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## **Teachers' professional learning and growth: Creating the conditions to achieve quality teaching for excellent learning outcomes**

### **Chair's Summary**

We have had the privilege of chairing this 6<sup>th</sup> International Summit on the Teaching Profession (ISTP) which the Standing Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the German Länder (KMK) is proud to have hosted from 3 to 4 March 2016, and which was attended by 23 delegations from OECD and other countries.

It is no exaggeration to use the word “revolution” when talking about how our lives have changed over the past few decades – and so has the set of skills we need to participate fully in and benefit from our globalised, hyper-connected, and increasingly knowledge-based economies and societies. There is therefore increasing pressure for governments to provide the right skills to all of their citizens, through high-quality education systems, and to do so in effective and equitable ways. When looking at the various factors that contribute to successful education systems, we know that beyond the influence of parents and other factors outside the school, teachers provide the most important influence on student learning. Policymakers, school leaders and teachers are therefore challenged to leverage the teaching profession to the next level – i.e., towards a trajectory of continuous professional learning and growth.

Because our environments are faster-paced and more volatile than ever before, getting policies right has become more important. As a result, countries increasingly look beyond their own borders for evidence of the most successful and efficient policies and practices to improve the lives of their citizens. As Minister Dr Claudia Bogedan (Germany) put it in her opening remarks, “Germany’s progress over the past 15 years would not have been possible without international networking”. Precisely because teachers play such a crucial role in our education systems, it is equally important for their voice to be heard when discussing how to improve these systems. Teaching professionals themselves, during an event prior to the Summit, emphasised the need to give them “a choice and a voice” in their development, affirming that they should also be seen as learners. The ISTP format itself provides a unique opportunity for governments and teacher unions to get together in order to discuss on the enhancement of the profession, and to learn from each other’s experiences.

This Summit has given us the opportunity to collectively reflect on the emerging challenges and opportunities that education systems face today, such as integrating the massive influx of refugees and preparing students to live in increasingly diverse societies, and to discuss what can be done to ensure teachers’ professionalisation to meet these new

demands. We have engaged in this Summit with high hopes to “go beyond discussions of past Summits, and get on with it”, as Education International’s General Secretary Fred van Leeuwen put it. He highlighted the vital need for governments to respond strategically and with vision to the refugee crisis as part of that practical response.

We have been uplifted to hear the significant progress made by countries since the last ISTP, hosted by Canada in 2015. The progress reports submitted by countries, particularly in the areas of stakeholder collaboration and partnerships, nicely illustrated that the ISTP is not only about the dialogue but is also about translating the dialogue and commitments into action.

We have also been inspired by the framing of the issues by the OECD and Education International. OECD’s Deputy Secretary-General Mari Kiviniemi reminded us of the power of evidence in breaking education myths, while Andreas Schleicher shared with us new insights from PISA and TALIS’ new report on *Supporting Teacher Professionalism* to shed light on the real issues to be tackled. Meanwhile, Education International’s expert John Bangs highlighted the importance of collaboration between governments and the teaching profession, and working hand-in-hand for further actions to achieve excellent learning of students.

We started the discussion drawing the lessons from previous ISTPs and asking ourselves **what competencies, skills, knowledge and dispositions successful teachers require**. We acknowledged that teaching is an increasingly complex task. Rapid social, economic and technological change and the emergence of a global knowledge society have created a demand for a broader set of competencies which young people need to acquire, hence the requirements of what teachers need to be able to do have expanded accordingly.

While the core of teachers’ work requires deep content and pedagogical knowledge to guide the learning of students, several countries expressed the importance of character building, values and civic education as core competencies that we expect the profession to exercise.

A number of countries also flagged the growing importance of managing increasingly diverse classrooms. Several countries in Europe reported being confronted with an unanticipated and massive influx of refugees to be integrated in their education systems, but we were also reminded that there are some 60 million refugees worldwide, as well as growing labour migrations; hence the diversity issue is not confined to the European refugee crisis. It was furthermore suggested that diversity of student populations also plays out in terms of race, poverty or indigenous groups, which in turn requires more diversity among teachers themselves, as well as teachers’ cultural competencies, awareness of their own biases, and concrete skills to work with language learners. As the competence to live in more global and interconnected world becomes ever-more important the PISA 2018 assessment of Global Competence will provide a key metric to measure progress in this area.

A few countries mentioned the need to support teachers in relation to digital competencies, at least to better understand their students if not to use in their own teaching.

A number of participants also emphasised the importance of passion for teaching, leadership, the ability to forge good relationships with students and communities, and reflective competencies to observe what isn’t working in classrooms and explore alternative approaches in collaboration with colleagues. As summarised by one participant: “teacher development takes time and good teaching is like wine – it takes time to develop!”

During our second session, we discussed **which policies could help foster teachers' competencies so that they are effectively prepared for teaching**. Teachers' continuing professional development has been found to be highly relevant for improving educational performance and effectiveness and for enhancing teachers' commitment to their profession and self-efficacy. This requires a career-long perspective on the teaching profession, aiming to enhance continuous professional learning throughout a teacher's professional life. We discussed how a wider concept of leadership and innovative approaches to professional development could contribute to effective teaching.

The **breakout session for ministers** used the three dimensions of teacher professionalism – knowledge-base, autonomy and peer networks – as an entry point to frame the discussion.

- With respect to the knowledge-base, the importance of strong subject knowledge to be a good teacher was stressed. However, while subject knowledge was seen as a necessary condition, it was not seen as sufficient insofar as an excellent subject expert won't necessarily be a good teacher. Teachers need to be equipped with both content and pedagogical knowledge. Ensuring the necessary deep subject matter knowledge was reported as challenging in some systems, especially attracting teachers in some shortage areas such as maths, sciences or bilingual settings. Some jurisdictions have been experimenting with specific salary incentives in high-need areas, but it was reported that this creates tensions with uniform contracts. The discussion also turned to career differentiation in terms of skills and whether we need to consider differentiating teams of teachers rather than trying to fit all 21<sup>st</sup> century requirements within a single teacher. There was a feeling that the job of teachers is becoming more complex and modern education systems might need a mix of both specialists and generalists.
- In relation to autonomy, several delegations stressed the crucial importance of ownership, underlining that autonomy of teaching profession goes hand in hand with teachers' leadership and their feeling in the lead for their own development. Some successful initiatives were described, whereby teachers have been involved in the design of their professional learning programmes with the unions through working groups, or district advisory councils that also bring together communities, parents and students in the development of policy.
- The benefit of continuous professional development through peer networks and collaboration was raised by several delegations. We were inspired by the development of communities of learning and innovations by the teaching profession in New Zealand, and the shift from supply-based to demand-driven professional development in Finland, through teachers' active involvement in the identification of best practices and peer learning.

The discussions revealed that implementing all these policy levers requires us to rethink the entire work organisation of the teaching profession and to engage in a redesign of systems so as to enable teachers to exercise their leadership and promote their professional learning. This raises the question of whether teacher professionalism should be more explicitly linked to career pathways and the identity of teachers. There was a sense that the professional identity of teachers should be clarified and policies need to make a distinction between different categories of teachers (primary, secondary) and provide differentiated measures to address different categories of teachers throughout their career stages.

We also acknowledged that when making strategic policy choice, policy trade-off is inevitable. The trade-off between reducing the class size and increasing the investment for teacher quality was debated as an example, drawing on the evidence that high-performing education systems have prioritised teacher investment over class size. It was noted however that this requires teachers to deploy pedagogies using small group work.

Talking about the policies to enhance teachers' professionalism, the demanding role of teachers in response to the increasing diversity was emphasised, especially in light of the latest flow of migrants and refugees in Europe or the growing population with diverse background and languages in other regions. We agreed on the need to craft policies to address the issues of diversity from different perspectives, including teacher's capacity to teach for diversity and teach in diversity. Increasing the diversity among the teaching workforce itself is also a challenge for some countries where some groups are under-represented in the profession.

The **breakout session for teacher union leaders and teaching professionals** also addressed the question "Which policies help foster teachers' competencies so that they are effectively prepared for teaching?" and was a wide-ranging and positive exchange of views, practices and ideas. Issues raised ranged from established examples of unions and government working together to proposals for greater attention. Some of these reflected systemic change, others more change in detail. Key subjects raised by delegations and addressing effective preparation for teaching included the roles of mentorship, collaboration, leadership and trust and the challenges of diversity, time and resource.

Some excellent examples discussed in some depth included where funds were allocated through government. The funds are managed and allocated by unions and teachers sometimes working in cooperation with other organisations. Such examples demonstrate leadership by the teaching profession, collaboration by its unions and members and provide the conditions in which trust can be established and built upon.

One clear focus for further attention raised in the session was diversity. Learning how to support students with diverse needs may be something that can be developed through sharing and learning by teacher communities. Diversity is not new, perhaps particularly for teachers in cities across the world, as teaching students from diverse cultural and language background is a fundamental part of work. However, the globalisation, special educational needs and desire for equality of opportunity that may have started this diversity, have been reinforced by conflict. Working on ways to share, learn and improve support for learning is clearly high in the minds.

In wrapping up the breakout discussions back in the plenary setting, we were reminded that success is about effective leadership at every level of the system and highlighted the importance of shared goals and trust between the government and the teaching profession. Trust enables diverse approaches to policy challenges supported by a unity of vision and leadership. Many of you noted that clarity about purpose and intended outcomes of reform is not sufficient though, and reminded us about the importance of clear and consistent priorities that extend across electoral cycles.

Creating the space for teachers' initiative and leadership is another driver for the growth and learning of the teaching profession. In this respect, one union leader pointed out that teacher leadership should be intended and structured so that opportunities for teachers to learn from experience are designed and incorporated in their career development. Several union leaders pointed out that whenever the space was created teachers used it, and the

nature of unions was changing as a result, e.g. by becoming a direct provider of professional development or offering solutions rather than pointing to problems.

With respect to making these changes happen, one union leader noted that including a thorough evaluation system and allowing for refinements in the process of reform implementation made everyone more comfortable to experiment with new approaches.

The last session delved more explicitly into the **challenges and opportunities to implement policies** which promote teachers' professional learning and growth. There was consensus that successful reforms can be delivered when the system shares a common vision. The respective roles and responsibilities of governments, teaching profession and other stakeholders were highlighted, as well as the different forms of partnerships that can make professional learning and growth happen.

In particular, the following points emerged from the discussion:

- Ensuring a shared understanding on what the priorities are facilitate a common ground to focus on priorities and foster closer collaboration between governments and teacher unions. A number of delegations emphasised that discussions were taking place to define the goals to be achieved. It was shown how divergent views and interests can be acknowledged while still finding the common ground to move forward, and how industrial relations can be separated from professional relations by focusing on children and evidence. It was furthermore suggested that this discussion should not be limited to the immediate actors and should engage other stakeholders as well, first and foremost parents.
- Ensuring long-term continuity and coherence is a challenge to ensure the best policies for the interest of children and learners. The challenge is always to make education systems resilient to political change but open to emerging demands from our societies. Politics is a brutal business driven by short-termism and election timeframes, and it is easy for unions or governments to make headline with surprises, but success and fostering trust and ownership are about exactly the opposite. Having experts reach agreement on what needs to be done can help to inject a bit of stability, as it will be hard for government and unions to resist experts' advice. Another common challenge is to strengthen evidence-based policy as education policy reform is too often dominated by ideology.
- Social partnership and collaboration between the government and teacher unions are indispensable. We discussed how an effective involvement of stakeholders cultivates a sense of joint ownership over policies, and helps build consensus over both the need and the relevance of reforms. Mechanisms of regular and institutionalised consultation are also key to the development of trust among parties. Many delegations reported efforts to strengthen the involvement of unions in the design of reforms and their implementation, which requires a strong relationship, built on trust. Success is contingent on building a constructive dialogue, which needs to be based on evidence and not distorted by ideology. In order to be sustainable, education systems should be open to respond to the demanding and evolving needs of education, and focused on student well-being and the updating of knowledge and skills. A couple of delegations underlined, however, that the issue of trust is not only important between governments and unions, but also with their membership on the ground which have sometimes lost trust in the system due to highly politicised debates for too long.

The conversation also reflected on some crucial issues for further discussion in future Summits:

- In order for teachers to take ownership for their professional development and growth, systems need to be explicitly designed to enable and support it. Teachers' career pathways have to be designed in a way that enables teachers to develop and exercise autonomy and leadership.
- The effective distribution and use of resources came up as common challenges. The trade-offs need to be weighed up and deserve more reflection on issues such as class-size, teachers' workload and time use, and taking into account the complexity of the issues. The debate needs to draw on the evidence, with a good understanding of the expected outcomes of learning of students and settings, and practices of teaching in individual countries.

Throughout the past two days, we have been able to share experiences of policies and practices that have proven successful in our countries or that are promising, and we have learned a great deal from each other's journeys. We have greatly benefitted from the discussions both around this table and in between sessions.

In closing this event, we would like to thank Tony Mackay and Gavin Dykes for guiding and moderating our deliberations so skilfully, and to all international and national participants for their commitment to the Summit and the constructive debates. Last but not least, we thank the German foundations sponsoring this event for their input and generosity, and the KMK Secretariat for the Summit organisation.