# THE NEW SKILLS AGENDA FOR EUROPE: EUROPEAN SCHOOLNET'S PERSPECTIVE

The current political momentum around skills is certainly welcomed by those whom, as European Schoolnet, strongly believe in the importance of skills and education to thrive in society. European Schoolnet is a Brussels-based network of 30 European Ministries of Education. We aim to bring innovation in teaching and learning. We therefore welcome the launch of the *New Skills Agenda* by the European Commission and support the priorities that are set within the agenda, in particular the emphasis on the need to develop digital skills.

From the safe and responsible use of online technology, through the wide variety of ICT in education projects[1] we are involved in, it is clear to us how much digital skills are needed for citizens to actively participate in today's digital society, and how central they are in shaping the personal and professional future of a connected generation. Our leading role in a number of European initiatives in the area of STEM and of Key Competences for lifelong learning[2] has further strengthened our belief that investing in the development and recognition of a wide variety of skills[3] is beneficial to learners' personal development, active citizenship, social inclusion, and employment.

European Schoolnet will support the New Skills Agenda for Europe in the four areas outlined below. We believe that our network of stakeholders (Ministries of Education, schools, teachers, researchers, and industry partners) together with our targeted actions, tools, platforms, and services are able to contribute to bring about change.

## Foster the development and assessment of key competences

*We believe that coherent assessment and evaluation frameworks are needed to support the implementation of Key Competences.*

Stakeholders from KeyCoNet (the European Policy Network on Key Competences in school education, coordinated by European Schoolnet) have indicated a need for greater clarity through a more precise vocabulary on key competences, as well as for clear overall curriculum objectives and supporting materials. We therefore welcome

---

1 Projects or initiatives include, among others, the eSkills for Jobs campaign, the Grand Coalition for Digital Jobs, the European Coding Initiative, the EUN Academy, MENTEP, I-LINC, Better Internet for Kids, the eSafety Label, the Web We Want and ENABLE.

2 Running STEM initiatives led by European Schoolnet include Scientix, the STEM Alliance and Amgen Teach. With European Schoolnet as a partner: Go-Lab, RRI Tools and Space Awareness. Additionally, European Schoolnet is coordinating the new Ministries of Education STEM representatives Working Group. Running projects related to Key competences include KeyCoNet and Co-Lab.

3 Which are intended here, as in the New Skills Agenda, to refer to what a person knows, understands, and can do.

the Agenda's intention to launch a revision of the Key Competence Framework, which will provide support for better developing and assessing these skills, providing a thorough review of national progress in implementing the current framework is undertaken first. Encouragingly, the Commission has in more recent years supported a common and shared understanding of two key competences with the development of reference frameworks on digital competence and entrepreneurship.[4]

We recommend a more comprehensive development of reference frameworks at European level for all 8 Key Competences and supporting material on their implementation, assessment, and evaluation. Further guidelines for European schools and teachers are needed to address these competences in educational practice, both in primary and secondary education, in a transversal manner.

European Schoolnet commits to discuss with a number of EC funding programmes how progress can be made in facilitating and promoting, alongside national frameworks and tools, the existing validated European reference frameworks. For instance, the MENTEP project, a self-assessment tool for teachers' digital competence, provides a means with which to implement the European Digital Competence framework.

## Develop learners' digital skills in school

*We believe that formal education has an essential role to play in the development of skills of children and young people, and in particular of digital skills.*

Digital skills are needed for work, for interacting with services, for buying and selling online, for entertainment, for cultural, political and civic participation. While most people, including children and youth, have wide access to digital technology, OECD studies talk of a second digital divide emerging:[5] some students are more skilled than others in grabbing the opportunities that technologies provide, and this difference seems to be related to their socio-economic background. Education cannot afford to leave anyone behind. We believe that digital skills should be considered as a fundamental right for all European citizens, including children and young people. In this respect, we call for a recognition of digital skills as basic life skills, which should be regarded as relevant as reading and writing. As all teachers improve literacy and numeracy of their learners, we believe that all teachers should work towards enhancing the digital skills of pupils and students. Digital skills cannot be limited to operational, passive use. They involve active creation, critical understanding, and problem-solving through digital means. Our learners need to be equipped with a wide variety of digital skills to be allowed to be in the driving seat of technological-based

---

[4] Namely: DIGCOMP and ENTRECOMP.

[5] OECD (2015), Students, Computers and Learning: Making the Connection, OECD Publishing.

innovation. Educational institutions at all levels should be enabled to empower children and young people to become digitally competent.

> We recommend to widen actions for enhancing the level of digital skills of children and young people and provide all with the basic digital skills and the right attitudes towards technologies by setting benchmarks for education on the levels of digital skills of young people.
>
> European Schoolnet commits to support the enhancement of digital skills of young people in a variety of ways. European Schoolnet Academy will carry on its commitment to developing primary and secondary school teachers' digital skills, in coordination with the training courses offered to teachers at the Future Classroom Lab. Through the Coding initiative, a public-private partnership coordinated by European Schoolnet, we will continue promoting innovative ways to teach Computer Science and programming.

## Enhance young people's employability

*We unambiguously support the current urge of promoting STEM careers, IT professionalism and eLeadership, of raising awareness of ICT jobs, and of promoting the need for digitally skilled workers.*

The Grand Coalition for Digital Jobs has forecasted 825,000 unfilled vacancies for ICT professionals by 2020, and has stated that by the same date 90% of jobs will require some level of digital skills. To fill the vacancy gap, a push towards educating a digitally skilled new workforce is necessary. Because indeed, there are currently high levels of unemployment while the ICT industry is striving to recruit. If we wish to have good and prepared top digital performers and STEM professionals, we need to be able to recruit from a large pool. If we want to foster digital and STEM talent, we should begin enhancing digital skills from the start and provide more opportunities for the early uptake of STEM subjects. The shortage of students choosing to undertake studies in Computer Science or STEM cannot be tackled at age 16 plus: fundamental choices are taken earlier in life, and disparities in experiences, competences and performance already arise at a young age.

> We recommend to pursue awareness raising efforts on the array of opportunities that arise from STEM careers, IT professionalisms and eLeadership.
>
> European Schoolnet commits to particularly invite EC programmes and projects to more consistently draw upon results, evidence and expertise emerging from Scientix, the STEM Alliance, and Go Lab, which show how teachers can be empowered to transform and innovate teaching and learning. European Schoolnet is moreover undertaking action in the support of digital skills for the employability of young people in projects as I-LINC and eSkills for jobs, by raising awareness on the need to develop digital skills for employability and entrepreneurship and on the opportunities offered by ICT careers.

## Develop students' media literacy and critical thinking for digital citizenship

*We consider that the development of digital skills through education touches upon the values and ethics of digital citizenship.*

For the New Skills Agenda to have a long-term structural impact, we see a need to move beyond a digital jobs narrative. While agreeing with the foreseen benefits of digital skills for employment and economic recovery in Europe, the urge to develop skills, including digital ones, goes well beyond jobs. We need digital skills in our everyday endeavours, but we lack them. We strongly believe that the aim of education is not merely to educate workers, but also future citizens. There is a need to focus on developing students' social and civic competences and their awareness of the implication of their digital citizenship. This position is particularly relevant after the recent dramatic events. In line with the Paris declaration, we believe that education should promote and share the common values of freedom, tolerance, and non-discrimination. In this regard, digital skills are of utmost importance: digital and media literacies enable children and young people to be critical thinkers, to judge media and digital messages, and to act responsibly in an online environment.

We thus encourage even more coordinated discussions across DGs, in dialogue with other European and national policy makers and stakeholders, and the support of a coordinated European exchange of expertise and best practices.

European Schoolnet is engaged in a digital citizenship programme, and commits to advocate for the rights and responsibilities of children and young people in an active and participative digital citizenship. European Schoolnet engages to continue the dialogue on these issues not only within the educational frame, but also through our public-private partnership initiatives. Better Internet for Kids and I-LINC already provide EC-funded platforms for stakeholder involvement and discussion, bringing in the voices of young people. The 2016 eTwinning conference will be centred on digital citizenship. In November 2016, European Schoolnet will organise EMINENT, its annual Experts Meeting in Education Networking, bringing together experts in education, Ministries' representatives and European decision makers to take this digital citizenship agenda further.

European Schoolnet, through its current and future actions, will contribute to promote the New Skills Agenda for Europe along the lines that are presented in this note.