



Doc. 11846

16 March 2009

Realising the full potential of e-learning for education and training

Reply to Recommendation¹: Recommendation 1836 (2008)
Committee of Ministers

1. The Committee of Ministers has examined with interest Parliamentary Assembly [Recommendation 1836 \(2008\)](#) "Realising the full potential of e-learning for education and training" and brought it to the attention of the governments of the member states and various competent committees and other bodies.²
2. It stresses the importance of education policies in a rapidly changing world in promoting democratic citizenship and contributing to the defence and development of democratic societies and cultures. In this context, it shares the Assembly's view regarding the potential and implications of e-learning tools for education and training. Thanks to the work accomplished and the expertise gained by its intergovernmental committees, the Council of Europe can play an important role in developing the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) in European education systems, vocational training and lifelong learning processes.
3. The Committee of Ministers agrees with the Assembly on the need to avoid the exclusion of certain categories of young people and citizens due to the difficulty of gaining access to the Internet or acquiring an adequate mastery of modern technological tools. It recognises the importance of empowering children and adults through the formal and non-formal education sectors to: (i) use media technologies effectively to access and manage data in order to meet their individual needs and interests and those of their social environment; (ii) exercise their democratic rights and civic responsibilities effectively; and (iii) make informed choices when using the Internet and other ICTs. The positive use of the Internet and ICTs can thus help to create a sense of confidence, well-being and respect for others. Education and learning in this manner can help children learn to understand and deal with content and behaviours carrying a risk of harm.
4. The use of audiovisual tools such as television can also facilitate education and learning. Public service broadcasters have an important position and role in this connection as a guide to society and a factor for social cohesion and integration of all individuals and groups, including those who are vulnerable. Affordable access to digital media (public broadcasters) and communication services for individuals and groups, irrespective of their age, gender, ethnic or social origin, helps societies advance their knowledge and skills bases and promotes the inclusion of vulnerable groups such as those on low incomes; those in rural and geographically remote areas; those with special needs (for example, disabled persons); and the elderly.
5. The Parliamentary Assembly's recommendation for a common approach to e-learning in European higher education is interesting in terms of enabling students to avail themselves of a training offer anywhere in Europe and not only in their countries of origin or residence. A European perception of a network like this could also make it possible to provide all students with hands-on access to human, documentary or laboratory

1. adopted at the 1050th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies (11 March 2009)

2. European Co-ordination Forum for the Council of Europe Disability Action Plan 2006-2015 (CAHPAH), European Committee on Migration (CDMG), Steering Committee for Equality between Women and Men (CDEG), Steering Committee for Education (CDED), Steering Committee for Higher Education and Research (CDESR) and Steering Committee on the Media and New Communication Services (CDMC).



resources thanks to agreements with distance teaching or other educational establishments that are readily accessible. The Committee of Ministers emphasises that this quest for a human dimension in education is perfectly consistent with Council of Europe policy, particularly in terms of interculturalism.

6. In response to the Assembly's proposal regarding the preparation of "common European quality indicators", the Committee of Ministers suggests drawing in particular on the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area drawn up by the ENQA (European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education) and adopted in Bergen in 2005 by the European Ministers responsible for Higher Education. Particular attention should be paid both to the quality of e-learning provision not forming part of a national education system (cf. the Council of Europe/UNESCO Recognition Convention), particularly in the field of transnational education, and to the information provided to prospective students on this provision.

7. The Committee of Ministers also takes note of the Assembly's recommendation to examine the standardisation of the technical infrastructure and software concerning e-learning, including free open-source software on the Internet, in order to facilitate their use and ensure their interoperability. In this connection, it draws attention to its Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)16 on measures to promote the public service value of the Internet, which urges member states to promote technical interoperability, open standards and cultural diversity in ICT policy and a diversity of software models, including proprietary, free and open-source software. It also draws the Assembly's attention to a whole series of standard-setting texts which it has adopted in the field of the media and new communication services and which are particularly relevant to [Recommendation 1836 \(2008\)](#).³

8. The Committee of Ministers recently complemented these standards by adopting Recommendation CM/Rec(2009)1 on electronic democracy (e-democracy) on 18 February 2009. This recommendation underlines the potential contribution of ICTs to democracy and society, whilst fully respecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, the need to narrow the digital divide by means of an inclusive and non-discriminatory approach and the importance of empowering people through support for education and training.

9. With reference to the Assembly's recommendation to "prepare a handbook and provide teacher training for the use of e-learning tools", the Committee of Ministers wishes to draw attention to the Council of Europe's Internet Literacy Handbook for classroom learning⁴, which has in fact been introduced in the "Pestalozzi" training programme for education professionals and its online game for children "Through the Wild Web Woods"⁵. These two tools can provide a framework for, and promote the development of, e-learning in education and training. Both are freely accessible, thereby providing an open educational resource.

10. Lastly, with regard to the Assembly's proposal addressed to the Standing Conference of Ministers of Education (paragraph 12.7), the Committee of Ministers notes that the "Resolution to foster the integration of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in educational systems in Europe",⁶ adopted by the Standing Conference of European Ministers of Education at its 21st session in Athens in 2003, is still relevant and covers many of the points raised in [Recommendation 1836 \(2008\)](#). Appended hereto is a more detailed analysis of certain relevant provisions of the above-mentioned resolution and how they should be applied in light of scientific and technological advances that have taken place since then.

11. The Committee of Ministers will continue to focus its efforts on the formulation and implementation of up-to-date, tangible education policies in order to promote the development of a modern European society reflecting the values upheld by the Council of Europe. It will also ensure appropriate dissemination of the results achieved and, in this connection, informs the Assembly that online learning and collaborative tools such as "Moodle" are currently being used in several Council of Europe projects such as the joint project with the European Commission on Human Rights in the South Caucasus and Ukraine and the project of teacher training in sociocultural diversity.

3. Declaration on the allocation and management of the digital dividend and the public interest (2008); Committee of Ministers' Recommendations CM/Rec(2007)16 on measures to promote the public service value of the Internet; CM/Rec(2007)3 on the remit of public service media in the information society; Rec(2006)12 on empowering children in the new information and communications environment and R (99) 14 on universal community service concerning new communication and information services.

4. http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/StandardSetting/InternetLiteracy/InternetLiteracyHandbook_en.asp.

5. http://www.wildwebwoods.org/popup_langSelection.php.

6. http://www.coe.int/t/e/cultural_co-operation/education/standing_conferences/e.21stsessionathens2003.asp#P106_10768

Appendix to the reply

- For matters of equipment, it would be possible to reiterate points 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3 of the 2003 resolution (to foster the integration of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in educational systems in Europe), which lay down the minimum conditions for real generalisation of ICT applications in schools.
- Where teachers are concerned, point 2 of the 2003 resolution was wholly devoted to ways of fostering developments in the teaching profession in relation to ICTs. Points 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 addressed the issue of recruitment, then recognition of the impact of ICTs on teachers' workload, and lastly the need for support for training at every career stage, particularly to keep abreast of developments regarding technologies and their impact on teaching techniques and practices, relying on research results. These three elements remain topical and would be worth taking up again in order to provide practical avenues which decision makers could use. Since 2003, technologies, the available provision and the uses to which they are put by the new generations of pupils have developed, prompting teachers to take advantage of the documentary wealth available on line (not only in textual form, as in the case of GoogleEarth), with the further possibility of downloading numerous broadcasts ("podcasting"), while having to cope with problems such as the validity of information sources (e.g. Wikipedia) and observance of copyright. E-training could constitute both the subject matter and an effective medium for in-service teacher training Europe-wide, while also aiding international exchanges of experience and development of the content of such vocational training.
- For pupils, the 2003 resolution proposed several lines of action. This is true of points 1.3, 1.4 and 1.5 dealing respectively with pupils' access to equipment outside classroom hours, the crediting of pupils' competences in their assessment in each subject area – the link with the contents taught is not mentioned, moreover, in the draft text, although it is a fundamental dimension of the training applications of ICTs – and lastly official validation and recognition of the competences acquired in school courses. Besides, the development of technologies since 2003 now permits the inclusion of two new dimensions: firstly tools of the "Web 2.0" type stimulating young people's creativity and aiding them in the production of multimedia resources (blogs, animations, videos, wikis etc); secondly participation in "social networks" and "mobile" Internet access via the new mobile telephones (with adapted versions of the software for web surfing, instant messaging and even applications of the word processing type) and in providers' 3G offers, encouraging "peer to peer" communication and exchanges.