QUALITY EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

Inputs on the UN call for contributions from educational stakeholders on **the design and implementation of curricula, pedagogy and assessment**

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Introduction

At QUEST we mobilized our network of schools, composed of both alternative and traditional schools across Europe, to answer the suggested questionnaire. In the first part of the document we provide you with summaries of their answers based on the educational model. In terms of geographical representation, most of the alternative schools of our network are based in Belgium, Germany, Poland, Lithuania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Italy. While our state schools are from Southern European countries.

In the second part, you will find QUEST's projects and best practices, developed through our effort to mainstream rights based education by promoting adaptable practices within every education system. We believe that by **featuring these projects in your report**, and leveraging the credibility that the UN holds, there is a higher probability of informing member states about rights based practices and innovation in education that member states can adopt and scale within their education systems.

Part 1 - Schools' contributions

1. Conception, design and implementation of the curriculum:

Alternative schools

In our network we have democratic, forest, and sociocratic schools, which base their pedagogy approaches in human rights treaties that recognize children as full holders of rights .

a) When it comes to balancing the acquisition of academic and life skills, these schools offer project-based learning opportunities, allowing students to learn by doing and through collaboration with their communities.

On the other hand, in outdoor schools, children spend significant time in natural

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settings, learning about their environment and developing a sense of connection with it, which enhances the acquisition of skills beyond the constraints of a rigid curriculum.

c) In alternative schools, there are no restrictions on specific subjects, and knowledge fields are chosen   by the children, while educators act as guides who support their students in exploring and on their learning-how-to-learn journey.

e) In these educational models students are active participants and contributors in their learning and knowledge is not transmitted passively. To achieve this, student councils or consultations are organised on a school level, where children hold decision making power and decide on school rules and inform the development of the curricula.

Traditional state schools

a) States schools follow the national curriculum and focus on core subjects such as language, mathematics, and science, while also promoting cultural and social knowledge.

b) The curriculum does not formally include local languages or dialects, indigenous or community knowledge. Teaching is based on the national curriculum and is delivered exclusively in every state's official language. While intercultural understanding is encouraged through general school practices and teacher initiatives, it is not systematically integrated into the curriculum through local languages or structured community-based content

c) Yes, there are restrictions on the subjects and topics taught. schools follow the national curriculum and the official instructions of the Ministry of Education, which define the subjects, learning objectives, and content to be taught at each grade level. Teachers are required to adhere to approved textbooks and teaching guidelines. As a result, schools have limited flexibility to introduce additional subjects or topics that are not included in the national curriculum. Any sensitive or cross-curricular topics must be addressed only within the framework and guidance provided by the Ministry, to ensure consistency, age appropriateness, and compliance with national educational policies.

d) Schools have limited ability to adapt curriculum content in response to learner interests, societal changes, or emerging challenges. Curriculum content, learning objectives, and teaching materials are determined by the national curriculum and the official guidelines of the Ministry of Education. Any adaptations must remain within this framework and follow Ministry instructions, which limits flexibility at school level.

e) Curriculum decision making is primarily carried out at national level by the Ministry of Education and its official bodies, in consultation with academic
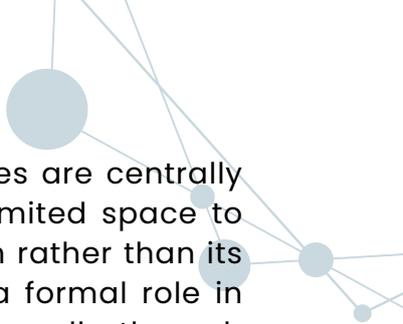
experts. The national curriculum, subjects, and learning objectives are centrally defined. At school level, teachers and school leadership have limited space to participate, mainly through the implementation of the curriculum rather than its design. Students, parents, and local communities do not have a formal role in curriculum decision making, although they may contribute informally through school activities or communication with the school. Overall, while academia is involved at national level, meaningful participation of teachers, students, parents, and local communities in curriculum decision making is limited and not systematic.

2. Pedagogy and classroom learning

Alternative schools

a) The pedagogical approaches adopted by alternative schools are rooted in inquiry-based learning, self-directed learning, group work, experiential learning and project-based learning
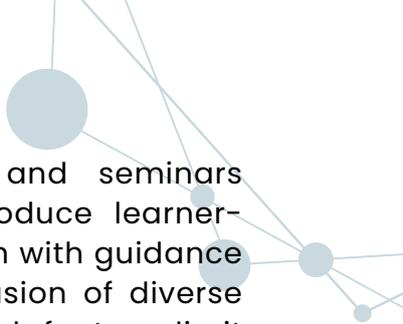
Traditional state schools

a) In states/traditional schools pedagogical approaches are teacher-centered and knowledge is transmitted to students, with limited integration of alternative pedagogical approaches.

b) Pedagogical freedom in teaching is ensured to an extent, within the framework of the national curriculum and the guidelines of the Ministry of Education. Teachers have some flexibility in choosing teaching methods, classroom activities, and ways of engaging pupils, as long as learning objectives and prescribed content are respected. There are limited mechanisms for dialogue and feedback from students and parents, mainly through informal discussions, parent–teacher meetings, and everyday classroom interaction. While this feedback can influence instructional practices at classroom level, it does not formally shape curriculum content and is not systematic.

c) Successful alternative pedagogical models developed in individual schools can feed into the mainstream educational system mainly through official recognition and dissemination by the Ministry of Education or the Institute of Educational Policy (IEP). If a project or approach demonstrates measurable benefits, it can be documented, evaluated, and shared through teacher training programs, conferences, pilot programs, and official guidelines. At school level, teachers may also adopt and adapt ideas from successful models informally, but formal integration into the national curriculum requires Ministry approval and alignment with national learning objectives. This ensures that innovative practices are scaled while remaining consistent with official educational standards.

d) State teachers receive training and support mainly through Ministry-

approved professional development programs, workshops, and seminars organised at regional or national level. These programs introduce learner-centered, inclusive, and participatory pedagogical methods, often with guidance on collaborative learning, project-based approaches, and inclusion of diverse pupils, including Roma students. In practice, however, several factors limit teachers' ability to fully implement these approaches. These include strict adherence to the national curriculum, limited teaching time, large or mixed-ability classes, insufficient resources, and limited flexibility to adapt content to pupils' interests or local contexts. Despite their motivation, teachers often have to balance innovation with compliance to Ministry guidelines and prescribed learning objectives.

3. Student assessment

Alternative schools

d) Alternative educational models use flexible and personalised assessment methods that focus on the learning process rather than just final outcomes. Students are often evaluated through portfolios, long-term projects, and experiential work that demonstrate the application of knowledge, problem-solving, and collaboration skills. Self-assessment and peer assessment are common, encouraging reflection, critical thinking, and ownership of learning. In outdoor or experiential settings, assessment often takes the form of observation and practical engagement with real-world challenges, emphasizing holistic development beyond traditional academic metrics.

f) As described above, alternative schools tend to use authentic, qualitative, and process-oriented assessment instead of grades or standardized tests that facilitate the recognition of SEL competences such as, creativity, cooperation, problem solving, initiative and autonomy, critical thinking, communication. These skills are assessed through real behaviors and real tasks, not through questionnaires or timed exams.

Traditional state schools

a) Assessment in schools follows Ministry guidelines and focuses mainly on standardised tests to measure academic progress. Teachers also use formative and flexible methods, such as projects, group work, and ongoing feedback, to support social-emotional skills and inclusion. While these approaches reflect principles of international human rights law, standardized assessment remains the main tool.

b) Current assessment practices follow national standards, which limits flexibility and can risk cultural or linguistic bias. To promote fairness, teachers provide extra support for pupils with language difficulties, socio-economic challenges, disabilities, or from remote areas, use differentiated tasks, allow oral or project-

based assessments, and apply inclusive classroom strategies alongside standardised assessment.

c) Assessment practices support learners' dignity and motivation by combining standardized tests with formative methods, such as projects, group work, and feedback that recognise effort and progress. Teachers also provide encouragement and adapt tasks to pupils' needs, promoting well-being and a positive learning environment for both students and educators.

d) Teacher autonomy in assessment is supported to a limited extent. While standardized tests and Ministry guidelines are mandatory, teachers can incorporate alternative assessment methods such as portfolios, project-based assessments, performance tasks, exhibitions of learning, self-assessment, and peer assessment within the classroom, as long as they align with national curriculum objectives.

Part 2 - QUEST Projects

At Quest, we aim to democratise education systems through both policy development and practical, on-the-ground initiatives. Our projects DECUS, DESC, and SWELL promote rights-based education and address key challenges including rigid curricula, educational bias, and limited access of state schools to alternative and learner-centered pedagogies. Below you will find a short intro of the projects, and all the educational resources developed in their framework, designed to support educators across education systems.

DESC: The Democratic Education in SChools project supports conventional schools in adopting democratic, learner-centered educational practices and approaches that foster life skills and personal development. The project has developed a comprehensive set of teacher trainings to implement democratic education in state schools, introducing educators to self-directed learning, multiple intelligences, and non-violent communication frameworks.

DECUS: Decolonization of Curriculums in Secondary School is a project that aims at dismantling power dynamics and knowledge paradigms that perpetuate racial, gender, and geo-political hierarchies. It entails rectifying historical and present power imbalances (dominations) and their social ramifications (discriminations), challenging the assumptions of Western knowledge hegemony and superiority. DECUS seeks to address these gaps by integrating decolonial approaches, and supporting teachers in their professional development – through a set of training modules, the "Engaging and (Un)Learning Toolkit accessible in 5 languages, and a living library –, fostering intersectional inclusion and equality in secondary education.

SWELL : Self-directed learning for Wellbeing of Educators and Lifelong Learners is a project to empower both pre-service and in-service teachers with the tools to

take ownership of their wellbeing and that of their students, by promoting competencies grounded in Self-Directed Learning (SDL) approaches to strengthen motivation, inclusion, participation and a sense of belonging among school communities. Now in its early stages, it will be incorporated in the programmes of 5 universities : Limerick, Mons, New Bulgaria, Bucharest, and Frederick University. Updates about the training will soon be available!

Additionally, QUEST has recently published
- an article on the state of more participatory education in Europe
- a position paper calling the EU to invest in quality, democratic, education as the strongest defence against authoritarian threats, and the only path to lasting peace ; ensuring that democracy is not simply taught as theory, but lived by young people across Europe.

All the questions answered to in this document can be found at the end of the **call for contributions**.

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