

Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027

EFEE Position Paper

Digitalisation is transforming formal education systems at an unprecedented speed, as digital technologies are impacting the ways we learn, teach, and manage education institutions, while also changing our societies and how we perceive them. Ensuring quality formal education is key in empowering everyone to actively take part in the societies of today and of the future, both in personal and professional spheres. Therefore, the European Federation of Education Employers (EFEE) welcomes the progress made so far on the implementation of the Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027, though we believe further efforts remain necessary to ensure quality and inclusive formal education across Europe. With this paper, we wish to provide further insights -besides the input we provided during the stakeholder consultation on 3 July 2024- into our position.

As the recognised European social partner organisation representing education employers, **we particularly welcome the efforts and achievements** with regard to the following DEAP initiatives and objectives:

- encouraging digital training for leaders and teaching and support staff of education and training institutions, and promote their capacity building;
- national and international staff exchanges and peer learning, promoting collaborative projects, networks, and communities of practice and research;
- exploring learning methods to make new opportunities attractive and offer better learning solutions for both learners and teachers;
- inclusive learning communities, extra teacher resources assigned to the class (e.g. co-teaching), and access to additional learning environments;
- supporting effective partnerships for infrastructure and resources between different education and training providers;
- help teachers and educators understand the potential that the applications of AI and the use of data can have in education, while raising awareness of the possible risks;
- the Erasmus+ programme providing funding for cooperation projects that support the digital transformation planning of education and training institutions at all levels of education.

However, we believe **the following points require further attention**:

- **The changing learning and teaching environments** – With the advent of digitalisation in education, several countries are seeing traditional classrooms, in which one teacher teaches a fixed group of students, give way to larger classrooms in which a team of teachers and/or assistant teachers facilitate learning for a higher number of students. As AI tools can track student progress, offer personalised learning pathways, and reduce the need for manual grading and other administrative tasks, teachers are empowered to focus more on guiding and mentoring students. However, the use of digital practices in learning environments requires careful consideration to ensure that the schools remain inclusive and

supportive for all students and fitting for teaching staff and school leaders too. Ensuring the well-being of school staff and students in such changing environments is also essential. Therefore, we believe innovative practices should be further explored in order to acquire a thorough understanding of how these can effectively support schools in their respective contexts. Moreover, it would be relevant to identify operational ways to evaluate the mass of data available in education, for example for learning analytics, and to use data analysis to enhance innovation in education and to assess its effectiveness.

- **Teachers' working time** - By automating administrative tasks, digital tools can provide teachers with more time to focus on teaching and on individual student support. In certain contexts, more flexible working hours are also possible thanks to the use of digital platforms. However, this kind of shift would require further investigation, as it is essential to ensure that the use of digital tools effectively supports teachers and school leaders and contributes to increasing the quality of formal education.
- **Working conditions of teachers and school leaders** - The introduction of digital tools, including education technology, has the potential to improve teachers' working conditions. Not only could administrative tasks be reduced, but co-teaching/team teaching in larger classrooms could become a common practice. Such innovative learning environments might, however, have an impact on the roles and responsibilities of the teaching staff and on the recruitment of teachers and assistant teachers. Therefore, it would be relevant to further investigate how digital practices affect the working conditions of school staff in Europe. Careful consideration and research would also be required when making decisions that affect students, for instance when it comes to allowing or forbidding the use of mobile electronic devices in schools. Assessing the quality of commercially provided education technology and other ICT-solutions for education would also be crucial, along with ensuring that these tools respect privacy and comply with GDPR or other related national regulations.
- **Opening up the teaching profession** - Digitalisation is expected to diversify the teaching profession by introducing new roles, such as assistant teachers whose responsibilities could be more related to social aspects of teaching. In this sense, we believe opening up the teaching profession would also contribute to tackling teacher shortages. However, teachers' contractual arrangements might also be affected. Therefore, it would be relevant to explore how such diversification of roles in schools might affect job security, but could also potentially enhance career progression.
- **Professional development of teachers and school leaders** - With the advent of digitalisation, we believe there will be an increasing need for tech-savvy school staff able to work in larger and more diverse classrooms with the support of education technology. Therefore, school leaders and teaching staff should have access to relevant professional development opportunities in order to acquire the relevant competences to teach in and to manage such new learning environments.
- **Leadership of education institutions** - The digital transition is also reshaping the ways schools are managed. Higher education institutions have already started using digital platforms, which expand the reach of their courses but also has an impact on the responsibilities of their teaching staff. In pre-primary, primary and secondary education, we believe leadership will likely become more collaborative in the (near) future. However, there is also a risk that such practices affect the

teachers' autonomy. Therefore, the impact of the digital transition should be further investigated in this regard in order to ensure positive outcomes.

- **Investment and funding to support these objectives** - In order to better explore and harness the potential of digitalisation in formal education, relevant investment and funding are essential. We believe formal education providers should be prioritised when it comes to allocating resources supporting the use and testing of digital practices in education. In addition, there is a need for scientific research into the use, efficiency, and effectivity of ICT applications in education. Such research can be supported and funded via Horizon calls. Funding should also support training of school staff, as they adapt to new technologies and to their changing roles.
- **The essential role of Social Partners in education** - Finally, we wish to highlight that the role of social partners in education is essential in ensuring that learning environments in schools are aligned with the realities of formal education, also in the context of digitalisation and increased use of education technologies as outlined above.

To conclude, we believe digitalisation is bringing significant changes in learning environments and in formal education in Europe as a whole. These ongoing and expected further transformations should, however, be appropriately tested and investigated in order to ensure that these support the work of school leaders, teachers and other school staff, while actively contributing to increasing the quality of education.