

Council Recommendation on Improving the Provision of Digital Skills in Education and Training and Council Recommendation on the Key Enabling Factors for Successful Digital Education and Training

Policy Brief

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Council Recommendation on the Key Enabling Factors for Successful Digital Education and Training

Introduction

The EU's renewed Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027) seeks to work towards high-quality, inclusive and accessible digital education in Europe, and aims to support the adaptation of the education and training systems of Member States to the digital age. This Council Recommendation complements a second Council Recommendation on improving the provision of digital skills in education and training. Both stemmed from the realised importance of digital skills in education and training with the advent of the 2019 global health pandemic. With almost 23 billion euros dedicated to digital education and digital skills development within the Recovery and Resilience plans, the implementation process is now a priority. It is also important to note that this proposal aims to be a relevant pathway for the EU in achieving a human-centered digital transformation.

The focus on digital education and training also aligns well with the priorities set for this year given that it is the European Year of Skills. In fact, the EU institutions have been steadily working in finding new means and opportunities in communicating the present needs to invest and work for a digital transition.

Recommendations

The Council Recommendation sets priorities to work with governments and key stakeholders in:

- Ensuring that national objectives are set in an integrated manner and are reviewed and updated regularly.
- Ensuring that the national objectives are aligned with the Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027 and the Union-level targets of the Digital Decade Policy Programme.
- The setting of national targets and ensuring that their progress is monitored, and reports are published assuring that best practices and recommendations are taken note of.
- Conducting the regular evaluations of the impact of digital education policies and practices.

The Council Recommendation also calls for greater synergies within government departments in ensuring that a cohesive and cost-efficient approach is taken when it comes to digital education policies and practices by:

- Ensuring that there is regular dialogue between the different government departments.
- Facilitating the active involvement of stakeholders and social partners at each stage in ensuring that everyone's interests are presented in the policy-making process.
- Calling for a two-way communication system with both the private sector and technology providers in ensuring that any subsequently proposed policy is well supported by the leaders in emerging technologies. A two-way communication system will also support public-private partnership and foster an element of peer-learning in finding solutions to common cross-national challenges.

In ensuring that all teaching staff is well supported, the Recommendation calls for endeavours in increasing the capacity of building of education and training institutions by:

- Involving educators throughout the process in getting the most appropriate digital equipment and effective curricula. It is also encouraged that educators are provided with training opportunities that allow them to continually upgrade their skills and benefit from professional development. For maximum effectiveness, such training should be made available as flexibly as possible in encouraging uptake.
- Encouraging education and training institutions to take up and engage in this digital transformation of the education and training sectors by equipping educators with the right and available tools (such as HEInnovate). Governments and relevant authorities in different member states are also encouraged to continue to engage education and institution leaders by recognising the work done by institutions, encourage peer-to-peer exchanges and support the dialogue between educators and the industry. For effective engagement of these institutions, the Commission is also recommending that each school has access to the right specialists including ICT administrators and that the appropriate awareness, training and policies are in place in ensuring a cyber secure environment.
- Focussing on the promotion of high-quality investment which specifically targets digital education and training. This is to be achieved by focussing on alternate investment sources in increasing the ability to provide tailored support and expertise.
- Having adequate investment in ensuring that there is equal opportunity for all learners. An investment focus on high-speed internet connectivity, facilitating students' access to devices and having the right classroom equipment in setting for modern, accessible and high-quality digital education.

The European Commission's Role

In supporting these recommendations, the European Commission outlines the following:

1. To establish a High-Level Group on Digital Education which is to be set up through a Commission Decision.
2. Promote the exchange of best practices, peer learning and cooperation through existing tools, platforms and communities.
3. Support the digital training of educators through Erasmus+ mobility and existing tools.
4. Support impact-focused investment in digital education and training infrastructure and services through national and Union funding and strengthen evidence on the effectiveness and efficiency of digital education policies and tools.
5. Improve transparency and evaluate progress in digital education and training by conducting a *Digital Education in Europe* survey every 3 years among other initiatives.



Council Recommendation on Improving the Provision of Digital Skills in Education and Training

Introduction

The focus on digital education and training aligns well with the priorities set for this year given that it is the European Year of Skills. In fact, the EU institutions have been steadily working in finding new means and opportunities in communicating the present needs to invest and work for a digital transition. This Council Recommendation complements a second *Council Recommendation on the key enabling factors for successful digital education and training*. The need for such action from the EU's side stems from the fact that while the demand for basic skills continues to grow across all sectors, many people still lack the much-needed digital skills.

This Council Recommendation aims to support Member States in tackling the challenges related to digital skills and development and the ability of education and training systems to support their provision. Its implementation will support the EU in reaching EU-level targets on digital skills, including by addressing the existing skill gaps.

Recommendations

1. The Council Recommendation provides Member States with guidelines in ensuring that in cases where a national strategy on digital education and skills approach is being adopted horizontally across Government ministries and departments, it is properly monitored for its effectiveness and impact. These include:
 - To set national objectives that call for regular review and update;
 - To ensure that national objectives align with those of the Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027 and the Digital Decade 2030 policy programme;
 - To ensure that the more vulnerable groups are taken into account thereby ensuring that national roadmaps account for any accessibility, territorial and socio-economic gaps in digital education;
 - To cater for the provision of digital skills consistently through all levels of educations and;
 - To facilitate for peer learning exchanges in finding common solutions to cross-national and regional challenges.
2. The Council Recommendation also focuses on how Member States can ensure that they are offering equal opportunities to develop digital skills. Among the points listed, the EU recommends:
 - That member states should prioritise early childhood education and ensure that are provided with the right tools in embracing the opportunities and risks that come with digitalisation and;
 - To strengthen the provision of digital skills in primary and secondary education including [VET](#).
3. It is also recommended that Member States should ensure that digital skills are thought transversally in different subject as well as improve teacher training and assessment through:
 - The support of cross-curricular approaches of digital skills in formal education;
 - The provision of quality training on the use of digital technology for teaching in addressing the barriers to the cross-circular approach and;
 - The action taken to close the gender gap in digital skills levels between educators.
4. The EU advises that Member states should have an active role in supporting high-quality education in informatics at school by:
 - Ensuring that informatics teaching is supported by qualified and specialised teachers who have access to quality and accessible learning resources and;
 - By promoting diversity and a gender-balance uptake.
5. To be able to provide for such education on informatics, Member States need to also ensure that they are taking the right steps in recruiting and training specialised teachers:
 - By building on ongoing initiatives such as the Pact for Skills in supporting a two-way exchange between educators and the private sector and;

- By enabling teachers to continue to specialise by offering opportunities (for example by using micro credentials).
6. Member States would also need to ensure that they cater for the development of advanced and specialist digital skills by for example expanding vocational programmes in areas such as AI, cybersecurity and software development. This is all done with the aim to attract students into programmes that match the labour market needs.
 7. In addressing the present digital skills mismatch, it is recommended that Member States:
 - Facilitate exchanges between industry and higher education institutions in developing interdisciplinary courses that focus on digital skills;
 - Ensure the quality and recognition of qualifications and micro-credentials and;
 - Support higher education institutions in attracting students, and particularly women, to enrol in and complete studies which focus on digital domains.
 8. Member states are also recommended to support the development of digital skills of adults and offer equal opportunities by strengthening efforts to better embed companies, particularly SMEs and start-ups to provide them with the necessary support.
 9. The text also recommends the promotion of the development of certification on digital skills by providing incentives and give visibility to digital skills for learning or career progression through certification of formal, non-formal or informal learning.
 10. The EU member states are also advised to develop a strategic or systematic approach in addressing the shortage of ICT specialists by designing and integrating in national strategies initiatives addressing specific digital skills shortages that are relevant at national level.
 11. Finally, member states are to provide the necessary funding for digital skills development by using various available funding streams and encourage private investment in digital skills.

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