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Subject: **Improving teacher quality and status at a time of scarce financial resources**
- 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 26-27 November 2012.

Presidency Discussion Paper

Improving teacher quality and status at a time of scarce financial resources

Introduction

As the European Union is currently trying to recover from a severe economic and financial crisis and simultaneously achieve its major objectives to become smarter, more sustainable and more inclusive, Member States underline the urgency for social and economic reforms. The important role that education and training systems have to play in achieving the EU's objectives is highlighted in the Europe 2020 Strategy. Their contribution is critical in equipping citizens with the skills and competences which European economy and society need in order to remain competitive and innovative, and simultaneously to facilitate the promotion of social cohesion and inclusion.

In acknowledgement of the fundamental role played by education professionals in the learning process, the Cyprus Presidency considers that efficient investment in high quality education and training should begin from the core of the aforementioned systems, namely the teachers. Education ministers are therefore invited to participate actively in an open policy debate, enhancing the dialogue that has been initiated previously with the aim of improving the quality and competence of teachers in times of scarce financial resources, on the basis of following:

- a) The conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, of 15 November 2007 on improving the quality of teacher education, in which it is stated that *“the education and training of teachers is a crucial element in the modernisation of European education and training systems...”*

- b) The Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ('ET 2020'), and especially Strategic Objective 2: *"Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training"*, which notes among other things, that *"...there is a need to ensure high quality teaching, to provide adequate initial teacher education, continuous professional development for teachers and trainers, and to make teaching an attractive career choice..."*.
- c) The Council conclusions of 14 February 2011 on the role of education and training in the implementation of Europe 2020, which stresses that *"investing efficiently in high quality, modernised and reformed education and training is urgent because it will both lay the foundations for Europe's long-term prosperity and also, by providing people with more and better skills and competences, help respond in the short-term effect of the crisis."*
- d) The discussion held at the Informal Meeting of Education Ministers on 4-5 October 2012 in Nicosia, during which ministers stressed the need to improve the recruitment, professional development and competence of teachers, school leaders and trainers in order to enhance the quality of instruction and the quality of the learning environment, as well as to enhance the attractiveness of the teaching profession.

The current and future challenges

Education and training have a crucial role to play in addressing the many socio-economic, demographic, multicultural, environmental and technological challenges faced by the European citizens today and in the years ahead. Teachers are important actors in facing the above challenges, especially in improving the quality of education and learning outcomes. The ability to inspire in every student the desire to learn in a creative and stimulating learning environment is important for the future of our societies. At the same time, the quality of teachers' knowledge, skills and attitudes is a determining factor for learning experiences and for the achievement of the goals set in every educational system.

Improving the quality and the status of teachers has always been a major consideration for the Member States' aspirations concerning the quality of the education systems. Through the quality improvement and the continuous upgrading of teachers' skills and competences, it is possible to enhance the quality of the educational system in a way which will respond to the current challenges and will promote the active and creative participation of citizens in the social, political, cultural and economic life of the 21st century.

Financial reductions are seriously affecting the teaching professions; in many education systems, cuts have been made in teacher salaries or else a salary freeze has been applied in response to the economic downturn. Improvements in quality and status will need to take account of this reality. Approaches to improving teacher quality and status at a time of scarce resources might include some discussion of the following elements:

- **Selection.** High-performing systems recruit all of their teaching staff from the top tier of graduates; they are highly selective and offer attractive working conditions. Even if not all European countries can achieve this, the economic situation may make teaching more attractive than other careers (leading to a greater pool of talent to select from); and some countries face high levels of retirements in the coming years (leading to large numbers of new teachers being appointed); these factors can be used to the advantage of both the education systems and individuals and raise the quality threshold for entry into Initial Teacher Education by selecting a better quality of candidates.
- Discussion of **Teacher Quality** implies that there is a clear understanding about what is meant by 'quality'. Do countries have a clear statement of the specific classroom competences (not just abstract knowledge) that all teachers should possess? Does everyone leaving Initial Teacher Education possess these competences?

- **Attractiveness.** Better remuneration is not the only factor in making the profession attract more capable candidates. Other measures could include:
 - offering a wider variety of pathways to salary progression and promotion within the profession; this could be a career ladder that recognises extra responsibilities, where access to each stage is more demanding, entails more responsibilities and a tighter selection, but also a higher status and remuneration;
 - providing attractive possibilities for **professional development**, including the chance to study for a full range of teaching qualifications, including at Master's and PhD levels; this can have the effect of placing teaching on a par with other high status professions;
 - a more **attractive work environment** in which teaching staff are treated as professionals and have sufficient scope to work autonomously;
 - **proper support:** many teaching staff leave the profession within the first few years; providing systematic programmes of professional and personal support ('induction') can help to retain new teachers¹.

- **Scrutiny of expenditure.** On average, more than two-thirds of Member States' education budgets are spent directly and indirectly on the teaching professions. This expenditure needs to be carefully examined in order to ensure that it is spent in the most effective way. For example: is money being spent on types of in-service training that do not lead to improved pupil attainment? Could it be redirected towards training that works? Could in-service training be tailored to the specific development needs of teachers?

¹ European Commission 'Developing Coherent and System-wide Induction Programmes for Beginning Teaching staff - a handbook for policymakers'.

In an ever-changing social environment with immediate effects on the learning process, education professionals need to keep up with the pace of change. Teachers are required to rapidly adapt to the new environment by updating their knowledge, skills and competences as well as to develop new pedagogical approaches. Teachers need to adapt to the rapidly developing digital environment, to promote new learning approaches and help students to consolidate autonomous learning skills. Furthermore, they need to respond to the multicultural environment of classrooms with learners of diverse social, cultural and economic backgrounds with different levels of skills and competences. Such changes require teachers to be involved in a continuous professional development process. Hence, it is important to adopt new policies or reinforce existing ones that could contribute to the upgrade of the status and of the attractiveness of the teaching profession.

Debate questions

Having in mind the above, ministers are invited to reflect upon the following two questions:

- 1) *In what ways can attracting, training and selecting teachers be improved in times of scarce financial resources?*

 - 2) *In what ways can in-service training and continuing professional development be made more effective in order to effectively respond to the current and future challenges?*
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