

Council conclusions on European teachers and trainers for the future

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

RECALLING the political background to this issue as set out in the Annex to these conclusions;

RECOGNISING THAT:

1. Education and training shape humanity and have a transformative role for both individuals and society. They are important for the social, economic, democratic and cultural engagement of citizens, as well as for growth, sustainable development, social cohesion and prosperity within the Union. Relevant, inclusive and equitable quality education and training not only provide citizens with knowledge, skills and competences in line with current and future developments, but also shape their attitudes, values and behaviours, enabling them to thrive professionally and personally and be active and responsible participants in society.
2. Teachers and trainers¹, at all levels and in all types of education and training, are an indispensable driving force of education and training. They have a crucial role in preparing individuals of all backgrounds and ages to live, learn and work in the world of today, as well as in creating and leading future changes.

¹ For the purposes of these conclusions, a *teacher* is a person who is acknowledged as having the status of a teacher (or equivalent) according to national legislation and practice, while a *trainer* is anyone who fulfils one or more activities linked to the (theoretical or practical) training function, either in an institution for education or training or at the workplace. They encompass teachers in general education and higher education, teachers and trainers in initial and continuing VET, as well as early childhood education and care professionals and adult educators.

3. In the context of constant social, demographic, cultural, economic, scientific, environmental and technological changes, the world of education and training is changing, and so is the occupation of teachers and trainers, with increasing demands, responsibilities and expectations put before them. Continuous innovations and challenges have an effect not only on the competences required, but also on teachers' and trainers' wellbeing and the attractiveness of the teaching profession.
4. European teachers and trainers are the cornerstones of the European Education Area, with a central role to play in promoting the European dimension of teaching², supporting learners in understanding and experiencing the sense of European identity and belonging.

ACKNOWLEDGING THAT:

5. The current crisis caused by COVID-19 has put an unprecedented challenge before teachers and trainers at all levels and in all types of education and training. They have been required to rapidly move from face-to-face to predominantly distance, and to a large extent virtual teaching. In such exceptional circumstances, teachers and trainers have shown impressive commitment, creativity, peer collaboration and made significant efforts to ensure that both learning and learners' progress continue, including by providing support for their wellbeing.

² As defined in the Council Recommendation of 22 May of 2018 on promoting common values, inclusive education, and the European dimension of teaching.

AWARE THAT:

6. In line with the principle of subsidiarity, which also encompasses the teaching profession, the responsibility for the organisation and content of education and training systems lies with the Member States. In this context, Member States have different requirements in terms of types and levels of qualifications needed to access and progress in the teaching profession³.
7. Completing higher levels of education and training can provide prospective teachers and trainers with a more comprehensive set of competences, including those needed to develop professional autonomy in their teaching practices. This can in turn contribute to greater job satisfaction, as well as to the perception of value and respect towards the profession⁴.
8. Teachers and trainers have the responsibility to facilitate learners' acquisition of key competences⁵ and professional skills, not only to prepare them to successfully perform future jobs - some of which are not even known yet - but also to foster their social responsibility and civic engagement, to convey human values, as well as to support their personal growth and wellbeing.

³ In the EU, teaching generally requires a tertiary qualification. The most common minimum requirement for teaching at primary level is a bachelor's degree. To teach at lower secondary level, half of the EU systems set the minimum qualification at master's level. To teach in upper secondary schools, in most EU countries, teachers need a master's degree as a minimum qualification. (ET Monitor 2019, p. 24) However, in early childhood education and care there are different requirements for minimum qualifications across Europe. In some countries, there are the same minimum qualification requirements for all staff members, whereas in others different qualifications are required for different positions and profiles. Tertiary qualifications are often not required for all members of an early childhood education and care team. (Key data on early childhood education and care in Europe, Eurydice report, 2019, p. 71 - 72)

⁴ ET Monitor 2019 (p. 24).

⁵ As defined in the Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning.

9. Their subject-related and pedagogical expertise, as well as their commitment, enthusiasm, job satisfaction and self-confidence, have an impact on learners' learning outcomes, progress and wellbeing. By being role models for lifelong learning, teachers and trainers can motivate learners' engagement and responsibility for their own lifelong learning, stimulating their interest and encouraging curiosity and creativity.

10. In reacting to different, ever-more-demanding roles, responsibilities and expectations of learners, institution leaders, policy makers, parents and communities, where applicable and in accordance with national circumstances, teachers and trainers need to remain engaged and supported to effectively respond to changes and challenges. These challenges may be present to a varying extent in different Member States, and are especially related, but not limited, to:
 - a) balancing different aspects of their workload, often coping with numerous administrative tasks, taking part in institutional leadership, providing support and guidance to their learners, planning and finding time for peer collaboration and their professional development, while at the same time continuously developing and maintaining the quality of their teaching and learners' learning outcomes;
 - b) encouraging the development of learners' intellectual, emotional, social and creative potential in a holistic manner, while at the same time ensuring their educational progress;

- c) using various research-based teaching methods and practices, mainstreaming innovative and digital methods and approaches, with a focus on learner-centred and competence-based approaches, in line with evolving and individual needs of learners, in order to facilitate the learning process and support the co-creation of learning and teaching, while ensuring that such practices are inclusive, socially just and equitable;
- d) working in environments transformed by technology, digitalisation and artificial intelligence, paying attention to their pedagogical potential and ethical, safe and responsible use;
- e) working in linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms and learning environments, with learners from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds, with different needs, including special education needs⁶ and safeguarding inclusiveness;
- f) participating in policy-making, in particular in development, implementation and evaluation of education and training reforms, including the continuous review of curricula;
- g) building a supportive and constructive atmosphere in learning environments, including positive and mutually supportive relationships within their teams and other educational staff, learners, families and employers, where relevant;
- h) dealing with classroom behaviour management and potentially preventing different types of violence, including cyber-violence, which can negatively affect learners' outcomes and health; moreover, possibly dealing with violent behaviour directed towards themselves;

⁶ Based on TALIS 2018 data, 21% of teachers report a further need for training in teaching students with special needs, 16% in the use of ICT for teaching, and around 13% in teaching in multilingual and multicultural environments (ET Monitor 2019, p. 10). Data suggests that Europe's higher education student population is also becoming more diverse (Eurostudent VI (2016-2018)).

- i) choosing appropriate assessment tools, criteria and methods, aligned with intended learning outcomes, in order to provide quality and timely feedback to each learner which can guide and improve their further learning;
 - j) teaching with often limited resources, including scarce or inadequate educational infrastructure, learning spaces, equipment and tools, including tools enabling online learning.
11. These challenges are even more demanding for novice (newly qualified) teachers and trainers, since from the first years of teaching or training they are facing the same responsibilities as their more experienced colleagues. In addition, they may often find themselves working in challenging environments, such as education and training institutions with higher rates of learners with socio-economically disadvantaged or migrant backgrounds⁷. Senior teachers and trainers might experience other difficulties, for example facing a generation gap at a workplace.
12. Moreover, there may be additional challenges for teachers and trainers working in rural, remote or disadvantaged areas, such as those related to professional isolation, limited infrastructure including digital infrastructure, accessing support and opportunities for professional development or teaching multi-age and multi-grade classrooms. Furthermore, teachers and trainers working in densely populated urban areas may face more prominent challenges related to teaching learners from different multilingual, multicultural and socio-economic backgrounds.

⁷ ET Monitor 2019 (p. 21).

13. Although many teachers and trainers share many of the same challenges, there are also, to a varying extent in different Member States, specific challenges related to different levels and types of education and training, including the following:

a) in early childhood education and care:

- difficulties to attract and retain qualified and well-trained early childhood education and care professionals;
- ageing of staff and gender imbalances, with predominantly female workforce;
- unattractive working conditions, including a high child/staff ratio, and a lack of attractive career pathways, as well as a lack of opportunities for continuous professional development;

b) in school education:

- there are difficulties related to attracting and retaining high-potential students in initial teacher education⁸, as well as to attracting graduates and retaining practising teachers in the profession;
- the teaching population is ageing; there are also gender imbalances, with predominantly female teachers, in particular in some subjects and at some levels of education; moreover, the profession may not be culturally representative of the community being served;
- all of this is reflected in shortages of teachers many Member States are facing, whether in general, in specific geographical areas, in certain subject areas, such as STEM, or shortages of teachers with competences for teaching students with special needs, teaching in a multicultural or multilingual setting or teaching students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds⁹;

⁸ There are shortages of students enrolling initial teacher education, as well as high drop-out rates (Teaching Careers in Europe, Access, Progression and Support, Eurydice, 2018, p. 10).

⁹ ET Monitor 2019, p. 9, 10, 21.

c) in vocational education and training:

- teachers and trainers should be competent in promoting and developing basic skills and key competences, along with teaching up-to-date vocational or technical skills and knowledge;
- there may be an increase in the need for hybrid-model teachers and trainers who work in both vocational education and training institutions and companies;
- there is also a need for collaboration between teachers and trainers, in particular in-company trainers, given their complementary roles and responsibilities, especially in delivery of apprenticeships and work-based learning;
- since it may offer better incentives, work in the private sector may be more appealing than work in vocational education and training institutions;
- many Member States face challenges related to the ageing of teachers and trainers;

d) in adult education:

- adult educators have a significant role in promoting and developing both basic and professional knowledge, skills and competences;
- they may have to deal with the challenge posed by learners' literacy, numeracy and language difficulties or poor education and training experiences;
- since adult educators often work with diverse groups of learners, they need to be prepared to apply diverse and effective teaching strategies and methods, in order to meet the needs, stimulate motivation and cater for individual learning pathways of their learners;
- in order to empower individuals to undertake learning for upskilling and reskilling, the role of teachers and trainers may need to be reviewed in the light of their potential contribution to guidance and validation of skills attained through non-formal and informal learning;
- adult educators may be required to engage with employers in relation to work-based learning;
- adult educators are often not specifically prepared to teach adults and might work part-time or as freelancers, so their professionalisation presents a significant challenge to assuring the quality of adult education;

e) in higher education:

- entry qualifications to the academic profession often do not focus on equipping candidates with appropriate teaching skills;
- large-scale, systemic opportunities for continuous professional development focused on improving the teaching skills of academic staff are not in place in all Member States;
- not enough attention is given to the support for inter-institutional staff development, including international teaching mobility, but also to build communities of practice and professional networks;
- diversity of the student population requires the use of different teaching methods based on student-centred approach that might be a challenge for the higher education institutions;
- there are gender imbalances in some academic disciplines and female staff is especially underrepresented in higher ranks;
- although teaching is one of the three missions of higher education, research is often more valued than teaching in evaluation with regards to career progression; more teaching is often demanded from junior and middle-ranking staff, as career progression often results in less teaching and more time for research¹⁰.

14. Although the requirements are becoming more complex and their profession more demanding, many teachers and trainers do not feel respected or valued by society¹¹ and the profession is losing its attractiveness in many Member States.

¹⁰ Modernisation of Higher Education in Europe: Academic Staff – 2017, Eurydice, 2017.

¹¹ Based on TALIS 2018 data, 18% of lower secondary school teachers in the EU consider their profession to be valued by society, and the share gets lower the longer the time in the profession, as does (in several EU countries) the share of teachers who would still choose to work as teachers (ET Monitor 2019, p. 9).

STRESSES THAT:

15. It is essential to further develop and update the competences of teachers and trainers, to ensure their expertise and encourage their autonomy and engagement, and to foster their personal and professional wellbeing, motivation and feeling of value, preparing them to adequately respond to change, but also encouraging them to be proactive and innovative in their profession.
16. In order to do that, it is necessary to further develop national policies to support the work of teachers and trainers in a targeted and comprehensive manner, taking into account the requirements and training needs identified by teachers and trainers themselves, as well as the needs of wider learning communities, the relevant findings of education research and overall national education and training policy goals. Moreover, it is beneficial to offer various training models, including face-to-face, virtual, blended and work-based learning.
17. A complementary and comprehensive approach is needed at all levels and in all parts of teacher and trainer education and training. This should include the recruitment and selection of students, initial teacher education (including traineeship), induction and quality mentoring, as well as promoting and supporting continuous professional development throughout their teaching careers and, if relevant, appraisal mechanisms. Special attention should be paid to novice teachers, by providing them with additional guidance and mentoring, to facilitate their career start and help them cope with the specific needs they are facing.

18. In line with national circumstances, this could be underpinned by up-to-date and relevant national comprehensive competence frameworks for teachers and trainers¹², developed in structured, systematic dialogue with relevant stakeholders, reflecting contemporary and innovative teaching approaches, strategies and methods, as well as newly arising circumstances in society at large. In this sense, it is important that education and training for teachers and trainers during the professional continuum cover more systematically the topics and learning opportunities related to work in multilingual and multicultural environments, work with learners with special needs and disadvantaged backgrounds, digital pedagogies, sustainable development and healthy lifestyle. In this context, special attention should be paid to the requirements and needs expressed by teachers and trainers themselves¹³.
19. The continuous professional development of teachers and trainers should be perceived as a precondition to delivering quality teaching and training; teachers and trainers should therefore be encouraged to reflect on their practices and training needs, as well as be motivated and supported to engage by offering quality training opportunities, as well as giving them time to participate and providing incentives.
20. Strengthening teachers' and trainers' link with researchers can have a positive effect on their professional development and stimulate research-led, innovative and enhanced teaching practices.

¹² Most European countries adopt frameworks describing a set of competences that teachers should possess or develop over their career. In practice, however, such frameworks vary in format, level of detail, value and use (ET Monitor 2019, p. 34).

¹³ Based on TALIS 2018 data, 21% of teachers report a further need for training in teaching students with special needs, 16% in the use of ICT for teaching, and around 13% in teaching in multilingual and multicultural environments (ET Monitor 2019, p. 10).

21. Cross-border mobility, either as short-term or longer-term, physical, virtual or blended, is a powerful learning experience and a valuable opportunity in developing participants' social, intercultural, multilingual and interpersonal competences, both for students in initial teacher education and practising teachers and trainers in their continuous professional development. However, there are obstacles impeding the mobility of both students and practising teachers, such as a lack of language competences, or finding replacements for practising teachers. Moreover, initial education programmes for teachers often display a weak international dimension and low levels of study and traineeship mobility, in comparison to study programmes in other subject fields¹⁴, and there are challenges related to recognition of mobility periods abroad and learning outcomes.

22. Opportunities related to different career choices within the teaching profession, offering multiple paths for professional progression, may increase motivation to access and remain in the profession, as well as motivation for lifelong learning. They may encourage teachers and trainers to remain dedicated to the profession, and committed to both their learners' and their own learning during the course of their working life. On the other hand, it is equally important that teachers and trainers are not overly burdened with administrative tasks in such a way that would make it difficult for them to focus on teaching.

23. Teachers and trainers, as well as institution leaders, can contribute to policy-making with their knowledge, expertise and practical insights. At the same time, their involvement in policy-making may increase their ownership, and consequently have a positive effect on the results of the implementation of various policy initiatives and reforms.

¹⁴ International mobility of student teachers during initial teacher education (calculated as the proportion of teachers who have spent a study period abroad as part of their initial teacher education) is not very common and varies considerably between Member States (ET Monitor, p. 26).

24. The wellbeing of teachers and trainers influences their job satisfaction and enthusiasm for their work, and has an impact on the attractiveness of their profession, and subsequently on their retention in the profession. It is an important factor in quality and performance, correlating with their own motivation and with the motivation and achievements of their learners.
25. Important aspects of wellbeing may be related to, inter alia, understanding and managing expectations; workload, work environments, including the safety of teaching and learning, and working conditions; available peer and institutional support; relationships with learners, parents, peers and institution leaders; and respect and appreciation given by the wider community. If these factors are missing or not experienced positively, it may lead to physical and emotional exhaustion, stress and burn-out, affecting mental and physical health.
26. In order to support both the achievement and wellbeing of teachers and trainers, as well as learners, it is beneficial to build and promote collaborative learning communities, and a collaborative team culture between teachers and trainers, their peers and institution leaders, learners, parents, and other stakeholders, such as employers. Experienced teachers and trainers can play an important role as mentors to their younger colleagues, while also benefitting themselves from intergenerational exchange. Moreover, it is important to stimulate bottom-up, peer-based professional learning, promote instructional and participatory leadership that builds trust, inspires and motivates educational staff. Furthermore, as appropriate, appraisal could be used to support improvements in their work, by providing constructive evaluation and feedback on their performance, setting up criteria for promotion and recognition of those who accomplish significant achievements.

27. Sufficient, effective and sustainable investment in teachers and trainers is investment in the quality of education and training. This encompasses various aspects, such as investment in opportunities for education and training of teachers and trainers, adequate infrastructure and learning spaces, tools and resources, as well as salaries¹⁵.
28. All of the above could be considered while developing incentives to tackle the issue of shortages of teachers and trainers. Additional possibilities to explore may include scholarships to attract students to relevant study programmes or recruitment of professionals with qualifications other than in teaching, while taking care to promote and support high-quality provision.

INVITES THE MEMBER STATES, WITH DUE REGARD TO INSTITUTIONAL AUTONOMY, AND IN ACCORDANCE WITH NATIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES, TO:

29. Continue and make further efforts to involve teachers and trainers in creation of education and training policies at all levels of policy design, increasing collaboration, fostering their ownership of the process, as well as their autonomy in applying these policies in practice.
30. Take into account the need for a comprehensive approach to teachers' and trainers' initial education, induction and continuous professional development when developing policies related to education and training of teachers and trainers.
31. Promote and support greater participation of teachers and trainers in continuous professional development, in particular by taking further steps to remove barriers to participation and opportunities, and strive for appropriate appraisals and recognition of the value of continuous professional development as a building block of career progression.

¹⁵ Evidence suggests that salaries have an impact on recruitment and retention of teachers and trainers, as well as on learning outcomes. Salaries of teachers are often lower than the average salaries of other tertiary-educated workers. (ET Monitor 2019, p. 39 - 40).

32. Encourage education and training institutions to provide impactful and research-based continuous professional development opportunities for teachers and trainers, based on collaboration, peer observation and peer-learning, guidance, mentoring and networking. In development of such opportunities, if appropriate, encourage education and training institutions to broaden their learning offer, including smaller units of learning, such as those possibly leading to microcredentials, taking into account quality-assurance arrangements.
33. Continue supporting higher education institutions, while fully respecting their autonomy, in enhancing the competences of academic staff in applying research-based and student-centred learning, teaching and assessment approach, and setting up and following clear, transparent and fair processes for staff recruitment and employment that recognise the value of teaching activities¹⁶, which should also be taken into account in advancement policies and practices.
34. Explore possibilities for diversifying careers of teachers and trainers and developing national career frameworks to help fulfil their career aspirations and motivations, as well as their learning needs.
35. Motivate education and training institutions to embed teachers' and trainers' mobility – physical, virtual or blended – in their learning, development and internationalisation strategies, including using the potential of European tools such as e-Twinning and EPAL as an integral part of the learning provision. Validate, whenever possible and in line with national regulations and according to national circumstances, the skills and competences acquired through European tools and mobility as part of continuous professional development of teachers and trainers.

¹⁶ Standards 1.3 and 1.5, Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, 2015.

36. Make further efforts to promote mobility among both students and practising teachers and trainers and remove persisting obstacles with a view to increasing participation rates. In this respect, encourage higher education institutions in charge of initial teacher education to fully harness the potential of mobility as part of their learning offer, which may include, as appropriate, mobility windows in study programmes. Moreover, facilitate participation in various forms of mobility in the professional development of practising teachers and trainers, including by making efforts to find sustainable solutions for replacement needs.
37. In order to improve the attractiveness and status of the profession, invest in measures related to improving their initial education and continuous professional training, working conditions and career prospects, as well as measures to further enhance their resilience and wellbeing, in order to support them in addressing stressful aspects of their work. In addressing these aspects, it is important to enable effective engagement of social partners.
38. Cooperate and exchange experience and information related to policy developments regarding teachers and trainers, including development and revision of national competence frameworks for teachers and trainers.

INVITES THE COMMISSION, IN LINE WITH ITS COMPETENCES AND WITH DUE REGARD FOR SUBSIDIARITY, TO:

39. In order to facilitate mobility of students and practising teachers and trainers, in cooperation with Member States, foster a dialogue and examine obstacles, including structural aspects, recognition of outcomes of learning periods abroad and academic qualifications, and provide guidance to education and training institutions to improve mobility and to broaden the international perspective of student teachers and trainers.

40. To complement existing national efforts, explore the possibility to prepare a proposal for a relevant European competence framework¹⁷ in order to foster development and assessment of knowledge, skills and attitudes related to sustainable development, to be used on a voluntary basis.
41. Support closer cooperation between education and training institutions in the Union, in order to strengthen research-based teacher education, support cross-border mobility and joint learning opportunities within a continuum of teachers' professional development, for example by means of encouraging voluntary cooperation and networking of national education and training institutions at Union level, in the form of European teacher training academies.
42. In order to complement existing national efforts, explore the possibility of developing European guidelines as support to be used, on a voluntary basis, in the creation of career frameworks at national level, building on the results of the work of the Education and Training 2020 Working Group on Schools, to address the progression of teachers and trainers in a broader perspective and provide a response to their aims, motivation and ambitions.
43. In cooperation with Member States, promote the use and consider further development of existing online platforms, such as e-Twinning, School Education Gateway and EPAL, and examine possible ways of extending their use in facilitating the mobility of both students and practising teachers and trainers, such as finding partners for mobility projects and by providing a platform for the preparation and follow-up of mobility.
44. In order to foster appreciation, promote the importance of the teaching profession and give visibility to high-quality teaching, investigate the feasibility and added value of introducing an annual European reward for exceptional teachers or trainers, for example for promoting innovation, inclusiveness or the European dimension in teaching.

¹⁷ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: The European Green Deal Communication, 11 December 2019 (p. 19)

45. Continue supporting the development of education and training opportunities for prospective and practicing teachers and trainers, as well as their mobility, in particular via the Erasmus+ programme and the European Structural and Investment Funds, in particular the European Social Fund, and their successors.

46. Take full account of these conclusions when developing proposals for the European Education Area and the new strategic framework for cooperation in education and training, including the continuation of exchange of good practices between Member States.