# Efficiency and equity in European education and training systems

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The European Parliament adopted by 479 votes in favour, 53 against and 12 abstentions the own-initiative report drawn up by Tomáš **ZATLOUKAL** (EDD-ED, CZ) in response to the Commission Communication entitled 'Efficiency and equity in European education and training systems', and emphasised the need to develop efficient and equitable policies for both life-long learning and the need to invest in education early. The report endorsed the long-term-planning process in the field of lifelong learning, and the plan to create a European qualifications framework for lifelong learning which would facilitate recognition of educational achievement and allow visible, transparent switching between different study options. Parliament believed that was a need for a culture of appraisal in education and training systems, and hence, effective long-term policies must be based on reliable measurement. It also believed that investment in lifelong learning fostered social cohesion and enabled individuals to solve problems, to adapt, to build up their self-esteem and to cope with change, which made it easier for them to deal with other changes in their lives.

The report contains certain recommendations for ensuring efficiency and equity in the framework of education and training policies.

**Pre-school education:** Members were of the opinion that efficiency and equity could be achieved individually if investment and reform were focused on the early stages of education. They stressed the need: to develop, from the pre-school phase, measures to encourage the integration of children from third countries resident in the EU ; to invest much more in pre-school - including nursery – education; to ensure adequately trained teachers; and accordingly, a need for a financially viable strategy to be followed which will result in high quality education and satisfactory teaching careers; to ensure social diversity of classes and establishments in order to avoid a differentiation of curricula and expectations; to involve parents by means of educational and information programmes (particularly in the case of disadvantaged children). Parliament urged Member States to increase the number of subsidised places in pre-school education, thereby offering better opportunities to children under school age lacking financial security to benefit from the education system.

**Primary and secondary education:** compulsory attendance at school and the training system should provide basic education and key skills. However, Members felt that premature categorisation had a detrimental effect on efficiency and equity in education systems. They favoured the creation of a flexible range of study options at secondary-school level, which should not preclude a choice of a different track at subsequent educational stages. In view of the different levels of support from which each pupil may benefit at home, and the sometimes very unequal nature of the education provided, Members supported efforts to involve parents in the education process with a view to significantly reducing the risk of future social exclusion. Member States were asked to: support initial and further training for teachers, to boost their motivation and to improve the qualitative conditions of school life - these being decisive factors in the achievement of efficiency and equity; promote multilingualism at every level in the educational system; raise awareness of gender equality among teachers and education providers in order that they be able to promote respect for this principle among the younger generation.

**University education**: acknowledging that university education was a key aspect of a knowledge-based economy, Parliament supported the plan to modernise universities with a view to ensuring that university education becomes more competitive, is available to everyone on an equitable basis and remains financially viable and effective. It acknowledged that providing university education free of charge would

not necessarily and by itself guarantee equity. It called for further studies on the assumption that tuition fees are not an isolated issue but are part of a nexus of factors connected with financial incentives in combination with accompanying financial support which, in the case of disadvantaged groups, can reduce inequity in terms of access to university education.

**Vocational education and training**: in view of the problem of an ageing population, Parliament supported better provision of adult education in order to make it easier for people to adapt to the requirements of the employment market and for the low-skilled to become involved in education.

It recommended improved access to tertiary education and the development of opportunities enabling those who have completed their training to continue studying and further their education whilst working. Member States were asked: to promote access for young women, especially from remote areas disabled women and low-skilled women, to education and training; to promote access for unemployed women, and those who have not succeeded in the compulsory education system, to publicly funded adult training schemes; to implement policies that would facilitate the school-to-work transition for young people; to support university excellence programmes; to increase the proportion of, and strengthen the position of, women in science, engineering and technology; to propose the flexible organisation of studies, in order to meet more effectively the needs of young men and women who are working or attending to family responsibilities at the same time as studying and to prevent them from leaving education prematurely; to involve education institutions, companies, social and other partners and the public sector in a joint partnership concerned with the implementation of successful training programmes.

**European Union action**: Parliament emphasised that the fundamental goal of EU action was to promote the convergence of EU education systems towards higher standards of performance. In order to better target EU action it would be necessary to develop a process, based on reports periodically submitted by Member States as well as on independent verification, for the appraisal of the performance of education and training systems in the EU, paying particular attention to the acquisition of basic skills by pupils and to the achievement of equity objectives. The Commission was asked to publish regular reports on efficiency and equity in European education and training systems in order to monitor progress towards higher standards of performance.