

Key Action: Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices
Action Type: Partnerships for Digital Education Readiness

Project Title

Inclusive Digital Education Access

Project Coordinator

Organisation EFMD AISBL
Address RUE GACHARD 88/3 , 1050 BRUXELLES , BE
Website www.efmd.org

Project Information

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Partners UNIVERSITE LYON 3 JEAN MOULIN (FR) , NEW BULGARIAN UNIVERSITY (BG) , CONFORM - CONSULENZA FORMAZIONE E MANAGEMENT SOCIETA CONSORTILE A RESPONSABILITA LIMITATA (IT) , UNIVERSITE LIBRE DE BRUXELLES (BE) , UNIWERSYTET EKONOMICZNY W POZNANIU (PL) , TALLINNA TEHNIKAULIKOOL (EE)
Topics ICT - new technologies - digital competences ; Open and distance learning ; Quality Assurance

Project Summary

The COVID-19 crisis forced HEIs to move their courses online almost overnight. Many were not prepared due to the lack of infrastructure or because of the lecturer's insufficient digital skills; their response was often limited to broadcasting the same lectures online, without adapting programmes nor teaching methods. Possibilities for exchange of ideas between faculty and students, students' participation and small group cooperation (all essential to high-quality pedagogy) decreased dramatically. 61% of students report that the experience of online learning failed to match that of classroom learning (WebGeneration survey, 09/2020).

Many students (in particular vulnerable ones, needing more support and accompaniment) disengaged from the learning process. The French Ministry of Higher Education estimates that the contact was lost with 5 to 8% of students. UNESCO evaluates that up to 7,9 million students could be at risk worldwide (issue note, 2020). The EC 2020 consultation for the Digital Education Plan observed that 'learning providers saw large numbers of students dropping out from courses, in some cases this was up to 3/4 of the group'.

Higher Education will evolve towards a mix of 100% online, hybrid (simultaneously face-to-face and online delivery) and blended format. All students are obliged to follow a significant part of their curriculum online. At this moment, particular attention has to be paid to the inclusive education, defined as "the recognition of all students' entitlement to a learning experience that respects diversity, enables participation, removes barriers and anticipates and considers a variety of learning needs and preferences" (Gravestock, 2017). Professors must be supported to ensure "the design and delivery of teaching, learning and assessment methods that allow all students to engage meaningfully with the curriculum and achieve their full potential" (Imperial College, UK).

The objective of the project IDEA is to support the transition towards a more inclusive digital education, by adapting the pedagogy of the faculty. The project will:

- Build awareness of the importance of inclusiveness in digital education and its consequences on pedagogical practices;
- Facilitate understanding of the importance of inclusiveness for the quality of digital education;
- Develop a quality assurance system embedding inclusiveness in all phases of the digital pedagogy;
- Provide practical tools and evaluation instruments to guide faculty members for the evolution of their pedagogical practice.

The target groups englobe faculty members and programme / academic directors, who design the curriculum, coordinate the courses and oversee their delivery and quality. The project also benefits indirectly the HEI senior managers in charge of the digital agenda and quality. They are already using digital tools but need extra guidance and tools to face the new challenges and adapt their teaching to be inclusive, without excluding any student.

The needs analysis conducted during the preparation phase showed that professors lack information on the 'new rules of the game' and feel frustrated by the 'trial and error method'. The project answers these needs with:

- an updated reference framework, mapping the new constraints and expectations of students and faculty for inclusive digital education;
- key learning points drawn from the emergency transition and year 1 of the 'new normal', best practices and analysis of the innovations;
- a quality assurance system for inclusive digital education complementing the existing procedures which do not deal satisfactorily with this aspect;
- solutions and training tools to guide the transformation of their digital pedagogy and monitor their progress.

The project's focus on inclusiveness is specific and clearly defined. It brings a multidimensional approach to a well identified problem, with outputs developed by a large competence pool of experts in digital skills, innovation and quality assurance. Progress and outcomes are measurable during the project duration.

The partnership demonstrates diversity and complementarity: 5 HEIs, 1 network for quality and accreditation and 1 adult education provider, all coming from countries with different levels of digital advancement. It allows benchmarking, inspiration and transfer of experience from more digitally advanced countries to least digital-savvy. This provides a wider perspective than national approaches and ensures that the project results can be exported in a variety of national/international settings.

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