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EUN/EC/DOC/031

Attended events : June - September 2010

1 Meeting school education. Stakeholder platform.

Brussels, 14 June 2010

Simone Barthel, president of EUNEC, attended the event.

On the 14th of June the European Commission invited organisations and institutions interested in school policy to discuss future actions in the field, in particular on the issue of early school leaving.

Adam Pokorny explained his wish to give a new élan to the social inclusion working group, as EU 2020 proposes a benchmark on early school leaving. He also presented the new chart of DG EAC.

The meeting started with an up-date on recent developments in school education policy and programmes at European level and an insight into the next initiatives by the Commission was provided.

Recent developments:

- Priority for inclusion
- Implementation of key competences. National report show steady but insufficient progress.
- Teachers: training, induction (cf. Talis), attractiveness, and also evaluation. A handbook has been developed on this subject ('Developing coherent and system-wide induction programmes for beginning teachers'¹)
- School leadership (cf. results of the Göteborg conference; study in Hungary on the changes within the teaching profession in Eastern Europe)
- School business cooperation
- Comenius Regio partnerships
- E-twinning (90000 teachers engaged!)

Next initiatives:

- An assessment handbook (assessment of key competences)
- Fight against early school leaving
- Communication on early childhood education (0 to 6 years) (= priority of the Hungarian Presidency)
- New expert groups on key competences, on maths and science
- Teachers (professional development, induction, leadership)

¹ <http://www.kslll.net/Documents/Teachers%20and%20Trainers%202010%20Policy%20handbook.pdf>

The Council Conclusions on social dimension of education and training adopted in May 2010 which tackles school education and VET was briefly presented, as well.

The main part of the meeting was devoted to the discussion on the draft Recommendation and Policy Framework on combating Early School Leaving (see annexed document) that the Commission is planning to present to the Council. A new version of the document will be ready towards the end of the year.

Early school leaving is causing problems on the long term: unemployment, social and financial problems.. Statistics show progress but, again, insufficient. The 2020 objective is to reduce the percentage to 10% (now 14.8 %); this objective seems realistic but will demand serious efforts.

Who's concerned? Students often come from vulnerable groups (minorities, migrants); lots of them often move. Problems start from primary school; boys are more concerned than girls. This complex phenomenon depends largely on local socio-economic and cultural realities; it is often the result of a combination of personnel and school factors. Combating Early School Leaving is only possible through a well coordinated strategy linking different political fields. This strategy insists on early childhood education and care.

In the field of prevention different strategies are mentioned:

- The duration of compulsory education could be linked to the moment of obtaining a qualification rather than to a certain age
- School programmes based on key competences
- Reinforcement of technical and professional trajectories
- Guidance
- An alert system at a very early stage
- Support in case of insufficient linguistic competences, mentoring and coaching of pupils, external support (speech therapists, psychologists..)
- Teacher training.

During the debate, Simone Barthel referred to the work of EUNEC on the impact of the crisis on school systems: how to mobilise new resources for combating ESL in these circumstances? The EU 2020 challenge is to make States see education as an investment rather than as a cost.

A link can be established with the right of the children, the fight against (child) poverty, but also with happiness and health. We have to have a positive view on the potential of each child. (Info: A communication from DG Justice is expected in December 2010).

Simone Barthel insists on the fact that, for some pupils, leaving school is an opportunity to do something else, to learn in a different way. She insist on better information about the possibilities to obtain a qualification after having left school.

The last point of the agenda was on the future initiatives on the issue of migration and education.

The Commission organised a public consultation in 2008, of which the results have lead to Council Conclusions on the education of migrant children (November 2009). These conclusions were briefly presented.

The conclusion of the debate is to consider the migrant issue as a challenge rather than as a problem.

2 Breaking the cycle of disadvantage. Strategies for equality and inclusion in and through education and training. (professor Ides Nicaise, University of Leuven)

Brussels, 28 May 2010 (internal seminar of the European Commission)

Carine De Smet attended the event.

Equality: how far do we want to go?

Professor Nicaise explains two different views on equality:

- Meritocracy (P. Saunders): rejects unequal opportunities, but accepts unequal treatment on the basis of merit (= 'talent' + 'effort')
- Egalitarianism (J. Dewey): rejects any form of unequal opportunities or unequal treatment on the basis of human dignity. Egalitarianism indeed promotes 'positive discrimination' to achieve equal outcomes, to compensate for unequal opportunities.

Although he formulates some critique of egalitarianism, professor Nicaise is adept of this view on equality. He identifies different strategies for more equal opportunities, for more equal treatment and for more equal outcomes.

Strategies for more equal opportunities

Characteristics:

- Boundary conditions
- Preventive
- Holistic
- The education system is not called into question

Two examples are explained:

- Early childhood intervention: the example of 'Head start (US)'
- Multiservice schools (Netherlands)

Strategies for more equal treatment

Characteristics:

- Within education
- Students' perspective
- Removal of discriminatory barriers
- Key role of communication

Graphs show that a strong degree in marketisation is one of the roots of inequality. There are different strategies to address this problem.

- Desegregation policies at the macro-level (for instance anti-discrimination laws, quota systems and educational priority funding) and at the school level (for instance magnet schools; two examples are elaborated: US Dept of Education (2003) and 'Vlaggen en Wimpels' (Flanders)).
- Comprehensive education. The earlier systems select, the greater will be the inequality in outcome; this is a very strong argument in favour of comprehensive education. Professor Nicaise points out a set of success conditions for comprehensive education.
- Parent-school community liaison. Professor Nicaise supports the view on parents as partners.

Strategies for more equal outcomes

Characteristics:

- Focus on final outcomes
- Positive discrimination
- Combination of equal opportunities and equal treatment
- Remedial strategies

Differentiation within schools can have positive effects, but can sometimes have opposite effects. The best example is the 'success for all' (USA). Educational priority policies can have positive impact, but needs clear criteria.

Conclusion

Professor Nicaise concludes that there is a wide range of successful strategies and examples of good practice; there is a need for competence development of educational staff on all levels (policy makers and practitioners).

There is now a general tendency to focus on equal opportunities, building on a limited (meritocratic) view on equality. There should be a change of emphasis.

Finally, the egalitarian approach requires questioning of deep-seated social discrimination embedded in education systems. There is a need for a debate on the values behind the systems. One of the main challenges ahead is the link between human dignity and the right to education, also for the slower learner.

3 "Youth on the Move" and mobility in VET

Brussels, 22 June 2010

Louis Somers (Flemish Education Council) attended the event.

The aim of the conference, hosted by the Flemish-European Liaison Agency (Vleva) and organised in cooperation with several European regio's, is to inform about European initiatives and allow you to share experiences on "skills development" and "mobility".

In the plenary session, two of the "Flagship Initiatives" of the EU 2020 Strategy, requiring specific cooperation in VET, were discussed:

- Youth on the move
- New skills for new jobs

A first interregional round table addressed the fast-changing demand for skills. A second round table discussed how to promote mobility of VET students. A third round table looks at how European tools and programmes are implemented in the field. (for instance, the European Qualifications Framework).