

*The iTEC project:
mainstreaming innovative use of ICT in schools in Europe*

INITIAL RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE ITEC HIGH LEVEL GROUP

July 2012

iTEC is a flagship, four-year project coordinated by European Schoolnet focused on the innovative use of ICT in schools. It involves 27 partners, including 14 of the 30 Ministries of Education that support European Schoolnet, plus major ICT vendors. With funding of €9.5 million from the European Commission's FP7 Programme, this flagship project is investigating how established and emerging technologies can be used effectively in classrooms in the next 5-10 years.

The iTEC project particularly addresses the growing concern of member states and the European Commission that innovative use of ICT in schools and scenarios for the future classroom must now move beyond small-scale pilots and really be taken to scale. Currently, therefore, iTEC is piloting learning and teaching scenarios for the future classroom in >1,000 classrooms in 15 countries, making it by some margin the largest pan-European validation of ICT in schools yet undertaken.

In order to meet the strategic objective of mainstreaming innovative use of ICT, the project has also put in place a High Level Group of decision-shapers to ensure that iTEC results feed into policy-making and the educational reform process at regional, national and European levels. This group includes former Ministers of Education, current heads of national ICT agencies and other leading experts in ICT implementation in schools.

This document represents the first in a series of recommendations from the High Level Group aimed at stimulating the policy debate on how schools in Europe can mainstream innovative use of ICT in the future classroom.

Recommendation from the iTEC High Level Group to European Teachers

The iTEC High Level Group (HLG) would first like to thank and congratulate the teachers involved in iTEC, both for their vision as co-developers of future classroom scenarios and also for their hard work and commitment in validating innovative learning activities derived from these scenarios over the five project cycles.

Since teachers are the lynchpin of change in any educational development process, it is essential that innovative practitioners should be at the centre of this project and directly shaping new teaching and learning processes involving ICT. Teachers in the large-scale pilots are also key, first by empirically testing iTEC scenarios in real world

conditions in order to help assess their potential to be taken to scale, and then by acting as iTEC ambassadors and encouraging other teachers across Europe to exploit the first results of the project.

The High Level Group is conscious that large-scale adoption of iTEC scenarios by teachers will increasingly be required as part of a bottom-up mainstreaming process in order to complement the more top-down mainstreaming strategies of ministries, industry partners and the European Commission.

As the iTEC project approaches the half way stage in September 2012, therefore, the High Level Group encourages teachers throughout Europe to link to the iTEC teachers' community¹ and profit by experimenting with and adopting some of the initial iTEC learning activities in their own classrooms. As part of this process, outreach should be supported and facilitated by mediators such as teacher unions, national agencies etc.

Recommendation from the iTEC High Level Group to European Ministries of Education

The iTEC project is currently the largest and potentially most strategic initiative in Europe concerned with reflecting on and shaping the school of 2025. 14 Ministries of Education (AT, BE/FL, CH, DK, EE, HU, IL, IT, FR, LT, NO, PT, SK, TR) joined as partners in the project when it commenced in September 2010 and, since then, additional Ministries at national level (CZ, FI) along with regional educational authorities have joined the project as Associate Partners.

With positive results currently emerging from the evaluation of the first phase of the project, the High Level Group now calls on other educational policy makers and authorities across Europe to join with iTEC partners in order to rethink how ICT can impact on teaching and learning in the future classroom and explore how iTEC results can support their own ICT strategies and priorities.

The major challenge for policy makers is how to facilitate widespread adoption of innovative practices involving ICT and then mainstream these practices into the everyday experience of teachers and learners in European classrooms. This is happening at a time when, as a result of technological and sociological trends, our schools are likely to be confronted with new organisational challenges and may particularly require new approaches to classroom and whole school management of ICT. Studies of the underlying change processes in schools will also increasingly be required that examine the extent to which informal learning opportunities outside the school involving ICT and social media are impacting on how learning is delivered within the classroom.

In the next few years, Ministries in the iTEC project and the High Level Group will be working together to examine these and other challenges confronting educational

¹ <http://itec.eun.org/web/teacher-community>

policy makers as they seek to engage pupils and improve teaching and learning by mainstreaming innovative use of ICT in our schools.

The High Level Group, therefore, encourages policy makers to connect with the iTEC project, capitalize on the expertise and support provided by iTEC partners and work with European Schoolnet to help embed innovative ICT practice in schools on a systemic level.

Recommendation from the iTEC High Level Group to ICT vendors

With its objective of mainstreaming innovative use of ICT, the iTEC project has been designed from outset as a multi-stakeholder partnership involving policy makers in the public sector working alongside researchers from the Technology Enhanced Learning community and leading ICT vendors. Promethean and SMART Technologies, two of the leading Interactive Whiteboard suppliers to education, are iTEC partners. Since the project commenced, companies such as Acer, Microsoft and RM Education have also joined iTEC as Associate Partners.

In addition, over a dozen Industry partners² are now supporting the European Schoolnet Future Classroom Lab³ which was launched in January 2012. This new initiative is closely linked to iTEC but independently financed in order ensure that iTEC results can be sustained after the end of the project funding.

The Future Classroom Lab in Brussels is an important new facility for education in Europe. It provides a reconfigurable teaching and learning space, fully equipped with the latest technology, within which European Schoolnet will showcase scenarios for teaching and learning in the future classroom that are being developed in the iTEC project. Around these, the Future Classroom Lab is also providing training, continuing professional development workshops and other events for teachers, ICT advisers and policy makers at both national and regional levels.

The High Level Group encourages the ICT industry to engage with the iTEC project and the Future Classroom Lab and to work closely with Ministries of Education in order to rethink how teaching and learning can be implemented in the future classroom. Educational ICT suppliers are particularly invited to showcase their own designs for new learning spaces in iTEC and the Future Classroom Lab and demonstrate how their technology can support innovative pedagogical approaches to 21st century teaching and learning.

Recommendation from the iTEC High Level Group to the European Commission

² Acer, Apple, eInstruction, Fourier, Mimio, Panasonic, Planet PC, Promethean, Microsoft, SMART Technologies, RM Education, Texas Instruments.

³ <http://fcl.eun.org>

The iTEC project and the work of the High Level Group directly feeds into the European Commission's Europe 2020 strategy⁴ and ET 2020 framework⁵ and supports the Digital Agenda for Europe⁶, particularly its specific focus on mainstreaming eLearning as a way modernizing education in Europe and enhancing Europe's competitiveness. iTEC also has the potential to feed into new projects that will be supported by the Commission's new Creative Classrooms' initiative⁷.

The High Level Group would also like to draw the attention of the Commission to the fact that the iTEC project is now part of a 'family' of related projects that has been designed as part of the long-term strategy of European Schoolnet as defined by its 30 supporting Ministries of Education. These projects all have a central focus on mainstreaming and sustaining innovative practice in schools involving ICT and are being coordinated under the umbrella of the independently financed European Schoolnet Future Classroom Lab initiative.

Associated projects include: the CPDLab project (Lifelong Learning Programme) which is developing continuing professional development courses for teachers, including a course based on iTEC future classroom designs; and the new LivingSchoolsLab project (FP7 Programme), commencing in October 2012, which will put in place a permanent network of schools in Europe for ICT validations and support the development of whole school approaches to ICT deployment and the mainstreaming of innovative practice.

iTEC, together with these projects and the European Schoolnet Future Classroom Lab, therefore, provides a unique, multi-stakeholder platform within which the Commission can come together with Ministries of Education and ICT suppliers, not only to discuss how existing and emerging technologies can have a transformative effect on teaching and learning processes, but also to analyse the enablers and roadblocks to educational reform and mainstreaming of innovative practice.

The High Level Group encourages the Commission, member states and Industry to continue working together on defining the requirements for successfully mainstreaming innovative teaching and learning practices involving ICT. It may also be important to recognise that the up-scaling of iTEC results at national level could be seriously constrained by the current economic situation in member states as well as inappropriate regulatory systems and financing mechanisms. It is possible that systemic mainstreaming of eLearning in Europe may require quite fundamental changes to how we support and fund education reform that involves ICT. The High Level Group will comment in more detail on this issue in future recommendations.

⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index_en.htm

⁵ Strategic Framework for European cooperation for education and training ET 2020
http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/policy-framework_en.htm

⁶ Action 68 of the Digital Agenda for Europe calls upon Member States to "mainstream eLearning in national policies for the modernisation of education and training, involving curricula, assessment of learning outcomes and the professional development of teachers and trainers." Digital Agenda for Europe, Pillar: Enhancing e-skills,
http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/newsroom/cf/fiche-dae.cfm?action_id=226

⁷ Call for Proposal EACEA/20/2012 http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/llp/funding/2012/call_et_2012_en.php

For more information on iTEC and the High Level Group please see at:

- <http://itec.eun.org>
- <http://itec.eun.org/web/quest/high-level-group>

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