What schools can learn from virtual schools (and online universities)

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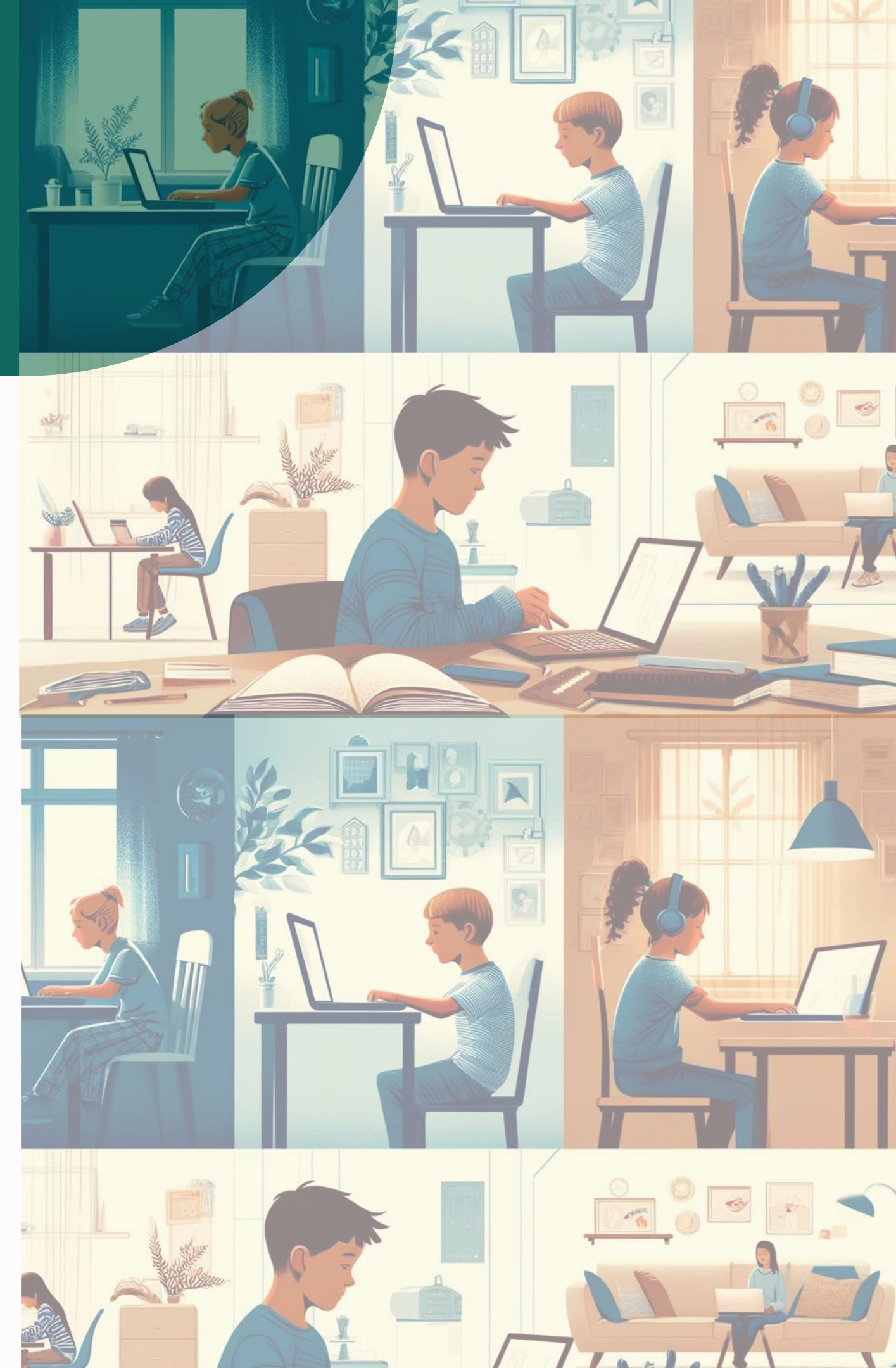Matic Media Ltd
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Overarching Objectives

- **To ensure that digital learning spreads through the schools sector**

- To grow the number of fully online providers (virtual schools) in the schools sector

- To grow the number of flexible and hybrid providers in the schools sector

- To ensure that such growth is documented and evidenced in the research literature

- **To generate a thriving international research community**

Core Question

- **Why is the schools sector not learning lessons from the growing community of virtual schools?**

- Additional question: Why are *other parts* of the education sector not learning lessons from virtual schools?
  - ➢ Universities – virtual universities especially
  - ➢ TVET providers ("colleges", etc)
  - ➢ Adult Education Providers
  (not covered in this short presentation)

Answer Processes #1

To understand the reasons why so many overview reports – from OECD, European Commission and some countries – largely ignore virtual schools and the positive implications of their practice

Some partial exceptions e.g. Taiwan and countries with many virtual schools.

Reason 1

They focus on papers in refereed journals.

Reason 2

…..and on established researchers.

Answer Processes #2

To scope and understand better the research community generating refereed research material on virtual schools

- How much it interpenetrates the "conventional" education research community, especially at elite levels

Reason 1

Virtual schools a tiny part of schools provision.

Reason 2

Research community remains small.

Reason 3

Very few renowned scholars, even fewer active.

Answer Processes #3

- To develop articles about virtual schools for publication in research journals

- *Education Sciences* Special Issue
  - ➢ Virtual Schools for K-12 Education: Lessons Learned and Implications for Digital K-12 and Other Sectors of Education

Virtual Schooling Models

Cutting-edge research and insights into K-12 virtual schools

Resource for researchers, teachers, school leaders and policy-makers

Focus on innovation, accessibility, diversity and educational outcomes

Answer Processes #4

- To investigate the full range of virtual schools – some "hiding in plain sight"

  ➢ Virtual schools (full-time)

  ➢ Supplemental virtual schools (part-time)

  ➢ Hybrid provision (e.g. mornings-only f2f)

  ➢ Online tutoring, on top of regular schooling

  ➢ Online content provision (+ AI services?)

  ➢ Support for homeschooling

  ➢ Virtual schools for adults (19+)

Outputs

- *Education Sciences* Special Issue
  - ➢ Virtual Schools for K-12 Education: Lessons Learned and Implications…

- Types of article:
  - ➢ Region studies (UK, EU, US – more?)
  - ➢ Thematic studies – e.g. accessibility
  - ➢ Case studies – e.g. longitudinal case studies of established providers
  - ➢ Future articles for other relevant journals of online learning/ed tech with focus on K-12
  - ➢ Articles for national and international bodies

Next Steps

- Make available research template for finalisation

- Continue the process of identifying and encouraging lead authors for further regional studies

- Identify authors with experience in virtual schools; and published researchers to work with such authors

- Continue to generate interest at events and online via LinkedIn group and [Wiki](#)

- International project? (It's been 12 years)

Interim Conclusions

- Virtual (digital) schools are relevant to all advanced countries especially OECD and EU

- There is a compelling story of the relevance of virtual schools for specific educational needs

- Schools can run the same global VLEs as universities – and some do

- An institution does now not need research capability in online learning in order to run a VLE

- Pedagogies for schools and universities overlap especially at upper secondary level

- There is a business case for [OER](#) where there is a National Curriculum or *de facto* commonality

THANK YOU

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