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**ETUCE statement
on the report of the Employment Taskforce chaired by Wim Kok:
"Jobs Jobs Jobs: Creating more employment in Europe"**

The European Council held in Brussels in March 2003 decided to step up efforts to implement the European Employment Strategy. A taskforce, headed by Wim Kok, was established to identify crucial areas for action. The report was published in November 2003 and forms the basis of the Joint Commission/Council Employment Report submitted to the 2004 Spring European Council.

Key role for education

Chapter 4 in the report concerns investment in human capital and lifelong learning, but education in broad terms is referred to several times throughout the report. ETUCE notes that one of the key objectives of the report is to set out the possibilities for creating a European labour market which also integrates the most disadvantaged groups in the Member States. ETUCE agrees that an intensive effort in the field of education is a prerequisite for ensuring that large groups of people are not detached from the labour market. Therefore, ETUCE also agrees that a high level of educational attainment for all is needed to enhance welfare and economic growth. The key task will be to secure that *everyone* acquires the necessary qualifications and competences, and that these are updated throughout working life.

Country-specific messages

The main issues in chapter 4 bear a close resemblance to the European Commission's report on the state of progress made in the Lisbon Strategy. Hence the Wim Kok report also takes a critical stand towards the overall efforts of the Member States in the field of education. And this report also emphasises that the Lisbon Strategy's demand to increase investment in education has not been adequately met. However, ETUCE notes that the Wim Kok report, contrary to the Commission's report, identifies the individual countries and the actions they have undertaken. The report states which countries have undertaken the necessary measures in the individual areas as well as which countries are under-performing. ETUCE was critical of the Commission report's method of basing assessments on an average of the performance of the EU as a whole. In the view of ETUCE, it is far more fruitful and productive for the further work that the Wim Kok report offers concrete suggestions on the specific areas in which the individual Member States should focus their efforts. At the same time, ETUCE stresses the importance of the Member States' competence in the field of education.

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The social responsibility of employers

The report points out a number of well-known problems in education. ETUCE agrees that there is a continuous need to focus attention on the group of young people who leave school early with only lower secondary education. In the future, this problem will become even greater as developments in the European labour market signal that there will be fewer and fewer unskilled jobs. Many of these disadvantaged citizens have at some point enrolled in education or training, but have dropped out. This group is characterized by having widely different obstacles: social problems, low level of literacy, general learning disabilities, etc. There is thus a need for intensive efforts from Member States in the form of manageable and module-structured education and vocational training, and education and vocational training involving a large degree of personal and continuous guidance. ETUCE agrees with the report's view that there is a general need to increase efforts to provide guidance, organised so that it is easily accessible for the individual citizen. However, in relation to the problem of early school leavers, the social responsibility of the employers should be stressed. Employers – public as well as private – cannot expect public authorities alone to undertake to provide opportunities for the weakest groups to obtain the skills needed. An inclusive labour market in which, among other things, in-service training is available to all young people is a prerequisite for growth and welfare.

Increasing investment in research

ETUCE agrees that increased investment in research is needed. Moreover, equal access to tertiary education and postgraduate research study is essential for the recruitment and professional development of the most talented.

Lifelong learning

In relation to lifelong learning, ETUCE notes that the report emphasises the joint responsibility for the individual citizen's attainment of qualifications and development of competences. Governments, employers and the individual worker share the responsibility for continuously renewing and updating the individual's skills and competences. In general, ETUCE accepts this view, but it should be emphasised that, in principle, ETUCE believes it is the responsibility of employers to secure access to lifelong learning for employees. Similarly, ETUCE believes that employers hold the responsibility for financing the continuing training of their workforce. However, in cases of further education as such, in which employees upgrade their qualifications and career prospects in terms of employment and salary, co-financing can be appropriate. This question should, moreover, be settled and regulated through collective bargaining among the parties of the labour market and *not* through legislation. Governments, however, have a joint responsibility to lay the foundations for making lifelong learning accessible to all.

Wage classification systems

ETUCE notes that, in addition to employment and educational policy reviews and recommendations, the report also contains suggestions for a changed wage classification system, in which seniority-based wage structures are replaced by wage structures based on qualifications. ETUCE highlights the contradiction between this suggestion and the well-known problem to which the report draws attention, namely

that those who have acquired the highest level of initial education are also the ones most liable to have access to continuing training. Possible agreements on increasing the use of wage structures based on qualifications must therefore depend on actual equal access for all to lifelong learning. Otherwise, it will result in additional inequality among the workforce.

Best practice

The report contains a number of examples of “best practice”. In the view of ETUCE, this method is exemplary in demonstrating how cooperation in the field of education in the EU should be carried out, namely through exchanging experiences and receiving mutual inspiration for problem solving at national level. If the ambitious goals of the Lisbon Strategy are to be achieved, it is imperative that Member States establish a common knowledge fund and draw benefit from previous experiences through the Open Method of Coordination.