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# Five Key Messages for Inclusive Education

Putting Theory into Practice

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Inclusive Education in Europe

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**EUROPEAN AGENCY**  
for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

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# **FIVE KEY MESSAGES FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION**

**Putting Theory into Practice**

**European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education**



The European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (the Agency; formerly known as the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education) is an independent and self-governing organisation, supported by Agency member countries and the European Institutions (Commission and Parliament).



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Secretariat  
Østre Stationsvej 33  
DK-5000 Odense C Denmark  
Tel: +45 64 41 00 20  
[secretariat@european-agency.org](mailto:secretariat@european-agency.org)

Brussels Office  
Rue Montoyer, 21  
BE-1000 Brussels Belgium  
Tel: +32 2 213 62 80  
[brussels.office@european-agency.org](mailto:brussels.office@european-agency.org)

**[www.european-agency.org](http://www.european-agency.org)**



## CONTENTS

<b>PREAMBLE .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>AS EARLY AS POSSIBLE.....</b>	<b>8</b>
Introduction .....	8
Early intervention .....	8
Early detection and assessment.....	9
Early support .....	9
Planning transition.....	10
<b>INCLUSIVE EDUCATION BENEFITS ALL.....</b>	<b>11</b>
Introduction .....	11
Inclusive education as an approach to raise achievement for all learners.....	12
‘What is good for pupils with SEN is good for all pupils’ .....	13
Monitoring progress .....	14
<b>HIGHLY QUALIFIED PROFESSIONALS .....</b>	<b>16</b>
Introduction .....	16
Initial and in-service training .....	16
The profile of inclusive teachers and other professionals.....	17
Approaches to recruitment .....	17
Positive attitudes .....	18
Networking and co-ordination.....	18
<b>SUPPORT SYSTEMS AND FUNDING MECHANISMS .....</b>	<b>20</b>
Introduction .....	20
Support systems and funding mechanisms.....	20
<i>Early Childhood Intervention (ECI)</i> .....	21
<i>Inclusive Education and Classroom Practice</i> .....	22
<i>Vocational Education and Training (VET)</i> .....	22
<i>Information and Communication Technology (ICT)</i> .....	23
<b>RELIABLE DATA.....</b>	<b>25</b>



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Introduction .....	25
Monitoring learners' rights.....	26
Monitoring the effectiveness of systems for inclusive education .....	28
<b>LOOKING FORWARD.....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY.....</b>	<b>32</b>



## PREAMBLE

In November 2013, the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (the Agency) organised an International Conference which facilitated an open debate on inclusive education. The debate involved all relevant stakeholders: decision-makers, researchers and practitioners, as well as people with disabilities and their families.

Talking about inclusive education implies talking about differences: how to deal with differences in schools, in classrooms and in the curriculum in general. The current debate is no longer about what inclusion is and why it is needed; the key question is how it is to be achieved. How to make progress at national level, how to implement the right policy measures at regional and local level, how teachers can best cope with differences in the classroom; these were the key issues during the conference.

This document presents the five relevant messages presented by the Agency and debated in groups during the conference. Participants were invited to contribute to and debate these five key messages:

- *As early as possible*: the positive impact of early detection and intervention as well as of proactive measures.
- *Inclusive education benefits all*: the positive educational and social impact of inclusive education.
- *Highly qualified professionals*: the importance of having highly qualified professionals in general, and teachers in particular.
- *Support systems and funding mechanisms*: the need for well-established support systems and related funding mechanisms.
- *Reliable data*: the important role played by data, as well as benefits and limitations of its use.

These key messages summarise an essential part of the work conducted by the Agency in the last decade and address relevant issues as far as inclusive education is concerned.

The Agency wishes to express its gratitude to all the conference participants for their contribution and commitment to this important debate.

Per Ch Gunnvall  
Chair

Cor J.W. Meijer  
Director



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The International Conference has been a useful platform for reflecting on and discussing inclusive education from different perspectives and involving all relevant stakeholders.

The conference's core issues included: how to cope with differences; how to support learners, teachers and families; how to benefit from differences in education; how to implement the right measures; and how best to invest.

The Agency highlighted five key messages which were discussed in depth, leading to further consideration and actions.

The participants suggested a number of considerations and proposals for actions related to the key messages:

- *As early as possible*: all children have the right to receive the required support as soon as possible and whenever it is needed. This implies co-ordination and co-operation among services, led by one of the services concerned. The stakeholders involved need to build real communication among themselves, being able to understand and provide information to each other. Parents are key stakeholders.
- *Inclusive education benefits all*: inclusive education aims to provide quality education for all learners. In order to achieve an inclusive school, support is needed from the entire community: from decision-makers to end-users (learners and their families). Collaboration is required at all levels and all stakeholders need a vision of long-term outcomes – the type of young people the school and the community will 'produce'. Changes in terminology, attitudes and values, reflecting the added value of diversity and equal participation, are needed.
- *Highly qualified professionals*: in order for teachers and other education professionals to be prepared for inclusion, changes are needed in all training aspects – training programmes, daily practices, recruitment, finances, etc. The next generation of teachers and education professionals must be prepared to be teachers/trainers for all learners; they need to be trained not just in terms of competences but also of ethical values.
- *Support systems and funding mechanisms*: the best indicators for financing are not to be found in finances, but in measuring efficiency and achievement. It is essential to consider outcomes and relate them to the efforts invested to achieve them. This involves monitoring and measuring the systems' efficiency in order to focus financial means towards successful approaches. Incentive structures should ensure that more financial support is available if learners





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are placed in inclusive settings, and that greater emphasis is placed on outcomes (not just academic ones).

- *Reliable data*: meaningful, quality data collection requires a systemic approach encompassing learner, placement, teacher and resourcing issues. Data related to learner placement is a useful and necessary starting point, but it needs to be supplemented with clear data on system outcomes and effects. Data on learner outcomes – the impact of inclusive education – is much harder to collect and is often lacking in countries' data collection.

Finally, the main results of the discussions can be summarised as follows: planning and implementing inclusive education is a process that concerns the entire education system and all learners; equity and quality go together; inclusive education must be seen as an evolving concept where issues related to diversity and democracy are increasingly important.



## AS EARLY AS POSSIBLE

### Introduction

‘As early as possible’ concerns, first of all, providing an intervention at an early stage in a child’s life. It also covers many other relevant elements such as: intervening as soon as the need is detected; putting early assessment in place; providing the required support as early as possible; and preparing and planning transition phases from one educational phase to the next and to employment.

Although the various Agency projects have not analysed the reduction of school dropout rates, reducing these rates involves good policies and practices regarding early detection, as well as early and efficient support.

### Early intervention

During the European Parliament Hearing that the Agency organised in 2011, young people made the following points: ‘Inclusion starts in the kindergarten’ (European Agency, 2012a, p. 14); ‘Diversity is positive; it is important to prepare people from the beginning, to work with the kids to build up a better generation’ (ibid., p. 29).

Within the framework of the 2010 Agency report, *Early Childhood Intervention – Progress and Developments 2005–2010*, early childhood intervention (ECI) is defined as:


*a composite of services/provision for very young children and their families, provided at their request at a certain time in a child’s life, covering any action undertaken when a child needs special support to: Ensure and enhance her/his personal development; Strengthen the family’s own competences, and Promote the social inclusion of the family and the child* (European Agency, 2010, p. 7).

Among the different elements identified as relevant to ECI, availability is one that must be highlighted:

*a shared aim of ECI is to reach all children and families in need of support as early as possible. This is a general priority in all countries in order to compensate for regional differences with respect to the availability of resources and in order to guarantee that children and families applying for support can benefit from the same quality of services* (ibid., pp. 7–8).

Early intervention was also discussed within the framework of the *Multicultural Diversity and Special Needs Education* project:

*Clear priorities were presented by teachers and also by professionals from a support centre. These included: high priority on early intervention; the*



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*importance and need to work with parents [among others] (European Agency, 2009a, p. 55).*

## **Early detection and assessment**

The Agency report, *Assessment in Inclusive Settings: Key Issues for Policy and Practice*, provides an extensive description of this important aspect. It says that:

*Initial assessment of pupils who are thought to have SEN [special educational needs] can have two possible purposes:*

- *Identification linked to an official decision to ‘recognise’ a pupil as having educational needs that require additional resources to support their learning;*
- *Informing learning programmes, where assessment is focussed upon highlighting strengths and weaknesses the pupil may have in different areas of their educational experience. Such information is often used in a formative way – perhaps as the starting point for Individual Education Plans (IEPs) or other target-setting approaches – rather than as a one off, baseline assessment (Watkins, 2007, p. 22).*

‘Multi-disciplinary teams carry out initial identification assessment with mainstream classroom teachers, parents and pupils as full partners in the assessment process’ (ibid., p. 38).

The importance of early assessment followed by early intervention measures was highlighted within the scope of the Agency report *Multicultural Diversity and Special Needs Education* (2009a), as well as in the findings of the Agency’s *Mapping the Implementation of Policy for Inclusive Education (MIPIE)* report (2011a).


## **Early support**

The majority of the Agency’s reports refer to the importance and benefit of early support.

The *Inclusive Education and Classroom Practice* project mentions that:

*The criteria that should be used when offering part-time special provision to pupils are that they should be: (1) as early as possible; (2) as flexible as possible (if one approach is not working, choose another); (3) as ‘light’ as possible (without negative side effects); (4) as close as possible (therefore preferable within the mainstream class and within the mainstream school); and (5) as short as possible (European Agency, 2003, p. 16).*

The report *Teacher Education for Inclusion Across Europe – Challenges and Opportunities* states that:



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*investment in early childhood education and an increasingly inclusive education system is likely to represent a more effective use of resources than short term initiatives designed to ‘close gaps’ or support certain marginalised groups (European Agency, 2011b, p. 77).*

## **Planning transition**

Different Agency projects on transition have focussed on the need for an early plan to move from one educational stage to the next, as well as from education to employment (2002a, 2002b, 2006 and 2013).

The report *Transition from School to Employment. Key Principles and Recommendations for Policy Makers* highlights that countries need to ‘ensure the development of transition plans early enough in a student’s school career, not just at the end of compulsory education’ (European Agency, 2002a, p. 5).

Within the framework of the Agency’s work on this topic, *Individual Transition Plans*:

*it appears that transition to employment is part of a long and complex process, covering all phases in a person’s life, which needs to be managed in the most appropriate way. ‘A good life for all’, as well as ‘a good job for all’ are the ultimate goals of a successful overall transition process. The types of provision or the organisation of schools or other education locations should not interfere with or impede the achievement of such a process (European Agency, 2006, p. 8).*

In conclusion, the main goal of early intervention is to provide meaningful and positive activities to promote early child development, family involvement, quality of life, social inclusion and societal enrichment. It must be borne in mind that support services are essential for some, but also beneficial to all. All children have the right to receive support whenever it is needed. This requires a co-ordinated approach across sectors and efficient co-operation among all stakeholders.



## INCLUSIVE EDUCATION BENEFITS ALL

### Introduction

There is increasing recognition across Europe, and more widely at international level, that moving towards inclusive policy and practice in education is an imperative. The *Council conclusions on the social dimension of education and training* state that: ‘Creating the conditions required for the successful inclusion of pupils with special needs in mainstream settings benefits all learners’ (Council of the European Union, 2010, p. 5).

The Commission of the European Communities’ Green Paper on Migration and Mobility underlines that:

*Schools must play a leading role in creating an inclusive society, as they represent the main opportunity for young people of migrant and host communities to get to know and respect each other ... linguistic and cultural diversity may bring an invaluable resource to schools* (Commission of the European Communities, 2008, p. 1).

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2009) clearly indicates that inclusive education is a question of equity and is therefore a quality issue impacting upon all learners. Three propositions regarding inclusive education are highlighted: inclusion and quality are reciprocal; access and quality are linked and are mutually reinforcing; and quality and equity are central to ensuring inclusive education.

A number of Agency projects have also focussed on this issue. The report on the Agency’s *Raising Achievement for All Learners (RA4AL)* conference (European Agency, 2012c) highlights that issues surrounding the definition of inclusion have become increasingly important, but that there appears to be growing agreement on the need for a rights-based approach to develop greater equity and social justice and to support the development of a non-discriminatory society. The debate about inclusion has, therefore, broadened from one that used to focus on relocating children described as having special educational needs into mainstream schools, to one that seeks to provide high-quality education – and consequent benefits – for all learners.

As more countries move to a wider definition of inclusive education, diversity is recognised as ‘natural’ in any group of learners and inclusive education can be seen as a means of raising achievement through the presence (access to education), participation (quality of the learning experience) and achievement (learning processes and outcomes) of **all** learners.



Agency work on *Key Principles for Promoting Quality in Inclusive Education* (European Agency, 2009b) reinforces the importance of learner-centred/personalised learning approaches, teacher assessment that supports learning, and collaborative work with parents and families – these are, however, key to improving the quality of education for all learners.

### **Inclusive education as an approach to raise achievement for all learners**

Wilkinson and Pickett note that ‘greater equality, as well as improving the wellbeing of the whole population, is also the key to national standards of achievement’ (2010, p. 29). They stress that if:

*a country wants higher average levels of educational achievement among its school children, it must address the underlying inequality which creates a steeper social gradient in educational achievement (ibid., p. 30).*

Challenging the idea that including all learners may somehow be detrimental to high achievement, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2011) shows that improving the lowest performing students does not have to be at the expense of higher performers. The findings of the UNESCO report *Learning Divides* (Willms, 2006) also provide evidence that strong school performance and equity can go hand-in-hand and that countries with the highest levels of performance tend to be those that are successfully raising the achievement of all learners (European Agency, 2012d).

According to the Agency’s *RA4AL* report,

*Farrell and colleagues (2007) ... found a small body of research to suggest that placing learners with SEN in mainstream schools has no major adverse consequences for all children’s academic achievement, behaviour and attitudes. A systematic review of the literature commissioned by the Evidence for Policy and Practice Initiative (EPPI) (Kalambouka et al., 2005) also found that, in general, there are no adverse effects on learners without SEN when learners with special needs are included in mainstream schools (European Agency, 2012d, p. 8).*

Several studies outline the benefits of inclusion for learners without disabilities. These benefits include:

*increased appreciation and acceptance of individual differences and diversity, respect for all people, preparation for adult life in an inclusive society and opportunities to master activities by practising and teaching others. Such effects are also documented in recent research, for example Bennett and Gallagher (2012) (European Agency, 2012d, p. 8).*



*The positive impact of inclusive placements on learners with disabilities is noted by research such as MacArthur et al. (2005) and de Graaf et al. (2011). This includes improved social relationships and networks, peer role models, increased achievement, higher expectations, increased collaboration among school staff and improved integration of families into the community (European Agency, 2012d, p. 8).*

Further benefits may include access to wider curriculum opportunities and recognition and accreditation of achievement.

*Consideration should be given to improving the organisation of ‘spaces’ for learning and providing more opportunities for learners to discover talents in a range of areas beyond academic learning (ibid., p. 25).*

Research by Chapman et al. (2011) focussed specifically on:

*leadership that promotes achievement for learners with SEN/disability and suggested that the presence of a diverse student population can, under the right organisational conditions, stimulate collaborative arrangements and encourage innovative ways of teaching hard to reach groups (European Agency, 2012d, p. 21).*

### **‘What is good for pupils with SEN is good for all pupils’**

This statement made in the Agency publication *Inclusive Education and Classroom Practice* (European Agency, 2003, p. 33) has, since that time, been frequently reiterated in Agency work.

For example, the same study highlighted that:

*peer tutoring or co-operative learning is effective in both cognitive and affective (social-emotional) areas of pupils’ learning and development. Pupils that help each other, especially within a system of flexible and well-considered pupil grouping, profit from learning together (ibid., p. 23).*

In Agency work on inclusive practice in secondary schools in 2005, it was stressed that:

*All students – including students with SEN – demonstrate improvements in their learning with systematic monitoring, assessment, planning and evaluation of their work (European Agency, 2005, p. 8)*

and that:

*All students benefit from co-operative learning: the student who explains to the other student retains information better and for longer and the needs of the student who is learning are better addressed by a peer whose level of understanding is only slightly higher than his or her own level (ibid., pp. 18–19).*



The *RA4AL* report states that:

*a system that allows learners to progress towards common goals, but through different routes, using different styles of learning and assessment, should be more inclusive and raise the achievement of all learners* (European Agency, 2012d, p. 25).

Agency work on *Assessment in Inclusive Settings* also notes the need to involve all learners and parents/families in both the learning and the assessment process (Watkins, 2007).

The same report points out that the process of differentiation needs careful consideration. Although it may also be associated with individualisation and personalisation and seen as a way to meet more specific individual or group needs, it often remains teacher-centred rather than learner-led. Personalisation needs to start with the needs and interests of all learners.

In the Agency's more recent *i-access* project, it is noted that the benefits of assistive technology or 'enabling technology' often prove useful for a large variety of users. 'Accessibility benefits users with disabilities and/or special educational needs and may often benefit all users' (European Agency, 2012e, p. 22).

The views of young people with and without disabilities expressed in the *Young Views on Inclusive Education* publication provide a clear summary of the benefits of inclusive education for all learners. As one young learner said: 'Inclusive education is for all children. Normal schools should be near their homes. This experience promotes meeting people from the neighbourhood' (European Agency, 2012a, p. 11). Others added: 'Students with and without special needs can learn from each other and exchange their knowledge', 'It is good for us – good for them. It is important to recognise the benefits to everyone in the class' and 'Inclusive education helps mainstream children to become more tolerant, with more open minds' (ibid., p. 22).

### **Monitoring progress**

As inclusive education has broadened to consider quality education for all learners, it is necessary to find new ways to monitor progress. It is suggested in Agency work on indicators and the *MIPIE* report (2011a) that, at school level, data collection could consider the factors that impact upon the quality of schools' admission strategies, such as: non-discriminatory admission rules and policies; policies and strategies developed to support learners in disclosing their needs; the existence of a clear policy statement against bullying; implementation of existing codes of practice on inclusive education; staff training sessions on admission issues and on creating a welcoming school climate; working respectfully and collaboratively with learners





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and families; strategies to help learners and families to participate actively in the school community and classroom; and the availability of information, counselling and advice strategies and their impact on learners.

In conclusion, the broader inclusion debate now seeks to provide high-quality education – and benefits – for all learners. Strong school performance and equity can go hand-in-hand.

The education system is complex and fragmented and, at present, lacks coherent thinking about inclusive education. In general, there is little support for principals and leaders who may be trying to bring about change in isolated situations. Diversity is increasing across the system, but the traditions of the past restrict action. Schools' capability must be developed through context awareness, correspondence (between legislation and policy/practice), conceptual clarity and a continuum of support – for all stakeholders – that encourages schools to be proactive rather than reactive. Getting to know all learners and intervening early will develop quality support for all learners that it is seen as part of regular education.



## HIGHLY QUALIFIED PROFESSIONALS

### Introduction

'Highly qualified professionals' concerns issues of initial and in-service training, the profile, values and competence of teachers, effective approaches to recruitment, and attitudes, as well as networking and co-ordination of all professionals.

Young people attending the European Parliament Hearing, organised by the Agency in 2011, pointed out:

*The starting point for inclusive education is teacher awareness and education ... Teachers must be aware of what everyone needs and give opportunities for successfully reaching goals. We all have our talents – together we make a better working community (European Agency, 2012a, p. 12).*

### Initial and in-service training

Appropriate initial and in-service training of teachers and other professionals is considered a key factor for successful inclusive practices. The Agency report *Key Principles for Promoting Quality in Inclusive Education – Recommendations for Practice* highlights that:

*All teachers should develop the skills to meet the diverse needs of all learners. In their initial and continuing education, teachers should be equipped with the skills, knowledge and understanding that will give them the confidence to deal effectively with a range of learner needs (European Agency, 2011c, p. 15).*

The Agency report *Teacher Education for Inclusion Across Europe – Challenges and Opportunities* refers to the structure of initial teacher education. It states that:

*One of the key priorities for teacher education ... included the need to review the structure to improve teacher education for inclusion and to merge the education of mainstream and special education teachers. The changing role of teachers is increasingly acknowledged, emphasising the need for significant changes in the way teachers are prepared for their professional roles and responsibilities (European Agency, 2011b, p. 18).*

Furthermore, it indicates that:

*Teacher educators are key players in assuring a high-quality teaching force; yet many European countries have no explicit policy on the competences they should possess or on how they should be selected or trained (ibid., p. 63).*



## The profile of inclusive teachers and other professionals

Within the framework of the *Agency Teacher Education for Inclusion* project, the *Profile of Inclusive Teachers* (European Agency, 2012b) has been developed as a guide for the design and implementation of initial teacher education (ITE) programmes for all teachers. It identifies a framework of core values and areas of competence that are applicable to any ITE programme for preparing all teachers to work in inclusive education and considering all forms of diversity.

The framework of core values and areas of competence includes:

**Valuing Learner Diversity** – *learner difference is considered as a resource and an asset to education. The areas of competence within this core value relate to: Conceptions of inclusive education; The teacher’s view of learner difference.*

**Supporting All Learners** – *teachers have high expectations for all learners’ achievements. The areas of competence within this core value relate to: Promoting the academic, practical, social and emotional learning of all learners; Effective teaching approaches in heterogeneous classes.*

**Working With Others** – *collaboration and teamwork are essential approaches for all teachers. The areas of competence within this core value relate to: Working with parents and families; Working with a range of other educational professionals.*

**Personal Professional Development** – *teaching is a learning activity and teachers take responsibility for their lifelong learning. The areas of competence within this core value relate to: Teachers as reflective practitioners; Initial teacher education as a foundation for ongoing professional learning and development (ibid., p. 7).*


## Approaches to recruitment

Effective approaches to recruitment and increased retention rates of teachers and other professionals are indicated as key factors in a number of Agency projects. The Agency report *Teacher Education for Inclusion Across Europe – Challenges and Opportunities* highlights that:

*Effective approaches to improve the recruitment of teacher candidates and increase retention rates should be explored along with ways to increase the number of teachers from diverse backgrounds, including those with disabilities (European Agency, 2011b, p. 71).*

The project report points out that:

*A minority of countries have tests to regulate entry to the teaching profession but recent research by Menter and colleagues (2010) highlights evidence*



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*showing that there are many dimensions of effective teaching that are not reliably predicted by tests of academic ability. This conclusion is certainly supported by the project literature review and country reports, as both highlight the importance of attitudes, values and beliefs in addition to knowledge and skills in developing inclusive practice. These, together with dispositions that support the development of the required competences are difficult to ascertain even through an interview situation and further research is needed into methods of selecting of teacher candidates (European Agency, 2011b, pp. 19–20).*

### **Positive attitudes**

Positive attitudes of teachers and other professionals are highlighted as a key element for inclusive education in most Agency projects. The Agency report *Inclusive Education and Classroom Practice* notes that:

*Of course, inclusion largely depends on teachers' attitudes towards pupils with special needs, on their view on differences in classrooms and their willingness to deal with those differences effectively. Generally, the attitude of teachers has been put forward as a decisive factor in making schools more inclusive (European Agency, 2003, p. 12).*

Similarly, the Agency report *Key Principles for Promoting Quality in Inclusive Education – Recommendations for Practice* highlights the importance of positive attitudes. It states that:

*All teachers should have positive attitudes towards all learners and the will to work collaboratively with colleagues. All teachers should see diversity as a strength and a stimulus for their own further learning (European Agency, 2011c, p. 14).*

The Agency publication *Assessment in Inclusive Settings: Key Issues for Policy and Practice* indicates that:

*The attitudes a mainstream class teacher holds in relation to inclusion, assessment and therefore inclusive assessment are crucial. Positive attitudes can be fostered by the provision of appropriate training, support, resources and practical experiences of successful inclusion. Teachers require access to such experiences to help them develop the necessary positive attitudes (Watkins, 2007, p. 51).*

### **Networking and co-ordination**

All the Agency reports refer to the effective role of collaboration and co-ordination of professionals and networking with interdisciplinary community services. One



noteworthy example is the Agency report *Teacher Education for Inclusion: Profile of Inclusive Teachers (TE4I)*, which highlights that:

*The implementation of inclusive education should be seen as a collective task, with different stakeholders each having roles and responsibilities to fulfil. The support that classroom teachers need to fulfil their roles includes access to structures that facilitate communication and team working with a range of different professionals (including those working in HEIs [higher education institutions]), as well as ongoing professional development opportunities (European Agency, 2012b, p. 23).*

In the Agency publication *Inclusive Education and Classroom Practice in Secondary Education*, the issues of co-operative teaching and collaborative problem solving are highlighted as key factors for efficient inclusive practice. The project states that: 'Teachers need support from, and to be able to cooperate with, a range of colleagues within the school as well as professionals from outside the school' (European Agency, 2005, p. 6).

To conclude:

Inclusive education involves a systemic change that requires transformation in the way teachers and other education professionals are educated, not just in terms of competences but also of ethical values.

The main aspects related to highly qualified professionals can be summarised by a number of indicators in the area of legislation for inclusive education developed and presented in the Agency project, *Development of a set of indicators – for inclusive education in Europe*:

*Initial teacher training and in-service teacher training programmes include special education or inclusion related issues.*

*Teachers and other staff are supported to develop their knowledge, skills and attitudes regarding inclusion so they are prepared to meet all pupils/students' needs in mainstream teaching.*

*Courses and professional development opportunities to enhance teachers' pedagogical skills are available.*

*Teachers plan, teach and review in partnership.*

*Dedicated resources are set aside for appropriate professional development related to meeting special needs in inclusive education (Kyriazopoulou and Weber, 2009, p. 28).*



## SUPPORT SYSTEMS AND FUNDING MECHANISMS

### Introduction

In November 2011, the European Agency hosted a Hearing at the European Parliament in Brussels. Eighty-eight young people, both with and without special educational needs and/or disabilities, from secondary and vocational education, participated to discuss what inclusive education means to them. Some of the outcomes directly link to issues of provision and financing: 'Inclusive education requires additional resources like time and money but each pupil must get the education they want' (European Agency, 2012a, p. 13).

*Physical access of buildings is important (lifts, automatic doors, accessible switches, etc.) ... In the case of tests, extra time is needed. ... Internal support systems are needed to support students with disabilities (ibid., p. 27).*

*Support from people outside of the school staff who can act as mediators for students with special needs is good. There were teachers who didn't want to cooperate in making inclusive education work for me and others; teachers should accept everyone in their classes (ibid., p. 20).*

*Government cuts are already impacting on some support – people like mediators are losing their jobs. Money is going to schools, but it is so dysfunctional as it means 'normal' teachers have to do the support and they have no clue (ibid., p. 27).*

*Inclusive education is quite often claimed to be expensive, but in trying to save, we end up paying more to handle problems anyway. ... Even if a country doesn't have many resources, inclusive education needs to be done in the best way. Inclusive education is an investment, we must invest in people; people are the only resource (ibid., p. 24).*

### Support systems and funding mechanisms

Support systems and funding mechanisms encompass all levels of learning and therefore touch upon various issues. Moreover, limiting the issue to the educational field alone would be insufficient:

*Children and young people will not be successful in their learning if their basic health, social and emotional needs are not met. This may require support for families and communities and will need services such as health and social services to collaborate and ensure a holistic approach (European Agency, 2011c, pp. 17–18).*

There is widespread awareness that evidenced-based policy-making is critical for the long-term development of inclusive education systems. This was recognised within



Agency work as far back as 1999 within the *Financing of Special Needs Education* report, which argued that:

*the evaluation and monitoring procedures within countries could also be improved within the framework of special education. In the first instance it is important to guarantee and to stimulate an efficient and effective spending of public funds. Secondly, it seems necessary to clearly show the clients of the educational systems (pupils with special needs and their parents) that education within the mainstream setting (including all the additional facilities and support) is of a sufficient high quality (European Agency, 1999, p. 158).*

Both financing and provision were addressed in various other Agency projects. Hence, the following statements and outcomes shed light on these two issues from different perspectives raised by different projects conducted by the Agency.

### **Early Childhood Intervention (ECI)**

‘The common tendency in Europe is that ECI services are located and delivered as near as possible to the child and the family’ (European Agency, 2010, p. 17), e.g. in the municipality.

*ECI provision and services should reach all families and young children in need of support despite their different socio-economical backgrounds. ... This implies that public funds should cover all costs related to ECI services that are provided through public services, non-government organisations, non-profit organisations, etc., fulfilling the required national quality standards (ibid., pp. 21–22).*

*Public funding for ECI services and provision usually comes from the central government and/or the federal/regional funds and/or local funds. In most cases ECI funding is a combination of the above mentioned three levels of administration, health insurance schemes and fund raising by non-profit organisations (ibid., p. 22).*

Recommendations to improve the co-ordination of ECI services and provision include, among others, that:

*ECI is often an inter-agency area of work, but in every case an interdisciplinary area of work. Policy makers need to recognise this by ensuring that policy and guidance is developed jointly by departments of health, education and social services and that any published guidance for regional and local services carries the logos of more than one department. Only in this way will integrated working filter down to regional and local level (ibid., p. 42).*



## ***Inclusive Education and Classroom Practice***

*The existence of different models of dealing with differences in classrooms depends not only on teacher factors but also on the way in which schools organise their educational provision and on other external factors.*

This statement was included in the Agency report on *Inclusive Education and Classroom Practice* (European Agency, 2003, p. 8).

*It is clear that caring for pupils with SEN is not only a question of the necessary resources at classroom level. It should be recognised that the organisational structure at the school level also determines the amount and type of resources teachers can use in teaching pupils with special needs (ibid., p. 14).*

*The use of resources within schools should be organised in a flexible way ... schools should have many degrees of freedom in using financial resources according to their own wishes and views. Bureaucracy should be avoided to the largest extent and also pupils with no or minor special needs should be able to profit from resources within classes or schools if needed or wished by the teacher (ibid., p. 16).*

‘Funding arrangements and the incentives that are included in these arrangements play a decisive role’ (ibid., p. 17).


*A so-called throughput-model at the regional (municipality) level seems to be the most successful funding option. In such a model, budgets for special needs are delegated from central level to regional institutions (municipalities, districts, school clusters). At regional level, decisions are taken as to how the money is spent and which pupils should benefit from special services ... Therefore, a decentralised model is likely to be more cost-effective and provide fewer opportunities for undesirable forms of strategic behaviour. Nevertheless, it is obvious that the central government concerned has to specify clearly which goals must be achieved (ibid., p. 18).*

## ***Vocational Education and Training (VET)***

The implementation of VET programmes follows long-term planning in the education sector and co-operation with social partners.

*There is a focus on establishing closer links ... in order to develop the curricula of the vocational programmes and to match educational approaches and content with the skills needed in the working life ... organising and carrying out assessment of competences, collaborating in establishing the content of new qualifications, standards and curricula, and matching VET programmes with the economy’s needs (European Agency, 2014, p. 23).*





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*At the individual level, learners with special educational needs receive special educational assistance (e.g. assistive technology, sign language interpreters, specially prepared learning materials, scribes or other forms of practical assistance) to make the VET curricula accessible (ibid., p. 15).*

Regional levels (i.e. county, communes, municipalities, federal provinces) are key to ensuring the best fit between educational goals and labour market needs. Regional advisory boards have an active role in updating the structure of the educational programmes within their regional responsibility and in co-operation with social partners. They play an important role in offering flexibility in learners' pathways.

VET institutions are led by different agencies in the European countries, such as local authorities, non-governmental organisations, private sector, etc. In the European countries analysed, the main responsibilities for funding lie with state and governmental entities at regional or municipal levels. Furthermore, in the majority of countries, the funding criteria are different depending on the ownership type (public/private) in the country. Other measures for promoting employment among learners with SEN are the payment of the service cost of supported employment, an exemption from payment of pension and disability insurance, a reward for exceeding the quota, financial aids to workers with disabilities who establish themselves as entrepreneurs, social security reduction, tax reduction for employing young learners with SEN or annual awards for good practice. There are also schemes which allow learners to enter the workforce while retaining a percentage of their original welfare payment (e.g. disability allowance), which is not subject to taxation or social insurance. Employees would also be allowed to retain 'secondary benefits' (e.g. fuel allowance, medical card) for a certain length of time.

### ***Information and Communication Technology (ICT)***

Undoubtedly, accessible ICT can act as a facilitator to equal participation in educational activities for a range of learners with SEN. Students with SEN highlighted the importance of ICT during the European Parliament Hearing in 2011:

*In our country there is an organisation that provides special materials and IT. The school can borrow the aids from the organisation and the students can also take them home. When they do not need these aids anymore these can be used by other students in the same or other schools. It is very important to have technological aids as a support (European Agency, 2012a, p. 14).*

However:

*The fact that the drive towards equity in education through the support of accessible ICT is being overshadowed by negative economic developments*



*highlights that overarching European and international policies must continue to take a stable lead in this field (European Agency, 2013, p. 24).*

In this context, procurement could be considered a funding mechanism if accessibility is a built-in prerequisite. Accessibility should be a guiding principle for procurement of all goods and services.

*Access to appropriate ICTs in different lifelong learning contexts – including home based situations – often requires input from professionals coming from different fields. ... This involves coordination between individuals, services and often policies for different sectors of work. It also involves flexible approaches to financing for ICT, with possibilities for local level decision making on expenditure linked to locally identified needs (UNESCO Institute for Information Technologies in Education and European Agency, 2011, p. 88).*

To conclude:

Four requirements with regard to financing systems need to be considered to ensure that these systems fully support the educational policy aims.

Policy on financing fully supports inclusive education. This includes developing fiscal policies that create incentives, rather than disincentives, for the provision of inclusion placements and services. While there are a number of alternative bases for funding pupils with SEN, per-capita financing appears to be the most promising for meeting the stated requirement.

Policy on financing is fully based on educational needs. Individual per-capita funding amounts may be determined through cost analyses showing the relative costs of serving students with selected special conditions.

Policy on financing fully facilitates flexible, effective and efficient responses to needs. Rather than funding or providing specific resources, e.g. pre-determined types of personnel, equipment or facilities, per-capita funding allocates monetary resources, promoting flexibility in local use.

Policy on financing fully promotes support from related services and necessary inter-sector collaboration.

In general, incentive structures should ensure that more money is available if a child is placed in an inclusive setting, and greater emphasis on (not just academic) outcomes is required.



## RELIABLE DATA

### Introduction

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), as well as the European Disability Strategy 2010–2020 and the Education and Training 2020 strategic objective relating to equity in education, all act as key drivers for inclusive education in countries. The UNCRPD calls for State Parties to:

*... undertake to collect appropriate information, including statistical and research data, to enable them to formulate and implement policies to give effect to the present Convention (United Nations, 2006, Article 31)*

and

*... in accordance with their legal and administrative systems, maintain, strengthen, designate or establish within the State Party, a framework, including one or more independent mechanisms, as appropriate, to promote, protect and monitor implementation of the present Convention (ibid., Article 33).*

There is widespread awareness that evidenced-based policy-making is critical for the long-term development of inclusive education systems. Policy makers, data collection experts and researchers are aware of the need for data collection at national level that not only meets the requirements of international policy guidelines, but also works within a shared approach so as to promote a synergy of efforts at national and international levels. Agency work has shown that there are calls for wide-ranging information to be available to policy makers and for different organisations at both national and European levels to take a variety of complementary approaches to data collection. However, while the need for such data is clear, the best methods and procedures for collecting and analysing it are far less clear.

As a result of Agency work – notably the *Development of a set of indicators – for inclusive education in Europe* (Kyriazopoulou and Weber, 2009) and *Mapping the Implementation of Policy for Inclusive Education (MIPIE)* (European Agency, 2011a) project activities – five key policy requirements relating to data collection emerge when considering the need for evidence on inclusive education at the national level:

- the need for national level data collection to be anchored within international and European level agreements;
- the need to understand the impact of differences in countries' education systems;
- the need to analyse the effectiveness of inclusive education;

- the need for data collection to provide evidence relating to quality assurance issues; and
- the need to track learners' progress in the long term.

Policy makers need qualitative and quantitative data that informs them about the quality of education of learners with special educational needs. These main messages reflect a central recommendation from the *World Report on Disability* (World Health Organization/World Bank, 2011): the need for countries to develop existing data collection systems for quantitative data, but also conduct detailed and specific qualitative research into cost-effectiveness and other quality assurance related issues.

*The MIPIE project leads to the call for the development of a shared framework for data collection that would build upon existing national data collection procedures, as well as international data collection agreements and procedures. ... Three dimensions underpinning a shared framework can be identified:*

- *A move to a system based approach for data collection based upon shared concepts and definitions;*
- *The collection of evidence leading to both quantitative and qualitative benchmarks;*
- *The use of a multi-level framework for analysing policies at national and international levels (European Agency, 2011a, p. 11).*

Such an approach is required to support countries in developing 'data collection in order to monitor learners' rights as well as to monitor the effectiveness of systems for inclusive education' (ibid.).

### **Monitoring learners' rights**

Within a comprehensive framework for monitoring rights issues, both quantitative and qualitative indicators must be identified with regard to a number of factors:

#### *(i) Participation in education and training*

The Agency report on *Early Childhood Intervention* suggests that:

*Policy makers should have effective mechanisms in place to evaluate demand for ECI services and effective mechanisms to check whether supply of services meets demand in order to be able to plan for service improvement. A systematic way of collecting and monitoring reliable data at national levels should be developed (European Agency, 2010, pp. 39–40).*

The *Participation in Inclusive Education* report states that:



*Although national and local governments already collect substantial data about education, little is known about participation. ... Currently most of the data collected for monitoring purposes is statistical data on enrolment in, and completion of schooling. ... Few countries have systematic methods for collecting, analysing and interpreting qualitative data on participation at the individual, classroom and school level, although school self-review and inspection reports often address questions of participation and inclusion (European Agency, 2011d, p. 19).*

This report also highlights some of the potential dangers associated with data collection in relation to participation:

*... structures put in place to monitor children with SEN can act as barriers to their participation and achievement by marking these children as different. An unintended consequence of categorising some children in order to monitor their participation can produce a paradox, resulting in separate arrangements being made for their education (ibid., pp. 17–18).*

#### *(ii) Access to support and accommodation*

Three Agency studies have considered different aspects of support for learners with SEN. The *Vocational Education and Training* project literature review cites Redley (2009):


*There are no reliable national figures regarding the number of organisations offering supported employment or the numbers of people with learning disabilities employed in them and the government does not participate in this process (European Agency, 2012f, p. 41).*

The joint study the Agency conducted with the UNESCO Institute for Information Technologies in Education, examining the use of ICT in education for people with disabilities, argues that:

*Both in relation to the UN Convention (2006) as well as regional (i.e. European) and national level policy, there is a need for more detailed information linked to monitoring of qualitative and quantitative indicators and benchmarks on ICT in education for people with disabilities (UNESCO Institute for Information Technologies in Education and European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2011, p. 93).*

In relation to accessibility of information for learning, the recommendations of the Agency's *i-access* project argue that:

*Compliance to [accessibility] policy should be systematically monitored. Monitoring of compliance can only be encouraged at present, but should be extended ... There is a need to collect systematic quantitative and qualitative*



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*data, which should also involve the end users of accessible information provision. However, monitoring progress must not be limited to numerical benchmarking, but should include the possibility of collecting good practice examples, which could serve as role models for other countries and organisations (European Agency, 2012e, pp. 40–41).*

*(iii) Learning success and transition opportunities*

Two major Agency projects have considered transition from school to employment. Both indicate a lack of reliable data in this field. The *Transition from School to Employment* project suggested that:

*National data from countries only includes registered unemployed people, but a high percentage of people with special needs are not registered – they don't have even a chance to obtain a first job (European Agency, 2002a, p. 2).*

The follow-up study (European Agency, 2006) indicates no developments in this area.

*(iv) Affiliation opportunities*

The Agency's study focusing on multicultural diversity highlights a lack of data in relation to one important affiliation factor – immigration background of learners with SEN:

*Many countries involved in the project reported that there is a current lack of data on pupils with SEN and an immigrant background. Different government agencies have different responsibilities and there is no co-ordinated data collecting approach. There are other reasons for the lack of data. Some countries do not keep official statistics regarding people's ethnic origin other than their citizenship and country of birth on the principle that processing personal data that identifies race, ethnic origin, disability or religious belief is prohibited. In other countries there is no systematic data collection concerning pupils with SEN or pupils with SEN and an immigrant background at national or local level (European Agency, 2009a, p. 28).*

### **Monitoring the effectiveness of systems for inclusive education**

Data that examines the effectiveness of systems for inclusive education considers cost-effectiveness issues, as well as a number of areas relating to learners' experiences of education: initial assessment procedures, the on-going involvement of learners and their families in educational experiences and the effectiveness of learning environments in overcoming barriers and supporting meaningful learning experiences for all learners.



The Agency study on *Assessment in Inclusive Settings* highlights that there is a need to support schools with:

*... guidance about how assessment information – particularly standardised assessment information collected for national monitoring purposes – can be used to improve provision and practice for all pupils, including those with SEN (Watkins, 2007, p. 57).*

The *Raising Achievement for All Learners* report argues that:

*In order to move towards greater equity in education, a variety of performance indicators are needed, suited to the local situation and focusing on input and resources, process and output/outcomes. While information (including data) should be used to target support and track the success of inclusive policy and practice, care is needed that accountability systems do not inadvertently cause inappropriate changes (European Agency, 2012d, p. 22).*

This study highlights potential difficulties with this:

*In the current climate, the development of appropriate accountability mechanisms and ways to measure valued achievement and monitor equity present many challenges. Despite the drive for hard data, Fullan (2011) cautions that: ‘statistics are a wonderful servant but an appalling master’ (p. 127) and Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) stress the need to place responsibility before accountability. They suggest that accountability should ‘serve as a conscience through sampling’ and that an assault should be conducted ‘on the excesses of tested standardization that deny diversity and destroy creativity’ (p. 109) (European Agency, 2012d, p. 22).*

Within the *MIPIE* project it was argued that monitoring effectiveness of inclusive education systems would also include a consideration of the effectiveness of teacher education (European Agency, 2011a). The *TE4I* project report highlights a number of issues relating to the availability of data in this area. With regards to the representation of teachers from minority groups:

*Most countries that do not collect data report anecdotally on the under-representation of people with disabilities and those from minority ethnic groups among student teachers and qualified teachers and the situation appears to be similar among teacher educators (European Agency, 2011b, pp. 20–21).*

The report also indicates the need for data leading to evidence-informed change:

*The lack of large-scale, cumulative research and empirical evidence in teacher education has been noted by the OECD (2010) ... research should be undertaken to secure a relevant body of evidence to inform change. The examples in this report highlight some key issues for research including:*



- *The effectiveness of different routes into teaching;*
- *Approaches to teacher education and the ITE curriculum and*
- *The role of discrete, integrated and merged courses and how best to move along the continuum towards a single initial teacher education course that prepares all teachers for diversity (European Agency, 2011b, pp. 64–65).*

The *MIPIE* project argues that:

*At school level, data collection should:*

- *Provide information supporting teachers and school staff to plan and deliver appropriate support and provision;*
- *Give clear insights into how parents and learners are enabled to take a full part in the educational process (European Agency, 2011a, p. 13).*

For this to be possible:

*There is a need for synergies at national level between key stakeholders that would be based upon a clear rationale for data collection considering national, regional, school and classroom level data if overall country data is to effectively reflect practice (ibid., p. 14).*

To conclude, data provision can effectively inform policy-making for inclusive education. There are increasing demands – at international, European and national levels – for accountability, and ‘between school’ and ‘between nation’ comparisons are growing. The emergence of ‘big data’ (meta-analyses of combined data-sets and sources) presents opportunities, but also real challenges for inclusive education.

The calls for evidence-based policy and resource allocation highlight the need for meaningful data related to all learners. It is necessary to know which learners are receiving what services, when and where (counting all learners). It is also necessary to have data on the quality of services and the outcomes they lead to (consider practice).

A major challenge for data collection is linked to avoiding classifying, categorising and labelling learners in order to provide information on the provision they receive. The ‘pluralities’ of definitions applied to learners and the ‘politics’ of labelling systems cannot be ignored; nor can the effects these labelling systems and definitions lead to.

Asking the right policy questions is the starting point for collecting data that informs policy in significant ways.





## LOOKING FORWARD

The first purpose of the conference in November 2013 was to reflect upon and summarise the Agency's work over the last decade. The five key messages described in the previous chapters highlight critical aspects as far as inclusive education is concerned. They are based on the results from extended analysis of key topics, as decided by the Agency's member countries.

The second purpose of the conference was to look forward, exploring how the Agency's work can better support the member countries, helping them to improve the quality and effectiveness of their inclusive provision for learners with disabilities and/or special educational needs.

The Agency is willing to help countries in a more concrete way with implementing the outcomes of our work. This means providing policy recommendations which are more directly applicable to policy makers in order to support future change and policy developments.

The Agency is aware that the work already conducted is in line with and directly supports all international and European policy initiatives on education, equity, equal opportunities and rights for people with disabilities and/or special educational needs. The Agency's work provides clear and coherent recommendations on how key policies in these areas can be implemented in practice. The Agency wishes to provide countries with information about their progress in terms of the goals they have set with respect to: (a) the Education and Training 2020 target and (b) the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), as well as various European Union directives and communications.

There is a need for guidance on how inclusive education can be implemented at the level of the teacher, classroom, school, region, municipality and national policy. The Agency is able to provide countries with guidance on how inclusive education can be implemented and how this affects the general quality of education.

The discussions during the conference, as well as in-depth discussions within the Agency, will guide this further step of the Agency's work.



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**EN**

Secretariat:

Østre Stationsvej 33  
DK-5000  
Odense C  
Denmark  
Tel: +45 64 41 00 20  
[secretariat@european-agency.org](mailto:secretariat@european-agency.org)

Brussels Office:

Rue Montoyer 21  
BE-1000  
Brussels  
Belgium  
Tel: +32 2 213 62 80  
[brussels.office@european-agency.org](mailto:brussels.office@european-agency.org)

**[www.european-agency.org](http://www.european-agency.org)**

