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PowEr hEad
Empowering Higher Education in Adopting Digital Learning

POWERHEAD Final Conference

Brussels, 17 October 2022

PowEr hEad

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Welcome address and presentation of the project, by the coordinator

Magalie Soenen, Department of Education and Training
Belgium/Flemish Community

Project information

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Title

Empowering Higher Education in Adopting Digital Learning (POWERHEAD)

Call

Erasmus+ KA3: Initiatives to support the implementation of European Higher Education Area (EHEA) reforms, 2019

Period

December 2020 – November 2022

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Partners and experts

Project partners

- Flemish Community, Department of Education and Training
- Flemish Education Council
- Latvian Ministry of Education and Science

Experts

- Linda Daniela, University of Latvia, Latvia
- Isabelle De Ridder, Antwerp University Association, Belgium
- Piet Henderikx, EADTU
- Demetrios Sampson, University of Piraeus, Greece
- Pieter Soete, Ghent University, Belgium
- Cis Van Den Bogaert, University of Antwerp, Belgium
- Janina van Hees, EuroTeQ European University, the Netherlands

Objectives

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At application stage…

The project's **objective** was to reduce the gap between

- the aim to install innovative, stimulating digital learning environments that enhance the learning and the digital skills of students and
- the ad-hoc way in which this topic is approached in different countries and higher education institutions.

Objectives

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How to realise this objective?

- **Sharing knowledge and good practices** between countries that are in different stages of policy development at the national level.
- **Consulting higher education institutions on their needs** regarding the implementation of digital learning, since they are the primary partners for implementing digital learning environments.
- **Drawing guidelines** from these exchanges. These guidelines are twofold. The project strives to develop (1) guidelines for national authorities and (2) recommendations for higher education institutions to support and stimulate further implementation of qualitative digital learning in higher education. These guidelines will be made available so every interested country or institution can make use of them in the way each one of them sees fit.

Objectives

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During the project lifetime…

The COVID-19 pandemic had a strong impact on the project and its objectives, as the pandemic has given a strong boost to the uptake of digital education. The focus came to lay on the question what higher education will look like in the long term.

The main objective became to help shaping this **long-term policy on digitalisation** post-COVID-19.

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Process

Setting the stage: background paper (Dec. 2020 – April 2021)

Needs analysis (April 2021 – Dec. 2021)

- National working groups -> national need analysis
- Common needs analysis

Broadening the expertise: Peer Learning Activity (Jan. – Feb. 2022)

Guidelines on digital learning in higher education (Feb. – Oct. 2022)

- National working groups -> national guidelines
- Common guidelines

Dissemination of results (Aug. – Nov. 2022)

Background paper

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Flemish working group

First version background paper on digital learning in higher education

Transnational steering group

(Flemish and Latvian partners + international experts)

Final background paper

Needs analysis

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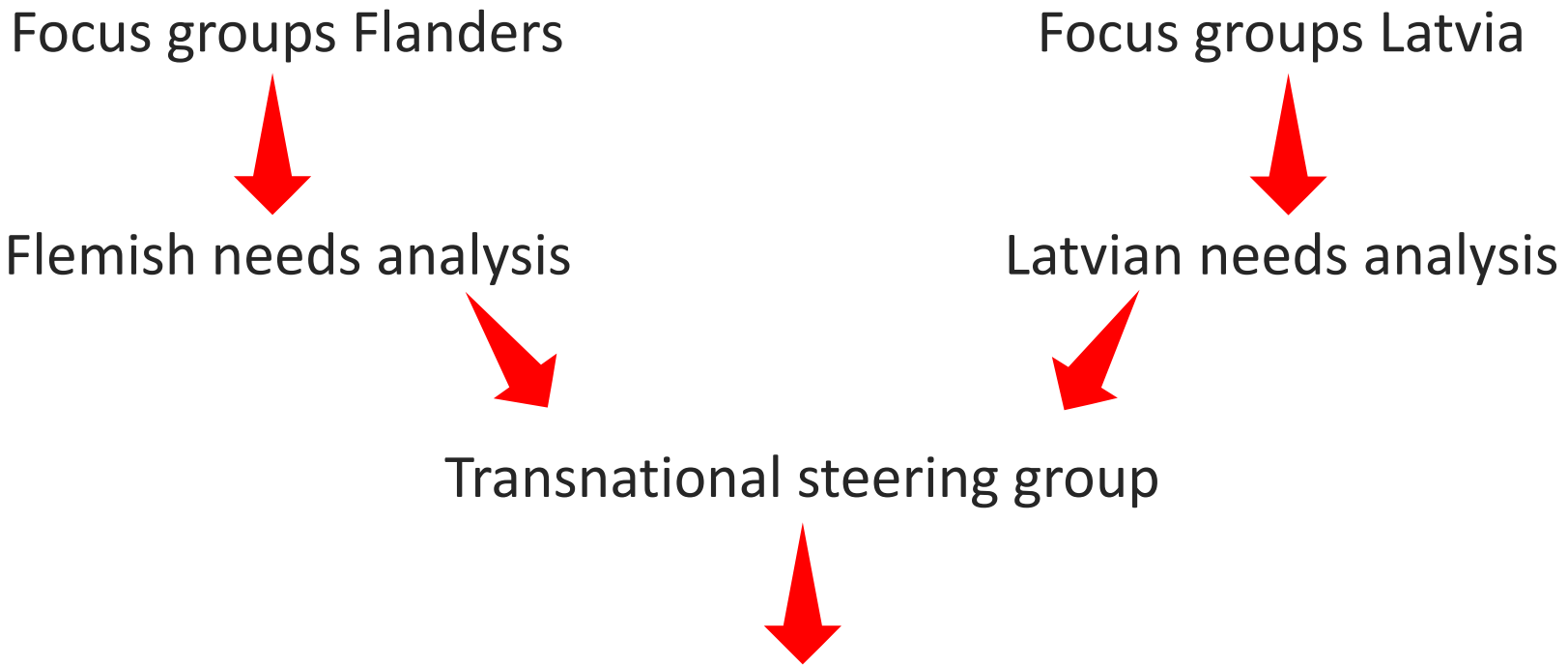

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Peer Learning Activity

Experiences from European countries

- Greece
- Germany
- Hungary
- Ireland
- The Netherlands
- Ukraine

Thematical exchanges

- Students
- Course and curriculum design
- Vision and policy
- Funding and infrastructure
- Other themes

Presentation of the Digital Education Action Plan, European Commission

Presentation of the student perspective, European Students' Union

Common guidelines

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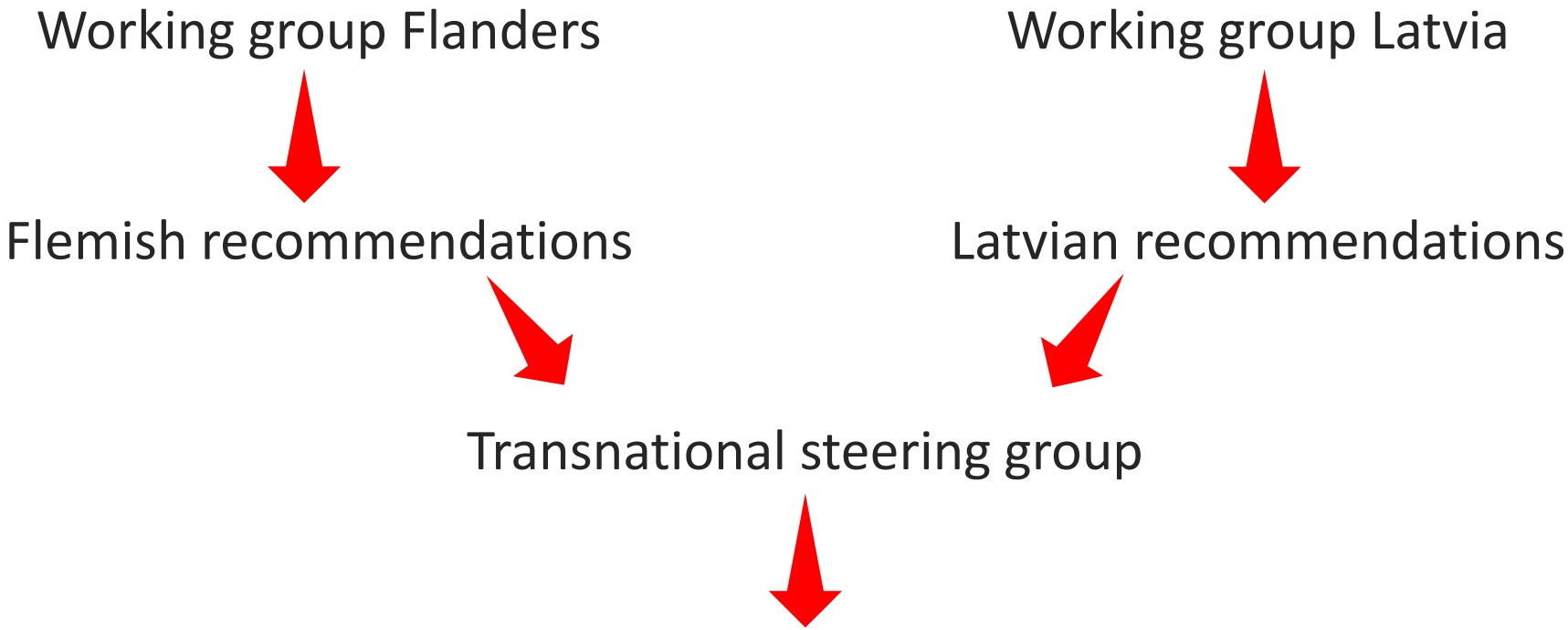

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Presentation of the common guidelines and recommendations

Simon Grymonprez, Flemish Education Council

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Introduction

- Guidelines in relation to the background paper, needs analysis, peer learning activity (PLA)
- The target groups:
  - national/central governments
  - higher education stakeholders (higher education institutions, students, academic and support staff), and other parties concerned
- This presentation: not an exhaustive list of guidelines

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Structure of the guidelines

- Per theme*:
  1) Vision, Policy and Quality Assurance
  2) Skills and Digital Readiness
  3) Students
  4) Course & Curriculum Design
  5) Funding and Infrastructure
  6) Cooperation and Stakeholders
- Per actor
  - Higher Education Institutions
  - National/central governments (+ local government)
  - European level

*Laurillard

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1. Vision, Policy and Quality Assurance

1. *Vision, Policy and Quality Assurance*

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1. Develop a **long-term vision** and strategy on digitalisation in higher education. **Streamline the vision** at various levels within the higher education institutions, at regional, national and European level.

For HEIs:

- A shared understanding of the digitalisation policy ('why')
- The importance of leadership
- Work together with other HEIs to develop self-assessment tools for digital readiness.

For national/central gov's:

- Make digitalisation in higher education a policy priority.
- Need of a(n) (aligned) policy framework

1. *Vision, Policy and Quality Assurance*

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2. Implement policy plans according to the principles of **proper change management**. This implies, among other things, **focused communication and clear messages**, empowering and supporting **change agents** within the institution, paying attention to **resistance** and the psychological acceptance of change.

Needs analysis

- From 'management of change' to 'change management'
- In need of change agents, balance between bottom-up and top-down change

1. *Vision, Policy and Quality Assurance*

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2. Implement policy plans according to the principles of **proper change management**. This implies, among other things, **focused communication and clear messages**, empowering and supporting **change agents** within the institution, paying attention to **resistance** and the psychological acceptance of change.

For HEIs:

- Support change agents within the institution. Aim for change agents among students and staff
- Build further on existing successful projects or good practices.
- Pay attention to possible resistance and to the psychological acceptance of change

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3. **Embed digitalisation in regular quality assurance systems** and use existing frameworks at institutional, national and European levels.

Needs analysis

- QA-frameworks available, but not (always) systematically used
- After the pandemic, quality assurance of digital education and processes should be included in the regular quality assurance system(s)
- No need for new frameworks, adjustments if necessary

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3. **Embed digitalisation in regular quality assurance systems** and use existing frameworks at institutional, national and European levels.

For HEIs:

- Ensure that these frameworks are effectively used. Adjust them if necessary to the new reality of a more digital and blended higher education
- Ensure that digital/blended learning is a focal point in internal QA-monitoring.

For national/central gov's:

- National QA-agencies could be involved in the process of adjusting frameworks

At European level:

- Do the European frameworks need adjustments in the new reality of more digital and blended higher education?

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2. Skills and digital readiness*

* Digital readiness in education is technology-related knowledge, skills, and attitudes and competences for using digital technologies to meet educational aims and expectations in higher education (Hong et. al, 2018)

2. Skills and digital readiness

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4. **Identify basic and advanced digital** and self-regulating skills and competences that students need to obtain during their studies. Build further on the attainment goals of compulsory education and on the skills that incoming students already have acquired.

Needs analysis

- Students' readiness for online learning is too often forgotten
- Teachers must understand the importance of students' readiness for online learning
- High digital literacy is closely related to the need for self-regulation skills

2. Skills and digital readiness

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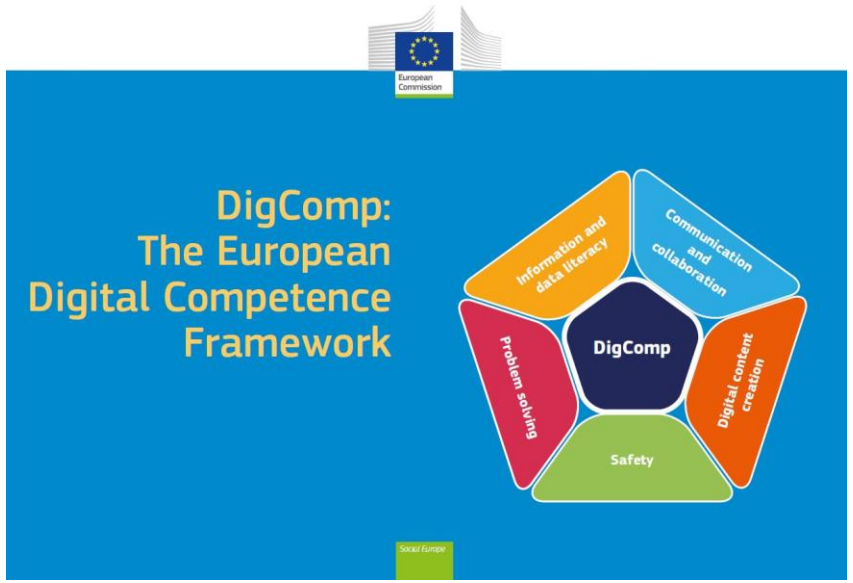
4. **Identify basic and advanced digital** and self-regulating skills and competences that students need to obtain during their studies. Build further on the attainment goals of compulsory education and on the skills that incoming students already have acquired.

5. **Measure and monitor 'digital readiness' of new students.** Improve and sharpen the digital literacy of students if necessary. Structurally embed the development of digital skills and self-regulation skills within the curriculum.

For HEIs:

- Identify which basic digital skills are required for all students regardless of their field of study
- Need for specific digital skills at a more advanced level
- Consider the possibility of skills certification either in the form of micro-credentials or otherwise



2. Skills and digital readiness

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6. Ensure **support for the continuous professional development of educators**. Develop a targeted, planned system for the specialized professionalisation of educators. Offer technical and didactic support and facilitate mutual exchange.

Needs analysis

- A need for ongoing mutual learning between educators. Cross-university subject-related communities are very successful. This kind of cooperation is, unfortunately, often project-driven
- The switch to more digital education requires time and energy of educators

PLA

- Professional development as major enabler of digitally enhanced learning and teaching
- Lack of support of professional development as a major barrier to enhanced learning and teaching

2. Skills and digital readiness

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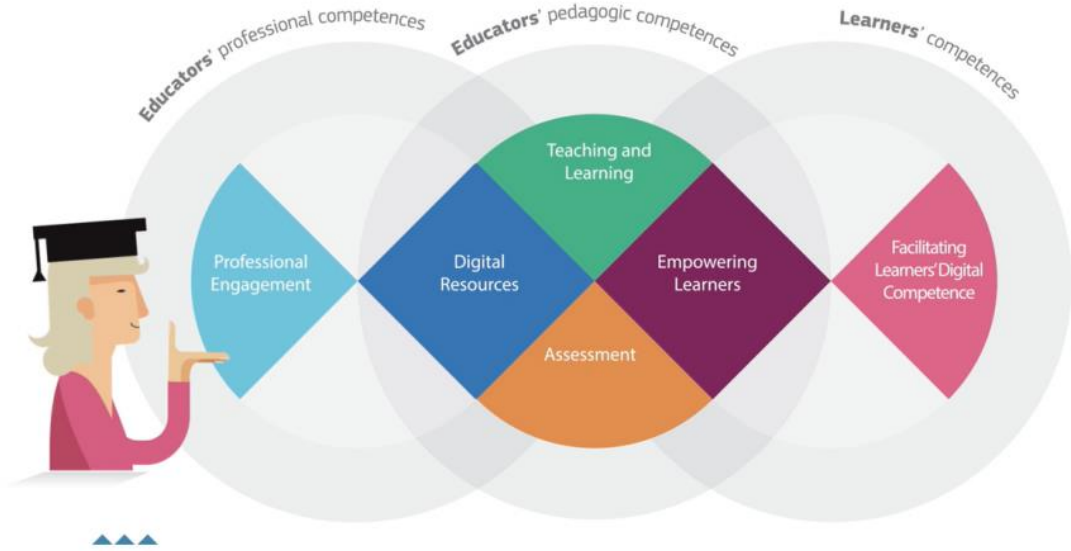
6. Ensure **support for the continuous professional development of educators**. Develop a targeted, planned system for the specialized professionalisation of educators. Offer technical and didactic support and facilitate mutual exchange.

For HEIs:

- Educators and teaching staff need more (basic and advanced) digital skills to teach high quality blended and digital courses
- Continue to support the continuous professional development of educators



For national/central gov's:

- Bring existing professionalisation and exchange initiatives together and expand them. Facilitate collaboration between HEIs

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6. Ensure **support for the continuous professional development of educators**. Develop a targeted, planned system for the specialized professionalisation of educators. Offer technical and didactic support and facilitate mutual exchange.

At European level:

- Use digital technology to enable international professionalisation, via virtual, blended or physical staff mobility, etc. This is possible within existing alliances or via other partnerships between higher education institutions
- Further support professionalisation of educators via various frameworks such as the Digital Competences Framework for Educators, by making available and exchanging digital credentials, by exchanging open educational resources, etc

2. Skills and digital readiness

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7. Ensure that there are **sufficient educators and support staff with a profile that allows** for further enhancement of the implementation of **digitalisation** in higher education. Valorise the effort and time educators invest in digitalisation.

Needs analysis

- The importance of human expertise and the difficulty in finding sufficient staff who has a specific profile & specific skills (e.g. design learning trajectories, interaction possibilities). Finding the right people and profiles will be the real challenge
- The well-being of staff needs to be monitored, because the digitalisation wave triggered by the pandemic has increased the workload on staff

2. Skills and digital readiness

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7. Ensure that there are **sufficient educators and support staff with a profile that allows** for further enhancement of the implementation of **digitalisation** in higher education. Valorise the effort and time educators invest in digitalisation.

For HEIs:

- Monitor the mental well-being of staff
- Guarantee that educators get support, time and recognition for the efforts they put into digitalisation. Good employment conditions, such as an ergonomic work environment, are indispensable in this respect

For national/central gov's:

- Guarantee that sufficient resources are available to employ staff with a suitable profile to support digitalisation in higher education

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3. Students

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8. Stimulate **communication**, **commitment** and **participation of students** in policy making on digital or blended education.

For HEIs:

- Ensure there is clear communication about the 'rules' of the digital or blended processes
- Make sure that students are not merely kept up to date with policy decisions on digitalisation but involve them actively as change agents throughout the process of policy-making, from conceptualisation to setting up and evaluating digital learning activities. This is possible at an institutional level, within study programmes, as well as in the context of an individual course

3. Students

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9. Pay attention to **students' mental well-being**, in particular in periods when there is intensive digital education and the social cohesion and social contact are under pressure.

For HEIs:

- • Support students where necessary regarding their mental health. This can be done in different ways

For national/central gov's:

- Take steps to combine forces across higher education institutions in supporting students' mental well-being. It is important that institutions cooperate, and that the government provides support

3. Students

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9. Pay attention to **students' mental well-being**, in particular in periods when there is intensive digital education and the social cohesion and social contact are under pressure.

A policy practice

MoodSpace is an initiative by the Support Centre Inclusive Higher Education (SIHO) in Flanders, in close collaboration with students, academic experts and Flemish higher education institutions, on behalf of the Flemish Minister of Education. It brings together the various initiatives for and by students and the opportunities offered by the institutions regarding students' mental health. MoodSpace wants to become a catalyst for making mental health a more open topic for discussion and for exchanging experiences. See moodspace.be.

3. Students

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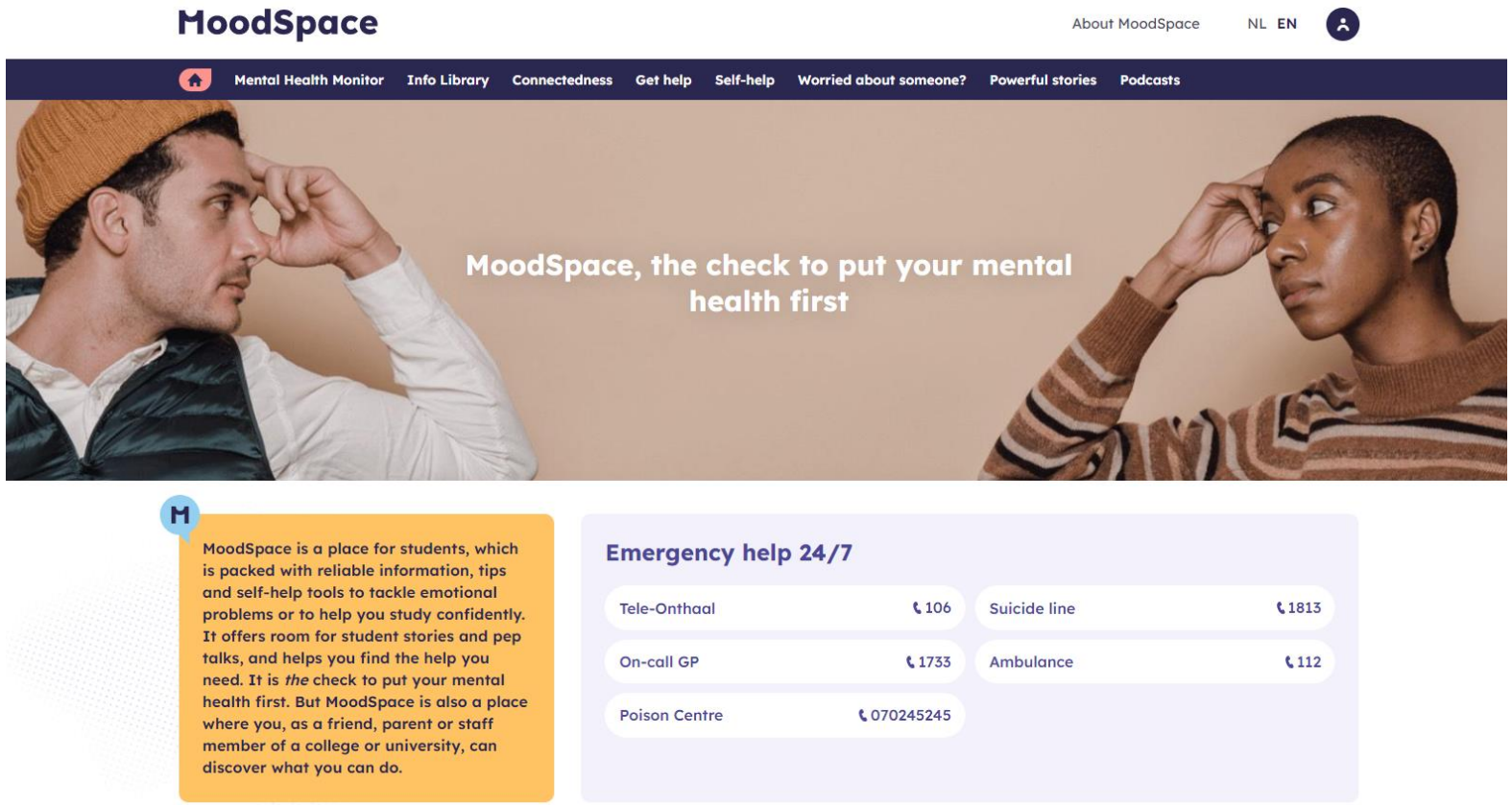

3. Students

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10. Implement **an accessible, flexible and adaptive digital and/or blended offer** for the **diverse student influx** in higher education: working students with a part-time job in higher education, students with a disability, students with a low socio-economic status, etc. **Consider and use inclusion as a driver for digitalisation.**

Needs analysis

- Blended or digital education may offer diverse groups of students more opportunities to study
- Can we use digitalisation to rethink the definition of a student?

3. Students

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10. Implement **an accessible, flexible and adaptive digital and/or blended offer** for the **diverse student influx** in higher education: working students with a part-time job in higher education, students with a disability, students with a low socio-economic status, etc. **Consider and use inclusion as a driver for digitalisation.**

Needs analysis

- Need to rethink international cooperation and mobility (which can also take place in a blended or virtual form), especially given that universities are increasingly involved in European Alliances. Virtual mobility should not replace physical mobility. On the contrary, virtual/blended mobility is about creating new opportunities, and about reinforcing internationalisation

3. Students

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10. Implement **an accessible, flexible and adaptive digital and/or blended offer** for **the diverse student influx** in higher education: working students with a part-time job in higher education, students with a disability, students with a low socio-economic status, etc. **Consider and use inclusion as a driver for digitalisation.**

For HEIs:

- Use the principle of Universal Design for Learning (UDL)
- Enhance lifelong learning through digitalisation, either via micro-credentials or other forms. Work together with other (European) HEIs to develop digital courses and consider curriculum networking. Virtual mobility can be a part of the internationalization strategy of HEIs and countries

For national/central gov's:

- Offer preconditions to achieve an inclusive digital transition for a diverse group of students
- Monitor and restrict the costs students personally have to pay for a study in higher education

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4. Course and curriculum design

4. Course and curriculum design

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11. Develop a **well-considered course and curriculum design**, **based on pedagogical-didactical principles**, in order to reach a more long-term redesign of education and curricula.

Needs analysis

- From emergency remote learning designing well considered blended education
- The traditional 'analogue' system of higher education cannot simply be transferred to a digital channel
- Tension between the educational community asking for professional autonomy to make decisions based on pedagogical-didactical principles and the need to streamline policy at the institutional level

4. Course and curriculum design

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11. Develop a **well-considered course and curriculum design**, **based on pedagogical-didactical principles**, in order to reach a more long-term redesign of education and curricula.

For HEIs:

- Aim for a balanced and coherent blended curriculum and course design, in which technology is used in a well-considered way as a means to achieve the students' learning objectives and learning outcomes of the study programme(s).
- Find a balance between the autonomy of educators and didactic teams in making decisions on designing teaching and learning environments on the one hand and streamlining such decisions across didactic teams, study programmes etc. on the other hand.

4. Course and curriculum design

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12. Ensure **high-quality assessments and feedback** in digital environments.

Needs analysis

- E-assessment as major challenge
- The need for a framework for e-assessment

PLA

- Digital assessment has emerged as a hot topic (e.g. in Germany)
- Assessment in a digital environment creates risks for academic integrity (e.g. proctoring tools). Building trust is important

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12. Ensure **high-quality assessments and feedback** in digital environments.

For HEIs:

- On the one hand, respect the professional autonomy of educators and didactic teams. On the other hand, make agreements on this at the level of study programmes
- Consider experimentation with automatic assessment and the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in assessments.

For national/central governments:

- Support institutions in further developing a (quality) framework regarding (e-)assessment. National QA-agencies should be involved in this process

4. Course and curriculum design

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12. Ensure **high-quality assessments and feedback** in digital environments.

At European level:

- Support national governments and higher education institutions in implementing (e-)assessment in digital environments via further developing a (quality) framework and regulations at European level (for instance with respect to proctoring, learning analytics, etc.)

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5. Funding and infrastructure

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13. Guarantee **continuous and adequate core funding** of higher education in addition to sufficient resources that are allocated specifically for digitalisation and digital innovation in higher education.

For HEIs:

- Pay attention to environmental sustainability when investing in digital infrastructure

For national/central governments:

- Guarantee adequate core funding. Prevent higher education institutions from having to use project-based resources for innovation in higher education to compensate for the lack of staff and basic infrastructure.
- Resources specifically destined for digitalisation in HEIs are welcome. Project-based funding has the potential to boost digitalisation because it can stimulate innovation. However, governments should make sure that once these (innovative) projects have ended, HEIs are able to structurally embed successful innovations

5. Funding and infrastructure

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14. Guarantee **the availability and accessibility of (digital) infrastructure** (basic equipment such as a computer, an Internet connection, a quiet place for studying).

Needs analysis

- The digital transition should take place in an inclusive way. Attention is needed for accessibility and inclusion of digital resources
- Not just digital technology, but the infrastructure as a whole needs to be available. There is a need for accessible infrastructure on campus (e.g., physical: spatial design of buildings, and online) as well as in the home environment

5. Funding and infrastructure

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14. Guarantee **the availability and accessibility of (digital) infrastructure** (basic equipment such as a computer, an Internet connection, a quiet place for studying).

For HEIs:

- Ensure that digital infrastructure is available for all actors in the higher education institution. The availability of suitable infrastructure has a major impact on the quality of education

For national/central governments:

- Guarantee the availability of sufficient funding (including investment allowances), to enable institutions to make infrastructure available to all actors in higher education
- Facilitate sharing and exchanging infrastructure between higher education institutions and with external partners, such as partners from the professional field and the labour market

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6. Cooperation and stakeholders

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15. Both higher education institutions and national governments have to take up their responsibility to **strengthen and facilitate cooperation**. Explore the possibility of establishing **a platform in which HEIs cooperate** in digitalisation of higher education with support from the government.

Needs analysis

- There is a need to encourage and support systematically embedded exchange and cooperation between educators, study programmes, and institutions
- Encouraging and strengthening the motivation to cooperate should also be a part of the support that could be offered from the government.
- Sharing of educational resources (materials, software, etc.): lots of barriers with regards to copyright, licenses, payments, GDPR, datasecurity, etc

6. Cooperation and stakeholders

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15. Both higher education institutions and national governments have to take up their responsibility to **strengthen and facilitate cooperation**. Explore the possibility of establishing **a platform in which HEIs cooperate** in digitalisation of higher education with support from the government.

For HEIs:

- A change of mindset in the sharing of (digital) resources between institutions is important
- Explore the possibility of establishing a platform in which HEIs cooperate in digitalisation of higher education with support from the government, in a similar way as forums such as SURF in the Netherlands, the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education in Ireland, and the Hochschulforum Digitalisierung in Germany
- Promote the wider use of open educational resources in HEIs and lifelong learning

6. Cooperation and stakeholders

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15. Both higher education institutions and national governments have to take up their responsibility to **strengthen and facilitate cooperation**. Explore the possibility of establishing **a platform in which HEIs cooperate** in digitalisation of higher education with support from the government.

For national/central governments:

- Create the preconditions (including structural funding) to support systematic cooperation and exchange between higher education institutions
- Resource sharing needs to be promoted as a productive solution to the digitalisation of higher education

At European level:

- Create the legal and financial preconditions to support cooperation and exchange between higher education institutions and national governments. This is possible within existing alliances and via other partnerships between higher education institutions

6. Cooperation and stakeholders

Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

15. Both higher education institutions and national governments have to take up their responsibility to **strengthen and facilitate cooperation**. Explore the possibility of establishing **a platform in which HEIs cooperate** in digitalisation of higher education with support from the government.

A policy practice

SURF is a cooperative association of Dutch educational and research institutions. SURF offers a diverse range of IT research for education and research and encourages knowledge sharing through continuous innovation. Priorities of SURF are good and efficient collaboration with (international) relevant parties, ensuring the continued autonomy of the education sector at a time when big tech is gaining influence, the protection of education infrastructure, (research) data, and personal data against (cyber) threats and a quicker and more efficient response to digital developments.

6. Cooperation and stakeholders

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16. Focus on **cooperation** with various **relevant partners**, such as players from the **labour market**.

Needs analysis

- Creating a network with employers and industry representatives, in order to develop study programmes, is necessary
- Micro-credentials can play an important role, although the role of higher education in continuous development is still being discussed and under development. When talking about digital higher education, micro-credentials offer opportunities to reach out to the demands of the changing labour market

6. Cooperation and stakeholders

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16. Focus on **cooperation** with various **relevant partners**, such as players from the **labour market**.

For HEIs:

- Create a network with employers and representatives from the labour market, to develop blended or digital study programmes within the context of lifelong learning
- Micro-credentials offer opportunities to meet labour market demand and create a flexible offer for lifelong learning in higher education

For national/central governments:

- Create the preconditions (including structural funding) to support cooperation between higher education institutions and external partners
- Facilitate a digital or blended offer of lifelong learning in higher education, by creating the conditions for providers (e.g. funding) and learners (e.g. enhancing the learning culture, providing various incentives

6. Cooperation and stakeholders

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17. Develop **a balanced relationship with the EdTech sector**.

Cooperation is important, but higher education institutions cannot be fully dependent on their software and hardware providers. A certain level of independence is needed.

For HEIs:

- Combine forces between higher education institutions, in a way that the dependence on external software or hardware developers is restricted and the negotiating position of institutions towards the EdTech sector is strengthened (see also recommendation 15)

For national/central governments:

- Support and facilitate the cooperation between higher education institutions in relation to the EdTech sector. Align government policy with HEIs to enlarge the leverage towards the EdTech sector.

6. Cooperation and stakeholders

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17. Develop **a balanced relationship with the EdTech sector**.

Cooperation is important, but higher education institutions cannot be fully dependent on their software and hardware providers. A certain level of independence is needed.

On European level:

- We recommend the European Commission to support higher education institutions in developing a well-balanced and equal relationship between HEIs and the EdTech sector. The Commission can contribute to the leverage institutions need to develop this relationship.

6. Cooperation and stakeholders

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18. As a higher education sector, pay attention to various **legal aspects** linked to digitalisation: privacy, data security, copyright, intellectual property rights, etc.

For HEIs:

- Identify the needs of institutions with respect to various legal aspects. Consult with actors from other higher education institutions and with the government to work on the details of an accompanying framework. A collaboration platform can be helpful.

For national/central governments:

- Support higher education institutions by providing a framework and by clarifying regulations concerning these various legal aspects.

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Questions?

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Panel discussion

Moderated by: Thérèse Zhang – European University Association

Panel members:

- Esther van der Stappen – Avans Hogeschool, the Netherlands
- Oliver Janoschka - Hochschulforum Digitalisierung, Germany
- Emily MacPherson – European Students' Union
- Ivana Juraga – European Commission
- Piet Henderikx – expert and member transnational steering group POWERHEAD project

Breakout sessions

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Breakout session #1

Option 1: Vision, policy, cooperation, stakeholders	room 1B05
Option 2: Skills and curriculum design	room 1C06
Option 3: Students	room 1B14
Option 4: Funding and infrastructure	room 1C25

Breakout session #2

Option 1: Higher education institutions (group 1)	room 1B05
Option 1: Higher education institutions (group 2)	room 1C06
Option 2: national authorities	room 1C11
Option 3: European level	room 1B14

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Lunch break

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Closing plenary session with conclusions and final remarks