



Recommendation 1836 (2008)¹

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

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Parliamentary Assembly recalls that the development of e-learning tools has had considerable impact on education and training. However, such tools are currently not used to their full potential for the benefit of education in Europe. The high expectations inspired by these tools have not yet been realised. E-learning tools are electronic means of teaching and learning in classrooms and outside at a distance – either individually or in a group – as well as in a blended format of classroom and distance studies.

2. The Assembly is aware that distance learning and the use of audiovisual means, including television, have a long history in Europe and it therefore recognises the ground-breaking achievements in this field, such as the television-based programme “Telekolleg”, created in 1967 by the regional ministries of education in Germany together with regional public service broadcasters; the Open University in Milton Keynes (Great Britain), which has been offering courses since 1971; and the FernUniversität in Hagen (Germany), which has been in operation since 1975.

3. The Assembly recalls its [Recommendation 650 \(1971\)](#) on the creation of a “European Television University”, [Recommendation 1110 \(1989\)](#) on distance teaching, [Resolution 1193 \(1999\)](#) on second-chance schools – or how to combat unemployment and exclusion by means of education and training, [Recommendation 1437 \(2000\)](#) on non-formal education, [Recommendation 1559 \(2002\)](#) on training of workers in the use of new technologies, and [Recommendation 1586 \(2002\)](#) on the digital divide and education.

4. Education is increasingly important for the development of social and human competencies, in everyday life, for employment as well as for social and cultural cohesion in rapidly changing living and working environments. In an era of globalisation and rapid technological change, Europe’s competitiveness and wealth will depend on its ability to become an advanced, knowledge-based society through constant improvement in lifelong education and training of the population in general, and the workforce in particular, including e-learning. Traditional classroom-based school education should be supplemented in order to prepare for these challenges. Our societies are faced with greater student mobility, more flexible working schedules, the replacement of linear professional careers by intermittent sequences of working and learning periods, the need to reconcile both family and working life as well as the diffusion of new media and communication services into all areas of life.

5. The Assembly is therefore convinced that the new means of disseminating and acquiring knowledge and skills through e-learning have the potential to offer more adequate solutions to these demands and circumstances. They can also be more inclusive, in particular for people with disabilities and the socially challenged. In the context of the integration of migrants, e-learning can be an invaluable tool for teaching the language and other skills needed in the host country.

1. *Text adopted by the Standing Committee acting on behalf of the Assembly, on 29 May 2008 (see [Doc. 11523](#), report of the Committee on Culture, Science and Education, rapporteur: Mr Fischer; [Doc. 11525](#), opinion of the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development, rapporteur: Mrs Papadopoulos; and oral opinion of the Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, rapporteur: Mr Ayva).*



6. The Assembly welcomes the development by the Council of Europe in 2007 of both an Internet-based learning tool for human rights education for lawyers, judges and prosecutors, which is part of its European Programme for Human Rights Education for Legal Professionals (HELP), as well as an Internet-based game for children on the safe use of the Internet. The Assembly stresses the need to protect children from the potential dangers of information and communication technologies (ICT) for their health and safety. ICT must not be allowed to undermine the interpersonal relations and contacts that form the essential basis for successful learning and the development of social skills.

7. E-learning poses new demands on educational institutions, teachers and students. Educational institutions should be equipped with the technical infrastructure and necessary software and should cooperate with each other in order to create synergies. Teachers should be aware of, and know how to use, new electronic means of teaching and communicating with their students. Teacher training courses on e-learning should become obligatory. Students should have access to the technical devices and course materials and know how to use them for their own study and communication requirements. This requires early training of students in the use of new communication tools, especially online. This also requires that e-learning technologies be secured in order to avoid attempts to violate the privacy of e-learning students.

8. The Assembly therefore invites the European Ministers of Education participating in the Bologna process and the universities of Europe, in particular through the European University Association and the European Association of Distance Teaching Universities, to develop common approaches to e-learning in the European higher education area. In this context, national legislation should be updated and ways should be found to provide adequate funding beyond that of the state, including public-private partnerships.

9. E-learning also offers new opportunities for vocational training, continuing education and in-house company training. To be competitive on a global scale, European employers and employees have to invest continuously in knowledge and skills. People and companies, especially small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), should not be excluded from education because of high financial costs. Therefore, the Assembly calls on member parliaments to consider supporting vocational training and in-house company training, as well as to encourage public-private partnerships.

10. E-learning can be a powerful means of creating open educational resources accessible to everybody, thus counteracting a society divided by unequal skill levels. In this regard, the Assembly calls on member parliaments to support the so-called "open-source" movement in software development and initiatives for open educational resources – freely accessible on the Internet – and to adopt measures to combat the digital divide in order to close the gap between those who have access to ICT and the acquisition of ICT skills and those who do not, thus ensuring digital literacy for all.

11. The Assembly recalls the financial support provided by the European Union under its programme for the effective integration of information and communication technologies in education and training systems in Europe from 2004 to 2006. It welcomes the support for lifelong learning and student mobility in accordance with the recommendations of the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union on key competences for lifelong learning and on transnational mobility within the European Community for education and training purposes of 18 December 2006. The Assembly underlines its support for the European Union's comprehensive Lifelong Learning Programme 2007-13, which builds on its former e-learning programmes and aims to become a world quality reference. It encourages the European Commission to make full use of the possibility foreseen in the Programme for co-operation with the Council of Europe, which has extensive experience of co-operation in education and training and in promoting social cohesion.

12. The Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers:

12.1. prepare recommendations for ensuring and facilitating the mutual recognition of study periods pursued, and qualifications obtained, by e-learning;

12.2. prepare common European quality indicators, regarding both technical and content aspects, for national information centres on recognition and mobility at university level (ENIC-NARIC networks) under the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (ETS No. 165);

12.3. 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;

12.4. assess the sociological, psychological and pedagogical effects of e-learning systems, in particular on specific groups of society, such as women, migrants, disabled persons, as well as people living in rural areas, in order to adjust e-learning strategies accordingly and combat the digital divide;

- 12.5. prepare a handbook and provide teacher training for the use of e-learning tools and new information and communication facilities for educational purposes;
- 12.6. set up a website to promote best practice developed in member states, allowing public authorities and NGOs to update this information, highlighting best practice targeting groups of society facing specific needs and constraints (such as women, migrants, disabled persons) and putting at the free disposal of Internet users these standards, studies, curricula and activities;
- 12.7. invite the Standing Conference of European Ministers for Education to propose relevant national or regional legislation and to set up national action plans for realising the full potential of e-learning and identifying examples of best practice in e-learning;
- 12.8. ensure that e-learning systems are accessible to groups of society – including women, migrants, disabled persons, as well as people living in rural areas – facing specific needs and constraints, irrespective of gender, racial, ethnic or social origin, religion or beliefs;
- 12.9. invite the member states to improve communication and mobile technologies and to support free access to Internet and mobile technology;
- 12.10. invite the signatory states of the European Cultural Convention (ETS No. 18) to set up transnational e-learning programmes, in particular for the purposes of Article 2 of the convention;
- 12.11. develop an e-learning tool about the work of the Council of Europe to be made available to primary and secondary schools as well as institutions for adult education and call on member and observer states to contribute financially to the translation and distribution of this e-learning tool;
- 12.12. provide the resources necessary for holding international meetings and conferences at the Council of Europe in Strasbourg by using Internet-based audiovisual teleconference facilities in order to facilitate participation from outside Strasbourg as well as by people with disabilities;
- 12.13. consider using e-learning tools such as the open-source “Moodle” and new information and communication facilities for future Council of Europe campaigns in order to increase their reach and accessibility, and to save financial resources.