

**"Improving competences for the 21st Century:  
an Agenda for European Cooperation on Schools"  
Communication of the European Commission, 3 July 2008  
COM(2008) 425**

The purpose of the Communication is to outline how European cooperation can most effectively support Member States' efforts to adapt their school education systems to meet the expectations of learners themselves, society and the labour market.

The challenge facing the EU is to strengthen the reform of school systems so that every young person can develop his or her full potential, through improved access and opportunities, to become an active participant in the emerging knowledge economy, and to reinforce social solidarity.

Most Member States now have strategies for lifelong learning in which they recognise the crucial role of school education in preparing young people for lifelong learning, the world of work and diverse societies. Progress towards European benchmarks is, however, slow, and the key targets will not be achieved:

- Today, one quarter of young people at the age of 15 only attain the lowest level of proficiency in reading; 15% of young people aged 18-24 leave school prematurely; only 78% of 22-year-olds have completed their upper secondary education; the level of interest in some subjects, such as science and mathematics, is low.

On the other hand, Europe's diverse school systems, founded upon shared values, contain a host of innovative and excellent practices. We should make better use of this diversity and help school system to mainstream good practise.

The Communication identifies three key areas in which change, sometimes radical change, will need to be made if Europe's schools are to equip young people fully for life in this century.

- First, there needs to be a focus on giving all pupils the competences they need for life in our rapidly changing knowledge society. This includes: increasing levels of reading literacy and numeracy; reinforcing learning-to-learn skills; and modernising curricula, learning materials, teacher training, and assessment accordingly.
- Second, there needs to be a commitment to provide high quality learning for every student. This involves generalising pre-school education; improving equity in school systems; reducing early school leaving; and improving support within mainstream schooling for students with special needs.
- Third, we need to strive to improve the quality of teachers and school staff. This will require more and higher quality teacher education; more effective teacher recruitment; and help for school leaders to focus on improving learning.

These are fields in which cooperation between Member States should be launched or intensified in the framework of the Open Method of Coordination, which is about agreeing upon common objectives, measuring progress through indicators and benchmarks, and learning from each others good practice.

For full information, please consult the Commission's website at:

[http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc64\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc64_en.htm)