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Att: Anne-Marie Falktoft

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### Response to the Commission Consultation on Quality and Accessibility of Childcare

DLI welcomes the consultation paper from the European Commission on “Reconciliation of professional, private and family life, including on the quality and accessibility of childcare”. This is a matter of extremely importance to the teaching profession throughout Europe. For one as a matter of reconciling teaching and family life and secondly to assure that children in the European member states have access to service of high quality combining care with education. But it must be underlined that “childcare” also is a matter of public social welfare.

The Commission asks for views on how to increase the “availability, affordability, accessibility and quality of childcare” and make reference to the targets of provision of childcare from the European Council in Barcelona 2002.

Before giving replies to the raised questions DLI draws attention to the concept of “childcare” to remind of the work done by the former European Network on Childcare (1986-96) led by Professor Peter Moss as well as of the 2 reports by the OECD: Starting Strong (2001, 2006). As well the report of the European Network as the two OECD reports give good answers to many of the questions that can be raised about the quality and contents of childcare.

From the viewpoint of DLI childcare should be seen as the composite of both “care” and “education” and thus not split up as seen in some European countries. The structure and organisation of childcare varies, but should always include both aspects and must be established as a comprehensive service no matter whether “childcare” is administered by social, public welfare or educational authorities.

“Childcare” would profit from being defined by the term of “education and care for young children” thus recognizing all aspects of the need for the child to be cared, nurtured *and* having all opportunities to develop - being socialised and learn in a safe environment. It might be organised as independent services or connected to schools. But early childcare must always be defined by its own aims, methods, principles, values and by an approach

DLI repræsenterer:  
- BUPL  
- Danmarks Lærerforening  
- Dansk Magisterforening  
- Dansk Teknisk Lærerforbund  
- Danske Produktionshøjskole Lærerforening  
- Efterskolernes Lærerforening  
- Formidlerne  
- Frie Grundskole Lærerforening  
- Gymnasieskolernes Lærerforening  
- Handelsskolernes Lærerforening  
- Københavns Lærerforening  
- Landsforbundet af Voksen og Ungdomsundervisere  
- Socialpædagogernes Landsforbund  
- Speciallærerforeningen af 1981

depending on the characteristics of young children's needs and development.

Especially it's decisive that the education and care of young children acknowledge the role of children's play, free time, fantasy and creativity on one hand, because this is the very foundation for developing innovative competencies and social competencies, and on the other hand it must be acknowledged that services for young children is the basic for developing in a safe and caring environment.

Finally DLI draws the attention to the Commissions communication from September 2006 on "Efficiency and equity in European education and training systems" (12677/06) which underlines that service for young children has the highest rates of return of the whole lifelong learning continuum. Early learning is to be understood as an investment for the member states, but programmes for young children should not be reduced only to learning but must also include personal and social competences as such comprehensive programmes produce better outcomes.

#### Comments on the Consultation paper.

On page 5 there's a section talking about "Childcare and care facilities for other dependants". The Commission should be strongly recommended to separate "childcare" from caring of the elderly etc. With the understanding of childcare as both education and care, services for children should not be a facility like caring for the elderly. We recognise that "childcare" functions also as a *service* for families – the same could be said about younger pupils at school – they are too looked after when at school, but there must be a strong and precise distinction between the services offered to young children and elderly people.

DLI welcomes the intention of the Commission to propose a Communication on availability, quality and affordability of childcare next year. We propose that the Commission should extend the term childcare to "education and care for young children".

The Danish trade union "The Danish National Federation of Early Childhood Teachers and Youth Educators, BUPL" offers its cooperation, experiences and knowledge in this field when the Commission is going to prepare the Communication.

As for the questions on "availability, affordability, accessibility and quality of childcare" DLI has the following comments.

DLI underlines that "*availability*" should be the responsibility of public authorities and not left to private enterprise. Especially when it comes to the age group below 3 years it's necessary that services are established and run by public authorities in order to insure high quality. Also for this age professional, well trained staff is a must.

*Affordability* should be connected to the view of the Commission in the Communication on Efficiency and Equity from September 2006, where it is underlined that high quality early childhood care is an investment in the future of Europe and thus should not be seen as an expenditure. In principle services for young children should be offered free of charge or fees for parents, i.e. on the same conditions as for attending school.

All young children no matter their age, sex, religious background etc. should have an individual right to attend a service of education and care. *Accessibility* is also to ensure that children in rural districts are offered public services.

*Quality* might be the most important issue of education and care for young children. First of all it's a matter of having well-trained staff - i.e. educators/teachers/pedagogues educated at tertiary level like other professional groups in the field of education. Documented by many research reports this is the foremost single element of securing high quality.

In addition quality requires good working conditions for the professionals with the necessary time for preparing, reflecting on and evaluating the education and care for young children.

Salaries etc. should be at the same level as for other professionals in the educational system.

Increased investment in research is needed in this field as well as economic support for peer learning activities at both national and European level. DLI very much recommends that the Commission initiates PLA's in the field of early childhood education. It is indeed of interest to try to map out which competencies young children can and may develop when offered a high quality day-care.

The pedagogical content of the education and care of young children should be a matter of autonomy of the profession and also related to other educational services and needs in the European societies.

As mentioned above the Danish Federation of Early Childhood Teachers would appreciate to be involved in the work of the Commission (and/or ETUCE!) on these matters as a social partner and as a first step a paper from BUPL on the roles and tasks of pedagogues is enclosed. The paper express' the understanding of education and care for young children and the need for a professional approach.

Yours sincerely

Med venlig hilsen

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Birgitte Birkvad". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial 'B'.

Birgitte Birkvad  
DLI Bruxelles