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**DIRECTORATE FOR EDUCATION
EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

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Meeting of the Education Committee at Ministerial Level

CHAIR ON CONSULTATIONS WITH BIAC AND TUAC

18-19 March 2004, Dublin Castle, Ireland

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CHAIR ON CONSULTATIONS WITH BIAC AND TUAC

Introduction

- BIAC and TUAC prepared detailed written submissions in response to the *Issues Paper*. We thank both organisations for those contributions and commend them to Ministers.
- Consultations on Thursday afternoon provided a further opportunity for BIAC and TUAC to comment on the policy issues to be discussed by Ministers.
- It was encouraging to see a large number of participants from each organisation, which indicates a high level of interest in the Ministerial discussions. The consultations showed points of agreement as well as points of debate.

Theme 1: Raising Performance Levels for All

Points of agreement

Both BIAC and TUAC:

- Stressed the importance of providing a strong foundation of general education, the need to develop competencies well beyond academic performance as well as the relevance of lifelong learning for all, beginning with early childhood education and care.
- Underlined the need to strengthen the authority and capacity of schools to respond to the rapidly changing needs of societies, within national frameworks of national curricula and standards, but emphasised that such autonomy would need to be based on knowledge-rich and research-based learning environments as well as trust by the different stakeholders in the teaching profession.
- Underlined the importance of developing support systems for schools and teachers and improving links and partnerships between education and other sectors of society.
- Accepted that BIAC and TUAC share a responsibility for creating a culture of valuing education and strengthening the involvement of society, including the business sector, in education matters and the education system.

Points of debate

- BIAC pointed to weak observed linkages between aggregate inputs and outcomes of education systems, suggesting that money alone does not guarantee quality and emphasising the need to improve efficiencies. TUAC considered that a perceived gap between the declaration of intentions and the actual allocation of financial and other resources posed major barriers for achieving quality learning for all. TUAC encouraged education ministers to be more assertive in ensuring that the necessary investments in education are made.

- While supporting standards-based reform as a means of raising the quality of learning outcomes, TUAC raised concerns about issues of implementation. In particular, TUAC suggested that standards, high stakes tests and related instruments that are merely imposed on schools will not be sufficient to help students to learn better, teachers to teach better and schools to be more effective. Success would largely depend on whether the process of developing and implementing standards becomes an open process of learning and participation by all stakeholders – representatives of both BIAC and TUAC commended practices in Ireland in this regard – and on whether educational reform succeeds in strengthening the capacity of schools and teachers to reach standards and to address equity-related concerns. TUAC also raised questions about the quality of the instruments that are currently used for high stakes assessment purposes, suggesting that their effect may often result in a narrowing of standards and curricula.
- BIAC and TUAC gave different emphases to the economic and social goals of education. BIAC stressed the need for education systems to be more responsive to changes in skill demands in the business sector. TUAC emphasised the need to develop well-rounded citizens, that learning and academic performance are related but not synonymous and that the goals and purposes of education would need to be established prior to the formulation of standards.

Theme 2: Improving Teacher Supply and Effectiveness

Points of agreement

Both BIAC and TUAC emphasised:

- the critical importance of raising the quality of learning for all;
- the need for greater school autonomy within a framework of quality control and agreed standards;
- the need to stimulate teachers' on-going professional development and lift the status of teaching; and
- the need for teachers to be actively involved with other education stakeholders in the processes of school reform and improvement.

Points of debate

BIAC emphasised that:

- Schools should become “learning organisations” with greater flexibility in responding to students needs, and a deep commitment to continuous quality improvement.
- Schools should have the power to recruit their own teachers, and to use methods of work organisation, teacher evaluation, teacher reward and professional development that meet individual school needs.
- Employers are willing to work closely with governments, schools and teachers in clarifying the goals for education, and in sharing expertise.

TUAC emphasised that:

- Achieving the widely-shared goals of lifting educational quality requires significant investment in school education, including in improving teachers' working conditions and their on-going development. Education Ministers need to be more assertive in making the case for greater investment.
- In a number of countries the processes and objectives of policy reform have impacted negatively on the status of teaching, and added to teachers' workload in counter-productive ways. High-quality teachers will not be retained in top-down, bureaucratic environments.
- There is a danger of over-reliance on narrow measures of students' and teachers' performance. Evaluation of performance needs to reflect the broad purposes of education and be tailored to school and student needs and circumstances.
- Governments need to develop national action plans for improving teacher supply and effectiveness in close co-operation all the stakeholders in education, including teachers, parents and industry.