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THE EUROPEAN UNION**

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LIMITE

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JEUN 77
SOC 815**

NOTE

from:	General Secretariat of the Council
to:	Delegations
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Subject:	Draft Council conclusions on literacy

Further to the discussions on literacy held during the Education Committee's meeting on 9 October 2012, delegations will find attached a revised set of draft conclusions on the subject, which the Presidency has prepared for consideration at the Committee's next meeting on 25-26 October 2012.

Bold type and [...] are used to indicate changes to the previous text.

Council conclusions on literacy

HAVING REGARD TO

1. The Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ("ET 2020")¹, which set the goal of diminishing the share of low achievers in basic skills (reading literacy, mathematics and science) to 15% by 2020.
2. The Council Resolution of 20 December 2011 on a renewed European agenda for adult learning², which aims to improve adult literacy and numeracy levels and to broaden learning provision for low-skilled Europeans.
3. [...]

AND RECALLING IN PARTICULAR

The Council conclusions of 19 November 2010 on increasing the level of basic skills in the context of European cooperation on schools for the 21st century³, which reaffirmed Member States' commitment in the context of their reform efforts to address curriculum design and the promotion of literacy across the curriculum, particularly in secondary education; to foster reading motivation, particularly among boys; to **examine the influence of new technologies on children's reading in order to exploit the potential of such technologies for new forms of learning**; to provide more support for struggling readers and pupils with a migrant background; to strengthen teacher education related to the acquisition of reading literacy, and to reinforce school ethos.

¹ OJ C 119, 28.5.2009, pp. 2-10.

² OJ C 372, 20.12.2011, pp. 1-6.

³ OJ C 323, 30.11.2010, pp. 11-14

DEFINING

Literacy as encompassing both reading and writing competences **for understanding, using and critically evaluating different forms of information, including written, printed, electronic texts and images, and covering** baseline, functional and multiple literacy⁴.

WELCOMING

The report of the EU High Level Group of experts on literacy⁵, which sets out the main evidence on the state of literacy performance in the EU and calls for action in order to improve literacy levels across the Union.

IN THE LIGHT OF

The Presidency conference “Literacy for All” held in Nicosia on 5-6 September 2012, at which the findings of the High Level Group report were first presented,

and the informal ministerial meeting held in Nicosia on 4-5 October 2012, at which literacy issues were discussed by EU Education Ministers.

⁴ Baseline literacy: Having the knowledge of letters, words and text structures that is needed to read and write at a level that enables self-confidence and motivation for further development.
Functional literacy: The ability to read and write at a level that enables someone to develop and function in society, at home, at school and at work.
Multiple literacy: The ability to use reading and writing skills in order to produce, understand, interpret and critically evaluate written information. It is a basis for digital participation and making informed choices pertaining to finances, health, etc.

⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/education/literacy/what-eu/high-level-group/documents/literacy-final-report_en.pdf

NOTING THAT

1. Literacy is a crucial life competence which empowers the individual citizen to develop capacities of reflection, critical thinking and empathy, boosting personal development, self-confidence, a sense of identity and full participation in a digital and knowledge society.
2. Low literacy levels hold back economic growth and reduce its sustainability. The **economic** benefits to Member States [...] of reaching the EU's target of reducing the low performance in reading of 15-year-olds to below 15% can potentially amount to billions of euro⁶.
3. Levels of literacy remain stagnant in most European countries and no less than 1.1 million 15-year-olds (i.e. one in five) have inadequate literacy levels⁷.
4. Literacy is the gateway to all further learning. Addressing low literacy levels is an effective way to combat the root causes of early school leaving, unemployment and limited participation in lifelong learning for the low-skilled.
5. Increasing digitisation requires ever higher standards of literacy, including the ability to assess texts critically, to deal with multiple forms of text, to decode images and to compare and integrate disparate pieces of information. In addition, social media networks have raised the importance and visibility of writing literacy.

⁶ Parsons and Bynner, 2007; Hanushek, Eric and Woessmann, Ludger (2011) The Cost of Low Educational Achievement in the European Union, EENEE Analytical Report No. 7, http://www.eenee.de/doc/cost_of_low_achievement.pdf

⁷ Inadequate literacy levels means reading skills at level 1 or below in PISA, which equate to the ability to use the most basic reading skills such as decoding words and writing simple phrases. Students at this level lack the ability to compare, contrast, categorise, integrate or evaluate information, to deal with long, complex, competing or unfamiliar texts, to make inferences, hypotheses or to approach a text critically.

6. A considerable gap in learning outcomes exists in all European countries between socio-economically advantaged and disadvantaged pupils. In many EU countries pupils in the bottom quartile of social status lag more than two or even three years behind students coming from the top quartile, while in a few countries disadvantaged students tend to be considered as functional illiterates by the age of 15.
7. There is a significant and widening gap between boys' and girls' performance in reading as measured at age 15, equivalent to around one year between them, the underlying cause of which is motivational.
8. [...]
9. [...] **In the field of** vocational education and training, there is often insufficient support [...] for improving basic skills and for understanding the importance of literacy in relation to work skills.

AGREES THAT

1. Literacy is not solely an educational issue, but also a personal, economic, **cultural** and social one. Accordingly, and in order to create broad ownership, a range of players in society - **including businesses, media, NGOs, social partners, cultural institutions, as well as social, employment and health services at local level** - need to be involved in any initiatives to improve literacy levels.

2. Creating a literate environment to promote reading and to improve literacy performance requires increased availability of diverse reading materials, for instance in libraries and media centres, **but also in unconventional locations such as shopping centres or railway stations**, as well as at home, and more support for families from a very early age. Parental awareness needs to be raised of the issue and of the crucial role which parents can play in improving children's literacy skills and supporting motivation and engagement with reading, both in early childhood and throughout a child's schooling.
3. It is urgent to increase the effectiveness of measures taken within Member States and at EU level with the aim of improving literacy among children and adults, in particular those with socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. There is much evidence to show that family literacy programmes are cost-efficient and highly effective⁸.
4. [...] Participation in [...] high quality early childhood education and care which provides play-based language development and stimulation **managed by qualified staff** is essential for reducing socio-economic gaps.
5. Improving the competences of early childhood education and care and primary teachers **in conducting rich interactions with children, and in detecting** and addressing [...] language and learning difficulties, will ensure earlier diagnosis and intervention and more effective learning support for struggling readers.
6. Ensuring that all primary school teachers have specific pedagogical competences in **the** teaching of reading and writing and in the pedagogical use of ICT, as well as promoting the provision of specialised reading teachers as resources for other teachers, will help to provide a sound basis for all pupils, while supporting teachers in secondary schools to teach literacy across all subjects will help to consolidate and achieve further progress.

⁸ Source: Carpentieri, J., Fairfax-Cholmeley, K., Litster, J., Vorhaus, J. (2011) **Family literacy in Europe: using parental support initiatives to enhance early literacy development**. London: NRDC, Institute of Education.

7. The impact of new technologies on literacy has not been fully exploited by education systems. Reviewing learning materials and methods in the light of increasing digitisation, and supporting teachers in the use of new pedagogies **can** reinforce the motivation of learners.
8. Language and literacy screening for newly arrived migrant children and adults in [...] the language(s) of the country of residence should be encouraged, along with more individualised support for such groups.
9. A more coherent literacy curriculum, including mainstreaming literacy across the school curriculum and developing an adult literacy curriculum, should be supported by distinct age-related standards and assessment tools, together with effective quality assurance.
10. Monitoring skills levels in the adult population and engaging businesses, media, NGOs, social partners, **cultural institutions**, as well as social, employment and health services at local level, **should form the basis for strategies aimed at increasing** awareness of literacy problems in society as a whole.
11. Diversifying and improving the quality of adult literacy provision requires tailored pedagogical training for adult literacy teachers; a curriculum closely linked to work-relevant skills and supported by appropriate materials; adequate length and intensity of courses; ICT support and assessment methods.

ACCORDINGLY INVITES MEMBER STATES TO

1. [...] ⁹
2. **Strengthen the evidence base through** monitoring and data collection, **making maximum use of existing resources** [...] ¹⁰.

⁹ Merged with paragraph 2a.

¹⁰ Paragraph 2 split in two = new 2 and 2a.

- 2a. **Develop [...]** national approaches to literacy that combine specific contributions from all relevant actors and organisations and authorities, educational and non-educational, as part of broader skills strategies; **and strengthen cooperation** on literacy **initiatives** between local, regional and national authorities, social partners and teachers' and parents' representatives.
3. **Encourage the adoption of** broadly based awareness-raising measures in order to keep the literacy issue in the public eye, including at the workplace, and to break the taboo of poor literacy skills at all ages, **especially** among adults. **In particular, employers should be made more aware** of the motivational and economic gains of improving the literacy skills of their employees, and encouraged [...] to take appropriate action¹¹.
4. **Promote the development and implementation of** family literacy programmes in order to involve and empower parents to improve the literacy skills of their children [...].
5. [...]¹²
6. Promote generalised equitable access to high quality early childhood education and care as an essential contribution towards reducing socio-economic gaps.
7. **Keep** learning materials and methods **under review** in the light of [...] increasing [...] digitisation, in order to support learner motivation, and make greater use of non-formal learning resources. **Encourage** industry to develop software for schools, in order to help teachers devise new approaches to improving literacy.
- 7a. Develop clear guidelines on the competences teachers need in order to teach reading and writing, **both in schools and to adult learners**¹³.

¹¹ Second sentence formerly paragraph 5.

¹² Merged with paragraph 3.

¹³ Formerly paragraph 9, amended.

8. Ensure that all teachers have appropriate knowledge of the theoretical foundations of literacy learning and teaching, **so as to enable them** to detect and deal with their pupils' reading and writing difficulties; and **promote the availability of** the expertise and support of specialised teachers [...].
9. [...] ¹⁴
10. [...] ¹⁵

INVITES THE MEMBER STATES AND THE COMMISSION TO

1. Report [...] on the impact of their actions to improve literacy levels at all ages **in the next Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ("ET2020")** in 2015.
2. Ensure, **for Member States with relevant country-specific recommendations**, that literacy issues are adequately covered in the national reform programmes, the global and country-specific analysis and the peer reviews as part of the European and National Semesters within the Europe 2020 process.

INVITES THE COMMISSION TO

1. Support European cooperation on literacy issues, notably through the establishment of a **European** network of [...] organisations working in this field in the Member States, with a view to promoting transnational cooperation and **supporting** the development of national literacy policies; and organise [...], together with **interested** Member States, a *Europe Loves Reading* week aimed at raising public awareness of literacy issues across the EU.

¹⁴ Moved to new paragraph 7a.

¹⁵ Moved to the next section, paragraph 1.

2. Propose in 2013 a policy framework on basic skills, outlining effective policies for reducing the share of low achievers¹⁶ in literacy, mathematics and science across the entire lifelong learning spectrum. Emphasise both reading and writing **skills** within this framework.
3. Ensure that Commission initiatives on ICT in education as well as in the youth field, fully address the challenges and opportunities of digitisation and new technologies in relation to literacy.
4. Facilitate the identification, analysis and sharing of good practices on policy initiatives to improve literacy performance by all appropriate means, including the instruments available under the open method of coordination and the new literacy page on the Europa website¹⁷.
5. Use all the relevant actions of the current Lifelong Learning Programme and the future EU programme in education and training, as well as the resources of the European Social Fund, to support and disseminate innovative approaches to improving literacy attainment across the EU, and to reinforce the evidence base for future policy making. Under the future EU education and training programme, support more strategic and cross-sectoral actions on literacy, in order to stimulate innovation and improve the effectiveness of policy measures.
6. Use the periodical Education **and Training** Monitor to provide comparative data and analysis on progress towards the "ET 2020" benchmark on basic skills and to reinforce the evidence base for policy making on literacy [...].
7. Use the new framework for cooperation with the OECD¹⁸ in the field of education to strengthen the availability of national monitoring and data collection.

¹⁶ "Low achievers" means students who perform at level 1 or below in PISA.

¹⁷ http://ec.europa.eu/education/literacy/index_en.htm

¹⁸ The right of participation **and representation** of all Member States in the work of this organisation should be ensured.