



ETUCE Statement on the Communication from the Commission:

Modernising education and training: a vital contribution to prosperity and social cohesion in Europe – Draft Joint 2006 progress report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the “Education and Training 2010 work programme”¹

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ETUCE welcomes recommendations on involvement of social partners

In response to the draft Joint 2006 progress report on the implementation of the Education and Training 2010 work programme, ETUCE first of all welcomes the approach taken in the 2006 report with regard to the dual role of education and training, crucial to both economic and social policy objectives of society. In comparison to the economic focus in the mid-term review of the Lisbon Strategy, the focus of the 2006 report on ‘Education and Training 2010’ signifies a more balanced approach.

In addition, ETUCE particularly welcomes the recommendation that mechanisms for coordinating the implementation of the work programme at national level are in place in all countries by 2008, involving especially the social partners.² The involvement of teachers’ unions at national level in both the preparatory, decision-making, and implementation phases of initiatives within ‘Education and Training 2010’ are of crucial importance for the success of the work programme. Until now however, only in very few countries have teachers’ unions been consulted on a regular basis on the Education and Training 2010 process. ETUCE strongly calls on governments to follow-up on the 2006 report’s recommendation on involvement of social partners.

In terms of social partner participation in the process, ETUCE welcomes the setting up in 2005 of the Education & Training 2010 Coordination Group (ETCG) with the European Social Partners as members, including ETUCE. ETUCE has for several years recommended the establishment of such a coordination group.

ETUCE has previously highlighted the lack of attention to the pre-school area in the “Education & Training 2010” process,³ and thus particularly welcomes the report’s attention to the “*paramount importance*” of investment in the pre-school area and the recognition of the role of pre-school education in preventing social exclusion.⁴

Promote continuous professional development for teachers, improve working conditions, and increase investments in education

ETUCE notes that the 2006 report emphasises that continuous professional development (CPD) of teachers remains a real challenge; ETUCE calls on governments to work with ETUCE member organisations in ensuring teachers’ continuous professional development, and to make use of the policy guidelines currently being developed in the context of the *ETUCE Europe Needs Teachers Campaign*. Launched

¹ COM(2005)549, 10 November 2005. Corrigendum: COM5(2005)549final/2, 30 November 2005.

² Ibid, p. 12.

³ ETUCE Council Recommendations, 2004.

⁴ COM5(2005)549final/2., p. 11.

in 2004, the ETUCE campaign *Europe Needs Teachers* sets the focus on improving initial teacher education, on recruiting and retaining a sufficient number of qualified teachers to maintain and improve the quality of the teaching profession, and on ensuring professional development as an integrated part of the teaching profession.

ETUCE notes that improving the education of teachers and trainers is among the top priorities which national progress reports identified as means of raising the quality of education systems.⁵ The annex to the report reveals, however, that very few countries “*are explicit on the challenges of raising the status or rewards of teaching as a measure to respond to the ageing professional profile*” (annex, p. 29). ETUCE emphasises that in addition to improving the education of teachers, raising the standards of teachers’ working conditions and pay levels are crucial to raising the performance of the educational system as a whole.

With regard to investment in education, ETUCE reiterates its demand made in the ETUCE position on the mid-term review of the Lisbon Strategy: Increased governmental investments in education are highly necessary. The 2006 report shows that five countries spend less than 4% of GDP on education, and an additional four spend just above 4%.⁶ Only little progress is being made in increasing public expenditure on education, from an EU average of 4.9% in 2000 to 5.2% in 2002. In addition, the report underlines that there is no progress in employers’ investment in education and little evidence of governmental incentives to promote this.

ETUCE warns against specific recommendations in the report regarding the means of raising investments and Public-Private Partnerships

ETUCE highlights that the draft 2006 report is setting out risky recommendations regarding the means of increasing investment. On the one hand, the Communication calls for increased private investment in education through tuition fees or other forms of raising private funding of education. On the other hand, the annex to the Communication highlights that the national reports’ deliberation on “*private supply of education services or reforming funding mechanisms, rarely reflect on the effects these may have on equity*” (p. 20). The annex points out that it is only discussions of fee charging for higher education students that are accompanied by “*consideration of effects on equity and measures to mitigate these, such as grants and loans for those from less affluent families*” (p. 20). ETUCE strongly emphasises that it is a public responsibility of governments to fund and to ensure equal access to quality public education for all citizens.

In addition, ETUCE emphasises that the Communication’s recommendations regarding ‘learning partnerships’ are highly problematic (“*Priority should be given to improving governance through learning partnerships, especially at regional and local levels, as a means of sharing responsibilities and costs between the relevant actors (institutions, public authorities, social partners, enterprises, community organisations, etc.*”, p. 11). 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 and ensure equal access to education. Nor should public-private partnerships lead to transfer of employees from the public sector to the

⁵ Annex, p. 13.

⁶ Communication, p. 26.

private sector. 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.

More needs to be done to ensure involvement of social partners at national level

With regard to consultation and involvement of social partners at national level, ETUCE stresses that in the majority of the 32 countries involved in “Education & Training 2010”, there was a complete lack of consultation of teachers’ trade unions in advance of governments’ submission of national progress reports to the Commission in the spring of 2005. In some countries, governments even failed to inform the Parliamentary education committee of the reporting exercise, in other countries governments were reluctant to provide the national report upon request from teachers’ unions after submission to the Commission.

Furthermore, ETUCE emphasises that the first wave of clusters of peer learning activities launched in 2005 have not been successful in involving teachers’ unions in the study visits that have taken place so far at national level in four countries. ETUCE is aware that the Commission insists that the national authorities organising the peer learning activities involve social partners of the host country. ETUCE strongly encourages the Commission and the Council to take further steps to ensure social partner involvement, including by inviting representatives of European Social Partners to take part in the planning phase of the peer learning activities, such as for example is the procedure for peer learning activities within VET in the context of the Leonardo da Vinci programme.

Speed up efforts to ensure lifelong learning and improve educational attainment levels

With regard to the five EU Benchmarks in the area of education, the 2006 progress report shows no significant progress in completion rates for upper secondary education, no improvements in reducing the percentage of low achievers in reading, and only slight improvements in reducing the number of early school leavers. ETUCE reminds that while it is evident that these three benchmarks will not be reached by 2010, efforts to make progress in these areas are of paramount importance for ensuring a sustainable and inclusive European society. Even though some of the benchmarks are linked to the themes of the planned Peer Learning Activities in 2006, the question of how these benchmarks link in with the objectives of the Education and Training 2010 process as a whole, should be given further consideration. Regarding the benchmark concerning participation rates in lifelong learning, ETUCE welcomes the 2006 report’s call for Member States to increase their efforts to set in place coherent and comprehensive lifelong learning strategies by 2006, as agreed by the European Council in 2003.