



EDUC-021

OPINION

by the European Confederation of Independent Trade Unions

An updated strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training

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Brussels, 3 June, 2009



The European Confederation of Independent Trade Unions,

- given** the conclusions of the March 2000 Lisbon European Council, which set the strategic objective of the European Union becoming, by 2010, ‘the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world’,
- given** the Commission communication ‘Investing efficiently in education and training: an imperative for Europe’ and CESI’s opinion on this communication,
- given** the various CESI opinions on lifelong learning, teaching skills, multilingualism and European learning credits,

adopted the following opinion on the 3rd of June, 2009:

1. In its 2004 opinion on the communication ‘Education and Training 2010: the success of the Lisbon Strategy hinges on urgent reforms’, CESI reflected on whether reforms to the national educational systems were progressing at sufficient speed to achieve the objectives set by the Lisbon European Council. It is worth noting that we are still asking ourselves the same question. Indeed, all surveys show that a certain number of objectives have still not been reached: pre-primary teaching is still insufficiently developed, the percentage of young people dropping out of school is still high, the percentage of pupils completing the second part of secondary education is still too low, not enough work has been devoted to language learning, the level of qualifications obtained by children from immigrant backgrounds is lower than that of children from other populations.
2. The economic and financial crisis which has been ravaging the globe since 2008 makes it imperative for us to re-examine both national and European strategies. Europe will overcome this crisis to a great extent with the help of training and this calls for more effective educational systems. The Commission has stressed the urgent need to provide more funding for education, which is logical enough but difficult in light of the current economic climate, in which the Member States already have excessive levels of public debt and in the absence of a European funding plan.
3. Were the Lisbon goals too ambitious or insufficiently realistic, especially after the European Union grew to encompass 27 Member States? We got lost in declarations which were more incantatory than adapted to the diversity of the situations with which we were presented. The Commission is doing its duty: it is communicating, making recommendations, looking for causes and supporting measures to accompany the beginnings of possible solutions.... But it is up to the Member States to raise their game, too!



4. We note that, in order to achieve the Lisbon goals, reforms have been set in motion, but these reforms are being carried out with constant or reduced funds in many Member States, with the subsidiarity principle guaranteeing the latter's independence in this field. We are thus witnessing a systematic reduction of the level of demand, pupils are not stimulated, good results are not assessed, etc. We want to make school and school programmes more 'attractive' because we think this will prevent pupils from dropping out or that it will give an apparently satisfactory signal to the Commission by raising the percentage of pupils who complete the second part of secondary education. So many solutions which are intended to respond to purely statistical data, and yet this does not really contribute towards improving training for young Europeans.
5. Improving education systems involves structural reforms which do not cease to make high demands in terms of quality but which reorganise school programmes and courses; over-rigid academic structures can be made more flexible in order to create new ways of organising teaching. What we need is the kind of pre-primary education which gets children ready to get the most out of primary school, where fundamental skills are acquired. At secondary level, programmes must be modified and adapted to current demands and pupils must be guaranteed adequate preparation for higher education and professional training.
6. Teacher training is essential when it comes to improving the quality and effectiveness of national education systems. CESI has already given its views on the career and training of teachers in its contribution to the project on European principles on teacher skills and qualifications (2005).
Let us recall several important points at this juncture:
 - Recruiting all teachers, regardless of what level they teach, based on at least a Master
 - Pedagogical or professional training validated by a diploma or the fact that the teacher has passed a *concours* (competition)
 - Moral and financial recognition
 - Real possibilities of promotion and further training
 - Mobility-friendly measures
7. The Member States should avoid two pitfalls:
 - An overly utilitarian vision of education and training, where the sole aim would be an adaptation to the needs of the market and short-term objectives set by the globalised economy,
 - Making training a partisan, political issue, as education cannot depend on provisional decisions changed at the drop of a hat each time there is a change of government.



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8. It must be ensured that lifelong learning becomes a reality: it is indeed urgent that skills be updated, in particular for adults, but this training must also provide the opportunity for professional development and not just amount to upgrading ones competences in order to meet selective needs.

Conclusion

It is vital that energy be devoted to furthering a knowledge-based training and education model which promotes staff commitment and takes account of training needs. Only then will the school become a place where knowledge is acquired once more.

Brussels, 3 June, 2009