



# Seminar on 'Excellence in education'

Amsterdam, 21-22 May 2012

## Programme

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### 1 Central question

The concept of 'excellence' can be defined in many ways. It has to do with 'eminence' but it is also linked to quality insurance and quality control, to benchmarking of educational institutions or educational systems, to gaining efficiency in education and in learning. The central question of this seminar, however, is of another nature. It deals with the way education can develop, stimulate and intensify 'talents' of children and youngsters..

#### ***Excellence, a permanent concern in the work of EUNEC***

This seminar builds on the statements approved by EUNEC after the seminar held in May 2011 in Budapest on the concept of 'Bildung'. In society, there is a growing need for people that are 'motor of their own development'. Youngsters (and adults) have to be able to integrate in society supported by a sustainable general education.

This seminar is at the same time a follow up of the statements of the conference held in Lisbon in October 2011 on the theme of the modernization of vocational education and training, and on the new skills required for new jobs. EUNEC has explored how education can stimulate the technical and practical talents of youngsters. The current economical and financial challenges are emphasizing the urgency of this debate.

During the upcoming seminar in Amsterdam, May 2012, EUNEC continues its work in the same direction, deepening the question.

#### ***Central questions during the seminar in Amsterdam***

The seminar will focus on the way in which education can discover and stimulate the diverse talents of children.

A first question to be addressed is certainly the question which talents we are talking about. In the future, society will need excellent scientists able to shape futur societal changes, innovative artists designing new and creative approaches, philosophers with a critical view on the spirit of society,

technicians building the infrastructure for a sustainable economy. At the same time, society will need people that feel responsible for society, and act according to that responsibility. Excellence not only has to do with cognition and learning outcomes, but also with soft skills such as cooperation, responsibility, communicative skills and dialogue, creativity, metacognition.. Furthermore, citizens need to be able to question critically and permanently society and culture, and to think out of the box. The seminar will focus on cognitive aspects of training as well as on other aspects of the large concept of *Bildung*.

The objective is not only to discover which competences are important for an innovative and sustainable society, but also to look for ways to enhance the performance levels of pupils. How can education enhance the learning outcomes? How can the outcome of the learning process become more effective? Pupils, especially in their adolescence, tend to adapt to the average level. They feel the pressure of the group not to try to excell.

Another important subtheme of the seminar has to do with the question how education can stimulate youngsters to enhance their learning outcomes. How can education discover their talents, how can education stimulate the learning outcomes of pupils in several domains? The pupil, with his/her diverse talents, has to be the starting point. Talents of youngsters are very diverse, they develop and learn in different styles and at different rythms. Some children have a passion for the world of science and tecnhique, others for culture and art. Some children are challenged by abstract and theoretical thinking; others are rather 'shapers' and learn by doing. It is important to hold the debate with a focus on the enhancement of the learning motivation and the preparedness to learn of the children. The learning process will be in the picture, rather than the structures. In this respect, recent insights from brain research can have an impact on education.

This approach is not in contradiction with an equal opportunities approach. PISA results show that good education stimulates the talents of all youngsters. To put it in the words of diverse PISA reports: excellence and equity are two sides of the same coin. Offering equal opportunities starts from an emancipatory perspective and is based on high and challenging objectives for all pupils. During this seminar, EUNEC will thus also pay attention to the learning outcomes of those who have more difficulties at school. How to stimulate those pupils to obtain good results in several learning domains?

Next to the perspective of the pupils, we want to identify the critical conditions to realise those objectives.

A first crucial lever are good functioning and competent teachers. Without excellent teachers, a model of talent development and talent stimulation can never work. Pupils do better at school if they feel good, if they are challenged and yet experience a sense of safety. These conditions are strongly influenced by their relation with one or several teachers. The quality of the relationship between the pupil and the teachers (team) is a decisive factor for the functioning and the learning of pupils.

A second lever is the school culture and the school organization. How can a school build the pedagogical context in which pupils are challenged to learn and to develop, to be ambitious?



## Tuesday 22 May 2012

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| 08.30 – 09.00 h | Bike ride to the school  |
| 09.00 – 12.00 h | The link with the workflow: school visit. Participants will visit the <b>St Ignatius Gymnasium</b> in Amsterdam and will be welcomed by the rector, Ms Anita Swenneker. Exchange with teachers and pupils, and with representatives of the Bèta Techniek Platform and Bèta Partners. |
| 12.00 – 14.00 h | Bike ride and lunch  |
| 14.15 – 17.00 h | Executive committee meeting at the hotel (only for members of the executive committee)   |