European Education Area Strategic Framework

Working Group on Digital Education: Learning, Teaching and Assessment: PLA 26-27 October 2022

Key Policy Messages on the Enabling Factors for successful digital education

1. Introduction

The policy messages outlined below are drawn from the discussions during the Peer Learning Activity (PLA) of the EEA Strategic Framework DELTA working group that took place in October 2022. Such a document is produced in line with the outputs indicated in the mandate of the group and is anchored to the discussions taking place during its meetings.

The discussion in this PLA, was focused around four areas of the enabling factors for digital education. The key policy messages in this document are organised according to these four areas.

The PLA affirmed that the four areas are interlinked and that Member States (MS) should take a holistic approach to digital education, one that is interconnected with other transformational reforms across their education and training sectors. While many MS have already invested heavily in digital education over many years, there are still gaps in relation to our knowledge and understanding of what constitutes effective approaches and practices in digital education. There is an imperative for MS to continue to invest, to evaluate, and to share their digital education practices with their stakeholders, the education research community, and policy makers. There was widespread agreement that the four areas of the enabling factors are key to such discussion.

2. Whole-government approach to digital education and training & involvement of stakeholders

- The successful design and implementation of digital education policies requires **structured active engagement** with a range of government ministries, relevant public bodies, regional and municipal educational organisations, civil society, and the private sector. These interactions need to take place regularly in order to support the development of a common vision enabling collective decisions that support the implementation of a holistic approach to digital education.
- The creation of a holistic vision should **articulate the intended impact** that the use of digital technologies aims to have on the education system. The vision should be a key element of a plan, typically referred to as a digital education plan, that is developed by the whole range of stakeholders. The Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education in Germany (KMK) Education in the Digital World Strategy and the Irish Digital Strategy for Schools to 2027 are examples of such plans. Sometimes, the funding of digital education is conceived as part of a larger national plan to transform education; an example of this is Poland's National Recovery and Resilience Plan.
- When designing structured active engagement processes it is important that these are **formalised across the whole of government** and actively involve all relevant ministries, not only education, and that such engagements take a systematic approach. Ministries of Education should develop internal structures to ensure meaningful and effective consultation and exchange with units within the ministry (e.g., specialist units, curriculum and assessment sections, school inspection) and other key stakeholders that receive funding from the ministry (e.g., teacher training organisations). Ministries of Education should also develop formalised structures to engage with other key stakeholders involved in education and training, as was carried out, for example, by the Irish Ministry of Education in developing their 2022 digital strategy for schools.

- **The role of leadership**, at all levels of education and training, is of vital importance in successfully implementing digital education policies. Digital leadership in a whole-government approach should be mirrored at all other levels of the education system to ensure digital education policies become a reality.
- While **digital technology companies are key stakeholders** in supporting educational organisations in implementing digital education approaches, it is important to ensure that their role is proportionate and not overly dominant, as quality education must remain the top priority. Moreover, the role of these companies in relation to data privacy, interoperability of systems and compliance with existing EU laws needs to be ensured.

3. Impact focused investment in digital education and training

- There are **significant costs** associated with digital education in areas such as connectivity, infrastructure, equipment, teacher training, capacity building, learning and administration management systems, and digital education content. These services and products can be procured centrally, regionally or at a local level, and individual Member States will wish to decide their own approach as to how to balance these. The procurement of such services and products should be planned and aligned with an overall vision as to how they will '*enhance'* education. MS would appreciate support from the European Commission (EC) on how to **effectively organise and run such procurements**, so that they maximise value for invested time and money.
- When planning such investments, it is important to make explicit the impact these investments are expected to have in schools (e.g. improved digital competences for citizens, impact on employability and/or impact on the quality of education, etc.). The investment plan should regularly monitor the extent to which the investments have achieved their proposed impacts. Policy makers should **identify the changes/transformation that are expected from investments, and describe them both in terms of '*outputs*' (e.g., the number of computers/the number of trained teachers) and '*outcomes*' (e.g., the number of students with access to a device), and track their realisation over time**. There is a need to specify what success will look like; an example of how this can be addressed is the eSchool programme in Croatia which sets out to improve the digital maturity of their schools, implementing a range of actions to enhance the digital competences of teachers and school leaders and which provides a digital maturity framework to help school leaders assess their baseline and their progress in implementing quality digital education. Similarly, tools such as SELFIE, can support schools to monitor their progress over time.
- Digital services and products (hardware, infrastructure, software, and e-content) depreciate over time and require ongoing maintenance and support. Therefore investment plans should include **plans for how these investments will be refreshed and maintained over time and by whom**.
- **Digital technology companies and publishers**, in particular, have a key role to play in providing appropriate digital education content to meet the needs of the educational and training sectors in supporting new approaches to teaching, learning and assessment. Therefore, there is a need to **work with these organisations to develop tools and content appropriate for teachers and learners**.

4. Support to education and training institutions and education and training staff to digitise in an inclusive manner.

- There is a need to ensure that education and training staff have access to **a range of supports in order to become confident and competent in using digital technologies** in their work and so to deliver quality inclusive digital education. Shortage of teachers in many Member States inhibits teacher release for training, with teachers saying they have little time to undertake such training, pointing out challenges related to the working conditions of teachers. Policy makers need to identify ways to provide appropriate time and incentives to teachers so they can upgrade their digital competences, which should include the adoption of flexible approaches to training (in-person, online and blended) where staff are given greater flexibility in terms of what they wish to learn, when they learn and how they learn. Such professional development experiences should **include both digital competences and the ability to apply digital technologies in a range of pedagogical settings, while also considering the emotional and social elements of living in a digital world** ('wellbeing'), as well as critical engagement with the particular challenges and opportunities offered by digital education in specific curricular areas.
- There are many innovative approaches taking place across MS to support educators, but there is still **a need for greater collaboration and sharing of effective and inclusive digital education practices**, so that educators have better guidance on embedding digital technologies into their practices.
- In addition to the Erasmus Programme which offers the possibility for innovation and support in digital education, the European Commission has already created a range of **platforms and services**, including the European School Education Platform and the European Digital Education Hub, where practitioners can access curriculum content and can interact and share professional practice. Policy makers should further seek to **encourage and support involvement with these services,** so that ministries and education staff can enhance their digital education practices through less formal methods than those offered by traditional training routes.

5. Monitoring and evaluation of digital education policies

- Digital education policies should **clearly articulate the desired impacts on existing education** and training practices (taking account of differences in approaches by Member States), so that **progress on these targets can be realistically monitored**. The Eurydice report, Digital education at school in Europe, found that only a few countries regularly monitor their digital educational policies and the OECD has called for greater involvement from all MS in future studies in order to enhance our understanding of the impact of digital education. **Member States should use a range of approaches when monitoring and evaluating digital education practices and investments**, and where possible these should include existing international measures, such as PISA and TALIS, together with more qualitative school inspection data. A good example of an approach to monitoring digital education is that taken by Austria.
- Monitoring should consist of the **collection of data on the actual implementation** of digital education policies and an **evaluation of the achievement of the desired impacts**, as well as monitoring for unexpected impacts. Monitoring approaches should make use of a mixture of both quantitative and qualitative data in making such judgements and should

have flexibility in order to take account of the size of the Member States and of their specific approaches to implementing digital education.

- Evaluating educational impact is challenging, and additional research should be carried out to determine how best to monitor and evaluate the impact of digital education policies. To conserve costs, where possible digital education evaluation should form one element of a holistic evaluation of educational impact. It was suggested that MS should consider approaches, such as the staged use of data, an approach used frequently in Japan which was cited as a good example of a smart data collection approach in the OECD presentation.
- There is a widespread perceived need for **additional research in the field of digital education and training**, particularly in terms of identifying approaches, methodologies and tools. Policy makers should seek to identify the research needs in this area and to further enhance **appropriate ways to access** this (and existing) research information.