



QUEST'S RESPONSE TO THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION'S CALL FOR EVIDENCE ON NEW EDUCATION PACKAGE

Brussels / 1 September 2026

This submission responds jointly to the three linked initiatives open for evidence :

- Strengthening basic skills and improving performance in school education
- EU Teachers Agenda: Enhancing the attractiveness of the education and training profession
- Quality education for all: a 2040 roadmap

About QUEST

QUEST (Quality Education in Europe for Sustainable Social Transformation) is an independent, democratic network of schools and educational organisations working to promote transformative pedagogies. Together with our +100 members, we run research projects, training, conferences, and workshops, and work to influence education policy at the EU level, acting as a bridge between innovative schools and the wider system, and as a multiplier of best practices.

Cross-cutting position

QUEST shares the Commission's concern that too many learners are leaving school without the competences they need to participate fully in society, and welcomes the Package's recognition that basic skills, teacher shortages and digital dependency are interconnected challenges rather than isolated ones. We also applaud the inclusion of civic education in the new Action Plan on Basic Skills, and we encourage the Commission to seize this momentum to broaden what is recognized as 'basic' alongside literacy, numeracy, and science. The EU and Council of Europe reference points, such as [the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture \(RFCDC\)](#) and the EU [Key competences for lifelong learning](#) (with [GreenComp](#) and [LifeComp](#)) already establish socio-emotional, civic, and collaborative competences as core, not supplementary, learning outcomes. QUEST recommends mainstreaming these existing frameworks so that democratic, civic, and eco-social competences are resourced and monitored with the same rigor as reading, mathematics, and science.

We believe the Education Package will have most impact if it also addresses a common root cause behind all three challenges it identifies: school systems that

treat children as passive recipients of standardised content and teachers as deliverers of curricula, rather than as co-agents in living, evolving learning communities.

Across all three initiatives, QUEST asks the Commission to anchor the Education Package in the following principles :

- Build on the broadened definition of 'basic' : Recognise and expand on the [Action Plan's inclusion of civic skills](#) by embedding socio-emotional, collaborative, and eco-social competences into the core definition of basic skills. These skills should be resourced, supported, and measured on equal footing with reading, mathematics, and science.
- Learner agency and participation : institutionalise students' voice and choice in how, what and with whom they learn, from early childhood onward, as a driver of stronger learning outcomes.
- Radical inclusion : treat the persistent link between socio-economic background, discrimination and underachievement as a structural equity failure requiring desegregation measures.
- Teachers as facilitators : support the shift of the teaching role toward facilitating self-directed, personalised and collaborative learning, and resource this shift through initial and continuous teacher education.
- Wellbeing as an outcome in its own right : measure and support the wellbeing of both learners and teachers as a precondition for basic skills, retention and inclusion (rather than as an afterthought, to performance indicators).
- Eco-pedagogies and outdoor/experiential learning : embed regular outdoor and experiential learning and eco-social knowledge into curricula, teacher training and school culture, as a proven way for engagement, wellbeing and basic-skills acquisition alike.
- Digital sovereignty in service of pedagogy (and not the reverse) : ensure any European digital education infrastructure is designed around pedagogical autonomy, child rights and data protection, with digital tools remaining optional complements to human relationships and outdoor/experiential learning rather than their replacement.

1. Strengthening basic skills and improving performance in school education

QUEST recommends that this strand be read together with our cross-cutting call to broaden the definition of 'basic' skills. The measures below apply equally to literacy, numeracy and science and to the civic, socio-emotional and eco-social competences we encourage the Commission to place on equal footing with them.

Which forms of EU-level support would best complement national, regional and local actions to reverse the long-term decline in basic skills, including the persistent link between underachievement and socio-economic status?

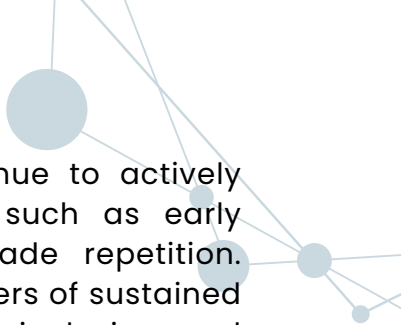


QUEST's experience across its network of member schools shows that improvement is strongest where learners are actively engaged in shaping their own learning path, and weakest where interventions are limited to standardised remediation. Reversing the decline in basic skills requires going beyond a narrow "deficit approach" focused solely on identifying and fixing individual "underachieving" learners. Instead, **EU support must focus on systemic transformation, rethinking educational equity, learning environments, and structural organisation.** We recommend that EU-level support :

- Fund and disseminate evidence on personalised, learner-led approaches (including self-directed and project-based learning) alongside more traditional models. Motivation, agency, and a sense of purpose are fundamental conditions for learning. The EU should support experimentation and evidence-building around pedagogies in which learners have greater agency over how they learn, work collaboratively, engage in meaningful projects, and apply literacy, numeracy, science, and digital skills to real situations. Because [evidence on personalised learning](#) depends heavily on how it is implemented and teacher resourcing, it should be built using diverse methods rather than defaulting to a single pedagogical paradigm.
- Support Member States in tackling school segregation directly (by socio-economic background, disability, ethnicity, migration status or first language) as a precondition for closing the basic-skills gap. [OECD evidence](#) and the Commission's [PISA-EU equity analysis](#) show that disadvantaged students in socio-economically advantaged schools tend to outperform those in disadvantaged schools, which means that adding measures on top of fundamentally segregated systems has its limitations.
- Resource peer-learning between schools, enabling practitioners (including from independent, non-profit and alternative-pedagogy schools already generating relevant practice) to share what raises engagement and attainment for disadvantaged and disengaged learners.
- Explicitly recognise outdoor, experiential and eco-social learning as an [evidence-based](#) lever for basic skills (numeracy, literacy, digital and civic skills can all be embedded in real-world, place-based projects), not only as an extra activity separate from 'core' instruction.

How could cooperation between schools and national/regional/local authorities be strengthened to improve the implementation of evidence-based methods for raising proficiency in basic skills?

- Institutionalise structured channels for learners themselves to feed back on what helps or hinders their learning, alongside teacher and authority input, following rights-based models such as the [Lundy Model](#) for realising children's [right to be heard \(Article 12 UNCRC\)](#). **Children are an under-used evidence source on why measures do or do not work in practice.**
- Broaden how educational success is understood and monitored : While comparable data on literacy, mathematics, science, and digital competence are important, EU cooperation must avoid creating stronger pressure towards teaching to standardised tests, which can have a negative effect on wellbeing



and long-term learning. EU cooperation should also continue to actively discourage structural practices that reinforce inequality, such as early tracking, excessive ability grouping, and unnecessary grade repetition. Monitoring frameworks should expand to examine critical drivers of sustained learning: learner engagement, agency, belonging, wellbeing, inclusion, and participation

- Use Erasmus+ and Teacher Academies to connect schools piloting learner-centred and eco-pedagogical approaches directly with local/regional authorities responsible for scaling successful practice, shortening the distance between practice-level innovation and policy uptake.

What evidence, data sources or best practice examples should the Commission consider when designing the monitoring and evaluation frameworks?

- Complement PISA/ICILS/ICCS attainment data with indicators of learner agency, participation and wellbeing, given the relationship between engagement and basic-skills acquisition.
- Track school segregation and disaggregated outcomes (by socio-economic background, disability, ethnicity, migration status, gender identity...) as a standing indicator.
- Draw on practice-based evidence from European networks of alternative, non-profit, and community-rooted schools that serve disadvantaged and disengaged learners. This includes QUEST initiatives like the [SWELL project](#) (demonstrating how teacher training in Self-Directed Learning drives student agency and basic skills) and the [DESC project](#), which provides actionable tools for measuring democratic culture, civic competencies, and participatory governance in practice.

2. EU Teachers Agenda : Enhancing the attractiveness of the education and training profession

Which forms of EU-level support would best increase the attractiveness of the teaching profession?

The Call for Evidence rightly notes that teachers report feeling better prepared for subject content than for the relational and social dimensions of the job, and that high workloads are a leading cause of attrition. QUEST points to a specific driver often missing from attractiveness debates : role clarity and professional agency. Teachers who are trusted and resourced to act as facilitators of learning rather than sole deliverers of a fixed curriculum under constant assessment pressure report higher job satisfaction and lower burnout. We recommend EU-level support that :

- Funds initial and continuous teacher education that builds facilitation, socio-



emotional and inclusion competences (multicultural/multilingual settings, recognising and addressing racism and discrimination, learner participation methods) alongside subject knowledge.

- Supports Member States in redistributing teacher time away from administrative and quantitative assessment tasks, addressing [the finding that EU teachers spend only half their working time on teaching itself](#).
- Treats teacher wellbeing as a standing element of the Teachers Agenda, with concrete measures (workload, peer support structures, preparation time, fair pay..).
- Recognises and supports diverse pathways into teaching, including from non-profit and alternative-pedagogy schools, also to help the workforce's diversity better match increasingly diverse classrooms.

How could cooperation between schools and authorities be strengthened to support teachers' professional and career development?

- **Promote and resource "open schooling" models that establish schools as community hubs.** Teachers cannot be expected to address complex educational challenges in isolation. Authorities should facilitate partnerships between schools, civil society organizations, local professionals, and community actors. Bringing external expertise directly into learning environments enriches experiential, real-world instruction for students while reducing teacher stress, workload, and isolation.
- Create funded space (like through Teacher Academies) for teachers to co-design their own professional development priorities with school leaders and authorities, instead of a more top-down approach.

What evidence should inform monitoring of the Teachers Agenda?

- Beyond recruitment/retention and workforce-age data, monitor teacher wellbeing, sense of professional agency, and time-use (teaching vs. administration vs. professional learning) as leading indicators of attrition risk.
- Include the perspectives of early-career teachers and of teachers leaving the profession, since their reasons for leaving are the most direct evidence for what 'attractiveness' measures need to fix.

3. Quality education for all: a 2040 roadmap

Which digital tools, infrastructure or practices currently support teaching and learning, and where do you see the greatest need and potential, as well as challenges, for European-scale, digitally sovereign and accessible solutions?

QUEST supports the objective of reducing dependency on non-EU digital providers and safeguarding pedagogical autonomy and data protection. At the same time, we recommend that any sovereign Digital Education Infrastructure :

- Be designed as an optional, well-governed complement to non-digital, relational and outdoor/experiential learning, with wellbeing, media literacy and online safety built in from the outset, as the Call for Evidence itself proposes.
- Embed child-rights-by-design and data-minimisation principles specifically for learners, including accessible, child-friendly mechanisms for learners to question or flag how AI/digital tools are used in their own learning.
- Build AI literacy (as per [the 2026 EU-OECD AI Literacy Framework](#)) around critical, participatory understanding of AI's role and limits, not only technical knowledge, so learners and teachers can meaningfully exercise agency over its use.
- Ensure not only large national/commercial (Ed)Tech providers but also smaller, mission-driven and non-profit education actors can develop values-aligned tools and resources.

Summary of QUEST's key recommendations

- Institutionalise learner voice and participation as a driver of basic-skills recovery, framing "quality education for all" around students' right to participate in shaping their learning path, moving beyond narrow access and attainment metrics.
- Support and reward teachers' role as facilitators of self-directed and inclusive learning through co-designed continuous education, inclusion-focused career progression, and workload reform.
- Treat learner and teacher wellbeing as monitoring indicators
- Embed outdoor, experiential, and eco-social learning as standard practice across all three Package strands.
- Address structural segregation and equity as primary indicators of success.
- Ensure digital sovereignty serves pedagogy, keeping digital tools as rights-respecting complements to human interaction.
- Resource non-profit and alternative school networks as standing sources of practice-based innovation and monitoring data.

QUEST (quest-eu.org) is available to provide further evidence, connect the Commission with member schools, teachers and learners, or contribute to future consultation stages on the Education Package.

For further information, please contact :



Mathilda Diaz
Policy Officer
mathilda@quest-eu.org

Martina Paone
Coordinator
martina@quest-eu.org