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### **BUSINESSEUROPE POSITION ON MODERNISING SCHOOLS**

#### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BUSINESSEUROPE acknowledges that education is and should remain the competence of Member States, but insofar as the Lisbon Strategy goals and addressing Member States' competitiveness is concerned, it is useful to identify common European challenges and possible solutions. Therefore, European employers welcome the European Commission's timely initiative to focus on the development of school education in Europe. National systems vary widely, both in terms of quality and attainment, suggesting that there is considerable scope for improvement as well as the opportunity to share best practices across countries.

By 2010 it is estimated that 50% of newly created jobs will require highly skilled workers, and this proportion is likely to increase with time. Taking into account future demographic projections and the shortage of uptake in science, technology, engineering and maths disciplines, not undertaking the necessary reforms of education systems could curtail Europe's competitive advantages in technology-intensive high-quality production which require higher standards of excellence and overall skills levels. Within these new and continually evolving conditions, the competitiveness of business depends to a larger extent on the competitiveness of people and increasing the investment in Human Capital.

Member States must ensure that they meet these challenges and deliver the highest quality in education systems, while responding to the needs of individuals, business and society.

Schools have an equally if not more vital role to play as other levels of education and training to instil a culture of lifelong learning into both education practices and attitudes of individuals, and need to modernise existing practices and structures.

With the use of individualised learning programmes, pupils need to be equipped with both generic basic competences and transversal competences to be enabled to develop their employability as well as personal fulfilment throughout life.

Companies can play an important role in many respects. Through enhanced cooperation with schools on a mutual basis, companies can offer insights into working life and training opportunities for both pupils and teachers, enable schools to keep up-to-date with industry developments, and provide know-how and expertise as needed.

The underlying condition for creating greater flexibility and efficiency in the way schools operate is to provide them with the autonomy they need. They can thus become self-managing organisations responsible for Human Resources, budget, and able to develop their own programmes and teaching methods while remaining compliant with national curricula and standards. Schools should also be accountable to a school board composed of parents, teachers, pupils, companies and local authorities. In this way, schools can play their part in reinforcing their local communities with the other actors.

Schools must keep abreast of the changing demands of working life through close cooperation with the surrounding community in general and enterprises in particular.

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### **Introduction**

1. The European Commission has launched a public consultation entitled 'Schools for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century' aimed at better identifying what actions can be taken at national level to improve the quality of schools and to assess ways in which cooperation at European level can contribute to the modernisation of Member States' education systems.
2. The consultation denotes that more work needs to be done to reach the key benchmarks of the Lisbon Strategy:
  - One fifth of under 15-year olds attain only the lowest level of proficiency in reading;
  - Almost 15% of 18-24 year olds leave school prematurely (LS target: < 10%);
  - Only 77% of 22-year olds have completed upper secondary education (LS target: > 85%).
3. By 2010 it is estimated that 50% of newly created jobs will require highly skilled workers, and this proportion is likely to increase with time. If we also take into consideration future demographic projections and the shortage of uptake in science and maths subjects, not undertaking the necessary reforms of education systems could curtail Europe's competitive advantages in technology-intensive high-quality production which require higher standards of excellence and overall skills levels.
4. Within these new and continually evolving conditions, the competitiveness of business depends to a larger extent on the competitiveness of people. Ongoing developments in all sectors of the economy dictate that companies increasingly require higher skills. Human Capital is therefore the foundation of competitiveness, prosperity and social security. It is therefore essential to concentrate on investment in Human Capital.

## **General Comments**

5. BUSINESSEUROPE acknowledges that education is and should remain the competence of Member States, but insofar as the Lisbon Strategy goals and addressing Member States' competitiveness is concerned, it is useful to identify common European challenges and possible solutions. Therefore, European employers welcome the European Commission's timely initiative to focus on the development of school education in Europe. National systems vary widely, both in terms of quality and attainment, suggesting that there is considerable scope for improvement as well as the opportunity to share best practices across countries.
6. The emergence of the knowledge economy means that people have become the key to international competitiveness, and increasing investment in Human Capital is vital. This poses fundamental challenges for all education systems. Member States must ensure that they meet those challenges and deliver the highest quality, while responding to the needs of individuals, business and society.
7. Education is crucial for improving the EU's competitiveness and social cohesion. BUSINESSEUROPE recognises that schools have an equally if not more vital role to play as other levels of education and training to instil a culture of lifelong learning into both education practices and attitudes of individuals. By the time an individual leaves the schooling system, they should be empowered with the knowledge and understanding that developing their employability and continually refreshing skills and competences is the key to their quality of life and pursuing successful careers.
8. Fundamental reform of the education system is needed to enable schools to equip their students for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and to supplement the traditional knowledge and competences which schools teach, with those increasingly needed for knowledge and excellence in fast evolving knowledge societies. Special attention also needs to be paid to raising standards and attainment levels in literacy and numeracy.
9. The challenge for schools is to respond to new and constantly evolving needs, and ensure that national education systems build in incentives to improve quality continuously, thus guaranteeing social cohesion and sustainable economic growth.

## **Responses to Questions of the Consultation Document**

<b>Question 1: How can schools be organised in such a way as to provide all students with the full range of key competencies?</b>
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10. BUSINESSEUROPE agrees with the view that there is no longer “one job for life”, that all individuals need to be equipped with both generic basic competences and transversal competences to be enabled to develop their employability as well as personal fulfilment.
11. This is consistent with the approach of focusing on outcomes rather than input variables. In terms of adapting curricula, the accrual of knowledge needs to be complemented with the practical application of knowledge. Schools need to ensure a balanced focus on theory and practice – to know and to know how to do. To stimulate pupils’ curiosity, they need to learn how to apply their knowledge and understanding. This is equally important for fostering talents as well as giving insights to less academic pupils.
12. Schools should focus on developing individualised learning and development programmes, with objectives for each pupil that can reflect the outcomes approach. This would not only nurture a process of independent learning but also encourage from an early stage a culture of self-assessment, initiative taking and an enhanced sense of responsibility. Individualised orientation processes can be introduced to identify and promote talents and potentials and to overcome weaknesses.
13. Another innovative way of developing key competences in schools would perhaps not be directly related to curricula changes but to set aside time where pupils can conduct interactive ‘business simulation games’, for example, which would have the effect of developing teamwork, communication skills and an early appreciation of the world of work. Such activities can also be designed to help develop ICT skills. School-level competitions such as finding original and innovative ways to raise money for community initiatives or charitable causes can also develop their entrepreneurship.

**Question 2: How can schools equip young people with the competencies and motivation to make learning a lifelong activity?**

14. BUSINESSEUROPE agrees that one of the key objectives of schools' reform is that pupils leave school competent and motivated to take responsibility for their own learning throughout life.
  
15. New teaching and learning methods can be developed and to make the learning process more interesting and interactive. Teachers' appreciation of the importance of lifelong learning must also be underlined first, so that a culture of lifelong learning can be more naturally transmitted to pupils. Measures for pupils to increase a process of self-assessment and taking greater responsibility for learning can also be beneficial for enhancing autonomy and instilling a sense of responsibility and ownership towards achieving learning outcomes. Teaching methods can thus be adapted to address more closely the key competences to be developed, with a particular focus on exploiting ICTs in an efficient way.
  
16. One of the ways in which employers can cooperate on a mutual basis with schools in this process is to provide early contact with industry – which can not only contribute in developing talents but also target disadvantaged pupils. Once pupils can envision the world of work and the fast pace of change in their areas of interest, notably with emphasis on illustrating how working methods and technology have evolved, this can also enhance their understanding of the importance of lifelong learning.

**Question 3: How can school systems contribute to supporting long-term sustainable economic growth in Europe?**

17. Schools must find ways to stimulate higher uptake in the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) subjects as well as increasing the overall quality in the system. BUSINESSEUROPE agrees that Europe's future labour force will increasingly require two types of skills, namely high and constantly updated skills; and social, communicative, entrepreneurial and cultural competences. In addition, we would like to highlight the following 5 features are of particular importance:

- I. Key basic skills: literacy and numeracy, foreign language skills;
- II. Generic practical skills: problem-solving, using ICTs;
- III. Social competences: communication skills, teamwork, interacting in multicultural settings, citizenship values;
- IV. Personal skills: a sense of autonomy and responsibility, self-assessment, an entrepreneurial mindset, knowing how to apply knowledge and an understanding of the importance of lifelong learning;
- V. Specialised skills (according to discipline): needing constant updating.

18. European countries must increase the proportion of more highly skilled workers, otherwise this is likely to result in less stable and sustainable economic growth, thus threatening to undermine Europe's competitive advantages on a global scale. Improving education attainment levels is therefore crucial as a growth driver in itself.

19. European employers strongly value the skills schools currently equip their pupils with, but schools must also evolve to be able to deliver the skills that employers will increasingly look for in their employees. Employers can support schools to prepare for working life through career guidance, offers for work experience, and offering secondments or placements for teachers. This can complement the much needed marketing of STEM subjects in schools, where closer contact with industry is vital. Parents, schools, and employers must cooperate to ensure that pupils make informed choices about further study and work.

20. From the perspective of individuals, pupils must be informed and equipped to manage their future employability. With the support of business, schools need to instil a culture of lifelong learning from an early age.



21. Ensuring a better integration of pupils with an immigration background is also crucial and can be achieved through providing equality of access to schools at an early age as well as further and continuous tuition available according to an individual needs-assessed basis.

**Question 4: How can school systems best respond to the need to promote equity, to respond to cultural diversity and to reduce early school leaving?**

22. Reducing the numbers of early school leavers is one of the key challenges facing schools. Providing equality of opportunity in education for each pupil already in early schooling stages can contribute to avoiding the substantial social costs felt in Member States.

23. Companies can play a role in cooperation with schools for young people to complete secondary education by alternating school and work. A mutual basis of cooperation would be an advantage for schools, companies and individuals. This would not only relieve part of the burden of responsibility on schools, but also keep a greater number of young people active.

24. Successful integration of people with an immigration background into the labour market on an equal footing is vital for economic sustainability. Preventing segregation on the basis of ability, socio-economic background and origin is important in this respect.

25. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds should have access to free school education from the pre-schooling age. If this is not provided, it will simply perpetuate the phenomenon whereby children that are disadvantaged from the start remain so throughout their schooling education. The early stages of education systems should be free, until it comes to higher education where fees are more appropriate as the projected rate of return on investment is greater for the individual. With the use of individualised learning programmes, another solution could be to have offers of all day schooling for those who require further support.

**Question 5: If schools are to respond to each pupil's individual learning needs, what can be done as regards to curricula, school organisation and the roles of teachers?**

26. The most effective realisation of individualised learning and development programmes for pupils entails the condition that schools and teachers have the liberty to choose their teaching methods, as long as they are in accordance with the educational standards of the national educational attainment agenda.
27. Greater differentiation in learning approaches can be put in place to better achieve learning outcomes. For example, in some cases smaller class sizes can be an advantage, in others bigger class sizes with one or more teachers. This needs to be done according to individuals' needs – addressing the needs of both stronger and weaker pupils.

**Question 6: How can communities help to prepare young people to be responsible citizens, in line with fundamental values such as peace and tolerance of diversity?**

28. BUSINESSEUROPE agrees with the urgent need for measures to combat increasingly prevalent tendencies such as violence, racism, and bullying in schools. Teachers with the help of support staff carry an important social responsibility in this respect and need to act as role models for pupils. The importance of parental care and parents' responsibility in educating their children plays an equally key role in imparting values to youngsters. Further integrating schools into local community life can also therefore help to tackle behavioural problems.
29. In terms of promoting tolerance towards a multicultural society, it is important to better integrate pupils with an immigration background into the school community. Focusing on the language tuition of pupils with an immigration background that have difficulties should be available throughout schooling years. Organising international events where pupils can present and explain their cultural and ethnic origins can also contribute in increasing multicultural awareness.
30. Initiatives of local companies and organisations opening up to schools in order to give pupils insights into the realities of working life and involving them in community activities also promotes the aim of educating responsible citizens, as cultural diversity itself also



imparts tolerance. This implies sustainable activities, as opposed to isolated 1-day actions.

31. Increasing the focus on each pupil as an individual is also important as it reinforces the sense of belonging and identity to the school and local community. Support staff (special needs teachers, teaching assistants) and support structures for single parent families are just as important.

**Question 7: How can school staff be trained and supported to meet the challenges they face?**

32. The teaching profession is not sufficiently recognised. Teachers should be valued professionals with the opportunity of a career which rewards better performance, offers incentives for committed and motivated teachers (for example through performance-oriented contracts), which presupposes an autonomous management structure.

33. All teachers must also recognise the importance of innovation as their role evolves more into that of a coach. Their role will often require a greater emphasis on teamwork. Subject-specific training should also be complemented with the further development of psychological and pedagogical training. Special needs teachers and psychologists should also form part of the staff to assist teachers with pupils having learning difficulties or behavioural problems and help alleviate the responsibilities of teachers.

34. A rigorous system of training and selection for teachers, supported by investment is needed. Notably, the initial training of teachers has to be advanced – which should involve an initial screening process to test the suitability of the person for the profession. This should be complemented with opportunities during studies to gain insight and experience at an early stage, for example through teacher-student scholarships. Each teacher should hold an appropriate level of qualification and should have a period of initial practical training in a school, and have access to continuous professional training (also in non-educational environments).

35. Teachers should have ongoing opportunities to gain insight and experience into economic life through training periods in companies which also enables them to keep

abreast of up-to-date knowledge evolution. This is of particular importance for teachers of the STEM subjects as the relevant industries and professions are among those evolving most rapidly. This would also contribute to the much needed boost in motivation in the uptake of STEM subjects.

**Question 8: How can school communities best receive the leadership and motivation they need to succeed? How can they be empowered to develop in response to changing needs and demands?**

36. Governments need to give schools the autonomy to manage themselves. Schools need to have high expectations, to set targets, and to take responsibility for meeting them. They should be able to choose their own team of teachers and to develop strong contacts with parents, the local community, other schools and employers.
37. BUSINESSEUROPE supports an autonomous school system as it fosters the individual positioning, profiling and objective setting of schools, that can develop their own programmes and teaching curricula based on the set standards of the national educational attainment agenda. The school is thus accountable for its teaching profile and complies with the national curriculum and standards, and is assisted by a school board (composed of parents, teachers, pupils, companies, local authorities).
38. The school board can act as a governing body ensuring that all parties concerned have an active role in school life and can therefore improve the quality of the school, and can also have the role of appointing and dismissing Headmasters.
39. An autonomous school can best position and profile itself by maintaining its own finances, controlling its budget and have the right to freely conclude legal transactions. Each school thus has an internal teaching and management evaluation process alongside national inspections. The Headmaster should be entirely responsible for the smooth running, organisation and HR management of the school. Leadership training is needed for the managerial responsibilities to fulfil this role. In this regard, inspiration can be drawn from business structures.
40. Governments also need to ensure that schools are accountable for cost and quality and to define national standards for each curriculum subject as a means of measuring school



performance and as a tool for their self-assessment, evaluation and continuous improvement. Published information on schools' performance should be available for national benchmarking between comparable schools, and to inform pupils, parents, employers and Government policy.

41. Schools must make more effective use of the existing resources to meet the changing needs of pupils and employers. Cooperation and competition are both needed to deliver inclusiveness, effectiveness and efficiency. Elements of competition – such as informed parental choice of the most appropriate school, schools choosing their own teachers, and benchmarking among comparable schools – should be introduced within a framework of public rules.

## **Conclusion**

42. Learning no longer ends at the school gates. The essence of 21<sup>st</sup> Century employment is the ability to learn and adapt throughout working life. Schools must teach pupils the value of lifelong learning and give them the tools and desires to pursue it. Schools must help young people to understand their responsibility to continue learning

43. Schools must renew their mission and their organisation. They must continue to provide high basic skills and a solid foundation for knowledge. But they must also emphasise social and personal skills and the importance of learning throughout life, which are prerequisite for work, mobility and quality of life.

44. BUSINESSEUROPE promotes the concept of individualised learning programmes. Just as important is to increase the degree of interaction and cooperation within local communities. Autonomous schools with boards composed of pupils, parents, teachers, companies and local authorities can ensure that both of these priorities are mutually reinforcing and more effectively prepare pupils for adult life. All actors thus have a joint responsibility to achieve this.

45. Schools must keep abreast of the changing demands of working life through close cooperation with the surrounding community in general and enterprises in particular.

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