

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

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A GRADUATE PROFESSION

a) Introduction

In the knowledge society, the education of teachers and trainers needs to be at a higher education level and supported by partnership between higher education institutions and the institutions where they will gain employment. For that reason they are graduate profession. To compete with comprehensive demands of their working places they need an advanced level of education based on research but also a broad set of knowledge, understanding and skills. The higher education reforms of today bring a momentum which could importantly help to ensure high quality teaching and outcomes, in particularly giving a possibility that teacher and trainer education programmes are delivered in all three cycles and strengthening opportunities for advancement and mobility within the profession.

b) Ideas behind the principle

In the knowledge society, teaching and training can be well founded only as *a profession based on tertiary level – university or equivalent – initial education* (or other appropriate professionally recognized levels for trainers) *opened to a continuous professional development* in a lifelong learning perspective. History of the development of pre-university teachers and trainers into a graduate profession has been long and multifarious. On one side, qualifications for teachers in education institutions which correspond to the level of upper-secondary general education were traditionally based on university studies in most cases, however, most often in their teaching subject only. On the other side, teachers at primary and lower secondary school level attained the status of graduate profession only in the second half of 20th century. We have entered knowledge society but in certain cases qualifications for teachers and trainers – in particularly at pre-school level as well as in vocational education and training and in some other specialized areas – are still on pre-tertiary level only.

All teachers and trainers at all levels of education and training should be properly equipped to respond to the evolving challenges of the knowledge society. They play crucial role in supporting learning experiences of pupils, students and adult learners. At the same time, they are also key players in the implementation of the educational reforms and innovation in education. Last but not least, they form an important group which promotes development, inclusiveness and cohesion in a society. With regard to these tasks, there is no difference between teachers and trainers working at various levels of pre-university education and training. To compete successfully with all these tasks, they all need an *advanced level of education* comparable to other (more traditional; graduate) professions competing with similar tasks in other professional and disciplinary areas. And more: they should also have the opportunity to continue their *studies at all three cycles to the highest level* for progression within their profession. A common European Qualifications Framework can importantly improve this opportunity in terms of comparability, flexibility, mobility, employability,

specialization etc. All these provide necessary elements which make teaching and training an *attractive profession*.

Teacher and trainer education is *multidisciplinary* and *research based*; university (higher education) environment can support its character in a most appropriate way. To compete successfully with the challenges of their profession, teachers and trainers need 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. Their education emphasizes as academic and scientific basis as practical skills and provides them with the competences and confidence necessary for autonomous professional work. Therefore, it rests on balanced partnerships: it should be provided in a partnership of various disciplines and research approaches as well as in partnership with educational institutions and social environments where graduates are going to start and prosecute their professional life and where their needs for continuous professional development are forming.

c) How the principle addresses the issues

A need for flexibility. Regulations on teacher and trainer profession should not demonstrate as an obstacle to free mobility throughout the Union but as necessary – most often nationally based – common denominator for the profession and its individual members. Today, there is a need for greater flexibility in teachers and trainers initial education; on one hand to facilitate geographic mobility, on the other to facilitate internal mobility in its various aspects. Trends in population and a lack of teachers, for example, call against rigid systems of qualifications. Initial qualifications should not close teachers and trainers in a narrow area of a professional work; rather they should have a systemic possibility to move – possibly with a reasonable load of additional training – from working in one to another level (area, etc.) of education. Similarly, and due to the multidisciplinary character of the profession, there should be also better systemic opportunities for graduates without pedagogical qualifications to qualify for teaching and training, often within lifelong learning perspective.

A need for compatibility and quality. Teaching and training is a regulated profession; there are special (national; institutional, etc.) provisions on level, profile, specialization, etc. which give guidelines and assure necessary quality standards in teacher and trainer education. These provisions reflect a whole range of concrete needs rooted in different environments as well as in different traditions of teacher and trainer education across Europe. However, teachers and trainers must be able to move within their profession throughout the Union. With full respect to different environments and traditions we need today a common understanding of teachers and trainers as a graduate profession and easier ways to recognize their qualifications. Common European principles for competences and qualifications can substantially contribute to greater compatibility and comparability of the systems of teacher and trainer education.

European Qualification Framework. Ministers from 45 European countries recently met at the Conference of the Bologna Process in Bergen, Norway (19-20 May) and, among other issues on their agenda, adopted the overarching framework for qualifications in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), comprising three cycles, generic descriptors for each cycle based on learning outcomes and competences, and credit ranges (expressed in ECTS). They also underlined the importance of ensuring complementarity between the overarching framework for the EHEA and the proposed broader framework of qualifications for lifelong learning as now being developed within the European Union. All EU countries are members of the Bologna Process and the adopted overarching framework for the EHEA will help elaborating national frameworks in the following years in all our countries.

Take the momentum; abolish anomalies. We should take advantage of this momentum, modernize teacher and trainer education and ensure a proper place for it in the EHEA. It is in particular important to ensure that teacher and trainer education programmes will be delivered in all three cycles and to strengthen opportunities for advancement and mobility within the profession – like in other, often more traditional graduate professions. Also for reasons of attractiveness of a profession!

Anomalies have been identified several times with regard to traditional models of teachers and trainers initial education. E.g.: although students may have accumulated (in particular in consecutive models) an equivalent of a total of 300 points ECTS and even more to obtain their initial teacher education qualification, in a number of countries these outcomes do not result in a second cycle award. It is a reason against attractiveness of a profession!

The challenge of three cycles for teacher and trainer education. Several networks and initiatives are active today in Europe trying to make teacher and trainer education compliant with the Bologna first, second and also third cycle degree structures as well as comparable with other disciplinary areas. In particular, today the second cycle brings a real challenge to inherited traditional structures. Competing with these challenges, the Education Working Group within the TUNING project,^{*} supported by the European Commission, recently identified and suggested a number of possible broad pathways to second cycle awards:

- a first cycle degree in the chosen subject(s) of 180-240 ECTS, followed by a consecutive teacher/trainer education award of 90-120 ECTS (a minimum of 90 ECTS where subject didactics or pedagogy is included in the first cycle degree), and including a research training component;
- a first cycle degree in the chosen subject(s) of 180-240 ECTS, followed by a second cycle consecutive teacher/trainer education award of 60 ECTS, followed, within a specified time limit, by a second cycle award in Education Sciences or structured induction (to include research training) of 60 ECTS;
- a first cycle integrated degree where the teaching subject(s) and education components are offered concurrently of 240 ECTS, followed by a second cycle award in Education Sciences/structured induction (to include research training) of 60 ECTS.

d) Possible discussion questions

Is the principle of teachers and trainers as a graduate profession important enough to be emphasized in the Common European Principles for the competences and qualifications of teachers and trainers?

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 principle of teachers and trainers as a graduate profession visible throughout the paper, and reflected in the competences and recommendations?

To what extent will an acceptance of the proposed recommendations help to ensure that the principle is embedded in policy developments? What could be further (or not yet identified) challenges in implementing this principle?

^{*} The Tuning Project is supported by the European Commission in the framework of the Socrates programme, see <http://www.relint.deusto.es/TuningProject/index.htm>. The mentioned findings will be soon published in the *Final Report – Phase 2*.