Thoughtful digitalisation

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The non-stop development of information and communication technology (ICT) means that an increasing number of products and services are being delivered in digital form. Education is attempting to keep pace with these developments, but is still casting around to find the appropriate content, form and role. In many cases there is no clear vision of the relationship between education and ICT, resulting in wide variation in the way schools shape digitalisation and the extent to which they contribute to digital developments and innovations.

The Education Council of the Netherlands believes that the increasingly digital society demands a response from the education system which creates scope for digital educational goals, the use of digital educational resources and the use of digital applications in the organisation of education. However, the Council does not consider digitalisation to be an end in itself. Digitalisation carried to excess comes with risks, and therefore the Council advocates thoughtful educational choices. To ensure that the education system is able to derive maximum benefit from the opportunities offered by digitalisation, the Council makes three recommendations.

Unburden education by guaranteeing the conditions needed for digitalisation
The Council believes that schools should not need to worry about the conditions for effective digitalisation. For this to happen, the first requirement is that the content of ICT applications be separated from some of the technical aspects. In the Council's view, these technical aspects should be designed collectively, to save every publisher or developer having to repeat the same process for their own products and so that schools are not saddled with a plethora of mismatched technical systems. The Council advocates a partnership between government, education system, publishers, technology companies and parents to oversee the contracting and design of these technical aspects. The Council also recommends that central government provide guarantees on cybersecurity and privacy for schools, by giving them access to a security officer. Privacy should be viewed more broadly than simply protecting personal data: the threat posed to education by Big Data could be more serious than currently thought. Schools need to be more aware of the risks around Internet security and the dangers of cyber-attacks, but also of their own responsibilities. Basic infrastructure is also a condition for effective digitalisation: schools need sufficiently modern, good-quality hardware, fast, stable Internet access and adequate financial resources.

Increase ownership of digitalisation in education
The Council believes that teachers and other stakeholders on the demand side of the market should have greater ownership of digitalisation. Involving them in designing innovative applications based on their own needs and requirements is crucial. Formulating and bundling questions with regards to educational content for providers will contribute to this. Those working in education need to address this themselves, but will initially require more support than is currently available. Central government could reinforce this support by broadening the tasks, powers and funding of organisations which facilitate and promote digitalisation of education on behalf of the government. In addition, alternative scenarios for collaboration in the educational infrastructure should be explored so that the strengths of educational publishers are optimally utilised and innovation is fostered. Developing, sharing and enhancing of open educational resources should also be given stronger support than is currently the case. Central government should make funding available for all educational sectors in order to bring open education out of the sphere of amateurism and altruism. Schools could help here by incorporating open learning activities and professionalisation initiatives in their task description. Supporting and facilitating the use of open learning resources needs to be stepped up. Finally, thoughtful digitalisation requires an increase in digital expertise within education. Until this expertise is assured, at least at team level, it is important that every school

has an ICT coordinator or e-coach to provide specific support in the integration of technology into didactics and teaching.

Explore digital applications to gain experience and develop a vision
Thoughtful digitalisation demands clarity of vision on the relationship between ICT and education. That vision should be developed in partnership by teachers and school authorities, by exploring digital applications. Teachers can develop an enthusiasm for digitalisation by trying out digital applications in small-scale, low-threshold pilots. Reflection ('what works?') on the outcomes of these pilots could then form a basis for the joint, interactive development of a vision on the relationship between education and ICT. Sufficient time and the right implementation conditions will then need to be in place for scaling up the pilots. During this upscaling, allowance will need to be made for the potential downsides of digitalisation. Everyone must be able to develop safely, be allowed to be vulnerable or rebellious and be able to grow, without having this thrown back at them later in the form of images, texts or other traces on the internet. The Council advises continuing to attach undiminished importance to the school as a proving ground, so that direct contact between teacher and student and between students can contribute to qualification, socialisation and subjectification. Finally, the Council stresses the importance of sufficient 'downtime', so that the benefits of non-digital learning resources are exploited and the adverse cognitive, physical and mental consequences of excessive ICT use are mitigated.