



## STELLUNGNAHME

Berlin, 15. Oktober 2007

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### Deutscher Industrie- und Handelskammertag

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Zum Thema:

**The public consultation of the European Commission on “Schools for the 21st century”**

The Association of German Chambers of Industry and Commerce (DIHK) is the umbrella organisation of the 81 Chambers of Commerce and Industry. All German companies– with the exception of handicrafts, the professions and agricultural concerns – are required, by law, to be a member of a Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Consequently, the DIHK represents more than three million companies. Members include companies of all sizes and from all sectors, from international corporations to medium-sized privately owned businesses. The DIHK does not represent a specific group of companies, but the entire industrial and commercial sector in Germany.

## Introduction

The 'Deutsche Industrie- und Handelskammertag' (DIHK) considers the public consultation of the European Commission on "Schools for the 21<sup>st</sup> century" an important contribution to the Lisbon process, not in the least because schools have to make their contribution if Europe is to develop in the most competitive and most dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world. The consultation should enable Member States to exchange ideas and to make educational developments and successful instruments for quality improvements known -- and accessible -- in all Member States.

Because of the principle of subsidiarity, education is a task of the Member States. The European Commission should therefore refrain from making direct recommendations or drawing up a catalogue of measures under this consultation process. The exchange of ideas on schools for the 21<sup>st</sup> century can however prove an enriching and imaginative process for the Member States.

As regards the public consultation paper, it must be noted that the European Commission should have avoided anticipating any possible results or including any assessment statements in the presentation of facts and circumstances in introducing the question (cf. in particular the paragraph "One school for all").

In answering the questions, the DIHK will limit itself only to those to which a contribution can be made from the point of view of an economic organisation.

### **Question 1: How can schools be organised in such a way as to provide all students with the full range of key competences?**

Schools in the 21<sup>st</sup> century have to tackle complex challenges, which may vary regionally, from place to place, and even from one part of a city to another. They consequently need as great a degree of decision-making freedom as possible. They must decide independently on the use of their means and resources, which personnel to use, how to organise their curriculum and what support measures to prepare. School supervision should be limited to the design of educational careers, the preparation of standards and core curricula, sufficient financing and the quality assurance process, and help schools in an advisory capacity. A centralised, detailed management makes no sense.

The provision of key competences includes that schools must look for many and diverse partners in their milieu, so that students can combine school learning with real life experiences from early life on. An active exchange with businesses, social institutions, music and art academies, museums, sport associations, and with parents, turns children into a living centre of social interaction in the community.

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

A good education is an important economic task, because a better educated population ensures Europe's competitiveness in the world. Education moreover takes place in a social environment, where new answers must constantly be found as conditions change. For the school system this means that it must always be able to cope with the constantly changing challenges. Schools must be learning organisations themselves. They must endeavour through an ongoing exchange with educational research to ensure further training for teachers (including coaching and in-house courses), so as to be able to implement new scientific findings directly into practice. They must themselves take part in method research. Furthermore, a convincing culture of evaluation and accountability to society, based on standards, must be developed. The work of teachers is not limited to supervising, marking, planning and evaluating each individual student, but also entails always checking, marking and where necessary, adjusting their own work accordingly.

Schools must offer many and diverse forms of learning, so as to promote and to provide training in independent and individual ways, geared to life-long learning. Nowadays, young people are less and less likely to accumulate extensive knowledge and to count on it as long as possible. Rather, they must learn to acquire new knowledge and be able to apply it in different contexts. Schools will have done their duty if their graduates can subsequently apply the competences they acquired in an active and independent manner in their working life, be able to compete successfully with others, face up to constantly changing requirements and lead a meaningful life.

### **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?**

A targeted pre-school education in early childhood must prepare all children for school. This includes the development of language skills that enable children to follow – and participate actively in – school instruction without any problems. This applies in particular to children from a migrant background.

Schools must show students early on that learning is acquired through hard work and effort. Individual support for each and every child must be self-evident for teachers. They must have their performance assessed by the learning results of their students. When moving from one school level to the next, thus from kindergarten to school and from school to training, children must be supported by the teachers, and the institutions involved must cooperate closely. The potential of closer cooperation with parents should also be approached more effectively.

As regards the Commission's demand for a "school for all" in the consultation paper, the following can be said: The 'DIHK' is not of opinion that a school structure that finds expression as a "school for all" inevitably guarantees equal opportunities. Even in EU countries with comprehensive school systems, equal opportunities can be restricted, in particular where many of the students who need special support, leave school early and without qualification. In our view, a proper approach to education is more a matter of ensuring the proper framework conditions for learning, of the responsibility of the individual school for each and every one of its students, of a good instructional culture and a high degree of individual support.

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

Teacher training should be geared to occupational practice from the outset. Teachers must gain experience through practical training in schools already while at university. During this practical training phase they learn how the learning processes are initiated and reflect and check their own motivation and suitability for the demanding profession. The theory and practice phases are inter-related and complement each other.

Teacher training should also include periods of practical training in the economy, to gain experience and orientation insight in the connections and processes in the economy, and get a glimpse of the world of work for which teachers prepare their students.

Access to the profession should be supervised by experienced mentors, who can support young teachers in planning and considering their instruction, and give them help and advice in solving problems that arise.