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**Questionnaire on the positions of education councils regarding the Corona Crisis**

Prepared by

Aiste Kairiene, National Education Council Secretary, Lithuania

Saule Maciukaite-Zviniene, National Education Council Secretary, Lithuania

In cooperation with Ministry of Education, Science and Sport

1. **Policy issues**

**Describe the main policy issues regarding the COVID 19 education policy**

* **Which were the main measures adopted during the lockdown (particularly those measures related to teaching and learning), Specify if relevant the education level concerned e.g. primary, vocational, higher education, special needs, others, …**
* On March 13 the Government announced that starting from March 16 Lithuania is going into lockdown and all kind of education institutions (starting from kindergarten[[1]](#footnote-2) and ending with higher education institutions) are closed.
* First two weeks of the lockdown were announced as holidays in order to prepare for distance learning.
* Children under age of 6 cannot be left alone without supervision of a person older than 14, therefore parents could apply to the child’s family doctor / paediatrician for a certificate of temporary incapacity for work (a “medical certificate of absence”). The national Social Insurance Fund is paying 65.94 percent of the recipient’s compensated wages from the first day of working inability. This possibility lasted till the end of lockdown. Kindergartens were open only for doctors’ and medical sector workers’ children.
* Vocational and higher education institutions also started to work online using Mooc and Moodle. Few universities operating in the art study area, prolonged their semester and exam sessions.

ECEC institutions: started working from distance by sending tasks for parents for home-schooling. Education support specialists gave consultations online.

General education institution:

* To help schools, a digital learning base has been developed with learning environments, methodological materials, teaching tools and other information relevant to schools (www.emokykla.lt). The digital learning base is still constantly updated. Schools are encouraged to submit their proposals.
* At the same time, since the introduction of quarantine, the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport has organized constantly online consultations for school principals, their deputies responsible for organizing education at school, teachers, school IT specialists, employees of municipal education departments, etc. Not only was they taught how to work, but they also shared experiences, looking for the best solutions.
* Private publishers have made available free of charge private digital education content and tools that they have developed.
* Education support specialists consulted pupils online.
* In the spring of 2020, the achievements of tenth grade students (lower secondary education achievement test – PUPP) did not take place. Students were offered to independently perform PUPP tasks in Lithuanian language and literature and mathematics online. It has been decided that this year the lower secondary education achievement certificate will be issued by recording annual assessments. The national pupils’ achievement testing also did not take place. It usually tests the knowledge of 2nd, 4th and 8th grade students.
* After discussions with education experts, representatives of parents and students, it was decided not to cancel the State Matura examination, only to delay the usual date of it. State Matura examination began in late June (usually State Matura examination starts on May).

Non-formal education: part of the non-formal children education is financed by the state through the tool called „non-formal children education basket“. The non-formal education providers, using this „basket“, had to collect parents‘ agreements that they agree to the distance way of learning.

VET:

* Practical parts of VET that required physical contact, such as internships and qualification exams, were not carried out.
* If the VET took the form of an apprenticeship and the training was organized by the employer, the real contact training could continue if the employer could ensure safe learning conditions.
* Contactless food delivery was organized for students who received free meals, such as the disabled.
* VET students who were awarded the scholarship continued to receive it despite the situation when VET could not be implemented.

Higher Education

* Practical parts of HE that required physical contact, such as medical studies or music, exams were not carried out.
* HE students who were awarded the scholarship continued to receive it despite the situation when EH could not be implemented.
* HE students continued to full fee.
* Universities opened more databases to students, signed contracts with coursera.org group for additional training, also online psychological consultations were organised.
* What were the main pitfalls to overcome? e.g. continuing education activities, impact on learning outcomes, inequalities, infrastructure, impact on wellbeing of pupils (psychological, social, … )

General education: During the first weeks of quarantine, it was clarified how many pupils have the necessary tools for online learning. It turned out that a part of pupils do not have computers and internet connection at home. As a result, 35,000 tablets and laptops were purchased and distributed to pupils from socially sensitive families. Private companies provided Internet for free. The schools and libraries themselves provided computers to the students, lending their own equipment. There was a civic campaign “Give or lend an unnecessary working computer or tablet”.

Describe the ‘normalisation’ process

* Which were the main measures adopted during the normalisation process (particularly those measures related to teaching and learning)? Specify if relevant the education level concerned e.g. primary, vocational, higher education, special needs, others, …

From May 25th, primary school students (grades 1-4) were able to return to schools. Pupils in lower secondary and upper secondary education could return to schools from May 30. From May 25th, counselling for graduates could also take place in schools. The special schools and special classes in general education schools have opened their doors since this day. The municipality and school principals took the final decision on whether schools will work remotely or on a regular basis. It was recommended that children with chronic illnesses or living with people at risk continue to be educated at home. In addition, even if the child was healthy, it was not mandatory to allow him / her to go to school – his parents could continue to look after him / her at home. Educators at risk continued to work remotely with children.

Schools decided when to complete the educational process and start the summer holidays. So for pupils in grade 1-4 the summer holidays started in the first days of June, for older pupils – around the middle of June.

* What were the main pitfalls to overcome ? e.g. continuing education activities, impact on learning outcomes, inequalities, infrastructure …

When schools were allowed to return to the regular way of working, it was expected that more schools will start implementing blended way of teaching. It was expected that it would be a repetition for the next school year that started on September 1. About 75 percent of schools have chosen to continue working remotely. The rest worked in a blended way.

What were the main innovations that opened new opportunities for renewal in education policies? Are there any lessons learned for new approaches in education (e.g. added value of blended learning, blended counseling of pupils, …)?

General education schools and VET:

* learned to create safe and effective environment to protect health of children and teachers;
* Try to stay at classrooms and use online learning only in case of COVID
* No common template exists. There are recommendations prepared by ministries in charge, but school Principals decode.

Higher education:

* Every institution decided individually. The majority first year students go to universities and other students are educated remotely.
* Some universities made separation based on study programmes

What was the role played by distance learning? Blended learning? What are the lessons learned by these innovations?

Distance learning took the leading role during the ‘strict’ period of the lockdown.

1. **Positions and recommendations of education councils**
* Did your Council release recommendations on education in pandemic times? Or are recommendations planned? In progress?
* What is the main focus of those recommendations?
* What are the most relevant recommendations produced by your Education Council?

Education Council of Lithuania worked intensively during the lockdown:

* The Council reacted to the discussion weather Matura exams should be held or canceled. The Council supported the opinion that Matura exams should not be cancelled and should be held by ensuring safety requirements. The alternative was to cancel Matura exams and to recognize annual subjects’ evaluation.
* The Council also issued recommendations to minimize the impact of COVID-19. The Council stressed that current legal acts do not define target groups and how they should be provided with learning tools during lockdown. The Council also paid attention to the HE financing mechanism and how to guarantee finances if the number of freshman would decrease. The Council provided concrete amendments to the legal acts.
* The Council also provided recommendations on targets in education within EU recovery plan;
1. Kindergarten – an ECEC institution, that implements pre-school education for children under 6 years of age. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)