ETUCE Policy Paper on Work-Related Stress

Submitted for adoption by the ETUCE Committee to the ETUCE Conference, the Regional Conference of Education International, meeting in Budapest on 26-28 November 2012, adopted on 27 November 2012

Psychosocial hazards, such as work-related stress, increasingly affect teachers’ health and wellbeing. Growing workload, bad work organisation, longer working hours, lack of control and autonomy at work, poor relationships with colleagues, a rising level of violence from pupils, parents and other third parties, and the lack of job stability and security are the main reasons for a rise in stress-related illnesses.

At international, European and national level work-related stress has been recognised as a concern for both employers and workers. Teachers are among those most affected by work-related stress. Education faces the consequences of the economic crisis and at the same time has to put up with the lack of vision and courage of policymakers. Education as a core investment for the future of Europe therefore has to become a key part again of the solution to the economic crisis.

Schools as the workplace of teachers and educational institutions for young students should be safe, healthy and propitious places for teaching and learning. Stress can be harmful not only for the teaching staff, but can harm pupils and put at risk the quality and efficiency of the education provided.

Based on the European social partners’ framework agreement on work-related stress, the European Framework Directive on Health and Safety and related European and national legislation, the ETUCE emphasises the legal obligation for employers to take action on preventing and reducing work-related stress, and in particular on the necessary steps for a suitable risk assessment at the

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workplace. Employers should consult staff and/ or their representatives and involve them to participate in all questions relating to safety and health at work. Risk assessment that involves staff is the most appropriate process to identify the hazards at the workplace of all teaching staff. Consequently, appropriate joint actions of education employers and teaching staff and/or their representatives will succeed in preventing, reducing and eliminating stress amongst teachers.

Against the background of the results of its European-wide assessment and evaluation of the impact of psychosocial hazards on teachers at their workplace, the ETUCE and its member organisations will continue to support the implementation of the ETUCE Action Plan⁴ and the European Social Partners’ Framework Agreement on work-related stress by promoting the exchange of good practices in the education sector and by disseminating these amongst the member organisations/affiliates.

To ensure a good working environment and well-being at school for teachers and pupils, the ETUCE and its member organisations seek to improve national policies and national legislations on occupational health and safety and particularly on stress at work. This includes informing and raising awareness about teachers’ work-related stress risks, especially about the implications of the failure to act. It also involves reminding national governments, local authorities and other employers in education on their duties on the need for action to tackle stress at work.

Aiming at giving greater prominence to work-related stress in the European and national agendas, the ETUCE and its member organisations will continue to monitor and influence the outcome of the decision-making processes at European and national level, such as the European Commission’s Strategy on Health and Safety at Work and related policies and legislative measures. This involves negotiating specific and joint guidelines with the employers in education at European and national level on the implementation of the European Social Partners’ Framework Agreement and the prevention of work-related stress in education and to further promote work-related stress as a priority issue in the European Sectoral Social Dialogue in Education.

Committing to implement this policy document in accordance with the procedures and practices in their countries, the ETUCE member organisations will give a progress report to the ETUCE Committee in 2013.

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