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Discussion paper

Sub-Theme 2: Teachers and digital transformation

DISCUSSION PAPER

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The New Democratic Pact for Europe places learning and practising democracy at the heart of its agenda – calling for stronger civic education, digital and media literacy and the capacity to navigate AI-generated content, hence putting the teaching profession at the centre of this response.

The White Paper on the Futures of Teachers and the Teaching Profession will guide future policy and standard-setting of the cooperation programme in Education of the Council of Europe. It sets out the main challenges teachers face today and may face tomorrow. It describes a shared European vision built on human rights, democracy and the rule of law. It explores policy options and paths for action. And it proposes practical steps to strengthen teaching as a profession – one that builds knowledge, drives change, and supports democratic resilience. The White Paper also looks at how digital technologies – including but not only AI – affect teachers and teaching.

This discussion paper invites Ministers to discuss how that vision can be turned into concrete commitments – on safeguards, professional learning, governance, and accountability – and to put teachers at the heart of digital change.

1. Why digital transformation matters

Teachers are at the heart of this paper. The ILO/UNESCO Recommendation on the Status of Teachers (1966) defines teaching as a profession that requires expert knowledge, specialised skills, and professional judgement. Teachers are not passive recipients of change. Their choices will decide whether digital transformation helps or harms education and democracy. The UN High-Level Panel on the Teaching Profession (2024) calls for teachers to be “drivers of change”, with technology “integrated supportively with teacher input”.

Digital transformation – accelerated by generative AI – is changing how knowledge is created, shared, and assessed. Done well, it may offer real benefits: less routine administration, more personalised learning, better connections to professional networks and resources, and wider access to quality education. Learners now navigate AI-generated content, algorithms, and automated systems that shape how they learn. To realise these benefits, digital transformation must be built on human rights. It must respect the rights of teachers and learners, ensure equity, protect privacy and dignity, and remain democratically accountable. It must also address the ethical dimensions of digital technologies, including questions of copyright, academic integrity, and the responsible use of AI-generated content.

Teachers are essential to making this work – but they face real challenges that must be addressed.

2. Key Systemic challenges

These challenges are not new. Council of Europe recent studies and policy recommendations have identified several major tensions for the teaching profession that remain relevant today.

First, AI risks overpowering rather than empowering educators. Technology is introduced as support yet may progressively narrow pedagogical discretion through standardised pathways or automated feedback loops. Second, AI-mediated interactions may damage the human core of

education and undermine independent thinking. Third, there is a tension between data-driven governance and democratic accountability. Fourth, expanded digital connectivity risks blurring the boundaries between professional and personal time, placing the right to disconnect under pressure. Fifth, the growing use of digital tools for monitoring and data collection raises serious concerns about surveillance of both teachers and learners.

These tensions do not stem from technology alone. They stem from governance choices, regulatory clarity, the degree to which educators (including teachers and school leaders) are meaningfully involved in design, implementation and evaluation, and how the technology is used. Therefore, ministerial action should lead towards a common agreement on priority measures and clear choices at national and European level that should contribute to:

2.1. Protecting professional autonomy and the teacher–student relationship: Digital tools can steer teaching through data analytics, automated suggestions, and standardised learning paths. This creates risk. Teachers must stay in charge – using tools to support their decisions, not replace them. Where a system makes a recommendation, a teacher – not the platform – must remain accountable. Teaching also depends on human relationships, trust, and knowing the individual learner. Digital transformation must support – not replace – that human connection. It must not turn teaching into supervision or outsource learning to machines. Where human connection matters most, it must be protected.

2.2. Addressing ethical dimensions related to academic integrity and protecting the rights of teachers and learners: Digital transformation raises profound ethical questions that extend into every classroom. Issues of copyright, academic integrity, and plagiarism are reshaping assessment and learning as AI-generated content becomes increasingly available to students and teachers alike. Clear guidance, norms, and frameworks are needed to uphold integrity without stifling legitimate uses of new tools.

The increasing use of digital technologies for monitoring must not slide into surveillance. Teachers and learners alike have the right to privacy and dignity. Data collected through educational platforms must be used to support learning – not to profile, discipline, or control. Teachers also have the right to disconnect: expanding digital connectivity must not translate into an expectation of permanent availability. Systems must establish clear boundaries that protect teachers’ personal time and mental well-being.

2.3. Building teachers’ real readiness for responsible AI use: Teachers are being asked to adopt new digital tools faster than they can prepare for them. What they need is sustained, practical professional learning – not a one-day workshop. This learning must build AI literacy and the confidence and competence to use digital tools and AI responsibly. It must include the ethical and critical dimensions of AI use, including questions of bias, transparency, and the appropriate limits of automation. It must be backed by reliable resources and clear guidance.

2.4. Ensuring the stability and capacity for action of the teaching profession: Digital transformation is happening while many school systems are under strain. Too many teachers leave the profession, and recruiting replacements is hard. Improving recruitment and retention – while keeping professional standards high – is essential. Without a stable workforce, systems cannot innovate. Reform that drives away the teachers it depends on defeats its own purpose.

Digital transformation can also add to workload. New platforms, reporting requirements, and constant adaptation to new tools all take time. Transformation must reduce administrative burden, stress, and “always-on” pressure. Teachers need time for what matters most: planning, teaching, assessment, and building relationships.

- 2.5. **Establishing trustworthy governance, procurement, and teacher voice:** Schools often adopt technology without clear evidence that it works or knowing who is responsible when things go wrong. This is especially true where private companies supply the tools. Systems need public-interest frameworks that ensure quality, protect data, and hold providers to account. These must be system-level responsibilities – not left to individual teachers. Teachers also need a real say in technology decisions that affect their classrooms. Their involvement must be built into how decisions are made – from procurement through to review – not treated as an afterthought.
- 2.6. **Ensuring system-wide coherence and engaging the broader society:** Digital transformation often moves forward in isolation. New tools are introduced without aligning them to curriculum, assessment, professional standards, or teacher training. This creates confusion and inconsistency for teachers. Reforms must be joined up. Changes to training, standards, curriculum, guidance, and oversight need to move together and reinforce each other.

3. Issues for Ministerial Discussion

Each challenge calls for a political decision. The following issues set out what Ministers can commit to – on standards, entitlements, governance, and accountability – in order to build a solid foundation for digital transformation while preserving the integrity of the teaching profession.

- 3.1. **Upholding professional authority, ethics, and rights:** AI systems and digital tools must remain advisory. Teachers must retain final decision and responsibility in matters of teaching, assessment, and student support. Where automated systems generate recommendations, a teacher – not the platform – must remain accountable.

It should be affirmed that human connection, trust and professional judgement are core to teaching and cannot be replaced by technology. Tools that substitute rather than support these qualities should not be adopted in publicly funded education. Clear ethical frameworks should address copyright, academic integrity, and the use of AI-generated content. Protections against digital surveillance of teachers and learners must be embedded in policy and procurement criteria.

- 3.2. **Investing in professional learning and teacher well-being:** Ministers may consider committing to a baseline entitlement: every teacher has the right to sustained, practical professional learning on digital transformation and AI – including its ethical and human rights dimensions. This entitlement should be supported by quality-assured resources, clear national guidance and protected time within the working week. It should be structured and enforceable – not merely aspirational. Professional learning programmes should be grounded in evidence and informed by research on effective educator development in digital contexts.

Digital transformation programmes should demonstrate, before large-scale rollout, how they will reduce teacher workload and improve working conditions. Monitoring mechanisms should be put in place to verify this in practice. Sustainable teacher retention depends on managing workload effectively and ensuring the right to disconnect is protected in practice, not only on paper.

- 3.3. **Building governance frameworks that are accountable, coherent, and inclusive:**

Before AI systems and educational technologies are adopted at scale, minimum safeguards should be in place. These should address equity and inclusion, privacy and dignity, transparency, and democratic accountability. A public-interest model for procurement and

governance should be applied. Adoption should require evidence of educational value. Selection criteria should be transparent. Providers should be subject to clear obligations concerning data protection, explainability and accountability. Teachers should have meaningful participation at all stages – from procurement and implementation to evaluation and review.

Digital transformation should not proceed in isolation from broader education reform. Changes to teacher training, professional standards, curriculum, assessment, and regulatory oversight must be sequenced and co-ordinated. Engagement with families and communities should be part of how systems design and communicate digital change. Fragmented initiatives increase workload and create inconsistency. Coherent, inclusive reform is essential for effective and sustainable transformation.

4. Key Guiding questions for Ministers

Ministers are invited to consider:

1. How can member States ensure that digital transformation strengthens the teaching profession, professional autonomy, and the rights of educators?
2. What commitments are required to ensure that digital transformation contributes to teacher well-being, retention, and long-term professional sustainability?
3. How can education systems balance innovation with accountability, ensure coherent reform, and engage the broader society including young people in digital transformation?

This conference is an opportunity to move from recognition to action. The commitments Ministers make here – on safeguards, entitlements, governance, and accountability – will determine whether digital transformation strengthens teaching and, through it, the quality of education for every learner.