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Fifth meeting

Geneva, 18–19 March 2010

Item 3 of the provisional agenda

**REPORT ON PROGRESS MADE BY THE UNECE¹ EXPERT GROUP
ON COMPETENCES IN EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AT ITS
FIRST MEETING**

Report by the Chairperson of the Expert Group

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The UNECE Expert Group on Competences in Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) was established by the UNECE Steering Committee on ESD at its fourth meeting (19–20 February 2009; ECE/CEP/AC.13/2, paras. 31–36). The present document represents a progress report to the Steering Committee with a view, inter alia, to ensuring full consultations with the Committee in its capacity as governing body for the process.

2. Following the establishment of the Expert Group, its composition of 18 experts was decided on the basis of nominations put forward by countries and other stakeholders, taking into account the selection criteria identified by the Steering Committee (ECE/CEP/AC.13/2, para. 33, and ECE/CEP/AC.13/2009/7, paras 19-21) and in consultation with the Chairperson proposed by the Committee. A list of the experts is available on the UNECE website².

¹ United Nations Economic Commission for Europe.

² www.unece.org/env/esd/sc.egc.htm

3. The Expert Group held its first meeting from 30 September to 2 October 2009 in Lund, Sweden. The meeting was co-hosted by the Government of Sweden and the University of Lund and was held back-to-back with the European Conference on Education for Sustainable Development organized by the University. Sixteen experts participated in the meeting.

4. Mr. Roel Van Raaij (Netherlands) was invited by the Steering Committee to chair the Group, but voiced his desire to step down. For practical reasons and to ensure continuity with the work of the Expert Group on Indicators, of which he had been the Chairperson, Mr. Van Raaij chaired the first day of the meeting. He then passed the chairmanship to Mr. Michael Scoullos (Greece, as Chairperson) and Mr. Roland Tormey (Ireland, as Vice-Chairperson). Mr. Tormey chaired the second day of the meeting and the two co-chaired third day.

II. MANDATE, TIMELINE OF WORK AND FORMAT OF OUTPUTS

5. At its first meeting, the Expert Group focused its discussions on (a) its mandate, including the scope of competences and recommendations to be developed, (b) the proposed workplan and modalities of work, and (c) the possible forms the outputs of its work could take. It also discussed links to various related international and national processes, with a view inter alia to ensuring synergies and receiving feedback from a broad range of stakeholders.

6. The Expert Group recalled that its mandate was to prepare (a) general recommendations for policymakers and (b) a range of core competences in ESD for educators.

7. In this regard, the Expert Group noted that the UNECE Strategy for ESD called specifically for the development of educators' competences to engage in ESD. The joint session on ESD held at the Sixth Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe" (Belgrade, 10–12 October 2007) had recognized the competence of educators as a frequent bottleneck to improving the quality of education. It had agreed that one priority for future implementation of the Strategy should be developing competences in ESD. The first reporting exercise clearly identified the need to further define the nature of competences in ESD and the ways in which these might be developed in the education sector. Furthermore, there was a need to create an enabling policy environment in which work on ESD competences could be supported and applied in each member State.

8. The UNECE reporting mechanism and the set of indicators for ESD provided a means to monitor broad implementation of the Strategy, including identifying countries' needs for integrating ESD into formal, non-formal and informal education. The report on progress made with implementation of the UNECE Strategy for ESD highlighted the key role of educators in advancing ESD. While the indicator framework outlined a number of competences for learners, in order to achieve this goal, there was still a need to identify the specific competences required by educators. Further work on competences in ESD would also contribute to future reporting exercises and make an important contribution to the United Nations Decade of ESD.

9. The Expert Group noted that its mandate included holding five meetings in 2009–2010. It planned to hold one meeting in 2009 and four meetings in 2010, with to the goal of preparing a

draft document on competences for consideration at the Steering Committee's sixth meeting in 2011. It had provisionally agreed on its internal workplan, noting however that such a plan should be fluid and flexible.

10. The Expert Group agreed to focus its first meeting on: (a) clarifying its mandate and the scope of its work; (b) identifying relevant issues and preliminarily agreeing the format of the output documents; (c) identifying relevant materials and processes; and (d) a tentative workplan.

11. The Expert Group agreed that by the end of its second meeting it would compile a list of relevant competences and identify both the target groups and stakeholders of the processes and the issues it wished to address at the Steering Committee's fifth meeting. It envisaged that the first outline of the competences document would be put together in time for its third meeting, and that it would be revised in the subsequent two meetings, with a view to finalizing the draft in time for the Steering Committee's sixth meeting in 2011.

12. The Expert Group discussed the forms the output document might take. It considered a document consisting of two parts ((1) recommendations to decision makers on developing competences in ESD and (2) a range of competences in ESD targeted at educators) might be the most appropriate, as it would allow for tailoring both the language and level of detail to the relevant audience.

13. The Expert Group considered the possibilities of issuing the output document as an official United Nations document and as a publication. The former would allow for the documents' translation into the three official languages of UNECE and would enable a full-fledged discussion of the draft at the Steering Committee's sixth meeting. At the same time, the experts felt that a publication by a publishing house might prove more user-friendly and would allow for greater flexibility and ease of access, in particular for educators at the national level. The Group agreed to seek further guidance on this issue from the Steering Committee.

14. In the Expert Group's view, it could be useful, wherever possible, to complement the competences with illustrations based on national practices. The Group noted, however, that collecting such illustrations could prove very time-consuming, and so their number and comprehensiveness would have to be approached flexibly and on a case-by-case basis. A number of practical examples might already be available in work under related processes such as the Environment and Schools Initiatives (ENSI) and the good practice examples collected under the UNECE Strategy for ESD. The Group agreed that such available materials should be identified and built upon whenever possible, so as to make efficient use of resources and avoid duplication of efforts. The Group decided to clarify with the Steering Committee the extent to which such illustrations should be used.

III. TARGET GROUPS, STAKEHOLDERS AND RELEVANT PROCESSES

15. The Expert Group noted that its mandate provided two clear target groups for its work: (a) policymakers at national and other relevant levels, and (b) educators. Any policy recommendations would have to be addressed to the former and would need to allow for a flexible approach that took into account national priorities and specifics. The competences

themselves would need to be drafted with educators in mind and should have to be tailored to their needs. In this regard, the Expert Group felt that teacher trainers and teacher training intuitions were a subset of this target group, and thus of particular importance.

16. The experts also noted that there were a number of other stakeholders in this process, including educational institutions and networks. Hence a number of relevant processes and existing materials should be identified and taken into account in the document's preparation.

IV. ISSUES FOR THE CONSIDERATION BY THE STEERING COMMITTEE

17. The Expert Group identified a number of issues on which it wanted to seek further guidance from the Steering Committee at the latter's fifth meeting (18–19 March 2010).

A. Format

18. The Expert Group considered that the output document might be more useful if it were drafted in two parts. This would allow for an appropriate level of detail in each part, and for tailoring the text to the relevant audience. The first part would be addressed and tailored to decision makers, and would deal with issues of a political nature. Its aim would be to assist countries with setting up the policies and frameworks necessary to promote development of necessary competences in educators. The second would be tailored to the needs of educators, including those working in teacher training.

19. The Expert Group noted, however, that other possibilities existed, such as placing relevant recommendations in each relevant section. This could provide closer links between individual competences and the relevant political recommendations, but would be less user-friendly, requiring policymakers to read through extensive technical material in order to identify the parts relevant to them. It was also possible to include, alongside a set of policy recommendations, a short list of competences in the first part of the document targeted to policymakers, while maintaining the two individual audience-targeted parts.

20. As there were other possible combinations for structuring the material, the Expert Group agreed to seek further guidance from the Steering Committee regarding the document's format.

B. Form

21. With regard to the output document's form, the Expert Group identified the advantages and disadvantages of issuing the material as an official United Nations document and/or as an independent publication (see para. 13). The Expert Group decided to raise the issue at the fifth meeting of the Steering Committee for further guidance.

C. Information on challenges and bottlenecks

22. The Expert Group considered that identifying particular bottlenecks that countries had experienced regarding building educators competences in ESD could be particularly useful in its work. It noted that certain such bottlenecks had already been identified, e.g. in the first round of

reports submitted by some of the countries, and that previous such assessments should be built upon. The Steering Committee might consider inviting countries to identify specific issues and challenges they might wish to highlight and bring to the Group's attention.

D. Illustrations

23. The Expert Group considered that a number of illustrations could be included alongside the competences. Collection of relevant examples, however, could prove time-consuming and labour-intensive (see para. 14). The Group wanted to explore the views that Steering Committee members might have in this regard.

E. Evaluation and assessment

24. The Expert Group was of the opinion that there was little information on evaluation and assessment and that it might not be possible to cover this issue extensively in the competences document.

25. The Expert Group also considered that the establishment of links with other relevant processes in the region could reinforce its efforts and provide for better synergies. There were a number of such processes that the Group considered relevant, in particular the Bologna and Lisbon processes, the European Union Sustainable Development Strategy and the ENSI work on competences. The Group wanted to seek further information from the members of the Steering Committee with regard to any processes or arenas that its members considered relevant to the work on competences.
