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on improving the quality of teacher education
(2008/2068(INI))

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MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on improving the quality of teacher education (2008/2068(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Articles 3(q), 149 and 150 of the EC Treaty,
- having regard to the Commission communication entitled 'Improving the Quality of Teacher Education' (COM(2007)0392) and to the related Commission staff working papers (SEC(2007)0931 and SEC (2007)0933),
- having regard to Decision No 1720/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 November 2006 establishing an action programme in the field of lifelong learning¹, which includes the specific objective of enhancing the quality and European dimension of teacher training (Article 17(2)(e)),
- having regard to the eight key skills set out in Recommendation 2006/962/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 entitled 'Key Competences for lifelong learning - A European Reference Framework'²,
- having regard to the 10-year 'Education and Training 2010' work programme and specifically to Objective 1.1 'Improving Education and Training for Teachers and Trainers'³, as well as to the subsequent joint interim reports on progress towards its implementation,
- having regard to the EU's multilingualism policy and to the Commission's High Level Group Report on Multilingualism (2007),
- having regard to the conclusions of the Lisbon Special European Council of 23-24 March 2000,
- having regard to the Barcelona European Council Conclusions in March 2002, which adopted concrete objectives for improving, among others, education and training for teachers and trainers,
- having regard to the Council Conclusions of 5 May 2003 on reference levels of European average performance in education and training (Benchmarks)⁴,
- having regard to the conclusions adopted by the Education, Youth and Culture Council at its meeting of 15-16 November 2007 and specifically to the conclusions on teacher

¹ OJ L 327, 24.11.2006, p.45

² OJ L 394, 30.12.2006, p.10

³ OJ C 142, 14.6.2002, p.7

⁴ OJ C 134, 7.6.2003, p.3

education¹,

- having regard to the OECD's triennial PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) surveys as well as to its report 'Teachers Matter: Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers' (2005),
 - having regard to the report 'How the world's best performing school systems come out on top' (McKinsey & Co, September 2007),
 - having regard to Rule 45 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Culture and Education (A6-0000/2008),
- A. whereas the quality of teaching is a critical factor in contributing to the European Union's job creation, competitiveness and growth potential in a globalising world,
- B. whereas high quality education and training have multifaceted benefits that go beyond job creation and the promotion of competitiveness, and are important elements of lifelong learning,
- C. whereas the challenges faced by the teaching profession are increasing as educational environments become more complex and heterogeneous; whereas these challenges include advances in Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), changes to social and family structures, and the increasingly diverse mix of students in many schools as a result of the emergence of multicultural societies,
- D. whereas there is a clear and positive correlation between high quality teacher training and pupils achieving high success rates,
- E. whereas pre-school and primary education have a particularly critical impact on children's eventual educational achievement,
- F. whereas more than 27 different teacher training systems are in place across the Union, the challenges facing the teaching profession are nonetheless, in essence, common to all Member States,
- G. whereas teaching is a vocational profession in which high levels of job satisfaction are important for the retention of good staff,
- H. whereas attracting top-performing recruits to the teaching profession requires corresponding levels of social recognition, status and remuneration,
- I. whereas teachers play important social and developmental roles that extend beyond traditional subject boundaries,
1. Strongly supports the analysis that raising the quality of teacher education leads to substantial gains in student performance;

¹ OJ C 300, 12.12.2007, p.6

2. Considers that the provision of more and better quality teacher education combined with policies aimed at recruiting the best candidates to the teaching profession should be key priorities for all education ministries;
3. Believes that increases in education expenditure should target the areas that produce the greatest improvements in student performance;
4. Emphasises that Member States must attach greater importance and allocate more resources to teacher training if significant progress is to be made in achieving the Lisbon strategy's 'Education and Training 2010' objectives, and in order for lifelong learning to be reinforced across the Union;
5. Strongly encourages the promotion of continuous and coherent professional development for teachers throughout their careers; recommends that all teachers have regular opportunities to improve and update their skills and qualifications, as well as their pedagogical knowledge;
6. Urges that particular attention be paid to new teachers' initial induction; encourages the development of support networks and mentoring programmes, through which accomplished and experienced teachers can play a key role in new colleagues' training, passing on knowledge acquired throughout successful careers, promoting team-learning and helping to address drop-out rates among new recruits; believes that by working and learning together, teachers can help improve a school's performance and overall learning environment;
7. Calls on Member States to ensure that, while maintaining the focus on recruiting and retaining the best teachers, the composition of the teaching workforce at all levels of school education represents the social and cultural diversity within society;
8. Emphasises the close link between ensuring teaching is an attractive and fulfilling profession with good career progression prospects and the successful recruitment of motivated, high-achieving graduates and professionals; urges Member States to take further measures to promote teaching as a career choice for top achievers;
9. Stresses the particular importance of ensuring that pre-school and primary school teachers are of high quality and that they receive the appropriate levels of social and professional support their responsibilities entail;
10. Highlights the marked differences between teachers' average wages, not only between different Member States, but also in relation to average national incomes and GDP per capita; calls for teachers to benefit from good remuneration packages which reflect their importance to society, and which address the 'brain-drain' of top teachers to better-paid private sector posts, particularly in the areas of science and technology;
11. Emphasises that teachers must be better equipped to meet the range of new demands made on them; recognises the challenges that developments in ICT present to teachers, but also the opportunities; encourages the prioritisation of ICT education during initial and subsequent training to guarantee up-to-date knowledge of recent technological developments and that teachers have the necessary skills to take advantage of these in the

classroom;

12. Calls on the Commission to reinforce the financial resources available to support teacher education through the Lifelong Learning Programme, and in particular teacher exchanges between schools in neighbouring countries and regions; emphasises that mobility facilitates the spread of ideas and best practice within teaching, and promotes improvements in foreign language skills as well as awareness of other cultures; stresses that teachers should benefit from greater language learning facilities throughout their careers, which inter alia, will maximise the opportunities provided by EU mobility programmes;
13. Strongly supports foreign language learning from a very early age and the inclusion of language lessons in all primary curricula; emphasises that sufficient investment in recruiting and training foreign language teachers are vital in order to achieve this objective;
14. Underlines that there is no substitute for time teachers spend in the classroom with students and is concerned that increasing administration and paperwork can be detrimental to this and to time spent preparing classes;
15. Considers that every school has a unique relationship with its local community, and that school leaders should have greater decision-making responsibility that allows them to address the educational challenges and teaching requirements particular to their environment, in collaboration with parents and with local community stakeholders;
16. Welcomes Member States' agreement to work together to enhance the coordination of teacher education policies, notably through the Open Method of Coordination; urges Member States to take full advantage of this opportunity to learn from each other and requests that Parliament be consulted on the timetable and developments in this area;
17. Underlines the need for better statistics on teacher training across the Union, in order to encourage the sharing of information, greater cooperation and the exchange of best practice; proposes that Member States, in cooperation with the Commission, put in place systems that ensure comparative data is readily available on teacher education across pre-school, primary and secondary education;
18. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and Commission, and the governments and parliaments of the Member States, to the OECD, to UNESCO and to the Council of Europe.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

The Commission Communication and the general framework

In August 2007, the Commission published a Communication entitled "Improving the Quality of Teacher Education"¹. This assesses the current situation in the European Union as regards the education and training of teachers, and proposes a shared reflection on actions that can be taken by EU Member States, as responsible for the organisation and content of education and training systems according to the EC Treaty.

The aims of this Communication are to ensure that provision for teachers' education and professional development is coordinated and adequately resourced; encourage that all teachers possess the knowledge, attitudes and pedagogic skills that they require to be effective; support the professionalisation of teaching; and to promote research within the teaching profession, as well as the status and recognition of the profession.

The overall framework is the drive to improve education and training in Europe, taking place in the context of the Lisbon strategy. The Barcelona Council in March 2002 adopted concrete objectives for improving Member States' education and training systems, including education and training for teachers and trainers. In 2004, the Council and Commission Joint Report on progress towards the Lisbon objectives in the fields of Education and Training called for the development of common European principles for the competences and qualifications needed by teachers and trainers. In November 2006, the Council stated that 'the efforts of teaching staff should be supported by continuous professional development', while in November 2007 the Council adopted Conclusions on teacher education, on the basis of the Commission's Communication. Among the conclusions, the Council stated that 'high quality teaching is a pre-requisite for high-quality education and training, which are in turn powerful determinants of Europe's long-term competitiveness and capacity to create more jobs and growth in line with the Lisbon goals'².

Nevertheless, insufficient progress has been made so far towards the objectives set under the Lisbon strategy's Education and Training 2010 programme.

The state of play

The Communication identifies the quality of teaching as one key factor contributing to Europe's job creation, competitiveness and growth potential in a globalising world, but also to improve student performance.

There are more than 6 million teachers in Europe, and they play a vital role developing knowledge and skills as well as playing an important role in children's development in

¹ COM(2007)0392(final), 3.8.2007.

² OJ C 300, 12.12.2007, p.7

society. The challenges faced by teachers are increasing as educational environments become more complex and heterogeneous. However, in the 2005 OECD survey "Teachers Matter"¹, almost all countries reported shortfalls in teaching skills, low investment in the continuous training and development of the teaching workforce, and low support in the first years of teaching.

There is also a wider range of related issues to consider. For example, women very much outweigh men in the teaching workforce; there are marked differences between countries in the salaries of teachers relative to average wages; the retention of teachers is specially affected by general labour market conditions; and the teaching profession has a high percentage of older workers, with the inevitable implication that sufficient numbers of motivated and high-calibre recruits need to be attracted as these experienced teachers retire.

Rapporteur's remarks

There is a vast array of factors which influence student learning, including a students' own potential and motivation, their families' and peers' attitude and support for learning, school organisation and the quality of their teachers. It is difficult for policy makers to influence most of these factors, at least in the short run². Nevertheless, a significant impact on education systems can be made through policies focused on teachers.

As the OECD has underlined, 'improving the efficiency and equity of schooling depends, in a large measure, on ensuring that competent people want to work as teachers, that their teaching is of high quality, and that all students have access to high quality teaching'³. As part of facing the challenges of an increasingly globalised world, Member States should take further steps to improve their teacher-centred policies, as a way to improving overall standards of education. This includes addressing teacher recruitment; teacher training, both initial and continuous; the status of the teaching profession; the management of schools; and genuinely taking advantage of what the EU can do to add value to all of these, especially through the exchange of best practice.

In this overall context, the following recommendations should be considered:

1. Recruit the best candidates

It is important that Member States ensure their education expenditure is efficient and targeted towards those areas that will generate the best results. As a recent report by McKinsey underlines, 'the available evidence suggests that the main driver of the variation in student learning at school is the quality of teachers'⁴.

For example, while reducing class sizes improves the overall performance of students, the

¹ "Teachers Matter: Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers", OECD 2005.

² Executive summary, "Teachers Matter: Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers", OECD, November 2004, p.3.

³ Ibid., p.2

⁴ McKinsey & Co. 'How the world's best-performing schools come out on top', September 2007, p.12.

evidence suggests that the degree of improvement is much less than if the same students are consistently taught by effective and top-performing teachers. The reverse is also true: if a student is consistently placed with poor teachers, his or her performance will be significantly affected, an impact which is particularly accentuated during the very important early years of education¹.

The key challenge is therefore to ensure that the best candidates become teachers. This not only applies to ensuring that a good proportion of the best graduates choose the teaching profession over other careers. School systems will also benefit, in terms of addressing teacher shortages and introducing new and valuable skills, by attracting experienced and high quality professionals from other walks of life into teaching at a later stage in their careers.

2. Improve status, recognition and remuneration in the teaching profession

Teaching is sometimes considered as a second-rate career choice: in some countries there is a tendency towards enrolment in initial teacher education programmes as ‘a fall-back option in case the graduate labour market deteriorates’². Nevertheless, successful school systems are not founded on second-best teachers.

It is important that teaching is considered an attractive profession for the best candidates. Key to this is the status of teachers in society. Studies show that perceived status is closely linked to both selection and to remuneration. Introducing competitive selection into the teacher recruitment process can make teaching more attractive, by challenging the belief that ‘anyone can teach’. Similarly, while teaching is essentially a vocational career and salary is rarely cited by candidates as the main motivation for entering the profession, it is nevertheless important to get remuneration – and starting salaries – right. As McKinsey highlights, ‘all top-performing systems [...] paid starting salaries that were at or above the OECD average, relative to their GDP per capita’³.

Pay, status and job satisfaction are also important elements in ensuring the retention of good staff, who might otherwise be tempted away from teaching by better paid careers in the private sector – especially teachers of science and technology. As the Commission Communication highlights, ‘teachers who receive higher pay relative to other professions are less likely to leave the profession’⁴.

3. Invest in initial and continuous training

Once the best candidate teachers have been selected and recruited, the challenge is to ensure that these teachers are turned into the most effective instructors.

This requires teachers to develop a specific set of skills and knowledge, and in turn requires

¹ See Ibid. p.12. In its 2006 Communication on 'Efficiency and Equity in European Education and Training Systems' (COM (2006) 481final, 8.9.2006), the Commission concludes that "pre-primary education has the highest rates of return of the whole lifelong learning continuum", p.3. See also pp. 5-7.

² "Teachers Matter: Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers", OECD 2005, p.102.

³ McKinsey & Co. 'How the world's best-performing schools come out on top', September 2007, p.20.

⁴ COM(2007)392(final), 3.8.2007, p.9.

significant investment in training both new and experienced teachers. Member States should therefore continue to improve initial teacher training and facilitate continuous professional development for teachers throughout their careers, so that they have opportunities to improve and update their qualifications, as well as their pedagogical skills.

To ensure the quality of teacher training, the quality of the teachers providing the training must also be a priority. For this reason it is important to recognise the role that accomplished and experienced teachers can play in newer colleagues' training. A slight reduction in these experienced teachers' classes could be envisaged so that they can in turn devote more time to training their colleagues. Similarly, encouraging each school to use its own resources so that teachers can learn together - and from each other - is important and can help improve overall learning environments.

As the role of teachers changes, so must the range of available training. For example ICT education should be prioritised to guarantee up-to-date knowledge of recent technological developments and that teachers have the necessary skills to take advantage of these in the classroom. In addition, sufficient investment should be provided for the recruitment and training of foreign language teachers, so that schools have the necessary resources to improve foreign language learning - and to provide it from a very early age.

4. Strongly support exchanging best practice

While there are over twenty seven different education systems in place across the EU, there is also a wide range of different outcomes. This leads to the inevitable conclusion that the systems of some Member States are performing better than others. There is clearly much need for Member States to learn from each other and to exchange best practice according to international benchmarks and standards – although better comparative statistics are needed in order to facilitate these exchanges between Member States.

Exchanges of best practice can clearly take place both at a macro and a micro level. At a macro level, Member States have recently agreed to work together in the area of teacher education and to exchange best practice through the Open Method of Coordination in the Council – and this is warmly welcomed, while underlining that this is an opportunity that Member States must genuinely take advantage of. At a micro level, the EU has a role in encouraging individual teachers from different countries to learn from each other directly through the mobility programmes at school level, and notably Comenius. This draft report strongly supports these mobility initiatives.

5. Promote more school-level decision-making

Research suggests that school leadership and management "is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on learning"¹ and that experienced and effective school management leads to a culture of high expectation throughout a school. At the same time every school has a unique and particular environment, from the range of its pupils to its resources and staff. In

¹ McKinsey & Co. 'How the world's best-performing schools come out on top', September 2007, p.29

this context, the leaders of every school should have more responsibility, in collaboration with parents and local community stakeholders, to address and manage their particular education challenges, including their own teacher training requirements.