

EFEE POSITION PAPER

“Promoting civic education, intercultural dialogue and democratic citizenship, and facilitating migrants’ integration in the educational and socio-economic environment of the host countries”

Adopted by EFEE members on 19 October 2016

In view of the growing influx of migrants to Europe and the publication in 2015 of the Paris Declaration, policy makers at European and national level are increasingly seeking to strengthen the role of education in promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination, and in facilitating migrants’ smooth integration in the host society. With this Position Paper, the European Federation of Education Employers (EFEE) aims to contribute to the current debate, to emphasise the important role education employers can play, and to provide concrete examples on what could be done to promote civic education, intercultural dialogue, and democratic citizenship, and to facilitate integration of migrants within the education sector.

In the Paris Declaration¹, adopted on 17 March 2015, the Education Ministers of the EU and European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport Tibor Navracsics laid down common objectives to promote democratic values and fundamental rights via education at Member State and EU level. The Declaration aims to contribute to:

- Ensuring that children and young people acquire social, civic and intercultural competences, by promoting democratic values and fundamental rights, social inclusion and non-discrimination, as well as active citizenship;
- Enhancing critical thinking and media literacy, particularly in the use of the Internet and social media, so as to develop resistance to all forms of discrimination and indoctrination;
- Fostering the education of disadvantaged children and young people, by ensuring that our education and training systems address their needs;
- Promoting intercultural dialogue through all forms of learning in cooperation with other relevant policies and stakeholders.

EFEE welcomes that EU Education Ministers further followed up on this important issue in the European Education, Youth, Culture and Sport (EYCS) Council meetings of 24 February 2016 and 30-31 May 2016. In particular EFEE welcomes the statements on promoting socio-economic development and inclusiveness in the EU through education:

“Education and training have a strong contribution to make towards ensuring a cohesive society as well as a well-functioning labour market. Education and training should level the playing field for all and serve as a strong vector for the social and economic inclusion of disadvantaged groups by embracing diversity in all its forms.”²

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/education/news/2015/documents/citizenship-education-declaration_en.pdf

² Council of the European Union, Outcomes of the European Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council meeting, 24 February 2016

Furthermore, EFEE is pleased to read that the EYCS not only values education and training as means to improve employability, but also as important features to promote citizenship and critical thinking, as highlighted in the Council Conclusions on developing media literacy and critical thinking through education and training:

“As part of their overall mission to prepare young people for society and the labour market, as well as to support them in achieving personal fulfilment, education and training have an important role to play in helping young people to become media literate and responsible citizens of the future”.³

Moreover, EFEE agrees with the ‘whole-school approach’, which the Council promotes in its Conclusions, which encourages empowering teachers and school leaders and promoting dialogue among all stakeholders involved.

This Position Paper builds further on the outcomes of EFEE’s Peer Learning Activity (PLA) organised in Malta on 19 May 2016 in cooperation with the Ministry for Education and Employment of Malta. Malta has a long tradition of taking in migrants and has recently set up a dedicated Migrant Learners Unit as part of the Ministry. The PLA brought together EFEE members from different European countries, representatives from the Ministry for Education and Employment of Malta, academics, and Maltese teachers and school leaders. The goal of the meeting was to promote peer learning and to reflect jointly on the key question: *“What is our role as education employers in promoting civic education, intercultural dialogue and democratic citizenship, as well as other relevant competencies, to facilitate the migrants’ inclusion and successful integration in the educational and socio-economic environment of the host countries?”*

In order to ensure that pupils and students acquire social, civic and intercultural competences, we should strive towards creating inclusive educational environments that aim to include all learners and to achieve equity in education. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), equity in education means that personal or social circumstances such as gender, ethnic origin or family background, are not obstacles to achieving educational potential (fairness) and that that all individuals reach at least a basic minimum level of skills (inclusion).⁴

School leadership and educational governance structures – key themes for education employers – play an important role in creating such inclusive educational environments.

Research from the European Policy Network on School Leadership (EPNoSL), of which EFEE is a member, shows the potential of school leaders to exercise effective school leadership in order to implement initiatives that aim to combat inequalities in access, opportunities and outcomes, and promote learning in schools:

“Educational leaders influence teams to work collaboratively, to share vision, to be motivated and to perform well. Leaders must try to empower staff by making public their own professional educational values and sharing them. This way, an agreed collegiate culture can be created, encouraging a learning environment for all staff and pupils”.⁵

³ Council of the European Union, Council Conclusions on developing media literacy and critical thinking through education and training, 1 June 2016

⁴ OECD (2012), Equity and Quality in Education: Supporting Disadvantaged Students and Schools, OECD Publishing, p. 9

⁵ EPNoSL (2013), Critical Factors in the discourse on School Leadership from the perspective of equity and learning: http://www.schoolleadership.eu/sites/default/files/epnosl-del-2.1-2013_1.pdf, p. 47

School leaders thus play an important role in creating a culture in schools which promotes democratic values and fundamental rights, social inclusion and non-discrimination. Furthermore, teachers should be empowered to establish such a culture in the classroom.

In order to reach this open and inclusive school and classroom environment, **a policy framework could be developed within schools at all levels (including VET and higher education environments and facilities) to identify shared values on diversity, equity, citizenship and non-discrimination, and to determine approaches on how to transmit them**, as was concluded at EFEE's PLA in Malta. In this context, it is important that the framework should be developed on the basis of partnership, engagement and sharing of practical examples within the school community. The framework could be part of initial and continuous professional training programmes for school management, teachers and other staff working in schools.

It is furthermore essential that **all people working in schools⁶ should have their vocational and pedagogical competences (including civic education, intercultural dialogue and democratic citizenship competences) regularly updated through participation in appropriate professional development programmes in order to be able to cope effectively with the changing needs of our diverse societies**. Regarding the provision of civic education, intercultural dialogue and democratic citizenship competences, EFEE would advocate for an integrated approach; that is to say, integrating them in the overall school values rather than teaching them as standalone competences.

Besides school leadership and governance structures, other institutional features could also contribute to creating an inclusive educational environment. Literature research from the European Expert Network on Economics of Education (EENEE) shows that aspects such as **preschool and school entry age, composition of the teacher team, class composition and school tracking could be of influence in the integration of pupils with migrant backgrounds** into the education system.

"Immigrant integration can be enhanced by using free preschool programs and by recruiting teachers with an immigrant background, who can help immigrant children by establishing positive role models. Since teachers have often been shown to assess ethnic minority students in ways that deviate from what would be expected from national standardised tests, training programs aimed at changing stereotyped teachers' attitudes toward immigrants might also be useful," EENEE concludes.⁷

Class composition is particularly relevant because educational outcomes might be affected by how children with an immigrant background and children of native parents are allocated to different classes. Research results suggest that pupils with an immigrant background are negatively affected by high concentrations of immigrant pupils in the class or school.⁸ Furthermore experience shows (among others, from EFEE's PLA in Malta) that mixed classes/schools could have a positive impact on the attitude of children and parents in the host countries towards foreign immigrants. EFEE would advocate therefore considering these education institutional features when developing policies regarding facilitating the integration of migrants into the educational environment of the host society.

⁶ Herewith we refer also to VET and higher education environments and facilities

⁷ EENEE (2016), Education as a tool for the economic integration of migrants (prepared for the European Commission), Publication office of the European Union, p. 12

⁸ EENEE (2016), Education as a tool for the economic integration of migrants (prepared for the European Commission), Publication office of the European Union, p. 2

Furthermore, **for the integration of migrants, the development of language skills is essential.** A basic command of the language of the host country is needed in order to engage in the school system, participate in the labour market and integrate into society. This requires from education and training institutions that language courses are provided for foreigners. Teachers will have to be trained in providing language lessons for non-native speakers. Having excellent teachers is key, as was underlined at EFEE's PLA in Malta. Teachers need to be innovative in adapting their lessons to the particular needs of a diverse group of newcomers. Flexibility and autonomy are thus essential for both the teachers in the classroom and education management in order to respond effectively to the changing needs within their education institutions. **Considering that education systems are so diverse in Europe – and selecting a single model would therefore be impossible and undesirable – education managements could benefit from peer learning activities as well as examples of good practice focussed on developing approaches on how to best facilitate the integration of migrants into the education system.**

In this regard, **it should be taken into account that needs may differ significantly between age groups.** Teachers at primary education level play a more 'parental' role with their pupils, while teachers at secondary level focus more on the command of a specific subject. At both levels it is however key that migrant pupils have an 'anchor' teacher with whom they can discuss their difficulties and challenges.

At VET and adult education level, challenges might arise with attracting migrant students and preventing them from dropping out of the system. **A flexible programme that enables students to follow courses suited to their (language) level, might be a way to keep students involved,** as was concluded at EFEE's PLA in Malta. Rigid programmes could demotivate students, if they have to follow courses in a specific order and be required to pass one course before being allowed to start on the next, although consecutive courses might better connect with already acquired skills or require a lower level of host language skills. In order to stimulate pupils and students to reach their full potential, it is key to offer tailor-made education, which puts their talents and competences at the centre.

At EFEE's PLA in Flanders on "Excellence and innovation in education"⁹, we saw the benefits of 'open learning centres' in schools to facilitate the integration of adults and to promote intergenerational learning and development. Open learning centres are places for students to learn and study, which are also open for youngsters and adults living in the community, and which organise integration courses, all with a view to lowering the barriers for adults with low skills to enter a learning environment without being officially registered in a school first.

In European countries a **wide variety exists in how language courses are being provided in order to prepare migrant pupils and students for regular education programmes.** In some countries, pupils are being trained in separate classes; in others, pupils are placed in 'regular' classrooms from the beginning. Although evaluation studies are rare, there is suggestive evidence that participating in the mainstream education system, with the support of trained teachers and other staff, gives better results than being taught in separate classes.

⁹ EFEE Peer Learning Activity to Flanders on "Excellence and innovation in education and supporting a new generation of educators", 15 October 2015, hosted by GO! Education of the Flemish Community (member of EFEE); outcomes are available [here](#)

Furthermore, research shows that training programmes involving parents have a positive effect on student performance.¹⁰

This brings us to our last point: **the importance of engaging with the wider community for promoting intercultural dialogue and facilitating the integration of migrants.** Cooperation among all key stakeholders involved is crucial at national, regional and local level. As these issues touch upon several policy fields, such as home affairs and integration, education and training, employment and social affairs, housing and health care, it is essential that the cooperation is well structured, balanced and clear. This requires a strong national vision, commitment and close cooperation at and between all levels (national, regional, and local) to make the strategy a success.

It was concluded during EFEE's PLA in Malta that it would be best to create a one-stop 'centre' where arriving immigrants could get all the information they need. **Education and training institutions could play a central role in providing further information on schooling and training, identifying specific (social) needs and referring for further support to appropriate (community) services, and guiding on labour market opportunities.**

However, it should be made clear that these issues are not the sole responsibility of employers in education, but of the broader community, including social and health care services, policy makers, business employers, etc. and that a structured approach is needed to respond jointly to the challenges. The involvement of the wider community is key as a "whole society" approach must occur to promote integration into the host society. It is important that schools are supported by the community (including political leaders) and the community is supported by the schools as educational institutions are very influential in promoting social values and fostering social cohesion.

Furthermore, at school level, **supporting cooperation among parents, pupils, teachers and school leaders could strongly contribute to promoting intercultural dialogue and integration of migrants.** Research shows that strong family-school connections leads to improved attainment, more engagement, less disruptive behaviours and more positive behaviours, as was highlighted by Dr Caroline Oliver, Senior Researcher, University of Oxford during EFEE's PLA in Malta. Furthermore, inviting parents of migrant children to school activities and engaging them in the school's life could help to enlarge their social network and support integration in the host society. Besides it could contribute to creating a culture of diversity among all children and parents within the school. It would be important to have one lead contact for the parents within the school: a person who informs the parents on the values and pedagogical programmes of the school, discusses with them the progress and challenges of their children and lends an ear when parents or the children encounter problems. We realise that this task could be (highly) time-consuming and therefore we will need to look for cooperative and innovative initiatives, such as establishing parent committees who operate in close cooperation with school management and inform other parents on developments and activities. Communication might also be problematic when parents don't speak the host language. In this regard, new technologies could be helpful, such as interpretation via skype or translation apps. Also, other parents who speak both the host language and that of the new arrivals could offer a solution.

¹⁰ EENEE (2016), Education as a tool for the economic integration of migrants (prepared for the European Commission), Publication office of the European Union, p. 29

To conclude, EFEE deems it very important that with the Paris Declaration, the issues of promoting civic education, intercultural dialogue and democratic citizenship, and facilitating migrants' integration into the educational and socio-economic environment of the host countries, have been put high on the European agenda. It is clear that education has an important role to play in fostering social cohesion, preventing marginalisation and radicalisation, and helping young people to become responsible, open-minded and active members of our diverse society.

As emphasised in this Position Paper, we are convinced that EFEE and its member institutions, as employers in education, could provide a valuable contribution to the follow-up process of the Paris Declaration. Education employers have a pivotal role to play in defining school leadership and governance structures, setting up educational institutional features, creating positive, diverse and open learning environments, promoting modernisation of teachers' and school management's skills and competences, and establishing alliances with the broader community. These are all aspects which are of great importance to reinforcing social cohesion, promoting active citizenship and intercultural dialogue, and facilitating integration of migrants.

EFEE, together with its member institutions, will continue to work on these important issues and, with this Position Paper we wish to underline that we are very much willing to contribute to European initiatives in this field from the perspective of education employers.



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