

## **EFEE Statement on the European Commission workshop on Quality Investment in Education and Training: what we already know and how we can move forward**

*Brussels, 15 February 2022*

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic took a toll on educational systems in Europe and highlighted the importance of investments for the future of millions of learners across all levels of education. High-quality and fair access to training depend on substantial levels of funding - for those who teach or train, leadership teams and support staff, buildings, books, and equipment such as ICT. However, funds should be allocated effectively and efficiently to reach optimal outcomes. Therefore, an Expert Group was set up at the EU level to identify education and training policies that have the potential « to boost education outcomes, promote inclusion and equity, ensure pupils' well-being and improve the efficiency of spending »<sup>1</sup>.

The European Federation of Education Employers (EFEE) represents 52 education employer organisations from all levels of education and 26 countries. EFEE welcomes the European Commission's ambition to improve the quality and efficiency of their spending to boost educational outcomes. It also congratulates the Expert Group on Quality Investment in Education and Training for its interim report.

For a more comprehensive analysis of efficient investment in education, EFEE invites the European Commission to take the following points into consideration:

### The inclusion of Social Partners in Education in the investigation process

Education and training systems are complex, and often, successful improvement programmes are not transferable when applied to a different context.

EFEE, as a social partner representing employers in the education sector at the EU level, should be included in the developments of the analysis process. It is paramount to further develop the expert group report and reach a comprehensive overview of efficient education policies following a needs-based approach. Social partners in education can act by analyzing the reasons behind the most successful arrangements and identifying the extent to which some factors can be introduced into different contexts in other countries. Indeed, the partners' closeness to the education providers and practitioners in early childhood education, schools, colleges and universities around the EU provide them with the ability to dispense accounts from on-the-field practical experiences in different member states. Considering their access to relevant information, they can also contribute to the collection of state-of-the-art data and robust evidence on the impact, cost and challenges in the implementation of key education and training policies.

### The importance of foreseeing all levels of education

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<sup>1</sup> *Interim Report of the Commission expert group on quality investment in education and training (January 2022)*

Lifelong learning is paramount, especially with the current green and digital « twin » transition we are experiencing, and the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Education and training providers, as well as companies cannot accurately predict what specific skills and competencies will be required in the workplaces of the future. A focus should be given to the provision of key skills and the inculcation of attitudes that provide workers with the capacity to continue learning all their lives. Ultimately, this will enable them to adapt effectively to upcoming professional and personal changes. Similarly, there is an increasingly large body of evidence showing the benefits of Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) on medium and long-term achievements, as stated in the European Platform for Investing in Children (EPIC) 2022 [report](#). ECEC assuredly represents the foundation of an individual's learning journey. EFEE welcomes the Expert Group's focus on school and higher education. However, we wish to emphasize the importance of the remaining sectors such as ECEC, adult education and Vocational Education and Training (VET) that are to be included in the final report, and altogether the importance of a holistic approach regarding investment in education.

In light of this, we encourage the Commission to take the following measures into account for the following focus areas: (1) Teachers and Trainers, and Digital Learning, (2) Management, Infrastructure and Learning environments, and Equity and Inclusion.

Education prepares citizens and workers for a world that is constantly changing and experiencing a green and digital « twin » transition. Initial teacher education is no longer sufficient throughout a teaching career. All teachers and trainers should have their vocational and pedagogical competencies regularly updated through participation in appropriate professional development programmes and assessments, as well as self-evaluations. Moreover, the need for continuing professional development throughout a teacher's career needs to be universally recognised, and investment, incentives and rewards are to be put in place to encourage increased teacher participation in such initiatives. Furthermore, to tackle shortages in the profession, it should be made more attractive through continuing promotion and improvement of social dialogue structures and capacities to face the future challenges of education. In view of this, we would like to highlight a project that we have conducted in cooperation with ETUCE titled "[e-Speed- European Social Partners in Education Embracing Digitalisation: Challenges and opportunities for European education trade unions and employer organisations in the digital era](#)". The richness of expertise that our members provide enabled valuable input to working groups on the impact of digitalization on teachers and school leaders' working environment, and on digitalization being a tool towards more inclusive education systems.

EFEE strongly believes that the key to successful integration, social participation, active citizenship and individuals perceiving lifelong learning as an enriching source is the access to qualitative and inclusive education from an early start. The COVID-19 pandemic has put an additional toll on students, especially the disadvantaged learners since before the pandemic started. European education systems are now facing the risk that the alarming percentage of early leavers from school and training and underachievers amongst pupils, as presented in the PISA 2018 study, will increase significantly. The expected increase in number of early school leavers triggered by the consequences of COVID-19 represents an obstacle for the long-term recovery of European economies that need skilled workers to manage the twin transition successfully. Early leavers also face difficulties in the labour market and in their daily lives. Studies, such as those published in the framework of the Education and Training Monitor 2020, have shown that a possible causality exists between the socio-economic background of a pupil and their decision to

become an early school leaver. It was found that school students with a migrant or refugee background or from a lower-income and education family, are more likely to leave school earlier than their peers from higher-income and non-migrant families. They also face a greater risk of living in poverty, being excluded socially and becoming NEETs.

We welcome the efforts made towards increasing equity and inclusion in education and highlight the importance of integrating EFEE as a social partner and representative of employers in education in all stages of the process, to successfully carry out the ambitions laid out in the European Education Area by 2025. We wish to emphasize the importance of facilitating closer cross-collaborations between stakeholders in education institutions, ICT support organizations and social partners to ensure synergies of interest and secure the civil value of education.

EFEE plays a crucial role as a facilitator for cooperation between school heads, teachers and students. We also foster effective communication between the school system and its external community of stakeholders, such as researchers, ministries, public employment services and NGOs.

Therefore, we encourage the European Commission:

- to build up a framework that measures the potential challenges for fundamental rights for teachers and learners, resulting from the growing use of big data and algorithms
- to foster top-down and bottom-up communication of education and training policy gained results through checklists and self-evaluation tools
- to conduct a detailed economic mapping of the state of play regarding access to digital tools and available infrastructures available to schools across the European Union Member States with data from social partners in education such as the European Federation of Education Employers (EFEE) that benefits from a diverse membership of education employers in 26 EU countries
- to support the Member States and stakeholders in education to promote efficient and smart investments in the education sector with a focus on students' attainments, educational outcomes and employability
- to collect solid national, regional and local data to address early school leaving and underperformance amongst pupils in education and training