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– La Poste supports home education during COVID-19 lockdown

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

La Poste (France) has rapidly implemented two new services to support the continued education of children during lockdown. In partnership with the Ministry of Education, which also provided the funding, the goal was to ensure that families with no home computer or internet connection would still be able to access learning materials and homework for their children. La Poste has a team dedicated to developing new community-focused products and services. This demonstrates forward thinking and is a manifestation of the principle that a service can both deliver a social mission and generate revenue. Key success factors in these projects include La Poste's commitment to and experience in offering social services, its existing plans for educational services, and its well-resourced, motivated and diverse project teams.

Worldwide, many Posts are **active in the field of education**. There is a long history of Posts supporting literacy, typically involving letter-writing competitions and the provision of teaching resources and materials for the visually impaired. Encouraging people to develop their writing skills has helped to support the postal business for decades, but some Posts are now diversifying into other educational services to **generate revenue** and **support government social policy**. This technical commentary examines the process by which La Poste (France) delivered two education initiatives in response to the COVID-19 pandemic: "IT equipment delivery" and "Homework at home". The commentary draws on information supplied by La Poste and articles written about these services.

Schools in France have been closed for many weeks as part of the French government's broader social distancing policy in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This situation presented a challenge shared by many other countries – how to support the **continued education**

of children during lockdown. In response to this challenge, La Poste implemented two initiatives that recognized that not all children have access to online learning materials. The first project helped to deliver spare school computer equipment to children in need, while the second involved La Poste facilitating the free delivery and return of homework assignments by post. More details on these projects can be found in the recent UPU news article featuring La Poste, and in an [article on La Poste's website](#) (in French). One-third of educational establishments in France are now participating in the "Homework at home" project. Given the success and scale of these initiatives, how were they implemented so quickly?

La Poste already had **extensive experience** in delivering public and social services, motivated by both its corporate social responsibility commitments and a desire to expand revenue streams. For example, it is heavily involved in the provision of **social care** and **e-health** services, and had already committed to reducing the

digital divide well before the pandemic. The principle that Posts should play a broad role in supporting public well-being appears to be **embedded within the organization**. La Poste's [current strategic plan](#) prioritizes its public service missions and identifies the provision of social services as a business opportunity.

The idea for this project began in the New Services Business Unit of the Service-Mail-Parcels Division. This unit specializes in the research, implementation and evaluation of projects involving domiciliary care services. The two education projects were already in the development stages and the COVID-19 crisis led to them being fast-tracked for implementation.

On the topic of **resourcing**, these projects were piloted in partnership with the Ministry of Education, which also provided the funding. No significant changes were needed to staff working methods as the project teams were already in place. The "Homework at home" project was implemented by a team of 20 people in under two weeks. Three hundred employees across two desktop publishing and two digitization offices printed, posted, received and scanned an average of 1,300 assignments per day. The "IT equipment delivery" project also had a dedicated team comprising experts in e-education issues and production." La Poste was keen to emphasize that a diverse team and the facilitation of good communication between actors were key factors in the swift and efficient launch of the project.

La Poste's advice to other Posts or ministries interested in implementing similar projects is "to build on your existing logistics network and support projects with real change management that motivates teams who feel that they are useful and providing a real service to customers."



CONCLUSIONS

La Poste's approach is a practical way of addressing digital and educational inclusion that utilizes the postal network to meet the immediate needs of families and national government. With sufficient resources, it should be possible for other designated operators to offer similar services. The fact that these services were developed prior to the pandemic is encouraging, as it suggests that La Poste may be able to continue to offer them after the crisis has ended. Key success factors appear to be:

- A strategic decision to offer social services and prior experience in doing so;
- Well-resourced and motivated project teams;
- The establishment of a business unit focused on new community services;
- The selection of projects with clear and direct social benefits;
- The inclusion of experts with diverse postal and production knowledge.