Towards a European Digital Education Lab: Supporting collaboration and co-creation amongst national and European digital education initiatives

In 2020, digital education has become more crucial than ever to support learners and teachers across all sectors of education. The COVID-19 crisis underlined the need for an effective response in the field of education far beyond 2020, to build confidence, to inspire, to focus and to consolidate. National and European initiatives have been increasingly successful in shaping the digital turn in recent years amongst specific groups of stakeholders. At the same time, European alignment is even more needed and the sharp distinction between different sectors of education does not always seem appropriate in the digital age as the boundaries between the different areas of education have become increasingly blurry.

The Digital Education Action Plan serves as a joint European approach strategically framing a joint vision. A next step within the Digital Education Action Plan could focus on linking digital education initiatives across Europe thus enabling more collaboration and co-creation facilitating agile, problem-solving approaches enabling joint solutions beyond borders.

As national initiatives working on digital education in a variety of educational sectors (higher education, research, professional education, vocational education), we propose the establishment of a European Digital Education Lab as a working unit by the European Commission. This working unit could orchestrate cross-sectoral exchange, discourses and actions in the field of digital education and enable strategic collaboration and co-creation amongst experts and stakeholders of digital education across regions, member states, and the EU. The initiatives to be targeted by a European Digital Education Lab should be well-established and at the same time be regarded as "enablers" and orchestrators of discourse and innovative action. Committed to the digital transformation of education, educational institutions and educational systems, they should have achieved sufficient relevance in their field at member state or EU level.

Supporting initiatives and organisations

Germany
Hochschulforum Digitalisierung (HFD)
German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD)
AI Campus

Netherlands
SURF

Austria
iMooX

France
France Université Numérique (FUN)

Ireland
National Forum T&L

1. Needs of national initiatives

A. A European expert network:
Empowering initiatives through networking & peer-to-peer exchange opportunities

In different fields of education member states have established successful initiatives focusing on education in the digital age. Exchange amongst these initiatives and their individual stakeholders is, however, up to now mainly based on personal contacts, selective topics and erratic frequencies. Cross-sectoral cooperation projects in the field of digitalisation have been running successfully . However, their number remains low. We therefore wish for European support to better align such national initiatives, learn from each other and strengthen joint approaches across sectors, institutions and countries.

Needs:
- ✓ A network supporting **peer exchange of national digital education hubs and initiatives** in order to increase the (joint) impact of such initiatives
- ✓ **Strategic alignment** of national digital education initiatives for joint reflection, strategies and dissemination of good practices amongst the EU member states
- ✓ Creating a **Europe-wide forum / think and do tank** that can give input, reflect on and disseminate output from European projects in the field of digital education
- ✓ Strategic **"match-making" for stakeholders** focussing on digital education, digitals skills and digital internationalisation (to identify strategic partnerships, increase impact and avoid ad-hoc-contacts)
- ✓ Empowering member states to **further develop their own digital education initiatives** based on **peer-to-peer exchange** and good practices across Europe

B. A European community of practice:
Enabling collaboration and co-creation amongst European and national initiatives

As national organisations implementing digital educational initiatives, we believe that our role is to enable visible progress in digital education, having already established strong communities of practice. Initiatives can play a role as a link between European, national and local levels of education, connecting joint European approaches (e. g. Europass, EDCI, Microcredentials …) to the end-user, students, teachers and staff. Institutionalised support by the European Commission for collaboration and co-creation between initiatives could strengthen our digital ecosystem. Future aims and focal points of the renewed Digital Education Action Plan can be jointly addressed.

Needs:
- ✓ European **communities of practice** / special interest groups on digital education priorities
- ✓ European **working groups** focussing on joint action supplementing existing approaches
- ✓ Strategic integration of **European University Alliances** and initiatives in collaborative approaches
- ✓ Collaboration to **protect public values**, organising countervailing power against the market
- ✓ Collaboration and co-creation on making best **use of digital technologies** (such as AI technologies, data analysis to facilitate personalised learning, etc.) in education
- ✓ Collaboration and co-creation on **quality assurance, standards and guidelines** for the digital age
- ✓ Joint development of agile, **Europe-wide collaborative formats** (such as **online-hackathons**)

C.   A European digital skills ecosystem:
Boost data & digital literacy and AI skills across Europe

Many national initiatives have focused on supporting educational institutions in the way forward to strengthen digital and AI skills amongst their teachers and learners. The European Commission has reached significant impact with the DigiCompEdu framework. EADTU has successfully strengthened strategic exchange and alignment amongst European MOOC providers by organising the European MOOC consortium. At the same time, national platforms, such as FUN, Miríadax, iMooX or the AI Campus have not reached a sufficient level of operational collaboration and strategic alignment on the actual skills and formats to be focused on. In order to strengthen a European Digital Skills agenda and to use resources amongst European member states more efficiently (for example by sharing material), more alignment and collaboration would be very much needed.

Needs:
- ✓ Alignment on **skills** to teach in different education sectors
- ✓ Exchange, guidance and consolidation on digital learning **formats** for different target groups
- ✓ Better **operative connection and collaboration** of national **MOOC initiatives** in collaboration with the European MOOC consortium, including topics of credentialisation and interoperability
- ✓ Joint approaches on **OER material** boosting digital and AI skills, including standards for open licenses and further exchange on **copyright rules / copyright exceptions / open science** for education

D.   A European digital data ecosystem:
Networked IT infrastructures and seamless data mobility

Digital transformation comes with technological innovation. Digital education initiatives across Europe and worldwide are using and developing new digital communication tools, e-learning services and platforms. On the one hand, the variety of digital solutions seems to be endless, on the other hand continuous exchange of expertise and sharing of good practices is needed to agree on common standards and harmonised processes in education. Making digital services and IT infrastructures interoperable is key for cross-border communication, mobility and exchange. Seamless data exchanges on the basis of EU regulations (e.g. SDG) can pave the way for networked digital ecosystems that are putting the individual user at the center. Citizens should be digitally enabled to share their educational data with whomever they want, whenever they want, wherever they are. Therefore, knowledge exchange is important to avoid isolated solutions that are not scalable and open to others. To focus on the technological aspects of digital education helps provide access to education for all.

Needs:
- ✓ Joint action on **interoperability of digital technologies**, services and IT infrastructures as basis for digital education
- ✓ Exchange on **European data formats** and emerging, common standards
- ✓ Joint approaches for the development of **networked digital ecosystems and seamless data mobility** as preconditions for international mobility and exchange

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