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Life Long Learning: policy and programmes  
**School Education; Comenius**

**Education and Training 2020 programme  
Thematic Working Group 'Teacher Professional Development'**

**Report of a Peer Learning Activity  
in Limassol, Cyprus  
17 – 21 October 2010**

***'School Leadership for learning'***

This note summarises the main conclusions of a Peer Learning Activity (PLA) in which experts from several European countries exchanged ideas on policy approaches to the competence requirements, the selection and the professional development of school leaders.

***Context***

**Research**

- 1 There is evidence that, after teacher quality, school leadership is the factor that most strongly affects student learning. In particular, good school leadership can improve teaching and learning by shaping organisational structures, school climate and teacher practices.
- 2 Recent years have seen increasing pressure on schools to be more accountable for the outcomes they achieve, and to measure and compare their effectiveness. Trends towards increasing school autonomy and decentralising decision-taking place increased responsibilities upon senior school staff, e.g. for managing human and financial resources. New approaches to teaching and learning, including more constructivist approaches to learning, more collaborative teaching practices and a focus upon responding to the needs of each individual learner, place greater demands upon school heads to focus upon improving the quality of learning.
- 3 School leaders are, in short, at the interface between a complex nexus of educational policies and their implementation at the school level. This can lead to a lack of clarity about the core purpose of school leadership.
- 4 These and other factors have led to increased interest in the role of school leaders. And yet, recent research suggests that policies around school leadership are not always keeping pace with these changes. Leadership roles are often not clearly defined; leadership tasks are often not adequately distributed. Competence requirements are often

neither clearly defined nor used in selection procedures; the assumption persists that experience as a teacher somehow equips people with the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to lead a complex business such as a school. 15 out of 22 countries participating in an OECD survey reported difficulties in finding a sufficient number of qualified candidates (OECD, 2008); yet few countries have effective policies for succession planning. Where training is given to people in leadership roles it is often insufficient and unstructured.

## Policy

- 5 Against this backdrop, recent discussions at national and European level have emphasised the crucial role played by school leaders in promoting effective learning and ensuring that young people acquire the competences they need to develop their full potential and to be active members of society and of the workforce. Ministers of Education have noted that

*“The knowledge, skills and commitment of teachers, as well as the quality of school leadership, are the most important factors in achieving high quality educational outcomes. Good teaching and the ability to inspire all pupils to achieve their very best can have a lasting positive impact on young people's futures.”*

- 6 They have also noted that

*“effective school leadership is a major factor in shaping the teaching and learning environment, raising aspirations and providing support for pupils, parents and staff, and thus in fostering higher achievement levels”*

and that

*“.. investment in the training of teachers and the strengthening of leadership for education institutions are crucial to improving the efficiency of education and training systems.”*  
(European Union 2009)

- 7 In this context, Ministers agree on the importance of ensuring that school leaders have, or are able to develop, the capacities and qualities needed to assume the increasing number of tasks with which they are confronted. They have accordingly agreed to devote great care and attention to defining the required profile of prospective school leaders, selecting them and preparing them to fulfil their tasks. They will encourage and enable teachers and school leaders to participate in advanced professional training and development and engage in pedagogical research. Member States will also seek to ensure that school leaders are not overburdened with administrative tasks but concentrate on essential matters, such as the quality of learning, the curriculum, pedagogical issues and staff performance, motivation and development.
- 8 School leadership is thus one of the priority areas of educational policy which ministers identified as subjects for peer learning.

## The PLA process

- 9 Accordingly, the peer learning Cluster ‘Teachers and Trainers’ agreed in 2009 that a Peer Learning Activity (PLA) should be organised to define the common characteristics of policies that lead to effective school leadership for learning and that it would focus on the following key issues:
  - what is understood by school leadership in participating countries?
  - the responsibilities / roles /tasks of school leaders
  - the competences that school leaders should have

- the recruitment and selection of school leaders
  - the preparation of school leaders before they take up their post, or just after; and
  - continuing professional development and support to school leaders in post.
- 10 The Cyprus Ministry of Education and Culture hosted the PLA in Limassol from 17 to 21 October 2010. 21 people took part, representing ministries, school leadership bodies and Teacher Education institutions from 14 countries (AT, B(nl), CY, CZ, D, EE, ES, HR, IE, NL, NO, SE, SI, UK(Sc) ).
- 11 The programme (attached) was planned by a steering group comprising representatives of CY, D, EE, ES and SE. During the PLA, representatives of CY, D, ES and SE met every day to further fine-tune the programme in response to participants' feedback.
- 12 Some participants agreed to act as facilitators/ chairs for one day of the PLA each.
- 13 Peer learning is rooted in research evidence. The European Commission circulated relevant research material before the event, including a summary of the recent OECD report 'Improving school leadership', a research brief prepared by the National College for school leadership in England, and a presentation made by Sir Michael Barber to a recent meeting of Education Ministers.
- 14 In addition, each participating country circulated a brief assessment of its school leadership policy, focussing on the following questions:
- What are considered to be the roles or purposes of school leaders in your country? Where are they defined?
  - How are people selected to be school leaders? According to what criteria?
  - How are people prepared for school leadership, before they take up a post?
  - How are school leaders supported when they are in post? and
  - What are the competences (knowledge, skills, attitudes) that school leaders need? Who ensures that school leaders acquire and further develop these?
- 15 The PLA provided participants with an opportunity to learn from other countries' policies and practice, and to reflect critically on the current arrangements in their own countries with a view to making appropriate modifications. The main inputs into the discussion were detailed presentations concerning:
- some recent research evidence about school leadership by Professor P Pashiardis of the Open University of Cyprus;
  - the current policy proposals to develop a Cyprus school leadership academy and reconsider procedures for the selection of school leaders;
  - the Scottish Standard for Headship, and the different routes to attain it;
  - the Dutch voluntary Register for primary school leaders;
  - the Swedish National school leadership Training Programme;
  - the Austrian educational Leadership Academy; and
  - extended school leadership in the context of the Flemish system of voluntary groupings of local schools.
- 16 At the end of the PLA, participants gave feedback to the host country about the challenges it faces in this area. They also identified the actions they would each take in their home countries to feed the conclusions of the PLA to relevant policymakers and stakeholders.

## **Issues in School Leadership**

- 17 The PLA covered a very broad area of policy. By way of introduction, this section highlights a small number of the issues that were addressed during the many formal and informal exchanges in the PLA. It is not exhaustive.
- 18 Leadership is a role, not a post or a place in a structure. Leadership may be formal or informal. It is possible to be a school principal, without exercising leadership; it is also possible for other school staff to exercise leadership; indeed, leadership is one of the key competences for all educators. In some systems, one person may exercise leadership in a group of schools. Other actors are also called upon to exercise educational leadership and to play their part in the development of the education system, e.g. school boards, inspectors and advisors, ministries and professional organisations; there is greatest potential for system reform when the various actors involved in work and develop together.
- 19 Policy on school leadership cannot be examined in isolation; it is inextricably linked with policies on school development, teacher professional development etc.
- 20 The national or regional educational context has a significant influence upon the conception of 'school' and the degree to which a school is understood as a community or organisation that *needs* to be led; some languages do not have a word for 'school leader'; such contextual factors in turn affect the expectations of Ministries, parents and other key actors, and affect the roles that school principals and other staff are able to play.
- 21 Developing a shared understanding in society about the role of the school leader and enhancing the status of school leadership as a profession is important. It is not unusual for there to be a tension between an expectation that school principals be (merely) administrators and a need for genuine leadership that promotes learning. The concept of leadership implies ownership and authority as well as responsibility; there is a strong connection between the degree of school autonomy and the potential impact of school leaders; however, systems vary significantly in the extent to which school principals can (for example) select the staff they are expected to lead, or adjust the school curriculum in the light of local needs.
- 22 Because school leaders can have such an important impact upon the quality of teaching and learning, constructing the right process to identify and select leaders is crucial. The PLA concluded that school leaders require certain competences and that selection procedures for leadership posts should ensure that post-holders possess and develop these competences. However, current reality ranges from systems in which the selection of school heads is based largely upon criteria such as seniority, to systems in which there is no 'selection' of school leaders because there are not enough candidates for leadership posts.
- 23 There may be different routes into school leadership, but in principle school leaders are no different from other teaching staff in that they need initial education in leadership, induction during their first years in post, and continuous professional development throughout their career. Pre-appointment education for a group of potential school leaders may be combined with processes to identify those who demonstrate appropriate competences to the relevant standard.
- 24 A greater degree of networking and mutual learning between school leaders at local, national and European level can bring benefits for school leaders themselves, but also for their schools and the education system as a whole; such collaboration can promote

self-reflection, encourage further professional development, facilitate mutual support, assist the development of the profession of School Leadership and mitigate some of the effects of between-school competition.

## **Policy Conclusions**

- 25 The overall objective of a PLA is to derive policy conclusions and recommendations to help Member States to develop their education policies. Through a process of comparison and contrasting of the different policy approaches, participants arrived at a better understanding of the common characteristics of policies that can lead to effective school leadership for learning. Their main conclusions are set out below.

## **School Leadership Roles and Competences**

- 26 School leadership is a challenging profession that demands a range of highly developed competences which must be underpinned by core values. Within each education system, policies will be most effective when they are underpinned by a shared understanding about:

- (1) the roles that school leaders are expected to play, and
- (2) the professional values and competences (knowledge, skills and attitudes) that school leaders require in order to fulfil these roles effectively.

- 27 There is no one single *style* of school leadership, but the main *competences* required by people in leadership roles can be identified; some are context- and culture-specific; however, in all contexts, policies can support effective school leadership by being based around the following core leadership competences (which are in no particular order):

- Vision; the ability to inspire staff and pupils
- Strategic thinking, the ability to take a holistic view
- the capacity to improve the quality of students' learning and their learning outcomes
- the ability to enhance learning environments and learning cultures
- the capacity to manage resources effectively
- a sound knowledge of the education system
- Strong communication skills, openness, and
- Problem solving skills

- 28 The PLA noted that effective school leadership requires a team approach and that the different members of any leadership team may have different and complementary expertise and competence profiles; this does not reduce the core competences required by school leaders; it underlines the need for clarity of roles.

- 29 Staff in school leadership positions are likely to be most effective if they have the following personal attributes:

- Courage
- Optimism and resilience
- Tolerance
- Emotional Intelligence, self-awareness
- Energy
- Ambition and commitment
- An appetite for learning

- 30 In most contexts there is a need to improve the image and status of school leadership. Appointing authorities will also need to develop effective ways to attract into leadership positions those who possess the competences defined above. Given the high rate of return on investment, relevant authorities should allocate sufficient funding to the selection of the best candidates. More effective ways may need to be found to assess the competences of school leaders and candidates for school leadership. (As one example, portfolios can be a useful tool in demonstrating a school leader's competences.)

### **Educating and developing School Leaders**

- 31 Applicants for a school leadership post need to demonstrate that they can draw on a deep knowledge, experience and understanding of pedagogy, school education, school administration and leadership in order to focus on improving student learning.
- 32 Effective school leadership for learning can be promoted by provision for programmes to support the personal and professional development of the individual school leader. Depending on the education system, these may be delivered before the school leader is appointed, and/or during the first years in post. Such programmes should draw upon four key elements: research evidence, educational policy, education theory and practice and should, as a minimum, focus on:
- the legal competences and understanding necessary to work within the relevant legislative framework
  - Strategic leadership
  - Creating an effective learning environment
  - Developing the leader as a person
  - Motivating others and
  - Assessing and improving teaching and learning
- 33 These development programmes will have most impact if they:
- specify clear learning outcomes,
  - are based upon active learning
  - use a variety of teaching and learning methods (e.g. self reflection, coaching, peer learning communities and networks, and action research) and
  - are designed so as to respond to the specific development needs of each participant.

### **Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for School Leaders**

- 34 Teachers have a right to be professionally led; therefore, for school leaders, career-long CPD is both a right and a professional responsibility.
- 35 Education systems will be more effective in promoting high quality learning if they prioritise school leader CPD as part of a systematic - and system-wide – process that aligns the development of school leaders with the development of the system as a whole.
- 36 Pre-conditions for effective school leader CPD are that it should be:
- Linked into the wider provision of CPD;
  - Organised as a group activity in which school leaders interact with peers;
  - Relevant to the development needs of the individual school leader and the school;
  - Founded upon critical reflection of self, practice and organisation;
  - Focused on the school's improvement agenda; and

- Valued and recognised.
- 37 CPD may be constructed around on different pathways. The CPD process should be subject to continuous evaluation. Relevant authorities should support and evaluate the outcomes of the CPD undertaken by school leaders.
- 38 In some contexts there is a need to stimulate school leaders who have been in post for some time to further develop their competences. Where school leaders are reappointed periodically, a condition of their re-appointment could be proof that they have continued to develop as a professional.
- 39 Depending on the national context there may also be a need to consider the place of stakeholders in the design of the process of CPD for school leaders, to consider the need CPD programmes or providers to be accredited, and to consider further developing the quality assurance of CPD programmes for school leaders.

## **Conclusion**

- 40 This Peer Learning Activity looked at the main aspects of policies that can promote effective school leadership for learning. It was able to build upon the findings of other work, notably that of the OECD, and to do so from a European perspective by focusing on examples from six countries. Further peer learning could help to complete the picture and to provide comprehensive advice to assist Member States to develop their school leadership policies along the lines outlines by Ministers of Education.

## **References**

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- European Union: Conclusions of the Council ... of 26 November 2009 on the professional development of teachers and school leaders (Official Journal 2009/C 302/04)
- ‘Improving school leadership’ Volume 1: Policy and Practice, OECD, Paris, 2008
- ‘Improving school leadership: the toolkit’, OECD, Paris, 2009
- ‘School Leadership and Whole System Reform’, Barber, M: presentation to EU Education Ministers, Gothenburg, Sweden, 24 September 2009;
- ‘School Leaders: Changing Roles and Impact on Teacher and School Effectiveness’, Mulford W, paper commissioned by OECD for the Activity Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers, April 2003
- ‘Successful School Leadership: What it is and how it influences pupil learning’, Leithwood, K, et al, University of Nottingham / NCSL 2006
- ‘The Impact of School Leadership on Pupil Outcomes’, Day, C et al., DCSF Research Brief, June 2009.

**PLA IN CYPRUS**  
**‘School Leadership’**  
**18-21 October 2010**  
**Programme**

<b>SUNDAY</b>		
Arrivals		
18:00	<i>Meeting of the preparatory group</i>	
20:00 – 21:00	Informal Welcome	
<b>MONDAY</b>		
<b><i>Getting Started</i></b>		
9:00 – 9:15	Official Welcome	Cyprus Ministry
9:15 – 9:30	What is Peer Learning? School Leadership - the EU perspective	EC – Paul Holdsworth
9:30 – 10:00	Presentation about SL developments - Discussion	Cyprus expert
10:00 – 10:30	<i>Coffee break</i>	
10:30 – 11:00	Participants’ expectations	Group Work
11:00 – 11:45	Definition of the term SL – national understandings	Group Work
11:45 – 12:30	Report back: participants expectations; Report back: participants ideas about SL	Plenary
12:30 – 14:00	<i>Lunch</i>	
<b><i>Roles and Responsibilities, Competences of School Leaders</i></b>		
14:00 – 14:20	U.K (Sc). Policy Example: Standard for Headship	Plenary
14:20 – 14:40	NL Policy Example: register for school leaders	Plenary
14:40 – 15:30	Discussion	Plenary
15:30 – 16:00	Reflection on roles and responsibilities of the school leader	Group Work
16:00 – 17:00	Report back – Discussions	Plenary
	<i>Meeting of the preparatory group</i>	
20:00	<i>Official Dinner</i>	
<b>TUESDAY</b>		
<b><i>Initial training for School Leaders; selection</i></b>		
09:00 – 09:20	Swedish Policy Example	Plenary
9:20 – 9:40	Discussion	Plenary
09:40 – 10:30	Reflection on the initial training needed by School Leaders	Group Work
10:30 – 11:00	Report back on group work	Plenary
11:00 – 11:30	<i>Coffee break</i>	
11:30 – 11:50	Cyprus policy example	Plenary
11:50 – 12:30	Discussion	Plenary
12:30 – 14:00	<i>Lunch</i>	
<b><i>CPD and other support for SLs</i></b>		
14:00 – 14:20	Policy example from Austria – Leadership academy	Plenary
14:20 – 14:40	Policy example from B (nl) – Communities of schools	Plenary
14:40 – 15:30	Discussion	Plenary
15:30 – 16:00	Reflection on CPD and other support needed by SLs	Group Work
16:00 – 16:30	Report, Questions, Discussion	Plenary
	<i>Meeting of the preparatory group</i>	

<b>WEDNESDAY</b>		
<b><i>Bringing it all together</i></b>		
09:00 – 12:00	School visits (the group is divided to a primary, secondary or technical/vocational school) focused on the practice of SL	
12:00 – 13:00	Discussion	Plenary
<i>13:00 – 14:30 Lunch</i>		
14:30 – 15:00	Preparation for the Round Table Discussion	Group Work
15:00 – 16:00	The perspective of the stakeholders	Round Table Discussion
16:00 – 16:30	Discussion	Plenary
16:30 – 17:30	Starting to draw conclusions on main themes of the PLA	Group Work
<i>Meeting of the preparatory group</i>		
<b>THURSDAY</b>		
09:00 – 10:30	Conclusions on the main points-themes of the PLA Conditions for success	Group Work
<i>10:30 – 11:00 Coffee break</i>		
11:00 – 12:00	Summary of PLA conclusions	Plenary
12:00 – 12:30	Reflections of participants – what to take back home	Group Work
12:30 – 13:00	Feedback to the hosts	Plenary
13:00 – 13:15	Closing remarks	EC – Paul Holdsworth
<i>13:30 – 14:30 Lunch</i>		
Departures		