



## **Creating effective teaching environments: Much remains to be done by governments says a new OECD report on teachers**

TUAC welcomes the release of the findings of OECD's first Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS). The report on "Creating effective teaching and learning environments," based on a survey of teachers and school leaders in 23 countries, provides new data on conditions affecting teaching in schools. Thus, TALIS presents an important step towards opening up the "black box" of teaching and to give particular attention to the conditions under which teachers carry out the most important part of their job, namely *teaching*, either through the transmission of knowledge or through facilitating of active learning.

In many respects TALIS provides encouraging insights regarding the improvement of teaching and learning. However, it also reveals that much needs to be done in order to facilitate learning by effective teaching and teachers. Moreover, many of the findings are particularly helpful in order to revise prevailing stereotypes and misconceptions regarding the teaching profession. And last but not least, the findings can also facilitate the design and implementation of policies necessary to improve and strengthen the status of teachers in order to keep teaching an attractive profession in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Based on a first assessment of the TALIS findings, TUAC would like to emphasize the following:

- 1) The survey reveals that teachers in general have a strong interest in doing a good job, namely to effectively facilitating learning. Regrettably, however, the survey also finds that the work environment in which teachers are operating, often is not very conducive for achieving a good performance in both teaching and learning. Institutional deficiencies and impediments, reflecting inappropriate or failing education policies, as well as social factors are often acting as barrier against effective teaching.
- 2) Moreover, the survey also suggests that the vast majority of teachers is interested and motivated in participating in professional development. Regrettably, however, education policy respectively public authorities often fail to provide the opportunities and conditions necessary in order to enable teachers to participate actively and successfully in professional development. Thus, it is not surprising than more than 40% of the teachers surveyed expressed concerns about a lack of suitable professional development on offer.

- 3) The high motivation of teachers to participate in professional development is also reflected in the finding that some teachers have not hesitated to pay for their professional development. That, in particular the conditions under which teachers pay for the acquisition of new qualifications, however, does not suggest that the provision of professional development by public authorities, often misleadingly characterised as “free” provision, should be reduced and that the responsibility for investing in professional development should increasingly be shifted towards teachers.
- 4) The design of the TALIS questionnaire, the conduct of the survey as well as the overall objective of the survey, have been informed to a large extent by the “economics of education,” that is the application of economic thinking and econometric methods to education, its determinants, outcomes and impacts. Most obvious is that in the part of the report focusing on how effective teaching is being rewarded by education systems. The underlying assumption in this respect is that performance related pay for teachers would improve student performance. That reflects the fact that performance-related pay is increasingly perceived by new public management approaches as an instrument of governance. At the same time, however, it is closely linked to a performance culture which reflects the trend towards marketization in both public governance and education.
- 5) Nevertheless, it is questionable, whether performance-related pay for teachers is appropriate and coherent in an environment such as schools, which relies in particular on specific social relations in which learning, the acquisition of knowledge and values as well as effective teaching depends on cooperation and teacher collaboration. It is anything but surprising that the experience with regard to performance related pay is not very encouraging. Evidence suggests that performance related pay of teachers does seem not to work as it was expected because most of the underlying assumptions are not valid. Studies available indicate that the connection between performance and pay at schools seems arbitrary and thus teachers are often lacking understanding of and trust in the grounds for assessing the quality of their work. Last but not least it must be emphasized that recent studies found little evidence to suggest that payments had improved results or attracted more people into teaching.

The fact that TALIS emphasizes that much needs to be done in order to improve both teaching and learning is welcome. That applies in particular to the need to provide “better and more professional development” for teachers. Continuous teacher training must become a key part of a strategy making lifelong learning a reality for all. It is an indispensable prerequisite for a successful transition towards a sustainable and knowledge based economy. That, however, puts the onus on governments, in particular on government departments and their subsidiaries in charge of education. They must provide the resources necessary for scaling up the professional development of teachers. In doing so, they have to take into account that education must not be reduced to its economic function. Education must mean more than responding to labour market demands, to allocate young people to occupations and to maintain and upgrade human capital.