

Council conclusions of 26 November 2009 on the professional development of teachers and school leaders

(2009/C 302/04)

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

HAVING REGARD to:

1. The Lisbon European Council conclusions of 23 and 24 March 2000, which emphasised that investing in people was crucial to Europe's place in the knowledge economy, and which called upon Member States to take steps to remove obstacles to teachers' mobility and to attract high-quality teachers ⁽¹⁾.
2. Objective 1.1 of the 'Education & Training 2010' work programme, which highlights the importance of attracting to the teaching profession, and retaining, well-qualified and motivated people, of identifying the skills that teachers require to meet the changing needs of society, of providing conditions to support teachers through initial and in-service training, and of attracting recruits to teaching and training who have professional experience in other fields ⁽²⁾.
3. The Council Resolution of 27 June 2002 on lifelong learning, which invited the Member States to improve the education and training of teachers involved in lifelong learning so that they acquire the necessary skills for the knowledge society ⁽³⁾.
4. The joint interim report of the Council and the Commission of 26 February 2004 on progress towards the Lisbon objectives in the fields of education and training ⁽⁴⁾, which gave priority to the development of common European principles for the competences and qualifications needed by teachers in order to fulfil their changing role in the knowledge society ⁽⁵⁾.
5. The joint interim report of the Council and the Commission of 23 February 2006 on the implementation of the 'Education & Training 2010' work programme, which emphasised that investment in the training of teachers and trainers and the strengthening of leadership for education and training institutions are crucial to improving the efficiency of education and training systems ⁽⁶⁾.
6. The conclusions of the Council and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, of 14 November 2006 on efficiency and equity in education and training, which stated that the motivation, skills and competences of teachers, trainers, other teaching staff and guidance and welfare services, as well as the quality of school leadership, are key factors in achieving high quality learning outcomes, and that the efforts of teaching staff should be supported by continuous professional development.
7. The conclusions of the Council and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, of 14 November 2006 on the future priorities for enhanced European cooperation on vocational education and training, which emphasised the need for highly qualified teachers who undertake continuous professional development ⁽⁷⁾.
8. 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 learning, which includes the specific objective of enhancing the quality and European dimension of teacher education, and which supports mobility for teachers and other educational staff ⁽⁸⁾.
9. The Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning ⁽⁹⁾, which sets out the knowledge, skills and attitudes which individuals need for personal fulfilment and development, active citizenship, social inclusion and employment, and which, given their transversal nature, imply a greater degree of collaboration and teamwork between teachers, as well as an approach to teaching that goes beyond traditional subject boundaries.
10. The Council conclusions of 25 May 2007 on a coherent framework of indicators and benchmarks for monitoring progress towards the Lisbon objectives in education and training, which called for work to be pursued on developing an indicator on the professional development of teachers and trainers ⁽¹⁰⁾.
11. The conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, of 21 November 2008 on youth mobility,

⁽¹⁾ Improving education and training for teachers and trainers — SN 100/1/00 REV 1.

⁽²⁾ OJ C 142, 14.6.2002.

⁽³⁾ OJ C 163, 9.7.2002.

⁽⁴⁾ Doc. 6905/04.

⁽⁵⁾ Annexes I and II to doc. 12414/07 ADD 1.

⁽⁶⁾ OJ C 79, 1.4.2006.

⁽⁷⁾ OJ C 298, 8.12.2006.

⁽⁸⁾ OJ L 327, 24.11.2006.

⁽⁹⁾ OJ L 394, 30.12.2006.

⁽¹⁰⁾ OJ C 311, 21.12.2007.

which invited the Member States to work towards the objective of increasing the mobility of teachers, trainers and other educational staff⁽¹⁾.

12. The Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training⁽²⁾, which recommend the gradual expansion of mobility for teachers and trainers with a view to making periods of learning abroad the rule rather than the exception, which define as one of the priorities during the first work cycle the need to focus on the quality of initial education and early career support for new teachers, as well as on raising the quality of continuing professional development opportunities for teachers, trainers and those involved in leadership or guidance activities, and which invite the Commission to study the possibility of including teacher mobility in any future proposal for a benchmark on mobility,

and RECALLING IN PARTICULAR:

1. The conclusions of the Council and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, of 15 November 2007 on improving the quality of teacher education⁽³⁾, in which it was agreed to endeavour to ensure that teachers are encouraged and supported throughout their careers to continue updating their knowledge, skills and competence as required, as well as to ensure that teachers with leadership functions have access to high quality training in school management and leadership.
2. The conclusions of the Council and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, of 21 November 2008 on preparing young people for the 21st century⁽⁴⁾, which invited Member States — when following up the aforementioned conclusions on improving the quality of teacher education — to focus cooperation on enabling all beginning teachers to benefit from structured early career support programmes, on improving the supply, quality and take-up of teachers' continuous professional development programmes and on improving the recruitment and training of school leaders,

REAFFIRMS that:

while responsibility for the organisation and content of education and training systems rests with individual Member States, cooperation at European level via the open method of coordination, together with the efficient use of Community programmes, can contribute to the development of quality education and training by supporting and complementing measures taken at national level and helping Member States to address common challenges,

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 320, 16.12.2008.

⁽²⁾ OJ C 119, 28.5.2009.

⁽³⁾ OJ C 300, 12.12.2007.

⁽⁴⁾ OJ C 319, 13.12.2008.

RECOGNISES that:

1. The knowledge, skills and commitment of teachers⁽⁵⁾, as well as the quality of school leadership, are the most important factors in achieving high quality educational outcomes. Good teaching and the ability to inspire all pupils to achieve their very best can have a lasting positive impact on young people's futures. For this reason, it is essential not only to ensure that those recruited to teaching and school leadership posts are of the highest calibre and well-suited to the tasks they have to fulfil, but also to provide the highest standard of initial education and continuing professional development for teaching staff at all levels. This in turn will contribute to enhancing both the status and attractiveness of the profession.
2. Teacher education programmes, which are key factors both in preparing teachers and school leaders to carry out their responsibilities and in ensuring teachers' and school leaders' continuing professional development, need to be of high quality, relevant to needs and based on a well-balanced combination of solid academic research and extensive practical experience. It is essential that initial teacher education, early career support ('induction'⁽⁶⁾) and continuous professional education are treated as a coherent whole.
3. A new teacher's first post after the completion of initial teacher education is a particularly important time in terms of his/her motivation, performance and professional development. Newly qualified teachers can have difficulty in adjusting to real school situations and applying what they have learned during initial teacher education. Indeed, a substantial number of them ultimately abandon their teaching careers, at a high cost both to themselves and to society. There is considerable national and international research evidence to show, however, that structured programmes of support for all new teachers can reduce this phenomenon. These may also be beneficial for teachers re-entering the profession.
4. No course of initial teacher education, however excellent, can equip teachers with all the competences they will require during their careers. Demands on the teaching profession are evolving rapidly, imposing the need for new approaches. To be fully effective in teaching, and capable of adjusting to the evolving needs of learners in a world of rapid social, cultural, economic and technological change, teachers

⁽⁵⁾ For the purpose of these conclusions, the term 'teacher' is used to denote a person who is acknowledged as having the status of a teacher (or equivalent) according to the legislation and practice of a Member State. It covers the specific situation of teachers and trainers in vocational education and training, but does not include persons employed outside the formal systems of education and training because of the different nature and context of the tasks they undertake.

⁽⁶⁾ The term 'induction' is used in this text to refer to any structured programme of support that is provided to new teachers after they finish their formal programme of initial teacher education and at the outset of their first contract as a teacher in a school.

themselves need to reflect on their own learning requirements in the context of their particular school environment, and to take greater responsibility for their own lifelong learning as a means of updating and developing their own knowledge and skills. However, there is evidence that some teachers still have too few opportunities to participate in continuous professional development programmes, while a significant number of those who do have such opportunities feel that these programmes are not always sufficiently relevant to their individual needs and the challenges they face.

5. Effective school leadership is a major factor in shaping the overall teaching and learning environment, raising aspirations and providing support for pupils, parents and staff, and thus in fostering higher achievement levels. It is therefore of key importance to ensure that school leaders have, or are able to develop, the capacities and qualities needed to assume the increasing number of tasks with which they are confronted. Equally important is ensuring that school leaders are not overburdened with administrative tasks and concentrate on essential matters, such as the quality of learning, the curriculum, pedagogical issues and staff performance, motivation and development.
6. Teaching staff at all levels, including school leaders, could draw greater benefit from increased learning mobility and networking, given the important role these have played in enhancing the quality of education and training systems and institutions, as well as in making such systems and institutions more open, more outward-looking, more accessible and more efficient,

AGREES that:

1. While Europe's education systems differ in many respects, they share a common need to attract and retain teaching staff and school leaders of the highest calibre in order to ensure high quality educational outcomes. Great care and attention should therefore be devoted to defining the required profile of prospective teachers and school leaders, to selecting them and preparing them to fulfil their tasks.
2. Teacher education programmes should be of high quality, evidence-based and relevant to needs. Those responsible for training teachers — and indeed for training teacher educators — should themselves have attained a high academic standard and possess solid practical experience of teaching, as well as the competences which good teaching requires. Efforts should also be made to ensure that teacher education institutions cooperate effectively, on the one hand with those conducting pedagogical research in other higher education institutions, and on the other with school leaders.
3. In view of the increasing demands placed upon them and the growing complexity of their roles, teachers need access to effective personal and professional support throughout their careers, and particularly during the time they first enter the profession.

4. In a rapidly changing world, and in keeping with the concept of lifelong learning, the education and development of teachers should be a coherent continuum spanning initial teacher education (with a strong practical component), induction and continuing professional development. In particular, efforts should be made to ensure that:

- (a) all newly qualified teachers receive sufficient and effective support and guidance during the first few years of their careers;
- (b) a reflective approach is promoted, whereby both newly qualified and more experienced teachers are encouraged continuously to review their work individually and collectively;
- (c) all teachers receive regular feedback on their performance, together with help in identifying their professional development needs and establishing a plan to meet these;
- (d) in the light of such feedback, sufficient opportunities are made available for practising teachers to update, develop and extend their competences throughout their careers, and that they are encouraged and enabled to do so;
- (e) professional development programmes for teachers are relevant, tailored to needs, firmly rooted in practice and quality assured;
- (f) teachers and school leaders are encouraged and enabled to take advantage of the opportunities offered by exchange and mobility schemes, and networks, at both national and international level;
- (g) teachers and school leaders are encouraged and enabled to participate in advanced professional training and development, to engage in pedagogical research and to take advantage of opportunities to develop their knowledge of other professional sectors.

5. Given the considerable impact which school leaders have on the overall learning environment, including staff motivation, morale and performance, teaching practices and the attitudes and aspirations of pupils and parents alike, there is a need to ensure that school leaders have sufficient opportunities to develop and maintain effective leadership skills. And since the challenges involved in leading learning communities are similar throughout Europe, school leaders could also benefit from collaborative learning with their counterparts in other Member States, notably by sharing experience and examples of good practice, and through cross-border opportunities for professional development,

INVITES THE MEMBER STATES TO:

1. Take further steps to ensure that the teaching profession attracts and retains candidates of the highest calibre, and that teachers receive sufficient preparation and support to enable them to carry out their responsibilities effectively.
2. Make appropriate provision for all new teachers to participate in a programme of induction offering both professional and personal support during their first years in a teaching post.
3. Provide for regular reviews of teachers' individual professional development needs as defined on the basis of self-and/or external evaluation, and make available sufficient opportunities for continuous professional development aimed at meeting those needs and in turn ensuring a positive impact on pupils' learning outcomes.
4. Actively promote the opportunities offered by exchange and mobility schemes at both national and international level, and support participation in such schemes, with a view to substantially increasing the numbers of teachers and school leaders who take advantage of these.
5. Review the responsibilities of — and the provision of support for — school leaders, notably with a view to lightening their administrative workload so that they focus their attention on shaping the overall teaching and learning environment and on fostering higher achievement levels.
6. Ensure that high quality provision exists to develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes required by both prospective and practising teachers, as well as to develop — for instance, by means of special programmes — the knowledge, skills and attitudes required to provide effective school leadership,

INVITES THE COMMISSION TO:

1. Enhance and support European policy cooperation in the areas of initial teacher education, continuous professional development and school leadership, notably by establishing platforms and peer-learning activities for the exchange of knowledge, experience and expertise among policymakers and teaching professionals.
2. Present practical information for policymakers on developing structured induction programmes for all new teachers, together with examples of measures that can be taken to implement or improve such programmes.
3. Promote and support greater participation by teachers, school leaders and teacher educators in transnational mobility schemes, partnerships and projects established under Community programmes, in particular the Lifelong Learning Programme.
4. Prepare a study of the existing arrangements in Member States for selecting, recruiting and training teacher educators.
5. Provide a compendium of teacher competences in the Member States, accompanied by peer-learning activities in this field.
6. Support the further development of an evidence base on the teaching and school leadership professions, including through cooperation with international organisations.
7. Inform the Council, using existing reporting mechanisms and at the earliest suitable opportunity, about measures taken by the Member States and in the context of European cooperation as a follow-up to the Council conclusions of November 2007 on improving the quality of teacher education and those of November 2008 on an agenda for European cooperation on schools with regard to the professional development of teachers and school leaders.