



Common European Principles for Teacher¹ Competences and Qualifications

Introduction

This text presents the common European principles for teacher competences and qualifications, which have been devised in response to the challenges laid down in the Joint Interim Report by the Education Council and the European Commission on progress towards *Education and Training 2010*.² They aim to support the development of new policies at a national or regional level, as appropriate.

Background

Teachers play a crucial role in supporting the learning experience of young people and adult learners. They are key players in how education systems evolve and in the implementation of the reforms which can make the European Union the highest performing knowledge-driven economy in the world by 2010. They recognise that high quality education provides learners with personal fulfilment, better social skills and more diverse employment opportunities. Their profession, which is inspired by values of inclusiveness and the need to nurture the potential of all learners, has a strong influence on society and plays a vital role in advancing human potential and shaping future generations. Therefore, to achieve its ambitious objective, the European Union needs to

¹ In this paper a *teacher* is a person 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 this context teachers could work with pre-primary children, primary and secondary pupils, adult learners, and students on initial vocational educational programmes based in colleges, companies or training organisations.

² *Education and Training 2010 – The Success of the Lisbon Strategy Hinges on Urgent Reforms* was adopted jointly by the Council and the Commission on 26 February 2004. This report recommended that European common references and principles in a number of areas, including the competences and qualifications of teachers and trainers, should be developed ‘as a matter of priority’, p.28.

view the role of teachers and their lifelong learning and career development as key priorities.

Teachers should be equipped to respond to the evolving challenges of the knowledge society, but also to participate actively in it and to prepare learners to be autonomous lifelong learners. They should, therefore, be able to reflect on the processes of learning and teaching through an ongoing engagement with subject knowledge, curriculum content, pedagogy, innovation, research, and the social and cultural dimensions of education. Teacher education needs to be at a higher education level or its equivalent and be supported by strong partnerships between higher education and the institutions where teachers will gain employment.

Teachers also have a key role to play in preparing learners for their role as EU citizens. As such, they need to be able to recognise and respect different cultures, while also being able to identify shared common values. First-hand experience gained in other European countries supports teachers in responding to this challenge. Priority should, therefore, be given to the development of mutual trust and recognition of the competences and qualifications of teachers between member states.

Although teachers play a critical role in society, they cannot act alone. Their own high quality education needs to be supported by coherent national or regional policies that are appropriately resourced. These policies must address initial teacher education and continuing professional development, but must also be set within the broader context of education policy in general. Teacher education has an impact on the quality of learning and, therefore, it needs to be part of national or regional systems that are focused on improving and evaluating the quality of education.

Common Principles

These Common European principles should be seen as a tool to support the development of policies on teacher education at a national or regional level, as appropriate. They should provide an impetus for developing policies which respond to the level and scope of the challenges faced by the European Union and which will enhance the quality and efficiency of education across the Union.

The common European principles are:

- **a graduate profession:** high quality education systems require that all teachers are graduates from higher education institutions or their equivalents. Every teacher should have the opportunity to continue their studies to the highest level in order to develop their teaching competences and to increase their opportunities for progression within the profession. Teacher education is multidisciplinary. This ensures that teachers have: 1) a knowledge of their subject matter; 2) a knowledge of pedagogy; 3) the skills and competences required to guide and support learners; and 4) an understanding of the social and cultural dimension of education. This allows them to respond to the needs of individual learners in an inclusive way. Their education, which should have an emphasis on practical skills and an academic and scientific basis, should provide them with the competence and confidence to be reflective practitioners and discerning in managing information and knowledge.

- **a profession placed within the context of lifelong learning:** teachers' professional development should continue throughout their careers and should be supported and encouraged by coherent systems at national, regional and/or local level, as appropriate. Teachers should be able to contribute to the process by which young people and adult learners become more autonomous lifelong learners. They should recognise the importance of acquiring new knowledge, and have the ability to innovate and use evidence to inform their work. They need to be fully engaged in the process of lifelong learning and be able to evolve and adapt throughout their whole career. They should participate actively in professional development and this should be recognised within their own systems.
- **a mobile profession:** mobility should be a central component of initial and continuing teacher education programmes. Teachers should, therefore, be encouraged to undertake mobility in other European countries for professional development purposes. Those who do so should have their status recognised in the host country and their participation recognised and valued in their home country. There should also be the opportunity for mobility between different levels of education and towards different professions within the education sector.
- **a profession based on partnerships:** institutions providing teacher education should work collaboratively in partnership with schools, industry, and work-based training providers. Teachers should be encouraged to review evidence of effective practice and engage with current innovation and research in order to keep pace with the evolving knowledge society. They should also work in learning organisations that reflect on their own and other's best practice, and which collaborate with a wide range of community groups and stakeholders. Higher education institutions need to ensure that their teaching benefits from their knowledge of current practice. Teacher education, in itself, should be an object of study and research.

These common principles ensure the attractiveness and status of the teaching profession. They recognise the role of teachers as key agents for developing values of inclusion within the individual and society. Teachers, therefore, should be highly educated; continually developing and reflecting on their competences; and appropriately remunerated.

Making it work: the key competences

Teaching and education should be seen in their broadest sense. They add not only to the economic but also to the cultural aspects of the knowledge society. Teachers should, therefore, be able to work effectively in three overlapping areas. They should be able to:

- work with information, technology and knowledge;
- work with their fellow human beings – learners, colleagues and other partners in education; and
- work with and in society - at local, regional, national, European and broader global levels.

Their work in all these areas should be embedded in a professional continuum of lifelong learning and their qualifications and achievements should be understood within the European Qualifications Framework.³

The development of professional competences should be viewed over the continuum of professional life. Not all teachers leaving their initial teacher education should be expected to possess all of the necessary competences. However, the challenge for education leaders is to ensure that such competences are present at a collective, institutional level.

Teachers should be able to:

Work with knowledge, technology and information: they need to be able to work with a variety of types of knowledge. Their education should equip them to access, analyse, validate, reflect on and transmit knowledge, making effective use of technology where this is appropriate. Their pedagogic skills should allow them to build and manage learning environments and retain the intellectual freedom to make choices over the delivery of education. These skills also allow for innovation and creativity. Their confidence in the use of ICT should allow them to integrate it effectively into learning and teaching. They should be able to guide and support learners in the networks in which information can be found and built. They should have a high level of knowledge and understanding of their subject matter and view learning as a lifelong journey. Their practical and theoretical skills should also allow them to learn from their own experiences and match a wide range of teaching and learning strategies to the needs of learners.

Work with fellow human beings: they work in a profession which should be based on the values of social inclusion and nurturing the potential of every learner. They need to have knowledge of human growth and development and demonstrate self-confidence when engaging with others. They need to be able to work with learners as individuals and support them to develop into fully participating and active members of society. They should also prepare and develop collaborative activities which increase the collective intelligence of learners and co-operate and collaborate with colleagues to enhance their own learning and teaching.

Work with and in society: they contribute to preparing learners for their role as EU citizens and help to ensure that learners understand the importance of lifelong learning. They should be able to promote mobility and co-operation in Europe, and encourage intercultural respect and understanding. They also need to know the contribution that education makes to developing cohesive societies. They should have an understanding of the balance between respecting and being aware of the diversity of learners' cultures and identifying common values. They also need to understand the factors that create social cohesion and exclusion in society and be aware of the ethical dimensions of the knowledge society. They should be able to work effectively with the local community, partners and stakeholders in education – parents, teacher education institutions, and representative groups. They should be aware that good education provides learners with

³ *Education and Training 2010 – The Success of the Lisbon Strategy Hinges of Urgent Reforms* highlights the need for a European Qualifications Framework, suggesting that such a framework would be 'based on national frameworks which themselves must be coherent and cover higher education and vocational education and training', p. 28-29.

more and diverse employment opportunities. Their experience and expertise should also enable them to contribute to systems of quality assurance.

Recommendations to national and regional policy makers

To implement policies in line with these Common European principles, the following recommendations are made to those responsible for policy-making at national or regional levels:

1. Teachers should be graduates from a higher education institution or equivalent.
2. Teacher education programmes should be delivered in all three cycles⁴ of higher education in order to ensure their place in the European higher education area and to increase the opportunity for advancement and mobility within the profession.
3. The contribution of research and evidence based practice to the development of new knowledge about education and training should be promoted.
4. Partnerships between institutions where teachers will be employed, industry, training providers and higher education institutions should be encouraged to support high quality training and effective practice, and to develop networks of innovation at local and regional levels.
5. Coherent and adequately resourced lifelong learning strategies, covering formal and non-formal development activities are needed to deliver continuous professional development for teachers. These activities, which include subject-based and pedagogical training, should be available throughout their careers and be recognised appropriately.
6. The content of initial and continuous professional development programmes should reflect the importance of interdisciplinary and collaborative approaches to learning.
7. Mobility projects for teachers should be facilitated and promoted as an integral part of initial and continuous professional development programmes.
8. Initial and continuous professional development programmes should ensure that teachers have the knowledge and experience of European co-operation to enable them to value and respect cultural diversity and to educate learners to become EU citizens.
9. Opportunities to study European languages, including the use of specialist vocabulary, during initial teacher education and in continuous professional development programmes should be available and promoted.
10. Priority should be given to developing greater trust and transparency of teacher qualifications within Europe to allow for mutual recognition and increased mobility.

⁴ In 1999, Ministries from 29 European countries signed the Bologna declaration which aims to establish a European area of higher education. This introduced the two cycle degree system. The Berlin conference in 2003 extended this to 45 countries and introduced a third cycle for degree programmes at doctorate level.