

QUALITY EDUCATION FOR ALL: A 2040 ROADMAP

CALL FOR EVIDENCE CONSULTATION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

The European Confederation of Independent Trade Unions (CESI) is a confederation of more than 40 national and European trade union organisations from over 20 European countries, with a total of more than 6 million individual members. Founded in 1990, CESI is a recognised European sectoral social partner and advocates improved employment conditions for workers in Europe and a strong social dimension in the EU. Among CESI's members are teacher trade unions from across Europe, representing education professionals in early childhood education and care, school education, vocational education and training (VET), higher education and adult learning.

PRELIMINARY REMARKS

CESI welcomes the European Commission's initiative to develop an 'Education Package 2040 Roadmap: Quality Education for All'. The three proposed strands under the Education Package – reversing the decline in basic skills, supporting and valuing the teaching profession, and developing sovereign digital education infrastructure - address interdependent challenges affecting the quality of Europe's education system, and as such long term economic competitiveness through skilled workforces and social and democratic cohesion and resilience through responsible and educated citizens.

Education is a fundamental right, a service of general interest and a strategic public investment. The Education Package should implement the relevant principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights, notably those concerning education, training and lifelong learning; gender equality; secure and adaptable employment; wages; social dialogue; work-life balance; and health and safety at work. It should reinforce the European Education Area while fully respecting Articles 165 and 166 TFEU and the responsibilities of Member States for the organisation of their education systems.

CESI has consistently emphasised that educational quality depends on well-qualified and adequately supported education professionals, sufficient public investment, inclusive access, professional autonomy and genuine social dialogue. The Education Package can serve as an important EU level instrument to this end. It should complement national, regional and local action through coordination, funding, evidence exchange and enforceable employment and occupational safety standards within EU competence. It should not create additional reporting duties for schools and education workers.

Teachers and their representative trade unions should be involved in the further design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of every strand of the Education Package.

QUESTION 1

Which forms of EU-level support would best complement national, regional and local actions to reverse the long-term decline in basic skills, including the persistent link between underachievement and socio-economic status, and to increase the attractiveness of the teaching profession?

CESI considers that basic-skills underachievement and teacher shortages must be addressed together. Sustainable improvements in learners' outcomes cannot be achieved without attractive teaching careers, sufficient staffing and supportive learning environments. Measures to improve basic skills should be assessed not only in terms of learning outcomes, but also against their impacts on professional standards, workload, professional autonomy and schools' capacity to implement reform. The European Commission should therefore provide an integrated support framework based on the following priorities:

1. **Mobilise adequate and sustained public investment.** Erasmus+, the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and future Multiannual Financial Framework instruments should further support staffing, teacher education and mobility, tutoring, inclusive education, modern school and VET infrastructure, connectivity, and accessible learning resources. Funding should prioritise disadvantaged, rural, remote and otherwise underserved areas. Funding instruments should also provide stable and predictable resources and avoid excessive earmarking or conditions that increase administrative burdens or unnecessarily restrict schools' ability to allocate resources according to local needs. The European Semester should identify persistent investment and workforce gaps without promoting expenditure cuts that weaken public education.
2. **Break the link between socio-economic background and underachievement.** As language, learning and basic-skills development begin well before compulsory schooling, sustained investment in early childhood education and care (ECEC) staffing and training capacities, including high-quality early language support, should form a central part of strategies to reduce socio-economic inequalities in educational outcomes. EU initiatives should thereby support high-quality early childhood education and care, early identification of support needs, language learning, targeted tutoring, access to devices and learning materials, and cooperation with families and community services. Inclusive provision must cover learners experiencing poverty, disability, migration or minority backgrounds, racial or ethnic discrimination, rural isolation or other forms of disadvantage. Measures should be designed with the affected communities and avoid segregation or stigmatisation.
3. **Protect a broad understanding of basic skills.** Literacy, numeracy, science and digital competences are essential, but curricula must also develop citizenship, history, politics, ethics, media literacy, critical thinking, creativity and the capacity to distinguish reliable information from disinformation. A skills agenda should not narrow education to short-term labour-market utility. It should prepare socially responsible, open-minded citizens and safeguard teachers' ability to exercise pedagogical judgement. Civic education remains critical for societal values including liberal democracy, tolerance and mutual respect and understanding.

4. **Restore the attractiveness and social recognition of teaching.** The proposed Council Recommendation on attractive teaching careers should call on Member States to ensure competitive remuneration comparable to other tertiary-educated professions, secure contracts, stable career prospects, manageable workloads, family-friendly working arrangements and meaningful career progression. Professional-development pathways should be linked to genuine recognition and career progression and should not simply result in additional tasks or responsibilities for individual teachers. The Council Recommendation should also explicitly address precarious successive fixed-term contracts, including arrangements that interrupt pay and social protection during school holidays. Teaching must be treated as a highly qualified public-interest profession, not as a business.
5. **Improve occupational health, safety and wellbeing.** The Education Package should establish teacher health and safety as an explicit objective and promote prevention of burnout and psychosocial risks, adequate staffing, occupational health support and safe workplaces. Violence, harassment, cyberbullying and attacks on teachers' reputation require effective legal safeguards, prevention protocols, reporting channels, support services and training for staff and learners.
6. **Guarantee high-quality initial education and career-long professional development.** Member States should ensure sufficient initial teacher-education and training capacities to respond to projected workforce needs. Qualification or professional standards should not be lowered. Professional and competence frameworks should address both the standards expected on entry to the profession and the competences to be maintained and developed throughout teachers' careers. Further training for teachers should be publicly funded, accessible during paid working time and adapted to classroom realities. It should cover subject and pedagogical knowledge, inclusive and multilingual classrooms, special educational needs, pupils' social-emotional development, digital and AI literacy, sustainability, democratic citizenship, media literacy and online safety. Mentoring and induction should be available to all early-career teachers. Professional development must not add to workloads. Authorities/education providers should have a clear responsibility to provide the time, resources and opportunities necessary for continuous professional development.
7. **Recognise sectoral and territorial differences.** Early childhood education and care (ECEC) requires better pay, recognition and career pathways. VET needs measures to attract and retain professionals with current occupational experience and investment in workshops and equipment. Any STEM, digital and special-needs education require targeted recruitment. Rural, remote and disadvantaged schools need staffing incentives, mentoring and access to professional development. Measures should also address gender segregation, including the underrepresentation of men in teaching and the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in the education sector.
8. **Support mobility without weakening national standards.** Erasmus+ and other EU exchange schemes should be expanded for teachers, trainers, school leaders and teacher educators. Recognition of qualifications and professional experience should be made more transparent and efficient, while respecting regulated-profession requirements, national competence and the quality of initial teacher education.

9. **Improve workforce data collection.** The EU should support the collection of robust and comparable education workforce data and the provisions of long-term workforce forecasting. Reliable projections of recruitment needs, retirements, regional and subject-specific shortages and training demand are necessary to enable Member States to develop evidence-based recruitment, initial education and retention strategies. Reducing unnecessary administrative burdens and providing adequate support staff are also essential components of sustainable retention strategies.

QUESTION 2

How could cooperation between schools and national/regional/local authorities be strengthened to improve the implementation of evidence-based methods for raising proficiency in basic skills?

CESI supports stronger cooperation provided that it reinforces, rather than displaces, teachers' professional autonomy. Educational quality should not be pursued through an accumulation of programmes, funding conditions and centrally imposed requirements. Cooperation should primarily enable schools and education professionals to access, interpret and apply existing research findings, educational data and proven practices in their specific educational contexts. Public authorities should provide the necessary working time, staffing, technical infrastructure and professional support to translate evidence into effective pedagogical practice. Where appropriate, specialised knowledge institutions and intermediary organisations should assess, synthesise and translate research into accessible forms for educational professionals, rather than expecting individual teachers to independently evaluate an expanding research base alongside their existing workload. Evidence-based policy must combine robust research with the knowledge of education workers and the circumstances of each school. Standardised testing as part of improved cooperation alone cannot establish what works or capture inclusion, learner wellbeing, democratic participation, critical thinking and social development.

Evidence-informed approaches should support school development and professional reflection rather than external control, ranking or standardised intervention. Data can inform professional decision-making, but its interpretation and application must remain context-sensitive and respect teachers' professional responsibility. Cooperation with families and the wider community should be systematic, especially for early intervention and inclusion. However, it must not transfer social, health or administrative functions to teachers without additional specialised staff and resources. The Education Package should address curriculum and task overload and draw a clear distinction between teachers' core professional responsibilities and other services.

For VET, regional cooperation should connect schools, public authorities, social partners and enterprises through high-quality partnerships and Centres of Vocational Excellence. Work-based learning and apprenticeships must comply with quality standards, provide effective learner protection and lead towards stable, quality employment. Public employers and SMEs should receive capacity support to participate.

The European Commission should encourage Member States to:

1. reinforce permanent, adequately resourced cooperation structures linking schools, education authorities, teacher education institutions, universities, public employment and social services, and representative social partners.
2. require the meaningful participation of teachers and their trade unions from the outset in defining objectives and in designing governance structures, as well as in the design, piloting, implementation and evaluation of basic-skills measures, including at school and local-authority level.
3. support school-based professional learning communities, cross-school networks, mentoring and peer learning, with participation recognised as working time.
4. strengthen school leadership through training in pedagogical leadership, inclusion, staff wellbeing, social dialogue and responsible digital transformation.
5. provide multidisciplinary teams, including teaching assistants, psychologists, social workers, special-needs professionals, language specialists, counsellors and administrative staff, so that teachers can concentrate on their core educational mission.
6. use Erasmus+, European Teacher Academies, eTwinning, the European School Education Platform, the European Digital Education Hub and European School Alliances to better exchange proven practice.
7. give schools stable implementation funding, technical assistance and sufficient preparation time, and assess administrative impacts before introducing new programmes or reporting obligations. New data collection or reporting requirements should therefore only be introduced where they serve a clearly defined pedagogical purpose and provide demonstrable added value for teaching, learning or targeted learner support.
8. allow existing reforms sufficient time to be implemented and evaluated before introducing additional initiatives or changing priorities, funding arrangements or assessment frameworks, as new policies and measures by themselves increase workload and reduce implementation capacity of concerned actors.

QUESTION 3

Which digital tools, infrastructure or practices currently support teaching and learning, and where do you see the greatest need and potential, as well as challenges, for European-scale, digitally sovereign and accessible solutions?

Digitalisation and AI should contribute to educational equity and must not reinforce existing socio-economic or educational inequalities. Digital learning platforms, secure cloud services, videoconferencing and hybrid-learning tools, open educational resources, assistive technologies, digital assessment tools, eTwinning, SELFIE tools and AI-assisted applications can all support teaching, collaboration, accessibility and professional exchange. Their educational value depends however on reliable connectivity, equitable access to devices, high-quality content, technical support and teachers trained in digital pedagogy.

Any AI in education must remain human-centred and pedagogy-driven. Teachers must retain final responsibility for pedagogical decisions, assessment and learner support. AI should not be used to replace teachers, impose algorithmic management, conduct intrusive surveillance or make high-impact decisions without meaningful human review. Before deployment, systems should be tested for accuracy, bias, accessibility, data protection, cybersecurity and educational value. Education workers require information, consultation, training and effective means to challenge automated outputs.

The European Commission should support a European reference framework for teachers' digital and AI literacy, career-long training within working time, and practical guidance on media literacy, disinformation, social networks, cyberbullying, online safety and wellbeing. Students should learn to use digital technologies critically, safely and responsibly while continuing to develop non-digital and interpersonal competences.

Face-to-face teaching and human interaction in education remain indispensable to this end. Digital tools should complement and not replace this. Digital technologies can also support differentiated teaching and individual achievement. Appropriately designed tools may help teachers provide additional challenges to high-performing learners, identify and develop individual strengths and talents, and offer learning opportunities adapted to different levels of proficiency. European initiatives should therefore combine inclusive access with support for excellence and individual development. In this context CESI supports a European-scale, digitally sovereign education infrastructure based on the following requirements:

1. Transparent procurement and accountability, with systematic participation of education professionals and social partners
2. Secure European cloud services, interoperability and portability based on open standards, coupled with effective safeguards against vendor lock-in
3. Compliance with EU data protection, cybersecurity, accessibility, consumer and AI rules
4. Universal design and assistive functionality so that learners and workers with disabilities can participate on equal terms.
5. High-quality multilingual European educational setting availabilities so that teachers can adapt infrastructure to national curricula and local contexts.
6. Anchorage of governance frameworks in long term pedagogical, ethical, transparency, and accessibility principles, given the rapid development of digital technologies and AI; these frameworks should also remain technology-neutral to ensure that safeguards remain effective as technologies evolve.

QUESTION 4

What evidence, data sources or best practice examples should the European Commission consider when designing the monitoring and evaluation frameworks for the proposed actions?

CESI supports proportionate, transparent monitoring designed for continuous improvement. The European Commission should use existing European, national and international data wherever possible and avoid new reporting burdens for schools. In particular it should draw on the data and information collected by Eurostat, the EU Education and Training Monitor, Eurydice, Cedefop, Eurofound, EU-OSHA, the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, and OECD data including on PISA, TALIS and Education at a Glance. Importantly, no single survey or league table should determine policy conclusions. Quantitative data should be complemented by qualitative evidence from teachers, trainers, school leaders, learners and representative social partners. Teachers and their trade unions should participate in defining indicators, interpreting results and reviewing implementation at EU and national level.

In terms of categories, monitoring and evaluation of the Education Package should cover at least:

1. basic-skills attainment and excellence, early childhood education and care, early school leaving, participation and progression, including equity gaps and access to support.
2. teacher and trainer recruitment, vacancies, age profile, retention, early-career attrition, contract security, remuneration, career progression and mobility.
3. working time, class size, administrative workload, work-life balance, psychosocial risks, sickness absence, violence and harassment, and access to occupational health support.
4. participation in high-quality initial education, induction, mentoring and continuous professional development during working time.
5. learner and staff wellbeing, inclusion, democratic participation, critical thinking, civic and media literacy, and transitions to further education and quality employment.
6. the scope of digital connectivity, equitable access to devices, AI-supported learning opportunities and assistive technologies, with a particular focus on territorial and socio-economic divides.
7. the extent of staff training and technical support and the administrative impact of digital tools.
8. the level, distribution and effectiveness of public investment, including take-up and accessibility of EU programmes by disadvantaged schools and smaller providers.