



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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*Mr Michael MÜLLER
President of the
Bundesrat
Leipziger Straße 3 - 4
D – 10117 BERLIN*

Dear President,

The Commission would like to thank the Bundesrat for its Opinion concerning the Communication on the Digital Education Action Plan – {COM(2018) 22 final}.

The Digital Education Action Plan contributes to an ambitious vision on education in general and on digital issues in particular. In fact, as a contribution to the Leaders' meeting at the occasion of the Social Summit in Gothenburg in November last year, the Commission presented in the Communication on Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture¹ its vision for a European Education Area and outlined ideas on how to get there by 2025 including reaping the benefits of technology. With the Digital Education Action Plan the Commission presented a range of actions that support Member States in their efforts towards digitisation and innovation in education.

An important element of the Digital Education Action Plan is to consolidate various ongoing initiatives related to the digitisation of education systems and to launch new ones. The Commission fully acknowledges the competence of Member States in the field of education. It is its aim to implement each initiative contained in the Digital Action Plan in full cooperation with Member States and stakeholders in the field of education.

The Commission welcomes the position of the Bundesrat and is pleased that it highlights the relevance and impact of digitisation in our society and the role of education in responding to the challenges posed by the digital transformation.

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/communication-strengthening-european-identity-education-culture_en.pdf

The Commission moreover appreciates the Bundesrat's in-depth analysis of the Digital Education Action Plan and has carefully considered each of the issues raised in the Opinion. The Commission believes that Bundesrat's Opinion constitutes an important contribution to the ongoing debate on digital transformation and an excellent opportunity to reinforce the political dialogue between the Commission and the Bundesrat. It also offers areas of reflections that could be shared with the other Member States.

The Digital Education Action Plan is a political document and the Commission will further inform on its operational aspects as part of the Commission's wider communication efforts. The Commission recognises the need for an open dialogue with stakeholders on the issues tackled in the Action Plan. For this reason, the Commission organised an Info Day in Brussels on 5 June 2018 where the various initiatives contained in the Action Plan were discussed with Member States' representatives.

More technical replies to the questions and concerns raised in the Opinion of the Bundesrat are provided in the attached Annex.

The Commission hopes that the clarifications provided in this reply address the issues raised by the Bundesrat and looks forward to continuing the political dialogue in the future.

Yours faithfully,

*Věra JOUROVÁ
Member of the Commission*

Annex

Connectivity gap (point 2):

The Commission intends to help narrow the connectivity gap through a series of activities. The action is centred on creating awareness (including via the recently created European Union network of Broadband Competence Offices) about Union funding opportunities for schools which include the European Regional and Development Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the Connecting Europe Facility. The Commission also aims to support schools in addressing the existing connectivity needs and accessing high-speed broadband.

Moreover, the Commission is currently looking into the possibility to develop a voucher scheme to support the connectivity of schools with a view to tackling the digital divide between and within Member States. In order to define the conditions for the potential voucher scheme for schools, the Commission will draw on the experience gained with the Wifi4EU scheme. In terms of financing, the Commission will look into future funding instruments, acknowledging that the new Multiannual Financial Framework and the future funding programmes cannot be prejudged at this stage.

Self-reflection tool for digitally capable schools (SELFIE) (point 3):

The Commission recognises that any instrument proposed at Union level should provide significant added value. The ultimate goal of the tool is to be a useful instrument for schools to self-assess their level of integration of digital technologies into the overall process of improving their teaching and learning. More specifically, the tool can be customised allowing schools to add their own questions to suit their national, regional or local context.

The aim of the Commission is not to substitute any self-assessment tools existing at national level. The self-reflection tool for digitally capable schools is a voluntary option that schools might wish to consider if interested in reflecting on their use of digital technologies. It has been developed in close cooperation with the Member States through the Education and Training 2020 Working Group on Digital Skills and Competences. The group has taken a keen interest in the tool and many members volunteered to pilot the tool in their countries.

In reply to the remarks of the Bundesrat on data collection, the Commission confirms that it ensures compliance with data collection regulations: no personal data is collected through the self-reflection tool and responses are entirely anonymous. The tool provides a SELFIE School Report, which shows the overall results of the anonymised information provided by participants. This report allows the school in question to see its strengths, weaknesses and areas for improvement without tracing the single answers of participants.

Mentoring scheme (point 4):

The Commission wishes to support teachers in their pedagogical use of digital technology. The mentoring scheme will involve a large number of school leaders supporting them to develop a whole school approach regarding their use of digital technologies. The Commission is currently seeking to launch this action under the Societal Challenge programme 2020, provided there will be sufficient budget available.

Acquisition, certification and validation of digital skills (point 5):

The Commission intends to address a number of challenges, such as the need of (i) employers, education and training institutions, and other competent bodies to be able to verify the authenticity of certificates, both within and beyond Member States; and (ii) learners to be able to present online their certificates to employers or admission committees. The Commission promotes ways how students and citizens can store and share their digitally signed qualifications on the New Europass platform or on any other electronic site. This would enable education providers and employers to access reliable and trustworthy information on the qualifications obtained by citizens.

The Commission considers this initiative to be aligned with previous work and commitments in the area. The European Skills/Competences, qualifications and Occupations classification (teriESCO) is part of the Commission's Europe 2020 Strategy. The Council Conclusions of 11 May 2010 on competences supporting lifelong learning and the new skills for new jobs initiative invited the Commission and the Member States, in cooperation with the social partners, the public employment services and other relevant stakeholders, to work on a common terminology. Between 2010 and 2017, the European Skills, Competences and Occupations (ESCO) classification was developed in cooperation with a wide number of stakeholders and published by the Commission on 28 July 2017. It is thus beyond the project stage and has since been used in various online services, e.g. by public employment services, online job boards and in big data analytics. The use of the classification system is voluntary. A mandatory use of the classification is foreseen by the Commission only in the framework of European Employment Services network. To this end, the Commission will adopt an implementing act under Article 19(2) of Regulation 2016/589/EU in mid-2018. In Europass, the European Skills, Competences and Occupations classification could be used on a voluntary basis following appropriate testing and evaluation and having due regard to the position of Member States. The Commission believes that the European Skills, Competences and Occupations classification terminology offers an added value for the transparent description of holistic educational qualifications and looks forward to a deeper exchange of views with the Member States on this subject.

The Commission will neither issue qualifications itself nor validate competences under the Digital Education Action Plan. The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System Users' Guide will be considered by the Commission when further developing the action.

New benchmarks for digital and entrepreneurship competences (points 6 & 7)

In line with what was suggested by the Council in 2014 and following up on the Communication on Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture, the Commission is analysing the relevance and feasibility of new benchmarks for digital and entrepreneurship competences. However, the Commission agrees with the considerations of the Bundesrat, specifically on the need to carefully consider Member States' activities on the topic, to reflect on the expected European added value and to consider the costs and benefits associated to possible new benchmarks. Beside the need to respect the subsidiarity principle, the evaluations by Member States of the benchmarks contained in the strategic framework for Education and Training 2020 show the need to combine quantitative targets with structural/education system-level information. In full respect of this important indication, the Commission is currently analysing available measures and indicators for digital skills and entrepreneurship and is pursuing a dialogue with Member States to explore the added value of such an exercise.

The Commission agrees with the Bundesrat on the challenges that a benchmark on entrepreneurship poses, especially because Member States have different approaches to entrepreneurship and show different levels of engagement in supporting the development of entrepreneurship as a key transversal competence. The Commission recognises that entrepreneurship education is a policy priority or part of a broader strategy in most Member States and highlights the benefits of an open dialogue with Member States in this area (e.g. by promoting a shared understanding, further supporting policy developments and enabling sustained progress across Europe).

Programming in schools (point 8):

The Commission agrees with the Bundesrat and fully respects the responsibility of the Member States for the content of teaching and the organisation of educational systems. Moreover, the Commission is fully aligned with the analysis of the Bundesrat on the need to consider digital skills beyond programming. This action of the Commission wishes to encourage primary and secondary schools, including vocational and education training schools, to participate in the European Union Code Week. The European Union Code Week is a grass-root movement run by volunteers who promote programming, computational thinking but also critical and creative thinking in their countries as Code Week Ambassadors. The Commission is supporting the participation of schools in this initiative in a number of ways, all of them respecting the freedom of teaching and the competences of Member States. This support includes for instance free materials for teachers in all European languages which are available on the European Union Code Week website.

Awareness-raising about cyber security (point 9):

The cyber-security initiative of the Digital Education Action Plan is in line with the previous work carried out by the Commission in cooperation with Member States.

Data collection (point 10):

The Commission accepts the position of the Bundesrat regarding data collection and the need for further data analysis. The Commission agrees that any data analysis should not be a burden on Member States and should not be redundant. The Commission underlines that the action carried out within the framework of the Programme for International Student Assessment aims at improving a currently existing data collection mechanism, namely the questionnaire on the use of Information and Communications Technology, which is provided as an option in the Programme for International Student Assessment.

European-wide platform for higher digital education (point 11):

The Commission takes note of the analysis of the Bundesrat. The Commission informs the Bundesrat that the European-wide platform for higher digital education will be implemented through a policy experimentation call: European Policy Experimentations EACEA/28/2017². In this context, the experimentation will directly involve universities in design and content creation.

Student eCard (point 12):

The Commission confirms that the Student eCard shall not be a mandatory condition for participating in the Erasmus+ programme.

Freedom of research and teaching (point 13):

The Commission agrees on the need to maintain freedom of research and teaching for all universities and higher education organisations. The Commission will promote actions that foster the development of open science skills in higher education, including actions that will enable students, researchers, and educators to improve their skills for open access publishing and dissemination. This initiative will be substantiated by a call for proposals in the framework of Forward-Looking Cooperation projects under the Erasmus+ programme in the second semester of 2018. Forward-Looking Cooperation Projects aim at promoting innovation emerging from representative stakeholders in the field.

Pilot project on Artificial Intelligence (point 15):

The Commission is currently exploring in detail how pilot projects on artificial intelligence and learning analytics could provide European added value. The pilot projects will explore the initiatives that are currently ongoing in Member States and pull together different experiences. The Commission will adopt an experimental approach in piloting the use of artificial intelligence and data analysis in specific sectors to predict the training requirements for future competence profiles. The objective is to exploit data applications that predict the competence requirements of future jobs and feed this information to education and training organisations and Member States through policy exchanges.

² https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/erasmus-plus/funding/key-action-3-initiatives-for-policy-innovation-european-policy-experimentation-eacea-282017_en