

Basic information

2008/2329(INI)

INI - Own-initiative procedure

Better schools: an agenda for European cooperation

Subject

4.40.01 European area for education, training and lifelong learning

4.40.03 Primary and secondary school, European Schools, early childhood

4.40.06 Teachers, trainers, pupils, students

Procedure completed

Key players

European Parliament	Committee responsible	Rapporteur	Appointed
	CULT Culture and Education	SCHMITT Pál (PPE-DE)	17/12/2008
	Committee for opinion	Rapporteur for opinion	Appointed
	EMPL Employment and Social Affairs	The committee decided not to give an opinion.	
European Commission	Commission DG	Commissioner	
	Education, Youth, Sport and Culture	FIGEL Ján	

Key events

Date	Event	Reference	Summary
03/07/2008	Non-legislative basic document published	COM(2008)0425 	Summary
18/12/2008	Committee referral announced in Parliament		
05/03/2009	Vote in committee		Summary
09/03/2009	Committee report tabled for plenary	A6-0124/2009	
02/04/2009	Decision by Parliament	T6-0217/2009	Summary
02/04/2009	Results of vote in Parliament		
02/04/2009	End of procedure in Parliament		

Technical information

Procedure reference	2008/2329(INI)
Procedure type	INI - Own-initiative procedure
Procedure subtype	Initiative
Legal basis	Rules of Procedure EP 55
Stage reached in procedure	Procedure completed
Committee dossier	CULT/6/71165

Documentation gateway				
European Parliament				
Document type	Committee	Reference	Date	Summary
Committee draft report		PE418.269	27/01/2009	
Amendments tabled in committee		PE420.225	19/02/2009	
Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading		A6-0124/2009	09/03/2009	
Text adopted by Parliament, single reading		T6-0217/2009	02/04/2009	Summary
European Commission				
Document type		Reference	Date	Summary
Non-legislative basic document		COM(2008)0425 	03/07/2008	Summary
Document attached to the procedure		SEC(2008)2177 	03/07/2008	
Commission response to text adopted in plenary		SP(2009)3508	13/10/2009	

Better schools: an agenda for European cooperation

2008/2329(INI) - 03/07/2008 - Non-legislative basic document

PURPOSE: to present a Commission communication on improving competences for the 21st Century: an Agenda for European cooperation on schools.

CONTENT: the European Council has repeatedly stressed the key role of education and training for the future growth, long-term competitiveness and social cohesion of the EU. To achieve this, it is crucial fully to develop the potential for innovation and creativity of European citizens. The education element of the knowledge triangle "research-innovation-education" should be strengthened, starting early – in schools. The competences and learning habits acquired at school are essential for developing new skills for new jobs later in life. The challenge facing the EU is to strengthen the reform of school systems so that every young person can develop his or her full potential, through improved access and opportunities, to become an active participant in the emerging knowledge economy, and to reinforce social solidarity. The Commission believes that, given the common nature of many of the challenges facing school systems and the importance of these issues for the Union's socio-economic future, school education should be a key priority for the next cycle of the Lisbon process.

This Communication proposes an agenda for strengthening European cooperation on schools by identifying the major challenges facing systems that can best be tackled by such cooperation. These are divided into three areas:

Focus on competences: the trend in school curricula is to help learners acquire knowledge and the skills and attitudes necessary to apply it in real life situations. The European Framework of Key Competences describes the knowledge, skills and attitudes required for a successful life in a knowledge society. It is a basis for a coherent approach to competence development, in school and in vocational training. Literacy and numeracy are essential components of key competences, but performance in the EU is deteriorating. The EU benchmark is by 2010 to decrease the proportion of 15-year-olds who are low-achievers in reading literacy to 17%. However, the rate actually increased from 21.3% in 2000 to 24.1% in 2006. Moreover, almost twice

as many boys as girls have low reading skills: 17.6% of 15 year old girls and 30.4 % of 15 year old boys. The decline in reading literacy must urgently be reversed.

To support the Member States in implementing the Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning, the Commission proposes to focus future cooperation on:

- developing action plans to increase levels of reading literacy and numeracy, including the use of target-setting;
- reinforcing transversal as well as subject-based competences, particularly learning to- learn; and
- adopting a comprehensive approach to competence development, encompassing curricula, learning materials, teacher training, personalised learning, and assessment techniques.

High quality learning for every student: providing all young people with the full range of competences for life is an equity challenge. No school system provides exactly the same educational opportunities for all pupils. The quality gap between schools should be closed. Recent research shows that low variation in student achievement scores can go together with high average achievement, and suggests that policy makers should reduce disparities and improve participation by targeting those with lower skill levels. The EU benchmark is that by 2010 at least 85% of young people should have completed upper secondary education. The 2007 average rate for 20-24 year-olds is 78.1%, an improvement of only 1.5 percentage points since 2000.

To support Member States in implementing the Council Conclusions on efficiency and equity in education and training, the Commission proposes to focus future cooperation on:

- generalising access to high quality pre-school education;
- measuring and improving the equity impact of school education systems, and reducing quality differences between schools;
- ensuring that school systems facilitate successful transitions between different school types and levels, and into further education and training;
- reducing early school leaving; and• providing more timely support and personalised learning approaches within mainstream schooling for students with special needs.

Teachers and school staff: teacher quality is the most important within-school factor affecting student performance. As such, it is vital to the achievement of Lisbon goals. The profession has a high percentage of older workers; some 30% of teachers are over 50, and around 2 million will need to be replaced in the next 15 years to maintain the size of the teaching workforce. Staff need the skills to give every pupil adequate opportunities to acquire necessary competences in a safe and attractive school environment based on mutual respect and cooperation, which promotes social, physical and mental well-being and where bullying and violence have no place. Yet most countries report shortfalls in teaching skills. Despite this, incentives for, and investment in, continuous training and development are weak. Generally, time spent on in service training is minimal and many Member States offer no systematic support for new teachers.

To support Member States in implementing the Council Conclusions on improving the quality of teacher education, the Commission proposes to focus future cooperation on:

- ensuring that teachers' initial education, induction and ongoing professional development are coordinated, coherent, adequately resourced and quality assured;
- improving the supply, quality and take-up of in-service teacher education;
- reviewing teacher recruitment to attract the most able candidates, select the best applicants, and place good teachers in challenging schools; and
- improving the recruitment of school leaders and equipping them to focus on improving student learning and developing school staff.

Better schools: an agenda for European cooperation

2008/2329(INI) - 02/04/2009 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution on the subject of entitled "Better Schools: an agenda for European cooperation", following the Commission's communication on the subject.

The text adopted in plenary had been tabled by the EPP-ED, PES, Greens/EFA, GUE/NGL groups, under Article 45, paragraph 2 of Parliament's Rules of Procedure, as a proposed resolution to replace the resolution proposed in the own-initiative report tabled by the Committee on Culture and Education.

The Parliament fully supports the proposals made in the Commission's Communication of 4 July 2008 (see summary of the non-legislative initial document) and in the parallel Communication of 16 December 2008 (COM(2006)0865) on "An updated strategic framework for European cooperation on education and training". Overall, it considers that school education should be a key priority for the next cycle of the Lisbon strategy.

In this context, Parliament makes the following recommendations:

Improving competences of every student: Parliament calls on the Member States to do their utmost to provide every young person with **basic skills that are fundamental** for further learning. It is concerned about the current trend of decreasing level of students' literacy and numeracy skills and calls for strategies to be put in place to reduce the number of early school leavers and to reduce gender imbalances in basic skills. The plenary notes that young people show a concerning lack of ability to concentrate and therefore calls on the Commission to conduct a study to investigate the main reasons for this lack of concentration among pupils. Parliament stresses the need to identify students at risk as soon as possible and to provide them with additional support, as well as to support them during the transition from one school level to the next and provide personalised learning approaches for those in need.

Parliament calls on the Member States to:

- ensure that their educational policies achieve a balance between equality and quality, with the stress on social facilitation measures for pupils and students from disadvantaged backgrounds and on adapting the learning process to their individual needs;
- enhance the access of disadvantaged groups to vocational training and university studies by drawing up and advertising appropriate scholarship schemes.

It also calls for the **modernisation and improvement of school curricula** so that they reflect today's social, economic, cultural and technical realities and are closely linked to industry, business and the labour market. The plenary considers it important for young people to be prepared during their time at school, college and university **for flexibility in the labour market** in view of its mutability, where employers' requirements can change rapidly. However, the reform of the educational system should be fundamentally geared to the full and multi-faceted development of the individual, cultivating respect for human rights and social justice, lifelong learning, the protection of the environment and personal and collective wellbeing. On the whole, the Parliament believes that schools should strive not only to improve employability, but also to give all young people the opportunity to develop their full potential, in line with their personal aptitudes. It also considers that all children should, from the earliest age, be given the opportunity to acquire musical, artistic, manual, physical, social and civic competences and strongly believe that musical, artistic and physical education should be compulsory parts of the school curriculum.

Reiterating its view that children should learn foreign languages from an early age, Parliament welcomes the proposal of a new benchmark, according to which **at least 80% of pupils in lower secondary education be taught at least two foreign languages**. Member States are also called upon to instruct pupils in the use and applications of new communications and digital technology.

High-quality schools and teachers: Parliament calls for a **European charter on pupils' rights** as a first and important step to guaranteeing the right of every child to quality education. Member States and the competent regional governments are also called upon to invest in high-quality pre-primary education.

In parallel, the Parliament considers that public education should remain primarily a state-financed domain which contributes to social equity and inclusion. However, the plenary also considers that public educational institutions in a more disadvantaged financial situation, particularly those located in **poorer regions** of the EU, should be granted **additional support**.

According to Parliament, a good quality learning environment, providing modern infrastructure, materials and technology is a pre-requisite for achieving high quality education in schools. The quality of education further requires curricula of a demanding and rigorous nature and assessment of pupils on a regular basis.

Parliament also calls on Member States to give schools the **necessary autonomy** to find solutions to the specific challenges they face in their local context (as well as the appropriate flexibility in curricula, teaching methods and assessment systems).

It also believes that it is necessary to provide high-quality initial teacher education based on both theory and practice, while stressing the importance of respect for the teacher's authority in the classroom. The quality of teaching depends on the skills of the teachers and on the mobility of teaching staff (via programmes such as Comenius, in particular) and school partnership projects. Parliament also recommends creating school/community partnerships in order to combat the problem of violence in schools.

At the same time, Parliament recommends **involving parents in school life**. It believes that all schools should foster the acquisition of democratic competences by supporting student councils and allowing students to take co-responsibility for the school in partnership with parents, teachers and school councils.

Lastly, Parliament calls on the Member States and the Commission to cooperate closely **to promote implementation of the European schooling system** in the Member States' respective education systems and to envisage including the European Schools in the work of the Eurydice network. In the meantime, it calls on the Commission to report regularly to Parliament on the progress made following the two aforementioned communications.