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## Priority Areas for Educational Reform in Ukraine

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### STUDIA

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## Priority Areas for Educational Reform in Ukraine<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

Education should respond to societal changes. But it is ever more important for it to project on what the society should become.

There have been vital changes happening in Ukraine for the last two years. Ukraine has chosen for the European integration. In September 2014, the Verkhovna Rada (Parliament) of Ukraine and the European Parliament simultaneously ratified the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the European Union. Among the key reforms that are introduced for economic recovery and development in Ukraine, educational reform is to address the issue of changes and needs of the Ukrainian society.

One of the first directions of the educational reform under way has been the reform of higher education. The new Law “On Higher Education” has been put into effect since September 2014. The Law introduces new mechanisms which provide for the university autonomy and academic freedom for lecturers

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<sup>1</sup> Annotation: The vital changes in Ukraine have shaped the main priorities for the educational reform in the country and the tasks for the new educational legislation underlying the reform. The paper dwells on the questions the legislation is to answer, as well as suggests the priorities that will enable the educational system efficiency and strengthen the reform agenda.

and students. The new system of external and internal quality assurance in higher education, country and international mobility, prerequisites for joining the European Higher Education Area have been introduced<sup>2</sup>.

Unlike higher education, the sectors of secondary and vocational education are going through the period of stagnation. Furthermore, the track for transition to the new 12-year secondary education has been terminated by the Yanukovych regime. Since then, there have been no significant changes.

There is a need for a clear vision of how the system of education will provide every citizen with an opportunity for lifelong learning and guarantee equal access to quality education. The Government is working out the new legislation which stimulates a heated public debate. This paper introduces the new priority areas for the reform of comprehensive secondary and vocational education which, in our opinion, should be reflected in the new educational Laws.

Today's society is under a permanent change. And the Revolution of Dignity in Ukraine has been exponentially speeding up rapid transformations. Education is entitled to not only react to the changes in society, but to set the direction of these changes for the next decades.

We aim at living in a European, democratic country, free of corruption, with a developed labour-market in which the dignity of every person and human rights are protected and national cultural space is in place. We need an efficient educational system. We need a system that would work for everyone, that is capable of providing each person with access to quality education, developing talents and competences and bringing up a responsible citizen. Extending possibilities for lifelong, regardless of health, special needs, gender or age is the task of the educational system as well.

### **Tasks for the new legislation**

The new legislation is to give answers to the key questions:

1. What should be the new content/curriculum for education?
2. How are the new teaching approaches to be provided?
3. How are we to create equity in educational system? How are we to create proper conditions of studies for every child?

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<sup>2</sup> Л. М. Гриневич, *Вища освіта України: на шляху інтеграції до європейського освітнього простору*, „Рідна школа”, № 11, 2014, р. 8–12.

4. How is the system of education to be turned into an efficient one which ensures appropriate outcomes, with the investments made?
5. How should a balance between the constitutional right for access to quality education for everyone and the freedom of choice in education in accordance with one's beliefs and needs be struck?
6. What should be the system of education structure in order to introduce the new content/curriculum and to provide the proper quality and lifelong learning opportunities?

The educational legislation of the present day Ukraine consists of a series of laws: the framework law "On Education" (1996) and 5 laws specifying the regulations for certain sectors of education. A lot of norms of the legislation are outdated and do not provide for meeting the modern challenges. The new draft law "On Education" and "On Vocational Education" has already been brought in and is now being considered by the Verkhovna Rada. As to the specific sectoral laws, the Law "On Higher Education" passed in the previous convocation of the Parliament, already requires certain changes. The new law "On Secondary Education" is to be drafted by the Government. The laws "On Preschool Education" and "On Out-of-school Education" require amendments. The law "On Adult Education" is due to be drafted, which is supposed to encompass the issues on continuing education.

A strong team of experts has been working on the development of educational legislation for the last two years. Ukrainian enthusiasts have enjoyed strong support of the international expertise provided by the TAIEX Project of the Council of Europe, as well as by the experts of the Swedish-Ukrainian project on support of decentralization in Ukraine and those of European Educational Fund and experts of the European educational fund in Ukraine.

The design of the new legislation has encompassed the recommendations concerning building an efficient and just system of school education, as set out in the communication note of the European Union Commission for the Council of Europe and the European Parliament entitled «Efficiency and Equity in European Education and Training Systems»<sup>3</sup>. The recommendations

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<sup>3</sup> European Union, Communication from the Commission to the Council and to the European Parliament, *Efficiency and Equity in European Education and Training Systems*, Brussels: Commission of the European Union, 2006, p. 11, available at <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX%3A52006DC0481>; European Commission, *Commission Staff Working Document. Assessment of Key Competences in initial education and training*:

include, for instance, prolonging the study period for comprehensive secondary education with a special focus on the acquisition of the key and basic competences by the young. According to this communication note, each extra year spent in school contributes to increasing the macroeconomic productivity of a country by 6.2%, topped by 1.3% in long term.

There also exist important defined instruments for increasing efficiency and equity as follows: intensifying the decentralization with the aim of granting more freedom to the educational establishments in designing the contents/curricular, meeting budgetary needs, staff selection procedures; introducing the system accountability consisting of external exams and internal self-assessment for educational establishments; increasing the quality of teacher training education – improving teaching techniques, acquiring experience through exchange, enhancing motivation for quality teaching practices<sup>4</sup>.

Thus, in our opinion, the framework law “On Education” has to correctly represent the following priority areas for changes in the educational sector:

I. The key figure for reforming school education has to be the teacher. The teacher with a high ranking qualification and a proper social status will be able to lead the reform. Unfortunately, teaching occupation remains one of the most unprotected professional paths in Ukraine. Currently, the teacher’s salary in Ukraine is the lowest in Europe. However, due to the current economic situation in Ukraine, it is impossible to increase the salary for all teachers substantially. So it is necessary to motivate those teachers who have higher qualifications level. For this, the system of voluntarily independent certification with the possibility to choose the method and place for training has been designed. There will be an additional payment for those who have passed the certification.

They will also be expected and are able to act as agents of educational reform and share their experience, skills and knowledge with other teachers. Such certification aims at checking the level of new competences required to work efficiently for strengthening the reform agenda. „If teachers are the most important in influencing the quality of students’ learning, the competences

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*Policy Guidance. Accompanying the document Communication from the Commission Rethinking Education: Investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes*, available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/education/news/rethinking/sw371\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/news/rethinking/sw371_en.pdf) [accessed: 21.11.2012].

<sup>4</sup> О. І. Локшина, *Зміст шкільної освіти в країнах Європейського Союзу: теорія і практика (друга половина XX – початок XXI ст.)*: монографія / О.І. Локшина. – К.: Богданова А.М., 2009, p. 33.

of those who educate and support teachers must be of the highest order”<sup>5</sup> hence professional competences of both teachers and teacher educators’ have been considered of great importance. The following competences will be required of teachers and teacher educators (such as key competences for lifelong learning, for instance) to have successful experience with the certification: teacher competences (teaching learners, 1<sup>st</sup> order; teaching about teaching, 2<sup>nd</sup> order); knowledge development (research); system competences (activities and relationships); transversal competences – various professional learning contexts; leadership competences – inspiring students and colleagues; competences in making connections with other areas.

Reflecting, researching, communicating, modelling and teaching about teaching define the areas of expertise required of teacher educators: pedagogy of educating teaching staff; educational studies, school-based education; (practice-based) research, linked with working contexts; general didactics; discipline (as school subject and as didactics); new skills (e.g. digital competences)<sup>6</sup>.

II. It is vital to create a reliable and European standards oriented system of lifelong learning in Ukraine while providing diversity in educational trajectories to everybody, so that certain results could be attained via alternative ways. Such possibilities can be created on the basis of existing establishments of vocational and higher education.

The system of adult education has not yet been developed in Ukraine. In our opinion, this sector requires a specific law on education of adults. It is also important to provide the recognition of the qualifications obtained in the non-formal, informal systems of education or independently. Lifelong learning starts at an early age. The issue has to be addressed urgently due to the high youth unemployment rate and, in many cases, skills mismatches<sup>7</sup>. Recently, the concept of key competences has been given particular attention and importance in European education systems. There exists the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on key competences for

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<sup>5</sup> *Supporting the Teaching Profession for Better Learning Outcome, Communication from the Commission Rethinking the Education: Investing for Better Socio-Economic Outcomes*, 2012, p. 54.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, p.55

<sup>7</sup> Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning, Official Journal of the European Union L394. [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/oj/2006/l\\_394/l\\_39420061230en00100018.pdf](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/oj/2006/l_394/l_39420061230en00100018.pdf) <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=URISERV:c11090> [access: 20.11.2015].

lifelong learning. The key competences have been incorporated into national curricula and other steering documents of most European countries<sup>8</sup> (4). Positive developments have been made about defining specific learning outcomes. Policy makers are fruitfully coping with a vitally important task of developing a range of assessment tools to support the learning process (2). Ukrainian policy makers and educators are now assessing the extent to which the European Policy Network on the Implementation of the Key Competences (KeyCoNet) can be applied for comparative analysis of the emerging initiatives for the development of the key competences, and introducing them into the system of education in Ukraine (5). There have been detected a lot of problem areas and challenges. One of them is linked to the need for a more strategic approach in supporting the key competences approach at school at the EU level. The second is caused by enhancement of the status of the digital, civic and entrepreneurship competences (transversal) as compared to the traditional subject-based competences. Furthermore, Ukrainian educators see the need of lowering the proportion of low achievers in the basic skills (mother tongue, mathematics and science). Encouraging young people to pursue careers in mathematics, science and technology (MST) should be made a priority. According to the cross-country report produced in support of the European Commission's Communication on Rethinking Education (2), the main objective for better implementing the key competences agenda today is to publicize the findings on the challenges that European countries face in the implementation of the key competences approach. Thus the identified problem areas and common obstacles will help in finding local research evidence and improving national practices, with a range of measures spotted that can effectively address these challenges when it comes to the Ukrainian system of education.

III. The system of education must provide new contents/curricular. And the new contents must be based on the European way marks. This includes the set of key competences, introduced by the European Commission and required by modern Ukrainian realities. With globalization confronting the world with new challenges, each Ukrainian needs a wide range of key competences for a changing and highly interconnected educational community. Dual social and economic role of education entitles it to ensure that citizens acquire

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<sup>8</sup> Joint Progress Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the Education & Training (2010). Work programme: Key competences for a changing world.

the key competences required to adapt flexibly to changes. There should be equality and particular support to fulfil their educational potential for groups that, due to educational disadvantages (personal, social, cultural or economic circumstances). People with low basic skills: low literacy, early school-leavers, the unemployed and those returning to work after a period of extended leave, elderly people, migrants, refugees and people with disabilities constitute such groups. According to the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of Europe on key competences for lifelong learning<sup>9</sup> (6), the Reference Framework is to define the key competences necessary for personal fulfilment, active citizenship, social cohesion and employability in a knowledge society, ensure that young people have developed the key competences to a level that equips them for adult life and forms a basis for further learning, and that adults are able to develop and update their key competences throughout their lives. In connection with is Ukrainian policy-makers, education providers, employers, and learners should facilitate national efforts towards European objectives and provide a framework for further action at community level.

As suggested by the Recommendation<sup>10</sup>, „competences are a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes appropriate to the context. Key competences are those which all individuals need for personal fulfilment and development, active citizenship, social inclusion and employment”. The new content for Ukrainian education should be shaped in accordance with the eight key competences sets out by the Reference Framework: 1) communication in the mother tongue; 2) communication in foreign languages; 3) mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology; 4) digital competence; 5) learning to learn; 6) social and civic competences; 7) sense of initiative and entrepreneurship; 8) cultural awareness and expression<sup>11</sup>.

All key competences are of equal importance, as each contributes to a successful life in a knowledge society. Overlapping competences in the fundamental basic skills of language, literacy, numeracy, information and communication technologies (ICTs) are an essential foundation for learning. Ukrainian policy making are also interested in incorporating critical thinking, creativity, initiative, problem-solving, risk assessment, decision-taking, and constructive management of feelings into the contents/curricular as they have an important role in developing all eight key competences.

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<sup>9</sup> Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council..., op. cit.

<sup>10</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>11</sup> Joint Progress Report of the Council and the Commission..., op. cit., p. 28.



IV. The new content/curriculum requires more study hours. The volumes of knowledge we are trying to provide children with are heavier than we once received, whereas the duration of studies has remained the same. Our children have to study at school for 12 years, whereas now there is an 11-year school system in place. It is not a foreign fashion, but the requirement of time in Ukraine. In Europe, only Russia, Belarus and Ukraine have got the 11-year school system. The new 12-year system is not only about the increase in the amount of study hours. It stands for the new content/curriculum aimed at gaining the above mentioned competencies, using new methodologies and teaching techniques, as well as providing the appropriate conditions for study. There should be access to equal quality of appropriate primary schooling followed by non-comprehensive secondary school and crowned by subject-specific senior secondary school in accordance with students' inclinations being taken into account in either academic or vocational streaming.

V. Under the conditions of decentralization which is well under way in Ukraine at present, it is important that financial responsibility be correctly distributed. The legislation must clearly define all indexes of educational subvention while specifying the areas it covers. It should guarantee to cover the salary, textbooks and professional development of teachers. The capacities of local and joint communities to contribute to financing comprehensive secondary schools, as well as to finance preschool and out-of-school education on their own should be accurately evaluated. Purchase programs of textbooks, busses, ICTs should be entrusted to communities, because they are most interested in the quality of the goods purchased for the studies for their children. Also, the autonomy of educational establishments concerning their finance, programme design and staff policy should be made wider. It is necessary to envisage special programs of preparation for headmasters as managers and leaders. Similarly, when it comes to the studies ideology of results, teachers must be capable to independently develop the curriculum.

Nowadays, parents have become more active. They are ready to participate actively in the development of Ukrainian education and we must set transparent legislative mechanisms of such participation.

It is very important to legislatively oblige communities to guarantee the right of children for all types of education, that are financed by them, in particular, out-of-school and preschool education, in order to prevent the un-grounded reduction of the network of these establishments. A pressing

problem about giving access to quality education and optimization of the network of schools in rural areas should be solved in the future. Over a period of 15 years, the number of pupils of comprehensive secondary schools has decreased by half (from 6.8 million pupils in 1999 to 3.8 million in 2015). At present, there exist 17.6 thousand schools, 68% of which are rural, where 32% of school children go. More than 2 thousand schools are small-scale and constitute about 37% of all comprehensive schools in Ukraine<sup>12</sup>. In such schools one and the same teacher gives lessons in several subjects, they are poorly equipped and appropriate conditions for study are not provided. Small-scale schools cannot be just closed. The children who used to attend the establishments which are scheduled to be shut, have to be provided with access to better quality schooling. The Government has planned grant allocations to joint communities for founding hub-schools, to which children will be brought by school-buses. Due to the concentration of resources they will be equipped with natural sciences laboratories, libraries, computer equipment and skilled personnel. Small public schools managed by civic parents' organizations on their initiative can be a way out for the localities with no possibility to retain larger communal establishments in place.

VI. While striving for decentralizing governance in education, we should introduce mechanisms for centralized education quality control. Experience has tended to show that in times of decentralization of education there always occurs centralization of control over quality. Organs of local self-government vary, treat their duties in various fashions and styles, that is why we need an effective system of state supervision, inspection and external monitoring. The development of the system of external and internal evaluation of the quality of education must be provided. At present, external independent testing is used at the level of final (school-leaving) examinations. It has been suggested to introduce external examinations as finals while graduating from comprehensive middle school prior to entering the 3-year senior specialized school.

VII. Educational needs of every child in Ukraine should be met notwithstanding their health, social status and nationality. Creating a truly inclusive educational space is an issue and challenge today. We must reach out for all children with special needs who can and want to attend comprehensive

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<sup>12</sup> *Освіта в сільській місцевості: Кризові тенденції та шляхи її подолання*, Науково-практичне видання / Автор-упорядник Є. В. Красняков. – К.: Парламентське видавництво, 2012, р. 272.

schools. At present the allocation for studies of children with special needs in specialized boarding-schools are five to seven times higher than those for ordinary schools. It is important to secure that the same sum follows the special needs child to the school that provides for inclusion. Thus for the money the school will hire trained teacher assistants and to introduce other socialization measures as required. It was due to the Soviet style schooling, that children with special needs went to specialized educational establishments. This contradicts Article 24 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities who should not be “excluded from the general education system on the basis of disability, and that children with disabilities are not excluded from free and compulsory primary education, or from secondary education, on the basis of disability”<sup>13</sup>. According to the Convention, the state is obliged to provide inclusive education where the person lives. However only as little as 11% of Ukrainian schools fulfil this obligation, and 39% of schools are partially available to people with special needs. Meanwhile, the number of children with such needs increases by 0.5% annually. That is why the new educational legislation is to envisage the mechanisms of inclusion and the opportunity of having a choice in education.

Granting the right for a choice in education, the increase of seating capacity at preschool establishments in most of the developed countries is carried out through private education, but for this, the money should follow a child to a private educational establishment. We suggest starting at 50 percent of the amount at least, as was once the case in Poland. In fact, less than 0.5 percent of schoolchildren go to private schools. Unfortunately, while saving on studies of these children the state today does not provide for the freedom of choice in education.

VIII. A link between the labour market and the system of education should be provided. The efficient national qualification framework is an instrument for creating the link. The framework under development should encompass all education qualifications and show what learners are expected to know, understand and be able to do on the basis of a given qualification (learning outcomes), and how learners might move between qualifications in an education system<sup>14</sup> (1). The qualifications framework is to be developed

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<sup>13</sup> United Nations, *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, , article 24, <http://www.un.org/disabilities/convention/conventionfull.shtml> [access: 20.11.2015].

<sup>14</sup> *The Bologna and National Qualifications Frameworks 2008*, [http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/qlf/documents/Bologna\\_Framework\\_and\\_Certification\\_revi-](http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/qlf/documents/Bologna_Framework_and_Certification_revi-)

by the competent public authorities with the participation of a broad range of stakeholders (higher education institutions, students, staff and employers) and broad international consultation on the issue. The national qualifications framework will then be tested and self-certified to ensure that it is compatible with the EHEA Framework. The agenda for developing the framework has already been set in Ukraine, the stakeholders have not yet been identified. An institution to coordinate the system of vocational standards and their correlation with educational standards needs to be set up in order to initiate effective communication between the system of education and the labour market.

**Abstract:** The Ukrainian system of education has had remarkable achievements and notorious traditions of schooling. However, at this very stage our society requires the changes that have been focused on by the author of this paper. The changes are necessary for the successful development of human recourse in the country in its struggle for the European integration. The mechanisms for the changes are to be introduced in the updated educational legislation. We do not really have time. We should unite and, instead of passively expecting changes, become the explorers and agents of the reform in education.

**Keywords:** educational legislation, system efficiency, access, equality, the quality of education, inclusive education, decentralization

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