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Contribution to EU Commission consultation on Schools for the 21st century

The School Student Union of Norway is an organisation for school students and apprentices in secondary education. The organisation has 350 member schools from all of Norway with about 150 000 students. The positions given in this paper was adopted by our national board consisting of 19 regional student leaders and based on policies from our national convention and the interest of school students in Norway.

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

- 1.1. EU has consistently stressed the importance of focusing and improving key competences, which is adopted by Norway in the Knowledge promotion reform from 2006. However, easy measurable key competences (such as reading, science and maths skills) risk being overrepresented and prioritised more than expected. This is very visible in Norway as Norwegian definitions of key competences are limited to skills in oral expressions, written expressions, reading skills, maths skills and use of ITC. Because of this we find it important to stress that holistic thinking towards key competences is crucial and that education and training must not be simplified to excessive priority of mother tongue, English and maths.
- 1.2. Social and civic competences need more attention. Whereas the above mentioned key competences are subject to testing, significant indicators of succeeding civic competences are democratic skills, knowledge and engagement.
- 1.3. An indicator of social competences is the number of students bullied by others. As far as we know there are few (or unknown) European comparisons of this. Experiences from Norway after some years of consistent work for eliminating bullying are that the results are not satisfactory, still 3 % of students report to be bullied every week¹.
- 1.4. School contribution to digital competences is decisive for lifelong learning and to promote equity at our present situation of development. We experience that

¹ The Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training 2007

the raising the number and access to computers and equipment is intense in Norway, nevertheless pedagogical knowledge and skills in teacher staff to apply digital learning in education is insufficient and must be improved.

2. How can schools equip young people with the competences and motivation to make learning a lifelong activity?

- 2.1. In order to improve student motivation for learning we find it essential to use a broad range of methods within the pedagogical field. To strengthen student motivation for learning it is important that teachers and schools focus on:
- Positive evaluation and constructive critique
 - Stronger and structured autonomy within fields of study
 - More individualised adaptations of learning
 - Student participation in evaluation processes
 - Student participation in the structure of schools
 - To promote students access to democratic participation at school
 - More, and better individual development conversations between student and teacher
 - Daily communication between student and teacher on subject development
 - Student contracts to promote learning
 - Strengthen the social environment in class/groups
 - Promotion of the value of gaining new knowledge
 - More relevant and profession focused training in stronger relation to work life.
- 2.2. Schools should cooperate closer with trade and industry on a competence level to secure a relevant education for life long learning.

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

- 3.1. A strong public school open and able to adapt to all student is important. To give the same opportunities to all students will benefit the learning outcome in total rather than giving a few students privileged education². We believe that long term sustainable development of school education is easier to achieve within a public and democratic frame. To continue raising the level of education in our population and give a strong education to all, governments have to prioritize education in public budgets.

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

- 4.1. Completely free secondary education for all is fundamental to promote equity. By free education we mean that there should be no tuition fees, free books and learning equipment should be publicly provided, students should be given a

² OECD 2007: Summary of PISA 2006



matching grant when studying away from home, and prices at public transportations should be reduced for students.

- 4.2. One step to prevent early school leaving is improving student guidance. There should be competent and enough guides available at schools. Student guides must have formal education and updated knowledge on trade, industry and enterprise development.

Social and carrier guidance is necessary to be seen separated as these are completely different fields of profession, nevertheless are both crucial to have in school.

Carrier guidance must be strengthened to prevent false grounds and expectations when choosing direction of education, which are large contributors to drop out from secondary education. One cannot expect that a few minutes of guidance will be sufficient for youth to plan the direction of their life.

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

- 5.1. In order to adapt the teaching and training to each individual student, stronger resources in school are required. The number of students in Norwegian secondary schools has increased by 24 % since 2002 without any increase in the number of teachers. Both students and teachers report that there is not enough capacity to reach the rights and ambition of education adapted to each individual needs and capacities. Therefore stronger school budgets are necessary.
- 5.2. It is impossible to respond to each pupil's individual learning needs without the participation of students. A real possibility of participation in planning teaching methods, evaluation methods and evaluation of the teaching is essential for individualised education. To achieve this, students must also be skilled in the key competence learning to learn.
- 5.3. Responding to each individual needs in student evaluation is important. Acknowledging different needs in teaching without adapting to the different needs for evaluation makes little sense and corrupts student motivation. The present Norwegian system of final subject grading and standard exams is not satisfactory, and should be replaced with a system of portfolios. Broader methods of evaluation are needed to give more comprehensive evaluation and relevancy to curricula and work life needs. Student evaluation must give constructive feedback and promote learning.
- 5.4. Evaluation of teachers by students is a natural step to promote the quality feedback teachers need to respond to each student's learning needs.



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?

- 6.1. Stronger student democracy and student participation in schools is essential to establish better democratic skills and attitudes. Norwegian students score well on democratic knowledge but report that there is little participation in practice and weak interest in politics³. Students are not given enough responsibility in school to achieve important civic competences.

Schools are the arena where most youth can learn elemental civic competences needed for participation and democratic exercise in the rest of our lives. Strengthening student democracy and participation, as well as student unions, promotes social equity and responsible citizens.

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³ IEA and the University of Oslo 2002: CIVIC Education Study Norway

