



EUROPEAN COMMISSION  
Directorate-General for Education and Culture

## **Common European Principles for Teacher<sup>1</sup> Competences and Qualifications**

### **Introduction**

This text aims to support policy makers at a national or regional level by setting out common European principles for teacher competences and qualifications. These have been devised in response to the challenges laid down in the Joint Interim Report by the European Council and the European Commission on progress towards *Education and Training 2010*.<sup>2</sup>

### **Background**

Teachers play a crucial role in supporting the learning experience of young people and adult learners. They are key players in how education systems evolve and in the implementation of the reforms which can make the European Union the highest performing knowledge-driven economy in the world by 2010. They recognise that high-quality education provides learners with personal fulfilment, better social skills and more diverse employment opportunities. Their profession, which is inspired by values of inclusiveness and the need to nurture the potential of all learners, has a strong influence on society and plays a vital role in advancing human potential and shaping future generations. Therefore, to achieve its ambitious objective, the European Union views the role of teachers and their lifelong learning and career development as key priorities.

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper a *teacher* is a person who is acknowledged as having the status of a teacher (or equivalent) according to the legislation and practice of a given country. The word “equivalent” is needed because in some countries there could be groups of teachers with different titles but holding the same status. In some countries a *teacher* could also be a *trainer* who works with school-aged pupils and young adults following vocational programmes in schools, colleges, companies or training organisations.

<sup>2</sup> *Education and Training 2010 – The Success of the Lisbon Strategy Hinges on Urgent Reforms* was adopted jointly by the Council and the Commission on 26 February 2004. This report recommended that European common references and principles in a number of areas, including the competences and qualifications of teachers and trainers, should be developed ‘as a matter of priority’, p.28.

Teachers should be equipped to respond to the evolving challenges of the knowledge society, participate actively in it and prepare learners to be autonomous lifelong learners. They should, therefore, be able to reflect on the processes of learning and teaching through an ongoing engagement with subject knowledge, curriculum content, pedagogy, innovation, research, and the social and cultural dimensions of education. Teacher education needs to be at higher education level or its equivalent and be supported by strong partnerships between higher education and the schools or other institutions where teachers will gain employment.

Teachers also have a key role in preparing learners for their role as EU citizens. As such, they need to be able to recognise and respect different cultures. First-hand experience gained in other European countries supports teachers in responding to this challenge. Priority should, therefore, be given to the development of mutual trust and recognition of the competences and qualifications<sup>3</sup> of teachers between member states.

Although teachers play a critical role in society, they cannot act alone. Their own high quality education needs to be supported by the institutions where they are employed, within the context of coherent national or regional policies that are appropriately resourced. These policies must address initial teacher education and continuing professional development, but must also be set within the broader context of education policy in general. Those who train teachers have an impact on the quality of learning and, therefore, they need to be supported as part of the national or regional system.

### **Common Principles**

These Common European principles should provide an impetus for developing policies which will enhance the quality and efficiency of education across the Union. The common European principles are:

- **a well-qualified profession:** high quality education systems require that all teachers are graduates from higher education institutions and those working in the field of initial vocational education should be highly qualified in their professional area and have a suitable pedagogical qualification. Every teacher should have the opportunity to continue their studies to the highest level in order to develop their teaching competences and to increase their opportunities for progression within the profession. Teacher education is multidisciplinary. This ensures that teachers have extensive subject knowledge, a good knowledge of pedagogy, the skills and competences required to guide and support learners, and an understanding of the social and cultural dimension of education.
- **a profession placed within the context of lifelong learning<sup>4</sup>:** teachers should be supported in order to continue their professional development

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<sup>3</sup> Teachers' qualifications and achievements should be understood within the European Qualifications Framework.

<sup>4</sup> Teachers' lifelong learning could be formal, non-formal and informal. It includes education, training, retraining, updating in schools and in public and private institutions. Training can occur in all matters which influence the learning process of the individual such as subject knowledge, teaching and learning methods, pedagogy, psychology, organisational approaches, theories and practices.

throughout their careers. They and their employers should recognise the importance of acquiring new knowledge, and teachers should be able to innovate and use evidence to inform their work. They need to be employed in institutions which value lifelong learning in order to evolve and adapt throughout their whole career. Teachers should be encouraged to review evidence of effective practice and engage with current innovation and research in order to keep pace with the evolving knowledge society. They should be encouraged to participate actively in professional development, which can include periods of time spent outside the education sector, and this should be recognised and rewarded within their own systems.

- **a mobile profession:** mobility should be a central component of initial and continuing teacher education programmes. Teachers should be encouraged to participate in European projects and spend time working or studying in other European countries for professional development purposes. Those who do so should have their status recognised in the host country and their participation recognised and valued in their home country. There should also be the opportunity for mobility between different levels of education and towards different professions within the education sector.
- **a profession based on partnerships:** institutions providing teacher education should organise their work collaboratively in partnership with schools, local work environments, work-based training providers and other stakeholders. Higher education institutions need to ensure that their teaching benefits from knowledge of current practice. Teacher education partnerships, which have an emphasis on practical skills and an academic and scientific basis, should provide teachers with the competence and confidence to reflect on their own and others' practice. Teacher education, in itself, should be supported and be an object of study and research.

### **Making it work: the key competences**

Teaching and education add to the economic and cultural aspects of the knowledge society and should therefore be seen in their societal context. Teachers should be able to:

**Work with others:** they work in a profession which should be based on the values of social inclusion and nurturing the potential of every learner. They need to have knowledge of human growth and development and demonstrate self-confidence when engaging with others. They need to be able to work with learners as individuals and support them to develop into fully participating and active members of society. They should also be able to work in ways which increase the collective intelligence of learners and co-operate and collaborate with colleagues to enhance their own learning and teaching.

**Work with knowledge, technology and information:** they need to be able to work with a variety of types of knowledge. Their education and professional development should equip them to access, analyse, validate, reflect on and transmit knowledge, making effective use of technology where this is appropriate. Their pedagogic skills should allow them to build and manage learning environments and retain the intellectual freedom to make choices over the delivery of education. Their confidence in the use of ICT should allow them to integrate it effectively into learning and teaching. They should be able to guide and support learners in the networks in which information can be found and built.

They should have a good understanding of subject knowledge and view learning as a lifelong journey. Their practical and theoretical skills should also allow them to learn from their own experiences and match a wide range of teaching and learning strategies to the needs of learners.

**Work with and in society:** they contribute to preparing learners to be globally responsible in their role as EU citizens. Teachers should be able to promote mobility and co-operation in Europe, and encourage intercultural respect and understanding. They should have an understanding of the balance between respecting and being aware of the diversity of learners' cultures and identifying common values. They also need to understand the factors that create social cohesion and exclusion in society and be aware of the ethical dimensions of the knowledge society. They should be able to work effectively with the local community, and with partners and stakeholders in education – parents, teacher education institutions, and representative groups. Their experience and expertise should also enable them to contribute to systems of quality assurance.

Teachers' work in all these areas should be embedded in a professional continuum of lifelong learning which includes initial teacher education, induction and continuing professional development, as they cannot be expected to possess all the necessary competences on completing their initial teacher education.

## **Recommendations to national and regional policy makers**

To implement policies in line with these Common European principles, the following recommendations are made to those responsible for policy-making at national or regional levels:

1. The teaching profession should be well qualified.
  - teachers should be graduates from a higher education institution or equivalent;
  - those teaching in the field of initial vocational education should be highly qualified in their professional area and have a suitable teaching qualification;
  - teacher education programmes should be delivered in all three cycles<sup>5</sup> of higher education in order to ensure their place in the European higher education area and to increase the opportunity for advancement and mobility within the profession;
  - the contribution of research and evidence based practice to the development of new knowledge about education and training should be promoted.
2. The teaching profession should be seen as a continuum which includes initial teacher education, induction and continuing professional development.
  - coherent and adequately resourced lifelong learning strategies, covering formal and non-formal development activities are needed to deliver continuous professional development for teachers. These activities, which include subject-based and pedagogical training, should be available throughout their careers and be recognised appropriately.

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<sup>5</sup> Bachelor, masters and doctorate within the meaning of the Bologna Process

- the content of initial and continuous professional development programmes should reflect the importance of interdisciplinary and collaborative approaches to learning.
3. Teacher mobility should be encouraged.
- mobility projects for teachers should be facilitated and promoted as an integral part of initial and continuous professional development programmes.
  - initial and continuous professional development programmes should ensure that teachers have the knowledge and experience of European co-operation to enable them to value and respect cultural diversity and to educate learners to become EU citizens and globally responsible.
  - opportunities to study European languages, including subject-related vocabulary, during initial teacher education and in continuous professional development programmes should be available and promoted.
  - priority should be given to developing greater trust and transparency of teacher qualifications within Europe to allow for mutual recognition and increased mobility.
4. The teaching profession should work in partnership with other stakeholders.
- partnerships between institutions where teachers will be employed, industry, training providers and higher education institutions should be encouraged in order to support high quality training and effective practice, and to develop networks of innovation at local and regional levels.

Common European Principles for Teacher Competences and Qualifications, drafted under the responsibility of the European Commission.



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