Statement on the European Digital Skills Certificate (EDSC)

12 March 2021

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a lasting impact on the needs of European societies and economies. Basically overnight, the demand for not only a solid digital infrastructure but also adequate digital skills has accelerated. This rapid digital transition furthermore is not only solely aimed at making sure the EU is ready to tackle future problems but is also very much helping workers and companies in many sectors to avoid lay-offs and bankruptcies right now by making the necessary adaptations, for instance in the form of remote working. It can be expected that many of these changes will last also beyond the pandemic, creating a new normal in shaping new tasks, jobs and consequently the demand for higher-level ICT skills and knowledge. According to a report from the European Internet Forum, 90% of all jobs will require an element of digital skills in the future.

In the face of this, it is alarming to see the digital skills gap existing in European societies, which has only been exacerbated during the course of the pandemic. Approximately 42% of European citizens lack basic digital skills, with the elderly generation being most affected. Furthermore, around 37% of people in the labour force – farmers, bank employees, and factory workers are lacking basic digital skills and competences. Also young people, often referred to as "digital natives'' with 94 % making daily use of the internet, show to have fundamental gaps when it comes to competences which are essential for a responsible and adequate use of digital tools. As an example, the latest published PISA 2018 results show that only few students possess adequate basic critical thinking skills. Reasons for the lack of such competences are diverse, ranging from the lack of personal skills (e.g. poor literacy and numeracy skills) to circumstantial (e.g. limited access to education and training opportunities due to poverty).

As a social partner representing over 50 European education institutions and formal education providers of all levels of education from 26 European countries and strong supporter of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSRs), the European Federation of Education Employers (EFEE) strives to prevent digital exclusion through fostering qualitative and inclusive digital education. We, therefore, very much welcome the Digital Education Action Plan and promote the therein foreseen development of an European Digital Skills Certificate (EDSC).

1.   **What is important to know about existing digital skills certification schemes and models in the EU?**

In order to guarantee coherence and effectiveness in actions, we advise the Commission to strengthen and build up on already existing frameworks, such as the "Digital Competence Framework for citizens" (DigComp 2.1) the therewith bound self-reflection tool "DigCompEdu CheckIn" or the European Computer Driving Licence. Moreover, it is necessary to strengthen the visibility of these already existing certification schemes as we have noticed that they are not very well known on the level of Member States. Consequently, we believe that the development of an EDSC represents a window of opportunity to foster the further public promotion and provision of information of these already existing frameworks. In this regard, we as social partners, functioning as a link between the EU and national level, consider it of utmost importance to be involved in the policy-development and design of the EDSC from the start. As an example in this regard, we are currently running a project titled "e-Speed - European Social Partners in Education Embracing Digitalisation". With on-site case studies in Denmark and Romania, we aim at strengthening the visibility of the opportunities and

challenges concerning the acquisition of digital competences and skills in the education sector.

2. Which are the key stakeholders that need to be consulted for the EDSC feasibility study?

In order to ensure that the mapping captures expressive data, which are relevant for further steps being taken in the development of the EDSC, it is essential to take a multi-stakeholder governance approach. In light of this, we consider the involvement of a diverse set of stakeholders as crucial. Among these stakeholders, we especially encourage the consultation of education and training institutions, e-providers (both in compulsory education, VET and lifelong learning), ICT teachers' Associations, ministries of education, researchers, education social partners, students and parents.

As a network of over 50 diverse institutions of all educational sectors of lifelong learning from 26 countries, serving as employers in education in their national frameworks of collective bargaining and social dialogue, EFEE believes to be able to make a valuable contribution in this regard.

Moreover, the involvement of industrial stakeholders, such as ICT-companies and Business Associations, including Incode2030, is crucial to further strengthening the bridge between education and the labor market. In doing so, it is ensured that a realistic need-based approach in the light of the fast-changing digital demands of the labor market is taken into consideration when it comes to the development of the EDSC. Also in this regard, EFEE considers our involvement in the building of the design of the EDSC as crucial, having expanded cross-sectoral expertise and working relations with partners such as SGI Europe.

3. Which aspects of the EDSC definition should be included in the study?

We suggest to include in the EDSC definition the number of Proficiency Levels (from basic to advanced skills), knowledge/competences/attitudes and areas (including AI, data literacy, cybersecurity), learning and teaching methods, cultural diversity and if it can be linked with EQF. In order to make this certificate more attractive, it should be also clearly stated whether the EDSC can offer a validation and valorization of acquired digital competences in compulsory and VET education.

4. Which aspects need to be included in the feasibility analysis?

The feasibility analysis should refer to the test delivery mode, as well as to the number and content of the questions. It should furthermore take into account the consistency of the EDSC with existing curricula in Member States, the key-competence framework and with DigiCompEdu made by the JRC.

5. Which aspects of the pilot need to be considered/defined?

The pilot needs to consider the following aspects: self-assessment, multiple languages, technical feasibility, the pilot planning, how to monitor the pilot, the results dissemination strategy and any recommendations for improvement. It should also be clearly defined if the certificate is about validation of existing competences (assessment) or about an examination which requires preparation beforehand or a combination of both. We finally recommend that the assessment does not only consider the needs of the labour market, often referred to as hard skills, but also soft digital competences, such as critical thinking.

6.   Any other element that needs to be included in the Feasibility study?

Lifelong learning should be a specific dimension and target of the design and implementation of the EDSC. Transparency on who will be in charge of the inspection of the validating process to make sure that EDSC would have the same value in each Member State needs to be ensured as well. Moreover, the study should outline the nature of the bodies validating the certificate with regards to the public and private sector. In case there would be any recognition procedure of validating bodies, it needs to be clarified if these could be both public and private. In this regard, it would be of interest to evaluate whether the validation can be conducted by schools. Lastly, we advise that the study specifies if the certificate would be linked with the digital skills portfolio as part of the new Europass.

Finally, we would like to underline once more that EFEE very much welcomes the initiative of developing an EDSC as we consider it an important step towards adapting to the new reality beyond the COVID-19 pandemic in line with the goals of the European Pillar of Social Rights and SDG goal 4. Given the expertise of our diverse membership with regards to digital competences as well as our cross-sectorial relations, we further believe that EFEE can bring added value to the development and implementation of this new initiative. For this reason, EFEE calls upon the Commission to be included in any processes related to the policy and design development of the EDSC from the very start.