

## Meeting of Directors General for Schools

Riga, 5-6 May 2015

### SUMMARY NOTE

The meeting of Directors General for Schools (DG Schools), organized by the Latvian Presidency, brought together Directors General from the Member States and representatives of the European Commission in order to discuss schools policy issues, including the role of early childhood education and primary education in fostering creativity, innovation and digital competence with the focus on innovative approaches and promotion and development of digital competences, as well as the accessibility of education and effectiveness of investments in educational institutions. Plenary sessions, including information points and discussions, as well as two rounds of parallel working sessions were held, promoting in-depth discussions on schools policy issues.

#### 1. The role of early childhood education and primary education in fostering creativity, innovation and digital competence

Within the opening session, the following topics were presented:

***The role of early childhood education and primary education in fostering creativity, innovation and digital competence*** emphasizing the importance of promoting creativity, innovation and digital competence through education during the early years, which can produce benefits later by laying the foundations for further learning; by enabling knowledge to be developed to a much higher level; as well as by improving each child's ability to develop creative and critical thinking skills and to become responsible citizens for the Europe of tomorrow.

***The potential of digitally enabled practices to support teachers and schools: example of eTwinning***, providing concrete evidence and data in the area of innovation in education on which to base policy recommendations; supporting schools and teachers in their teaching practices in particular through teacher innovative professional development; as well as developing and sustaining a network of schools engaged in innovative teaching and learning approaches.

***Talent recruitment and development in education: the case of Mission Possible and Teach for All***, introducing Teach For All in the European context, providing examples on the lessons learned – creating alternative certification pathways to enable more talented people to become teachers; recruiting young people to inspire them to teach; selecting candidates to place high-impact teachers with disadvantaged students; providing ongoing support to teachers and center it on leadership development and transformational student impact; - as well as presenting the Teach For All model in the Latvian context.

***Supporting all pupils: examples of innovative approaches in tackling low achievements in basic skills***, presenting the main data on students' achievements in basic skills, policies to raise achievement, considering socio-economic disadvantage and migrant background, and different approaches and aspects of teaching methods.

#### Working sessions

Within the ***Working session on fostering innovation and creativity in early childhood and care (ECEC) and primary education: developing and promoting digital skills and competences*** practical examples were given by Latvia and Finland, followed by discussion, when participants emphasized further actions:

- not to lose sight of the physical world behind the virtual one;
- emphasize the pedagogical meaning and content of ICT;
- create an electronically safe environment;

- ensure that socio-emotional aspects of education are not affected negatively by the digital environment;
- keep the open-mindedness and scepticism as a way of thinking, which fosters creativity and innovation;
- keep all players involved in continuous discussion about the benefits and weaknesses of digital learning (students, parents, educators, researchers, policy makers, and industry stakeholders);
- differentiate between confidence and competence.

Participants mentioned the following policy approaches to make teaching of digital skills part of teacher education, including initial teacher training:

- collaboration between teachers, students and stakeholders;
- promotion of a broadly based, multi-literacy framework;
- change of teachers' mindset as the only source of knowledge;
- support for non-formal learning by teachers;
- sharing of good practices regarding initial teacher education;
- development of the "whole school" approach, involving parents, businesses and public sector.

Participants also emphasized the necessity of age appropriateness of different digital tools, pointing out the main conditions: (a) research is the first and foremost ingredient for successful policy-making; (b) data has to be based on the principles of independency, high quality and transparency.

Within the ***Working session on fostering innovation and creativity in ECEC and primary education: innovative approaches*** participants were invited to explore the links between innovation, creativity and the use of ICT tools, discussing the existing digital gaps in schools in terms of teaching approaches, assessment, pedagogical resources and learning environment.

Regarding the use of digital tools and their integration into learning process, the following aspects were emphasized during the discussion:

- using game approach as the part of education process;
- willingness to learn, structuring verbal language, familiarisation with written word;
- assistance of educational technologists to teachers in using the technology;
- analysing exam results, especially STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics);
- knowledge sharing between universities.

As the ways to develop digital skills, participants mentioned the following approaches:

- didactical games, paper prototyping of computer as a good way to teach how to cooperate;
- different painting technologies, including digital;
- focus on learning process;
- interdisciplinary professional development of teachers.

Regarding the digital gaps in schools in terms of teaching technology-driven mindset was highlighted, but also some concerns were mentioned, such as overrating touchable devices and ICT not being the only way to promote key competences.

A presentation was given after the working sessions on the ***Evidence base for digital competence in early childhood and schools***, addressing the issues of digital competence, use ICT of among young children, development of critical thinking, as well as the European Digital Competence Framework and future initiatives.

## 2. Information from the European Commission

Information was provided by the European Commission regarding the policy developments relevant for education:

***Strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET2020) – work plan and state of play of the preparation of the Joint Report***, anticipating the Commission's proposal to be published in July / September 2015, followed by discussions at the Education Committee and further adoption in November 2015 by the Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council.

***Brief overview and update on Europe 2020 strategy***, including country-specific recommendations 2015, Employment policy guidelines, and Europe 2020 strategy review due to be published at the end of 2015.

**Investment Plan for Europe** stressing the need for quality projects bringing together public and private resources, as well as informing about the regulation for the European Fund for Strategic Investment.

**Digital Single Market**, promoting better access to digital goods and services; developing the environment where digital networks and services can prosper; emphasizing digital as a driver for growth.

**European Week of Sport**, providing information on the main elements, as well as some ideas for school participation, as well as the role of education ministries in spreading the messages of the Week; identifying, promoting and supporting concrete activities and events; and providing resources to schools for the organization of specific activities.

### **3. Promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through school education**

Participants were informed that, considering recent tragic events in France and Denmark, as well as the results of informal meeting of heads of states and governments on 12 February 2015, France, the Latvian Presidency and the European Commission jointly organized an informal meeting of EU education ministers on 17 March 2015 in Paris. As a result of this meeting, a declaration was adopted, which emphasized the important role of education in strengthening and dissemination of EU values – respect for others, freedom (including freedom of expression), democracy, equality, rule of law and respect for human rights.

In light of this initiative, the importance of education in preventing radicalization was stressed, focusing on diversity, inclusion and active citizenship. As the possible follow-up, the following main elements were mentioned:

- European Agenda on Security
- 2016 Work Programme of Erasmus+
- Exchange of views on the follow-up at the Education Council (18-19 May 2015)
- ET 2020 Joint Report (especially within the third strategic objective)
- European Youth Strategy (2010-2018)
- EU Work Plan for Sport (2014-2017)
- Culture Work Plan (2015-2018)

Mobilization of ET2020 instruments, including mutual learning activities, Education, Training and Youth Forum, as well as cooperation with civil society was considered necessary for successful promotion of active citizenship, common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through the education process.

Good practice examples were provided from the experience of Austria and the Netherlands, focusing on bringing the values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination to life through school education, as well as averting radicalization in schools.

### **4. Accessibility of education and effectiveness of investments – management of school network with focus on small schools**

Presentation was given on **Management of school network: change in thinking and doing**, analyzing the use of resources and potential of schools, learning opportunities for adults and children, as well as emphasizing the importance of providing opportunities to develop new ideas and activities.

#### **Working Sessions**

Within the **Working session on finding the right approach – division by geographic principle, demographic principle** participants discussed existing good practices and challenges in widening and deepening functions of schools and their interactions with local communities in order to promote access to high quality interactive learning, social inclusion and development of social capital. The following actions were highlighted:

- changing approaches and attitudes to education process – still not compromising on quality;
- maintaining and expanding functions of schools: (a) adding adult education activities; (b) developing specific services for young children and their families; (c) supporting entrepreneurship and increasing employability potential; (d) building partnerships and civic participation;
- allocation of resources (human resources, infrastructure, etc.), based on demographic, social-economic

- and geographic criteria;
- quality and equity: giving more to those, who have less.

In order to improve coordination of functions and resources, as well as cooperation among different sectors (education, culture, health, social services etc.) at local, national and European level, participants addressed the following issues, considering that change is a process, not an event:

- involvement of different stakeholders: cooperation with local NGOs, different ministries and agencies, etc.;
- need to create a flexible system, considering increase and decrease of population;
- provision of data for very precise local analysis, more sophisticated mapping;
- resource-based decisions, local strategies;
- different funding streams, cooperation instead of competition.

Within the ***Working session on school consolidations, school size and accessibility: effects on student achievements, high-school enrolment, completion and early school leaving*** participants emphasized the main criteria taken into account during the consolidation process: decrease of students (availability of local and regional data); costs of school maintenance; teachers' wages; distance to school; normative regulations; position of local community (parents, local government); availability of financial resources.

In order to find the best way to balance economic efficiency and provision of maintenance, and social profit, it was recommended to evaluate the results of school consolidation, as well as establish local education centres using the resources of small schools.

## **5. ET2020 Working Groups**

The overall presentation on the ET2020 Working groups was given by the European Commission, including basic work principles; assessment within the ET2020 stocktaking process; alignment with the key policy priorities; synergies between Working groups; as well as visibility, dissemination and valorisation of results.

A special focus was put on the ET2020 Working group on School Policy, in particular on the progress and the next steps regarding the initial teacher education and innovative and collaborative approaches to tackle early school leaving and disadvantage. Certain concerns were expressed regarding the effectiveness of work of this group, considering its size and structure.

## **6. The incoming Luxembourg Presidency's priorities**

The incoming Luxembourg Presidency announced its priorities in education and training, which include:

- Multilingualism in quality education;
- ET 2020 Joint Report, which is due to be adopted at the Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council in November 2015.

A list of planned events was presented, including the meeting of High Level Group on Education and Training on 18-19 June, DG Schools meeting on 26-27 October and Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council on 23 November.

## **7. Conclusions of the meeting**

The importance of strengthening the link between Directors' General level and ministers' level within the Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council agenda was emphasized at the end of the meeting.

There was also identified a need for much detailed research, analysing the impact of quality of learning, as well as promoting new ways of learning, especially at early age.

Participants agreed that education is a growth-promoting area; therefore, the role of school policy is also important, providing an input to the overall development of Europe, ensuring qualitative, innovative and creative education.