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EDUCATION ACTION PROGRAMME AT COMMUNITY LEVEL

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOR GIRLS

(second level education)

(Communication from the Commission to the Council)

S U M M A R Y

By virtue of a Resolution⁽¹⁾ adopted on 9.2.1976, the Council and Ministers of Education approved a first action programme in the field of education. The achievement of equal opportunities for free access to all forms of education was stated to be an essential aim of the education policies of all Member States (Point IV 20). It was further agreed that an exchange of views and experience on concepts and trends should be organised at Community level in order to identify specific areas in which joint action might be undertaken (Point IV 21).

The present document concerns the position of girls in the second level of education. This initial focus on the theme of equal opportunities for girls must be seen in the wider context of Community action to achieve equality of treatment between men and women workers, as already recognised by Member States⁽²⁾.

The Communication contains the analysis made by the Commission on the basis of an expert's report⁽³⁾ drafted in collaboration with liaison officers designated by each Ministry of Education. The Communication summarises the extent, type and character of inequalities arising in the second level education of girls, proposes areas of common concern on which cooperative action should be prepared in the light of the meeting of the Council and the Ministers of Education on 27 November, 1978.

(1) Resolution of 9.2.1976, OJ No. C 38 of 19.2.1976.

(2) Directive on equal treatment as regards access to employment, vocational training OJ No. L 39 of 14.2.1976 and particularly Council Declaration 2a on this Directive.

(3) Report by Dr. Eileen BYRNE to be published shortly.

Education Action Programme at Community level

Equal opportunities in Education and Training
for girls (second level education)

I Introduction

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EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOR GIRLS
IN THE 10-18 AGE RANGE

I. INTRODUCTION

1. "The achievement of equal opportunities for free access to all forms of education is an essential aim of the education policies of all Member States and its importance must be stressed in conjunction with other economic and social policies, in order to achieve equality of opportunity in society". This statement of principle forms Point IV.20 of the resolution of the Council and of the Ministers of Education meeting within the Council of 9 february 1976 (1). The resolution provides moreover that "an exchange of views and experience on concepts and trends will be organised at Community level in order to identify specific areas in which joint action might be undertaken" (Point IV.21). The need for specific actions to ensure equal educational opportunities for girls was made explicit in Point III.1 (c) of the resolution of 13 December 1976 concerning measures to be taken to improve the preparation of young people for work and to facilitate their transition from education to working life (2).

2. The theme of equal educational opportunities for girls must be seen in the wider context of Community action to achieve equality of treatment between men and women workers. Community directives on equal pay (3) and on equal treatment as regards access to employment, vocational training, promotion and working conditions (4), together with the draft directive on equal treatment as regards social security (5) focus on the removal of discriminatory legal provisions and practices.

(1) O.J. N° C 38 of 19.02.76
(2) O.J. N° C 308 of 30.12.76
(3) O.J. N° L 45 of 19.02.75
(4) O.J. N° L 39 of 14.02.76
(5) O.J. N° C 34 of 11.02.77

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The more general theme of inequality, as opposed to discrimination, between men and women in the employment field was taken up in a Commission memorandum of 12 February 1975. In the last few years, particular attention has been paid to the removal of inequalities in the provision of vocational training for women. Positive action has been taken by the European Social Fund, initially in the context of its pilot projects and studies and more recently by the creation of a specific category of intervention for vocational training programmes for women (1). The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training in Berlin is also devoting its attention to the situation of women workers.

3. Action in the field of employment and vocational training can however only partially compensate for those inequalities which affect the career chances of women during their formative years before their entry into working life. The Member States have recognized that progress towards equality of treatment in the field of vocational training is closely linked with the question of equality of opportunity for girls and boys in the field of education and vocational training (2).
4. The purpose of this Communication is to summarise (3) the extent, type and character of inequalities arising in the education and training of girls in the second level of education, that is, in the approximate age range of 10 to 18 years. It seeks to identify specific areas in which joint action may be undertaken within the Community. In this context, full account has been taken of work in the field of educational equality for girls by international organisations such as the Council of Europe, the OECD, the ILO, UNESCO and the Nordic Council.

(1) O.J. NO. L 337 of 27.12.77

(2) Council Declaration 2a referring to the Directive of 9.2.76
(cf. footnote 4 p.1).

(3) This summary draws on a report on the equality of education and training for girls in education prepared by Dr. Eileen Byrne, an expert appointed by the Commission who worked in consultation with liaison officers designated by each Ministry of Education.

5. The second level provides an appropriate focus because it is at this stage of schooling that pupils have to choose between different types of school, or different courses or programmes within schools ; some of these choices are directly related to later opportunities for vocational training and employment. Almost all countries introduce some form of specific preparation for the world of work, including careers guidance, to pupils in the range from about 13 to 18. The debate on co-education is more pertinent at secondary level since proportionately more second level than primary schools are single sex. It is also at secondary level that the onset of full puberty - earlier for girls than for boys - sharpens the influence of female and male adult "models" on the attitudes of young people.
6. The focus on the second level of education does not detract from the importance attached to the formative influence of pre-school and primary schooling. The field of pre-school education is already under review by the Education Committee on the basis of the February 1976 resolution, whilst the area of primary schooling can be examined separately at a later stage.
7. Similarly, the emphasis on the role of the education system itself in the achievement of equal opportunities for girls and women does not detract from the importance of factors external to the education system. The influence of the family, of the local socio-economic environment, of various cultural and religious traditions, of the behaviour of the peer group and of conditioning by the mass media and the leisure industry are among the factors which are recognized to have a profound influence on the behaviour and aspirations of young people. The education sector cannot change society but nor does society provide an alibi for inadequacies within the education system.
8. The present intention is therefore to examine those barriers hindering the achievement of equal opportunity in secondary level education for both sexes which are directly related to or are part of the education system; since these are the barriers which can be altered, removed or influenced by educational authorities.

II. THE CONTEXT FOR POLICY DEVELOPMENT

9. Educational authorities are increasingly concerned with the problems of under-achievement by girls. It is widely recognized that in the modern world, and particularly in the 21st century for which children are today being educated, education should give both men and women the right of choice : choice to work full-time or part-time, choice to be the breadwinner or the principal home-based parent, choice to alternate roles at different stages of marriage and careers. The current economic situation does not diminish the responsibility of schools to educate all pupils and not only boys for economic employment for part at least, if not most, of their lives. Conversely, all young people, boys as well as girls, need to be equipped to share responsibility for domestic affairs and the bringing up of young children. It is furthermore recognized that education must be offered to each child in accordance with his or her actual, not assumed, personal gifts and individual needs, rather than on the basis of any other preconceived notion such as sex, colour or origin.

10. The overall picture of second level education is, however, one of widespread underachievement by girls. This is partially evident from the general participation rates of girls in the first and second cycles of second level education, which vary considerably between countries. More significant are the sex differences in participation in the different levels and types of schools and courses. Predictably, these differences are more marked during the second than the first cycle.

11. So far as second level vocational and technical education are concerned , the overall participation rates of girls are mainly much lower than those of boys. Most vocational and technical

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training that is followed by girls tends in many countries to be geared to traditionally feminine sectors of employment, involving skills with limited transfer value. Moreover, if given the choice, girls often opt for shorter courses with lower level qualifications than those generally attained by boys. In countries where training demands outstrip supply, more girls fail to find training places than boys.

12. Nevertheless, as regards "academic" or general education, the initial problems of access or actual participation do not appear to be the most significant. In most though not all countries, girls' participation rates in traditional pre-university academic courses either equal or exceed those of boys. Such evidence as is available suggests, however, that girls tend to opt for shorter courses in the second cycle or to leave school without having completed long second cycle courses. This is directly related to the lower recruitment level of girls to higher education, which is still common to all countries. A separate cause for concern is the sharp sex typing of studies chosen by girls entering higher education, which is clearly influenced by the pattern and conditioning of second level education.
13. The sex differences summarized above may be seen in the wider context of the many other factors influencing educational achievement, such as social class, linguistic background, ethnic origin, residence in rural areas etc. Though sex may be a less decisive single factor than social class for instance, the cumulative effect of several factors of inequality creates special needs requiring urgent action.

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III. AREAS OF COMMON CONCERN

14. Various factors or barriers can be identified within the educational systems, which either directly or indirectly impede the achievement of greater equality. These barriers may occur within the structure and organisation of second level education, within the curriculum or, more intangibly, within the social and psychological environment of the schools where teachers can play a significant role. These different areas for action are examined in turn below.

Structure and organisation

15. The organisation of single sex schools can provide a structural barrier to equality insofar as girls' schools may offer more limited curricula or facilities, particularly as regards traditional male dominated areas of study, such as mathematics, science, technical crafts and technology. This is a form of discrimination which finds its most explicit expression in those cases where courses and schools of vocational and technical education and training continue to be designed and reserved exclusively for one sex.
16. The introduction of co-education can remove certain barriers to educational opportunity, by providing equal access to all curricula facilities and to staff for all subjects, and by establishing a basis for improved social education with the aid of a teaching force of both sexes. A hasty commitment to the introduction of co-education can however fail to meet its objectives and actually reinforce sex-stereotyping, if the necessary resources and expertise are not made available.

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17. The introduction of co-education is clearly more problematic in those countries where the control of single sex schools does not lie wholly with the state. In such cases, certain barriers may be reduced by requiring that a minimum basic curriculum with appropriate facilities is made available and that teachers of the opposite sex are not excluded. It can be added that many positive results in diminishing sex-stereotyping have been achieved in single-sex schools.
18. Although there appears to be an accelerating trend towards the introduction of universal co-education in the Community, there is no clear cut view on a policy for its general application. In any event, the introduction and the management of co-educational schools remains a live political issue throughout the Community, justifying further investigation based on the comparative experience of different types of single sex and co-educational schools.
19. Further barriers may be found within the structure of second level education, which act as serious motivational disincentives to boys as well as girls. Those systems which prevent adolescents from remaining with their peer group as they move up through school, by requiring whole school years to be repeated, tend to encourage many young people to leave school prematurely. Similarly the rigid separation of different courses or programmes, which can make transfers between courses impossible in practice, can also reinforce disaffection with school life among those with low motivation. This is particularly serious in those educational systems where specialisation can begin already in the first cycle of second level education. These problems are beginning to be recognised, and greater flexibility has characterised the various recent reforms of second level education in the Community.

20. Special programmes which cut across existing structures can be used to promote equality, and particularly to help the most disadvantaged of girls. The concept of positive discrimination is beginning to be applied in a number of countries with regard to vocational training where the aim is to maintain special programmes for girls in traditionally male dominated areas until new trends can be established to enable girls to catch up with their male peers. Similar initiatives in the first cycle of second level education and in the field of educational and vocational guidance could equally be envisaged.

Curriculum

21. Irrespective of the structure of schools in second level education curriculum organisation is a frequent obstacle to equality of opportunity. On the one hand, any system of premature specialisation which enables girls to discontinue such basic subjects as mathematics or physical sciences by an open option or choice system limits the later choice of opportunities in further education, training and employment. On the other hand, the organisation of parallel curricular options between technical crafts and domestic crafts acts as a severe obstacle to equality in later educational achievement and employment. Domestic crafts, so often the option of the less academically gifted girls, frequently have very little relevance to employment. Conversely the possibility to avoid an option in domestic education implicitly encourages many boys to refuse to recognize their domestic and family responsibilities in later life.
22. The deferment of specialisation and the establishment of a compulsory and balanced central curriculum up to the minimum school leaving age, to which options can be added, can make a considerable contribution to offering girls (and boys) a better foundation for later choice of third level education or

for training for employment. Current trends in curriculum reform with the increasing emphasis on a technological element in the core curriculum can usefully diminish the tendency to regard technical education as a male preserve. Education in personal relationships, social roles and the duality or interchangeability of domestic and external adult responsibilities in marriage can usefully replace lower level domestic skills and be introduced as part of the compulsory curriculum for both sexes.

23. The widespread sexism and sex role stereotyping of educational media and teaching materials is perhaps the most obvious curricular barrier to equal educational opportunity as well as being an adverse social influence depressing girls' motivation and aspirations. Some Member States have begun to take steps to review teaching materials in this light and in some cases to issue guidelines for the production of new materials. This is a valid exercise even in countries where there is no central control either of curriculum content or of educational materials.

The teaching force

24. Many of the social and psychological factors which have an impact on girls' educational achievement and career aspirations lie outside the area of influence of educational authorities. Within the school environment, however, there is considerable scope for counteracting rather than reinforcing those behaviour patterns which spring from social conditioning about sex roles. The teaching force in its day to day contacts with girls and boys has a privileged opportunity to compensate for external perceptions of, for example, woman's domestic role and of "men's work" and "women's work". Teachers, particularly those involved in personal counselling and vocational guidance, can be made more sensitive

to certain psychological and developmental factors such as girls' earlier physical development, parental influences, girls' lack of ambition, their desire not to outshine boys in adolescence, etc. In-service training programmes as well as initial teacher training courses can be used more extensively to equip teachers and those involved in vocational guidance to overcome some of the adverse effects of implicit sex-stereotyping in the curriculum.

25. The achievement of a better sex balance in the teaching force, as regards the sector of employment (nursery, primary, secondary), the areas of study (humanities, sciences, crafts) and most particularly the level of authority, could have an even more profound influence on the perception of adult models by children during their formative years. In some countries there has been an actual decline in the proportion of women holding senior positions over the last ten years, frequently as a result of reorganisation and the introduction, ironically, of co-education. Similarly there has been a tendency to polarise the roles of men and women teachers in the administrative duties involved in large new schools. Teacher redeployment has become a major element in the planning of many national educational policies as the teaching force declines with the fall in the birthrate. This now provides an opportunity for positive staff development programmes to achieve a better sex balance in the teaching force.

Data and applied research

26. There is still too little research evidence on where girls are in the educational system, what their relative achievements are, and in what way their motivation and development differs from that of boys. There is an urgent need for a coordinated and planned programme of research and for all educational statistics to be

divided by sex, at least for the next decade, in order to allow more effective monitoring (and to contribute to breaking some of the mythology which surrounds the sex inequality debate). Surveys into pupil achievement, curriculum organisation, or school government and management could now always include an examination of sex differences.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

27. The achievement of greater equality of opportunity for girls in education is a long term objective to which educational authorities can make a major contribution by adapting educational structures, curriculum and staff policy. These are sensitive areas for action, given the interplay of legal, administrative and attitudinal factors. As yet there is in the Community remarkably little research into or practical experience of specific measures designed to resolve the problems outlined above. Cooperative action in the field of research and development could therefore make a useful contribution to the achievement of this objective in the Member States.
28. IT IS THEREFORE PROPOSED THAT :
 - a programme for consideration by the Council and by the Ministers of Education meeting within the Council should be drawn up to focus on the following topics which have been identified as of common concern :
 - a) the management and implementation of co-education ;
 - b) the design of compensatory programmes specifically for girls in the first cycle of second level education and in vocational guidance ;
 - c) the design of core curricula and the introduction of new compulsory subjects such as technology and home management ;

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- d) the creation of new staff development policies, designed to achieve a better sex balance in the teaching force, particularly in the context of policies for teacher recruitment and promotion ;
 - e) the design of new training modules to increase the awareness of teachers and guidance personnel of the social and psychological factors involved ;
 - f) the improvement of data and research on educational equality for girls and the exchange of information on this subject between Member States.
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ANNEX

Action: Equal opportunities in education and training for girls
(in second level education).

Financial and staffing implications

1. Budget line

392 Expenditure relating to action in the field of education.

2. Heading within budget line

Item 3920 point 21.3 (Equal opportunities).

3. Legal base

Resolution of the Council and Ministers of Education meeting within the Council on 9 February 1976 comprising an action programme in the field of education (O.J. C38 of 19.2.1976); in particular, paragraphs IV 20-21 of the Resolution which read :

20. The achievement of equal opportunity for free access to all forms of education is an essential aim of the education policies of all the Member States and its importance must be stressed in conjunction with other economic and social policies, in order to achieve equality of opportunity in society.

21. In addition to the action taken in each Member State, an exchange of views and experience on concepts and trends will be organized at Community level in order to identify specific areas in which joint action might be undertaken. This exchange of views will focus initially on the following questions:

a)

b) the organization of compulsory secondary education in such a way as to give all children the opportunity to develop their full potential.

4. Objectives of the action

4.1. General objectives

Promote equal opportunities for free access to all forms of education and facilitate the organisation of compulsory secondary education in such a way as to give all children, and especially girls, the opportunity to develop their full potential.

4.2. Specific objectives

- a) Contribute to an exchange of views and experience on concepts and trends in this field;
- b) Prepare, on the basis of a more precise political mandate, proposals for joint action.

5. Financial implications

5.0. Implications for expenditure

None over and above what has already been envisaged in the corresponding chapter of the draft budget for 1979.

5.1. Implications for resources

Not applicable.

6. Financing

6.0. - 6.2. Financing possible by means of appropriations referred to in the relevant chapter of the draft budget for 1979 (50,000 EUA maximum).

6.3. Appropriations to be entered in future budgets: none on the basis of the present communication.

7. Supplementary information concerning staff necessary for the implementation of the action

Not applicable since it is a question of a preparatory action during the 1979 financial year.