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TESTING CONFERENCE ON THE COMMON EUROPEAN PRINCIPLES FOR TEACHER COMPETENCES AND QUALIFICATIONS 20TH - 21ST JUNE 2005

Introduction

1. This report is a summary of discussions at the testing conference on 20-21 June 2005. This conference was organised by the European Commission in order to examine a draft set of European Principles for Teacher Competences and Qualifications prepared by the Commission on the basis of the work undertaken by its Expert Group on improving the education of teachers and trainers. Conference delegates included government representatives with national and regional policy responsibility for teacher and trainer education, staff from teacher education institutions and representatives from European stakeholder organisations.

Background

2. Education and training are essential aspects of the European Union's Lisbon strategy for jobs, growth and social cohesion. The European Council at Lisbon in 2000 called for the adaptation and modernisation of education and training systems within a lifelong learning perspective, and set a target for the EU to become the most dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world by 2010.

3. Within this context the European Council and Commission established the 2010 Education and Training work programme. This included setting up a series of Expert Groups, including one on teachers and trainers which was asked to consider policy practices aimed at improving education and the performance of teachers and trainers in the context of their changing role in society. Initially the Expert Group focused on the competences that were needed by teachers, the policies which could enable teachers to respond to their changing role in society, and the availability of indicators for measuring progress in the area of teachers and trainers.

4. In 2004, the Education Council and the Commission, in their Joint Interim Report to the European Council, reiterated the fact that the success of the Lisbon strategy depended on the availability of high quality teachers and trainers who can implement reforms on the ground. The report gave priority to the development of common European principles for the competences and qualifications needed by teachers and trainers in order to fulfil their changing role in the knowledge-based society.

5. The Expert Group on teachers and trainers responded to this report by making the development of common European principles one of its key priorities. The Expert Group considered how best to reflect the needs of teachers and trainers in one paper. Following considerable discussion and debate, they decided to focus on the work of

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teachers as there were more areas where a common European approach could be productive. Their work, strongly supported and enhanced by a focus group comprising four European experts, led to the production of the first draft of European principles for teachers' competences and qualifications. The testing conference was organised to examine more closely the ideas underpinning this paper.

The testing conference

6. The Commissioner for Education, Training, Culture and Multilingualism, Mr Ján Figel', opened the conference by welcoming delegates and stressing the importance of the teaching profession to the Lisbon strategy. Although progress in the area of education had been better than in many other areas, more needed to be done if the targets in the Joint Interim Report were to be met. These targets for 2010, agreed by Ministers at the Education Council in 2003, are:

- to achieve an average rate of no more than 10% of pupils are early school leavers;
- to increase by at least 15% the total number of graduates in Member states while at the same time reducing the gender imbalance;
- to raise to 85% the proportion of 22 year olds completing upper secondary education;
- to halve the percentage of low-achieving 15-year olds in reading, mathematical and scientific literacy; and
- to raise the average participation of the adult working population in lifelong learning to at least 12.5%¹.

7. The conference focused on teachers², rather than teachers and trainers, because teaching is a regulated profession where the regional and national state authorities have a significant role and considerable influence. Whilst in many countries there is an overlap to the work of teachers and trainers, there are also significant differences especially for those teachers who work with pupils in primary schools and pre-school settings. The conference reflected the discussions of the Expert Group by concentrating on the work of teachers.

8. The development of common European principles for teacher education should provide an impetus for policy reforms at a national or regional level. These principles recognise the important role teachers play in contributing to the economic and cultural aspects of a knowledge-based society. They also help to foster individuals' employability, and prepare young people to be active citizens and autonomous lifelong learners. Although much is expected of teachers, they cannot be expected to bear these responsibilities on their own. High quality initial and continuing teacher education is needed throughout Europe to provide teachers with the skills and qualifications they need.

¹ as shown by surveys of the percentage of the population aged 25-64 who have participated in education and training in the prior four weeks (taken from COM (2003) 685 final – Implementation of the Education and Training 2010 programme)

² A *teacher* should be considered as someone who is acknowledged as having the status of a teacher (or equivalent) according to the legislation and the regulations of a given country. The word "equivalent" is needed because in some countries there could be groups of teachers with different titles but holding the same status. In some countries a *teacher* could also work with school-aged pupils and young adults following vocational programmes in schools, colleges, companies or training organisations.

9. The testing conference considered the extent to which there was, or could be, a European consensus on how best to support and train teachers. Recognising the importance of national and regional systems in the field of education, the draft principles paper aims to have an impact on the environment and context within which teachers work. The paper should help policy makers examine and reflect upon their own system in order to identify what else could be done to support teachers' education and training.

10. **General comments on the conference paper.** The testing conference, organised around a series of concurrent workshops, discussed the draft principles and recommendations in the paper.

11. There was widespread agreement that a paper aimed at regional and national policy makers would be helpful, particularly if the recommendations were of a general nature in order to provide opportunities for policies to be contextualised and meet the needs of different educational systems. While some delegates would value guidance on how to implement the recommendations e.g. through examples of good practice, others welcomed a paper which offered an overarching framework and context in which policies could be developed. Other delegates suggested that including too much detail would not be helpful and they were keen to keep the ideas focused at a strategic level.

12. For some delegates the paper merely set out the current situation and did not provide sufficient guidance on the next steps. For them the paper was weak and did not go far enough in recommending or promoting change. However, others saw the paper as an attempt to encourage convergence in European systems in order to improve quality. As such they felt the paper's recommendations were not sufficiently flexible and did not adequately recognise the different systems across Europe.

13. There was general agreement that the relationship between teachers' competences and the recommendations should be improved. Some of the ideas in the section on competences had not been reflected fully in the subsequent recommendations. As such some delegates were unsure which parts of the paper were most relevant to their own context. Delegates asked for a closer relationship between the sections of the paper in order to help to clarify its purpose.

14. Many delegates commented on the collection of good ideas in the paper, the potential to use the paper as a checklist for individual countries and regions, and the flexibility to determine which parts of the paper to accept and follow up. Some delegates would welcome greater clarity on the purpose of the paper and guidance on how it will be used, particularly with regard to whether the European Commission intends to monitor the implementation of the recommendations. While some delegates felt the inclusion of indicators or benchmarks would strengthen the document in terms of encouraging implementation, others considered any additional monitoring to be burdensome and felt these issues should be addressed at a later date.

Emerging issues

15. During the discussions on the principles and recommendations a number of emerging issues, focusing on specific aspects of the paper were identified by delegates.

The role of trainers

16. For some delegates the paper's focus on teachers was a lost opportunity as there are significant overlaps between the work of teacher and trainers and everyone's needs could be accommodated in the paper. As some national and regional systems consider teachers and trainers as belonging to one profession, some delegates felt there would be benefits in including trainers.

17. Although much of this discussion was based on the principle of including trainers

in the paper, some specific issues were considered including the need to ensure continuing professional development provides vocational teachers and trainers with opportunities to experience work-based settings in order to update their subject based skills and industrial knowledge. Developing extensive partnerships networks, with private and public sector enterprises, is one way of supporting trainers' vocational development.

18. Informal and non-formal learning opportunities are of particular importance to trainers. Sometimes this involves developing systems which encourage candidates without traditional qualifications to enter the teaching and training profession, at other times it leads to flexible continuing professional development opportunities. In both situations trainers' skills and knowledge of industry should be valued and regularly updated.

Partnership

19. There was general agreement on the importance of retaining partnership as one of the common principles, and a wider definition which included industry, work based learning opportunities and the European perspective should be applied. Many delegates felt it would be useful to strengthen the text surrounding partnership in order to put things on a more formal basis, and set out the roles and responsibilities of each partner. Delegates emphasised the value of partnerships which improved the quality of training.

20. The importance of practical, relevant training was stressed, particularly in order to ensure teachers' and trainee teachers' pedagogic skills were strong. For some the links to schools, and the schools' perspective on partnership needed to be strengthened to ensure that their interests are met. Partners should be expected to demonstrate a continuing commitment to high quality, relevant training, and recognise the roles and responsibilities of all. Partnerships should be based on shared values and support the development of trainee and serving teachers. Sometimes these partnerships will involve the transfer of resources.

The importance of schools as employers

21. There was a widespread view that teaching should be viewed and promoted as a career of choice rather than a last resort. As such, policies need to be developed that support a high status, high reward profession. Some delegates thought more should be said about teachers' working conditions and remuneration in order to enhance the status of teaching and make the profession more attractive.

22. Some delegates felt the needs of schools had been understated and the paper reflected the perspectives of governments and teacher education institutions. Greater consideration should be given to the role of schools as a context for teachers' continuing professional development as training should not only involve attending courses. Delegates emphasised the important role schools have in promoting and actively involving their own staff in lifelong learning. Many delegates thought schools were interested in becoming learning organisations, able and willing to innovate, and ready to help trainee teachers, teachers and other staff develop further their skills.

23. There was some discussion as to whether the paper would help to equip teachers to work in the schools of the future. Many delegates commented that it was important to train and support teachers who are able to respond to uncertainty, in order that they can become agents of change rather than recipients of change. Schools recognise the importance of values, ethics and teachers' attitudes to change, and would want these aspects of professional life to be supported and developed. Training should also help teachers who wish to reflect on their own practice, develop other staff, look outside their immediate school environment and work in teams.

The European dimension

24. Many delegates stressed the importance of locating this work within the context of other European developments such as the Bologna process and the creation of a European Qualifications Framework. There was considerable interest in ensuring that teacher education was available in all three cycles of higher education for those teachers who wished to pursue doctoral level studies. Some delegates raised the question of whether all teachers should be expected to have a second cycle qualification, either to enter teaching or as a result of subsequent professional training and development.

25. There was support for the European dimension in teacher education, particularly as it relates to mobility projects supported by European and national programmes. Mobility programmes were seen as adding value to training programmes as they helped teachers and trainee teachers gain a better understanding of cultural differences. Delegates thought that European mobility, both for professional development and as part of a European project, should be developed within the European Credit Transfer System and the European Higher Education Area. Some delegates wondered if the paper should promote a set of European values associated with the idea of a European citizen.

26. There were a number of specific proposals relating to the European dimension including support for the development of foreign language skills, with some delegates asking for this to be a key competence within the paper. A few delegates proposed the establishment of a European Centre for Teacher Education and others suggested introducing a global dimension to the paper.

Support for teachers and teacher educators

27. Much is being expected from teachers and delegates recognised that this could only be justified if teachers were well supported. There was a debate over who decides what continuing professional development should be available in each education system. Some delegates felt that teachers should have the choice as to what further training to undertake, others thought this was a role for schools as their employers, and others thought the government should make the decisions in partnership with schools and teachers. For some delegates it would be useful to have guidance on this issue.

28. A second key issue related to who should take responsibility for arranging and instigating teachers' further training. Many delegates thought the paper placed too much responsibility on individual teachers at the expense of the school systems within a national structure. Delegates asked for the paper to emphasise the role of national and regional policies in supporting teachers to update their pedagogic skills and subject knowledge. Delegates emphasised that primary and secondary teachers are likely to have different training needs and these needs will change over time.

29. Teachers should be considered as valued professionals who are highly-regarded members of their local community. As such they should be able to influence decisions on their own training. Delegates stressed the importance of leaving pedagogic decisions to teachers and giving them the intellectual freedom to make their own choices in the classroom. It is only in this way that teachers will be encouraged to be innovative and build on their own successful practice.

30. Delegates were keen to include a reference to teacher trainers in the paper as they play an important part in supporting and developing new and serving teachers. Without support for the training providers the overall education system would be weakened.

Opportunities for teachers' lifelong learning

31. Delegates emphasised the important role that schools could and should play in supporting teachers' lifelong learning. Lifelong learning should be relevant to the work of teachers. It should reflect teachers' needs and help them to improve the quality of the school system. It should not be seen as an exercise in gathering credits towards a qualification or award, rather it should be something that develops competence. For some teachers it will have a research focus, for others it will help improve practice and pupils' achievements. National and regional policies should encourage individual teachers to participate in lifelong learning, either through offering incentives or through demonstrating the value of improving and developing their own practice. High quality systems which are tailored to the needs of individual teachers are more likely to encourage participation and lead to improvements in pupils' achievements.

32. Teachers and trainee teachers should be encouraged and supported to recognise change as an important part of all educational systems. This would help to create more demand for continuing professional development and establish lifelong learning as a common experience and expectation of all teachers.

The role of evidence

33. Delegates emphasised the importance of teachers' ability to adapt to new circumstances throughout their career. Skills in research and the use of evidence were thought to help prepare them for frequent changes and new developments in policy and practice. Delegates welcomed the ideas in the paper and considered whether it would be more effective to incorporate aspects of research and the use of evidence in all the common principles rather than as a separate section.

34. For some delegates an interest in using or undertaking research needed to be developed during a teachers' initial training programme. This would prepare teachers to use evidence to inform their own practice and create a greater understanding of the role of research in the development of practice.

A graduate profession

35. Within a context of supporting the principle of a graduate-based profession there were questions about how to value non-formal and informal learning through a system of accrediting prior experiential learning and achievement. Delegates thought this was particularly important for trainers as those without graduate level qualifications would need support to gain professional recognition. Delegates also gave examples of Member States' policies to encourage those with relevant professional experience to enter the teaching profession.

36. Delegates thought it was important to include references to flexible ways of training to be a teacher in order that prior achievement and non-formal qualifications and training could contribute to initial teacher education.

Teachers' mobility

37. There was support for a wide-ranging definition of mobility based on professional development. This could include short-term and long-term teacher and trainee teacher exchanges, bilateral and multilateral arrangements and mobility between different sectors of education. Delegates would like to see obstacles to mobility removed in order for teachers to be able to find the scheme or initiative that best met their needs and circumstances.

38. For some teachers mobility could involve developments outside the education sector as well as exchanges with staff in other European countries. Delegates considered whether references to funding and the availability of resources within a European context should be added to the paper.

Other issues

39. Delegates also asked for the following issues to be included or strengthened in the paper: the role of school support staff, the attractiveness of the teaching profession, the importance of teachers' attitudes and professional values, teachers' readiness to be flexible and open to changing their current practices, the importance of creating an inclusive society which values diversity, and links with other developments in the higher education sector.

Next steps

40. The ideas and recommendations within the text were welcomed and gained widespread support at the testing conference. There have been some minor adjustments to the paper in the light of delegates' comments and discussions. The final version of the paper (Annex A) which forms an integral part of this report includes changes to the sections on:

- trainers – while it was always difficult to draw boundaries between the work of teachers and trainers, the Commission has reviewed the way in which the two professions are defined in the paper;
- lifelong learning – the conference paper had assigned a lot of responsibility to teachers. The final version recognises that it is reasonable for teachers to expect more from schools as employers, and national systems and structures which can support their continuing professional development;
- partnership – it is important to recognise the wide range of partnerships which could benefit trainee and serving teachers. More has been done to acknowledge the value of local, flexible arrangements particularly in the area of vocational education and work based learning.

41. In early 2006, the Commission will table a proposal for a recommendation of the Council and the Parliament on the quality of teacher education which will invite national authorities to use the common principles as a reference point in the development of their policies on teacher education on the understanding that there is a widespread consensus that they are seen as appropriate and relevant to teacher education.