Learning in the information society: action plan for a European education initiative 1996-1998

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OBJECTIVE : The purpose of this communication is to define the main thrust of a Community action plan on 'learning in the Information Society', to be implemented between 1996 and 1998, with three objectives: - to accelerate schools' entry into the Information Society; - to encourage widespread application of multimedia; - to reinforce the European dimension of education and training with the tools of the Information Society. SUBSTANCE: In order to achieve these three objectives, the plan will pursue four additional lines of action; it will: - encourage the interconnection of school networks at a Community level. this 'network of networks' will be open to all schools' networks, existing or in the pipeline, and to geographically isolated or socially disadvantaged schools. Multimedia discovery classes will also be set up; - stimulate the development and dissemination of content of European interest which can be used for educational purposes by: .setting up a high-level working group to explore the opportunities for cooperation in the production of general-interest educational content (learning of languages, science, culture and European civilization, arts, music, etc.) and to define the methods for disseminating such content, from both a technical and legal point of view; .supporting the drawing-up by the Commission of an inventory of European multimedia products which can be used for teaching; .supporting the creation of electronic networks of multimedia resource centres (mediatheques, teacher training centres, 'digital libraries', etc.); - promote training for teachers and trainers in the use of new technologies: Training will cover the use of tools (equipment, services and software), on-line searching for information and structuring information obtained from various networks. It will also cover the design and distribution of multimedia teaching materials. Measures are planned to: .step up training activities under Community programmes (exchanges of teachers between European schools, familiarization of the least experienced teachers with using multimedia, distance learning courses), .set up a network of training centres for teachers and trainers to be built upon local, national and Community initiatives; - inform those concerned about the educational opportunities afforded by new technologies: .creation of a platform for the exchange of information accessible on the Internet offering a guide to the various Internet sites presenting projects in progress in the Community and the Member States and will make it easier to obtain information on schools' networks, available software, etc., .campaigns to raise the awareness of teachers who are still unaware of the opportunities offered by multimedia: brochures, radio broadcasts and conferences. As regards the resources for this initiative, the Commission will take advantage of the complementarity between existing Community instruments and national instruments in the same field, in particular Community programmes such as 'Telematics Applications', 'Information Technologies', Media II, Socrates and Leonardo and the funds allocated to the trans-European telecommunications networks. The initiative will also encourage utilization of the opportunities offered by the Structural Funds in the education and training sector and the funds intended for the promotion of the Information Society. At the same time, activities will be launched to involve and promote public/private partnerships. Such partnerships will in particular study the best means of financing investment in equipment in educational establishments. A workshop will be organized at the beginning of 1997 to encourage such partnerships by signing Memoranda of Understanding. The workshop will also examine the possibility of setting up a European body, in the shape of a foundation, to act as a point of reference and dialogue between actors at the European level. In order to raise the awareness of schools themselves, two types of event will be organized: - 'Action Days or Weekends for School Networking', to review the state of play with regard to the electronic networking of schools, - a European award scheme for the best educational multimedia products (with the attribution of a European label) created in partnership between young people and teachers.