



## Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the European Union

### Conference

### *Teacher professional development for the quality and equity of lifelong learning*

Lisboa, Parque das Nações – Pavilhão Atlântico – Sala Nónio  
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### *Some concluding remarks*

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#### Introduction

- I would like to thank our hosts for such a well-organised conference and the wonderful hospitality we enjoyed last night.
- We have heard some very interesting and often passionate contributions - which have covered the topic of Teacher Education from just about every angle and also from every corner of the EU. It is clear how much key stakeholders are concerned about the state of Teacher Education in the EU.
- Commissioner Figel' (and Minister Rodrigues) referred to the importance of high quality Teacher Education systems for our economy, for our society and above all for our young people, and I think this conference has borne that out.
- We are very pleased that Portuguese Presidency took the initiative to hold this conference so soon after the Commission adopted its Communication on Teacher Education. You have really taken matters in hand when they were "hot off the press!".
- Let me take the opportunity to make clear from the outset that the Commission's message is *not* that the quality of teaching is poor but rather that teachers performance can be improved, teachers' job satisfaction will be greater and they will be encouraged to stay in their jobs longer, if they have access to a well resourced, coherent and attractive system of education, training and support from the beginning to the end of their careers.

- We place so many demands on teachers that anyone contemplating a career in the profession who was listening in on our discussions at this conference would surely be frightened off by the super-human list of qualities we expect them to have!

### **Points from the discussions at the conference**

I was particularly struck by the following contributions:

- **Antonio Novoa's** comments about the need to put the teacher education debate inside the profession and strengthen the public voice of teachers – to let them have the “ownership” of determining the organisation of their profession.
- **Pavel Zgaga** underlined how radically different the profession is today. Teaching and Teachers have changed but teaching lags behind other professions in the Europeanisation/ internationalisation of the profession. He also underlined the need to upgrade teacher educators – we have to "teach old dogs new tricks".
- **Marco Snoek** told us of the lack of mechanisms in schools for teachers who are starting out on their careers, to learn from the experience of older colleagues and teachers. A sort of a mentoring system would be very welcome. He also underlined that teachers should create their own professional body and develop their own standards.
- The **good practices in teacher education** from a variety of countries: Finland, Netherlands, Denmark, Romania and Cyprus.
- **Maria Roldão** remarked upon the two separate worlds of initial and continuing training and the need to break down the barriers between them.
- **Kari Smith** explained that teachers identify themselves locally i.e. with their immediate classroom environment rather than the wider development of the profession. This can have a very limiting effect.

## Main themes

In fact, if we look back over the last couple of days, I think we've seen that the issues raised by the European Commission in its Communication on Improving the Quality of Teacher Education were the right ones.

- **First:** the importance of having initial teacher education that is of the highest quality; in this regard, the question clearly arises as to why there are not more Member States who insist that all their teachers should have a Masters degree?
- I know there are several schools of thought on this; but I also know that this seems to be growing trends in Europe for more countries require their teachers to have a Masters degree because teaching is such a complex profession. It is very difficult to deal with every aspect of it in a Bachelors degree. So it was encouraging to learn that Portugal itself is going down that path as from the year 2007/08.
- If we look at the systems across the EU we see that many Member States require a lower level of qualification for their primary teachers than they do for secondary teachers. I wonder if this doesn't undervalue the key role that primary teachers play in helping the very youngest to develop as people. Could we not argue that all teachers, including primary teachers, should have the same level of education?
- But whatever the level of the qualification, I think we can all agree that Initial Teacher Education has to strike the right balance between knowledge of the specialist subject and knowledge of how to teach; between pedagogic theory and practice in real classrooms with real pupils.
- **Second:** it's clear from the interventions we've heard here that initial Teacher Education - even at Masters level - can never be enough to sustain a teacher for a career lasting 30 or 40 years. The skills and knowledge that our young people need are evolving all the time; and teachers need to be encouraged and enabled to carry on developing their own competence. If we expect our young people to be life long learners, we can surely also expect our teachers to set the example.
- Continuing professional development can take many shapes, as we have heard; it can involve informal as well as formal learning. And doesn't have to take place outside school; indeed, as we have heard, there is much to be gained by making the school the centre for Continuing<sub>3</sub>

professional Development, so that teachers can learn from the experienced teachers around them, and so that the development of the teacher is an integral part of the development of the school. I know that this was certainly the opinion of the national experts who took part in the Peer Learning Activity on 'the school as a learning community' last year.

- **Third:** Provision for Teacher Education needs to be planned and coordinated. If we want to make absolutely sure that every single teacher is getting the right training at the right moment in their career, then we need to have systems that do this; we need to make sure that no teacher is left struggling, or discouraged, or unfulfilled because she does not have adequate opportunities to develop herself personally and professionally. This partly relies upon every teacher assessing her training needs, but it also means that there needs to be enough opportunities for further education or training in place, that really respond to the needs of teachers, and there have to be the encouragement and incentives to make them attractive.
- And, of course, Member States have to make sure that the system is adequately funded. Here I wonder whether enough has been made of the **economic case of investing in teacher education**. Marc Snoek said that teachers are the number 1 determinant of students' achievement. Teacher training may provide a much less costly means of improving pupils' attainment than reducing class size or adding school hours/other support mechanisms.
- **Fourth:** we should expect teachers to play their part in extending the boundaries of professional knowledge; from what I've heard yesterday and today, I'm sure that there is scope for much closer working between teachers in the classroom, and educational researchers; there should be a two-way flow of information and advice between them. May I be a bit provocative here – there may be a need for education academics to deliver their studies and analysis in an “understandable” way to policymakers. Not to be over-theoretical. There needs to be an active “sales” operation to convince policymakers to change policies which may be rooted in centuries of tradition.
- This also means that we need to encourage a culture of reflective practice amongst more teachers. We need teachers who can assess the effectiveness of every lesson they give, and learn from their successes and failures. And partly, of course, this requires there to be in place adequate systems of mentoring and guidance so that teachers always have someone to turn to for support

## What next?

- So as some people have said to me in the margins of the conference – the Commission’s Communication is all very fine and on the right track but what next?
- Before going into this, I need to explain a bit what the role of the Commission is. I think it is important to recall that the European Community has no competence in the field of education – this is a matter for the Member States exclusively. We therefore have to tread a very delicate line as to how far we can go in this area. We have broken new ground with this Communication and now the ball is mainly in the court of the Member States as to what happens next.
- The Portuguese Presidency has seized the initiative and in addition to hosting this conference is preparing Council Conclusions which will hopefully be adopted at the **political** level in the European Education Council in November.
- Ministers will be invited to set out what they see as the priority areas for action over the coming years.
- I would also urge you to get the debate going in your own countries and use the Commission’s Communication (as well as the eventual Council Conclusions) to promote this issue further. We need to move out of the realm of the theoretical to the practical. The Commission would be happy to participate in national events to follow-up on its Communication.
- Other follow-up activities: Under the Education and Training 2010 programme, a group of experts from Member States that are particularly interested in Teacher Education meets regularly to exchange good policy practice. Their aim is the modernisation of their national systems for Teacher Education. I hope that the Ministers will provide a clear indication of the direction that this work should take in coming years.
- In the same way, I believe that the results of this conference and the deliberations of Ministers will serve to highlight the contribution that can be made by ENTEP (European Network of Teacher Education Policies) to this process of modernising Teacher Education policy.
- But I would also like to remind you of the many opportunities that are offered by our **Lifelong Learning programme**. Mobility (as Kari Smith told us) brings great benefits to teachers: it can

foster a better understanding of cultural differences and an awareness of the European dimension of teaching. The Comenius sub-programme offers exciting opportunities for individual teachers to undertake in-service training abroad; it also offers funding for institutions of Teacher Education in different Member States to collaborate on new projects to improve the quality of the Teacher Education they provide.

- Prof. Niemi – spoke about the Bologna Process and what it can contribute to teacher education. The Commission supports much of the groundwork behind Bologna and will continue to drive forward on Higher Education Reform in Europe.
- I think our discussions have shown that Member States face very similar problems when trying to equip their teaching workforce to provide education of the highest quality for our young people;
- This conference has provided us with a very good basis for future policy work in this field, and the European Commission will continue to support Member States in their endeavours.

Thank you