



VISION PAPER

Working conditions for school leaders in Europe

A central aim of ESHA is "*to improve the quality of European school leadership*". This vision paper is presented following consultation among member organisations at General Board. The Vision Paper enjoys the support of school leadership organisations throughout Europe.

In each educational system, the position of the school leader is vital for the performance of the school. In the Mission Statement for ESHA it is said that "School heads can and should make a difference within their schools by leading and motivating staff members and students". According to the OECD-report "Improving School Leadership" (2008) school leadership has become a priority in education policy agendas across most of the European countries because it plays a key role in improving classroom practice, school outcomes and links between individual schools and the community. Research shows that effective school leadership is essential to improving teaching and learning within the school and to linking the school to the outside world.

The recent study and research shows that as a result of the movement towards increased school autonomy and accountability for learning outcomes, the workload of school leaders has expanded and intensified over the last few decades. The job of school leader has expanded so much and is now so demanding that the workload often goes beyond what any individual can possibly achieve. The OECD-report also shows that aspiring leaders are reluctant to apply for position of school head because of concerns about work overload, lack of administrative support, a lack of clarity about what the position involves and the perception of an unacceptable work-life balance.

The relatively low salary levels in many countries seem to be another reason why school leadership is not seen as an attractive career. The salary offered often does not reflect the workload, responsibility and the level of accountability involved.

ESHA statement:

One of ESHA's goals is to emphasize the particular role of the school leader and to promote working conditions that improve the quality of school leadership. How the school leadership role is structured and the level of the salary will depend on each country's vision for society, its values, educational priorities and policies, the public perception of the role of the school leader and the legislative framework for education.

But even though there are differences from country to country, each national organisation within ESHA shares these common goals:

- Given the structures of the modern school distributed leadership is the only way to lead. The leadership structure in each school should reflect the need for effective delivery of the curriculum accompanied by adequate support to ensure effective control of finance and staffing
- The role of school leader needs to be acknowledged as a position of influence and responsibility within society.
- School leadership positions should be tenured and permanent
- The school leader should have sufficient support, power and autonomy to justify the accountability and responsibility associated with the position
- The role of the school leader should be supported and acknowledged as a discrete profession having particular responsibilities, skills and competencies.
- The school leader should have complete autonomy in the day to day management of the school.
- The school leader, being accountable for school outcomes and results, should have responsibility for the selection and employment of school personnel.
- Collaboration between schools in different countries is a valuable way of enhancing education and should be encouraged.
- Sharing experiences, expertise, good practice and resources between school leaders can only benefit the pupils and should be encouraged.
- School leaders benefit from collaborative networks of schools and ESHA will work to promote links across the ESHA network of schools.
- The career prospects of school leaders must be improved. The salary must reflect the workload and increased accountability involved.
- Necessary support and development opportunities must be put in place to encourage aspiring school leaders to create the necessary talent pool to secure the future of a cohort of dynamic and progressive school leaders.