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on blended learning for high quality and inclusive primary and secondary education

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Commission Proposal for a Council Recommendation on blended learning for high quality and inclusive primary and secondary education

Commission Staff Working Document - June 2021

Commission Proposal for a Council Recommendation on blended learning for high quality and inclusive primary and secondary education

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1. Introduction

1.Introduction

1.1 About this document

This Staff Working Document is designed to accompany and support the Recommendation on blended learning for high quality and inclusive primary and secondary education.

It provides research evidence and other information as a basis for both the legal text of the Recommendation and its subsequent supportive actions. It is also, as far as possible at the time of writing, a practical guide/handbook to help stakeholders understand the full potential of this topic and to support real and positive change across systems and across Europe.

The document describes a vision for blended learning in school education from the perspective of the Digital Education Action Plan 2021-27 and European Education Area: its key ideas on inclusion and on Key Competence development as part of high quality school education. It describes how these ideas are connected to the concepts of a blended learning and innovation and change in education. It also provides a glossary and further explanation of relevant terms (see Chapter 2).

In order to support the statements of the Recommendation and to support action stemming from its adoption, this document accompanying the proposal for a recommendation discusses recent evidence from research together with European stakeholder opinions and experiences (see Chapter 3). Examples of existing policies and projects supporting blended learning are provided. However, given that this is an evolving field in school education – particularly in the context of school site closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic – it should be acknowledged that new evidence and perspectives are constantly emerging.

The document also outlines considerations for legislation and a number of existing EU frameworks and tools that can inspire and support change at school, regional, national and EU level, together with suggestions for monitoring and evaluating future developments (See Chapter 4).

Finally, based on the evidence and examples provided in the other chapters, the document presents a framework for blended learning outlining a set of challenges and examples of good practice on 10 specific areas (see Chapter 5).

1.2 Why a Recommendation on "blended learning"?

It is the vision and the commitment of the European Union to improve the quality of school education: its inclusiveness, the capacity of teachers and school leaders, and the governance of school education systems.[1] All learners should have the opportunity, supported by school education, to achieve their full potential and develop a broad range of competences for their current and future life in society.

The COVID-19 pandemic led to widespread school site closure and a necessary embracing of certain forms of distance and online learning, labelled "Emergency Remote Teaching". It demonstrated the capacity of systems to be flexible and inclusive with embedding different learning environments and tools. Stakeholders, who were consulted for the preparation of the Recommendation, pointed to the opportunity to build on these experiences and not lose any positive effect of the current momentum of change. The actions taken by European education systems in 2020-21 demonstrated that rapid adaptation and innovation in education is possible, with the emergency response triggering new legislation for some systems, as well as more autonomy and guidance to authorities and school leaders at the local level. Some schools and systems have also developed new stakeholder partnerships, with parents, local and regional communities, business, NGOs, and cultural organisations.

However, there were shortfalls from a lack of readiness of school education, including Vocational Education and Training, systems and stakeholders to take advantage of different learning environments and tools. These include low levels of digital competence and a lack of sufficient resources (adequate tools, infrastructure, and time) to prepare and offer alternative ways of learning. Science and arts, physical education, and VET were heavily disrupted, given their focus on practical tasks. Existing inequalities in learner opportunities and progression have been exposed further, and new inequalities have appeared.[2] The European Commission is committed to investing in recovery from the pandemic in the knowledge that education systems have a desire and a need to improve their resilience, to cope and adapt with changing circumstances in the future.

There is a need, a desire and an opportunity to build on this knowledge and experiences, draw lessons from the experiences made during the pandemic, and explore the full potential of blending learning environments and tools that, if sustained, can provide young people with an

[1] https://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/school/about-school-policy_en

[2] Whilst early research, such as by the European Commission's Joint Research Centre, considered the "likely" impact of school site closures, emerging evidence is sometimes based on surveys to small samples of teachers asking about "perceived" gaps. Longitudinal data about pupil progression is not yet available for consideration on a European scale. What is consistent across this research is the variation in access to learning tools, contact time between teachers and pupils, and what is perceived to be a supportive home learning environment. It is this variation that is the basis for statements about "inequalities".

education that prepares them for a rapidly-changing and complex world.[3]. The challenges for the design of school education remains the same as before the pandemic: how to build meaningful learning experiences in different environments and for pupils of different ages, abilities and circumstances; how to support broad competence development appropriate to learners' needs for today's and the future global society; how to support well-being; and how to support teachers and schools to be innovative in terms of their own organisational and pedagogical approaches, for the benefit of all learners. In order to meet these challenges and improve capacity, a blended learning approach requires a coherent approach by the school education system as a whole within a culture of continous improvement.

[3] Vegas, E. and Winthrop, R. (2020) Beyond reopening schools: How education can emerge stronger than before COVID-19. Available at https://www.brookings.edu/research/beyond-reopening-schools-how-education-can-emerge-stronger-than-before-covid-19/

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