
Position of CESI regarding the European Education Area

The European Commission presented its contribution on this matter at the Gothenburg Conference by means of its Communication “Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture” on 17 November 2017. The aim is to create a European Education Area.

In December 2017, the European Council invited the Member States, the Council and the Commission to put forward key initiatives mentioned in the Gothenburg Communication.

In this view, the Communication published the “Future of Learning Package” in January and May 2018. CESI strongly supports this set of initiatives and aims to implement it in the field by means of its member trade unions acting in the area of education.

CESI supports this package in concrete terms through the submission of a series of recommendations, such as:

- proposing efficient measures that take the social aspect of education into account and provide solutions to the existing challenges;
- adopting joint European-level initiatives; and
- making recommendations to the Member States concerning the implementation of practical means.

1. Proposing efficient measures that take the social aspect of education into account and provide solutions to the existing challenges

1.1. Reject a purely utilitarian vision of education

Education must not only serve the needs of the job market by means of the “production” of future “tailor-made” workers. Indeed, education must promote the development of the intellectual and emotional capacities of all. Modern society requires educated, cultured and critical citizens because this would mitigate the proliferation of “fake news” on social networks. Moreover, education must be considered as a **channel to transmit the values that form the basis of our liberal and democratic societies**. Through the study of fundamental religious, philosophical, political and social works, citizens will be able to understand the origin and merit of the inviolability of human dignity and of our fundamental freedoms and rights.

1.2. Get educational institutes involved so as to provide educational excellence

The transmission of knowledge alone is insufficient to raise European citizens. **Concretes measures** must be implemented, such as awareness-raising activities, namely on the role of the European institutions and on common values¹. At school, students must experience humanist values in their daily lives, whether it be within the framework of classroom projects or extra-curricular activities, or within the schools' management systems themselves, by getting young people more involved in decision-making processes with the aim of generating greater interest in such matters (e.g. by means of student committees).

Reinforcing collaboration with the world at large is another path which should be explored. The problems faced by school communities cannot always be resolved by education professionals. However, in reality, there are no synergies between the various state services dealing with young people (e.g. social services, justice, police, etc.). This means that governments should forge real partnerships or efficient collaboration measures between these services. In addition, in order to increase the quality of schooling and allow students to expand their horizons beyond the classroom, it would be beneficial to strengthen the links between the private sector (e.g. companies) and schools, so that students can do internships in the various sectors of their choice and so that collaboration with external experts may take place and be integrated into the classroom. This form of intervention must remain under the supervision and control of teachers.

1.3. Strengthen social dialogue and the role of trade unions in the design and set-up of reforms

These players are experts and have the practical knowledge required in their respective fields. It is therefore fundamentally important to **get them involved in decision-making processes** and not shut them out. Indeed, CESI has noted that their role has not been considered within the context of the European Commission's initiatives.

1.4. Strive to improve the well-being of all players in the field of education (learners, teachers and staff in the education sector)

Bad working conditions lead to dysfunctional practices in teaching. Teaching teams in schools should have the support of **psycho-social and socio-educational staff** to ensure the students benefit from an efficient support framework, thus allowing teachers to focus on providing high-quality lessons. High-quality education can only be provided to learners if they can work in a healthy environment. **To fight efficiently against the burnout of professionals, harassment and absenteeism**, schools must be viewed as a living space as well as a place of education.

2. Making recommendations to the Member States concerning the implementation of practical means

2.1. Improve the image of the teaching profession

In Europe, it is becoming increasingly difficult to attract young university students to the teaching profession, as well as to retain older teachers in the job. This problem concerns us all: the provision of high-quality education ensures a better future for upcoming generations and societies. Here, not only must society and politicians take responsibility for improving the image of teachers and increase society's respect for them, but the media and parents should play their role too. Educational policies must strive to make the

¹ CESI Position paper on the promotion of social inclusion and shared European values through formal and non-formal learning

teaching profession more attractive. From a material viewpoint, **salaries must be decent and perks must be given**. In addition, morally, the governments must be held responsible for **strengthening schools' level of authority** as institutions, and must provide support to those working in the field.

Greater material and moral value granted to the teaching profession will make lead to greater regard and respect for the profession, which will help fight some of the current challenges faced, i.e. the difficulty to recruit new teachers and to attract high-quality professionals. Finally, the objective of “excellence in the field of education” will be achieved in this manner.

2.2. States must create tools that permit the attainment of the defined objectives Political commitments will not suffice to reach the objectives defined by the European Commission, such as learning two languages in addition to one's mother tongue. **Efficient means** must be implemented (e.g. the guarantee of support provided to individuals experiencing difficulties) in order to provide “educational excellence”.

2.3. Define concrete investment terms for the field of education on a national level, representing over 5% of GDP

Most countries already invest this proportion of their budget in education. In order to reach the objective of educational excellence, this investment must be raised.

2.4. Ensure all have the right to education and training, and promote lifelong learning

This right should be guaranteed to all workers, including those with few qualifications and independently of the size of the company for which they work. This would allow all citizens to gain better skills and would permit the anticipation of job market needs. For instance, digitalisation is a growing reality in workplaces and in the citizens' daily lives, and yet many people are finding it difficult to adapt to this new environment. Training adults and lifelong learning should be promoted through the establishment of adult training centres as well as the provision of wide training offers aimed at adults and tailored to their needs (e.g. evening classes, e-learning). In order to guarantee this right is met, a **legal framework must be set up**, either on a national level or as part of collective agreements. Finally, CESI advocates for **the introduction of education leave** for all workers, with the aim of responding to the need for lifelong learning resulting from the fast pace of change in society today.

2.5. Improve access to Erasmus+-related actions and funding

Adequate measures must be taken to increase the level of diversity of Erasmus+ beneficiaries. It may possibly be ideal to **limit** or even **stop the access selection process** so as to promote equal opportunities for all. Moreover, CESI recommends the **reduction of the administrative steps required** because they too represent a barrier to equal access.

3. Adopt joint European-level initiatives

3.1. Maintain the subsidiarity principle which should permit the resolution of global problems

CESI underscores the importance of the principle of subsidiarity in education, which is a national responsibility. However, the principle of subsidiarity should not represent a barrier to the resolution of

global problems, and should allow the EU and Member States to work hand in hand in order to find joint solutions².

3.2. Encourage the Member State to increase their investment in education

The European Union must encourage the Member State to ensure they adequately fund their education systems, because current austerity measures represent a threat to their successful operation. Educational excellence as defined by the initiatives of the European Commission will only be achieved if there is greater flexibility on the level of budgets. CESI already adopted a motion at the 2016 Congress that highlighted the importance of social investments³, particularly in education and healthcare. A successful education system – i.e. with sufficient jobs filled and qualified, highly-respected personnel – allows societies to become more competitive. Finally, CESI believes that investments made in the education sector must be viewed as social investments and must be specifically taken into account in European economic governance and budget monitoring rules.

3.3. Increase mobility programme funding

CESI is of the opinion that the budgets allocated to the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps should be increased. Indeed, not only do they promote the mobility of young people and their integration onto the job market, they also help forge their European identity.

3.4. Offer common guarantees to all learners in Member States by means of the European Student Card

In addition to its validity in all EU countries, this card should be made **accessible to all categories of learners**. The European Student Card could be a tool to promote **equal access to culture and mobility**.

3.5. Indispensable measures that must be adopted in schools in Europe

A **transparent recruitment process** must be guaranteed, and **diversity must be promoted**. These measures must apply to both teaching staff and students.

² Position of the CESI Presidium on the Future of the European Union: “the understanding of subsidiarity, (...) which should not only require member states’ competence or action on the lowest levels, but should focus on solving problems in an increasingly-integrated EU”.

³ Main motion of the 2016 CESI Congress on the Future of Europe, “Investing in people”