



**Report from the 3rd Global Education Industry Summit:
Schools at the crossroads of innovation in cities and regions,
held in Luxembourg, 25-26 September 2017**

Jointly organised by the European Commission, the OECD and the
Luxembourg Ministry of Education, Children and Youth

Summary

The 3rd Global Education Industry Summit started off by highlighting the challenges that societies and education systems face today, as they attempt to prepare learners for rapidly and unpredictably evolving labour markets and societies. Major societal and technological changes mean that it is increasingly difficult to anticipate what the world of work and labour markets will look like in several years' time, as well as what competences today's learners will need to cope with the upcoming constellations. At the same time, education is seen as key to addressing the challenges modern societies face. Thus, summit participants were unanimous in concluding that the time for debating the need for innovation had passed and that innovation has become a must for education today.

Despite the challenges outlined, the GEIS also provided reason for optimism, as it highlighted numerous examples of locally-emerging progressive pedagogies, school-business collaborations, advanced learning technologies and innovative practices. These examples underlined the enormous potential for schools to be the centres of innovation where teachers, parents, communities and businesses come together to educate and empower learners to contribute to society both economically and as active citizens.

Yet, there are still many obstacles to innovation in schools. Too often the answer to real-world challenges from the world of education is defensive and self-protective. Assessment and evaluation systems in education punish mistakes. Parents can also be adverse to innovation, seeing it as a risk for their children. Teachers themselves often perceive the schools where they work as innovation-hostile environments. States and policy makers have a key role to play here. It is their responsibility to investigate and reflect on factors that hinder innovation and to create enabling conditions for schools to innovate, while reassuring all stakeholders. School autonomy is part of the answer, but on its own it is not enough to kick-start innovation.

Technology is also part of the answer. Many schools already benefit from the active use of technology in their classrooms. Indeed, the education industry enables us to use learning tools unheard of before. But, as many studies show, technology alone does not improve the learning process or its outcomes. The kinds of aspects that are easiest to digitise are those that are easiest to memorise, and this is not the direction where we need to go. In order to have a positive impact on learning, modern technology needs to be used smartly by competent teachers in close collaboration with their students. Used optimally, technology can close existing gaps, for example by allowing customised and individualised solutions for each learner (like the MathemaTIC project in Luxembourg),

something not always possible in a traditional classroom. Technology could also be harnessed to create a giant open source community of educators and teachers, outside schools.

The many examples of innovative schools highlighted at the summit also brought attention to the fact that it can be easier to develop innovation in a small organisation. The bigger challenge lies in creating something that works for the entire system. Luckily, there are also examples of approaches to boost innovation in the overall system. One that really makes a difference in Europe is the European Institute of Innovation and Technology, which builds innovation hubs where education institutions, together with innovators and entrepreneurs, develop world-class solutions which create growth and jobs directly in their regions. And importantly, it does not only support the usual suspects – it also funds schemes which enable those regions in Europe that have a lower innovation capacity to fully develop their innovation potential.

As in previous years, the GEIS provided opportunities for participants to exchange experiences and good practices, to hear views from various stakeholders (e.g. industry, policy makers, teachers, social partners), and to network with peers and decision-makers from across the EU and beyond.

Session 1: Innovative schools

The session was opened by a presentation about Lycée Ermesinde, an innovative school in Luxembourg, and a video about the John Monash Science School JMSS in Australia¹.

While innovation in schools should happen at the micro-level and cannot be forced upon ‘from above’, ministers, policy makers and school leaders more generally can play an important role in sparking innovation in schools. They can do that, for example, by providing a compelling vision of the future, by setting ambitious goals that force innovation, by providing opportunities for autonomy, choice and competition, by empowering agents of change, by tolerating risk-taking and by rewarding success. Innovation only happens within a strong context of knowledge creation and diffusion, and, hence, also requires that schools embrace innovation and cooperate with external partners in school networks to foster knowledge dynamics and collective learning.

The discussions in this session focused on the conditions that need to be created to enable schools to be innovative, on how best to support teachers and on advice from industry leaders to education policy-makers and practitioners.

Participants emphasised that:

- The need for innovation has become mainstream and the willingness from schools to engage in innovation is already there.
- On the other hand, parents and teachers can sometimes feel that there is too much focus on innovation, at the expense of traditional/basic knowledge. It is important to reassure them that innovation is not in conflict with basic competences.
- It is important to create opportunities for schools who innovate to talk to each other and learn from each other, and only to learn from the industry. If they work with schools around them, they spread the innovation around the system. Yet it is often the case that there are two schools in the same small area which do not talk to each other.

¹ All conference materials are available at <http://globaleducation.onetec.eu/doc.html>.

- Finland has had good experiences with creating a teachers' network to develop teacher training and innovation in teaching. This network confirmed that having discussions and exchanges on practices, both successful and unsuccessful ones, is always beneficial.
- It is important to examine the negative factors that can impact innovation, e.g. an assessment system that punishes mistakes. On the other hand, accreditation and evaluation systems could be used to promote innovation, for example if they routinely included assessments of how much the school contributes to innovation.
- Technology in education should not be collected as a trophy. Technology on its own does not mean innovation or better learning outcomes.
- Innovation should not only focus on the pedagogical methods, but also on the subject matter taught. Industry and researchers can help teachers with that.
- Creating enabling conditions for innovation does not only mean removing barriers to innovation. Other steps are needed to boost it. For example, some countries have established innovation funds, which schools can tap into. The freedom of schools to use their own budget as they prefer was mentioned by several participants.
- The role of teachers is central, but principals also have a key role to play.
- Innovation as a process is partly top-down, but primarily bottom-up.

Session 2: Schools driving progress and well-being in local communities

The session was opened by an interview with the headmaster of the Väätsa Basic School in Estonia and a video about the Community Learning Campus (CLC) in Olds, Canada.

In many countries schools are increasingly seen as important spaces and hubs in the local community and regional economy. In connecting to the local and regional environment, schools also engage many stakeholders to collaborate in improving the well-being of everyone involved. Schools not only engage parents and families in learning, but also draw on the various resources provided by local enterprises, community organisations, social services, sports and cultural institutions such as museums, theatres or libraries. Yet, as local communities differ in wealth and cultural capital, schools do not find themselves on a level playing field. Geographical segregation leads to unequal opportunities for schools in benefitting from their engagement with the local community.

The discussions in this session focused on the role of schools in addressing issues affecting local communities, on the challenges that schools face when opening up to the outside world and on the framework conditions which make this easier or more difficult.

Participants emphasised that:

- School is much more than just a school. A school is the heart of every community.
- When engaging with the community, schools should approach it from the angle of seeing what the real community needs are and then trying to address them. Engagement for the sake of engagement may not be successful.
- The difficulty of designing approaches that work across a range of very different schools.
- Israel has had positive experiences with including the community-focused activities of high school students in their matriculation certificates. It is a symbolic way to show the importance of engaging with the community and reinforces the idea that the school is not apart from the community.
- Schools can play many roles within the community: parents with lower levels of education can become learners together with their children, schools can play a role in

building the skills of workers in the local industries, they can teach newly-arrived immigrants the language.

- It is precisely from such activities, in which a school takes initiative to address a need in the community, that innovation can blossom.
- Schools often take a central role precisely in those communities which feel like they have been "left behind" (e.g. small rural communities).

Session 3: Local economy supporting schools

The session was opened by a video about the Erasmus+ KAREL project that involves three high schools from Poland, Greece and Turkey as well as a non-formal education institution from Romania.

Dynamic and collaborative learning spaces and partnerships are indispensable in building innovative learning ecosystems. They can help students develop skills that cannot be learnt easily in classrooms. Connecting schools to local businesses creates better opportunities for learning those skills that matter in tomorrow's economies and societies. Entrepreneurship skills cannot be developed in an abstract context, but require hands-on experience with real-world problems. Problem-solving skills are now rightly considered to be critical 21st century skills. The old distinction between theoretical, abstract knowledge and more practical, applied and concrete knowledge is quickly losing relevance. Abstract knowledge remains incredibly important, but is best acquired through the interaction between concrete problem-solving and theoretical reflection. Enterprises cannot replace school-based learning, but can profoundly enrich and broaden the learning experience, while assuring its relevance and supporting learners' motivation.

The discussions in this session focused on the different expectations and motivations of schools and businesses when entering into partnerships, and on transcending the old opposition between practical skills training and theoretical knowledge.

Participants emphasised that:

- Business-school cooperation can be very beneficial, for example in helping to reduce skills mismatch.
- Schools can also learn from industries on how to become learning organisations. This is relevant because schools have difficulties changing.
- Businesses, on the other hand, should think of their social responsibilities when cooperating with schools. But they may not always be motivated to take the initiative. We need to think how we can motivate businesses to be interested in schools.
- When considering innovation, it is important to look beyond the label. Innovation for innovation's sake is not the goal.
- Learning should remain at the centre of the school-business cooperation. The curriculum should not be compromised for the sake of cooperating with business.
- It is important that businesses support schools within the own school context.
- Looking at the practicalities of school-business cooperation is important.
- When working with business it is important to check whether the motivations of the different actors are aligned. They will not be the same, but they need to be compatible, otherwise problems can arise. There needs to be a balance of the different interests.
- The challenge for both sides is to articulate their goals clearly and enter the partnership with open eyes. Schools and businesses often speak different languages, their dialogue needs to be continuous.

- Education is about long-term projects, whereas business is about short-term turnaround and profits. There are inherent tensions in this partnership which need to be recognised.
- The roles and responsibilities of different actors in a partnership need to be very clear. Binding commitments and contracts are important.
- Teachers can sometimes be opposed to cooperation with business. We need to give them opportunities to learn more about business.
- Schools should be careful not to get dependent on one industry or one company, to avoid lock-in effects.
- There are risks in seeing business in an overly positive light. Maintaining a social dialogue is key.
- The danger of not getting it right is not a reason for not trying.

Session 4: Policies for better ecosystems of innovation

The session was opened by an interview with a representative of the National Education Ministry about two institutional networks that contribute to developing innovation and experimentation in France and a video about Innova schools in Peru.

Local, regional and central governments play a very powerful role in creating the conditions for schools to engage in innovation ecosystems. Innovating schools and engaging with the local economy requires navigating the regulatory frameworks, accountability systems and policy conditions. Public policy can also create opportunities for developing local and regional ecosystems of innovation. Policies intervene in various components, dimensions and steps of the process of innovation. They can hinder or facilitate the openness of schools to their local environments, the opportunities of school leaders to engage in partnerships and networking, the decision-making and governance arrangements for schools etc. They also determine various dimensions of the education system that condition openness, such as the competences required from teachers, the autonomy of schools, the time/space regulation of learning, the objectives set for learning, the curriculum, the teaching methods, pedagogies for learning etc.

The discussions in this session focused on the experiences with opening up schools to innovation, on the challenge of scaling up innovative experiments into system-wide solutions, and on the role of other stakeholders in triggering the education policies needed.

Participants emphasised that:

- If we want to change parts of your systems, we need to allow and motivate risk taking. That is a scary proposition, but those who have succeeded are those who have taken enormous risks. We can motivate people to do this, we can give them time to do it, opportunities to exchange experiences with others, allow them to make mistakes and correct them. We also take an enormous risk every single year when we allow another generation to go into a system that has not been changed.
- But it is also the role government to mitigate that risk as much as possible. Children are not lab rats, they only get one chance at it. It is important to make sure that the innovations we are scaling up are proven to work well. We therefore we need a way to evidence innovation, so that when we are scaling them up we can be confident that they are working and not doing any harm.
- Evidence-based policy in innovation is therefore very important. While freedom for schools and teachers is important, we also need a way to evaluate how innovations

are working. Various stakeholders need to be reassured that the experimentation will have good outcomes.

- Deregulation should be approached cautiously. It can be easy to deregulate, but more difficult to get competences back that allow you to push reforms, if the deregulation has not worked as intended.
- Governments are in the best position to invest in risky projects.
- Any investment in education is a long-term investment and should therefore be the top priority for governments. Education is not only about filling labour market needs, it is about encouraging good citizens. The purpose of education also includes values, citizenship etc. Social and political innovation must also be put on the table.
- The relationship between innovation and centralisation/decentralisation is important. Despite calls for greater autonomy for schools, central policy guidance is still essential.
- Learners should be given a voice in the process and put in the very centre of it.
- Parents, as part of the learning ecosystem, are key in the process and should not be forgotten, like learners, they should have a central role.

Closing Session - Conclusions

The debates in the closing session confirmed what was also tangible in the other sessions: that education policy makers and industry representatives are not yet on the same page. While the latter forcefully argued for a sense of urgency and more drastic changes, the former made a case for the stepwise engineering of a very complicated system. Some participants concerned with the economics of education argued that innovation will become a systemic imperative, driven by the exploding cost of current models. But education policy makers argued that education needs to be inclusive, taking into account not only the innovation pioneers but many other stakeholders as well.

It was also pointed out that innovation is not only about the latest state-of-the-art disruptive technologies, but also about the breadth of societal changes, including *social* innovation. It is also about the knowledge and skills that make societies future-proof, including capacities and capabilities for using, integrating, accepting novel solutions to challenges. This includes making education more inclusive and open to individualised approaches and to systemic diversification that meets very different economic and social needs and thus to provide opportunities a range of different talents.

The role of teachers was stressed as critically important: Innovation-proof education systems will have to rely on a very strong, mature and well trained, highly qualified teaching profession; for this, a giant leap in the process of the professionalisation of teachers was considered necessary.

In the end, all participants agreed that governments have a critical role in steering innovation in education. Increasing school autonomy, decentralisation, complexity and technological disruption make the task of governing education systems more difficult, but also move the governance challenge to a higher level, that of leadership in a period of change.

Democratic government is and will be the system through which change and innovation in education will happen. But this will only be possible by empowering schools and supporting those that promote innovation.

