



ECSWE contribution on European policy on Education

The European Commission has announced that in December 2008 there will be a new strategic framework for European co-operation in education and training.

This programme will present future perspectives for education in Europe and recommend the objectives Europe should achieve in the next few years.

As we know, this programme will not be legally binding for EU Member States (education is still a pillar which only Member states can decide upon), however it will be important as recommendations that Member States should follow and implement.

For the first time the European Commission has involved European stakeholders and citizens in the preparatory work of this new programme, as it is acknowledged that stakeholders contribute their practical knowledge of the realities on the ground, the challenges that citizens face and what works in practice.

ECSWE has been in dialogue with the European Commission in the last year to advocate not only Steiner education, but quality of childhood. This dialogue is long term and the results not always immediately apparent, but it is important in a society that is pressing ahead with policies for pre-school teaching, early formal learning and more and more testing. Our voice has been heard so far and we hope to see some results in the new strategic framework for European co-operation in education and training.

As a first important step in the direction of involving civil society in the European policy development, a public consultation was launched by the European Commission through the staff working paper "School for the 21st Century" and in June 2008 the Commission published an analysis of all the responses.

The full report of the consultation with a short summary can be downloaded from:

http://ec.europa.eu/education/school21/results_en.html

All the responses, including the one from ECSWE, can be found at:

http://ec.europa.eu/education/school21/results/report_en.pdf

Who responded to the consultation?

482 valid responses were received, coming from all Member States of the European Union (plus Norway), though their geographical spread was very uneven. Half of the responses came from two Member States: Italy with 132 replies and Slovenia with 113. In Slovenia, 110 students from one high school responded! In Italy, the Ministry of Education had encouraged regional school authorities to participate with the effect that a large number of schools, teachers, student groups and individual students participated. In relation to the type of respondents, schools and teachers accounted for 36.9% of all responses, while 27.4% came from individual students. Other individuals (11.6%) and national organisations (11.4%) were also active in the consultation.

The public consultation focused on 8 main themes:

- Key competences for all
- Life long learning
- The economy
- Equity
- Inclusion
- Citizenship
- Teachers
- School communities

In the report, the European Commission highlighted a few responses that were of particular interest. ECSWE response on theme 7 "Teachers" was one of these. On page 78, we read: "*Teacher education and continual professional development should be more experiential than just theoretical. Teachers should be encouraged to work as a team and to stay in the classroom rather than seeking promotion that could take them away from direct contact with the children.*"

Inspiration to try new ways should be forthcoming and ongoing research in child-development a central consideration in the school community. Teacher's status needs to be improved and job satisfaction enhanced. Teaching is a learning profession and this requires investment and opportunity for the planning and provision of their facilities".

Other main issues that arose from the consultation have been the following ones:

- School curricula and teaching methodologies need to enable students to develop their own learning competences in a more flexible learning environment. Many responses stressed the need for schools to develop independence and autonomy among pupils, as well as responsibility for their own learning. The development of creativity and intercultural skills by schools was also strongly supported.
- One of the key tasks of our school system is to prepare students for future participation in life long learning. It is essential to foster positive attitudes towards and motivation for learning. Many schools stressed the need for teachers to be able to work autonomously in order to develop the pedagogic strategies that work best for them.
- What happens in schools is important for equity in our societies. The strong support for measures for students with some form of disadvantage is indeed one of the main conclusions of the consultation. More and better early learning opportunities were perceived as one of the most effective ways to improve the equity of the overall system.
- More flexibility in the curriculum, allowing for it to be tailored to the individual pupil's specific needs and more support from teachers and ancillary staff.
- The presence of some form of citizenship education in the curriculum.
- Need to rethink current models of initial teacher education in order to link theory and practise more effectively.

It is essential that those who enter the profession are supported in developing a deeper understanding of the historical, social and cultural contexts within which they work.

Teacher education also needs to present teaching as a research in action activity during which teaching methods and strategies, formal and informal, are examined in relation to the children's learning and their process.

- Creation of inclusive learning communities. It is felt that school autonomy and the development of less hierarchical structures can reinforce this involvement.

As a second main event for broad consultation of the European stakeholders representing civil society, the European Commission in partnership with the European Civil Society Platform on Lifelong Learning (EUCIS-LLL) organised in May 2008, in Brussels, a Stakeholders' Forum on the future of Education in Europe.

This was the first Forum of its kind – consultation with civil society on education themes. ECSWE was officially invited to this event with around 60 other stakeholders representing various European organisations in education and training.

A full report of the Forum is available from the ECSWE office.

Christopher Clouder attended the Forum on behalf of ECSWE and was invited to participate in workshop no.2 "Sustainability and resources", during which he addressed these three main issues:

- 1) The European Commission and other institutions should stop referring to pre-primary education, but see early childhood education in its own right.
- 2) Pressure for early formal learning could be detrimental to a development in early childhood.
- 3) The ranking by league tables is detrimental to a healthy education and leads to teachers just teaching to tests.

These three aspects had a full consensus among the group and have been included in the final draft of recommendations for the European Commission.

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What should our schools be like in the 21st century?

On the 3rd of July 2008, as a summary of latest research evidence and of the responses to the Public Consultation "Schools for the 21st century", the Commission presented a Communication "Improving Competences for the 21st Century: An Agenda for European Cooperation on schools".

In the Communication, the EC says that change, sometimes radical, will be needed if European schools are to equip young people fully for life in this century. The Commission is proposing an agenda for cooperation in three main areas:

- A focus on **giving all pupils the competences they need for life**. This includes: increasing levels of reading literacy and numeracy; reinforcing learning-to-learn skills; and modernising curricula, learning materials, teacher training, and assessment accordingly;
- A commitment to **provide high quality learning for every student**. This includes: generalising pre-school education; improving equity in school systems; reducing early school leaving; and improving support within mainstream schooling for students with special needs.
- **Improving the quality of teachers and school staff**. This includes: more and higher quality teacher education; more effective teacher recruitment; and help for school leaders to focus on improving learning.

"Our school systems must adapt if they are to provide young people with new skills for new jobs" said Commissioner Ján Figel, "because we need to prepare our young people for jobs that may not even exist yet. What's more," he added, "how well pupils do in school has a real impact on the opportunities they get later in life, so we need to even out some of the inequalities in order to make our school systems more efficient and effective. We are **encouraging Member States to work together on this.**"

The views expressed are those of the writers and are not necessarily those of ECSWE.

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One way for school systems to tackle disadvantage is to **improve access to pre-primary education**.

There is also a need to make sure that schools are succeeding in **teaching young people the basics**. Currently 24.1% of young people (17.6% of girls; 30.4% of boys) are classed as low-achievers in reading literacy.

A more individualised approach to learning and a more creative use of assessment could help with this. The Commission proposes improving the quality of school education through **more school self-evaluation** and through better quality training for school staff.

The full document of the Communication can be downloaded from:
<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/08/1094&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=fr>

2009 will be the European Year of Creativity and Innovation.

Christopher Clouder on behalf of ECSWE was invited on 20th August 2008 to give a briefing to the staff of KEA European Affairs, a consultancy based in Brussels, specialising in culture and creative industries.

They are currently in the process of preparing a report commissioned by the European Commission on the "Contribution of culture to creativity" and they had a particular interest in knowing more about the Steiner method and the Waldorf schools.

The aim of the study is to show the contribution of culture and art to economic and societal developments as well as the merit in integrating artistic creativity in the Lisbon process to the same extent as scientific innovation. This study follows on an earlier work carried out by KEA for the European Commission on the "Economy of culture in Europe".

One of the core aspects of the study is to consider ways to stimulate creativity as well as identifying what kills creativity.

For that purpose, they are looking into education systems, and more precisely the role of schools and education in stimulating creativity.