

# The European Community and education

## European File

The developing European Community is not just about the free movement of goods between the nine member countries. The objectives of the Community as stated in the founding Treaties are to bring together the peoples of Europe and to improve their living and working conditions. Even though the Treaties make few explicit references to education these twin objectives elevate it to a central position in the process of constructing Europe.

- Bringing together the peoples of Europe implies a greater understanding of the way of life and language of neighbouring countries and also requires the extension of exchange programmes, particularly for young people. The European Treaties give every Community citizen the right to live and work in the country of his or her choice. To make this right effective, a number of linguistic and administrative obstacles need to be removed. Schools receiving the children of migrant workers must also be able to give them a more suitable education.
  
- Improving living and working conditions depends on education:
  - education has particular value in the development of the personality, a value which becomes even more important when our fundamental objective is to improve the quality of life;
  
  - education enables a whole range of socially or personally handicapped groups to gain access to a less unequal and more satisfying social life;

- education occupies a strategic position in the process of economic and social development and absorbs a large share (12% on average) of public expenditure in Community countries;
- education is inseparable from employment and vocational retraining policies which have been highlighted for Community action by the founding Treaties. And it is even more important when our society is faced with an economic and social crisis (as witnessed by the unemployment levels) and when it is progressively moving towards a new division between leisure time and work and towards more extensive further education.

The history of Community cooperation in the educational field started in 1971 with the meeting of Education Ministers from Community countries. In Paris, in 1972, the Nine's leaders gave the fundamental go-ahead by underlining the necessity to develop the Community's social and human aspects. In 1974, the European Commission put forward its first proposals. The Education Ministers of the Nine, agreeing on the need to preserve the originality of educational traditions and policies in each country, stressed the value of developing European cooperation in a certain number of priority sectors:

- the education of migrant workers and their families;
- establishing closer relations between the various educational systems, particularly in higher education, as well as the development of an information and statistical facility at the Community level;
- the improvement of foreign teaching;
- encouraging the mobility of pupils, students and researchers, particularly by removing administrative and social obstacles to free movement and by the mutual recognition of diplomas and periods of study undertaken in other countries;
- equal opportunity of access to all forms of education throughout the Community.

Based on this, the Nine adopted the first programme of educational cooperation in February 1976 which was complemented in December of the same year by specific initiatives dealing with the transition from school to work — a problem which is becoming increasingly important given the present economic crisis and growing unemployment amongst young people.

The implementation of this programme is taking place at the present moment. It is being monitored and coordinated by an Education Committee composed of national representatives and the European Commission.

## **1. Educating migrant workers and their children**

Since its creation, the Community has promoted the principle of the free movement of workers. There are today some 11 million migrants and their search for jobs in

other countries has greatly contributed to our economic expansion. Their children now number over two million (under 18 years old) and, as a whole, too little has been done to help them integrate into the social and working life of the host country without losing their cultural identity. Since 1968, however, the rights of migrants to receive education and vocational training and be given equal treatment with nationals — including study scholarships — has been covered by a Community regulation. Going one step further, since 1976 the Nine has been active in improving the educational and training opportunities open to migrant workers and their families. A European directive adopted in July 1977 makes it mandatory on Member States to provide:

- reception classes to learn the language of the host country;
- tuition in the language and culture of the country of origin;
- specialized training of teachers working with migrants' children.

To support the directive the European Commission finances a certain number of studies and pilot projects aimed at improving reception and educational methods for migrants' children: crash courses in the local language or languages and integration into the social environment (in Luxembourg, Leyden in the Netherlands and Genk in Belgium); experimental classes continuing the teaching of the children's native language and culture (Paris and Bedford in the UK); training local teachers (north and east of France), and training Italian teachers in the Rhineland of North-Westphalia, etc. On a different level the European Social Fund finances migrant worker training programmes (allocating some 16 million European units of account<sup>1</sup>).

## **2. Equal opportunity and preparation for work**

Each year, four million European teenagers leave school without the qualifications needed to enable them to find a job. One third of the Community's six million unemployed are under 25 years of age. Certain categories are particularly affected for various socio-economic, cultural or geographical reasons; others have less chance on account of their sex or because of mental or physical handicaps. Schools should not perpetuate or encourage these inequalities. They could instead be the important link in efforts to compensate for them or help young people into the hazardous world of work.

The Nine decided in 1976 to give priority to the problem of transition from school to work. The four-year programme currently in force covers information exchanges (grants for study visits by vocational guidance specialists, colloquiums for teachers and administrators, etc.) and caters for studies on common problems (organization of 'second chance' education for young people, coordination of education and other sectoral policies to avoid regional inequalities, etc). And, above all, some thirty pilot projects have been launched involving several hundred educational establishments

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<sup>1</sup> 1 EUA = about £0.65 (at exchange rates current on 5 October 1979).

and some 10 000 youngsters all over Europe at an annual cost of around six million European units of account. These projects — up to 50% subsidized by the Community — are linked together by a series of inter-project visits and exchanges and by a unique Community system of continuous evaluation. They revolve around the following themes:

- the educational and training needs of school leavers who find difficulties in obtaining employment;
- the lack of interest in study and in work shown by many young people and ways of stimulating their participation;
- drawing up measures likely to give greater chance to disadvantaged groups such as young girls, migrant workers, the handicapped;
- the development of continuous educational and vocational counselling based on cooperation between those responsible for education, guidance, training and job placement;
- initial and in-service training of teachers so that they can give young people better preparation for working life.

The reform of vocational training is, for example, the subject of several pilot projects conducted in Belgium and France, whilst new organizational arrangements for educational and vocational guidance are being experimented with in Ludwigshafen (Germany), Aarhus (Denmark), Shannon (Ireland) and many parts of Italy. The creation of new links between periods of compulsory and non-compulsory education is being tested in London and in Baden-Württemberg whilst the development of systems alternating work with further education is being conducted in Denmark, Italy and the Netherlands.

The programme complements other Community initiatives taken in the field of unemployment and vocational training for young people including action by the European Social Fund which in 1978 allocated 179 million EUA out of a total budget of 569.6 million.

Equal opportunity is crucial in other periods besides the transition from school to work. To an important degree, pre-primary education often affects the ability of children to make the most of compulsory education. Further education for adults can offer socially deprived groups the opportunity to make up some ground — and this is the objective of the preparatory work being conducted in collaboration with the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training in Berlin.

Particular attention is being paid to certain groups: migrants (as has already been mentioned) but also young girls and handicapped people:

- young girls: the principle of equal treatment for men and women at work is supported by the Treaty of Rome and by several European directives. But the roots of inequality lie very deep and the European Commission recommended the Nine

in October 1978 to attack the problem in schools by undertaking joint research dealing particularly with the impact of co-education, on the elimination of traditional stereotyped attitudes as well as raising the awareness of young girls of the job opportunities open to them;

- the handicapped: following a conference held in Rome in December 1978, the European Commission began a detailed analysis of the educational problems of physically and mentally handicapped youngsters and is currently drawing up a series of proposals to help facilitate their transition from school to working life. This work in the educational field would complement that undertaken by the European Social Fund which allocated some 49 million EUA in 1978 for the vocational rehabilitation of the handicapped for ordinary employment.

### **3. Education and European realities**

Europe has a continuous influence on our lives. It is also very topical. Europe's youth — the future electors of the European Parliament — should not leave school without having a critical awareness of the workings of the Community and the way of life in other Community countries. Too many clichés still abound. In 1976, the Nine decided to give a European dimension to teacher training and the teaching of pupils in primary and secondary schools. The European Commission put forward concrete proposals in June 1978 to encourage the study of European problems in their geographical, historical and political aspects. Supplementary measures are currently being examined dealing with educational material, teacher training and the exchange of information and experiences.

At the higher education level the Commission has given its support to numerous research institutes on European affairs and to European documentation centres set up by universities. In addition, the European university institute in Florence — set up by the Nine and opened in 1976 — has launched post-graduate study programmes on European problems in their historical, economic, legal and socio-political dimensions.

### **4. Foreign language teaching**

How can Europeans understand each other without knowing each other's languages? And without knowing other Community languages how can they exercise their right to live and work in other Community countries? In 1976 the Nine set down three objectives:

- all Europeans should be encouraged to learn at least one other Community language;
- teachers should undertake part of their training in the countries whose language they intend to teach;
- new language teaching methods must be developed, especially for educating adults.

In June 1978, the European Commission published a draft action programme aimed at extending the opportunities for foreign language study from primary school to adult education. Special measures were drawn up for the less gifted pupils and for teacher training. Exchange programmes for teachers and for pupils were envisaged as well as the creation of a network of pilot schools, which would utilize the experience gained by the European schools which have been involved in multilingual education for over 20 years in the cities accommodating the Community institutions and research centres.

## **5. Student and teacher mobility**

Studying foreign languages and European problems is not enough. Young people must be helped to expand their contacts in other countries whilst ensuring that such opportunities are open to all no matter what their social background or where they live. The Commission put forward various proposals aimed at:

- promoting pupil exchanges at the secondary school level: assistance to poor families and to inhabitants of peripheral regions; organizing holiday activities; pilot schemes dealing with the exchange of handicapped children, dealing with pupils in technical and vocational education, or with the particular situation of countries with less internationally used languages;
- encouraging the admission of non-national students in higher education: eliminating quantitative restrictions and financial or administrative discrimination, the creation of study scholarships, recognition of diplomas and study periods.

The European Commission has published a guide to higher education in Europe and is preparing another dealing with secondary education. It is currently examining the obstacles hindering teacher mobility. The Commission has also been collaborating with the Council of Europe to develop a school record book which should specify the level of education achieved in the country of origin and help secondary school children to transfer from one teaching system to another.

In the long term, the objective is to establish a minimum of common ground between the national educational systems and to ensure the mutual recognition of study periods undertaken in one or other of the Community countries.

## **6. Extending information flows and cooperation between educational systems**

The educational systems in Community countries vary considerably and this variety — which is the result of historic and cultural factors — itself constitutes a great wealth which should be preserved. On the other hand it is in the interests of everyone to draw benefit from the experiences and projects of neighbouring countries. The Community is consequently trying to improve mutual awareness of the different educational systems and develop exchange programmes and cooperation between national and local administrators. The European Commission is currently:

- setting up an information network on national educational policies;
- organizing or supporting numerous colloquiums and study visits and since 1977 has been offering grants to educational administrators for short study courses;
- multiplying contacts between teacher organizations, parents and young people as well as with higher educational establishments where cooperation is particularly encouraged. Since 1976 some 87 joint study programmes involving 171 universities and other higher educational institutions have been prepared and set up as a result of financial support by the Community.
- collaborating closely with the international organizations concerned with educational problems and particularly with the Council of Europe, the OECD and UNESCO.



Cooperation between the Nine in the educational field is part of the logic of constructing Europe. It demands collaboration at all levels including teachers and educational administrators in schools and in the regions. It cannot resolve all the problems by magic but it does give an opportunity for common thinking, for setting higher standards and for providing a broader understanding of the issues at stake. It can help find solutions for common problems and new approaches whether at local, national or Community level. It can help bring education to the forefront of policies designed to build a better Community for tomorrow. Solid foundations have been laid since 1976 but much remains to be done to enable schools and students throughout the Nine to benefit from the opportunities created by the existence of the European Community ■



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