

# Schools for the 21st century

22 April 2008

## **EHF Response to the EU Commission's Consultation**

The EHF submitted the following response in October 2007 to the EU Commission's [consultation](#) on Schools for the 21st Century:-

The European Humanist Federation (EHF) is the umbrella organisation for the humanist organisations of European states, and promotes the principles of humanism and of a secular society to the European institutions.

Below we give brief answers on the eight questions posed in 'Schools for the 21st Century'. We would be happy to be consulted further at any time.

### **Question 1 : How can schools be organised in such a way as to provide all students with the full range of key competencies?**

We believe that attention should always focus on the potential of the individual student and a priority given to the learning needs of the individual;

We believe this can be facilitated by focusing attention on the creation of smaller learning entities, paying close attention to the student as an individual, not on the bureaucracy of governing bodies;

We believe changes to the learning program must begin from the diversity of students, instead of adapting the students to the program;

More attention should be given to renewing education systems such as Dalton education to obtain optimum results;

We believe the time at which students move from one class to the next should not be strictly governed by age.

### **Question 2 : How can the school equip young people with the competences and motivation to make learning a lifelong activity?**

Schools must stimulate students to develop a positive attitude towards lifelong learning;

The school must approach the student as an individual and focus on creating learning experiences which leave students with a sense of success and achievement;

The school must become a community in which all students feel happy to live, not just a place where work is done. This means students must not be judged simply by their cognitive development but by the development of their whole character;

Schools, above all else, must stimulate free inquiry and seek to convey the joy of intellectual inquiry;

Ways must be developed by which schools may develop intrinsic motivation.

### **Question 3 : How can school systems contribute to supporting long-term sustainable economic in Europe?**

- developing attention in policy-making to long-term thinking;
- paying attention to sense of reality in drawing up curricula;

- offering work and learning stages for students who have a less favorable cognitive attitude;
- attention to second chance education with involvement of the industrial life;
- a driving democratization may never endanger the education standard.

**Question 4 : How can school systems best respond to the need to promote equity, to respond to cultural diversity and to reduce early school leaving?**

Schools should provide an open environment where everyone is welcome and feels welcome;

Schools must take account of the culture and the life stance of the students. The ability to develop their own identity should be afforded to students, free from coercion. The teacher and the curriculum must probably pay attention to the life stance which is preferred by the parents of the student (up to approximately 10 to 11 years). From approximately 11 years students should enter into dialogue with each other. They can learn from, for example, official representatives, about other life stances and cultures;

Schools must pay attention to

- maximising the socialisation of students and developing a sense of solidarity;
- the generalization of values education;
- finding measures for the development of multicultural training;
- financial support to schools which give attention to diversity.

**Question 5 : If schools are to respond to each pupil's individual learning needs, what can be done as regards curricula, school organisation and the roles of teachers?**

- developing a student following system;
- working with portfolio when acquired (e.g. deepening tasks);

The teacher can operate not just as a coach and a guide, but also a role model and a supplier of new knowledge on several levels.

**Question 6 : How can school communities help to prepare young people to be responsible citizens, in line with fundamental values such as peace and tolerance of diversity?**

Schools can increase opportunities for active participation: let students really take part in decision making on several levels in the school;

- establishing a obligatory council of students, starting from the highest classes of primary education;

The curriculum should make provision for social training in secondary education;

Schools should encourage the practise of democracy with explicit attention to debate exercises at all educational levels;

- initiating and stimulating dialogue between several groups within the school and within the direct surroundings of the school (e.g. by integrating social work and community work);
- exchanges within the own borders and between other countries, by means of the Internet and for real. Giving it a structural place in the education policy;

Schools should be initiating and developing meetings between different populations which differ on the intellectual domain, the domain of life stances, the cultural domain, the domain of language ... Especially taking initiatives when there are problems between several groups;

Schools should be education students about children's and human rights and mainstreaming the practice of them into their own organisation.

**Question 7 : How can school staff be trained and supported to meet the challenges they face?**

- improving the living-standard of teachers;
- structural exchange of teachers between European countries (to learn from each other);
- in-service training and refresher courses, e.g. civil society processes, coping with nagging, biology and social processes, psychology, ... (however, paying attention to the magnitude of the task for the teacher);
- effectuating the attractiveness of the teaching profession by introducing a relative rest in education.

**Question 8 : How can school communities best receive the leadership and motivation they need to succeed? How can they be empowered to develop in response to changing needs and demands?**

- creating a full-fledged evaluation system and letting credit facilities depend on the performances of the school;
- a decentralised policy-making for all schools with a centralised evaluation system;
- attention to reflection at school level.

**What will EHF undertake to modernise the education system as a support for their member organisations?**

1. We will support member organisations with their offer on the domain of diversity (among other things in the field of lifestyles) and intercultural education;
2. We will support an active exchange policy of teachers in the field of intercultural education and the education of lifestyles;
3. We will work to stimulate Human Rights Education in schools;
4. We will work to draw attention to the diversity of lifestyles and extra attention to the humanist lifestyle. Many inhabitants of Europe do not have the choice of a non-confessional or humanist lifestyle presented to them and they are in many countries oppressed by traditional religious lifestyles, especially in education systems;
5. We will defend the equal treatment of religious and non-religious people;
6. We will promote the separation of church and state across Europe. Education about different lifestyles should be examined and assessed within this secular framework.