



THE NETWORK  
OF MAJOR  
EUROPEAN  
CITIES

## **EUROCITIES Response to the Public Consultation “Schools for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”**

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### **EUROCITIES**

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EUROCITIES is the network of major European cities. Founded in 1986, the network brings together the local governments of 131 large cities in some 34 European countries. EUROCITIES represents the interests of its members and engages in dialogue with the European institutions across a wide range of policy areas affecting cities. These include: economic development, the environment, transport and mobility, social affairs, culture, the information and knowledge society, and services of general interest.

EUROCITIES website: [www.eurocities.eu](http://www.eurocities.eu)

## Introduction

EUROCITIES, the network of large European cities, welcomes the initiative of the European Commission to launch a public consultation on the subject “Schools for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”, which offers the opportunity to highlight the most important issues that European cities have to deal with in the future. The Working Group on Education and Inclusion of the EUROCITIES Social Affairs Forum has worked in the last few years in particular on issues related to unqualified school leaving, pre-schooling, cultural education and the need for integrated youth policies. We are happy to see a similar perspective in the Commission Draft Working Paper.<sup>1</sup>

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

First, we need to acknowledge that the full range of competences cannot be developed by schools alone. Educational resources in the environment of the school and in the city have to be involved. An example of this is the model of the ‘partner’-school. In this case, the school is seen as the centre of the neighborhood, functionally relating and co-operating on the level of child needs with other educational, caretaking and welfare institutions. This model, which has already proved to be successful in preventing school-dropouts in several North-West European and Scandinavian cities, as well as involving ethnic communities in every day school life, deserves further elaboration and dissemination.

On the internal organisation of school systems a few remarks can be made:

- for better chances for all students it is important to keep pupils together in the school system as long as possible, preferably up until a first qualification. Early selection or ‘streaming’ has a strong de-motivating effect on pupils with learning difficulties.
- a standard for optimum class size (number of pupils) should be developed at European level, and adequate teaching-methods developed.
- using input from ‘the real world’ and increased involvement of pupils in designing curricula and teaching methods should be considered.

Although the importance of transversal competences (learning to learn, entrepreneurship,

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<sup>1</sup> This response is based on the input of representatives of the educational authorities of the following cities, being members of the Working Group “Education an Inclusion” (Antwerp, Berlin, Copenhagen, Eindhoven, Netwerkstad Twente, Malmo, Rotterdam, Stockholm, Tampere, Vienna) and has been compiled by Paul Hoop, city of Rotterdam (Chair of the WG Education & Inclusion).

cultural awareness) is generally agreed upon, the development of traditional competences (languages, mathematics, science) should remain the basis of education.

On the role of cities: local governments, with the support of regional, national and European levels of policy-making, should play a facilitating role by offering and sustaining a local educational context - building bridges between schools and other relevant social, cultural and economic institutions and actors.

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

The most important factor for developing motivation is the quality of the teacher. Thus, a crucial question is: to what extent are teachers equipped with skills to empathize with pupils of different backgrounds, different expectations and cultures? Schools will have to be enabled to develop their own policies on building and maintaining teachers' skills in teaching, motivating, mediating and listening.

On the organizational aspects:

- the model of Second Chance Schools deserves elaboration and dissemination
- the opportunities for in-service training must be optimized
- full-time and part-time compulsory education needs to be extended

Cities can play an additional role in organizing an educational stimulus for their citizens, in emphasizing the importance of education and in lowering thresholds (financial as well as cultural and physical) to respective trainings and courses.

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

This is a general challenge for all partners in the economic domain. Schools will have to clarify the responsibilities of the companies in their arrangements for vocational education and training. It seems very important that schools, companies and local authorities coordinate their policies together for economic growth. But as is stated under question 1, it is also crucial to acknowledge that schools have a comprehensive task to impart knowledge, skills and values. Education should not be reduced to employability, in particular as the economic world is changing quickly and radically and labour market demands of the future cannot easily be predicted. A solid, comprehensive knowledge base and the qualification to learn and lead an active and responsible life need to be the key aim (this reflects the key competencies

mentioned in the working paper).

**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?**

Being responsive to diversity implies a system that reflects in itself this diversity and is capable of reaching out to the social environment of the school. Teachers will have to develop special competences for this, either in initial training, or in-service. This also means that cities must facilitate integration in schools and prevent monocultural schools in a multicultural city. The further postponement of ‘selection’ during compulsory education mentioned previously, together with more individual coaching and mentoring of pupils at risk has proved to have a positive effect towards reducing early school leaving. Furthermore, raising the status of vocational education can also serve to motivate potential early school leavers.

Finally, the initiative of several cities to install more “European Schools”, with a special focus on Europe’s diversity and communities, and to create a stronger European dimension in schools, is a good model for coping with cultural diversity in education.

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

Many schools in European cities already have a long history and expertise on this topic: more open curricula, aimed at different competences, needs and learning styles, often facilitated, for example, by better use of information technologies. Parental boards help to bring the schools closer to the families, and additional opportunities for parents at the school (e.g. second-language-training) are a good way to promote life-long-learning and to promote education-friendly lifestyles. More emphasis should be placed on developing teaching skills rather than content knowledge in the initial teacher training institutes. Input from ‘the real world’ will add to a school’s attractiveness, and, finally, a direct involvement of pupils in designing parts of the curricula will have a stimulating effect.

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

Again, this is not a task for schools alone, but has to be a point of focus for all partners in education. Fundamental (democratic) values will have to be incorporated in all parts of the curriculum. At the same time, lessons and exercises in conflict resolution and mediation skills should be offered to the students. In addition to that, a stricter control is needed on intolerance in schools, on behavior, messages and rules.

Apart from education in values (pedagogical task) the school culture has a tremendous impact on the development of social competences. That is why schools have to take an active role in

building citizenship, by actively monitoring and, if necessary, intervening in the social environment of the pupils (e.g. through youth crime prevention projects). Trying to build a school community with a safe climate for all pupils is crucial.

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

Firstly, it is important to break the negative downward spiral of teachers leaving the system with burnout, stress and disappointment, leaving other teachers overburdened.

For the short term, this implies better conditions in the work place, better status, salary, etc. Schools should also have greater autonomy to set their own objectives, to develop and change their own curricula according to their students, to select their staff and to implement changes if necessary, to have an own budget for school development, more staff (tutors, social workers, administration staff) to lighten the administrative burden on teachers and to open up space for pedagogical issues. More time for individual coaching and mentoring would be highly valuable. Teachers need to be acknowledged as the key agents for educational innovation and adaptation. In general, more room for creativity and flexibility has to be given.

**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?**

We should move towards a system of shared responsibilities between boards, parents and local authorities. Furthermore, it is necessary to develop a culture of self-evaluation in schools with special evaluation-advisors to enable the implementation of evaluation results in every day work in 21<sup>st</sup> century schools.