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COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT

Accompanying the document

Proposal for a Council Recommendation

on blended learning for high quality and inclusive primary and secondary education

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Commission Proposal for a Council Recommendation on blended learning for high quality and inclusive primary and secondary education

Commission Staff Working Document - June 2021

Commission Proposal for a Council Recommendation on blended learning for high quality and inclusive primary and secondary education

Commission Staff Working Document
June 2021

Contents

1. Introduction.....	5
1.1 About this document	5
1.2 Why a Recommendation on “blended learning”?	5
2. Blended learning and educational change	12
2.1 A history and a vision of blended learning.....	12
2.1.1 What is blended learning?	12
2.1.2 Why rethink the blend of environments and tools with established practices of school site learning?.....	15
2.1.3 What is the history of blended learning?	17
2.1.4 How many varieties of approaches can a blended learning approach integrate?	19
2.2 Key Competence development and blended learning.....	22
2.3 A blended learning approach by schools as part of the wider learning community and education system	25
2.3.1 Whole School Approach.....	25
2.3.2 Schools as Learning Organisations.....	27
2.3.3 System organisation and feedback loops.....	28
2.4 Teachers and school leaders: moving to a blended learning approach	31
2.5 Learners and blended learning	32
2.6 Glossary of terms	37
3. What has been learnt from European education stakeholders	43
3.1 Stakeholder groups and modes of communication.....	43
3.2 Main findings during the consultation process.....	46
3.2.1 Design and management of learning	47
▪ Environments: where learning takes place.....	48
▪ Tools: types and access.....	65
▪ Tasks: how learning takes place.....	78
▪ Assessment in blended learning	90
3.2.2 Supporting teachers.....	95
3.2.3 School leadership: creating the appropriate school climate and culture	104
3.2.4 Well-being of staff and pupils	109
3.2.5 Inclusion and targeted support to learners	115

3.2.6	Quality assurance and building evidence for future development.....	126
4.	Supporting the development of blended learning within primary and secondary education	134
4.1	Challenges for implementation.....	135
4.1.1	Clear vision and co-ordinated approach by the whole of the system.....	136
4.1.2	Developing a legal basis for enabling and supporting blended learning.....	138
4.1.3	Infrastructure: the need for investment	139
4.2	European frameworks – competence and strategic guidance	140
4.3	European tools that support the broad school education community	145
4.4	Monitoring and evaluation of developments in blended learning.....	149
4.5	European funding for developing blended learning in primary and secondary education	150
5.	A framework for Blended Learning	153

1. Introduction

1.Introduction

1.1 About this document

This Staff Working Document is designed to accompany and support the Recommendation on blended learning for high quality and inclusive primary and secondary education.

It provides research evidence and other information as a basis for both the legal text of the Recommendation and its subsequent supportive actions. It is also, as far as possible at the time of writing, a practical guide/handbook to help stakeholders understand the full potential of this topic and to support real and positive change across systems and across Europe.

The document describes a vision for blended learning in school education from the perspective of the Digital Education Action Plan 2021-27 and European Education Area: its key ideas on inclusion and on Key Competence development as part of high quality school education. It describes how these ideas are connected to the concepts of a blended learning and innovation and change in education. It also provides a glossary and further explanation of relevant terms (see Chapter 2).

In order to support the statements of the Recommendation and to support action stemming from its adoption, this document accompanying the proposal for a recommendation discusses recent evidence from research together with European stakeholder opinions and experiences (see Chapter 3). Examples of existing policies and projects supporting blended learning are provided. However, given that this is an evolving field in school education – particularly in the context of school site closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic – it should be acknowledged that new evidence and perspectives are constantly emerging.

The document also outlines considerations for legislation and a number of existing EU frameworks and tools that can inspire and support change at school, regional, national and EU level, together with suggestions for monitoring and evaluating future developments (See Chapter 4).

Finally, based on the evidence and examples provided in the other chapters, the document presents a framework for blended learning outlining a set of challenges and examples of good practice on 10 specific areas (see Chapter 5).

1.2 Why a Recommendation on “blended learning”?

It is the vision and the commitment of the European Union to improve the quality of school education: its inclusiveness, the capacity of teachers and school leaders, and the governance of school education systems.¹ All learners should have the opportunity, supported by school education, to achieve their full potential and develop a broad range of competences for their current and future life in society.

The COVID-19 pandemic led to widespread school site closure and a necessary embracing of certain forms of distance and online learning, labelled “Emergency Remote Teaching”. It demonstrated the capacity of systems to be flexible and inclusive with embedding different learning environments and tools. Stakeholders, who were consulted for the preparation of the Recommendation, pointed to the opportunity to build on these experiences and not lose any positive effect of the current momentum of change. The actions taken by European education systems in 2020-21 demonstrated that rapid adaptation and innovation in education is possible, with the emergency response triggering new legislation for some systems, as well as more autonomy and guidance to authorities and school leaders at the local level. Some schools and systems have also developed new stakeholder partnerships, with parents, local and regional communities, business, NGOs, and cultural organisations.

However, there were shortfalls from a lack of readiness of school education, including Vocational Education and Training, systems and stakeholders to take advantage of different learning environments and tools. These include low levels of digital competence and a lack of sufficient resources (adequate tools, infrastructure, and time) to prepare and offer alternative ways of learning. Science and arts, physical education, and VET were heavily disrupted, given their focus on practical tasks. Existing inequalities in learner opportunities and progression have been exposed further, and new inequalities have appeared.² The European Commission is committed to investing in recovery from the pandemic in the knowledge that education systems have a desire and a need to improve their resilience, to cope and adapt with changing circumstances in the future.

There is a need, a desire and an opportunity to build on this knowledge and experiences, draw lessons from the experiences made during the pandemic, and explore the full potential of blending learning environments and tools that, if sustained, can provide young people with an

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/school/about-school-policy_en

² Whilst early research, such as by the European Commission’s [Joint Research Centre](#), considered the “likely” impact of school site closures, emerging evidence is sometimes based on surveys to small samples of teachers asking about “perceived” gaps. Longitudinal data about pupil progression is not yet available for consideration on a European scale. What is consistent across this research is the variation in access to learning tools, contact time between teachers and pupils, and what is perceived to be a supportive home learning environment. It is this variation that is the basis for statements about “inequalities”.

education that prepares them for a rapidly-changing and complex world.³ The challenges for the design of school education remains the same as before the pandemic: how to build meaningful learning experiences in different environments and for pupils of different ages, abilities and circumstances; how to support broad competence development appropriate to learners' needs for today's and the future global society; how to support well-being; and how to support teachers and schools to be innovative in terms of their own organisational and pedagogical approaches, for the benefit of all learners. In order to meet these challenges and improve capacity, a blended learning approach requires a coherent approach by the school education system as a whole within a culture of continuous improvement.

³ Vegas, E. and Winthrop, R. (2020) Beyond reopening schools: How education can emerge stronger than before COVID-19. Available at <https://www.brookings.edu/research/beyond-reopening-schools-how-education-can-emerge-stronger-than-before-covid-19/>

List of examples

- EXAMPLE A: Comprehensive School Giovanni XXIII of Acireale, Italy
- EXAMPLE B: Makerspaces – guidelines for schools and case studies
- EXAMPLE C: Digital simulation tools that enhance VET learning in a safe environment
- EXAMPLE D: School for Circus Children, Germany
- EXAMPLE E: Using online platforms to support communication between learning environments
- EXAMPLE F: “Scholaris” portal for teachers in Poland
- EXAMPLE G: Interactive mathematics by implementing blended learning
- EXAMPLE H: Online learning to support learning in a native language or where there are staff shortages
- EXAMPLE I: Youthpass for supporting and recognising non-formal learning
- EXAMPLE J: Assessment of transversal skills: policy experimentation project
- EXAMPLE K: Supporting school education and cultural partnerships in Norway and Latvia
- EXAMPLE L: Portugal’s website “Support for Schools”, created in 2020
- EXAMPLE M: Campus schools with a full-time distance learning option
- EXAMPLE N: Websites for well-being at home – Luxembourg
- EXAMPLE O: “Bednet” for pupils with a long-term illness and recuperation
- EXAMPLE P: ‘iScoil’ for disengaged learners
- EXAMPLE Q: Home-School Liaison Scheme (HSCL), Ireland
- EXAMPLE R: Distance Learning Evaluation Tool

List of figures

Figure 1: Examples of designing for learning in new ways with environments, tools and tasks	16
Figure 2: Timeline of distance learning in school education	18
Figure 3: Elements of a flipped classroom approach	20
Figure 4: Blended learning as a process including before and after learning events	21
Figure 5: Blended learning approach as a spectrum of situations and opportunities	22
Figure 6: The eight Key Competences for Lifelong Learning	23
Figure 7: Eight areas for institutions to consider when developing a blended learning strategy	27
Figure 8: The school as a learning organisation, as developed by the ET2020 Working Group Schools	28
Figure 9: Three levels of design and implementation of a blended learning approach	29
Figure 10: Eight steps to successful change	30
Figure 11: Learning and cultural identity transcends different environments	36
Figure 12: Student drawings as part of the 2021 consultation survey	51
Figure 13: Overlapping learning communities as a powerful environment for development	54
Figure 14: Student drawing of a classroom with comfortable furniture and one device per student	66
Figure 15: Percentage of households with broadband internet access, 2019	69
Figure 16: Tools used for Emergency Remote Teaching during spring 2020	71
Figure 17: SAMR model defining different levels of integrating educational technology	73
Figure 18: Parent's perceptions of children's learning skills during spring 2020	75
Figure 19: Percentage of individuals with “basic or above basic” digital skills among young people (16 to 19 years of age), 2019, as compared with the general population	76
Figure 20: Six learning types	79
Figure 21: Blended learning as a process of before, during and after the live/shared learning event	81
Figure 22: Example of the process of developing a personalised learning plan for a student	86
Figure 23: The roles of different stakeholders in managing the learning environments	88
Figure 24: Students with a higher sense of school belonging performed better in mathematics and science	100
Figure 25: A perspective on teacher competence in blended learning	103
Figure 26: Student concerns about getting poor grades because of online activities	110
Figure 27: Five areas for adapting established quality assurance processes	128
Figure 28: Considerations for a blended learning approach and ongoing school education development	135
Figure 29: The roles and relationships between education stakeholders	137
Figure 30: Schematic View of European Commission's Digital Competence Framework for Citizens.	140
Figure 31: Schematic View of European Commission's Digitally Competent Educational Organisations (DigCompOrg) Framework.	142

Figure 32: Schematic view of European Commission's Digital Competence Framework for Educators	143
Figure 33: Progression model of the European Commission's DigCompEdu	143
Figure 34: Framework for the Personal, Social & Learning to Learn Key Competence (LifeComp)	144