



EUCIS-LLL

4 March 2014 - Synthesis report

## Policy Debate

# “Digital wave: supporting a cultural shift in learning systems”

The debate on harnessing the potential of ICT for education and training has become more and more vivid. In 2013 a new Commission Communication on “Opening Up Education” has been made public, echoing the commitments made in the Digital Agenda. After the launch of the Open Education Europa portal, many actions are to be undertaken in 2014 to concretise EU recommendations in the field of digital learning. It is now up to Member States to show political will and relay the European impulse through genuine national policies in line with the modernisation of our education and training systems. EUCIS-LLL considers that digital access can contribute to pedagogic innovation and this is a priority in its Manifesto for the European elections. It gives a warm welcome to a European integrated approach; but despite the collective enthusiasm about the opportunities offered by new technologies for education, several key questions are still pending. This event is meant to take stock of the recent European policy developments and deepen the reflection on the direction they should take in 2014 onwards.

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# Welcome words

**David Lopez**

**EUCIS-LLL President**

David Lopez thanked MEP Maria Da Graça Carvalho and MEP Maria do Céu Patrão Neves (Portugal, EPP) for hosting this important debate within the European Parliament. EUCIS-LLL provides a space to debate on transversal issues and one cannot ignore the necessity to deal with the impact of the digital wave on education and training whether it is formal or non-formal. Today our schools lack digital resources, between 50 and 90% of our students never use online educational resources while 60% of our teachers have never been trained to use those new tools although 70% would be willing to use them. This is very problematic and raises the issue of social inclusion as it creates a new divide between those digitally skilled and those who are not and between schools who are equipped and prepared and those that lag behind. The role of teachers and educators and the relationship between educators and learners is very important. We need more partnerships between stakeholders. Education for us is a universal and fundamental right; it is important to keep this in mind in order to avoid widening the gaps within our societies.

**Maria do Céu Patrão Neves**

**MEP (Portugal, EPP)**

Mrs Maria do Céu Patrão Neves thanked EUCIS-LLL for this initiative and remarked that the interrogation mark in the title should be an exclamation mark highlighting thus the emergency of the situation. She stressed that it is up to governments and professionals to push forward the intentions into new practices. Teaching and learning should be improved by taking advantage of new technologies. She raised two points: first IT technologies should be seen for the major achievements they can bring for instance by drawing communities closer. Instead of widening the gaps between generations and social groups it should become a tool to bridge them. We need a multicultural approach and a more tolerant and democratic society. Human resources should be seen as a value both for economic and social development.



**Maria Da Graça Carvalho**

**MEP (Portugal, EPP)**

Mrs Maria Da Graça Carvalho thanked the organisers and expressed her satisfaction to see civil society getting closer to EU institutions and policy makers. The debate is welcome today as society is changing and learning and teaching new techniques have to accompany those changes. The new generation of EU funding programmes, in particular Erasmus+ and Horizon 2020, will help nurturing those changes. Mrs Carvalho insisted in particular on the European Institute of Innovation and Technology aiming to enhance Europe's ability to innovate, and which will strongly contribute to achieve Horizon 2020 objectives from 2014 onwards. Education will be at the centre of this knowledge triangle and educational stakeholders involved in ICT should follow it closely. Marie Curie fellowships are also an interesting lever, promoting mobility of researchers, innovation across sectors and regions and proposing broader opportunities than before. New technologies have the potential to modernise learning systems but also to foster more open societies; it is a fascinating area to investigate, especially from the social point of view.

# Presentation of the Commission communication

Ana Carla Pereira

Head of Unit – “Skills and qualifications strategies”, DG Education and Culture  
European Commission



Mrs Pereira reminded why it is important for Europe to address this crucial issue. The potential of ICT is looked at in different parts of the world. It is a mean and not an end; there are different approaches as well as needs and challenges. Three elements are at stake. First, the need to **bring innovation into the classroom through new learning methods** - ICT supported or not - while technology can really be an enabler of this innovation process. Our education systems have to prepare young students to modern economies and lives, and technology is part of it. Do we have learning settings embracing this aspect of society? In this perspective, **equality and access** are important issues to be addressed. Education can no longer follow fifty years old paradigms and be immune against the flow and speed of information. Secondly, **Europe is lagging behind**, not in terms of demand but of supply. MOOCs are a proxy of this phenomenon, as most of the offer is produced by American universities (see [Opening up Education](#) portal). Thirdly, **equity and cost efficiency** aspects are to be taken

into account. **More than half of EU countries have cut their public budget for education** in the past years.

With this Communication the Commission aims at a quite different and more ambitious initiative than in 2000 with its report on “[Designing tomorrow’s education: promoting innovation with new technologies](#)”. “[Opening Up Education](#)” is not just about distance learning and reaching out to remote regions, it is also about inserting ICT in traditional educational institutions. Indeed it should no longer be a niche for front-runners whereas **it should be a concern for most institutions** because the expectations of learners and of parents are different.

Mrs Pereira reminded the three different streams of the Communication (open learning environments, open educational resources, open infrastructures and connectivity) and evoked the **numerous opportunities offered by the new EU funding programme 2014-2020**. [Erasmus+](#) key action 2 “Strategic partnerships” will enable beneficiaries to build sustainable initiatives related to Opening Up Education. Under Key Action 3 “Support for policy reform”, the so-called “Prospective Initiatives” will allow

government-led policy experiments to scale up existing successful projects. The “Forward-looking Initiatives” will support the testing of innovative methods and tools.

At policy level, the [Council of Member States of November](#) discussed Opening Up Education and broadly supported the initiative, with two main concerns: **quality assurance and the role/support given to teachers**. The [Council meeting of 24 February](#) raised the issue once again and ten Member States have announced that it is becoming their priority; **national plans will follow, showing a real political will**. With the upcoming Italian presidency, it has been agreed to hold a summit on the digital era. The first issue debated will be role of teachers and educators at large in the process of change, but also innovation in learning as well as social equity (broadening access to education but also reducing its cost). The Commission would also like to discuss the issue of **validation** of skills acquired through digital learning.

Finally she encouraged participants to participate in the open consultation on a European area of skills and qualifications.

*Participants outlined the need to support and sustain innovative projects around Europe; not to forget SMEs while the Commission tends to focus on big international companies; and to address the issue of teachers’ initial and continuous training as a priority for changing cultures.*

# Panel discussion (I)

**Moderation: Etelberto Costa, APG Portugal, European Training and Development Federation (ETDF-EAPRIL), Vice-President of EUCIS-LLL**

## **Saskia Van Uffelen**

**Digital Champion of Belgium, CEO at Bull and CSB Consulting**

Mrs Van Uffelen expressed her frustration to see her own children go to a school she considers as cruelly lagging behind in terms of digital progress. Commissioner Neelie Kroes has motivated the digital champions to convince their government of the **sense of urgency of digital integration within our education systems**. 2020 is tomorrow and most digital champions have chosen **primary and secondary schools as their primary focus**, because focusing only on universities would mean losing a generation. How come students use a PC everywhere except at school? Still, **progress remains extremely slow** while Internet has been existing for twenty years. Waiting for another ten or twenty years, as some decision-makers propose, is unacceptable. Even though teachers should not be incriminated, people are generally reluctant to change. Besides, we are not only speaking about technical competences but of passion and motivation, and we should **accept that the role of teachers will be different**. Educational leaders have also a key role to play: in Belgium, schools that are doing the best are those where **school heads** are forerunners. Some other key aspects should be taken into consideration, such as **security and social media**, or how to develop **critical thinking** among children faced to the amount of information they can obtain online.

## **Joke Van Der Leeuw Roord**

**Former Director of [EUROCLIO](#) and General Secretary of EUCIS-LLL**

The first question that should be raised in this kind of debate is **to which extent OERs enable a bigger access to education**: very interesting ideas about distance learning can be collected from countries in difficult situation like Iran or Russia, and we should also reach out to those target groups. A second point is about innovation: **too little has changed indeed in so many years**. EUROCLIO has launched in 2008

in a big project entitled [Historiana](#), an online portal where educators can find useful resources on European History. However this type of initiative takes a **lot of energy** because huge amounts of material have to be uploaded and managed in such an environment. Besides, precisely due to this abundance, we had to make sure the portal was user-friendly enough so that teachers could find those resources and turn them into practice. **Constantly readapt to a fast changing world and bringing innovation into the classroom is indeed what they will have to face in the upcoming years**. However making education better through ICT should not only be motivated by reducing its cost.

## **Fabio Nascimbeni**

**Director of the [MENON](#) network**

There is a real problem because **too little is happening** to address the challenges that have been mentioned. The issue of **leadership** is a very important one, as education leaders can drive the change towards technology-enhanced learning. However it is not an issue of technology anymore, or costs, or infrastructures, but well and good about leadership. The suggestion from the Commission to associate Opening Up Education and Erasmus+ is also very interesting, as well as using ESF funds as a catalyst for change. We have to dream big and build sustainable projects. **Policy experimentation has to be evidence-based and has to be opened to new initiatives**. Top-down innovation works but **bottom-up innovation works better** because it is coming from the ground. The key is to look at technology as an end but at how it can support new ways to facilitate learning. **Policy-makers should identify innovators and talk to them**, find new ways to make innovation flourish for instance by supporting experimentation.



## *Eszter Salamon*

### *President, European Parents Association*

One should not forget that education and training are a national competence; even though the EU can support the discussion and launch initiatives, it is **very important that Member States are on board**. As for **parents, they can also be key drivers of change** as they would make any sacrifice for the future of their children. If we look at certain groups of low educated parents and economically depressed families, they will still buy digital devices and this can contribute to the shift towards a digital era. But they will be **mobilised only if political groups have messages for them**. That is an important message for the upcoming EU elections.

## *Agnes Roman*

### *Policy adviser, ETUCE*

[ETUCE](#) is very much engaged in ICT and believes **education is a human right** to which everyone should have equal access. **ICT should be a tool to improve quality education** while PIAAC results say 25% of adults cannot even switch on a computer; so how could they fill in a Europass CV or apply for jobs? ETUCE has launched a campaign on quality education and the fact that it is worth investment. MEPs are invited to sign an online pledge. Indeed Member States are cutting in education budgets, and ETUCE has clearly reminded that ICT is not a solution to those cuts. It is a tool to improve quality education and **needs more investment**. **Quality assurance is a key issue to look at in OERs**: only 10% of MOOC students finish the course they have enrolled in. Besides, the **teachers** have a crucial role to play in this process and they cannot be replaced; who are the new education providers mentioned in the Communication? It is true that teachers are an ageing population and that Member States have difficulties in recruiting them but they can still contribute to broaden access to education through ICT.

## *Ana Carla Pereira*

### *Head of Unit – “Skills and qualifications strategies”, DG Education and Culture, European Commission*

Why did things not move in ten years? Still today, **no research has indeed been made on OERs quality or effectiveness**. However reality is catching up, ICT change our perception of things, the way we live or work. We have to make sure now that ICT enhances a quality learning experience because education cannot cope without it anymore. Indeed, MOOCs retention levels are very low, but it should not be forgotten that the number of students finalising a course is far more than what a teacher alone would do with a standard classroom, even with a 10% rate of completion. On the issue of cost, the Commission does not want to reduce the cost of education; yet with the resources we have, **we can be more effective**. Finally, the OERs debate also includes a geopolitical component that is not a negative thing: **Europe needs to be able to attract talents**. We need to show that our universities and schools are able to offer quality education: why shouldn't we place Europe on the top of the scale?

# Debate with the audience

If Erasmus+ and the European Social Fund (ESF) are indeed good levers for action, we need to consider that ESF money has decreased, for instance in Greece, which is not helping to bridge the competitiveness gap. It is essential that we liaise this question with structural funds investments; otherwise no reforms will be sustained. But for this policy-makers need to break down barriers between sectors and adopt a transversal approach. Another consequence of this sectoral approach is that the issue of MOOCs takes far too much space in the debate. Other sectors are in particular interesting to look at, such as VET that has also a lot at stake when speaking of OERs. The Communication should identify more clearly its target groups in that sense. Besides, as much as the discussion should also be oriented on how ICT can help education better address labour market changes, this should not be done at the detriment of the public good approach to education. Why should we copy the US model? The “new education providers” mentioned in the Communication should indeed be made clearer in this line. It comes to the more global debate on quality digital learning, that should be taken seriously (learning outcomes approach, interaction between learning and teaching). Indeed, more infrastructures are the easiest solution to the problem; the difficult part is rather to change mentalities.



# Panel discussion (II)

**Agnes Roman** outlined that as much as EU funding can help, countries should understand it is essential to maintain and **increase investment in education in general and teacher continuous training** in particular. When the elder teachers were studying, Internet did not exist. **Partnerships** need to be built with younger teachers for mutual learning. In the **VET** sector, ICT could indeed contribute to its improvement and attractiveness and the debate should be linked to apprenticeships. Can OERs be a solution in this case and how? Another crucial target group to reach are the **low skilled adults**. How to train and motivate them to use OERs?

**Eszter Salamon** reminded that since the majority of European schools have a traditional 19<sup>th</sup> century configuration, it does not help to upgrade them with ICT solutions; we need a **profound change of mindsets**, first from teachers, but also from learners; they have to switch to a mentality where they would not learn anymore because they will be evaluated, but rather because it is important for them. She mentioned the experience of Portugal that took a flagship initiative on digital learning but there is always a problem of sustainability. Generations are also changing notably in terms of brain development as science has shown for example that young people tend to be more multi-tasks than their parents.

**Fabio Nascimbeni** stressed that policy-making comes in waves: concepts such as virtual mobility are for example well accepted now; **we are in a positive policy wave with Opening Up Education** and things are getting more balanced (i.e. between quality and innovation, between technology and pedagogy). We are in a moment of big experimentation, for instance with a big project financed by DG CNECT enabling 5000 schools to exploit ICT for science education. Those kinds of **large-scale projects** could make a change. We can see some light at the end of the tunnel.

**Joke Van Der Leeuw Roord** added that when we started to talk about digital learning, it was indeed all about infrastructures but we had little idea on what was needed to make a change and I agree that we are moving forward in that sense. We have to identify really **innovative ideas** brought by young people and **work with the new generations**.

**Saskia Van Uffelen** stressed that we are not there to replace teachers but to create the world in which they can survive. **Inclusive education** is a challenge; for instance **disadvantaged children lack motivation, to address this challenge entails huge extra public costs...** Digital learning gives a change for those children to be accepted and gives a chance to the teacher to survive. Let us do inclusion differently with e-inclusion. It is true that **low skilled adults** should also be a priority: the plumber of today has to learn how to use a 3D printer, know what the digital world is if she/he wants to catch up with labour market changes.

**Ana Carla Pereira** said that not so lately OERs were out of the radar of policy-makers; there is still a long way to go, yet **the question is not “if” anymore but “how”**. There is awareness and a serious intention to look at this issue from Member States. This gives a bit of hope on the point raised on structural funds, which is a fundamental one. How to make sure we can upscale the limited innovations we can support with EU funding? This cannot be done if there is no political willingness. We can try to make the links when negotiating operational programmes but what is more important is **political commitment**. Support the Member States in the policy process is where we can have the biggest added value.

# Closing remarks

**Audrey Frith,**  
**EUCIS-LLL Director**

Audrey Frith concluded the debate by providing a summary of main policy recommendations that emerged from the debate.

## State of play

- **There is a clear consensus on the challenges ahead:** education is a fundamental right and access is a priority; we are now moving from “digital divide” to “digital integration”. We also have to **move from political intentions to practice** and **this process is very slow whereas we face a technological “revolution” with an “urgency” to act;** inaction is thus being seen as “unacceptable” as it is also about building an open and equal society.
- **However there is no consensus on the question of investment and cost efficiency** (a EUCIS-LLL policy debate on funding of education will take place in December 2014). Current cuts in education affect and weaken the systems. It is about efficiency and equity and balancing short-term with long-term impact.

## There is an urgent need...

- **We need to adapt our education and training systems for various reasons:** to attract new talents, to match the supply/demand for MOOCs, to ensure media education seen as necessary in a media society and also to take into account scientific knowledge about the development of the brain.
- **There is a double challenge:** we should have answers **adapted to local needs**, to specific schools taking into account geographic, social and gender issues as well as to **mainstream digital skills and competences in all education and training systems**. We clearly need a **comprehensive approach** that is not limited to higher education. Furthermore digital education should no longer be seen as a niche. The **transfer of initiatives** should be encouraged.

## How?

- **Political will:** is the key to further progress; it is important to operationalise the Opening up Education strategy with national plans.
- **Leadership:** beyond infrastructures and funding, the role of **teachers and educators** was raised as essential. They need an enabling environment for change, good working conditions and not only technical competences but to be empowered on the use of new technologies and on a self-reflection on their role in a digital society. Motivation appeared as a key word. We also need a digital vision in educational institutions, hence the important **role of school heads** to support this transition.
- **Partnerships:** the issue of stakeholders’ motivation and empowerment is central in making progress. More collaboration should take place between teachers, parents, SMEs and other actors.
- **Funding and policy experimentation:** EU funding should support and sustain innovation and policy experimentation (top down and bottom up); the use of ESF and Erasmus+ as a leverage was seen as particularly important. It shall support innovation and peer learning.
- **Other issues:** were raised such as quality assurance, validation of learning outcomes acquired in digital environments, assessment and sustainability and innovation.