

BRITISH AND IRISH GROUP OF TEACHERS' UNIONS

A response to the consultation on the proposed new draft by-laws for the European regional structure of Education International

The British and Irish Group of Teachers' Unions represents the eleven EI affiliates from the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland in Education International. We welcome the proposed new constitution set out in the consultation document circulated by the President. The Group will vote unanimously for the Structure proposals and new draft by-laws at the European Conference as they stand, at the European Conference in November. We will urge other unions to do so too.

We are anxious for the debate on structure which has absorbed so much time and energy, to be brought to a satisfactory conclusion, in a way that meets the expectations of the European Conference and that is consistent with the constitution and culture of Education International. We are convinced that only an integrated structure within EI can do this. Any other solution will ensure that the debate - and the damaging problems that have provoked it - will go on. The Group believes that the debate has already been unnecessarily prolonged and complicated by myths and misunderstandings about just what an integrated structure will involve, and by proposals for amendment to the package which would only perpetuate the confusion and dysfunction which led to the call for structural change.

We believe that the constitutional proposals achieve the integration that the last European conference demanded. They will eliminate the confusion and waste in the present structures and provide a single understandable European structure, internally efficient and democratic, with a unified, authoritative voice to the outside world, and crucially, with the key strong links to the world teachers' union movement which are essential in the increasingly integrated global polity.

The distinctive Pan-European and EU needs will be met in the new structure. We will have a clearer, stronger structure and larger secretariat able to address our concerns without the discontinuities which exist now. EU matters will be dealt with, and voted on, by the unions from EU countries, which is the core issue of principle which was raised in the discussions at the last European Conference.

The doubts which some have voiced about whether the new structure will achieve recognition at the European level are simply unfounded. It is understood that all ETUCE members are members of EI European region. EI Europe is already a big player at the European level, and with a new integrated structure making use of the 'ETUCE' title which is familiar in the EU structures, the change will take place without any difficulty. But also, the changes will ensure that the broader European initiatives, for example emanating from the OECD or the Bologna Process, are dealt with most effectively and in a coherent way. There will be an end to the real or apparent confusion over who represents European teachers which has damaged our effectiveness in recent years, as well as a strengthened capacity to respond to outside developments and to be more pro-active.

The new structure will be fully compatible with the EI world constitution, and we are sure, would be supported by the European members of the world Executive, and would be endorsed at world level, which is an essential requirement for its adoption. But the 'ETUCE' name will signal the distinctive character of the European Region. The integration of the European structures is essential to the European region and to the place of Europe within the global family of EI. The global economic crisis, GATS, Bologna, all demand a truly global as well as a European response. Any attempts to erect new walls around relations with the European Union, are retrograde and harmful - they do not even recognise the extent to which the EU itself has opened up beyond its own formal boundaries.

As trade unionists, we welcome the assurances that have been given regarding the protection of the present EI European and ETUCE staff. We understand that their employment position will be protected and potentially their security and career opportunities will be enhanced in a larger organisational structure.

The British and Irish Group of Teachers' Unions strongly asserts its support for the proposed constitutional changes. They will build a single unified structure at long last. They will make the most of our limited resources. They will ensure we maximise our strength and authority in Europe. They will bring to an end years of sterile debates on Structure and enable us to concentrate on working for our members. We urge all EI European unions to support them.

**BIGTU members: Ireland - ASTI, IFUT, INTO, TUI United Kingdom - ATL, EIS,
NASUWT, NUT, SSTA, UCU, UTU**