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ETUCE

European Trade Union Committee for Education EI European Region

ETUCE views on the “A New Skills Agenda for Europe” of the European Commission

EUROPEAN REGION-
ETUCE

President

Christine BLOWER

Vice-Presidents

Odile CORDELIER
Walter DRESSCHER
Paula ENGWALL
Andreas KELLER
Galina MERKULOVA
Branimir STRUKELJ

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Following the consultation of *DG Employment of the European Commission* with social partners on 20-21 January, ETUCE, which represents 132 teachers' trade unions in 45 countries, hereby would like to express the views of the teacher trade unions on the forthcoming initiative of the Commission on skills. We welcome the preliminary consultation of the European Commission with various social partner organisations on “A New Skills Agenda for Europe”, to be launched in May 2016. Our views are of the professionals of the education sector and are additional ones to the position of ETUC, which we fully support. Our position was consulted with ETUCE member organisations¹.



5, Bd du Roi Albert II, 9th
1210 Brussels, Belgium
Tel +32 2 224 06 91/92
Fax +32 2 224 06 94
secretariat@csee-etuice.org
<http://www.csee-etuice.org>

European Director

Martin RØMER

Treasurer

Mike JENNINGS

The role of teachers

Since the new Commission's initiative would deal with improving provision of skills, we strongly believe that it should consider the role of teachers and trainers in this process. We would like to recall the [Council Conclusions on effective teacher education](#) adopted by the Education Council of the European Union on 20 May 2014, which rightly identifies factors having impact on the teachers and trainers and their education, such as requirements of **new skills and new technological development**.

Furthermore, the European Commission, when speaking about skills development, should take into consideration the **status and working environment** of teachers and trainers and reasons which lead, for example to shortages in the education sector and difficulties on recruitment and retention, among others, also of the VET teachers and trainers.

ETUCE member organisations have identified several national challenges teachers and trainers in all education sectors face day by day which obviously derived from the fact that **teacher education was affected by the economic and financial crisis**².

¹ Special thanks for the input from AoB (NL), DLI (DK), OAJ (FI), FENPROF (PT), FLESTU (LT), Lararförbundet (SE), Utdanningsforbundet (NO), UCU (UK)

² ETUCE ACTION AND CAMPAIGN FRAMEWORK ON THE ECONOMIC CRISIS 2012 Analysis of the mini survey: http://etuice.homestead.com/crisis/crisis_survey/minisurvey_-_etuice_action_and_campaign_framework_on_the_economic_crisis_final_29.3.12.pdf

ETUCE Analysis of a mini-survey on the impact of the economic crisis on teacher education in the European Union, 2012

http://etuice.homestead.com/Crisis/Crisis_survey/Results_of_ETUCE_Minisurvey_on_Crisis_effecting_teacher_education.pdf

ETUCE SURVEY: The continued impact of the crisis on teachers in Europe, 2013

http://etuice.homestead.com/Policies/6.e.EN_Survey_Analysis_CONTINUED_IMPACT_OF_THE_CRISIS_ON_TEACHERS_IN_EUROPE_2_-Layouted.pdf

While we welcome and support the 5th priority of the [Riga Conclusions 2015 on a New Set of Medium-term Deliverables in the Field of VET for the Period of 2015-2020](#), which puts special emphasis on initial and continuous training of VET teachers and trainers, we think the new Commission's proposal should consider that also other factors related to teachers and trainers have enormous impact on **high quality skills provision and on its societal and economic return in Europe**. ETUCE surveys³ proved that there is a destructive effect of the crisis on the teachers' personal and professional well-being, concerning their **salary, working conditions, initial education and continuous professional development**. Besides of focusing on professional training to VET teachers and trainers following the Riga Conclusions, we ask that the new Commission's initiative should propose solutions on how to lift up barriers in front of **quality teaching to improve the work of teachers and trainers in Europe for better skills development**.

The role of education

Overall, our member organisations assessed the [Final ET2020 Report](#) positively and underlined that teacher trade unions had a crucial role in securing the provision of quality education in difficult and **challenging circumstances** such as the economic and financial crisis. We welcomed the fact that the monitoring of the [Paris Declaration](#) (March 2015) is a key priority in the upcoming work cycle. The education sector is an important area in promoting active citizenship and common values on freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination, which are essential also to prepare learners to an inclusive labour market. The intentions of the Paris Declaration are in good consistency with the eight key competences, including social competences and citizen competences.

In this context we are dissatisfied with the Commission's note on the new skills initiative, firstly because it seems ignoring the **achievements of ET2020, including its focus on the Paris Declaration**; secondly because it will focus only on skills but not on all the elements of education leading to **qualifications**, such as **knowledge, skills, competences, attitude and behaviour**; furthermore, because it sees the **full education sector** only from the perspective of vocational education and training; and finally because it considers education a sector which should react and be reformed following the **immediate needs of the labour market**.

We ask the Commission to reconsider its views and the way of **approaching "education"** as a whole in light with **"vocational education and training"**, which later one is a fragmented sector and historically is much closer to the labour market. Improving quality and esteem of vocational education and training is essential and solid basis of knowledge, skills and competences should be provided to all students and learners in initial and continuous VET to be improved thorough lifetime. European countries should develop more VET at level 5 in EQF and beyond (**"higher VET/tertiary VET"**) and to ensure that VET leads both to higher

³ ETUCE Analysis of a mini-survey on the impact of the economic crisis on teacher education in the European Union, 2012
http://etuce.homestead.com/Crisis/Crisis_survey/Results_of_ETUCE_Minisurvey_on_Crisis_effecting_teacher_education_.pdf

education and labour market. This should be an important objective of the Commission's new initiative.

General education should provide the full basis of knowledge, skills and competences which should be further improved during life in and beyond the labour market. Designing national curricula is the national governments' responsibility in cooperation with teacher trade unions and creating school curricula is a part of the teachers' job. This is why we do not support the Commission's idea of **education and business partnership** and that employers/businesses should **design curricula**. Instead, better description of qualifications based on **learning outcomes** (knowledge, skills, competences) and more training to teachers to teach according to these learning outcomes and in light of preparing the students for civic life and labour market equally should be supported. We ask to respect effective involvement of the teacher unions in **national social dialogue structures**, furthermore we ask to respect the **autonomy of education sector** from the always changing business sector.

Concerning VET, as ETUCE has been one of the pledging organisations to support the [European Alliance for Apprenticeship](#), we support improving **apprenticeship** in Europe and involvement of VET teachers and VET school-based trainers into company-based teachers' training. Companies have a very important role in providing apprenticeship places and in cooperating with VET schools. Education systems should support better **cooperation between VET schools and companies** as companies have the latest knowledge on the sectoral innovations and new technical equipment what VET teachers and VET students should learn about. At the same time, ministries and national social partners should keep the full responsibility for the curricula and maintenance of the VET schools.

Concerning **European Qualifications Framework**, we do not agree to use it as a political tool. Involvement of teacher trade unions in the design of National Qualification Frameworks is still to be improved to achieve that EQF remain a voluntary tool for better comparison and transparency on education systems. As education is under the subsidiarity principle of the EU, we would like to underline that further developments of EQF should not go beyond this principle, e.g. towards recognition of individual degrees.

International mobility has an essential role in implementing the goals of the Paris Declaration, but the Commission's note on the new Skills Agenda considers mobility from the perspective of employability only.

We strongly believe that the increasing number of asylum seekers and the recent **refugee crisis** in Europe should be taken into consideration in the Commission's initiative. The text should include the need for **sustainable and quality educational support** to young and adult migrants and refugees via improved focus on training and recruitment of teachers in all education sectors.

The new Commission's initiative should also provide solutions to decrease high number of **NEETs, early school leavers, socio-economically disadvantaged young and adult learners**, including those who are excluded based on race, gender, nationality, age, etc., and how to support schools and teachers to achieve this goal.

Sustainable investment

More influence of businesses in education would affect the autonomy of the schools and teachers and would impact sufficient, predictable and sustainable investment to the sector. Furthermore, in the recent years we experienced some negative impact on schools in several educational sectors which had to close following the bankruptcy of companies which owned / maintained them. Involvement of businesses in education should not lead in any way to **privatisation and/or commercialisation of education services**. Thus, we ask the European Union institutions to continue advocating sustainable public support for public education.

After several years of continuous demands to EU Member states to bring down public debt to accomplish fiscal consolidation, it is a fact that the education sector as a whole in Europe is currently under strain due to **unprecedented cuts in public funding**. The EU member states increasingly privatize potentially profitable education services, thus jeopardizing free access to quality education for all⁴.

Therefore, we ask the European Commission to encourage governments in the new initiative to take all the necessary measures to ensure they have sufficient revenue to invest in education in order to ensure the provision of **high quality public education for all**, including investment in teachers' training. Governments and public authorities, in cooperation with social partners should take a holistic view on investment in education, and oversee the design and impact of education budget in order to guarantee that resources meet the most marginalised and those coming from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, often of migrant origin. ETUCE recalls that the **investment capacity of today's public education will also determine the quality of jobs**, qualification of workers, social well-being and democratic participation in society of citizens, thus having potentially a significant effect on economic growth in Europe and on the vital reduction of social inequalities.

When talking on VET, it is essential to note that it is a fragmented sector, including public and private providers and can be provided to young people in initial education and adults and workers in CVET. When the Commission proposes "**performance-based funding in VET**" to improve quality of provision, we think that public initial VET is also included and thus, we are not in favour of this proposal. The Commission needs to argue more positively in favour of **high quality public education** as the basis for providing the opportunity to all children and young people to learn, regardless of their socio-economic background. Equity must be the hallmark of education quality. This twin mission cannot be left to market forces and the Commission's initiative should focus on arguing for a major role for government in **securing high-quality public education for all** as the basis for an inclusive, fair and democratic society.

⁴ See [ETUCE Position on Investment Plan for Europe, December 2014](#)

Performance-based funding to initial public VET schools may create unequal funding to schools and inequality among the students and schools. VET financing strategy should not be based on a wrong, e.g. on one size fits all and penalising approach. There are several negative examples of funding of schools and universities based on not well established indicators, which, instead of improvement, had negative impact on the achievement of students and teaching.

Performance-based funding systems rarely take into account the **different micro-economic environment of schools**, for example poverty rate, the existence of local industries, qualification level of parents and rate of low-skilled parents, unemployment rate of parents, distance from and access to schools, etc., which have also impact on the performance of students, thus, of the VET schools.

Considering the fact that in many countries' initial VET is also for students under compulsory age of education attainment, it should be considered that **education is a human right** and all should deserve high quality education which competition between schools for funding should not impact.

- **FENPROF**, a **Portuguese** teacher union reported that all public schools in Portugal (primary, secondary and VET also) that achieve better results (students' outcomes, students' marks in national examinations, success in decreasing school dropout) have the right to more credit hours, to provide more support for students, to hire more teachers or to strengthen curriculum in certain subjects. However, this measure excludes the schools who are most in need of providing support lessons for their students and this system favors those who already have good results and come from more advantaged backgrounds. It is a measure and a practice that discriminates negatively thousands of students who has also equal right to a quality public education.
- In **Finland** the performance-based funding for VET schools at the moment is 3%. **OAJ**, a Finnish teacher union representing 120.000 teachers sees this problematic as the VET providers are not willing to take students who are low achievers because they might not graduate and thus the VET provider would not receive the extra performance-based fund. This means that low-skilled students face more challenges. Additionally, students who want to change the subject or field of studies/school, they cannot do it because the provider insists keeping the student to ensure the performance-based funding. Furthermore, there is a risk that a student, who does not have the skills required, gets a diploma only because the provider then receives the performance-based funding. This can contribute that providers could issue "low quality diplomas" instead of focusing on providing quality education with quality equipment.
- A **UK** teacher union, **UCU** have similar experiences on the competence-based VET system. They reported that this system has a negative impact on equal opportunities as providers are reluctant to recruit learners who had perceived mental and/or physical disabilities as it might cost more to teach and train such learners. Performance-based funding had a negative impact on providers up-to-date equipment and plant as the rate of performance-based funding only covered teaching/training in the UK. There was a tendency to recruit learners who would pass easily the programme so as to maximise the amount of performance-based

funding. A particular disadvantage in English performance-based funding for VET was that it was only paid out on successful completion of the whole programme, which was particularly disadvantageous where qualifications were made up of units. So a learner might achieve in a half the units in the qualification, but the provider would not gain the funding. Additionally, the introduction of performance-based funding restricted the amount of curriculum development by providers as they became risk averse and did not develop new programmes which might initially have lower pass rates.

- **AoB, a Dutch education trade union** reported us that in the Netherlands 20% of the regular national funding of VET providers is based on an indicator (the rate of early school leaving) to allocate performance based additional funding for improvement. The government plans introducing two additional indicators: from 2016 VET providers will be rewarded if they succeed better than in previous years and from 2017 also based on quality of work-based learning. The AoB is against these new indicators because the students and teachers have no say in how to achieve these goals and in how lump-sum funding is allocated to achieve these goals. They should be in a position to influence the policy of the school otherwise these goals will not be achieved. The indicators mean that an even more significant part of the funding for VET becomes uncertain. This will lead to more temporary contracts for teachers, less continuity in teams of teachers and therefore a deterioration in the quality of teaching. This way the goals will not be achieved.

Also indicator on yearly improvement of school outcomes will lead to an enormous bureaucratic burden, because there will be many new facts about every student that should be administrated and evaluated. There is no funding for all these new administrative tasks in the schools. Indicator on funding based on work-based / company-based learning is very dependent on the state of the economy. Conjectural fluctuations and regional differences will have more influence on the outcome than the policy of the school. So AoB has serious questions too about the objectivity of this indicator.

- **Danish union of VET teachers, Uddannelsesforbundet and Danish Teacher Trade Union (DLI)**, who represent 175.000 educators, reported that Danish vocational education and training programmes (I-VET) are alternating between practical training in a company and school-based training. The school-based part of the vocational education and training programmes is financed by the state on the basis of a “taxameter system” (paid per student) based on e.g. completion rate. According to the unions, VET schools should be provided with the same budget regardless whether the students complete the education or get a job immediately after graduation. For example, in the field of construction work, employment rate is directly dependent on (often variable) market conditions, thus financing of VET schools based on the employment rate of graduates would be problematic. Such incentives accommodate simultaneously the danger that educational institutions will have an interest mainly to attract the best students with good educational outcomes / employment prospects.

Instead of actual performance based incentives, more funding should be available based on “social taxameter” provided to schools/regions with many socio-economically disadvantaged students, including also migrants and refugees, who face challenges in education.

All in all, instead of performance-based funding, teachers' unions suggest **need-based funding for VET schools** which tackle with more socio-economically disadvantaged students, and also with migrants and refugees, and they need to invest more to extra hours of teachers for individualized learning, more and modern ICT tools in teaching, psychologist, guidance and career advisors and extra educational support personnel.

Teacher unions in social dialogue

We suggest that Commission's initiative should pay more attention on the importance of **social dialogue**. While effective social dialogue remains the key for the development of successful educational reforms, unfortunately, several teacher trade unions reported that they have generally not been consulted on key education reforms linked to the implementation of ET2020 goals. We ask to suggest to the governments to enhance social dialogue with the unions of professionals of the education sector on how to improve not only skills provision but education and training is general.