



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

*Brussels, 12.05.2021
C(2021) 3493 final*

*Reiner HASELOFF
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 from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions – Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027) – Resetting education and training for the digital age {COM(2020) 624 final}.

As you are aware, the Commission presented the new Digital Education Action Plan (“Action Plan”) in September 2020, which was followed by the Council conclusions on digital education in Europe’s knowledge societies¹, issued under the German Presidency in December 2020. The excellent cooperation between the Commission and the German Presidency during this process led to a strategic, timely and ambitious effort of the European Union to accelerate the support to digital education across Europe as part of the overall objective for high quality and inclusive education. As such, the Commission intends to continue in the spirit of co-creation and ensure that Member States and stakeholders are fully involved in the next steps of the implementation of the Action Plan.

Moreover, in working to deliver on the European Education Area, the vital contribution of digital education and, more specifically, the Action Plan cannot be overstated. The Action Plan is a key enabler of the European Education Area, as it contributes to Europe’s recovery and resilience strategy in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis and to achieving the objectives of both the multiannual financial framework and the European Semester.

¹https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv%3AOJ.C_.2020.415.01.0022.01.ENG&toc=OJ%3AC%3A2020%3A415%3ATOOC

The Commission welcomes the general support of the Bundesrat to the Action Plan and is pleased to learn that its strategic objectives on the creation of a strong digital ecosystem and the improvement of digital skills and competences are in line with Germany's "Education in the Digital World" and with the 2019-2024 "Digital Pact for School".

The Commission agrees that the implementation of the Action Plan needs to happen in full respect of Articles 165 and 166 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union as regards the principle of subsidiarity. The Commission also acknowledges the long-standing cooperation of the European Union with the Member States in the field of education and training. As such, the actions presented in the Action Plan aim to support Member States' efforts to, for example, improve connectivity, support the professional development of teachers and strengthen the digital skills of young people. Likewise, although the Commission promotes synergies across its various policy initiatives related to the acquisition of digital skills, each policy initiative remains within its specific realm of competence.

The Commission notes that upcoming initiatives, such as the Recommendation on online and distance learning for primary and secondary education, would not interfere with the responsibility of Member States to design the content of their curricula. Moreover, they would provide a basis for mutual learning, sharing expertise and providing guidance on emerging areas, such as blended learning. As such, the Commission underlines that learning content remains the exclusive competence of the Member States.

The Commission reiterates that the design and implementation of actions, such as the European Digital Skills Certificate and the update of the Digital Competence Framework, would be done with the full respect of the legal and structural frameworks of national educational systems.

Furthermore, the Commission would like to point out that the support and expertise of Member States in the design and implementation of these actions will be ensured through targeted consultations and continuous dialogue with Member States. The Commission would like to ensure that the added value of cooperation at European level does not duplicate what may already be taking place at the national level. Similarly, the opinions expressed by Member States during the online public consultation leading up to the adoption of the Action Plan provided rich insight into education and training during the crisis/recovery period, as well as the vision for digital education in Europe. The Commission received over 2,700 submissions, including 136 position papers from organisations. The submissions showed that learners need more interaction and guidance from teachers, more communication with peers and more support for mental health and well-being. Respondents rated teachers' digital skills and competences as the most important component of digital education, followed by leadership and vision in the educational institution, suitable digital resources/content, tools and platforms and infrastructure. This valuable input will enrich the implementation and roll-out of the Action Plan's initiatives and actions.

On the self-assessment tools for teachers, the Commission is working on a SELFIE (Self-reflection on Effective Learning by Fostering the use of Innovative Educational technologies) to help primary and secondary teachers assess their digital competences and identify further learning needs. This tool builds on the existing successful “SELFIE for schools” tool² and will be launched in the second half of the year.

The Commission points out that the introduction of a European Union target for student digital competence (e.g. to reduce the share of 13-14-year-old students who underperform in computer and information literacy to under 15% by 2030) has been discussed with Member States and relevant stakeholders. For example, it was discussed with the Standing Group on Indicators and Benchmarks, which is the main forum of discussion on the shared EU-level targets in education and training and brings together experts from Member States, the Commission, Eurostat and other research institutions. Likewise, the Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030)³ confirms the Member States’ endorsement of the different EU-level targets and includes the benchmark on the level of digital competences of students. Lastly, the Commission supports countries participating in the 2023 International Computer and Information Literacy Survey (ICILS)⁴, which is the dataset for the digital competence benchmark, and will address the question of how well students are prepared for study, work and life in a digital world.

The Commission strongly supports the ongoing work of existing bodies, such as the Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council of the European Union and the Education Committee, and values their contribution to delivering digital education across Europe. As such, it does not intend to create parallel or new structures that would duplicate these efforts. Likewise, in delivering on the European Education Area and shaping its future governance structure, the aim is to strengthen the exchange and cooperation at political level and promote the engagement of stakeholders through fine-tuning existing processes and configurations. As such, the objective is to complement and reinforce existing activities related to achieving the European Education Area rather than to introduce or duplicate existing bodies.

The Commission agrees that the implementation of European wide platforms is intended to strengthen cooperation, create synergies and disseminate expertise and, when applicable, to process personal data in full compliance with European Union rules.

Moreover, the Commission is in full agreement with the Bundesrat that the acquisition of basic skills is a priority for all learners across Europe. This is clearly articulated in the Communication on Achieving a European Education Area by 2025⁵, as well as in the aforementioned Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation

² https://ec.europa.eu/education/schools-go-digital/about-selfie_en.

³ [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:32021G0226\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:32021G0226(01))

⁴ <https://www.iea.nl/studies/iea/icils/2023>

⁵ COM(2020) 625 final.

in education and training. The latter stresses the importance of helping all learners reach a baseline level of proficiency in basic skills, with a special focus on groups that are at risk of underachievement and early school leaving.

Lastly, the Action Plan aims to support the digital education strategies of Member States. As cooperation on digital education is a voluntary action and it is not tied to European funding, the Action Plan provides Member States with guidance and insight on how their priorities on digital education can be developed further. The Action Plan identifies specific areas where action is particularly needed to support their education and training systems, which Member States can consider within their Recovery and Resilience Plans. Likewise, the potential funding of the Erasmus+ programme, Horizon Europe, Digital Europe Programme, InvestEU and the European Structural and Investment Funds also play an instrumental role in delivering digital education.

In response to the more technical issues in the opinion, the Commission would like to refer to 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 our political dialogue in the future.

Yours faithfully,

*Maroš Šefčovič
Vice-President*

*Mariya Gabriel
Member of the Commission*

Annex

- *The Commission notes the concerns of the Bundesrat on Europass and reiterates that learning opportunities within Europass aim to support individuals in their career development and are not intended as tools for tracking educational achievement. Moreover, to ensure transparency in the development of Europass, Member States are extensively consulted and informed about the development of its different versions.*
- *The Commission reiterates that the focus of a possible European Exchange Platform, which is subject to a feasibility study, is the sharing of high quality digital education content. As such, the platform seeks to provide high quality content in a digital format and in full respect of the principle of subsidiarity, given the exclusive competence of Member States for learning content.*
- *The Commission notes that the recognition and validation of courses and learning opportunities delivered both face-to-face and in digital formats, as well as across borders, play a key role in making lifelong learning and upskilling and reskilling a reality. Likewise, the Commission agrees on the need to further improve and develop existing recognition systems whilst, in parallel, recognising the diversity of Member States' education and training systems. To this end, the Commission would like to highlight the ongoing work in this matter, such as the development of a European approach for micro-credentials⁶.*

⁶ See, for instance, the report on micro-credentials in higher education: https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/european-education-area/a-european-approach-to-micro-credentials_en.