



FAQ: *Improving Competences for the 21st Century: An Agenda for European Cooperation on Schools*

Q1. . Why a Communication on schools a year after a Communication on Teachers?

The Member States are increasingly recognising the vital importance of the quality of their school education systems in attaining their objectives under the Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs. Previous documents have highlighted ways in which certain aspects of the system could be improved (e.g. the Communication on Efficiency and Equity in Education and Training systems; the Communication on Improving the Quality of Teacher Education; the Recommendation on Key Competences for lifelong Learning¹). This is the first time that the Commission, after a public consultation and a thorough review of research evidence, addresses the issue of school education as a whole. It is a clear sign of the growing importance of this issue at European level.

Q2. Is this Communication really necessary?

It is needed because school systems must adapt if they are to provide young people with *new skills for new jobs*. And yet, many Member States are still not on track to meet the benchmarks they have set themselves in key areas such as improving reading literacy, reducing early school leaving, and increasing the rates of completion of secondary education. The quality of school systems, and the quality within each school system, is still often uneven; it is necessary to make sure that all young people can have access to the same quality of schooling. This is especially important because how well pupils do in school has a great impact on the opportunities they get later in life. This quality depends to a large extent upon the quality of teaching. That is why this Communication reinforces the Commission's view that Member States should implement their joint agenda for improving the Quality of Teacher Education.

Q3. What about subsidiarity?

Member States are responsible for the organisation and content of their education and training systems. Nothing in this Communication impinges on this. Its purpose is to encourage Member States together to analyse the scale of the problem, and to cooperate more in finding solutions. The Commission proposes an agenda for cooperation to focus on how to improve performance on key issues, such as improving literacy, extending access to pre-school provision, reducing early school leavers and strengthening teachers' education.

Exchanges on this cooperation agenda should be undertaken through the Open Method of Coordination in education and training and supported by the Lifelong Learning Programme, while key challenges should be highlighted in Member States' Lisbon National Reform Programmes.

Q4. How does this Communication relate to the public consultation on schools the Commission organised in 2007?

The Commission organised a public consultation based upon a working paper 'Schools for the 21st Century'. The responses to the consultation came from all kinds of stakeholders, from school pupils to Ministries. The contributions of all those who gave permission will be published shortly on the Commission's website,² along with a full report on the consultation results. The consultation responses are briefly summarised in the Staff Working Paper that accompanies this Communication, and which also sets out in some detail the very latest research evidence upon which, together with the consultation responses, the Commission's proposals are based.

To know more:

http://ec.europa.eu/education/news/news492_en.htm

http://ec.europa.eu/education/index_en.htm

¹ [COM\(2006\) 481 final](#) "Efficiency and Equity in Education and Training systems";
[COM\(2007\) 392 final](#) "Communication on Improving the Quality of Teacher Education";
[COM\(2005\) 548 final](#) "Recommendation on Key Competences for lifelong Learning".

² http://ec.europa.eu/education/school21/index_en.html