



Triangle

Secured digital education system for vocational skills for youngsters in closed institutions

Policy Recommendations

Triangle Project Partners

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Foreword

Defence for Children, IPS_Innovative Prison Systems, VOCVO, and Opgroeien developed this Policy Recommendations as a partner in the project Triangle: Secured Digital Education System for Vocational Skills for Youngsters in Closed Institutions. The Triangle Project (KA220-VET-1C349708) is co-financed by the European Commission under the "ERASMUS + KA220-VET - Cooperation partnerships in vocational education and training".

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Introduction

What is Triangle?

Triangle is an innovative tailor-made digital learning environment for young people and (young) adults in closed institutions. Triangle works with a whitelist and/or blacklist system for each institution, and a complementary learning environment that supports educational programs. It contains over 50 educational tools, creative programs, and digital and twenty-first-century skills exercises. The intended impact is that participants in a closed (youth) institution have access to sufficient digital and twenty-first-century skills via the Triangle platform, promoting successful reintegration into society and reducing the chance of recidivism.

Where can I find the platforms?

- For Portugal: pt.trianglenow.eu
- For Belgium: opgroeien.trianglenow.eu and <https://be.trianglenow.eu/>
- For the Netherlands: nl.trianglenow.eu
- For Europe: <https://eu.trianglenow.eu/>

All platforms have a user guide, with which teachers can add new learning tools that fit the needs of their pupils.

The importance of digital literacy

According to the European Commission (2018), “*digital competence involves the confident, critical and responsible use of, and engagement with, digital technologies for learning, at work, and for participation in society.*” (p. 10). In this sense, children and adults can only be active, responsible, and independent participants in society if they are digitally literate¹. It is therefore important that children and young people develop knowledge and skills in the field of digital

¹*Media and Information Literacy*. (n.d.). Digital Citizenship Education (DCE). Council of Europe. Available at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/digital-citizenship-education/media-and-information-literacy>

technology, also when they stay in closed (youth) institutions. Those who stay there longer fall behind in terms of twenty-first-century skills.²

The Right to Digital Literacy in Closed Institutions

What is the legal framework that underlies the right of children and young people in a (closed) youth institution to digital inclusion?

- The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child considers in paragraph 4 of General Comment 25 (2021) that *“meaningful access to digital technologies can support children in realising the full range of civil, political, cultural, economic and social rights. However, if digital inclusion is not achieved, existing inequalities are likely to be exacerbated and new ones may emerge”*
- The Child-friendly Guidelines of the Council of Europe recognise that the right to information and participation means that children within the judicial system should have access to the internet so that they can develop and participate fully in society.
- The Council of Europe indicated in the 2020 resolution on access to digital technologies, that this right also includes access to and training in the use of modern digital information technologies. This resolution builds on the recommendations from 1989 that all prisoners have the right to education.

²Toreld, E. M., Haugli, K. O., & Svalastog, A. L. (2018). Maintaining normality when serving a prison sentence in the digital society. *Croatian Medical Journal*, 59(6), 335–339. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6330768/pdf/CroatMedJ_0335.pdf

Document Objectives

This document aims to inform policy and decision-makers at various levels, from local governance to the European Union, regarding the key conclusions and findings of the Triangle project.

Additionally, the policy recommendations herein are intended to promote the continued enhancement and support of education centre activities, particularly in the domain of digital education, to prepare youths for successful re-entry into modern society. These recommendations underscore concise guidelines for policymakers to consider.

Policy Recommendations

1. Develop a policy for Digital Education in closed institutions

A clear and comprehensive general framework for digital education in a (closed) youth facilities is essential in the contemporary context. Although the Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027)³ has introduced key measures to tackle digital education in Europe, there remains a need for specific policies targeting the unique environment of education centres. It is crucial to establish a coherent policy with a unified vision shared by all staff members, including policymakers, directors, teachers and social workers, on digital education. For instance, appointing a digital coordinator and developing a policy for software and hardware within closed institutions are vital steps.

This unambiguous framework should contain agreements on how the end users interact with the hardware and software, as well as the types of hardware and software available. In addition, it must also be explicit to the educators which hardware and software options are accessible in the classroom to achieve better digitisation in education. This framework should include a broad range parameter, including end users, teachers or supervisors, hardware and software components, security, online use, platforms, network, digital training, etc.

It is important to make different **policies** for open, half-open, and closed institutions, as well as for various locations within these institutions (e.g. living group, in school, own room) and different individuals (person level).

³ <https://education.ec.europa.eu/focus-topics/digital-education/action-plan>

2. Create a quality digital space

Having a **quality digital space** with computers that have a stable, secured internet connection, within the closed institution would be of key added value to the young people. It's important to have a budget allocated for this matter in order to implement sustainable solutions for a stable internet connection and regular equipment maintenance. Additionally, it must be clear who is responsible for the budget and the equipment that is needed: the institution, welfare, or educational services. This may vary between country or jurisdiction.

“It is a very useful platform for us, as young people, to learn new things.” - Youngster from Portugal, who tested the platform.

3. Implement professional development policies

Teachers and social workers require adequate **time to learn and familiarise themselves with new educational resources, such as the Triangle platform**, to effectively supervise and enhance the young people's learning experience. In the specific case of the Triangle platform, ongoing practice is essential to provide these professionals with the confidence necessary to develop and upload ongoing content within the platform.

In this sense, it is crucial to implement continued professional development policies that consider the need for teachers and social workers to a) practice with new resources, b) understand the needs of the young people, c) share materials and best practices with colleagues, and d) develop further educational materials.

4. Recognise and minimise security risks

Despite the comprehensive security measures within the Triangle platform, and other digital learning tools validated for use in closed institutions, access to the internet brings **security risks**. However, given that young people have the right to information, which includes the use of the internet and consequent digital literacy⁴, it is important that these risks are recognised and minimised **without preventing young people from accessing these tools**.

In the case of Triangle, the platform provides young people with knowledge and skills, helping them in a successful reintegration process, and preparing them for future challenges. **Risks can be minimised by digital security specific policies or procedures, trained staff, regular checks of the websites on the whitelist, and communication with the digital coordinators of the platforms.**

"Triangle means a very interesting step in the right direction for digital learning in a closed institution. It feels like we are on the right track here." – Youngster from Belgium, who tested the platform.

⁴ Council of Europe. (2020, October 16). *Resolution adopted by the Conference of INGOs on access to digital technology in Europe and the responsibility of member states (CONF/PLE(2020)RES1)*. Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/conf-ple-2020-res1-en-digital-technology/16809feab0>

5. Promote the importance of creative approaches to learning

Digital learning has become a well-established way of enhancing **interest in learning** among young people in closed institutions. Given that many young individuals prefer digital learning methods, for example, puzzles, quizzes, videos, and pictures, over traditional text-based approaches, it is essential to provide information through these preferred mediums.

“The content of the modules is offered in various interactive work formats and connects very well with the young people's world. The interactive aspect of the modules bridges the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical tools that the young people need to connect with society after their detention period.” - Peter van Olmen, Eduvier, the Netherlands

6. Improve accessibility

Digital platforms should be accessible for users of all levels, including those with disabilities (i.e., hearing, visual, and sight impairments) and users who **don't speak the language** well. According to the European Commission's report on Promoting diversity and inclusion in schools in Europe, “all learners need to be considered in policies aiming to promote diversity and inclusion in schools to ensure that no one is left behind and that all are supported in their learning and development to achieve their full potential”⁵.

In this sense, educational policies targeting young people in closed institutions must guarantee that all practices, whether digital or otherwise, are accessible to individual with varying levels of educational attainment, with different learning styles. These policies should also accommodate those with disabilities and individuals who are not proficient in the language of the host country. Such inclusivity is essential to promote integration and foster social reintegration.

⁵European Commission, European Education and Culture Executive Agency. (2023). *Promoting diversity and inclusion in schools in Europe*, Publications Office of the European Union, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2797/443509>

7. Multi-sector approach for quality digital education

A **multi-sector approach** is a crucial success factor for developing a platform like Triangle. Experts from the justice system, vocational training, digital experts, and young people in closed institutions, should collaborate, combining their perspectives, learning from one other, and sharing experiences to ensure quality digital education is provided

Country-specific recommendations

For Belgium: Preserve the improved cooperation that is developed during the Triangle project. The sharing of good practices improves the quality of the work of every actor. The Triangle project could also provide an impetus to share digital good practices from education teams across Belgium. In this way we share information, so knowledge becomes more sustainable.

For the Netherlands: Some institutions are further in digital education than others. There needs to be a shared level of digital education on a national level in the Netherlands.

Conclusion

Digital literacy is crucial for the empowerment and active participation of individuals in modern society. This necessity extends to all ages, including children and young people in closed institutions. Without digital literacy, these individuals risk falling behind in acquiring twenty-first-century skills, thereby limiting their future opportunities. The legal framework supporting the right to digital inclusion is robust and well-established, however is yet to extend into the justice sphere.

In light of this this, the Triangle project has proposed several policy recommendations aimed at enhancing digital education within closed youth institutions. These recommendations include developing a comprehensive policy for digital education, creating quality digital spaces, implementing professional development policies, recognising and minimising security risks, and appreciating the importance of creative approaches to learning. Furthermore, improving the accessibility of digital platforms and adopting a multi-sector approach are essential for ensuring quality digital education.

By adopting these recommendations, policymakers can support the continued improvement and enhancement of educational activities in these institutions, ultimately preparing young people for successful re-entry and reintegration into modern society.



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