



## **‘SCHOOLS FOR THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY’ COMMUNICATION FROM THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION:**

### **RESPONSE FROM THE EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF REGIONAL AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES FOR LIFELONG LEARNING (EARLALL)**

The European Association of Regional and Local Authorities for Lifelong Learning (EARLALL) is made up of 22 member authorities with a diverse range of responsibilities for schools and compulsory education, as well as vocational training for children and young people. Although the responses below draw heavily for illustration on the experiences of two UK members of the Association with policy responsibilities for schools as well as lifelong learning, many of the comments made have relevance to EARLALL members more generally.

However, whilst the Association welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Communication, it recognises that this is not an area in which the European Commission has direct competence. A number of its members have expressed concern that, while increased co-operation between member states and competent regions may properly be encouraged by European institutions, the Communication should not herald increased involvement by the Commission in matters beyond its competence.

Any policy on quality of education should be rights based, in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. It should ensure that all children and young people have the opportunities and receive the support they need, to achieve their full potential.

#### **Question 2 - How can schools equip young people with the competences and motivation to make learning a lifelong activity?**

There must be a functioning infrastructure on national, regional and local level in a society that can support the citizens’ learning needs, if lifelong learning is to become a reality for people of all ages and backgrounds. This fundamental principle is not sufficiently pointed out in the document. It is necessary to encourage independent thinking and creativity by allowing learners to make choices which accord with their needs and aspirations, which take account of local circumstances and which help to develop a positive disposition towards lifelong learning. Most importantly we should encourage young people to retain an enthusiasm for learning and support them in 'learning how to learn', identify gaps in their knowledge through reflection and self-awareness and to learn new skills effectively throughout their life.

The non-formal educational system described as folkbildning in Sweden provides:

- a parallel to the formal adult educational system
- an alternative educational route
- an important part of lifelong learning.

One of its missions is to offer those, who previously received the fewest chances, new opportunities to affect their situation through increased knowledge.

In Wales, the Welsh Assembly Government is committed to providing learners with an entitlement to learning to age 18 through its '14-19 Learning Pathways' policy. This sets out to encourage and support young people to remain in learning past the end of compulsory education at the age of 16 and to build up a portfolio of learning experiences that will enable them to become genuine lifelong learners.

### **Question 3 - How can school systems contribute to supporting long-term sustainable economic growth in Europe?**

A skilled and educated workforce is essential to productivity and sustainable economic growth. Young people's education, from the early years of a child's life through their compulsory education, lays the foundations of skills for life and work. What they learn and how they learn have a major bearing on wider outcomes including employability and participation in society in later life. Pupils should have the opportunity to build up a strong foundation of a wide variety of skills and be able to present and demonstrate their skills in a way that will be of high value to themselves, their parents and carers, employers, colleges and universities.

Schools can contribute to linking with the skills agenda and helping to equip learners with the skills that Europe needs to meet the challenge of globalisation (the Lisbon agenda). In Scotland, 'Determined to Succeed' – the strategy for enterprise in education – will continue to create an enterprising culture in schools and make the link between the classroom and the workplace so young people see the relevance of their learning. A range of enterprise experiences - more opportunities for vocational learning and achieving a parity of esteem with academic learning, enhanced employability skills, understanding the world of work and commerce - are building blocks to help achieve sustainable economic growth. Similar aims are being pursued in Wales where the 'Dynamo project' is delivering a range of activity to support the implementation of the Welsh Assembly Government's Youth Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Strategy.

Indeed, education and lifelong learning for the promotion of entrepreneurship features strongly in the policy objectives of many EARLALL members. The Association discussed this important subject at its conference in Livorno earlier this year; and it is one of the areas of policy development in which we as an Association think we can make a significant contribution over the next few years.

### **Question 7 - How can school staff be trained and supported to meet the challenges they face?**

The principles and required standards for teacher training vary from state to state and, in the case of some devolved and federal systems, within states. It is therefore difficult to bring together a single approach to teacher and support staff training which

meets the needs of the different circumstances they will face. However, by sharing experience across Europe in this field and by encouraging exchanges and work placements in other countries, member states and regions can develop an appreciation of the arrangements and standards applying elsewhere, so that they might decide whether any domestic changes are needed. EARLALL seeks to facilitate such contacts between regional governments and practitioners via joint projects, seminars and the development of bilateral mobility agreements.

Initial teacher training in Wales is structured through courses at higher education institutions or in work-based learning which prepare trainees to meet the Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) standards. These cover:

- Professional values and practice
- Knowledge and understanding: qualified teachers must be confident and authoritative in the subjects they teach and to have a clear understanding of how all pupils should progress and what teachers should expect them to achieve.
- Teaching: these relate to skills of planning, monitoring and assessment, and teaching and class management.

QTS is the first stage in a continuum of professional development that continues through the statutory induction period and throughout a teacher's career. ITT lays the foundation for subsequent professional and career development.

In Scotland, a national framework for continuing professional development (CPD) is in place to enable teachers at every stage in their career to realise their full potential, develop and maintain and develop their skills and contribute to achieving a more successful outcome for every child and young person. The CPD framework does not dictate definitive training programmes but allows for individuals, together with their line managers, to take account of particular individual needs, while also considering school, local and national priorities when drawing up the annual plan. CPD can take many forms such as work based projects, learning networks, formal courses and coaching and mentoring. However, effective CPD must be modern, relevant, coherent and challenging if it is to meet the needs of teachers, stimulate them and impact on school and pupil learning.

**Question 8 - How can school communities best receive the leadership and motivation they need to succeed? How can they be empowered to develop in response to changing needs and demands?**

To provide the best possible education for pupils, schools must be led by motivated leaders who are committed to excellence. Teachers must have the opportunity to develop new skills as they progress through their careers. Again this is an area of policy and practice where contact between countries and regions can assist in the identification and setting of relevant benchmarks of what is achievable.

For example, in Wales there is a School Effectiveness Framework which sets out the role and contribution of the school, the local authority and the Welsh Assembly Government. Local authority responsibilities include setting a vision for improved educational outcomes and driving performance improvement at school level, and supporting the development of leadership skills across schools. Local authorities need to ensure the setting of ambitious but achievable school targets aimed at

raising standards generally and reducing variation in learner performance. These targets are informed by information on learner performance in Wales as a whole relative to other parts of the UK and, where comparative data is available, other parts of Europe and beyond. In this regard, the recent OECD PISA study data has been helpful in setting existing targets and progress towards these targets in perspective. However, knowledge of what can be achieved elsewhere is not sufficient. It must be supported by understanding of how such achievements have been attained; and this is gained through the sort of international and inter-regional governmental and practitioner contact that organisations such as EARLALL seek to promote.

**PART 2: identify those aspects of school education on which cooperation at EU level could help support Member States in the modernisation of their systems**

Given the enormous diversity in culture, structure and priorities within and between Member States, it is important that the content of teaching and organisation of education systems remain a responsibility of Member States and their devolved regions.

The areas where the EU can make a valuable contribution include enabling peer learning and networking and facilitating mobility. It is important that the EU ensures that results of peer learning are disseminated effectively and that a wide range of users have the opportunity to benefit from them. As noted above, regional organisations such as EARLALL are well-placed to share information about experience gained directly with policy-makers and practitioners in member regions.

The Commission also has an important role in sharing key messages from international surveys and facilitating the exchange of information between Member States and the leading OECD countries. However, benchmarking and target-setting for the Union as a whole should not dominate at the expense of local solutions to local issues – retaining the integrity of Member States, whilst still benefiting the European Community as a whole.