



**DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR INTERNAL POLICIES**  
**POLICY DEPARTMENT B: STRUCTURAL AND COHESION POLICIES**

**CULTURE AND EDUCATION**

**TEACHING TEACHERS:  
PRIMARY TEACHER TRAINING IN EUROPE  
- STATE OF AFFAIRS AND OUTLOOK**

**STUDY**

**Abstract**

This study provides input to the European Parliament's Committee on Education and Culture on teacher quality in primary schools in Europe. It assesses the state of initial teacher training, early career support and continuous professional development in Europe from the perspective of individual teachers and teacher educators. We report to what extent these sub-systems on the continuum of teacher education help teachers confront challenges in their classrooms, at school and system level. The report takes stock on reforms in the sector following previous recommendations. The study concludes with policy recommendations on how to further improve teaching quality through teacher education.

This document was requested by the European Parliament's Committee on Education and Culture.

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Original: EN  
Translation: DE, FR

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Manuscript completed in July 2014  
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This document is available on the Internet at:  
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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Aim of the study

Teachers are the most important in-school factor influencing the quality of pupils' learning. In this study we follow a multi-level approach to teacher quality in which the training and professional development of teachers is instrumental to pupils' learning and educational achievement.

Teachers experience a large variety of challenges related to teaching and teaching effectiveness, as well as increasing societal demands for educational effectiveness. This calls for systemic changes to the teaching profession, but also for increased emphasis on teacher education and training.

The main questions for this study are (1) to what extent are the European teacher education systems currently fit for purpose and (2) how can improved initial and continuous teacher education help teachers to face current and future challenges.

This study explores how national strategies set out to improve teacher quality relate to different stages in teachers' careers and to a continuum of teacher education. Teacher education can be seen as including three stages: Initial Teacher Education (ITE), Early Career Support (ECS) and Continuous Professional Development (CPD).

The study is based on a review of the available literature and policy documents, interviews with relevant stakeholders at EU level and in-depth country analyses based on interviews with school teachers, teacher educators, ITE programme managers, students and policy makers in seven Member States (Austria, Finland, France, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania and the Netherlands).

### Conclusions

The conclusions are grouped into three sets. The first category are conclusions related to developments at EU level:

- At European level, teacher training is high on the agenda and many useful studies and handbooks have been provided. However, direct practical impacts are difficult to see.
- National reforms are generally in line with the recommendations from EU documentation. Teacher training is high on the political agenda in many countries and reforms are generally targeting the challenges encountered.

The second category are conclusions related to challenges and reforms:

- The challenges at classroom level are addressed by all structures (ITE, ECS and CPD). Policy reforms however, focus primarily on ITE and to a lesser extent on CPD and ECS.
- School level challenges are hardly addressed through teacher education policies. These can be more effectively addressed by other policy reforms related to labour conditions and school organisation (resources).
- The system level challenges are addressed by ITE reforms, but are related to other policy fields as well (labour conditions, financial frameworks, perceptions of the teaching profession).

The third category are conclusions related to teacher training structures and reform strategies:

- Reforms mostly focus on ITE. In general, when ITE is considered to be in place, other parts of the continuum receive more policy attention. Teacher training is only rarely interpreted as a continuum containing ITE, ECS and CPD. Consequently, there is a lack of coordination between the structures (which challenge is targeted by which structure).
- ITE programmes differ largely in the countries studied, depending on national conceptions of what is a good teacher. Related to this, any ITE reform yields a lot of political and societal debate.
- Early Career Support has gained prominence on the policy agenda. However, in many countries the approaches are still underdeveloped.
- Continuous Professional Development is provided in most countries. However, there is a general lack of incentives to enroll in CPD (related to career progression) in combination with individual dispositional barriers for participation.

### Recommendations

Several recommendations can be provided to ensure that teacher training structures are in place to support teachers in dealing with the challenges they face.

Recommendation 1 (to European, national, local stakeholders, schools and teachers): **Approach teacher training as a continuum in which ITE, ECS and CPD are all involved to address the challenges of teaching practice.** In this light, it is recommended to:

- Structure the ECS and CPD offer into continuous learning pathways, building on previous stages of the continuum.
- Provide transparency of the ECS and CPD in order to better link the provision offered.
- Provide transparency in the expectations the employers have concerning the continuous development of teachers.

Recommendation 2 (to national stakeholders, schools and teachers): **When developing and implementing reforms, take into account the already accomplished results at European level on teacher training.** It is recommended to:

- Use the relevant EU literature to put particular issues on the national agenda (ECS and CPD)
- Make use of the relevant documentation to develop national, local or school level ECS and CPD structures.

Recommendation 3 (to national and local/school level stakeholders): **Teacher training reforms should be inline with reforms in school organisation and labour conditions. In addition, the financial resources should be sufficient to implement reforms.** In this light, it is recommended to:

- Give support to teacher learning by organising attractive training options.
- Create incentives for learning by strengthening human resource management in schools and linking continuous development to teacher's careers.
- Adjust labour conditions, school organisation and school cultures to create more differentiated career pathways, create stimulus for in-school collaborative learning and give teachers more time for school development related tasks.

Ensure that when implementing reforms, the financial resources are sufficient to pursue the policy objectives.