



# **Guidelines for School Leaders on Online Teaching and Learning**

Contributors:

Dr Jacqueline Vanhear (DQSE)

Mr Grazio Grixti (DDLTS)

Ms Denise Gatt (DQSE)

Mr Keith Aquilina (DDLTS)

Mr Vince Carabott (DDLTS)

Dr Robert Cassar (DQSE)

Ms Bernardette Mercieca (DQSE)

School communities should take advantage of **learning** opportunities afforded through improved personalisation, collaboration, and communication enabled by **learning** technologies. Lessons learnt due to school closure can be used to better shape teaching and learning in its many different forms. Recent months have shown that digital is not always about participating in flashy projects, it's about transforming people and ways of working. Developing digital skills across the school community, not just within IT departments.



School leadership teams are in a key position to guide and support the school community in the successful adoption of technology for blended (realtime/non-realtime) teaching and learning. In its document issued in June 2020, the European Commission (EC) identifies key areas for such successful adoption.

- i. Develop a **shared vision** for the implementation of blended (realtime/non-realtime) learning,
- ii. Transform the vision into action with a **collaborative school culture**,
- iii. Support teachers to make **autonomous decisions**,
- iv. Ensure that all **objectives of the curriculum** are able to be achieved in combination of on-site and distance learning,
- v. **Develop teachers' and school leaders' capacity** for making the optimum use of available tools,
- vi. Provide **targeted support** to learners with particular needs,
- vii. Build **community support** for new approaches to teaching and learning and fully access external expertise when needed,
- viii. **Communicate** with authorities.

Successful school leadership teams give time to plan and work on a **shared school digital strategy** for transforming the school through components including:

- Leading an effective personalized and digital **learning transformation**,
- Building a **strong teaching workforce** including supporting teachers in new ways of teaching,
- Fostering a **school culture** that supports personalized and digital learning.

Establishing a strong communication system with all stakeholders including INCO, psychosocial teams, guidance, nurture groups, peripatetic teachers and other professionals. The shared school digital strategy should include managing in-school and distance learning environments for all learners. It is suggested that the main areas are to include;

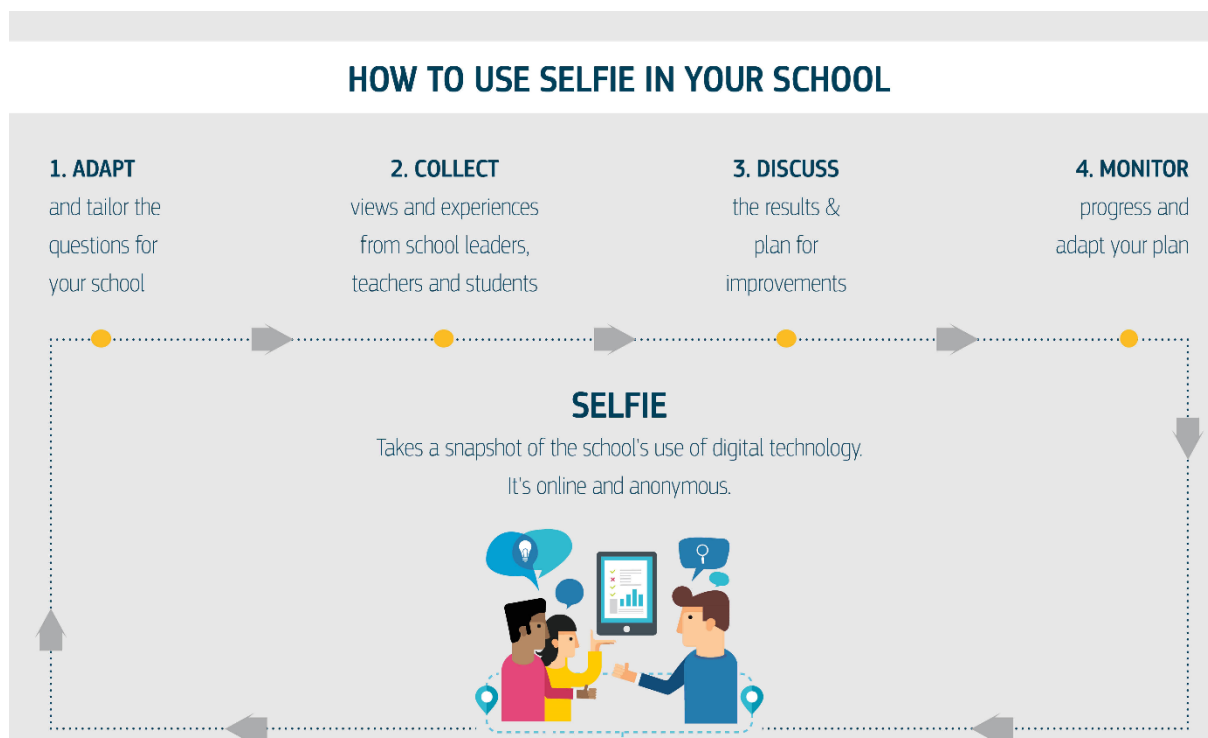
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| • School Timetable,   | • Support Staff,         |
| • ICT Infrastructure, | • Parental involvement,  |
| • Digital Tools,      | • Digital environment/s. |

**SELFIE** (Self-reflection on Effective Learning by Fostering the use of Innovative Educational Technologies), an initiative of the EC, is a free, easy-to-use, customisable **tool** to help schools

assess where they stand with learning in the digital age. This tool focuses on the role of leadership in the school-wide integration of digital technologies and their effective use for the school's core work: teaching and learning.

When the school uses SELFIE, it will get a good picture of what's working well and where improvement is needed in relation to the use of digital technologies for teaching and learning. This can be an added value for school planning, and thus the Digital Literacy team will be able to better support the school according to its specific digital needs.

The SELFIE School Report can be used for a dialogue within the school community, to define steps to develop a shared school digital strategy. For example, this may include specific training for teachers or support for students on issues such as online safety. For further information on SELFIE, browse to: <https://digitalliteracy.skola.edu.mt/selfie-2/>



*SELFIE takes snapshots of schools use of digital technology. It is online and anonymous. European Union 2019*

A shared school digital literacy strategy considers the management of the physical and virtual school environment. The below sections include practical tips meant to facilitate the process and implementation of a shared school digital literacy strategy.

### **1. Organisation of the School Timetable**

During the covid physical school closure, the school day hours and working hours of staff were not always the same. Changes to the timetable may be influenced by whether there is a need to synchronise learning i.e. having the teacher and full class in the same lesson (physical or virtual), meaning that they cannot be occupied elsewhere. Through discussion and agreement within a school community, teaching and learning hours may also change when a significant number of students are not in-school.

In such a scenario, the timetable would benefit through a flipped classroom approach where students learn content online by watching video lectures, usually at home, and homework is done in class with teachers and students discussing and solving questions. Teacher interaction with students is more personalized – with guidance instead of lecturing. As earmarked by EC (2020), timetable changes may benefit teaching and learning by offering longer (or double) lesson periods for extended practical or collaborative project work.

Meetings with SMT and School assembly should be slotted in the timetable and held in various modalities thus keeping the learning community together whilst sharing school’s vision on a regular basis.

At secondary level, coordination of subject departments is crucial. In recent months, some schools have allocated a timetable, timing the number of minutes per week per subject including both work done in ‘class’ and at home. Agreed time slots for any possible live sessions should take into account the time for work on given tasks.

The design of a school timetable of blended (realtime/non-realtime) learning for different age groups may also be reflected in the timetable. For instance, younger pupils may have more teacher contact time or time inschool compared to older pupils.



### **2. Access to Devices – ICT Infrastructure**

EC (2020), indicates that blended (realtime/non-realtime) learning is likely to shift teaching and learning resources online, it faces similar challenges to some of those experienced by many schools during the emergency distance learning in recent months.

Every member of the school needs access to dependable digital devices, a reliable infrastructure (including broadband and WiFi) and knowledgeable support IT staff to assist teachers and learners to use online resources effectively. The availability of appropriate IT devices, Internet connection with sufficient bandwidth may be a challenge for economically disadvantaged families.



It is suggested that state SLT keep school community updated with main services provided by IMU and DDLTS.

### 3. Digital Environment/s – Platform/s for Teaching & Learning

Educators need to discuss and agree at school level on which online platforms will be used. Considerations need to be taken in the use of MySchool and Microsoft Teams by state schools as highlighted in the circular DDLTS 26/2020 which outlines that both online environments will complement each other to carry out online teaching and learning whilst being supported by IMU and DDLTS.

This includes taking attendance, recording assessment, sending announcements to parent and students, sending work to students, receiving students' work, correcting work and giving feedback, communicating and more.

It is recommending that a staff room is setup in each school using MS Teams. By regularly updating and collaborating within a Ms Teams staff room, a virtual community of practice will enhance the physical collaboration offered within a physical school setting whilst allowing each member of staff en the opportunity to nurture the growth mindset required for 21C learning.

These platforms are widely used by educators, school leaders, students and parents. For further information:

Teams: <https://support.office.com/en-us/teams>

My School: <https://support.msm.io/hc/en-us/sections/201677905-General>



### 4. Digital Tools

If teaching and learning are relevant, personalized, fun and make use of tools that students like using, education becomes something to look forward to and more engaging. Digital tools can enable such an environment where teachers accomplish daily classroom tasks such as grading, homework assignment, and collection of classwork, student discussions, parent interaction, attendance, and an online class calendar for assigned tasks. When lesson plan and resources (i.e. videos, links, and audio) are available online, students can access them according to their own schedules and location.



The accessibility of proposed tools and content should be adaptable for learners with Special Educational Needs. This includes possible language-related obstacles for children whose home language is different to that of school (EC, 2020).

For practical tips on the use of digital tools for teaching and learning and related good practices

Primary schools <http://bit.ly/maltatoolkit>

Middle & Secondary schools: <https://sway.office.com/RHYPUMpW7010e3Hf>

## 5. Parental Involvement

Parents play a vital role in student's learning and this is augmented when learning online. The family background, parents' involvement, support, encouragement and cooperation are important factors which increase students' participation and involvement. Good parental support helps children to be positive, healthy and successful life-long learners.

Schools need to consider how to strengthen the trust and mutual understanding between parents and educators. Understanding what challenges parents and students faced during school closure, will better involve parents in their children's learning, students are encouraged and motivated to participate.

- Schools can strengthen their relationship between educators and families by giving clear guidelines to parents/guardians which online platforms will be used and when educators can be contacted.
- Physical and virtual sessions can be organised to upskill parents' digital competences and make them more familiar with the chosen platforms.



## 6. Supporting Staff

The European Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators: DigCompEdu stresses the need for educators to develop and enhance their own digital pedagogical competence in order to make effective use of digital technologies. Educators need training and support to be able to provide learning opportunities which nurture 21st century competences whilst offering educators to

better understand how to use technology to support students' learning and meet the needs of diverse learners.

Sharing of good practices can be priceless professional development activities that help educators reflect on their practices, think about teaching strategies in different ways and learn new ways how digital technologies can be used for enhancing and innovating education.

- Identifying existing staff training needs,
- College and school based professional development sessions (online or face to face) can be organised for educators on the use of digital tools which promote communication, creativity, collaboration and critical thinking,
- Identify existing online courses that address needs e.g. portals offering professional development training (e.g. Microsoft.education.com),
- Internal & external support. For example, the digital literacy primary and secondary support teams work in state schools with teachers, other staff members, learners and parents to support the acquisition of digital literacy competences and assist in the transformation of teaching and learning through the use of technology in the classroom,

- Provision of central support training of which professional development training and online training. Develop and deliver courses for educator training based on upskilling needs,
- Availability of digital resources (e.g. school collaborative repository and/or access to online repositories like [twinkl.com](https://www.twinkl.com), <https://teleskola.mt/>)

