETUCE defines ECE as education taking place before compulsory education, including kindergartens, nurseries, pre-school classes, childcare centres and other similar institutions.

<sup>10</sup> See ETUCE response to the European Commission’s second stage of consultation of the European Social Partners on reconciliation of professional, private and family life, July 2007.

## **Vocational Education and Training**

The ETUCE is concerned about the fact that the role of vocational education and training is not included in the Communication. The CEDEFOP's forecast of future skills needs, published in February 2008, stated that half of the new jobs will require vocational qualifications as there will be fewer low skilled jobs in the future. Occupational mobility and restructuring of sectors together with demography will put pressure on adult learning and continuous vocational training systems to meet the constantly changing needs of European people at labour markets.

This should be reflected in the European co-operation in education and training and also in benchmarks and indicators. Vocational education and training needs additional publicity and a special focus because of its two-folded mission: the inclusion of all and the development of excellence in skills. The Copenhagen process of vocational education training has been a success in raising the profile and status of vocational education and training and has led to new EU measures.<sup>11</sup> However, the Copenhagen process should create better links between the different qualification systems both at the EU level and at a national level. Continuing to implement ECVET and EQARF can address these issues.

The ETUCE agrees with the overall recommendation on developing clear and diverse pathways through VET to further learning and employment, but it is unfortunate that the Communication focuses on the years 2009-2010. For the next decade, main challenges should be identified from the developments in the European labour markets without tailoring VET provision too narrowly based on these immediate labour market needs. This could reduce the diversity and flexibility of the VET systems in Europe, which the ETUCE finds to be of utmost importance.<sup>12</sup>

## **The working methods in the Open Method of Coordination**

The current Open Method of Coordination (OMC) has proved to be inefficient in a number of areas. The progress in achieving the current benchmarks has been limited and not all national governments and teacher unions have felt a direct impact of the OMC on the national political agendas. Moreover, there is a lack of transparency taking place under this method. The ETUCE therefore stresses the following aspects which should be taken into account in the definition of a new strategic framework:

- *Involving social partners at national level*
- *Strengthening the ETCEG's role as a coordinating body*
- *Establishing a more structured dialogue and evaluation on the PLA and clusters*
- *Better reporting – social partners as a key factor*

### **Involving social partners at a national level**

The future OMC must be inclusive and agenda-setting at a national level. The democratic aspect of the process must be stressed in order to prevent the exclusion of the social partners at national level. The ETUCE believes that the future OMC should anchor itself in a real social dialogue and that more concrete measures should be taken so that policy

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<sup>11</sup> Such as the EQF principles for the validation of non-formal and informal learning, the Europass and the proposed European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training.

<sup>12</sup> See also ETUCE statement on "New Skills for New Jobs" January 2009 and ETUCE Statement on "Efficiency and Equity in European Education and Training Systems 2006"

makers, national stakeholders and social partners can more easily evaluate the process at the national level.

A future work programme should stress the need to involve social partners at the national level. These parties should get involved through consultations on the elaboration of the national progress reports and on the various proposals for EU recommendations and consultations prior to meetings of the Education Council.

### **Strengthening the ETCG's role as a coordinating body**

The ETUCE supports increasingly coherent and coordinated working methods that include the different education and training sectors which commonly contribute to the overall strategic priorities set by the Council. Since 2005, the Education and Training 2010 Coordination Group (ETCG) has been supporting and coordinating the operational management and implementation of "education and training 2010", including not only members from all the participating countries but also the European social partners. The ETUCE, together with ETUC, are representing the trade-unions at EU level in the ETCG. The ETUCE stresses that the ETCG should play a vital role in improving the implementation and efficiency of the education and training policy measures. It is crucial that not only member states but also social partners play a fundamental role in the education and training policy area at EU level, by participating in the process. Therefore, the ETCG must be maintained, in order to keep coherence in the overall coordination of the work programmes. Furthermore, its role in monitoring and advising the Commission on the process should be strengthened!

The ETUCE believes that the desire to enhance the strategic role of the High Level Group in steering the OMC, as a means to achieve better coordination across education and training sectors and improve national ownership should not be to the detriment of the relevant social partners' participation in the OMC. Maintaining the existence of the ETCG is therefore crucial.

### **Establishing a more structured dialogue and evaluation on the results on PLAs and clusters**

The work and outcome of the EU Peer Learning Activities (PLA) has not been efficient. The ETUCE agrees that the PLA can be a good method of sharing knowledge across EU in education and training. To improve the work of the PLA, a clear mandate, coordination and aim is crucial. Currently the most critical issue has, been the lack of information about the work in the PLA and clusters. To increase their efficiency, the dissemination of the PLAs outcome is essential. The PLA as well as of other cluster activities, should be enhanced by support systems that could distribute the knowledge gathered to the national and local level. The activities in the clusters as well as the knowledge-sharing between the national participants in the PLAs should reach *all* relevant stakeholders in the education sector and not just the national policy makers and ministers. The ETUCE stresses that the social partners should be more closely involved in the work of the EU Peer Learning Activities (PLA), both in the home country and at the EU level (as a non-governmental expert). A more structured dialogue and evaluation on the results from the PLA and other clusters' in the Member States is also required and the Commission should emphasise this. The ETUCE is concerned that the Communication does not mention any funding in relation to enhance mutual learning and PLA.

### **Better reporting – social partners as a key factor**

For the ETUCE it is crucial that biennially national progress reports reflect the results of policies; point out the current challenges and consist of more than good intentions.

Though ground could be gained through a more individual and detailed focus on each country's specific situation, it is vital that the recommendations remain comprehensive to fulfil their broad purpose in society rather than to solely reflect country specific priorities or the immediate demands of the labour market. The different reporting exercises made at EU level within the education and training work programme should primarily be based on national evaluations. These reports should therefore be seen as an opportunity for national influence as the reports ensure that Member States' views are taken into account. In these national evaluations, the relationship to the stakeholders is crucial. A more systematic consultation of teachers' unions and other stakeholders in the elaboration of the national reports would enhance the reports in terms of describing the current challenges. This would be a way to include the practitioners and other partners' perspective on education and be a token of good governance.

The ETUCE notices that progress toward achieving the education and training 2010 benchmarks has been inadequate and is concerned that the proposal of ten new benchmarks will only weaken the efforts to achieve the existing benchmarks. The ETUCE does believe that indicators and benchmarks can be means to compare and exchange knowledge between Member States, but the number of benchmarks should be limited. In this context, it must be noted that the areas of VET and Migration are missing from the proposed benchmarks. To reach the benchmarks, the commitment of the member states is fundamental.

On several occasions the ETUCE and its member organisations have criticised the hesitation of the Member States in carrying out national plans of action within these areas. It is evident that priority areas and benchmarks in education and training, defined at EU level, are without any value if the Member States do not commit themselves sufficiently to achieve them. The ETUCE therefore stresses that more must be done to pressure the Member States, to reach the benchmarks by developing national action plans within these areas. The inclusion of the social partners is fundamental in this process.

Overall, the ETUCE expresses concern that the need both to gain national ownership of the Education and Training Process and to preserve direct influence of the social partners in the future is being underestimated.