



PRESS RELEASE

‘ESHA comments on the growing impact of the economic recession on children, schools, families and their communities...’

Over the past three months our membership across Europe has reported a range of responses to the current economic crisis and the impact which the current economic downturn has begun to have on children and their families. In a recent membership survey a common pattern is beginning to emerge where school leaders are consistently reporting that they fully recognize that the greatest challenge to children and their family life is unemployment with the most marked impact on those families with low incomes and whose ability to avoid longer-term unemployment outcomes and consequences is limited.

The national government response in Europe to the financial crisis is mixed - with continued investment in per capita expenditure remaining a national priority for some nations (with increased budget allocations to their respective education sectors) and contrasting responses which confirm where national governments are already implementing spending reductions of up to 25% in funding for education and schools.

ESHA has identified the following key challenges arising from the crisis:

- ***a focus on avoiding the ‘fall-out’ from the financial crisis becoming a ‘head on’ social crisis*** with all the associated effects on the most vulnerable workers and low income families arising from rising unemployment
- ***action to reduce the long-lasting impact of unemployment*** and the relationship with embedded under-achievement in school communities
- ***recognition that stress increases the risk of developing depression and ill health*** at a time when we are in totally uncharted waters in terms of the numbers of people/families affected by the current crisis and the likely timescale
- ***sustainability for schools which have recruited, trained and ‘upskilled’ many support staff*** from their local community to work in the school environment - this investment in staff has been multiplied over and over again – and, they remain key ‘social capital’ within the local community served by the school
- ***losing a job results in lost confidence and self-esteem*** and impacts negatively on a person’s ability to return to work at a later date – and, the resultant impact on

family life and well-being is known to affect pupil behaviour whether they are in the school, the home or in the local community

- ***finally, the outlook, for this year's school leavers is an area of immediate concern*** requiring urgent planned, co-ordinated, action if we are to avoid long-term disappointment, dismay and disenchantment with the world of both work and employment for our youth of all abilities
- ***Finally, we appeal to all governments in the European Community that we must invest in schools and young children for their future***

School leaders acknowledge that in recent times it is the work ethic and work itself which has become so central to the fundamental definition of success in life in European society. And, this is a success which is all too often then becomes measured at the economic, social and emotional level in terms of how many young people are able to enter higher education, or the world of work or who are able to maintain a positive social life and fulfilling relationships with others. In these times of recession we risk losing these very foundations of a positive social/work environment whereby self-confidence, self-esteem and success give meaning, purpose and structure to those in our communities.

Therefore, we judge that the economic crisis underlines the urgent need to promote and maintain each nation's focus on the value of the role of education in their society; education and schools requiring long-term investment if we are to strengthen the health, capacity and resilience of all our children and their communities.

Most of all, we need to see care wherever there is a response to the economic crisis which places a lot of emphasis on the cost of things and not much, or less, realisation of the value of the things that really matter to us all in our work to build a stable and confident Europe.

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Note to Editors:

As an 'association of associations' ESHA strives to meet key aims and to not interfere in national issues, but play its' role at the European level by influencing European policy and practice.

ESHA is involved in all matters that are relevant for school leaders within an international community in which the experiences, visions and views between the members are promoted, encouraged, shared and exchanged. It is where new ideas are developed by:

discussing and developing views within the ESHA-membership on innovative education and on school leadership

identifying and sharing good practice in school leadership

promoting these views at the European level

influencing the policy of the European institutions (European Commission, European Parliament)

promoting international exchange and cooperation

supporting the member organisations to play their role at the national level

providing commentary on the quality and development of education policy and practice

promoting the position of school leaders and the quality of school leadership