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Update of the Digital Education Action Plan
CSC – IT Center for Science Ltd.

CSC welcomes the Commission's plan to update the Digital Education Action Plan in the aftermath of the digital leap that European education and training systems have taken during the school and campus closures resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. It is of utmost importance that the lessons learned from this development are analysed and best practices shared. This will help European learners, educators, researchers, companies, policy-makers and other stakeholders to prepare for the increasingly digital future that will allow us to explore new ways of teaching and learning as well as supporting lifelong learning and international mobility.

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The impact of digitalisation on education and training is twofold. On the one hand, education and training systems must be able to ensure that all Europeans have the necessary **skills and competences** for the increasingly digitalised economy and society. On the other hand, they can make use of the **opportunities of digitalisation** ranging from the various tools, platforms and materials for digital teaching and learning to the creation of digital services for lifelong learning and international mobility or systematic data-based quality assessment of education and training providers.

Digitalisation is a multidimensional phenomenon that extends far beyond the technological aspects. In the field of education this means that digitalisation cannot be seen as an isolated technical phenomenon that can be applied to the existing structures and processes as such. Instead, it must be addressed with a **strong pedagogical approach** and according to the **same principles and objectives as education and training in general**. This requires ensuring that all teaching professionals have the resources, competences and confidence to rethink learning, teaching, assessment and related use of technology and digital solutions. It also entails paying due attention to questions related to core values like equity, privacy and data protection.

Ensuring **equity and equal access** to education requires a solid legal framework as well as adequate support services, both online and offline, for both learners and teachers using digital solutions. Actions must also be taken to ensure learners' well-being (social services, social activities, spotting/reducing drop-outs) when digitalising education. As to **privacy and data protection**, it is crucial to fully adhere to existing legislation and to respect the MyData principles allowing learners to determine how their data is used for digital teaching and learning purposes.

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According to CSC's preliminary analysis of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Finnish higher education institutions, the necessary service infrastructure in terms of network and applications for remote learning was scaled successfully. However, collaboration between the different actors in the field could have been stronger. Digitalisation creates similar challenges at all levels of education and should therefore be met with solutions developed in good **cooperation across all levels and fields of education**. Such cooperation must be encouraged also because it supports **lifelong learning** by facilitating the creation of interoperable platforms, tools and databases as well as a seamless path of digital services for lifelong learning. Further positive impact can be reached by extending the cooperation and interoperability to other related fields, such as employment services.

Open educational resources play a key role in ensuring that inclusive education and training can be provided for all learners. The quality and availability of educational resources must therefore be improved on a large scale. While there have been successful implementations by frontrunners, there is a need for a modern platform for sharing and utilising materials effectively and ways to encourage both teachers and institutions to share their work. Another issue to be considered is **assessment and recognition of competence**; both prior learning as well as what is learned during training. Reliable and legally sound methods of identification of learners and remote proctoring of exams need further development. At the same time, there is a need to develop ways to validly assess competence remotely. Exams may be the norm but they do not cover all areas of competence.

Digitalisation can also support **international mobility** in various ways and make it more sustainable. Digital solutions are needed for the whole chain of mobility, from recognising competence gaps and identifying learning opportunities to transferring credits etc. Such solutions require effective data flows and interoperable machine-readable data, which illustrates the need to link the Digital Education Action Plan to the rapidly evolving European **data policies**, to ensure coherence and consistency. In order to be successful, sustainable and efficient, both remote learning and international mobility require a safe, reliable and user-friendly solution for **identification of learners**. This issue needs prompt action at European level and must be addressed in the ongoing revision of the eIDAS regulation and further development of initiatives such as the creation of a European Student Card.

Digital solutions are needed to achieve the objectives of the **European Education Area**, such as increased international mobility and cooperation of teachers and learners as well as improved recognition and validation of competences. Therefore, the European Education Area and the Digital Education Action Plan need to be developed in close convergence. In addition, in order to build a solid and continuous competence and innovation base in Europe, a tighter connection between European Education Area and European Research Area is needed.

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