

**Brussels, 10 October - Proposal for a Council Recommendation on Pathways to School Success**

## Background

The *Communication on Achieving the European Education Area by 2025* foresaw the adoption of a recommendation to repeal the *2011 Council Recommendation on policies to reduce early school leaving*. Based on the 2011 Recommendation's assessment, its implementation contributed to a decrease in the rate of early leavers from education and training (ELET) at EU level (from 13.4% in 2011 to 9.7% in 2021), and encouraged changes within educational institutions and policies. To continue, the *Commission has published a new Proposal* on "Pathways to School Success", accompanied by an annex proposing a framework for action, see *here*, and its infographic *here*. The Proposal is foreseen to be adopted during the Czech Presidency's Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council meeting (27-28 November).

## Understanding the Proposal for a Council Recommendation

For a clearer understanding of the Proposal, LLLP compiled a selection of the key points presented by the European Commission which can be accessed *here*. These, together with Policy Framework for Action annexed by the Commission to its Proposal serve as the basis of LLLP's Statement.

## A successful set-up for the future learning pathways

The Proposal embeds a view favouring wellbeing in education and training. In accordance with LLLP's *2021 Position Paper on Rethinking Assessments: Prioritising Learners' Wellbeing*, **the Proposal's referral to mainstreaming a wellbeing approach to education and training is timely and appreciated. The general concern for mental health and wellbeing spans strategies for bullying and cyberbullying, the establishment of support mechanisms for learners at risk or with additional wellbeing needs, and a general understanding that without wellbeing, school success cannot be achieved.** Following up on LLLP's Position Paper's logic, threats to wellbeing are a significant indicator for dropping out of learning and/or lagging behind peers. This is more relevant where assessment in education and training relies on high-stakes, end-of-the-year, summative formats which increase anxiety and limit the opportunity of learners to engage in socio-emotional development. **Therefore, LLLP fully endorses the broadening of school success from academic achievement towards wellbeing and socio-emotional development as well.** To support Member States in achieving this vision of education, the Proposal's Annex offers practical initiatives. Looking directly at assessment, LLLP appreciates the approach of **matching it with personal learning needs and the diversity of practices recommended ranging from peer assessment to self-assessment to portfolios and, in general, to formative assessments.**

**The acknowledgement of the insufficient presence of learners, families, civil society and NGOs in policy design, implementation and evaluation is commendable**, especially as this is established in the context of the need for the whole-school approach if educational success for all is to be achieved. The variety of stakeholders with whom the formal education sector must collaborate to achieve a whole-school approach is not exhaustive but reveals a keen awareness of how these stakeholders facilitated the establishment of a lifelong and life-wide learning culture in the past years, enriching formal education and supporting learners to develop holistically and adapt to ever-changing realities.

In achieving the ambitious goals that it set for itself, the Proposal hinges upon three key features:

- Funding
- Policy coherence
- A framework for action that foresees several policy suggestions

### *Funding*

The comprehensive reference to EU funding opportunities (spanning from Erasmus+, the Recovery and Resilience Facility, European Social Fund+, European Regional Development Fund, Digital Europe Programme, Horizon Europe, the Technical Support Instrument, to the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund and beyond) is encouraging, providing Member States with an overview of how they can be supported in planning reforms to boost educational success. The setting-up (as from December 2022) of the **Learning Lab on Investing in Quality Education and Training**, which enhances evaluation and monitoring of education policies and investments at European level, could be beneficial for fostering additional conversations on monitoring funding efforts across the EU in education and training. **LLP raises the worrying point that the Recommendation has not identified the overall decreased investment in education and training in the past decade<sup>1</sup> as a challenge.** This underinvestment was exacerbated by austerity policies which were advanced also by means of the European Semester through terminology such as ‘efficient funding’. **Therefore, LLP draws an alarm signal to the reference in this proposal to the ‘optimisation of national and European funding’, calling instead for increased public investment which greatly contributes to securing equity for all learners.** Though monitoring and assessment of the different funding initiatives’ impact must be performed, there must be an acknowledgement that there is insufficient public funding in the EU to achieve quality education systems that set-up learners for success.

### *Policy Coherence*

If investment requires improvement, **LLP recognises the well thought-through policy coherence foreseen by the Proposal.** The initiative builds on ET2020 and is integrated in the policy framework for achieving the European Education Area (EEA), considering the expert group of the European Commission operating directly on this topic, considering the monitoring of this initiative via the Social Scoreboard, the European Semester and the EEA Strategic Framework, while an additional expert group on strategies for creating supportive learning environments for groups at risk of underachievement and for supporting well-being at school is to be set-up. The complementarity with the other initiatives foreseen under the

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<sup>1</sup> LLP (2022). *Public investment on education and training in the EU: Trends, challenges and future prospects*. Available [here](#).

European Education Area and the Digital Education Action Plan are apparent, while, from a national perspective, the Proposal's Annex is attuned to respecting existing national policy frameworks.

### *Framework for Action*

Based on the Framework's key policies, LLLP notices ambitious proposals which align with recognised good practices across Europe from research and practitioners. However, even with a Framework for Action, **the Proposal appears to present solutions without providing guidance on how these can be achieved at a time when Europe is being confronted with inadequate financing and support for education and training systems, with a shortage of educators and with global challenges that can easily displace resources from the learning sector.** This section will discuss the Framework's positive elements, while the following section will aim to address the lax forms of guidance for Member States.

There is reference to **targeted support, additional learning environments and to the multi-disciplinary and team-based approach to the needs of the learners**, calling back to LLLP's vision for Community Lifelong Learning Centres (CLLCs)<sup>2</sup>. The CLLCs rely on such measures to ensure that learners, and especially those from a disadvantaged socio-economic background, can remain in learning and fully develop. The reference to **individualised learning support, backed by increased educational support staff**, is also a call that LLLP made in the past years. The practices recommended tend to view learners as more than receptacles of knowledge, **encouraging co-creation of learning, reinforcing a dialogic, two-way learning process where learners gain ownership and share their knowledge and experience.** This is underpinned by a **learner-centred curricula, which is open for development together with other education stakeholders, and which broadens the scope of academic success to include social and emotional education, bullying prevention, mental and physical health.** The curricular developments proposed are similar to a series of pedagogical suggestions from [LLL's 2020 Position Paper](#), as Member States' education and training systems are advised to rely on **interactive and experiential teaching which expands the learning environment beyond the confines of the classroom and engages other stakeholders, including the civil society, in promoting a lifelong and life-wide approach to learning.** An element that could have been insisted on more is offering mobility opportunities to disadvantaged young people which can trigger motivation and self-confidence which contribute to school success. This is tightly linked to the recognition of learning outcomes of mobility which should be part of a learner-centred approach to curricula.

The updates proposed for Initial Teacher Training and the Continuous Professional Development courses are aligned with educators requirements. They have, in the past decade, referred numerous times to the need of updating training to boost the profession's attractiveness and to ensure that they are adequately equipped to promote classroom diversity. A collaborative approach to how educators are to continue the teaching process is referenced in the Framework, with calls to Facilitate staff exchanges, peer learning, and peer support among teachers, trainers, and other educational staff and professionals, through networking, seminars and multi-professional learning communities, as well as access to centres of expertise. The Framework also calls for appropriate resources that can help adjust teaching and learning to the specific needs of all learners. **LLL supports the suggestions made in the Framework, but**

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<sup>2</sup> More information [here](#).

**underlines the fact that they are narrowly focused on training for classroom diversity and recruitment of diverse educators, missing out the additional challenges that the educators face at the moment in their day to day work.** Indeed, and as a recent study by the European Commission draws attention to how over-work, high-stress levels and exhaustion have come to characterise the experiences of many educators across the EU with more than 50% reporting quite ‘a bit’ or ‘a lot’ of stress at work<sup>3</sup>.

### **What more is needed to ensure success in learning?**

**LLLp supports the perspective adopted in the proposal and annex with regards to linking assessments and wellbeing while broadening school success beyond a traditional understanding of academic achievement, and implicitly a specific form of assessments. However, it must be highlighted that this should be better stressed across the proposal document,** as it currently seems to be confined to the annex. It is not sufficiently prominent given the weight that assessment practices across the EU carry when it comes to learners’ wellbeing and their desire to continue participating in education and training across their entire life.

Monitoring and data gathering amounts to a large section of the recommended actions towards Member States. LLLP welcomes monitoring and data collection as very important for policy and organisation evaluation, which has been revealed through projects such as [COMORELP](#) and [TaMPADA](#). However, **LLLp warns against overburdening education and training systems with monitoring duties at a time where they lack the resources to engage in this.** In an effort to facilitate the required monitoring, **LLLp recommends making this recommendation voluntary for education institutions, aiming to create incentives, perform piloting and involve all stakeholders in the design of the selected monitoring tools.** While data collection needs to be improved, **this should be done in parallel with providing adequate resources to the education and training stakeholders (e.g. tools, training, financial incentives).** **At the same time, the recommendation could benefit from highlighting the usefulness of relying on data collected by other education stakeholders such as the CSOs, which have been quite often excluded in the data collection process performed at EU and national level.**

The suggested actions to be taken with regards to educators are, to a great extent, endorsed by LLLP and its members. Regardless, there are a series of structural issues that have been largely neglected. Considering the prioritisation of educators in the Education and Training Monitor 2019, which has aptly identified the sectors’ challenges<sup>4</sup>, it is **a surprise to see no reference made to the increasing shortages in the teaching profession.** Hints are made towards bringing specialised support in formal education and to boosting connections of formal education institutions with other education stakeholders, but there is no point made on the **need for better recruitment and retention of educators.** Improvements to working conditions are essential in reinforcing the retention strategies, but the crux of the matter remains that **funding needs to be increased to also ensure a larger pool of educators, and to improve the attractiveness of the profession.** At the same time, **LLLp is appreciative of the training contents suggested in the Proposal, but draws attention to the issue of working conditions, as there is a high volume of educators reporting an inability to attend further training due to increased workloads and**

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<sup>3</sup> Eurydice 2021, Teachers in Europe - Wellbeing at Work, [here](#)

<sup>4</sup> European Commission (2019). Education and Training Monitor 2019. Available [here](#).

**lack of options to take paid leave for following the training. LLLP is apprehensive of the manner in which the suggestion to incentivise teachers' presence in education institutions with a high share of pupils with a socio-economic disadvantage was done.** This requires more in-depth planning as research reveals that younger teachers who were assigned at the beginning of their career to education institutions which required more experience in the sector have dropped out in the first years of their career due to burn-out<sup>5</sup>. **Incentives have to be provided and education institutions with a high share of pupils with a socio-economic disadvantage must be adequately staffed and supported, but for this reason additional targeted support must be directed, aligned with the needs of the learners, while the teaching team must be diverse, multi-disciplinary and prepared to work in collaborative fashions and with a wide variety of education support personnel.**

Moreover, LLLP recognised a less assertive adoption throughout the Proposal of the recommendations present in the [First Interim Report of the European Commission's Expert Group on Quality Investment in Education and Training](#). If the report is clear on the need to increase investment with the aim of reducing the teacher-pupil ratio across all classrooms in the EU, the Proposal limits this to those education institutions that have a higher share of learners from a disadvantaged socio-economic background. While the report makes the case for increased remuneration and improved working conditions for teachers, the Proposal ignores the issue of remuneration while being slightly unclear about what specific measures need to be taken to improve working conditions or what role would social dialogue play in this context. The report is unequivocal in the need to intensify anti-segregation policies in formal education, while the Proposal works within the pre-existent status quo to improve conditions within education institutions. Lastly, while the report requires a delay on the tracking age for learners, the Proposal encourages Member States to simply look for alternatives, without a clear goal set.

**As a final consideration, successful learning is not a zero-sum game which demands following a specific educational path.** As school drop-outs are a reality, one need not only consider how to combat this but rather to **plan a strong system of lifelong and life-wide learning** which would allow learners to get possibilities later in life or in different learning environments. Pathways to School Success depend on the architecture of learning surrounding formal schooling and there is a requirement to ensure that formal education is collaborating with non-formal and informal learning, ensuring that learners that have difficulties in schooling settings can be adequately supported.

## Conclusions

**LLLp is pleased with the Proposal's potential considering the forward-looking language employed and the diverse approach it encourages for teaching, learning, funding, collaborating and co-creating.** The current state of learners' participation in education and training, compounded by the ever-increasing amount of crises which require transversal competences, makes it urgent to make this Proposal a reality. For this reason, **the ambitious solutions suggested in the Policy Framework annexed to the Proposal require a more comprehensive guidance if Member States are to be supported in exacting real change.** What does it mean to have a system for early identification of developmental problems? What does the

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<sup>5</sup> OECD (2018). Early Career Teachers: Pioneers Triggering Innovation or Compliant Professionals?. Available [here](#).

promotion of pedagogical approaches that are interactive and experiential actually entail? How can a curriculum become more learner-centred? Which working conditions of educators need to be improved and how? For all these questions, there is a need to provide more support to Member States. Thus, **this statement is associated with an [annex](#) of its own.** The annex contains good practices from LLLP, its membership and partners, to provide examples of how civil society tackled some of the issues above, how they collaborated with formal education institutions and state actors to tackle the issues but also to show how EU funding can be relied upon to achieve the Proposal's goals. Initially, the Statement will be accompanied by the V1.0 of the Statement, but as additional good practices emerge, the annex will be updated regularly. The conclusion that one can draw from our annex **is the importance of building Community Lifelong Learning Centres (CLLC) to ensure that learners' needs are approached adequately. Hence, it is slightly misleading for the Proposal to call schools by the name of such centres. This causes an additional burden on already stretched education institutions. Moreover, the diversity of learning processes requires schools to be a key piece within such CLLCs, but one should avoid falling into the trap of requiring formal education to become the centre of a lifelong and life-wide learning culture.**

The Lifelong Learning Platform will continue monitoring this timely Proposal and calls for active efforts into making it a reality and supporting Member States in ensuring the success of young generations and their transition into lifelong learning.

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