

EFEE Statement on Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of Regions

Opening up Education: Innovative teaching and learning for all through Technologies and Open Educational Resources

Adopted by EFEE Members on 9 December, 2013

The European Federation of Education Employers (EFEE) welcomes the communication from the Commission on “*Opening up Education*”, which sets out an agenda for stimulating high-quality, innovative ways of learning and teaching through new technologies and digital content.

We consider the proposed agenda towards more open learning environments as an important and necessary step forward in modernising our education sector. It will enhance the high quality nature, in addition to the equity and efficacy of the educational sector. Through the anticipated developments, it will have a positive impact on the competitiveness of the European educational sector and its steps towards becoming a stronger global actor.

The proposed actions also strengthen the possibilities for further economic activities, employment and growth, not only by increased efficiency, but also by creating possibilities for new activities in the educational sector.

IN LINE WITH OUR MISSION

The communication is in line with the vision of EFEE on contributing to a modern European education sector. Our mission is to improve the quality of teaching and school management through European cooperation and dialogue. We can increase the awareness of the possibilities highlighted in the “*Opening up Education*” initiative and support our members in their goals toward achieving a modern and efficient education system.

EFEE reaffirms that open learning environments require the leaders of educational institutions to play an active role by providing a strategic vision transforming institutions into connected learning communities and stimulating professionals to strive for innovative teaching approaches. Our current work on “*Professional autonomy, accountability and efficient school leadership*” will be contributing towards the empowerment of school leaders, and towards the awareness of employers’ organisations and trade unions of the urgent necessity for an open learning environment that uses ICT to its full potential. Not only will schools and curricula become more and more interesting for active pupils and students, but also courses will become more dynamic for teachers and professors.

We would like to further comment on some issues stated in the communication:

Acquiring digital skills by teachers is an important step towards efficient use of the possibilities created by new digital technologies. We, as education employers, see such development of digital skills as a necessary investment in our teachers, for their pupils, students and for the future of Europe. It provides an opportunity to increase quality, efficiency and equity in education. However, the resources necessary for acquiring such digital skills of the 21st century can be significant and we need to be realistic in the current economic and financial situation where we as employers are under pressure from national governments to freeze or downsize educational budgets. Two possible ways of bridging the funding gap are through sponsorship by the large multi-national companies providing ICT hardware and software (who will benefit in the longer run from the greater usage of their products from more ICT-literacy); and through pump-priming investment via EU funds. Such funding would be of a once-and-for-all nature, mainly in training trainers, adapting curricula to the special requirements of teaching via ICT and in providing ICT hardware, rather than a continuing subsidy to support national funding.

One should also be mindful that acquiring and further developing digital skills is not the sole responsibility of the education institutions, but rather a joint effort amongst the key players in the education sector; national and local authorities, teacher training institutions, education providers, teachers, employers, trade unions, schools, school leaders and other stakeholders. Therefore, the financial burden needs to be divided between these stakeholders. Together, we need to be innovative in providing training: peer learning and train-the-trainers might provide welcome learning opportunities for teachers and school leaders.

Needless to say that, like any other employee in any other job, teachers themselves have an important role to play in their professional development. They have the first responsibility for their own eligibility in the labour market.

Connecting classrooms and deploying digital devices and content is a step towards a more efficient and open educational sector. However, it should be taken into account that the digital situation in schools and universities varies amongst the EU member states and among educational institutions. Therefore, the necessary steps to take are very diverse. Again it is a shared task and all stakeholders in education will need to be innovative and entrepreneurial in making sure that every school is connected.

Mobilising all stakeholders to change the role of digital technologies in education institutions is a challenge and an opportunity for our sector. Employers, trade unions, school leaders and others can contribute to the creation of an atmosphere that stimulates teachers to consider the utilisation of new technologies as an opportunity rather than as a threat. We already mentioned the importance of finding new and innovative solutions (e.g. peer learning) to concretise the switch towards digital teaching and learning.

Regarding the Commission's remark on the rewarding of teachers for new teaching methods, we would like to support the idea that teachers would indeed benefit from the positive feedback of their employers and school leaders. But let us keep in mind that digital technologies are tools, also in the teaching profession. Learning to use tools and implementing them in the workplace is not an accomplishment to be financially rewarded separately. Any rewards, personal incentives or salary-related issues for teachers are within the sole discretion of the Member States and individual education employers. The benefit that a teacher, or indeed any other employee, receives from better ICT equipment or better training in the use of ICT is in the enhancement of the job that is enabled as a consequence.

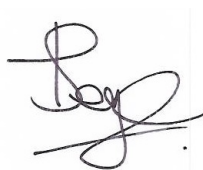
OUR ROLE

As European sectoral partners in education, we also need to reflect and work on our own role to play in opening up education.

Our members, the employers of teachers in primary schools, in secondary schools, in schools of vocational education and training, and of professors and other personnel at universities, know the day-to-day work in classes, in colleges and at universities.

Together with our members, we are working towards improving the quality education in Europe in order to make sure that our schools and universities of the 21st century are up-to-date and modern. They should provide for a **professional working environment for our teachers and professors** and an **interesting learning community for our pupils and students**.

As a consequence, our role as sectoral social partners in education is to make sure that the skills of our teachers, our professors, our researchers and our school leaders are also excellent, up-to date and modern. EFEE invites its members to continue their efforts in providing the optimal teaching and learning climate, fostering a culture of openness and continuous learning for all.



Bianka Stege

General Secretary

European Federation of Education Employers