

LA GOUVERNANCE ET LA PERFORMANCE DES ÉTABLISSEMENTS SCOLAIRES EN EUROPE Poitiers. 6 et 7 novembre 2008



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European Conference

"School governance and performance"

6 - 7 November 2008, Futuroscope - Poitiers, France



A "key" conference

any superlatives have been used to describe the importance of the European conference on school governance held at the Futuroscope in Poitiers on 6 - 7 November 2008, with French Minister for Education Xavier Darcos calling it *"the most important conference of all"* and MEP Elisabeth Morin terming it *"a key seminar"*.

The event, which was organised as part of the French Presidency of the European Union by the Ministry for Education and the French National College for Education Management or ESEN (*École supérieure de l'Éducation nationale*), attracted almost 300 participants. Among those present were European education-system managers and international education experts, and common questions addressed included: "Does school autonomy, which has been implemented to various degrees in EU countries, help enhance pupils' performance?", "Is there a right mode of governance for educational systems?" and "What can be learnt in this respect from the experience across Europe?"

The high quality of the conference's scientific and intellectual content did not prevent attendees from taking some time out to relax, whether by enjoying the attractions of the Futuroscope leisure park or attending the gala evening, which also took place on the site.

ESEN director Pierre Polivka and Poitiers académie education head (recteur) Frédéric Cadet were particularly happy to be able to host the conference and contribute to its success. "The conference theme ties in fully with our school's very purpose - developing, steering and implementing training courses for education-sector managers," said Mr Polivka. Mr Cadet said that the theme was "particularly topical", at a time when the education authority (académie) was designing its plan and objectives contracts were being drawn up with schools.

Debate focused extensively on the key notions of governance, autonomy and performance, which were analysed by European experts. Most importantly, the two-day event gave participants an opportunity to share their experiences and conduct a comparative analysis of the benefits of various education policies across Europe.

The conference clearly showed that a common European education culture is coming into being. While top-down autonomy has been successful to a greater or lesser extent, the success of this development will ultimately depend on the ability of the learning community – i.e. parents, pupils and teachers – to endorse new modes of governance. They will need to advance towards common goals, using a common language. In this context, the quality of the *"shared leadership"* exercised by school

heads will be decisive. Over and above the notion of autonomy as a steering mode or an administrative structure, this will be the path to the future of the educational system in Europe.

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Xavier Darcos: schools need greater autonomy



s he stated during his opening speech at the European conference - which he said was "undoubtedly the most important" event organised as part of the French Presidency of the European Union - Xavier Darcos firmly believes that "where autonomy is concerned, real room for manoeuvre cannot be handed down by decree - it must be developed".

The minister spoke out clearly in favour of school autonomy, saying "Schools need greater autonomy. I firmly believe that more must be done and that this autonomy has not yet been developed to the full". He also stated that "The education system cannot be properly examined if the idea of school governance is not taken into account".

The autonomy that Mr Darcos is calling for is, first and foremost, "pedagogical" in nature, and must "enable school heads to choose strategies that help pupils to succeed, and to enter into contracts with local authorities". "While curricula and the overall structure of learning must remain national, schools must be allowed to adapt to their local environment and restrictions," while preserving "teachers' pedagogical freedom".

What is good governance?

The minister spelt out his vision of good governance: "Good governance is governance that makes bbetter performance and a more autonomous system possible". The lycée (higher secondary school) reform, which "allows schools room to implement appropriate policies for their pupils" and the primary-school reform, "which enables schools to manage the two hours of remedial teaching in a way that fits local needs" both meet that requirement.

Although he said that these recent reforms have made for greater autonomy, Mr Darcos openly admitted that progress still needs to be made in terms of steering modes and governance in France. He did, however, mention a number of French *"initiatives"* designed to enhance schools' autonomy - among them the so-called *"Fillon Law"* of 23 April 2005, *"which made experimental pedagogy possible"*, and the réseaux ambition réussite (networks for success), which allowed for a *"diversified governance system"* in *collèges* (lower secondary schools).

EPEPs: "We're going to do it"

Attendees also heard Mr Darcos speak out for the first time in favour of the creation of more autonomous primary-

school entities known as "public-sector primary-education establishments" or EPEPs (établissements publics d'enseignement primaire). "I'm in favour - and we're going to do it - of having our primary schools, which don't currently have any special legal status, group together to form little public-sector establishments," he said, adding that they can then "pool their resources and define common strategies".







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Governance and autonomy: an attempt at definition



John MacBeath

overnance, performance and autonomy: how should these three concepts be understood, and what is the reality behind them? The inaugural sessions of the conference on governance explored avenues for discussions, paving the way for a clearer understanding. For a full morning, European researchers - John MacBeath (Cambridge University), Joao Barroso (Professor at the University of Educational Sciences in Lisbon) and Walo Hutmacher (former president of the Foundation of the European Regions for Research in Education and Training, Switzerland) compared their visions of modes of governance and school autonomy.

What governance are we talking about?

Joao Barroso pointed out that the word "governance" conjures up somewhat different images from one European language to another, saying that it is the "political nature" of the concept, rather than the "polysemy" that matters. Mr Barroso cited Philippe Moreau Desfarge, defining governance as "the expression of a quest for a depoliticised policy".

The researcher contrasted two visions of governance an idyllic vision in which governance frees society of conflict and community differences, and a negative vision of an *"ideological tool serving a neoliberal policy"*. He stated that governance is based on ongoing dialogue and on the sharing of resources. It is neither the invisible hand of the market nor the *"iron fist in a velvet glove"* associated with state coordination. Moreover, if the shape of school autonomy is so different from one

Joao Barroso



country to another, this is because it is imposed politically. There is something "paradoxical" in the idea of ordering someone to be autonomous. Mr Barroso concluded by saying "school autonomy is like Santa Claus - everyone knows it doesn't exist, but people pretend to believe in it". Above all, school autonomy requires "recognition for the individuals that make it a reality" and "a more political role for school heads".

Political and school timeframes

According to John MacBeath, the key to striking the right balance between autonomy, performance and State intervention, is simply to listen to the players. "Governments are impatient. They want quick fixes, but things don't work like that!" he said. The interface between the micro-political and the macro-political is very important, and "if it's bureaucratic, improvement won't come about". "Governments must do some grass-roots listening. We must create schools that are learning communities, but it takes four or five years to build a community of learners". The key to reaching this objective is to achieve dialogue between the learning community, local authorities and the government. "Government can learn!" said Prof MacBeath.

On the path towards autonomy, one notes tension between two radically-different timeframes - that of the school and that of politics. Joao Barroso reminded attendees that "school is like slow food". John MacBeath added that politicians react to the media pressures. They had, for example, reacted to media reports on the PISA study, rather than to its actual findings. "The media are responsible for the instrumentalisation of PISA by politicians," he said.

"Schools are born dependent"

Swiss sociologist Walo Hutmacher placed the debate in its historical context, stating that education systems had, since the 19th century, been highly political, imposing single languages and national identities, transmitting the values of civility and teaching a reasoned conception of the world, which means that school is born dependent. Although education is the role of the State everywhere, its implementation is, of necessity, decentralised, and depends on individual teachers providing the same knowledge to their pupils in schools that are, theoretically, of equal quality. Until the early 1980s, therefore, modes of governance remained unchanged, and involved an increasing number of schools and classes. In most



François Perret

European countries, the 1990s saw a tendency towards devolution, with a focus on results, performance and cost cutting. Notwithstanding this, governments have not managed to reduce social inequalities as illustrated by disparities in success levels.

Teaching culture - an obstacle to the exercise of autonomy?

Mr Hutmacher nevertheless identified two obstacles to the implementation of these new modes of governance - the absence of strategy and of political communication as regards changing governance, and the heritage of the past: *"tradition has left us with a dependent teaching profession! It should be remembered! It's a culture! I've gone through the syllabus, so I've finished my work!"*

He concluded, however, that the opportunity costs of autonomy can also be measured in terms of the players' enthusiasm. Political strategies must be communicated rather than decreed.

Another, more French, obstacle is distrust of the notion of *"performance"*, which is associated with the corporate and sports arenas. According to François Perret, head of the French educational inspectorate (doyen de l'Inspection générale), this concept is poorly received by teachers, and the link between performance and governance is not *"univo-cal"*. The danger, according to Mr Perret, is that of widening the *"gap between managers who value performance, and teachers who are unfamiliar with the practices"*. Shared leadership, collaborative management, self-assessment and the setting-up of learning communities are all levers for the creation of a "common language" uniting two worlds that were often isolated from one another - that of the "steerers" and that of the teachers.

Mr Perret added that since the implementation of the Organic Law on Finance Laws or LOLF (Loi organique relative aux lois de finances), the performance of the French system has been measured using performance indicators. However *"it is regrettable that so few indicators relate to the control of pupils' skills"*. This is perhaps an example of the French *"schizophrenia"* mentioned by Mr Perret, which is characterised by tension between a "modern" managerial discourse that is strongly focused on performance and actual practice that is less so.

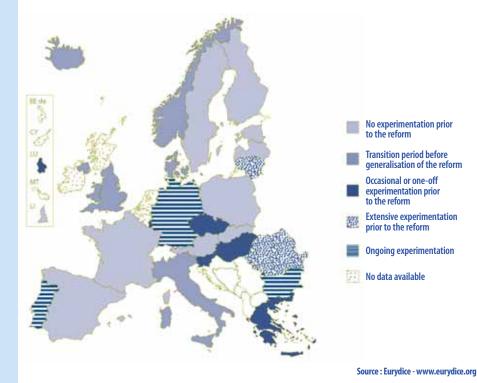


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School autonomy: a European overview



works", specific laws (as in Portugal and Luxembourg) or more flexible regulations (as in Italy). She stated that schools and teaching teams are therefore having autonomy forced upon them. Teachers are, however, consulted when it comes to reforming their status and working conditions, and they play a role in the decision-making process.

While the political processes differ little from one European country to another, the ways in which autonomy is implemented vary greatly. Autonomy covers a wide range of areas, from financial management to teacher recruitment to curriculum design. Its extent also varies, since it can be comprehensive or restricted to certain decisions. In Sweden, for example, local authorities can decide whether schools should be given autonomy. Unlike their French and Italian counterparts, UK school heads have a high degree of autonomy where teacher recruitment is concerned. Lastly, in most European countries, decisions regarding the use of public funds are made by school heads, who are advised by management committees.

More autonomy, but more pressure

Autonomy experiments at CITE 1 and CITE 2 levels (1985-2007)

s school autonomy comparable from one country to another? Arlette Delhaxhe, head of the study and analysis department at the Eurydice European Unit, has examined autonomyimplementation mechanisms in 30 European countries. She shows that, while the principle of autonomy is universally accepted in Europe, it takes very different forms depending on individual national contexts. During her contribution on the second day of the conference, Ms Delhaxhe provided a brief overview of education policies in Europe, casting light on the complexity and diversity of the modes of governance encountered.

"We have entered Act II of school autonomy"

School autonomy developed in the 1980s, and became generalised in the 1990s. Belgium and the Netherlands started early, with autonomous schools in the mid-20th century. In the 1980s, Spain and France began granting greater autonomy to schools, and were joined by the United Kingdom in 1988. In the 1990s came the turns of former Eastern-Bloc countries (the Baltic states), Northern Europe and Italy. Since 2000, other countries, such as Bulgaria and Lichtenstein have joined the movement. Ms Delhaxhe stated that we are now entering *"Act II of school autonomy"*. While this stage is characterised by

greater overall autonomy, we are seeing restrictions being placed on pedagogical autonomy. Examples can be seen in England, where *"curriculum flexibility"* is being restricted; in Belgium, where end-objectives are being set for pupils; and in Hungary, where *"education kits"* are being developed.

In Europe, the concept of autonomy has not always been understood in the same way. In the 19th century and for much of the 20th century, autonomy was linked to *"philosophical and religious considerations"*. In the 1980s, it was perceived as a participatory-democracy process, and, a decade later, it was seen as a way of ensuring *"efficient management of public funds"*. With the influence of PISA, the opening years of the 21st century had seen a focus on achieving "educational quality" through school autonomy.

Autonomy is almost always imposed politically

Arlette Delhaxhe has studied the political processes that lead to greater autonomy being granted to schools. Paradoxically, autonomy is almost always imposed from the top down, whether through *"national legal frame-* Concluding her overview of the situation in Europe, Arlette Delhaxhe noted that the granting of autonomy goes hand in hand with a tendency to shift more responsibility to schools, which are now *"held accountable"*. The 1990s saw a considerable increase in the use of national tests designed to measure pupils' progress, the generalisation of self-assessment, the formalisation of objectives contracts (as in France), and the principle of multiple responsibility - i.e. towards parents, local authorities and the inspection authority (Ofsted).

A two-pronged development is therefore under way in most European countries, with increasing school autonomy tied in with the development of assessment tools, the purpose being to ensure that objectives can be reached and results measured. *"We've gone from upstream assessment to downstream assessment, and the system is regulated in terms of the objectives to be reached,"* said Ms Delhaxhe. Similarly, we have gone from schooloriented collective assessment, to teacher-oriented individual assessment. She asked what performance is, and whether it means having a good atmosphere within a school or getting good PISA results. Summing up, she stated that it would appear difficult, in the light of the available studies, to establish a direct correlation between school autonomy and performance.



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The three challenges of governance: system performance, relations with partners and management of human resources

here were three workshops: "school governance and the roles of stakeholders (institutional, economic and social partners)", "school governance and performance" and "governance and human resources management". A summary report of each of these lively, concrete workshops was presented to attendees and discussed with the audience on the final day of the conference.

"No one seems to oppose the current development of autonomy in Europe".

Donald Lillistone, head of St Mary's College in the United Kingdom and rapporteur of the first workshop, made three observations:

- Different forms of autonomy - financial, administrative and pedagogical - coexist in Europe.

- Workshop no. 1 also highlighted the role played by parents as stakeholders in the autonomy process, something that was also underscored by European Parents' Association Vice-President Brigitte Haider, who was one of the workshop *"witnesses"*. Mr Lillistone, for his part, said that parents are a form of *"social capital"* for schools. - Mr Lillistone also took another look at the example of *"French-style"* governance, which was examined by Nantes académie education head (recteur) Gérald Chaix and which is characterised by *"State and local-authority regulation"* and partnerships. At the end of the workshop, the rapporteur noted that *"no one seems to oppose the current development of autonomy in Europe"*.

On the back of these remarks, Mr Lillistone put forward three questions to spark debate further: How can financial, pedagogical and administrative management be delegated more efficiently for greater fairness? How can parents' interests in the educational system be promoted, while taking account of the general interest and avoiding destabilisation of the system? How can leadership be developed for a better quality of education?

Four examples of assessment policies designed to enhance performance.

The second workshop looked at four educational systems - those of England, the Czech Republic, Italy and Germany - with a view to how schools' results culture could be developed.

The workshop *rapporteur*, Alexandre Ventura - who teaches at the University of Aveiro, in Portugal - noted that, in **England**, learning is focused almost exclusively on success in tests that are seen as complex and unreliable by parents and teachers alike.

In the **Czech Republic,** schools assess themselves, and the reports are made public and can be accessed by parents. Although the quality of the self-assessment is checked by the inspection service, schools need tools to help them improve the self-assessment process.

In **Italy**, school autonomy is theoretical, to say the least, and the authorities feel that schools are not properly prepared for it. They are not assessed, and teachers have a lot of (too much?) autonomy.

After experiencing a "PISA shock", **Germany** set up a national education agency. It also introduced national tests in order to compare pupils' performance, and a quality charter tailored to the needs of individual educational communities.

These four examples showed that, although the solutions and the pace of implementation differ significantly, countries share the same concerns in terms of governance and performance. In conclusion, Mr Ventura stated that *"performance is related to autonomy and responsibility"*. In this context, self-assessment could clearly serve as a lever to make the players responsible, and indicator readability was a key factor. One question remains: is teacher autonomy compatible with the development of collective assessment projects?

Human resources management: what companies teach us

The third workshop was unusual in that it compared inschool HR-management experiences in three countries - Finland, Romania and Tunisia - with an account by Françoise Andres, CEO of the Richard Laleu printing company. Ms Andres felt that the HR management challenges faced by schools are very similar to those of companies. Her story was instructive: in response to a fall-off in employee motivation, she set up eight-person teams, each steered by a *"tutor"* with no hierarchical relationship with the rest of the team. This system, which helps ensure that the team remains cohesive and tied to a common culture, has had a significant positive impact on productivity, showing that, over and above modes of administration and management, a common culture is one of the keys to the success of a school or company.



The *rapporteur* of the third workshop, Françoise Caillods - who is a Researcher in Education Economics at UNESCO - felt that the wide range of decentralisation in the area of human resources management in Europe is another key point. In Finland, for example, schools are managed by local authorities, who can delegate curriculum design, budgeting and personnel management to heads. Modes of governance can concern the choice of heads and the definition of their roles (e.g. whether or not they are to teach), change management (imposed on a top-down basis or decided in collaboration with the players), the choice between encouragement and regulation (Finnish teachers' pay depends on their results), and the development of quality indicators (quality audits, notably in Tunisia).

"Autonomy leads to high expectations in terms of improved performance," said Ms Caillods. However, it is essential to take a long-term approach to such reforms if resistance on the parts of teachers and trade unions is to be overcome. In terms of human resources management, greater autonomy must go hand in hand with reforms as regards recruitment and training of heads. This begs the question - one of a number raised during the workshop - of how nepotism and corruption could then be avoided.



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Autonomy, assessment and education quality: can a consensus be found concerning the "right" mode of governance?



From left to right: Dorothée Bauni, Jean-Pierre Boisivon, Alain Bouvier (member of the French higher council for education [Haut Conseil de l'éducation]), Bernard Hugonnier and Mark Bray

hy autonomy? At the close of the conference, that question was addressed by five European experts: Bernard Hugonnier, deputy-director of Education at the OECD; Mark Bray, director of the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning; Jean-Pierre Boisivon, professor emeritus at *Université d'Assas* and delegate general of Institut de l'entreprise; and Dorothée Bauni, a German education-authority inspector.

Shared leadership

Bernard Hugonnier said that leadership and assessment are indissociable from autonomy. PISA shows that the countries with good results are those in which schools are autonomous and enjoy real leadership. The OECD has four recommendations concerning school management: heads should receive training; the resources required for effective management should be made available; the profession should be made attractive; and management groups should be created to ensure that leadership is shared.

Jean-Pierre Boisivon added that, in a system where productivity depends on the activity of individuals - i.e. the teachers - performance is the responsibility of school heads. "The education ministry manages positions and procedures, rather than people! The teachers are not being managed, and that's a problem for them," he said.

If the heads are to be responsible for making the system a

success, tools are needed to oversee their work. This role could be filled by supervisory committees, whose members would include school employees, as well as parents who do not have children attending the school in question. "Supervisory powers must be vested in those who have a legitimate claim to them – parents and local elected representatives," concluded Mr Boisivon.

Controlled assessment

As a former director of French education ministry's assessment and long-range planning division or DEPP (Direction de l'évaluation et de la prospective du ministère de l'éducation nationale), Jean-Pierre Boisivon wondered how assessment should be used: "Assessment can be a substitute for market-type regulation, but what should be done with it? Should parents be informed? There's no escaping that question!"

Dorothée Bauni explained that, in Germany - where there is a "secret assessment" system - assessment is seen as a diagnostic tool enabling pedagogical quality to be improved. Her country would see a historic turning point this year, since, for the first time, the Länder have agreed on financing for a central institute in Berlin with responsibility for defining core skills to be acquired by all pupils. National tests would take place in March for interested Länder. The results, which would be kept secret but made available to teachers, would be used as a "basis for dialogue" within schools.

Continued discussions

At the close of the two-day conference, participants were of the opinion that it was preferable to conduct further discussions on the notion of autonomy, rather than to provide modular governance models to be used in different contexts. *"The PISA data must be used as a basis for consideration,"* said Mark Bray, who took on board Prof. Mac-Beath's opinion that performance or quality indicators are not so much assessment tools as *"bottle openers",* meaning that they do not so much encourage comparisons as feed discussions on current practices. From that standpoint, it is, more than ever, important that teachers endorse them.



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Conference snapshots



From left to right: Mark Bray and Bernard Hugonnier

"Autonomy" and "decentralisation": false friends

Autonomy does not necessarily mean decentralisation. Jean-Pierre Boisivon was of the opinion that a more autonomous arrangement would inevitably mean stronger central power, notably where strategic decisions are concerned, an example being the reform of the vocational baccalauréat or *"bac pro". "We need a strong central power structure when it comes to negotiating resources. To think that greater autonomy means less central power would be a serious mistake,"* he said. In a similar vein, Bernard Hugonnier said that decentralisation and better school performance do not always go hand in hand. He cited the example of the United States, a country that is *"highly decentralised, but where results are very poor".*



Swedish doubts

Greater autonomy does not necessarily bring better results for pupils. The Swedish example, explained by Per Thullberg is a case in point. After embarking on a radical decentralisation policy in the 1990s, Sweden saw pupils' results worsen, as was shown by the PISA tests. "Despite our policy of greater school autonomy, the quality of education deteriorated", said Mr Thullberg, who went on to ask: "Were we wrong to delegate greater powers to local authorities?" and "Can the state really renege on its responsibilities to children?". Thullberg, who is the director of the Swedish National Agency for Education, felt that Sweden did not provide teachers with sufficient support when the new policy was introduced. "The teachers interviewed did not play an active role in the change process. We did not manage to build dialogue with them concerning objectives, results and the quest for performance," he said.

Autonomy: a dissenting voice

Dorothée Bauni expressed surprise that "everyone here seems to think that autonomy must be a good thing!". Her remark called into question the conference theme itself, and the preconceived notion that autonomy is the right mode of governance, something of which Ms Bauni was far from convinced. She felt sure of one thing - even if a state of dependence can be a comfortable thing, autonomy cannot be imposed. She said that "it must, however, be accompanied by support", and that it is important to "get everyone on board... the entire learning community".

During the conference, the idea of autonomy both excited fears of *"corruption"* and *"nepotism"*, and drew consensus. As one participant remarked: "no one wants to stop the movement of autonomy". Ms Bauni asked what such a conference would have been like in 1998 or 1988, and whether it would even have been possible at the time. "It's difficult to strike the right balance!" she concluded.

The expansion of the private-tuition sector

In France, the private-tuition sector grosses \leq 470 million. Some 80% of Greek pupils receive private tuition. Mentioning these figures, Mark Bray expressed surprise at the fact that this issue had not been raised during the conference. *"Europe must look at this phenomenon before it's too late,"* he warned, suggesting that the role played by private tuition could be taken into account when education-system indicators and assessments are being managed. Jean-Pierre Boisivon remarked that *"We're moving more and more towards a so-called 'competitive' system. It's important to call a halt to this shift and to ensure that private tuition is factored in."*





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Developing cooperation in education

t the close of the conference on school governance in Europe, Adam Pokorny, Head of Unit at the European Commission Directorate General for Education and Culture, promised that *"the commission will take account of the ideas raised during this conference"*.

At the beginning of his address, he remarked that the Lisbon process has started a *"real revolution"* at European level. He said that education has become *"a crucial theme for social cohesion"* and that *"this is why member States' governments are focusing on education and looking into the idea of cooperation regarding schools".*

Mr Pokorny presented a Communication paper from the Commission concerning a European school cooperation programme.

The purpose of the programme is to prepare school systems for the knowledge-based Europe of the future. The planned actions are hinged upon three areas: - Ensure that all pupils acquire the skills that they will need in our knowledge-based society: improve literacy and numeracy skills; develop the capacity to "learn how to learn"; update curricula, teaching materials, teacher training and assessment methods.

- Give every pupil the benefit of high-quality teaching: generalise preschool teaching; make school systems fairer; reduce early school-leaving and provide additional support for pupils with special needs.

 Member States must also seek to improve the quality of teachers and other school employees. This means longer, better teacher training and more efficient recruitment of teachers. School heads should also focus on achieving improved learning.

These conclusions were adopted at a meeting of the European Council of Education ministers in Brussels on 21 November.



Adam Pokorny

Elisabeth Morin's roadmap

losing the two-day event, MEP Elisabeth Morin said: "Thanks to the French Presidency, we have had a key seminar on questions relating to performance and governance. It is clear that, at a time when Europe has to defend its position on a global scale, school policy is a core issue". She stated that, while there is no such thing as a single "right model of governance", the conference has shown that there is a "new spirit of work" based on the sharing of best prac-

tices, and "taking account of national specific features". "We are dealing with a range of very different systems, but we have common objectives. The Lisbon strategy is our objective and our horizon. It unites us in a forwardlooking vision and a focus on what we want from our education systems," she added. She said that the social and vocational integration of young people remains the core objective of education, adding: "The objectives defined for us go beyond schools themselves. They concern individual paths and lifelong learning. (...) the ultimate aim remains a higher-quality education for all".

In conclusion, Ms Morin presented a roadmap to participants, proposing that mobility of young people and education managers be developed, and that cooperation with local authorities and companies be enhanced, *"because the young people in our care have to be integrated into the world in which we live"*.

Elisabeth Morin



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