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NOTE

from: Council General Secretariat
to: Permanent Representatives Committee (Part 1)/Council

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Subject: Ensuring a teaching profession of the highest quality to underpin the achievement of better learning outcomes
- *Policy debate*
(Public debate pursuant to Article 8(2) CRP [proposed by the Presidency])

Following consultation of the Education Committee, the Presidency has drawn up the attached discussion paper as the basis for the policy debate on the above subject at the EYCS Council meeting on 16-17 May 2013.

Presidency Discussion Paper

Ensuring a teaching profession of the highest quality to underpin the achievement of better learning outcomes

Teaching is an essential profession

The importance of the teaching professions and the quality of teaching in contributing to learning outcomes is beyond question. Teacher quality is frequently cited as the most important in-school variable influencing student achievement.

We know from research and from practice – but also from our own experience – the impact that good teachers can have.

Equally, we have an increasing understanding of the profound negative consequences for individuals and society which can arise from sub-optimal teaching quality. To take one simple but instructive example, research from Stanford University has estimated that, accumulated over the lifetime of someone born today, the US economy will lose out on over €87 trillion in economic output if the effectiveness of under-performing teachers is not improved¹.

Crucially, whereas other factors affecting outcomes are either beyond our control or are difficult to influence (e.g. community, family and individual background characteristics), as Education Ministers we have access to policy levers which can have an impact on the quality and effectiveness of the teaching professions. These levers include:

- attracting and recruiting the most talented people and retaining them in the profession;

¹ <http://hanushek.stanford.edu/publications/valuing-teachers-how-much-good-teacher-worth>

- providing teachers with the right mix of skills and knowledge, throughout the teacher education continuum; and
- ensuring they receive regular feedback and appraisal.

A further set of policy levers allows us to address the issue ‘upstream’ by improving policy support for the teacher educator profession, which is key to improving the quality of teacher education. These levers include: implementing competence-based criteria for selecting teacher educators and facilitating their career-long professional support and development.

A focus of significant international attention

Given their central importance, it is not surprising that issues related to the teaching professions have received significant attention from the Council, Commission and external bodies such as the OECD in recent years. Some examples include:

- The Irish Presidency held a conference on the profession of teacher educators² which highlighted the need for effective policies to select and educate this key group of staff;
- Issues regarding teacher quality featured significantly during a second Irish Presidency conference on Better Assessment and Evaluation for Improved Learning³ and also during a recent meeting of the Directors General of Schools chaired by the Irish Presidency.⁴
- The Council held a debate on enhancing the quality, competence and status of teachers during the Cyprus Presidency⁵. Issues related to teachers have also been a major theme emerging from other Council debates, such as the one held during the Polish Presidency on *Investing in education and training in a time of crisis*⁶.

² 18-19 February 2013, Dublin.

³ 19-20 March 2013, Dublin.

⁴ 16-17 April 2013, Brussels

⁵ EYCS Council, 26 November 2012.

⁶ EYCS Council, 28 November 2011.

- The future Lithuanian Presidency has signalled its intention to focus on school leadership issues.
- The need for more effective support for the teaching professions features significantly in the Commission's recent major communication *Rethinking Education: Investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes*⁷.
- The OECD's most recent report, *Synergies for Better Learning: An International Perspective on Evaluation and Assessment*, provides an analysis of current practice regarding teacher appraisal as a contributor to quality in school systems.
- The *International Summit on the Teaching Profession*, most recently hosted by the Netherlands, has focused on a range of issues related to the quality of the teaching profession.

A key feature of the Commission's Rethinking Education agenda

The Commission communication *Rethinking Education* (and the related Staff Working Paper on *Supporting the Teaching Profession*⁸) recognises the central role of teachers, sets out some challenges facing education systems and the teaching professions in the coming decades, including:

- Rapidly changing demands requiring new competences for teachers, teacher educators and school leaders;
- The need to identify policies which develop and enhance the professional identity of the teacher educator profession and boost its attractiveness;
- The need for competence frameworks that clearly define the professional profile of teachers and teacher educators;

⁷ 14871/12.

⁸ 14871/12 ADD 4

- Recruitment, preparation and retention of the right individuals for leadership positions, who can focus on improving teaching and learning;
- New approaches to teaching and learning, including collaboration with business and employers, well-resourced continuous professional development and use of new technologies, which cater for diversity and inclusion.

The Commission also notes that the High Level Group on the Modernisation of Higher Education will make recommendations to policy makers and higher education institutions on how to promote quality in teaching and learning in higher education.

Ministerial debate: immediate and practical responses

At the European level, we have agreed an agenda for co-operation, with a particular focus on addressing the crisis in youth unemployment⁹ and achieving the Europe 2020 targets in respect of early school leaving and higher education attainment. Providing young people with the wide range of competences they will require in tomorrow's economy and society relies heavily on the quality of the teaching workforce, and therefore on the effectiveness of those who educate them. Teachers play a critically important role in enhancing both young people's employment prospects and life chances generally.

With that in mind, the central question for the Ministerial debate will be:

What major practical initiatives have Member States taken in recent years to improve quality in the teaching professions, in order to underpin the achievement of better learning outcomes?

⁹ Tackling youth unemployment is a key concern of the European Council, which agreed the Youth Employment Initiative at its meeting of 7-8 February 2013, with a budget of €6 billion for the period 2014-2020. Additionally, the Council (EPSCO) adopted the Youth Guarantee Recommendation at its meeting on 28 February 2013. Information on the Youth Employment Initiative will be provided by the Commission at the beginning of the debate.

In order to promote another interactive, free-flowing debate, the Presidency will be inviting two external speakers to give their perspectives on this issue:

- **Ms Christine Blower** is President of the European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE) and General Secretary of the UK's National Union of Teachers;
- **Mr Pasi Sahlberg** is Director General of Finland's Centre for International Mobility and Cooperation and author of *Finnish Lessons: What Can the World Learn from Educational Change in Finland?*

In their interventions, Ministers should be guided both by the question set out above, and by the presentations of the external speakers. Ministers will be encouraged to intervene freely in response to the speakers, without scripted interventions, by asking questions or commenting. The Presidency will also invite the external speakers to respond to the debate as it unfolds, and reflect on points made by Ministers.

Ministers will also be asked briefly to highlight one practical initiative in their Member State that could be of relevance to other Ministers.

In order to give all Ministers an opportunity to contribute, as well as to foster a more interactive discussion, interventions should be as brief and concise as possible (maximum two minutes).

In this way, Ministers will have the option of intervening more than once.

The Presidency's aim is that each Minister leaves the discussion with one or two practical ideas which they can take back to their capitals for discussion.