

Improving the quality of teacher education

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The European Parliament adopted by 579 votes to 46, with 25 abstentions, a resolution on improving the quality of teacher education and strongly supporting the analysis that raising the quality of teacher education leads to substantial gains in student performance.

The own initiative report had been tabled for consideration in plenary by Maria BADIA I CUTCHET (PES, ES) on behalf of the Committee on Culture and Education.

According to MEPs, the provision of more and better quality teacher education combined with policies aimed at recruiting the best candidates to the teaching profession should be key priorities for all education ministries.

Allocate more resources to teacher training: MEPs consider that increases in education expenditure should target the areas that produce the greatest improvements in student performance. In addition, more resources should be allocated to teacher training if significant progress is to be made in achieving the Lisbon strategy's 'Education and Training 2010' objectives. In order to promote the continuous professional development of teachers throughout their careers, MEPs recommend the introduction of government scholarships to improve and update their skills and qualifications. These training opportunities should be structured in such a way that the qualifications are recognised in all the Member States. Parliament also urges that particular attention be paid to the initial induction of new teachers. In this context, it encourages the development of support networks and mentoring programmes, through which teachers of proven experience and capacity can play a key role in new colleagues' training, passing on knowledge acquired throughout successful careers, promoting team-learning and helping to tackle drop-out rates among new recruits. It believes that by working and learning together, teachers can help improve a school's performance and overall learning environment.

Promote excellence: MEPs consider it necessary to recruit and retain the best teachers, notably by making the profession sufficiently attractive, and by ensuring that the composition of the teaching workforce at all levels of school education represents the social and cultural diversity within society. They emphasise the close link between ensuring teaching is an attractive and fulfilling profession with good career progression prospects and the successful recruitment of motivated, high-achieving graduates and professionals. They therefore call on the Member States to take further measures to promote teaching as a career choice for top achievers and to ensure that pre-school and primary school teachers receive the appropriate levels of social and professional support their responsibilities entail.

Better trained and better paid teachers: the Parliament highlights the marked differences between teachers' average wages, including between Member States. Teachers must therefore benefit from good remuneration packages which reflect their importance to society. Only better quality careers for teachers can stop the 'brain-drain' of top teachers to better-paid private sector posts. Teachers must also be better equipped to meet the range of new demands made on them, including the challenges of developments in ICT. The new forms of training given to teachers should include media studies, considered a priority, and the environment perspective.

Promote teacher mobility: MEPs stress the importance of teacher mobility. They call on the Commission to increase the financial resources available to support teacher education through the Lifelong Learning Programme, and in particular teacher exchanges between schools in neighbouring countries and regions of the EU. According to MEPs, mobility facilitates the spread of ideas and best practice within teaching, and promotes improvements in foreign language and other skills. They stress, in this regard, the crucial role of the Comenius and Comenius-Regio school partnership.

Promote language learning: in the same way as mobility, MEPs strongly support foreign language learning from a very early age. This involves the inclusion of language lessons in all primary curricula and the provision of sufficient investment to recruit and train high quality foreign language teachers. MEPs therefore underline the need for teachers in all Member States to have the certificated competence of knowing at least one foreign language. It is, however, also necessary to promote mastery of the mother tongue, as this enables pupils to develop other skills more easily.

Less bureaucracy, more intercultural skills: MEPs deplore the increasing level of administration and paperwork in the teaching profession. They stress, in this regard, that there is no substitute for time teachers spend in the classroom with students. MEPs also stress that every school should have a unique relationship with its local community, and that school leaders should have greater decision-making responsibility that allows them to address the educational challenges and teaching requirements particular to their environment. MEPs underline that, with the arrival of a highly diverse immigrant population, the teaching profession needs to be made specifically aware of intercultural issues and processes, not only within schools but also in relation to families and their immediate local environment.

Combat violence at school: MEPs consider that, in order to deal with violence at schools, it is vital to achieve closer cooperation between head teachers and parents and to create the tools and procedures to tackle the phenomenon effectively. It is therefore important to include in teacher training conflict resolution programmes, so that teachers are better prepared to cope with violence and aggression in school. Parliament stresses the importance of gender-sensitive teaching and of the gender aspect in teacher training. MEPs also call for civic education to become a compulsory subject in teacher training and in schools so that teachers and pupils have the requisite knowledge of citizens' rights and obligations.

At European level: Parliament calls on the Member States to work together to enhance the coordination of teacher education policies. It also underlines the need for better statistics on teacher training across the Union. Furthermore, it calls on the Member States to include in teacher training basic knowledge about the European Union, its institutions and their mode of functioning and arrange for practical visits by trainee teachers to the European Institutions. MEPs call on the Member States to ensure that only suitably qualified physical education teachers can give PE lessons within the public education system. Lastly, the European Parliament calls on the Commission to disseminate best practice models from the Member States which improve general life skills by means of school projects, e.g. healthy diet and sport, domestic science and private financial planning.