

EFEE/ETUCE Statement on the Interim report of the Commission expert group on quality investment in education and training

Brussels, 8 March 2022

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic is taking its toll on educational systems in Europe and highlighted the importance of quality investments for the future of millions of learners across all levels of education. In this context, as recalled in the [2020 Joint ETUCE/EFEE Statement on the impact of COVID-19 crisis](#), it is essential to ensure “an extraordinary public investment plan in high quality education, training, and research through large scale fiscal stimulus measures, needed during the recovery phase with a view to uphold democratic principles and equal opportunities for all”.

As the European Sectoral Social Partners in Education, we strongly believe that high-quality education and fair access to education and training profoundly depend on substantial levels of quality funding . However, effective and sustainable investment should be carefully allocated to reach optimal outcomes.

Against this backdrop, the European Sectoral Social Partners in Education, the EFEE (European Federation of Education Employers) and ETUCE (European Trade Union Committee for Education) welcome the European Commission’s initiative to set up a two-year Expert Group 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 » (Interim Report, January 2022). EFEE and ETUCE further welcome the Interim Report of the Expert Group on Quality Investment in Education and Training.

For a more comprehensive analysis of sustainable and effective investment in education, EFEE and ETUCE, the European Sectoral Social Partners in Education invite the European Commission and the Expert Group to take the following points into consideration:

The inclusion of European Sectoral Social Partners in Education

- Education and training systems are complex, and often, successful improvement policies are not transferable from one context to another by adopting a one-size-fits-all approach. In the light of this, it is essential that European Sectoral Social Partners in Education, embodying the interests of ground practitioners in the education sector, including education employers, school leaders, teachers, academics, and other education personnel are included in the developments of the analysis process.
- It is paramount to further develop the expert group report and reach a comprehensive overview of effective education policies following a needs-based approach. In doing so, concrete social dialogue at a European, national, regional, and local level must be ensured in the formulation of any policy recommendation deriving from the work of the expert group and their subsequent implementation.
- Considering the role of European Sectoral Social Partners in Education and their access to relevant information, they can also contribute to the collection of state-of-the-art data and robust evidence on the impact and challenges in the implementation of key education and training policies.

The importance of ensuring cohesion in education

EFEE and ETUCE welcome the Expert Group's focus on primary and secondary as well as higher education. However, we wish to emphasise the importance of the remaining sectors such as Early Childhood Education (ECE), adult education and Vocational Education and Training (VET) that need to be included in the final report, and altogether the importance of a holistic approach regarding investment in education.

Besides, ensuring access to quality and inclusive lifelong learning for all is paramount, especially with the current green and digital transition and the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Recalling the [*EFEE-ETUCE Joint Recommendation Social Partners in Education promoting quality and inclusive VET to enhance lifelong learning for all*](#), we remind the importance of investing in quality, inclusive, attractive, and innovating VET systems and lifelong learning opportunities, including targeted investments to ensure decent and supportive working environment for teachers, trainers, school leaders, and other education personnel to promote quality and inclusive teaching.

Similarly, there is an increasingly large body of evidence showing the benefits of Early Childhood Education on medium and long-term achievements, as stated in the [*Toolkit for inclusive early childhood education and care*](#). ECEC assuredly represents the foundation of an individual's learning journey.

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 students, citizens and workers for a world that is constantly changing and experiencing a green and digital transition. Therefore, teachers, academics, trainers and other education personnel need to be supported in order to continuously update their vocational and pedagogical skills through their participation in continuous professional development programmes. Moreover, the need for quality and accessible continuous professional development programmes needs to be universally recognised as crucial to regularly update the pedagogical competence of teachers and academics. To this scope, sustainable investment and incentive mechanisms are to be put in place to encourage increased teacher participation in such initiatives.

Furthermore, the teaching profession 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 the “Joint ETUCE/EFEE Declaration Towards a Framework of Action on the attractiveness of the teaching profession” (2018).

As social partners in education, we strongly believe 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 for all from an early start.

The COVID-19 pandemic has put additional strain on students, especially the disadvantaged learners. European education systems are now facing the risk that the alarming percentage of early school leaving and underachievement will increase significantly. The expected increase in the number of early school leavers triggered by the consequences of COVID-19 represents an obstacle for ensuring a sustainable education-led recovery. Research shows that students with more disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, migrant or refugee background, are more likely to leave school earlier than their peers from higher-income and non-migrant families and face bigger difficulty in the labour market, risk of living in poverty, being excluded socially and becoming NEETs. Therefore, especially in the context of the recovery from the COVID-19, targeted policies and sustainable investment is needed to support the most vulnerable social groups.

We welcome the efforts made towards increasing equity and inclusion in education and highlight the importance of integrating EFEE and ETUCE as European Sectoral Social Partners in Education and representatives of education employers, teachers and education personnel 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 and ETUCE play a crucial role as facilitators for cooperation between school leaders, teachers, academics, trainers 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.

Brussels, 8 March 2022

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Daniel Wisniewski'.

Daniel Wisniewski
General Secretary, EFEE

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'S. Flocken'.

Susan Flocken
European Director, ETUCE