

**European Testing Conference on the Common European Principles for the competences and qualifications of teachers**

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**A profession within a lifelong learning context**

***a) Introduction***

The knowledge society is a society constantly engaged in the learning process, in which knowledge and competences evolve. Society in the 21st century needs new knowledge and new skills. This is a major challenge for schools and for teachers. Lifelong learning is an essential element of the knowledge society. The need to prepare pupils for this society and give them the capacity to carry on learning throughout their lives, and the fact that the teaching profession is itself in a constant state of development involving new skills and competences, make it one in which lifelong learning is essential. This continuum, which begins with initial teacher education, is now a fundamental element teaching profession.

***b) The concepts behind the principle***

- **The knowledge society is a society of lifelong learning:** We are entering the age of the "information society", a society in which information is a commodity to be bought, sold and stored. But information is not knowledge: information does not depend on the subject, whereas knowledge is information which has been reconstructed by the individual in the light of context and personal experience, and is organised into a structured whole. The knowledge society is human, and must respond to human aspirations. It is concerned with the use rather than the storage of knowledge. The knowledge society is a learning society. The evolution of knowledge and of access to it, the development of techniques and concepts, mean that this society is not only a learning society, but a society of lifelong learning.

- **Today's students will have to keep on learning throughout their lives:** Knowledge is not restricted to specific disciplines, but includes know-how, life skills, competencies, aptitudes. Schools have a two-fold mission – both to transmit knowledge and to prepare for citizenship. Citizens of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be citizens of a learning society and must therefore be equipped with the wherewithal to learn throughout their lives. This is the key role of the school.

- **Knowledge evolves constantly,** and the knowledge and skills needed for a whole life cannot be learned just once and relied on forever. New knowledge and new skills will have to be acquired all the time; and this process must begin at school.

- **Teachers** are doubly concerned by this need for lifelong learning. On the one hand, they must teach their students how to continue learning throughout their lives and, on the other, they will constantly have to review and expand their own knowledge and skills. Teachers will not be able to continue teaching without also continuing to learn.

***c) How the principle addresses the issues***

### Workshop 3

- Flexibility, mobility and adaptability are now essential competences. Teachers **must be in full possession of them** both to be able to transmit them to their pupils and to further their own professional development.

- It is becoming common in the knowledge society to change jobs several times over a career and to be prepared to move in the context of employment. This cannot be done without the capacity to acquire new knowledge and skills throughout life.

- **Initial teacher education and continuing professional development: a continuum.** Teaching is a profession, requiring a professional education and professional development. Initial teacher education must therefore not only be an accumulation of knowledge and professional skills, but also a preparation for career-long development and adaptation. Initial teacher education and continuing professional development should not be seen as separate, but as forming an interdependent continuum. The question of whether continuing professional development of teachers is really necessary or a dispensable luxury, whether it should be compulsory or not, is no longer pertinent – it is an integral component of the teaching profession and combines with initial teacher education to form an organic whole.

- **What kind of initial teacher education do teachers need?** The fact that teachers are learning all their lives and that continuing professional development is an integral part of the job raises the question of what the content and methods of initial teacher education should be. What knowledge and skills should teachers have when they start their career? What is the essential basic equipment that they need? Are there points in a career where more intensive training is called for (such as structured support for new teachers, as practised in some countries)?

- **Lifelong learning takes many forms.** It does a question of remaining a pupil throughout one's life. It means taking advantage of the new forms of learning, participating in collaborative learning, taking on new concepts, getting to grips with new processes, being fully integrated in the learning society. Knowledge develops, access to knowledge develops, and the result is a kind of collective intelligence which everyone has a role in building, throughout their lives.

- Establishing **the content and methods of lifelong learning for teachers** is an open-ended process, reflecting teaching content and methods, which will continue to evolve at an increasing pace.

Knowledge is no longer confined to schools, but can be found or constructed in many other places too, accessible in various ways. Schools no longer have a monopoly on access to knowledge. The teacher is no longer simply a dispenser of knowledge, but is the means through which the pupil learns to acquire it in all its forms and becomes aware of the many channels through which it can be accessed. Thus, lifelong learning for teachers must incorporate advances in knowledge, where and how to find it and the ever-changing means of access.

- **Lifelong learning is a collective process** involving collaboration and networking, and must not, in the case of teachers, be restricted to an individual process. Teachers who continue to learn throughout their lives are active stakeholders in the “networked society”.

- **Reconstruction and complexity:** Lifelong learning is not a continuous stockpiling of knowledge and skills. It is an evolutive process, a continuum, a constant reconstruction of one's own knowledge, a moving forward through the vast complexities of knowledge.

- For teachers, **lifelong learning is linked to innovation and research.** Teachers are not generally researchers, but must be capable of appropriating certain research results for educational purposes, of questioning research and extending their knowledge and skills according to advances in research. They can be involved in research, contribute to research development and applications; all this is part and parcel of lifelong learning.

- Teachers, whether they like it or not, are **actors in the education system.** They are not simply executives, but contribute to developing education policy, moulding education, shaping the schools of tomorrow. This "political" side of the job is one of the dimensions of lifelong learning.

- **Lifelong learning affects all aspects of the teacher's profession,** and not only the content of the subjects taught. Maintaining information, technology and knowledge skills is dependent on lifelong learning. But so does the ability to work with people and in society. Lifelong learning should take all three of these aspects into account. For teachers, lifelong learning does not relate only to teaching and what is taught in schools; rather, it is centred in society and embraces the issues of society and of education in society.

- Teaching is above all **an intellectual profession,** one which is based on intellectual freedom. It implies lifelong intellectual activity, which in turn necessitates lifelong learning.

### *d) Possible discussion questions*

Is the principle of lifelong learning as a context for the teaching profession important enough to be emphasised in the Common European Principles for the competences and qualifications of teachers?

Should it be kept as one of the main principles?

If yes, can the text describing it be improved?

If not, why not? Does the principle need to be replaced with something else?

Is the lifelong learning principle visible throughout the paper, and reflected in the competences and recommendations? Do recommendations 5, 6, 7 and 8 address lifelong learning issues adequately? Should they be improved, or extended?

To what extent will an acceptance of the proposed recommendations help to ensure that the principle is embedded in policy developments?