

## EFEE Statement on Digital Education Action Plan Update

27 February 2020

Digital technologies, including Artificial Intelligence (AI), are transforming the world at an unprecedented speed. They change how we communicate, live and work and they are changing our society and how we perceive it. Quality education has a key role to play in empowering everyone to join the transformation to the digital age, as it provides people with the skills they need for the society of the future. Therefore the European Federation of Education Employers (EFEE) very much welcomes the initiatives by the European Commission to update the Digital Education Action Plan in order to *'get Europe up to speed on digital skills for both young people and adult'*.

With this statement, EFEE wishes to provide further insights, besides our reply to the [Stakeholder Questionnaire](#), into our position expressing the voice of education employers from across Europe. EFEE is a dynamic organisation established in 2009 to represent the interests of employers in the strategic and highly diverse European education sector. We represent 45 (public and private) education employer organisations from 23 European countries in all levels of education, from pre-school to higher education and research. This includes different national organisations, such as education councils and ministries of education, associations of VET colleges and universities, associations of independent schools, and local and regional authority employers' organisations.

In the Political Guidelines of the Von der Leyen European Commission and the flagship strategy ['A Europe fit for the digital age'](#), it is appropriately underlined that investment in education is crucial for Europe to get up to speed with digital skills and to drive herewith Europe's competitiveness and innovation. Nevertheless, EFEE is convinced that more educational aspects need to be stressed here in order to empower everyone to join the transformation to the digital age.

First of all when talking about education contributing to the digital transformation, it is crucial to take into account all three key issues, which are:

- i. Providing people with the skills they need for the digital age (as correctly mentioned). Herewith it is key to not only focus on digital skills and competences (such as coding, computing and computational thinking) in a restricted way, but to clearly realize that other basic and transversal skills are also crucial for life and work in a digital age, such as: mathematics, literacy, communication, critical thinking, entrepreneurship skills. These should thus also be taking into account when tackling the skills-question for the digital age.
- ii. Using digitalisation in education. It is clear that the use of technology could have (and will have) a big impact on teaching and learning. This ranges from the use of ICT-tools within the classroom to the introduction of Artificial Intelligence, Learning Analytics, and big data for education purposes, which might have a

radical impact on the way our current education systems are organised. Many initiatives are available in Europe in this field and we welcome EU funds that promote the development of digitalization (including ICT infrastructures) in education. We also welcome the SELFIE-tool developed by the European Commission as a useful tool for schools and would applaud an extension to other education levels as well (such as VET and HE). However at the same time we want to stress that not much is known about the most effective use of the tools and initiatives and their genuine impact on educational infrastructures, working environments in education and on the role of management, teachers, and other education staff. More research needs to be done here. We also have to be conscious about the related ethical questions. As an education employers' organisation we aim for safe and conducive working environments in education and for improving teaching and learning outcomes. We have thus a pivotal role to play here. Therefore we would also like to call upon the European Commission to make the aggregated data from the SELFIE-tool also available to education employers (besides public authorities) to enable them to use them for improvement purposes within their education institutions.

- iii. Professionalisation of all people working in education (and training) institutions. The potential of the education sector to contribute to the digital transformation highly depends on the ability of the people working in the sector to guide this journey. Professionalisation of teachers, leaders and other staff working in education (and also training) institutions at all education levels is herewith key and thus deserves a place high on the EU agenda in this context (in particular also in view of the ageing teaching force in Europe).

Regarding the review of the Digital Education Action plan, we deem it crucial that all three mentioned key-issues are well reflected in order to make the transition to the digital age a reality. Furthermore we want to stress again that the whole education sector including early childhood education, primary, secondary education, higher education and research, and vocational education and training should be taken into account, since all levels are inter-linked and have a pivotal contribution to make in preparing people for living, working, and acting as active (and critical) citizens in a digitalised society.

Finally, in order to make the transition to the digital age successful and inclusive (by ensuring that no-one is left behind) the policy initiatives need to be underpinned by sound, sustainable, and coherent investment structures. EFEE welcomes the fact that several DGs of the European Commission are working on the issue of digitalisation, which is reflected in the number of funding programmes and schemes available for this topic. At the same time we want to share our concern that this might lead to fragmentation, duplication and confusing situations of who the target groups are. Moreover we would like to emphasize the important role that education employers play in preparing education and training institutions for the digital age and consequently they should be regarded as a key target group for these funding programmes.



With the support of the ERASMUS+ Programme of the EU