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EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

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Meeting of the Education Committee at Ministerial Level

THEME 2: IMPROVING TEACHER SUPPLY AND EFFECTIVENESS

SUB-THEME: IMPROVING TEACHER SUPPLY

Lead Speaker - Denmark

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Contact:
Ms Ulla Tornaes, Minister of Education, Denmark
Tel.: + 45 33 92 50 00 ; e-mail: ulla.tornaes@uvm.dk

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Improving Teacher Supply

Thank you Mr. Chair and also thank you to the Education Directorate of the OECD for giving me this opportunity to talk to you about matters of my deepest interest and concern.

Quality of education

Quality of education has been on the political agenda for as long as I can remember – and rightly so. Like all other OECD-countries, Denmark is willing to spend money on education – as a matter of fact we spend quite a lot - between 8 and 9 % of our GNP; but we want to be able to show a return for our outlay - we monitor outcomes, and we encourage research and development.

Teacher supply and teacher recruitment

Today, I have been asked to address the issue of teacher supply, and I shall do so by referring to the changes in teacher education and teacher recruitment that are taking place in my own country.

Our willingness to allocate ample resources to education is based on our conviction that education is fundamental to economic growth and to the development of our civilization. But without well-educated and committed teachers growth and development could not happen.

Teachers influence children in their formative years, and not only do they have a lasting influence on what is learnt, teachers also have a profound influence on young people's attitudes to learning, and on their skills and motivation for lifelong learning.

Making the teaching profession more attractive

To me, what seems most important at the present stage, is to ensure that able young people want to enter the teaching profession and to enrich it by bringing with them skills, attitudes and experiences learnt during their education and – perhaps not least – from other jobs. We need to create more flexible paths into teaching and we need to make the teaching-profession attractive for people with different backgrounds. We need to attract groups of teachers who more closely mirror society in all its complexity.

Society expects schools to be sensitive to cultural issues; we expect schools to be able to educate all, regardless of background. Schools need to promote tolerance and social cohesion, they need to respond to disadvantaged children, and they need to prepare the children to be self-directed learners.

No country can afford to leave anyone behind – and I am not just talking economics.

All this is far from easy, and I know that teachers feel the strain. In Denmark, we saw recruitment into the profession dropping, and we saw the beginning of a vicious circle. It was easy to imagine what could happen:

Lack of teachers would mean more stress and more demands on individual teachers; that again would be certain to lower quality and to lower standards, and the circle would be complete.

On top of all this, the teaching population is becoming rather elderly; we urgently need to attract young - and perhaps not so young people - who could make a difference to schools and to the entire field of education.

A different road into the teaching profession

A few years ago - and bearing in mind all these very good reasons I have already mentioned - we decided to break the vicious circle by offering people with other educational backgrounds places at colleges of education. And most importantly, we took into account their backgrounds, making it possible for them to finish their teacher training within a year or two. Many of them work as substitute teachers for a few days a week while they attend college.

As a result, recruitment soared – so much so that we have had to monitor the total student intake in order to create better balance between the number of students educated in the ordinary manner, and students educated within the new programme.

But still, the programme is a success. Colleges tell me that the - often mature - students have a very good influence on their younger fellow students. Mature students are very goal-oriented, and they develop into very good teachers who bring to the profession a breath of fresh air.

But more is needed to make sure that the teaching profession is held in high regard by society as such. A means to that end is to make sure that the profession can attract able and skilled young people.

I should like to take this opportunity to mention an initiative just taken in my own country. Very shortly, The Danish Government will be publishing a white paper proposing some necessary changes in initial teacher training. Most importantly, focus will be on the two main subjects in Danish schools, Danish and mathematics, and more emphasis will be put on the natural sciences.

The proposals are aimed at raising the quality of teacher education by demanding a bit more from young people entering the profession. By doing so, we send a clear message: Good teachers are invaluable for ensuring quality in the educational system.

Initiatives and incentives

Some initiatives have to be taken at governmental level, and I have just outlined one initiative taken by my own country. But – even though I regret to have to say this - Governments can only do so much. Local authorities directly responsible for the hiring of teachers must find incentives at local level. Otherwise, they will be unable to recruit and retain teachers.

Many local authorities have already understood this, and I have heard of incentives such as:

- Higher wages for young teachers at the beginning of their careers
- Extra pay for specific qualifications
- Help in finding proper accommodation; houses in many of our cities are prohibitively expensive for young professionals
- Fully paid in-service training opportunities
- Extra time allocated to preparation for schoolwork in groups.

I am certain you can all think of other incentives. By introducing the subject I wish to send the message that we are all – at local level, at national level, and at supranational level – responsible for creating the best possible environments for present and future teachers.

The future?

Perhaps the next step forward would be the introduction of pay for particularly enthusiastic teachers who never stop doing experimental work.

And perhaps that would attract a larger number of male teachers? Because, let's face it, for some reason women are attracted by job-satisfaction, men by decent salaries and job-satisfaction – perhaps even in that order.

And perhaps more equal numbers in regard to male and female staff would make the workplace even more attractive.

Finally I would like to express my hope for an open and fruitful discussion this afternoon. In my short speech I have been unable to address all the relevant aspects of the important issues related to the theme that we are about to debate. The issues paper distributed by the OECD adds relevant topics for debate and provides an excellent overview. And yet there might still be relevant matters or approaches that remain uncovered. So I am looking forward to a debate that I hope we all can learn from.

Thank you for your attention!