

# **MENNTUN FYRIR ALLA Á ÍSLANDI**

Úttekt á framkvæmd stefnu um menntun án aðgreiningar á Íslandi

# **EDUCATION FOR ALL IN ICELAND**

External Audit of the Icelandic System for Inclusive Education

Annex 3: Desk Research Report



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



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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

### **Abbreviations    Full version**

ADHD:	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
Agency:	European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education
CPD:	Continuous Professional Development
EACEA:	Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency
ESL:	Early School Leaving
EU:	European Union
GDP:	Gross Domestic Product
ICT:	Information and Communication Technology
IEP:	Individual Education Plan
IT:	Information Technology
ITE:	Initial Teacher Education
LSA:	Learning Support Assistant
NESET:	Network of Experts on the Social Dimension of Education and Training
NESSE:	Network of Experts in Social Sciences of Education and Training
OECD:	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PISA:	Programme for International Student Assessment
SEN:	Special Educational Needs
SENCO:	Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator
TALIS:	Teaching and Learning International Survey
UDL:	Universal Design for Learning
UK:	United Kingdom



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UN:	United Nations
UNCRC:	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNCRPD:	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
UNESCO:	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNESCO-IBE:	UNESCO-International Bureau of Education
UNICEF:	United Nations Children’s Fund
USA:	United States of America
VET:	Vocational Education and Training



## PREAMBLE

This desk research report presents research evidence relating to the seven Audit Standards that were agreed by the Icelandic Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. The report aims to place the Audit work in Iceland within a wider research and policy context and to ensure that the Standards and the Audit recommendations are based on firm evidence. The desk research was on-going throughout the Audit. Early drafts of the research helped to inform the development of the Standards, while later drafts have been shaped to better reflect those Standards.

The main areas for this desk research were identified from the **Critical Reflection Document (Annex 2)**, prepared by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. There is one chapter for each of the seven Standards. Each chapter contains an opening section that focuses on the Icelandic context, followed by wider research findings that also highlight policy and practice in other countries. The chapters conclude with a summary that relates the main points back to key issues in Iceland.

The research covers academic papers, books and reports from international organisations (e.g. UNESCO, OECD), as well as 'grey' literature (theses, conference papers, etc.). It also draws on recent Agency project work – in particular Organisation of Provision to Support Inclusive Education and Raising the Achievement of All Learners in Inclusive Education. Many of the country examples in this report are from work undertaken during these projects.

In summary, the desk research informs and supports other Audit activities by:

- placing the work in Iceland within a wider context;
- providing evidence around the areas of policy and practice raised in the Icelandic Team's **Critical Reflection Document (Annex 2)** and those selected for the Audit Standards;
- setting out concepts and core issues that were explored in the fieldwork and data analysis;
- highlighting some key factors to be considered in future work, following the Audit.

It is hoped, therefore, that the desk research will provide a valuable resource to the Icelandic stakeholders as they plan the further development of their system for inclusive education.



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## 1. UNDERSTANDINGS OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Conceptual clarity is a key factor in successfully implementing national policy for inclusive education (European Agency, 2014). The Agency's Organisation of Provision project recommended that policy-makers clarify the concept of inclusion across and between system levels as an agenda that increases quality and equity to address underachievement by all vulnerable groups, including learners with disabilities. It stressed the need for all education policy-makers to take responsibility for **all** learners.

Internationally, there is no consensus around the definition of inclusive education – and this holds true for Iceland at a national level. De Beco states that:

*Inclusive education is obviously not equal to education in special schools, which would lead to a segregated education system. But neither is inclusive education equal to integration, which would simply provide access to regular schools for children with disabilities without allowing them to be educated there in a way that takes account of their special needs (2014, p. 275).*

Norwich (2015) highlights in particular the problem caused by equating inclusion with placement. He says this fails to take account of the richness of the concept of inclusiveness that covers values, such as social belonging, acceptance, respect and equality. He notes that school inclusiveness depends on both general school, as well as wider political and socio-economic, values and conditions.

In an attempt to support member countries in achieving greater clarity, the European Agency set out its position on inclusive education systems:

*The ultimate vision for inclusive education systems is to ensure that all learners of any age are provided with meaningful, high-quality educational opportunities in their local community, alongside their friends and peers (2015a, p. 1).*

In Iceland, Ólafsdóttir et al. reviewed the regulations, laws and literature in order to 'shed some light on the effects and implementation of the ideas of inclusive education in primary and lower-secondary schools in Iceland' (2014, p. 6). Their report includes a summary of definitions and interpretations of the construct of inclusive education, as well as a history of developments in the Icelandic context. It is interesting to note that this work does not extend to upper-secondary education, where many learners attend specialist provision.

It has been suggested (Sigurðardóttir et al., 2014) that the different perceptions and experiences of the process of inclusion may be rooted in the disbelief of teachers, rather than any political emphases. Gunnþórsdóttir and Bjarnason (2014) found that teachers' understanding of the term 'inclusive education' was most often confined



to the idea that all learners should be together in the same location (their home schools) and in ordinary classes when possible, irrespective of their needs. Teachers did not refer to concepts related to inclusive education, such as quality education, diversity, equity, social justice, participation or democratic schooling. This suggests that they were uninformed about inclusive ideology and lacked the terminology to discuss the policy and practice involved. Gunnþórsdóttir and Jóhannesson (2014) also note that by labelling learners as having special educational needs (SEN), the school system devalues one group of learners and obscures their diversity.

Jónsdóttir & Coleman (2014) analysed Icelandic teachers' discourse on inclusive education. They found it to be characterised by contradictory and, in many ways, incompatible views. They noted a general agreement on the benefit of inclusion for most learners, especially those identified as vulnerable, such as learners with developmental disabilities and also regarding reference to social inclusion and human rights issues. At the same time, teachers were found to have numerous reservations as to whether and how inclusive practice is really possible. Many see inclusion as an additional task (to the main task of educating 'normal' learners). They believe, therefore, that inclusion leads to increased demands and a certain amount of luck concerning 'what kind' of learners arrive in the classroom. This conflicts with the law, which considers diversity to be usual among compulsory school learners.

In her study of the inclusive compulsory school, Gunnþórsdóttir (2014) found that teachers are unclear about the inclusive ideology and find it difficult to identify procedures that lead to discrimination and exclusion. She argued that in attempting to respond to individual needs in an ethos of individualised learning, teachers provided additional support to learners in segregated groups, focusing on their weaknesses. Gunnþórsdóttir concluded that learners who fall at either end of the academic continuum seem to be a challenge for many classroom teachers.

Jónsson (2016) analyses discursive patterns and labels four distinct, but interwoven, themes about Icelandic views of inclusion:

- Individualistic understanding: the difficulties of learners are seen as 'their' difficulties and support is premised on individualised learning.
- Medical model: difficulties form the starting point (diagnosis) for a 'special education' response to fix what is out of order.
- Technical approach: 'Diagnosis rather than pedagogy appears as the method (technology) for inclusion' (Jóhannesson, 2006, p. 111).
- Market commodity: there is a competitive ethos between learners and between schools – education is seen as learners' opportunity to increase their own market value.



From autumn 2013 to spring 2015, a working group considered the implementation of inclusion in compulsory schools. The report (Mennta- og menningarmálaráðuneytið, 2015) stated that the understanding of inclusion varies in different school communities. Many teachers also reported feeling stressed by inclusive education due to the increased bureaucracy around the growing number of learners seen as having SEN. Recommendations included the need for raising awareness and research and monitoring of inclusive education criteria to support consistent practice and clear accountability. In particular, the report highlighted the need to clarify what providing a high quality service to all learners means in practice, with clear responsibilities for ministries and municipalities and an emphasis on early intervention.

Kesälahti and Väyrynen (2013) agree that different stakeholders may see the concept of inclusion in separate ways, creating barriers to coherent change. They review understandings of inclusion in Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Russia and Finland and examine the following aspects of inclusive education: legislative basis, teacher education, school practice, learner support, and future development. They use definitions by Ainscow, Booth and Dyson (2006) to divide definitions into two categories: descriptive – based on the concept of inclusion in practice – and prescriptive – which refers to understandings of the concept and how it is used.

The descriptive definitions set out are:

- Inclusion as a concern with learners who have disabilities and others categorised as ‘having SEN’.
- Inclusion as a response to disciplinary exclusion
- Inclusion in relation to all groups seen as being vulnerable to exclusion.

Prescriptive definitions include:

- Inclusion as developing the school for all
- Inclusion as education for all
- Inclusion as a principled approach to education and society.

Graham and Jahnukainen note the difficulties of moving towards ‘inclusion’ and believe that one ‘inexorable barrier appears to be the attraction that special education holds for policy’ (2011, p. 2). They continue:

*... by both validating and relieving the ‘general’ education system, special education supports the widespread belief that school failure is intrinsic to those students who have been diagnosed with ‘special educational needs’ (ibid).*

They point out that growth in the identification of SEN has led to an unsustainable increase in public expenditure on special education. However, ‘student



disengagement, referral to off-site education settings and educational failure remain intransigent' (ibid.).

The conceptual framework for the Organisation of Provision project (European Agency, 2013a) supports the need for system change to move from a deficit (needs-based) model of disability, which locates the problem within the learner, to a model that considers the rights of learners within education, ensuring that all actively participate in the learning process. This highlights the need to move from compensatory approaches and organisation of provision in terms of individual support to a consideration of how systems of support can be organised to make mainstream schools more capable of meeting the requirements of all learners for a quality education – preventing failure rather than taking 'remedial' action.

Such a move requires legislation underpinned by a fundamental commitment to ensuring each learner's right to inclusive and equitable educational opportunities and policy that provides a clear vision of inclusive education as an approach for improving the quality of education for all learners. It requires leaders at all levels who are prepared to disrupt the dominant discourse in order to actively promote inclusion. Fraser and Shields (2010) point out that many long-held assumptions about people, their behaviour and capabilities emerge from taken-for-granted beliefs held by dominant groups in society. They shape educational practice in ways that often exclude members of minority groups by perpetuating a 'cult of normalcy' (ibid., p. 7) that assumes that there are certain acceptable ways to fulfil different roles – and that there are some who do not fit these normative patterns. Rather than recognising difference and uniqueness, terms used tend to be negative – such as 'impaired', 'defective' and 'deficient'. Unless such practice is challenged, such discourse can continue – even alongside a rights discourse.

The Agency has produced a resource for developing collaborative policy and practice. It supports decision-makers at national and local levels to engage in a dialogue with all stakeholders about the meaning of inclusive education and the organisation of provision. The resource is called Increasing Inclusive Capability – please refer to: [www.european-agency.org/agency-projects/increasing-inclusive-capability](http://www.european-agency.org/agency-projects/increasing-inclusive-capability)

### **Monitoring inclusive education**

Without a clear understanding of what is meant by inclusive education, it is difficult – if not impossible – to monitor inclusive development and progress within schools/systems in moving towards any goals set in this field.

With regard to learners with disabilities, in particular, effective monitoring is a requirement of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2006). Mont notes that tools exist to 'try and



consolidate that information in a way that can be used to characterize, and subsequently monitor, a school system's degree of inclusion' (2014, p. 14). He points out that the main goal is to recognise the barriers to inclusion, as this is essential to support the identification of the policy levers that can be employed to overcome them. Such tools include work by UNICEF and frameworks developed in Serbia and in South Africa (all described in Mont, 2014). The *Index for Inclusion* (Booth and Ainscow, 2011) has also been widely used as the basis for further developments (e.g. Alberta Government, 2013). Other relevant examples include: from North America, Jorgensen et al., 2012 and Florida Inclusion Network, 2013; the Zero Project in the Pacific Region (Sharma et al., 2016); and evaluation indicators from New Zealand (Education Review Office, 2015).

Agency work in this area (Kyriazopoulou and Weber, 2009) suggested the need to measure inclusive education on three levels – macro (jurisdictions, nations, regions), meso (groups of schools, communities) and micro (classroom, individuals) and introduced the framework of inputs, processes and outcomes. Loreman et al. (2014) have further developed these ideas to provide a conceptual frame from which specific indicators for use in international contexts can be developed. Importantly, Loreman et al. stress that there is no 'quick fix'. They say that to present a definitive list of indicators would be to 'obscure the complexities found at the local level with respect to cultural, social, religious and other contextual differences' (2014, p. 182).

More recently, the Agency published an 'Ecosystem Model of Inclusive Early Childhood Education' (European Agency, 2016a). It was inspired by Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1988, 1989; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994) and drew on a structure-process-outcome model (Pianta et al., 2009). This model sees the process of development and learning as being created by interactions between the learner and their surrounding environments and sets out the structures and processes that influence participation.

This model has now been developed in light of findings from the Agency's Organisation of Provision to Support Inclusive Education project (European Agency 2013a, 2014) and the Raising the Achievement of All Learners in Inclusive Education project (European Agency, 2016b). It is considered to apply to all learners, across all ages/phases of education. The model is presented in full in the final section of this report.

## **Summary**

This chapter has centred upon the 1<sup>st</sup> Standard: *Inclusive education is defined by all stakeholders as an approach for improving the quality of education of all learners.* It



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has examined relevant research in relation to the core issue: *The clarity and common understanding of inclusive education shared by all stakeholders.*

This chapter has emphasised the importance of clarifying the concept of inclusive education, as recommended in the 2015 review of inclusive education in Iceland (Mennta- og menningarmálaráðuneytið, 2015). It is essential that all stakeholders – across the education sector and beyond – become aware that inclusive education is about quality and equity, not about placement or learners with ‘diagnosed needs’. It is also essential that stakeholders are aware of the implications if such clarity is not achieved and any misunderstandings are not challenged.

Extensive dialogue and further research will be needed to achieve this shared understanding and to ensure that the education system assumes responsibility for *all* learners. Smyth argues that: ‘social change of any consequence comes through collective commitment to ideas’ (2013, pp. 119–120).

The research presented here shows that learner diversity can provide a catalyst for innovation (Ainscow, 2016) and act as a stimulus for a move from individualisation for some, to effective personalisation for all.



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## 2. LEGISLATION AND POLICY FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

In the Icelandic governmental system, there is a low level of centralisation and the 74 local authorities play an important role. The Parliament (Althingi) is responsible for education, under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. However, municipalities are responsible for the operation of schools at pre-school and compulsory level and are free to make decisions about school organisation and school policy.

Municipalities have no administrative responsibilities at the upper-secondary level. Schools in this phase have a high level of autonomy, although goals and learning outcomes are defined centrally.

A fundamental principle of the Icelandic education system is that everyone should have equal access to education, irrespective of sex, economic status, geographic location, religion, disability and cultural or social background. This principle is stated in the Constitution of the Republic of Iceland (Government of Iceland, 1944) and in the legislation pertaining to the various educational levels. The Icelandic education system has much in common with other Nordic countries, which have retained some of the characteristics stemming from social democracy, despite recent changes aimed at increased freedom of choice, competitiveness and effectiveness (Arnesen and Lundahl, 2006), in turn leading to greater self-interest (Telhaug et al., 2006).

The legislation comprises the following: the Preschool Act (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2008a), the Compulsory School Act (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2008b), the Upper Secondary Education Act (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2008c), the Act on the education and recruitment of teachers and administrators of preschools, compulsory schools and upper secondary schools (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2008d) and the Act on educational and vocational counsellors<sup>1</sup> (2009).

According to the laws that govern different educational levels, pupils with disabilities at pre-school, compulsory and upper-secondary school levels are entitled to the same education as other pupils.

Pupils have the right to have their special needs met in inclusive compulsory schools. Municipalities must ensure that specialist services are provided. Regulation no. 584/2010 on specialist services for pre-schools and compulsory schools (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2010a) sets out the services that should be provided.

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<sup>1</sup> Further information is available from: [www.erasmusplus.is/media/euroguidance/Educational-and-vocational-guidance-in-Iceland.pdf](http://www.erasmusplus.is/media/euroguidance/Educational-and-vocational-guidance-in-Iceland.pdf)



The Upper Secondary Education Act (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2008c) states that pupils with special needs shall be provided with instruction and special study support. Specialised assistance and appropriate facilities should be provided as considered necessary by the Ministry of Education. Pupils with special needs should study with other pupils, but many schools offer four-year programmes for pupils with disabilities who are provided with education according to IEPs.

According to the Ordinance on Special Education no. 585/2010 (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2010b), it is the responsibility of special education teachers to make IEPs for pupils with disabilities and organise the teaching in co-operation with parents/guardians. These education plans are generally reviewed at least annually. This applies to pre-school, compulsory and upper-secondary school level, and to special units within schools.

In upper-secondary, a new regulation for learners with special needs no. 230/2012 (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012a) aims to ensure that all learners have equal opportunities to education and that their educational, physical, social and emotional needs are met. It also ensures that these learners have broad learning opportunities, mentoring and support in a motivating learning environment and suitable facilities.

## **International instruments**

### ***United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)***

In October 2013, Iceland became one of the first states to incorporate the UNCRC (United Nations, 1989) (ratified in 1992) into national law, which was then adopted unanimously in the Icelandic Parliament – an important milestone in ensuring children’s rights in Iceland.

Children in Iceland generally enjoy good material and environmental well-being conditions, although 11.6% live in workless households – above the OECD average of 9.5% (OECD, 2016a). The majority of children are well provided for and enjoy a very good social and family environment. The life satisfaction of Icelandic children overall (including satisfaction with school) is among the highest in the OECD. However, social problems impact on some children and there are inequalities in health status (ibid.).

In the Icelandic Human Rights Centre, Save the Children Iceland and UNICEF report (2011) the work of the ‘Children’s House’ was noted as benefiting the rights of children and also as an example of effective multi-disciplinary practice. The Children’s House was established in 1998 to enable child protection services, the medical professions, law enforcement, prosecution and judges to work together to



investigate cases of suspected sexual abuse and other violence against children and contribute to more child-friendly judicial processes.

Save the Children Iceland has provided educational materials for compulsory schools (6–16) in compliance with Article 42 of the UNCRC. Iceland has also established a Youth Council in line with Articles 12 and 13 of the UNCRC.

The *Inclusion Europe report on the UNCRC for children with intellectual disabilities* (Latimier and Šiška, 2011) provides an overview of 22 countries. It notes that access to mainstream education for learners with intellectual disabilities in general is still rather modest. Significant shortcomings identified include a lack of educational opportunities, inadequacy in the work of support staff and teaching staff and/or discrimination based on intellectual disability. In addition, insufficient support in mainstream schools and the lack of trained staff and resources can lead to these learners moving back and forth between mainstream and segregated schools. Restricted access to mainstream education at secondary level and the absence of support in the transition between compulsory and secondary education are also crucial factors which often contribute to the disruption of the education of learners with intellectual disabilities compared to other learners. While Iceland is not specifically referred to in this report, the Report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (Office of the Ombudsman for Children in Iceland, 2010) highlights similar issues.

The report highlights in particular:

- *Children with disabilities and long-term illnesses (Article 23)*. There is no formally approved overall strategy in this area. Budgetary allocations are not based on regular assessments of the need for services, as is provided for by law.
- *Assistive equipment (Article 2)*. The Ombudsman has received information that children with disabilities do not always enjoy the same rights as other children. For example, when the parents of a child do not live together, the social security subsidy covers the purchase of equipment for the home of one parent only. This can restrict the child's right to have access to both parents.
- *Psychological services at healthcare centres (Article 2)*. The Ombudsman for Children has noted that healthcare centres do not always offer comparable services for children. For example, while free psychological services are offered to children at certain healthcare centres in the greater Reykjavík area, children who live in other areas must find such support elsewhere and pay in full.
- *Services for children with behavioural and mental disorders*. Although the waiting list for services was shortened following an action plan in 2007,



demand has again grown since the economic crisis. Some children wait up to a year to access treatment. Overall, the roles of schools, healthcare centres, and social services need further clarification. Communication between services also requires improvement along with evaluation of the effectiveness of services.

- *Children with ADHD.* The Centre for Child Development and Behaviour is a centre of expertise for children with ADHD and their parents. However, services are only available to children up to the age of 12. Moreover, while the Centre aims to serve the whole country, it generally works only within the Reykjavík area. The Ombudsman for Children considers that young people with ADHD should receive the same service, especially as the teenage years can be particularly difficult.
- *Accommodation for children with special needs (Article 28 – Education).* Article 17 of the Compulsory School Act states that learners are entitled to have their academic needs met in public compulsory schools, ‘without separation and irrespective of their physical and mental capacities’ (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2008b). The Ombudsman for Children is concerned that, due to financial constraints, services to children with special needs will be cut back and it may not be possible to guarantee access and accommodation for these children.
- *Learners’ well-being in school.* The Compulsory School Act (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2008b), points to the role of the school in ensuring learners’ general welfare and security. The National Curriculum Guide for compulsory schools requires a strategy for responding to bullying in every school (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012b). Information provided to the Ombudsman for Children suggests that children are subjected to serious bullying and that action taken by the school authorities is unsatisfactory. All parties within the school community school take responsibility and ensure that children feel safe and secure in school.
- *Equalisation subsidy.* Article 32 of the Upper Secondary Education Act (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2008c) highlights the entitlement of all people to attend school until age 18. In order to enable learners who live a long distance from an upper-secondary school to attend, the State provides equalisation subsidies. However, only learners who are Icelandic citizens, citizens of countries within the European Economic Area, or citizens of countries with which Iceland has concluded international agreements are entitled to such subsidies. This means that a small group of learners who do not come from the abovementioned countries do not receive the subsidy, even though they have lived in Iceland for many years and attended



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compulsory school there. The rules on the allocation of this subsidy discriminate on the basis of nationality and violate Article 2 of the Convention. This also serves as a barrier to the reduction of the dropout rate among immigrants.

### ***United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)***

Iceland signed the UNCRPD in March 2007. In September 2016, the Parliament unanimously adopted the proposal to ratify the Convention and the Optional Protocol by the end of 2017. A number of amendments have been made to Icelandic law to prepare for ratification of the Convention. However, further amendments may be needed to ensure that Icelandic law is fully aligned with the Convention on elections, law protection and personalised assistance.

The UNCRPD is potentially a powerful instrument in progressing the inclusive education agenda. It gives a legal basis to inclusive education, moving beyond the debates about the benefits – or otherwise – of such an education system.

Article 24 of the UNCRPD confirms the right of people with disabilities to an inclusive education without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity. It requires States Parties to ensure (by law) an inclusive education system at all levels, including lifelong learning. Core elements of Article 24 include the establishment of the principle of non-discrimination and the emphasis on achieving a common learning environment that guarantees the presence, participation and development of people with disabilities. Parties to the Convention are also required to provide reasonable accommodation to learners with disabilities of all ages throughout the education system.

The European Foundation Centre (2010) produced a report for the European Commission Directorate-General Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. It recommended that States Parties should:

- Carry out a screening exercise to ensure that legislation is in place to promote the right to education for people with disabilities of all ages, and is directed at providing equal educational opportunities at all levels of education (primary, secondary, general tertiary education, academic, vocational training, adult education, lifelong learning, or other).
- Ensure that legislation advances inclusive education systems that allow for learners with disabilities to learn alongside their peers in inclusive schools (at the primary and secondary school levels), for example through IEPs.
- Adopt specific measures to ensure people with disabilities are not excluded from the general education system. Specific measures may include the



development or strengthening of laws and policies enabling people with disabilities to reach their fullest potential in mainstream educational settings.

- Ensure that legislation provides that people with disabilities should benefit from reasonable accommodation to facilitate their ability to learn in general education settings. Legislation should also provide for provisions of individual support for people with disabilities to reach their fullest potential in the classroom. Legislation should further require that people with disabilities have the right to receive education in a manner that is accessible to them (e.g. Braille, sign language or other appropriate means).
- Employ teachers who are qualified to teach people with disabilities. To best promote inclusive education, States Parties should ensure that all teachers are well trained in teaching methods for people with disabilities and that teacher training schools are encouraged, and provided with incentives, to provide quality inclusive education training. Furthermore, States Parties should provide disability-specific training to all staff working in the education system.

During a visit to Iceland in 2012, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights called for Iceland to adopt comprehensive equal treatment legislation. He called for the establishment of an effective and independent national equality body to promote its implementation to ensure that people with disabilities, as well as older people, members of ethnic and religious minorities and transgender people, would benefit from stronger guarantees against discrimination. He noted that children with disabilities and mental health problems are a particularly vulnerable group and that specific services for them should be safeguarded from budgetary savings. Furthermore, immigrants – who currently make up about 10% of the population (Statistics Iceland, 2016a) – find it difficult to integrate into Icelandic society and are disproportionately represented among the unemployed (Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, 2012).

### **European Union-level legislation and policy**

Iceland is not a European Union (EU) member state, having suspended its application to join in 2013. However, it is influenced by EU policy and practice. Ólafsson (2011) notes that Iceland's 2020 reform programme provides good grounds for a direct comparison of Iceland's goals and the EU 2020 targets.

Furthermore, education is a priority area for international co-operation. Iceland is an active member of the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education and, through its participation, follows closely developments in individual member countries across the EU. Iceland shares many of the EU 2020 goals, along with some



benchmarking indicators, in particular the key issue of addressing the high rate of early school leaving (ESL) which, in 2012, was around 20%.

Regarding the UNCRC discussed above with regard to Iceland, the EU guarantees the protection of children's rights by EU institutions, as well as by EU countries when they implement EU law through the Treaty of Lisbon objective to promote children's rights and also the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU. Within this framework, the Commission has set out an EU Agenda for children's rights containing 11 concrete actions where the EU can contribute to children's well-being and safety.

As a signatory to the UNCRPD, the EU itself is also working on implementing the Convention, in particular to promote better co-ordination within its services, with the other EU institutions and with the Member States in this area of work.

The European Commission's European Disability Strategy 2010–2020, adopted in 2010, builds on the UNCRPD and takes into account the experience of the Disability Action Plan (2004–2010). Its objectives are pursued by actions in eight priority areas: Accessibility; Participation; Equality; Employment; Education and training; Social protection; Health; and External action to promote the rights of people with disabilities in the EU enlargement and international development programmes.

However, the European Disability Forum, in its *Alternative Report* to the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2014) found the current European Disability Strategy limited in scope and lacking funding for implementation of the Europe 2020 targets (European Commission, no date).

To support the implementation of the UNCRPD, the European Commission provides an online tool, managed by the Academic Network of Disability Experts (ANED) that provides an overview of key instruments needed (please refer to: [www.disability-europe.net/dotcom](http://www.disability-europe.net/dotcom)).

In a report on *Member States' Policies for Children with Disabilities*, the European Parliament (2013) suggested that the Commission should develop actions to support Member States in improving education systems for children with disabilities through the Open Method of Co-ordination or peer review, while respecting their general competence for matters related to education. The report suggests that action at EU level could include:

- *Development of best practice guides and recommendations on the minimum type of resources needed in mainstreaming schools, and on the role of parents and children with disabilities in decision-making processes affecting children with disabilities or the development of education objectives;*
- *Promotion of training for teachers on better understanding of children with disabilities' needs and evolving capacities, teaching methodologies and*



*handling of children with specific disabilities in a class together with their able-peers;*

- *Support for and promote teaching tools to help the inclusion of children with disabilities in schools and outside of schools such as the Council of Europe's COMPASS manual;*
- *Promotion [of] anti-bullying and anti-stigmatisation initiatives, including awareness-raising campaigns promoting inclusion of children with disabilities; and*
- *Development of quality objectives for education offered to children with disabilities and the promotion of initiatives to maintain the support for higher education (2013, pp. 142–143).*

While the focus here is on children with formally identified disabilities, inclusion is concerned with high quality education for all learners. It therefore requires consideration of all learners who may be vulnerable to exclusion – many of whom may not be recognised as being in need of additional support.

At European level, there is growing recognition of the key role inclusive education plays in combatting racism and discrimination and in promoting citizenship and acceptance of differences of opinion, conviction, belief and lifestyle (European Commission, 2015a).

The *2015 Joint Report of the Council and the Commission* states that:

*Education and training can help to prevent and tackle poverty and social exclusion, promote mutual respect and build a foundation for an open and democratic society on which active citizenship rests (European Commission, 2015b, p. 3).*

The *Joint Report* proposes as one of its six priorities for education: strong support for educators, as well as inclusive education, equality, non-discrimination and promotion of civic competences.

Van Driel et al. (2016) note that recent studies show an increase in intolerance and social exclusion, with migrant groups in particular feeling alienated. This is leading to social tension and unrest. The report stresses that education has a key role to play in addressing these issues and distils policy lessons based on evidence:

- Respect for others can be taught from an early age.
- School policies need to create inter-cultural competence – just bringing different groups together is not enough.

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- Schools with ties to and partnerships with parents and the local community have the potential to create cohesion, creating a positive atmosphere and sense of belonging which may also be supported by out-of-school activities.
  - Traditional teaching methods should be replaced by, for example, project-based learning, co-operative learning, service learning and peer education, which have been shown to help combat intolerance.
  - Social and emotional learning has a role in promoting tolerance and respect for diversity, but this could be better incorporated into the school curriculum.
  - Effective leadership and governance are essential and teachers need diversity training.

Finally, Van Driel et al. note the importance of mother tongue on identity and well-being and the importance of new media as both a threat and an opportunity.

The EU *Education and Training Monitor* notes that, across the EU Member States, the persistent determinants of underachievement are socio-economic status, immigrant background and gender. However, structural and institutional characteristics play a part, with access to quality education and ability grouping still disproportionately penalising under-represented groups (European Commission, 2015c). The *Monitor* highlights a decrease in education investment for three consecutive years – when, in some countries, the school-age population is increasing – and emphasises the need to tackle inequalities and focus on those at risk of ESL, particularly through collaboration and co-ordination. It highlights the following policy levers for inclusiveness, quality and relevance:

- Early childhood education and care to provide a foundation for skills later in life and reduce risk of ESL, to improve the integration of immigrants and develop literacy and other competences.
- Modernisation of school education through:
  - raising quality of teaching, early career support, mentoring, and continuous professional development (CPD) and through collaboration and collegiality, improve the attractiveness of the profession;
  - innovation and use of digital technologies through CPD and leadership;
  - languages in school education;
  - modernisation of VET – with good links to the labour market and more work-based learning.

While Iceland is not directly involved in this analysis, such information is relevant and worthy of consideration.



## National legislation and policy for inclusive education

According to the Constitution of the Republic of Iceland, ‘everybody shall be equal before the law and enjoy human rights regardless of gender, religion, beliefs, origin, race, skin colour, economical status, ancestry and other status’ (Government of Iceland, 1944, §65). This is stated clearly in the 2008 law on compulsory schools, which states that inclusive compulsory schools should seek to meet the learning needs of all learners regardless of their physical or mental abilities (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2008b).

Inclusive education is defined in regulation no. 585/2010 (§2) (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2010b), in accordance with laws on compulsory schools (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2008b) and the National Curriculum (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012b). Here, inclusive education refers to pupils attending a compulsory school in the local community or close to home, where their learning and social needs are met in general school work, with human values, democracy and social justice as a guiding light. The definition states that:

*Inclusive education is a continuous process which has the objective of offering a good education for all. Diversity and diverse needs are respected, as well as abilities and characteristics of students and elimination of all types of discrimination and exclusion in schools shall be emphasized ...* (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2010b, pp. 45–48).

The regulations also state that: ‘In an inclusive school, work procedures and teaching methods should vary widely’ (ibid., pp. 45–48).

While this definition is in line with those of international organisations (for example UNESCO, 2008) – including reference to inclusion as a process, quality education for all, respect for diversity and elimination of discrimination – it appears to be the lack of a common *understanding* that presents a barrier to the practical implementation of policy in many settings.

However, some inconsistencies in the legislation have been recognised. For example, the pre-school law (§42, Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2008a) and the law on compulsory schools (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2008b) discuss possible special resources within compulsory schools as ‘inclusive’. Gollifer and Tran (2012) note that national curriculum documents reflect a shift from a conservative approach to one that reflects a critical multi-cultural approach. However, this lacks consistency and can lead to inequitable school experiences (in particular for ethnic minority learners) due to cultural and language constraints.

Gunnþórsdóttir (2014) writes that it is not acceptable that in one document the right to education is stated (Compulsory School Act – Ministry of Education, Science



and Culture, 2008b), but restricted in another document (Ordinance on Special Education – Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2010b). She points to the need for agreement on the fundamental values laid down in the policy and clear messages to schools about their responsibility to find solutions and ways for all learners to achieve from their education.

While learners are entitled to have their learning and social needs met in an inclusive school, local policy and practice can vary according to the municipality. As an example, the policy from Reykjavík states:

*An inclusive school is based on acknowledgement and participation of all students. The curriculum is meaningful for all students and the learning environment is characterized by diversity. All students enjoy respect and the best possible achievement. Inclusive school work is a continuously developing process, all the school work is coherent and integrated and support is provided according to the needs of each individual (Reykjavík City, Department of Education and Schools, 2012, p. 3).*

The *White Paper on Education Reform* (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2014a) notes that disparities exist between municipalities. Worryingly, literacy in particular has deteriorated more rapidly in most regions outside the capital area. This highlights a need to consider factors leading to such disparity and work with municipalities to ensure equitable opportunities for all learners.

In upper-secondary schools, Leiknisdóttir and Jónsdóttir (2012) discovered that, while most offered opportunities for all learners in general programmes, there was a lack of appropriate materials and opportunities for more practical training. Recognising the need for reform, a major focus of the recent *White Paper* is proposed changes to upper-secondary education in order to meet the targets for ESL and ensure that more learners complete upper-secondary studies. Three priority areas are identified:

- Reorganising the duration of studies
- Implementing measures to tackle ESL
- Improving vocational study programmes.

Proposed measures include shortening academic programmes to three years, greater choice of exit points from upper-secondary education, screening for risk factors for ESL and improved support, funding and collaboration between services. Plans also include restructuring vocational programmes with an increase in workplace learning and improvements to counselling and career guidance.



In considering policy reform, Schleicher (2016), at an OECD summit on the teaching profession, suggests that the following points need to be taken into account:

- Policy-makers need to strive for consensus about the aims of education reform and engage stakeholders, especially teachers, in formulating and implementing policy responses without compromising the drive for improvement.
- External pressure can be used to build a compelling case for change.
- All political players and stakeholders need to develop realistic expectations about the pace and nature of reforms to improve outcomes.
- Reforms need to be backed by sustainable financing.
- There is some shift away from reform initiatives per se towards building self-adjusting systems with feedback at all levels, incentives to react and tools to strengthen capacities to deliver better outcomes. Investment is needed in change management skills. Teachers need reassurance that they will be given the tools to change and the recognition of their professional motivation to improve their learners' outcomes.
- Evidence from international assessments, national surveys and inspectorates can be used to guide policy-making. Evidence is most helpful when it is fed back to institutions, along with information and tools about how they can use the information to improve outcomes.
- Whole-government approaches can include education in more comprehensive reforms. These need to be co-ordinated with all relevant ministries.

Clearly, in order to achieve consistency across different system levels, some clarity is required about the specific requirements for learners who may require additional support. An example of such practice can be found in the USA, where the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA – 2004) requires schools to evaluate learners suspected of having disabilities. The Act includes specific requirements for early intervention and sets out a multi-level prevention system that includes:

- Primary prevention: high quality core instruction that meets the needs of most learners
- Secondary prevention: evidence-based intervention of moderate intensity to address the learning/behavioural challenges of at-risk learners
- Tertiary prevention: (individualised) interventions of higher intensity for learners who show only a minimal response to earlier levels.



Further requirements are set out – for example the need for a functional behaviour assessment for learners if they have been excluded from school for more than 10 days.

Working in the UK context, Ainscow et al. (2016) suggest a three-pronged approach to national policy:

1. A clear specification of the purposes of education, which goes beyond a narrow focus on attainment and implies:
  - the development of clear, focused accountability mechanisms, built on the idea that education is about more than passing tests;
  - the development of funding mechanisms which target resources where they are most needed, without placing undue constraints on local decision-making.
2. The creation of space to enable those who are closest to learners and communities to make decisions about how best to educate them in relevant ways – and that allow them to explore new ways of working in systematic ways, but without fearing the consequences if outcomes do not immediately improve.
3. The development of an intermediary layer able to:
  - interpret national purposes/priorities at local level;
  - promote the networking of schools both with each other and with other agencies;
  - learn from local developments and innovations and feed them back into national policy.

## Summary

This chapter has focused upon the 2<sup>nd</sup> Standard: *Legislation and policy for inclusive education has the goal of promoting equal opportunities for all learners*. It has examined relevant research relating to the core issue: *How far legislation and policy supports an equitable education system for all learners*.

This chapter has highlighted the positive developments in Iceland regarding children's rights, but also the need for further development regarding children with disabilities. Following the development of a shared understanding of inclusive education, it is important to ensure consistency in all educational legislation and appropriate linkage with international instruments, in particular the UNCRPD. To ensure effective implementation, it is essential to clarify key roles and responsibilities at different system levels in order to secure co-ordination and



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continuous improvement of the whole system that will benefit all learners and, in particular, groups vulnerable to marginalisation and exclusion.



### 3. INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN PRACTICE

This chapter explores the move from policy to practice in inclusive education. It first presents a short introduction to the Icelandic context and then considers organisation of provision for inclusive education in terms of teaching and learning approaches, curriculum and assessment. It finally focuses on some specific issues, of particular relevance to the Icelandic system, around certain groups of learners who may require additional support and also considers some phase-specific concerns.

As highlighted in the *White Paper on Education Reform* (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2014a), one of the main strengths of the Icelandic system is equal access to education. According to the PISA results, Iceland is among those countries where learner performance varies least between schools at the compulsory level. However, learner performance varies more within school than in many other countries, possibly due to the policy of including all learners.

The report to the OECD (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2014b) highlighted the policy on inclusive schools as a particular challenge. While there is general agreement that the policy itself is justified, school administrators and staff feel that the implementation is not sufficiently managed or funded and the policy has led to increased demands on the school system. The report notes that access to and operation of specialised services to schools is problematic, as there are no central criteria on the provision of services or on quality and equal access across school levels and geographic areas.

According to the Compulsory School Act (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2008b), municipalities must ensure that specialist services are provided in compulsory schools, determine the organisation and contribute towards such services. These may include support for pupils and families, for compulsory school activities and for school personnel. Municipalities are expected to emphasise preventive measures to avert difficulties and learner welfare should be paramount.

The amount of support for each learner is often determined by counsellors in schools or by the special support services of the municipalities. If a preliminary assessment reveals the need for further diagnosis or therapy, parents/guardians are directed to one of four main national agencies: the State Diagnostic and Counselling Centre, the Icelandic Organization of the Visually Impaired, the National Hearing and Speech Institute and the Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Department of the National Hospital. Each agency works in consultation with the parents.

Most large municipalities have one or more special classes within their catchment area, within mainstream schools. The organisation of teaching for learners with special needs/disabilities depends on the individual needs and the size of the school. However, it is the responsibility of special education teachers to make IEPs for



learners with disabilities and to organise the teaching in co-operation with parents/guardians. There are currently three special schools that provide services for the whole country at the compulsory level: one for learners with severe disabilities and two for learners with psychiatric and social difficulties.

A new regulation for learners with special needs in upper-secondary schools (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012a) aims to ensure that all learners have equal opportunities to education and that their educational, physical, social and emotional needs are met – also that these learners have broad learning opportunities with other learners and mentoring and support in a motivating learning environment, along with suitable facilities.

### **Developing inclusive practice**

The process of inclusive education requires the transformation of mainstream settings, as well as a reconsideration of the role of special schools/specialist provision (European Agency, 2013a). The Organisation of Provision (OoP) literature review (ibid.) states that change does not necessarily result from the application of new techniques or the introduction of new organisational arrangements in schools (Ainscow, 2007). Moreover, policy-makers often struggle to change schools by using new regulations and legislation (Pijl and Frissen, 2009).

The consequences that arise from such action is not real change – schools may show that they comply with the new guidelines (for example, by welcoming learners with disabilities into their classrooms), but only through minor adjustments (e.g. creating resource rooms and special units within the mainstream) and without really transforming the way in which schooling (i.e. teaching and learning) is structured.

As schools strive to improve the basic education that they offer, a certain level of support is considered the norm for all learners at different times during their education. In Sweden and Germany, for example, the OoP project found that structure is used to enhance the use of time and ensure that all learners understand what is expected of them. In Austria, coaching in study methods has been used to support all learners to engage in more active learning.

International research has concluded that organisational differentiation (or ability grouping) of different kinds does not provide the benefits that teachers intuitively imagine (European Commission, 2009; Persson, 2012). Elboj and Niemela (2010) argue for the development of interactive groups of learners as a way of promoting learning and turning learner diversity into an opportunity for academic success. Many others (e.g. Racionero and Padrós, 2010) agree that learning is a social process based on the dialogic and egalitarian interactions between learners and their peers, as well as between learners and adults. The INCLUD-ED project (2006–2011) compared different types of learner grouping (mixture, streaming and



inclusion) and found that co-existence in heterogeneous classrooms where co-operative and dialogic learning take place can improve academic achievement (Flecha, 2015).

Swann et al. add that ability grouping practices perpetuate social class inequalities. As they note:

*To believe in fixed ability is to believe in fixed futures and the limited power of teachers – to believe in the transformability of learning capacity is to embrace the following convictions: human development is not predictable, children’s futures are unknowable, education has the power to enhance the lives of all* (2012, p. 127).

Macleod et al. (2015) found that schools which have been more successful in raising the performance of disadvantaged learners in particular have first addressed ‘basics’. These include attendance and behaviour, setting high expectations, developing the quality of teaching and the role of teaching assistants. They have then moved on to more specific improvement strategies, such as supporting learners’ social and emotional needs, addressing individual learning needs, supporting effective data use and further engaging families.

In its work on innovative learning environments, the OECD (2013) identified core elements (learners, educators, content and resources) that can be subject to innovative practices. This might mean, for example, considering the re-grouping of teachers, the re-grouping of learners, re-thinking the use of learning time and innovating pedagogy and assessment.

### ***Teaching and learning approaches***

UNESCO-IBE (2016) point out that seeing the teacher as a facilitator, rather than as an instructor, makes it easier for diverse learners to be educated together, as they can work at their own pace, in their own way, within a common framework of activities and objectives. This section will consider approaches to teaching and learning that are likely to support the participation and achievement of all learners.

#### ***Teaching and learning in Iceland***

In the Icelandic context, Gunnþórsdóttir and Jóhannesson (2014) suggest that individualisation has promoted segregated thinking, seeing individual needs as individual problems. This subsequently leads to the conclusion that learners’ needs are not an issue for the whole classroom. These authors note that direct lecturing, followed by learners working with textbooks and predefined assignments remain the dominant ways of teaching (Óskarsdóttir, 2014). Despite the fact that a move towards more open spaces, increased co-operation among teachers, more thematic work, and the development of professional learning communities (Sigurðardóttir,



2010) have had a positive influence on educational practices, Jónsson notes that ‘teacher-centred educational authority is rarely challenged’ (2016, p. 89). Learners have few opportunities to influence work, input to the formation of values and goals or use their own critical and creative abilities. However, Ragnarsdóttir and Hansen (2014) have observed exceptions to such practice, documenting the development of a collaborative school culture in a school in Reykjavík.

Guðjónsdóttir and Jónsdóttir studied innovation education, where the role of the teacher differs from that of traditional instruction as learners are considered experts in their own ideas, with the teacher as guide and support. They suggest that this practice integrates naturally with inclusive teaching, as both ‘build on developing a capacity of action and critical and creative thinking through dealing with real life issues’ (2012, p. 153). In a more recent study of ‘emancipatory pedagogy’, Jónsdóttir (2015) suggested that innovation and entrepreneurial education requires teachers to relinquish control to learners and adjust their professional identity to this role.

The European Commission Joint Research Centre (2015) report on teaching practices found that teachers in Iceland used non-active teaching practices (such as presenting summaries of recently learned content and checking learner books or homework) less frequently, while a lower percentage of teachers reported letting learners practice similar tasks until they have understood the subject matter. However, less than half of teachers reported referring to problems from everyday life or work to demonstrate why new knowledge is useful. Iceland also has smaller class sizes than many other countries and seems to achieve balance of such practices. Research suggests that a good balance of teaching practices that combine constructivist and direct instructional practices is the most effective and adequate approach for effective classroom learning (Creemers, Kyriakides & Antoniou, 2013).

### *Teaching and learning in the wider context*

Information collected in the Organisation of Provision project (European Agency, 2014) shows that the types of teaching approaches provided to meet the needs of all learners – including those with disabilities – in mainstream settings are similar across the majority of Agency member countries. These include additional teaching time, small group/individual coaching and teaching/support from a learning support assistant (LSA). Team teaching or co-teaching (pairing a mainstream subject teacher with a teacher who has a SEN or learning support specialism) has been introduced in a number of countries. This strategy appears to provide a number of benefits. In Essunga, Sweden, for example, teachers interviewed on the OoP project visit found this approach invaluable as a form of professional development. They recognised that ‘having two teachers in the classroom forces you to improve and think about



what you are doing' (ibid., p. 14). Similarly, in Flensburg and other examples from Germany, team teaching and partner classes are used to good effect.

Dyssegaard and Larsen (2013) reported that the presence of two teachers during class has a positive effect on all the learners, if the two teachers are a general educator and a special needs educator. The studies which they examined emphasised the importance of instruction/in-service training in collaborative teaching. Teacher assistants were also found to have a positive effect on all learners when they are trained to deliver a specific intervention and when their role/function during class is defined and planned in advance. Dyssegaard and Larsen also found peer tutoring to be an effective strategy for including learners with special needs in mainstream education, with a positive effect on all the learners in the class.

Ó Murchú (2011) also studied co-teaching between general and special educators and noted the need for these to be equal partners. He examined the possibilities offered by team teaching to reposition learners previously withdrawn from classes and 'reframe' special provision. In Iceland, Óskarsdóttir (2014) found that schools using such approaches 'stood out', demonstrating better differentiation for learners and increased job satisfaction among teachers.

Following extensive research, Hattie (2009, 2012) notes that strong influences on learner outcomes include high expectations for each learner, formative feedback, teacher-learner relationships, teaching of meta-cognitive strategies and study skills, and finding ways to stop labelling learners. Other (medium) influences include peer influence and the effect of the home environment. He concludes that helping pupils to become independent reflective learners, involved in their own learning, is the most effective way of increasing attainment. The Education Endowment Foundation and Sutton Trust (2013) provide a summary of evidence for a wide range of teaching approaches.

More recently, Mitchell (2014) identified the following evidence-based strategies that have proved to be successful in raising achievement and participation:

1. Co-operative group teaching
2. Peer tutoring
3. Parent involvement and support
4. Cognitive strategy instruction
5. Memory strategies
6. Review and practice
7. Behavioural approaches
8. Formative assessment and feedback



## 9. Optimal physical environment

### 10. Classroom climate.

Almqvist, Malmqvist and Nilholm (2015) found that peer tutoring, direct instruction and metacognitive strategies have high effects on the goal achievement of learners in need of special support. They noted, however, that there is currently a lack of evidence around individual and co-operative learning for such learners, although co-operative learning was found to be good for learners in general.

Many of the practices and approaches discussed above are widely used in pre-school education. The European Commission (2014) notes that appropriate teaching methods, learning activities based on well-defined objectives, good communication between learners and staff, follow-up of progress towards the desired learning outcomes, as well as the involvement of stakeholders such as parents and the local community, all contribute to the delivery of high quality education and care. They found that many countries recommend the type of approaches to pre-school education that should be adopted – including finding the right balance between adult-led and child-initiated activities and between group and individual activities and also making reference to free play.

#### *What is 'good teaching?'*

Hart et al. (2006) introduce the 'ethic of everybody', explaining that there is no room in inclusive classrooms for learning opportunities that only benefit some people. So how can teachers take responsibility and plan a range of opportunities for all learners?

In general, there appears to be little evidence to justify a distinctive 'special needs' pedagogy. Florian has put forward the idea of inclusive pedagogy, as:

*an approach to teaching and learning that supports teachers to respond to individual differences between learners, but avoids the marginalisation that can occur when some students are treated differently (2014, p. 289).*

Florian and Pantić (2016) set out three key ideas that should receive attention in teacher education for diversity, to enable them to support the participation and achievement of all learners in ways that recognise difference as an ordinary aspect of human development, rather than seeing it as a problem.

- A new way of thinking about diversity – that every person is unique with multiple and overlapping identities.
- A focus on how people learn and how they learn together – and that people's capacity to learn can be 'transformed'.

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- Alternative ways of working – in particular using ‘specialist knowledge’ in ways that enhance learning without marginalising or stigmatising some learners.

Working with these principles challenges some of the assumptions and practices usually associated with teaching and learning, for example that it is not necessary or helpful to predetermine individuals’ outcomes for learning before teaching. The decisions that teachers make are rather more focused on ensuring high levels of engagement and motivation. Furthermore, this approach does not mean that individual differences are unimportant.

Baglieri et al. (2011) suggest that research in inclusive pedagogy should focus on the development of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) as a way of analysing all teaching situations that can be useful to teachers. What is paramount, however, is a setting where all teachers have a positive attitude and the belief that all learners belong in the learning community and are their responsibility.

Stoll (2015) summarises some key messages about what makes ‘great pedagogy’:

- Talk with pupils about their learning, listen carefully, and involve them
- Be open to new learning and challenges and do not give up
- Use a range of strategies flexibly to meet pupils’ needs
- Develop pupils’ thinking and learning skills
- Do not underestimate what pupils already know and can do
- Build in time for assessment for learning and scaffold it
- Develop a common language to talk to colleagues about pedagogy.

Work by Vieluf et al. (2012) on pedagogical innovation draws on OECD TALIS data to show that a combination of clear, well-structured classroom management, a supportive learner-oriented classroom climate and cognitive activation (challenging content that promotes deep reflection) has been shown to be effective. High quality teaching requires a balance between challenging tasks and content, learner-oriented supportive practices and teacher-directed practices that provide structure and clarity.

Håkansson and Sundberg’s (2012) synthesis of research results indicates the basic underlying principles for and qualities of good or successful teaching, which remain stable over time:

- Visible pedagogic leadership: well organised, planned and reflected
- A clear mandate for teachers and a professional pedagogic climate



- Teacher competence: rigorous subject knowledge and efficient use of this knowledge in relation to a deep understanding of the learners
- Safe, supportive and encouraging learning environment
- Search for evidence, based on a context-based critical reflection.

In terms of impact on learner outcomes, Coe et al. (2014) summarise six components of great teaching:

- Pedagogical content knowledge;
- Quality of instruction
- Classroom climate
- Classroom management
- Teacher beliefs
- Professional behaviours.

They also point out some practices that are not supported by research evidence:

- Using praise lavishly
- Allowing learners to discover key ideas for themselves
- Grouping by ability
- Encouraging re-reading and highlighting to memorise ideas
- Addressing issues of confidence and low aspirations before trying to teach content
- Presenting information to learners in preferred learning style
- Ensuring learners are always active rather than listening passively if you want them to remember.

Regarding classroom management, dealing with challenging behaviour is a key issue for many teachers. In the UK, head teachers surveyed in 2015 felt that behaviour management was one of the most significant gaps in the abilities of new teachers. Pétursdóttir (2011), among others, has highlighted the importance of functional behaviour assessments to understand the purpose of the problem behaviour in context – and therefore design an appropriate response.

Recognising the need to ‘enhance students’ engagement, improve attainment and develop the kind of learning habits of mind, or wider skills, which characterise successful 21<sup>st</sup> century learners’ (p. iv), Claxton and colleagues (2012) developed a model called ‘studio teaching’.



The seven dimensions of studio teaching, designed to increase resilience, resourcefulness, reflection and relating, are:

- The role of the teacher – facilitative or didactic?
- The nature of activities – authentic or contrived?
- The organisation of time – extended or bell-bound?
- The organisation of space – workshop or classroom?
- Levels of interaction – group or individual?
- Visibility of processes – high or low?
- The role of the learner – self-managed or directed?

Finally, work in the USA from the Measures of Effective Teaching (MET, 2013) project looks at feedback and evaluation systems that better support teachers. The project concludes that effective teaching can be measured and provides suggestions of ways to measure and gather feedback. These include classroom observation and use of video, asking learners and designing a balanced approach with a focus on learner achievement gains.

### *Personalisation versus individualisation*

In Iceland, the criteria for quality education in compulsory schools stress the need for schools to elaborate the national curriculum and local authority policy and also to adjust learning to ensure all learner needs are met (Sigurjónsdóttur et al., 2012). The need for an individualised curriculum for some learners is also included in the criteria, but this may benefit from some clarification and consideration of its implications for classroom practice.

An important consideration is that differentiation and individualisation involve the teacher providing instruction and accommodating the learning needs of a group of learners or individual learners, respectively. In contrast, personalisation entails the learners driving their own learning, being responsible for connecting learning with their own interests and actively participating in the design of their own learning (Bray and McClaskey, 2014).

In the majority of Agency member countries, some form of individual education/support/learning plan is in place. The plans usually set out pedagogical support, personalisation, environmental factors and co-ordination of services, along with plans for monitoring and review.

Very often, the IEP includes information about the medical conditions and needs of the learner with disabilities. Ideally, such a tool will also include all information that safeguards the social and educational inclusion of learners with disabilities in the



different phases and aspects of life (see for example, Agency 2009a; 2009b; 2010). It should therefore involve a range of staff from the school (e.g. teachers), resource centres (e.g. specialised personnel, peripatetic teachers) and, where necessary, local health units (e.g. medical personnel), as well as personnel from voluntary organisations. Most importantly, it should involve the learners with disabilities and/or their representatives and advocates.

Careful management is required to ensure that individual plans do not lead to an emphasis on 'individual' teaching or a narrower curriculum and that they support an effective use of resources by guiding support which is an integral part of classroom life. It is therefore worth asking the question of whether the IEP is necessarily the best way forward, especially in light of developments such as provision mapping.

Peters states that individualised/personalised education is 'a universal right and not a special education need' (2004, p. 42). Increasingly, a continuum of support is seen as the norm, allowing all learners to receive the right support at the right time to facilitate their learning. Arguably, all learners should therefore have a flexible (individual or group) learning support plan.

Pane et al. (2015) found that, compared to their peers, learners in schools using personalised learning practice make greater progress over a two-year period and learners who started out behind are catching up to national averages. However, Yonezawa et al. (2012) note the need for more research into personalisation, as many interventions and reforms have failed to provide secure evidence about what personalisation interventions are worth scaling up and for which learners. They say:

*It appears the field is becoming re-convinced that good teaching—teaching that is engaging, filled with high expectations, and that gives students a chance to feel a sense of belonging as well as become competent in a relevant area of study— may be an important pathway to personalization and engagement (2012, p. 22).*

Sebba (2010) and Baglieri et al. (2011) suggest that differentiation may risk reproducing the same limits it purports to avoid (e.g. adaptation by teachers, rather than transformation of settings and teaching and learning routines putting the learner at the centre). Ware et al. (2011) point to flexibility and differentiation to provide for diverse learning needs, but also highlight the issue of overreliance on LSAs as the agency of differentiation. Similarly, Persson (2012) reports on the risk of adopting differentiation, individualisation and ability grouping as ways of responding to learners' diversity in Sweden.

Increasingly, the idea of UDL is gaining ground, with emphasis on designing the curriculum and lesson content with options for all learners 'up front'. To achieve



this, it is crucial to personalise learning, taking inputs from learners and parents into consideration.

McKinsey & Company and GSMA (2012) show that mobile education represents a shift in the way that education is delivered and received through mobile devices and connectivity. This, they say, has the potential to improve education delivery and enhance outcomes by:

- simplifying access to content and experts, overcoming constraints of time, location and collaboration;
- personalising education for individuals, helping educators to customise the teaching process with software and interactive media that adapt to different levels and pace;
- addressing challenges that lower the efficiency of education, e.g. giving access to best practices.

### ***Curriculum***

The National Curriculum for all school levels in Iceland rests on six fundamental pillars: literacy, sustainability, health and welfare, democracy and human rights, equality, and creativity. The National Curriculum Guide for compulsory schools (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012b) emphasises that all learners have equal study opportunities and a chance to select subjects and learning approaches for their own education. The objectives and practice of study aim to prevent discrimination based on origin, gender, sexual orientation, geographic location, social class, religion, health or disability. All school activities should encourage a healthy lifestyle and consider differences in personality, development, talent, abilities and interests of each individual learner.

Article 24 of the Compulsory School Act (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2008b) emphasises in all school activities:

- Self-consciousness
- Ethical consciousness
- Social awareness and civil consciousness
- Social competence
- Physical and mental welfare
- Competence in Icelandic
- Learners' reasoning and critical thinking
- Balance between academic and practical education



- Play integrated into every subject and learning area in a varied learning and working environment and in extra-curricular activities
- Preparation of both sexes equally for active participation in society
- Preparation for further studies and employment through systematic vocational and study counselling.

Recent reforms emphasise equal status for academic, arts and vocational studies. The setting of a fundamental literacy target has led to a proposal for increased time to be allocated to the teaching of Icelandic and foreign languages, but this has not been implemented centrally. However, individual schools have some flexibility to plan activities in line with their needs and those of their learners. The concept of competence, comprised of knowledge and skills, is emphasised in the curriculum and certain elements of knowledge and skills are defined within each subject or field of subjects at the end of grades, 4, 7 and 9.

Ragnarsdóttir (2010) considered that, formerly, the Icelandic National Curriculum Guides for pre-schools and basic schools were mainstream-centric and that, while emphasising the equal rights of learners to education, they were largely centred on the ethnic majority. The new curriculum is said by Jónsson to be aimed at a return to democratic principles. However, he feels that 'schools are preparing students for a predefined future rather than setting them on a journey of transgression and discovery' (2016, p. 89). Experienced upper-secondary school teachers in Iceland, however, consider the decentralisation of the National Curriculum Guide as one of its greatest advantages (Reynisdóttir and Jóhannesson, 2013).

More widely, the Agency OoP project found that many countries are attempting to introduce more flexibility into their curricula. In countries where the curriculum is undergoing reform, there is an emphasis on access to the framework of the curriculum. However, there is also an acknowledgement that, for some learners, particularly those with intellectual disabilities, there will be a need to adapt content or even to use the curriculum areas as contexts for learning where the knowledge is not considered relevant/appropriate.

Both country information and visits from the OoP project show that a focus primarily on academic achievement/national standards may present a barrier to inclusion. However, the research generally points to the need to balance the benefits of flexibility against the need for learners to meet standard criteria for accreditation and certification, and to prevent adapted curricula from becoming too narrow. In some cases, time pressures created by a heavily prescribed curriculum may create further difficulties for schools, as teachers may feel the need to adhere to 'traditional' methods of teaching and assessment that may not be learner-centred.



UNESCO-IBE (2016) stress that in order to include all learners in the curriculum, there is a need to broaden the definition of learning used by teachers and decision-makers in the education system. They write:

*... as long as learning is understood as the acquisition of bodies of knowledge presented by the teacher, schools are likely to be locked into rigidly-organized curricula and teaching practices (2016, p. 22).*

Fadel et al. (2015) consider the competencies that learners need to succeed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. They point to increasing evidence that learners are more successful on a range of measures when they are given opportunities to learn an expanded set of competencies.

The European Reference Framework of Key Competences for Lifelong Learning was developed in 2006 (European Parliament and Council of the European Union, 2006). Countries are increasingly incorporating these into cross-curricular frameworks alongside more traditional subjects. In 2012, the European Commission published an analysis of national policies to support the acquisition of key competences. It found that most countries have in place a national strategy or centrally co-ordinated initiatives – most often for mother tongue, mathematics and science, although less often for other key competences (European Commission, 2012b). They note that further support is needed for the development of transversal competences – with the need to integrate them into assessment practice. It is interesting to note that, according to Muskin: ‘Developing competencies takes much longer and is more complex than delivering information’ (2015, p. 4).

To achieve a co-ordinated approach, the school culture must change to support work with a range of partners, provide interactive learning environments, attend to the social context of learning and put in place a range of assessment methods and tools to gain a full picture of learner competences (Cook and Weaving, 2013). There are real benefits to working with partners in the community, including: improved curriculum relevance, external visits, mentoring and real-world projects – with work experience and opportunities for external validation of work (West-Burnham and Harris, 2015).

Regarding the pre-school curriculum, the European Commission (2011) states that this should include learning and personal and social competences to meet the full range of needs – cognitive, emotional, social and physical. This is supported by other research, for example Soni (2014) who stresses the need for a holistic approach. Play is also recognised as a central component of child development and a fundamental way of learning (Nutbrown et al., 2013). Free choice and free play should, therefore, be part of the discourse as children learn from being in a group and should have the opportunity to create both group and individual agencies,



through shifting power structures, relationships, conflicts, negotiation resistance and subversion (Wood, 2014).

### *Literacy across the curriculum*

In Iceland, a national agreement on literacy followed the *White Paper on Education Reform* (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2014a). The agreement, prepared with municipalities, compulsory schools and parents, aims to improve the literacy and reading skills of compulsory school learners. This goal is that by 2018, at least 90% of compulsory school learners in each municipality will meet minimum reading standards. This figure currently stands at 79%. As mentioned above, the time spent on Icelandic has been increased in some schools following the *White Paper* and criteria have been set for reading skills that learners should access at each stage of the compulsory school. The *White Paper* also proposed that reading and literacy should be measured regularly from pre-school to the end of compulsory school. Furthermore, immigrant learners should receive additional support to enable them to reach the same proficiency in reading comprehension as other learners. However, these proposals have yet to be fully realised in practice.

All pre-schools and compulsory schools will adopt the literacy policy in line with the national curriculum guides and the policy of each local community. Learners will be encouraged to read for pleasure outside school and parents will be encouraged to support their children. The Directorate of Education is responsible for the project and employs literacy consultants to support local schools and communities.

Literacy is noted as a priority by the Teachers' Union of Iceland (2014a) and is seen as necessary to improve attainment and overall progress. This report calls for early identification of any difficulties with support being provided to learners, parents and teachers. The report also notes a need for more support for those for whom Icelandic is not a mother tongue, improved resources and reading materials and the education of more pre-school teachers to redress the serious shortage at this level.

One specific initiative in Iceland is the Beginning Literacy programme, developed by Eggertsdóttir, a specialist at the Centre for School Development (CSD) at the University of Akureyri (UNAK). This was introduced in 2006 as a model for literacy education in the first two years of compulsory school. Currently, about 42% of all compulsory schools use the programme. Sigbórsson et al. (2014) report initial findings which point to the positive impact of both this literacy teaching, as well as the wider professional development on learning and teaching and school improvement activity. However, the Directorate of Education criticised this approach in 2016 and further evaluation is needed to establish the longer-term impact.



Literacy is high on the agenda of most countries across Europe. Research in the UK (Sutton Trust, 2012) suggests that poor standards of literacy are the biggest single factor leading to low attainment. The EU High Level Group of Experts on Literacy notes that 'literacy is about people's self-esteem and ability to function and flourish in society as private individuals, active citizens, employees, or parents' (European Commission, 2012a, p. 5). It stresses that investment in literacy makes economic sense, producing gains for individuals and for society. The report sets out to dispel some common myths about the causes of low literacy levels and raises the need for joined-up policy-making and co-operation between a wider range of stakeholders to develop functional literacy for all citizens. Recommendations include:

- Creating a more literate environment
- Raising the level of literacy teaching and providing more reading support
- Increasing participation and inclusion – closing socio-economic gaps, migrant gaps, gender gaps, digital gaps and addressing the specific challenges presented by each age group from early years to adult.

Connor et al. (2014) note that learners who do not read well are more likely to be retained a grade in school, drop out of high school, become teen parents, or enter the juvenile justice system. Their report focuses on assessment, the cognitive and linguistic processes of reading, effective interventions, and teacher professional development to increase knowledge about how to help learners with or at risk of reading disabilities. Brooks (2013) gives a detailed review of the many intervention schemes commonly used for young people with literacy difficulties. Bornfreund (2012) provides information about the work of the What Works Clearing House on Literacy and the National Dropout Prevention Centre Model on Early Literacy Development.

### *The key role of information and communication technology*

ICT's potential for improving quality of life, reducing social exclusion and increasing participation is internationally recognised, as are the social, economic and political barriers that inaccessible ICT can create (World Summit on the Information Society, 2010). Recent advances in ICT can bring many advantages to schools and learners. Rose and Gravel (2012) predict a move towards flexible and customisable curricula that are well designed for diversity and say that digital technologies, and principles like those in the UDL framework, can play an essential role in these changes.

Nugent et al. (2015) report that ensuring that all young people have access to ICT, particularly in secondary education, was found to impact on achievement/attainment. However, this study also pointed to the distraction of gaming, particularly affecting boys. A recent study by Przbylski and Mishkin (2015)



found that, compared with those who did not play, teenagers who engaged in low levels of gaming (less than one hour a day) evidenced lower levels of hyperactivity and conduct issues. However, the opposite was found for those who gamed for three or more hours per day. They recommend that schools encourage parents/carers to limit the amount of time they allow their children to use a games console or portable games player.

Darling-Hammond et al. (2014) found that using computers as replacements for teachers in traditional drill and practice exercises has not produced great success, but that more interactive, proactive and teacher-supported uses have helped learners to greater achievement. They consider the policy implications of their findings and stress the need for 1:1 computer access and speedy internet connections, along with the need to consider that at-risk learners in particular benefit from technology that promotes high levels of interactivity and engagement and information in multiple forms. Finally, the report suggests that policy-makers and educators should plan for blended learning environments with high levels of teacher support and opportunities for interactions among learners, as well as technology use.

Straw et al. (2015) studied the benefits and challenges of the flipped learning approach to teaching mathematics. Learners undertake online learning at home and arrive for lessons with a higher level of knowledge and understanding. This frees up time for consolidation and practice, questioning and discussion, collaborative learning and individualised support which can increase engagement, confidence, self-awareness, independence in learning and progress and attainment.

Work by the European Agency (2013b) attempts to identify the critical factors that underpin the effective use of ICT in inclusive settings for all learners, but pays specific attention to learners with disabilities and SEN. The Information and Communication Technology for Inclusion (ICT4I) project analysis identified the following critical policy issues:

- Bridging the digital divide to ensure that all learners benefit from ICT as a tool for learning
- Seeing ICT4I as a cross-sectoral issue that has been considered and is visible in all relevant policy fields
- Recognising that the availability and take-up of comprehensive and integrated teacher education pathways in ICT4I is a vital 'pre-condition' for any related initiative
- Addressing the perceived gap between ICT4I-related research findings, evidence and classroom practice

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- Making both qualitative and quantitative data meaningful and securing its availability for monitoring and informing policy and practice in ICT4I.

The project also identified specific developments and opportunities in the following areas:

- *legislation and policy focussing upon rights and entitlements;*
- *ensuring an accessible and sustainable ICT4I infrastructure;*
- *improving professional training for ICT4I;*
- *empowering schools to use ICT as an effective tool for learning;*
- *developing communities of practice in ICT4I;*
- *empowering learners through their use of ICT (ibid., p. 7).*

The Agency has also produced an open educational resource to support the creation of accessible information for learning (European Agency, 2015b).

### **Assessment practice**

The Agency Organisation of Provision project highlights the need for assessment to be guided by inclusive principles:

*Inclusive assessment shifts the focus from assessment procedures that focus on diagnosis and resource allocation, often conducted outside the mainstream school, to on-going assessment that is conducted by class teachers to organise individual educational planning. Such assessment procedures allow schools and teachers to take responsibility for all their learners and to effectively address all their needs (European Agency, 2013a, p. 46).*

This section will discuss the challenges of developing such assessment practice and its role in promoting learner achievement.

#### *Assessment in Iceland*

In Iceland, according to the Compulsory School Act (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2008b), assessment of pupils' results and progress is a regular part of school activities. This is to monitor whether pupils fulfil the objectives laid down in the National Curriculum Guide (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012b) and to encourage them to make progress and determine any additional support needs.

Assessment is not standardised among different schools and teachers. Reports are given throughout the school year and at the end of each year. The purpose of assessment by the school and the teacher is to help improve learning and teaching and to provide both parents and pupils with information on progress. However,



nationally co-ordinated examinations are taken every year in Icelandic and mathematics, in Grades 4 and 7 and in Icelandic, English and mathematics in Grade 9. The Directorate of Education sets, marks and organises these examinations. Learners and parents are entitled to information about test results and evaluation methods and they receive information on the progress of learners from the examinations in 4<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade.

Gunnþórsdóttir and Bjarnason (2014) note that teachers in their study expressed dissatisfaction at having to include their less able learners in the standardised national tests. They found inconsistency between the expectation to use diverse teaching approaches and preparing learners for competitive standardised tests that were further felt to control their teaching.

From 2015, some amendments were made to the criteria for assessment in compulsory schools and links with the competence levels of the upper-secondary school, as follows:

- The four standardised evaluation criteria (A–D) have been extended to include B+ and C+ and to describe partial achievement of competences.
- Learners completing the compulsory level with a B, B+ or A are considered to have reached second-level competence of upper-secondary education. At the completion of compulsory school, the learners' certificate must use the A–D criteria.

At national level, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) data for Iceland shows a decline in reading comprehension between the years 2000 and 2012, both for native Icelandic and immigrant learners. However, while the decline in performance averaged 47 points for immigrant learners (equivalent to a whole school year by the OECD's definition), it was an average of 20 points for Icelandic learners (Halldórsson, Ólafsson & Björnsson, 2012).

Analysing learner performance in PISA by social status, only 8.8% of the variance can be explained by living in areas with low versus high social status. Outside the capital area, in towns with more than 1,000 inhabitants, the explained variance is 4% and 2.7% in rural areas with fewer inhabitants. Social status is related to the status of the parents' jobs, their educational background and economic situation.

Maths literacy has also declined in all regions of Iceland in the PISA results for 2012 compared to 2000. This decline is smallest in the Reykjavík area and the rural West and South of Iceland. It is greater in the North-East region, and highest in the Southern Peninsula, the West Fjords, North-West and East Iceland – where performance has declined by the equivalent of a full school year. This variance in trend across regions does not seem to be related to geographic location or population size, to rural versus urban areas, or to how advanced or developed the



areas are. There is no clear denominator for trends by region. The same can be said of the results of reading comprehension (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2014b).

No performance data has been collated for learners with special needs, or for public versus private schools, although data is available for individual schools. The latest data available on Iceland from the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) is 1999 and from the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) is 2006.

### *Assessment in wider contexts*

School systems in many countries across Europe and beyond experience challenges with assessment practices due to the tensions between curriculum and assessment (Garner et al., 2012) and specifically between the intended and assessed curriculum (Davies and Elliott, 2012). Muskin notes that: ‘Where these two functions are out of sync – an all too common phenomenon – the efficacy of both is in peril’ (2015, p. 5).

A number of researchers have identified formative assessment and feedback as the best way to promote achievement (Hattie, 2009; Mitchell, 2014). Formative assessment (also referred to as assessment for learning) can involve learners, enabling them to take a more active part in their learning. It is usually carried out in collaboration with others (Higgins et al., 2014) and can have substantial positive impacts on learner achievement (Dwyer and William, 2011). Formative assessment puts the learner at the centre of the assessment process and provides the basis for personalisation according to learners’ interests and aptitudes.

Teachers need to understand the nature and purpose of formative assessment for learning and summative assessment at the end of a period of learning and also the appropriate use of assessment tools. In a recent review of the curriculum, assessment and reporting systems in Australia, it was noted that, particularly for learners with more complex needs, there is evidence that assessment tools may be used as a curriculum, with consequences for both teaching and curriculum entitlement. (For further discussion, please refer to Muskin, 2015; Kefallinou and Donnelly, 2016.)

Andrade et al. call for a ‘balanced’ assessment system of formative, interim and summative assessment to support learner-centred learning. They suggest that:

*Students must learn how to take advantage of feedback to improve their work, deepen their understandings, and regulate their own learning. Teachers must learn how to individualize instruction and assessments and to make adjustments to instruction based on assessment results. Schools and districts must learn how to combine formative, interim, and summative results and*



*interpret them in meaningful ways. And policymakers must learn to create and use balanced assessment systems that inform but do not overburden or overwhelm those they are designed to assist (2012, p. 21).*

EACEA/Eurydice (2009) also report that ‘high stakes’ assessment can impact on teaching. If only some competences are assessed, teachers and learners will tend to focus on these competences, narrowing the curriculum on offer. They suggest that combining test results with other assessments enables teachers to have a say in decisions affecting their pupils and also addresses the concern that tests represent a snapshot of learner attainment at a particular time.

From an inclusive perspective, it is important that research focuses on the importance of evaluating the engagement, progress and outcomes of learners, in particular those at risk of underachievement due to disadvantage or disability in order to understand whether the support provided for them fully meets their needs. Douglas et al. (2012) note that international bodies tend to collect data that provides information about performance against given standards (for example in literacy and numeracy) or about learner attendance. They suggest that educational outcomes in relation to learners with disabilities could be grouped into: attainment-related outcomes, attendance-related outcomes, happiness-related outcomes and independence-related outcomes.

Claxton et al. note the need for a ‘multi-faceted portfolio of indicators rather than a single metric’ (2011, p. 150). Evidence may be provided by learner views about themselves as learners, teacher observations as well as other evidence from peers, parents and out-of-school activities – on a day-to-day, monthly, termly or annual basis.

In pre-school, assessment of learners’ progress is most often based on continuous observation, with a focus on personal development and language and social skills. The assessment information is often shared with parents and, in some cases, with primary school teachers to facilitate the transition from early childhood education and care to school (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Eurostat, 2014). Early childhood educators use assessment to understand learners’ needs, to observe and take note of the involvement of learners in their activities and their interactions (Pugh and Duffy, 2014). A major issue for inclusive early childhood education and care provision is how best to recognise, identify, assess and make provisions for individual educational needs while avoiding the potential damaging effects of labelling and stigmatisation. It is important that any disadvantages or barriers to learning are identified as early as possible to enable appropriate interventions to be put in place.



At compulsory and upper-secondary levels, where national tests and examinations are a common form of assessment, many countries operate a system of special arrangements that allows learners with disabilities to access standard papers through adapted materials (e.g. Braille, large print, use of signers, scribes, etc.).

Although a high level of resources has been devoted to such access arrangements, few have developed alternative accreditation for learners with more complex learning disabilities – or given consideration to what progress means for such learners. Work by the Welsh Assembly Government (2010), the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (2011) and the Education Review Office, New Zealand (2010) provides further information on this issue.

Muskin (2015) considers what questions education systems should ask themselves about how to review and revise their assessment priorities, programmes and strategies and suggests that they need to:

*... provide the 'right' strategies, conditions and incentives to motivate, equip and guide teachers and other educators to teach to the full curriculum and the entire range of learning objectives and competencies [...] rather than narrowing the curriculum primarily to 'teach to the test' and thereby produce rote learners and consumers of information with limited other competencies (2015, p. 24).*

### **Supporting all learners**

Current work on Raising the Achievement of All Learners in Inclusive Education (European Agency, 2016b) stresses that marginalisation and exclusion perpetuate social and education inequalities and that equity can only be achieved by educating all learners together. In turn, this not only improves the well-being of whole populations, but also raises national standards of achievement (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2010).

The OECD notes that:

*... successful school systems – those that perform above average and show below-average socio-economic inequalities – provide all students, regardless of their socio-economic backgrounds, with similar opportunities to learn (2010, p. 13).*

Nasir and colleagues put forward the view that diversity should be regarded as a 'pedagogical asset' of effective educational systems (2006, p. 498). This position sees all learners as equally valued, listened to and provided with opportunities for full participation in all learning and social opportunities.

Seeing inclusion as a 'mega strategy' for raising achievement (Mitchell, 2014, p. 27) does not, however, involve treating all learners in the same way. While personalised learning should be the means to provide high quality education for all learners, it



may be useful to consider issues around the organisation of provision for some learners with particular requirements – that present particular challenges for many countries, including in the Icelandic context.

### ***Challenging able learners***

A wide range of qualities, characteristics and processes contribute to high potential and achievement, so more able learners (also referred to as gifted and/or talented) are not easily identified. What is important is that all learners are provided with a high quality education that is engaging and challenging and enables their potential to be recognised and developed.

Reid and Boettger (2015) note the wide variation in policy and practice regarding gifted learners across Europe. Some countries have a long history of making provision (e.g. UK – England, Austria, Hungary, Slovakia), while in others (Germany, Switzerland) such initiatives depend on local area policy. For other countries, there is little explicit reference to this group of learners. Countries also vary regarding whether they consider giftedness to be a special educational need. In Iceland, programmes for more able learners are usually organised at municipal or school level, rather than at national level.

Country definitions of giftedness vary, but increasingly take a broad view that aims to allow learners with a range of gifts and talents to be recognised – not only those who are academic high achievers. In the UK (Wales), the term ‘more able and talented’ encompasses approximately 20% of the total school population. It is used to describe learners who require enriched and extended opportunities across the curriculum to develop their abilities in one or more areas. ‘In every school, there will be a group of pupils who require greater breadth and depth of learning activities than is normally provided for the usual cohort of learners’ (Welsh Assembly Government, 2008, p. 6).

The Welsh guidance also notes that:

*The needs of more able and talented pupils cannot be separated from the move to raise standards for all pupils. Research shows that schools that focus on the needs of more able and talented pupils improve the quality of learning and raise standards of achievement for all pupils (ibid.).*

The UK (Scotland) uses the term ‘highly able’ to avoid the comparative term ‘more able’. They point out that most of the terms used to describe this target group can be seen as problematic (Scottish Government and Scottish Network for Able Pupils, 2014).

Freeman et al. note a movement away from gifted education designed for:

- giftedness as mainly inherited and fixed

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- a small percentage of high achievers
  - a focus on acceleration and/or withdrawal for special provision

towards seeing giftedness as:

- mainly developed through opportunity allied with application and effort
- potential among many, acknowledging peaks of gifts at different stages of learners' school careers
- focusing on a wider range of abilities extending beyond the academic – including help for the disadvantaged gifted
- possibly requiring support for special social and emotional needs;
- encouraged by enrichment and differentiation within the normal classroom;
- a feature of normal children, who are in all other ways like their classmates (2010, p. 4).

They note a growth of a more democratic approach that is empowering to teachers, parents and learners.

In the European context, the European Council for High Ability (ECHA) aims to act as a communications network to promote the exchange of information among people interested in high ability – educators, researchers, psychologists, parents and the highly able learners. Since 2014, they have accredited 14 European Talent Centres in Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Northern Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Switzerland. In addition, they have also identified a number of European Talent Points – schools and centres that can form part of a support network. New centres are being established in Denmark, Greece and Southern Germany.

In 2013, the European Economic and Social Committee set down an opinion on *Unleashing the potential of children and young people with high intellectual abilities in the European Union*. This document records that the situation in the EU displays considerable room for improvement in the following areas:

- *initial and ongoing training of teaching staff to improve teachers' perception of students with high abilities and facilitate their understanding of these student profiles, along with the methods to be used for their detection and targeted educational care;*
- *incorporating into teacher training the values of humanism, the reality of multiculturalism, the educational use of ICT and, finally, the encouragement of creativity, innovation and initiative;*

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- *pooling of psychoeducational assessment procedures, along with those to assess social and family-related factors, which are used when detecting learners with high intellectual abilities. This detection should be carried out at an early age, but it should also be possible to carry it out at later educational stages, including in the workplace of those who have already got a job;*
  - *designing and implementing measures for educational care of students with high intellectual abilities or other exceptional characteristics, both inside and outside ordinary educational establishments in the context of non-formal education: educational enhancement programmes;*
  - *designing and implementing mechanisms and procedures to facilitate lifelong learning for people with high intellectual abilities, particularly when it comes to accessing and attending university (European Economic and Social Committee, 2013, p. 7).*

In 2009, the Agency produced a report on gifted learners in response to a survey of member countries (D'Alessio, 2009). This noted some crucial issues, including the lack of any specific legislative definition of gifted learners (although most countries have a general understanding of who is included in this target group); the move to a wider conceptualisation of giftedness; a shift in attention from individual needs to the environment and the need to modify classroom practice; a move from diagnostic tests to teacher assessment and wider information; the use of additional and extra-curricular resources and streaming to address learner needs; and the lack of mandatory teacher education in this area of work.

### ***Learners from a migrant background***

Iceland has experienced rapid demographic change over the past 10–15 years, leading to an increasingly diverse population. In 1996, 2% of the Icelandic population were first and second-generation immigrants, with an increase to 9.4% in the year 2014 and the numbers are still growing (Statistics Iceland, 2016b). In 2013, 11% of all pre-school learners and 6.5% of all compulsory school learners had mother languages other than Icelandic (ibid.).

The largest immigrant group comes from Poland (36.8% of the total immigrant population), while Vietnamese immigrants total 495, a figure that does not include children who are born in Iceland of Vietnamese parents (Statistics Iceland, 2011). The number of second-generation immigrants is rising and this change in demographics in Iceland raises questions about the appropriateness of the education system to accommodate the needs of an increasingly diverse learner population (Gollifer and Tran, 2012). In the Icelandic context too, Jónsdóttir and Ragnarsdóttir (2010) discuss educational policy and curricula in relation to the development of a multi-cultural society. They note that there is little reference to



multi-cultural or inter-cultural education in policy or national curriculum, but that good examples are increasing.

Learners from a migrant background may have particular educational needs, including overcoming language barriers, socio-economic disadvantage and discrimination. As a result, they are disproportionately represented among under-performers.

In 2011, the European Commission launched the SIRIUS Policy Network on the Education of Children and Youngsters with a Migrant Background to support EU countries to address the needs of disadvantaged groups. Essomba (2014) sets out a number of proposals for ways that local, regional and national institutions can reform education systems to close the achievement gap between migrant learners and their native peers:

- Integrating strategies developed by both school and community to create a sense of belonging and build positive relationships between families and the education system.
- Move to a systemic strategy with flexibility to respond to diversity, rather than fragmented provision and 'special' programmes. This may include training teachers to become strategic thinkers and establishing schools as learning communities where all stakeholders – including parents and community members – learn from each other.
- Work within an inclusive paradigm to consider learners holistically, involving them in learning that extends beyond the school.

In further work with the Migration Policy Group (2014), SIRIUS set out a clear agenda for migrant education in Europe with recommendations for member states and European institutions.

The OECD (2015a) stresses that the successful integration of refugees and immigrants requires a whole-government response – but points out that education plays a crucial role. It suggests the following actions:

- Provide language instruction quickly.
- Offer high quality early childhood education.
- Encourage all teachers to prepare for diverse classrooms.
- Avoid concentrating high numbers of immigrant learners in the same disadvantaged schools.
- Re-think education policies such as grade repetition, tracking and ability grouping which are harmful to all learners, but may particularly affect



immigrant learners whose language and cultural difference may be misinterpreted.

- Reach out to immigrant parents.

In a study of language support for migrant learners, Siarova and Essomba (2014) note the need for multiple approaches to language support based on fundamental implementation goals, but with flexibility to adapt to specific needs and country contexts. They suggest an emphasis on comprehensive, community-based approaches that involve parents and seek to quickly include the children of immigrants in mainstream classrooms and activities, and integrate them into society. Finally, they state that teacher training, leadership training and the professionalisation of everyone in the education process, including policy-makers, schools, teachers, parents, communities and learners, are key to success.

A further key issue raised by the European Agency (2009b) is the need to distinguish between difficulties relating to acquiring the host country language and learning difficulties – thereby ensuring that learners receive appropriate support.

Van Avermaet (2012) challenges the predominant binary thinking and concludes that diversity is now the norm – and that it is also an asset. Noting that the discourse around migrant learners starts from a deficiency viewpoint, he questions the current definition of some key concepts in this area of work including:

- Integration: unidirectional or reciprocal? Who has to be integrated? The migrants have to ‘integrate in our society’ is the common approach.
- Diversity: group or individual? Why talk about, for instance, ‘the Moroccans’? There might be more similarities between social class groups than, for example, groups from the same ethnic background.
- Migration: static or dynamic mobility?
- Language proficiency: condition or outcome? Language is seen as a condition to move and/or to transition. However, we can in reality only learn a language in context via the educational process.
- Learning and education: formal or informal? 86% of what we know is learned outside of school. Instructivist or constructivist approaches to teaching? Plurilingual repertoires – an obstacle or an asset for learning? (2012, p. 50).

Budginaitė et al. (2016), in a recent NESET II paper, set out a number of key findings and lessons for policy and practice regarding migrant children and ways to ensure their inclusion in education.



To summarise, it is worth considering the statement made by Herzog-Punzenberger: ‘the lessons learned from good practices in migrant education: they are tackling the more general problems of the system’ (2016, p. 19). She continues:

*The main goal is clear – achieving excellence with equity and therefore closing the achievement gap for children with migration background while having the highest possible level of well-being. This goal serves the overarching need of belonging to a sufficiently cohesive interconnected society that is able to faithfully promise a bright future for all (ibid., p. 20).*

### **Learners with mental health issues**

Across Europe, the ‘hidden disability’ of mental health is of increasing concern, particularly in adolescents. Schools are key partners in addressing the challenges presented that can be hugely costly and damaging to individuals and to communities. Learners with mental health issues and other SEN form a particularly vulnerable group and more research is needed on effective assessment and interventions for this group of learners (Rose et al., 2009).

The Icelandic Centre for Social Research and Analysis (ICSRA) was founded in 1999, in collaboration with the Icelandic Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, and municipalities throughout Iceland. Since its formation, ICSRA has conducted national Youth in Iceland surveys among 10–20 year olds, providing extensive data and information on adolescent and family welfare. This effort was designed in part to inform primary prevention through research aimed at arresting and reversing increases in adolescent substance use. (See: [www.rannsoknir.is/en/ipm/](http://www.rannsoknir.is/en/ipm/)).

In addition, in Iceland all upper-secondary schools and almost one third of compulsory schools participate in a health promotion project run by the Directorate of Health. A pre-school health promotion project is under development. In spring 2013, the secondary school health promotion project was nominated as one of the five most innovative programmes within the public sector in Iceland.

In Canada, Sokal and Katz (2015) write that supports for learners with mental health issues range from mental health workers, guidance counsellors and school psychologists, to segregated settings and family outreach. However, little has been done in terms of preventative work on a whole-school basis. They suggest that programmes to address social exclusion and social and emotional learning should be an integral part of the curriculum.

In January 2016, the European Framework for Action on Mental Health and Well-being was launched in Brussels. The conference report (European Union, 2016) noted that there is a growing evidence base for the effectiveness of school-based mental health promotion, mental disorder prevention and early recognition and



signposting for treatment. While stressing that schools have an excellent opportunity to implement interventions, it notes that teachers and school staff are not always equipped to meet this responsibility – in particular detection of early signs of mental and behavioural disorders. The link between mental health and ESL was also raised.

*The Joint Action for Mental Health and Well-being recommends that Member States:*

- *Promote schools as a setting where promotion of mental health, prevention of mental and behavioural disorders and early identification of mental disorders can reach all children and young people;*
- *Strengthen information about the levels of wellbeing and different mental disorders as well as coverage and outcomes of effective school based public mental health intervention;*
- *Enhance training for all school staff on mental health and consider schools as part of a wider network with other stakeholders and institutions involved in mental health of children and adolescents in local communities (ibid., p. 17).*

It adds examples of good practices, including YoungMind, Norway; United We Stand: Together against Bullying, Italy; Regulation on specialised services by the municipalities for pre- and compulsory schools (n. 584/2010, art.3), Iceland and the International Union for Health Promotion and Education (IUHPE).

A recent study in the UK (Clarke et al., 2015) also supports the effectiveness of universal social and emotional school-based programmes, targeted interventions for learners at higher risk, violence and substance misuse prevention programmes, and the adoption of whole-school approaches to bullying prevention. There is good quality evidence regarding the effectiveness of out-of-school youth programmes and family-based interventions that span the home and school settings.

Goodman et al. (2015) similarly conclude that there are potentially substantial benefits across people's lives if effective interventions can be found to enhance social and emotional skills in childhood, in particular self-regulation and self-control as well as social skills, and emotional well-being. Recent work by Downes and Cefai (2016) further supports this.

In the UK (England) the Children and Young People's Mental Health and Wellbeing Taskforce published a report (Department of Health, 2015) setting out the need for: improved public awareness and understanding, timely access to effective mental health support, a step change in how care is delivered – away from a system defined by the services that can be provided, to one that is built around the needs of young people and families – and finally, the increased use of evidence-based treatments focused on outcomes and training for professionals.



One approach that is gaining ground is mindfulness-based approaches. The Mindfulness in School Programme (MiSP), developed for young people in secondary schools has been shown to have positive outcomes in well-being, reducing anxiety and improving behaviour. Kuyken et al. suggest that, as a universal intervention, this approach:

*... minimises inequalities in accessing the intervention and the acceptability, stigma and social comparison that often arise when targeting interventions at subgroups of young people within schools (2013, p. 126).*

The MiSP is designed to fit into the school curriculum and be taught by teachers who have followed appropriate training. This should lead to a more embedded and sustainable approach. Overall, the findings of this study provide promising evidence of the acceptability and efficacy of the MiSP.

### ***Classroom support***

Increasingly, schools set out what support they can provide in provision maps (e.g. teaching approaches, interventions, resources, learner groupings and organisation and ways of 'graduating' support). This can provide an overview of possible responses at different system levels to meet different needs, identify resource allocation and monitor effectiveness. It can also support joint working between services, helping consistency and transparency. Rieser (2008) provides a checklist of reasonable adjustments which shows some of the practical classroom arrangements that teachers have found useful.

Any additional support should be regularly reviewed and changed, reduced or increased as necessary in consultation with learners/parents, as well as any external sources of expertise. Within each school, a balance of skills and competences (e.g. SEN staff working with others) should be available, with external expertise used to increase school capacity and not just to support individual teachers/learners.

Jahnukainen and Itkonen (2016) studied tiered intervention. They noted that the introduction of this approach in Finland was a 'bottom-up' initiative with 10 of the largest municipalities working with the Ministry of Education (Thuneberg et al., 2014). Both general and special education personnel were required to be involved in implementation, with municipalities and schools being given authority to design a model to fit their local context.

In many countries, LSAs are increasingly used to support learners with identified needs, often those with learning and/or behavioural difficulties. This may be considered as an additional support to teachers and may also be seen as desirable by parents who want 1:1 attention for their child.



However, in Iceland Gunnþórsdóttir and Bjarnason (2014) noted a tension relating to teacher aides who lacked skills to work with learners. Instead of sharing responsibility with the teacher, aides required educating and guiding. In a similar way, other recent research also questions the ‘conventional wisdom’ of 1:1 support.

Giangreco and Suter (2009) suggest that many paraprofessionals are not adequately trained, although they are often required to assume teacher-type responsibilities. Giangreco (2010a) says that overreliance on 1:1 support is conceptually flawed, particularly in assigning the least qualified, lowest paid, inadequately supervised staff to learners with the most complex needs. ‘Inadvertent’ detrimental effects include dependency, stigmatisation and interference with peer interactions. Such arrangements can also shift concerns such as teacher attitudes, engagement, curriculum issues and collaboration between special/general teaching staff without addressing them.

Mortier et al. (2011) report that, in some cases, learners themselves consider adult support to be a barrier. Such support may also be perceived as a form of control that does not allow them to experiment, but rather increases their feelings of inadequacy and dependency. Webster and Blatchford (2012) further note a ‘discourse of care’ and nurturing role of assistants.

Blatchford et al. (2012) found problems when teaching assistants took on teaching tasks, leading to a ‘separation’ of individuals from the teacher and a possible reduction in teacher-led learning. They found that many assistants were more concerned with the completion of tasks than with learning and understanding, being reactive rather than proactive.

Webster et al. (2010) recommended that:

- Schools should examine the deployment of support staff to ensure they do not routinely support lower attaining learners.
- There should be equity of access to qualified teachers and teachers working outside their area of expertise.
- Teachers must take lesson planning responsibility for all learners in their classes, including those supported by support staff.

Blatchford et al. (2012) found that, in some cases, support staff reduced teacher workload and stress levels, increased attention to individual learners and improved class control. In secondary schools, the study results showed that assistants could have positive effects on relationships, following instructions and independence in learning.



In other studies, LSAs were found to contribute to effective organisation and management of schools, raising the need to:

- examine specific activities where LSAs can support learning;
- train teachers to work effectively with them;
- ensure that LSAs do not reduce input from teachers and that they focus on learning not task completion;
- evaluate the impact of different ways of deploying LSAs to ‘add value’ and build capacity, working with all learner groups.

It will not be possible to establish one single model of effective provision that can be used internationally, as flexibility will be required for different contexts, schools and learners (Rose and O’Neill, 2009).

### **Phase-specific issues**

The priorities for the external Audit in Iceland included a focus on early childhood education and upper-secondary education where specific challenges had been identified. These specific issues will be discussed in the following section.

#### ***Pre-school provision***

In Iceland, around 19,360 learners attended pre-school in 2015, with about 6,000 of these being in the 1–2 age group. International comparisons show that this is one of the highest figures among OECD countries. While the pre-schools (approximately 250 in number) are mostly funded and organised by municipalities, parents do contribute towards the cost.

The status of pre-school teachers changed in 2008. A Master’s Degree was made the general requirement for gaining a teacher’s licence at the pre-school level and two years were added to the minimum teacher education requirements. Einarsdottir (2011) has expressed concern that pre-school may lose its special character because of these changes. In the past, teachers are reported to have favoured the social pedagogy approach, but there may be a tendency toward a greater focus on more formal learning. However, although the higher level of qualified staff should be beneficial, it has compounded long-term problems regarding a shortage of pre-school teachers. While the law stipulates that two thirds of teachers should be licensed to teach in pre-school, currently only one third of teachers have this status. These problems are further increased by the growing number of learners attending pre-school provision.

Work by the Agency (European Agency, 2010) highlighted the need to provide early childhood intervention services as early as possible, putting learners and families at



the centre. It also recommended the development of common standards of evaluation and monitoring mechanisms to assess progress of the following key elements: availability, proximity, affordability, interdisciplinary working, diversity and co-ordination. The development of professional competences was a further recommendation, with shared understanding between professions and disciplines. Finally, recommendations were made in the areas of respecting the rights and needs of families, improving co-ordination and legislation and policy measures.

The value of investing in high-quality pre-school provision is clear. An epistemological Danish study (Bauchmüller, Gørtz and Rasmussen, 2011) found that the quality of the staff has a direct influence on learners' learning acquisition in the long run. They found that significant improvements in learners' test results in Danish by the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> grade were related to a higher number of staff members per learner, a higher share of male staff, a higher share of staff with a pedagogic education and a higher share of teachers with a non-Danish ethnic background.

A recent long-term study in the UK (Sammons, Toth and Sylva, 2015) showed that attending any pre-school, compared to none, predicted higher total General Certificate of Lower-Secondary Education (GCSE) examination scores at age 16. It also showed that positive parenting experiences – especially a more stimulating home learning environment when children were young – helped to promote better long-term outcomes. An analysis by the Sutton Trust (2012) showed that there is a lasting impact of pre-school attendance for the specific sub-group of disadvantaged young people who were classed as 'high achievers' at the end of primary school.

OECD (2014a) similarly concluded that 15-year-olds who had attended pre-school for at least one year perform better in mathematics than learners who had not attended pre-school. They stress that countries have to work harder to ensure that all families, particularly disadvantaged families, have access to high quality pre-school education.

### ***Issues in upper-secondary education***

Everyone has the legal right to attend upper-secondary school in Iceland, irrespective of their results at the end of compulsory schooling and, according to the Upper Secondary Education Act (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2008c), can study until the age of 18.

Upper-secondary schools are funded and accredited by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. Schools are responsible for the admissions process, along with the Directorate of Education, under the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. They may make specific demands for entrants to certain study areas, but around 99% of learners get their first or second choice of school. Since 2012, schools can admit learners who live outside of the local area and there is competition for places



at popular schools. Upper-secondary schools can vary in size from around 2,000 pupils to fewer than 100.

The main types of schools offering upper-secondary education are as follows:

- Schools which offer three-year general academic study (recently reduced from four years), leading to the matriculation examination.
- Comprehensive schools, which offer academic courses and also theoretical and practical ones (e.g. those for non-certified trades, master craftspeople, etc.).
- Industrial vocational schools, which offer theoretical and practical study in the certified and some non-certified trades. These schools also offer post-secondary non-tertiary programmes to educate master craftspeople, but are few in number.

The *White Paper on Education Reform* (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2014a) notes that, following a six-year tracking of learners who registered for upper-secondary education in 2007, 76.9% completed the matriculation examination in just over four years. However, of those following other programmes, 23% completed the matriculation programme (in around 4.7 years), but almost 70% had not graduated at the end of the six-year period. This included around 55% following vocational programmes.

Learners with recognised SEN/disabilities usually follow a separate track, with special units in most upper-secondary schools that follow a specialised curriculum. A new regulation was introduced in 2012 for learners who are entitled to special education and support in accordance with assessed needs (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012a). This regulation aims to ensure that all learners have equal opportunities to education and that their educational, physical, social and emotional needs are met – also that these learners have broad learning opportunities, mentoring and support in a motivating learning environment and suitable facilities.

The poor graduation rates from upper-secondary schools are attributed in part to poor reading literacy skills and also that learners make poor choices about programmes that may not be well-suited to their abilities/aptitudes. Many learners also work part-time during their later school years which has an impact on their education.

The upper-secondary sector is seen as a challenging context in which to work, as teachers are also experiencing greater pedagogical changes due to the increased diversity of learners (Reynisdóttir and Jóhannesson, 2013). However, the benefits of more innovative practice are becoming evident. More recently, Jóhannesson and



Bjarnadóttir (2016) report how learners, who had returned to a selected upper-secondary school after having quit one or more other schools, benefited from an innovative pedagogical approach that demonstrated three main assets: supportive school ethos and teacher-learner relationships, an online learning platform and use of formative assessment with no exams. They suggest that approaches such as the use of less prescriptive resources, increased learner input, better connections to learners' lives outside school and more questioning and problematising the curriculum could increase engagement.

Since 2015, upper-secondary education providers have greater autonomy regarding the curricula for general education and VET. Learning outcomes are presented in a new credit system and partners play a key role in informing providers about the knowledge and competences needed for the labour market to make study programmes relevant and useful. These reforms are designed, at least in part, to address the issue of ESL.

Here it is useful to consider recent work by Green and Pensario (2016), who studied factors that drive differences in inequality mitigation. They examined the effects of curricular standardisation and parity of esteem of different study routes (academic and vocational). They found that countries where parity of esteem is higher and there is some standardisation in programme duration and core skills content, are better at mitigating skills inequalities. Countries with school-based upper-secondary systems can also be relatively good at addressing skills inequality when they combine extensive vocational provision with mandatory core skills learning and high rates of upper-secondary completion. Countries with mixed systems and a low level of participation in high quality vocational programmes are poorer at mitigating inequality. The authors suggest that this is due to unequal access to core skills learning and say that, to reduce disparities, it is important to ensure that access to learning basic skills is relatively standardised across different tracks, however these are organised.

### ***Early school leaving***

The OECD suggests that the high dropout rates in Iceland may be, at least in part due to a 'lack of relevant curricula, or a system that is not addressing well enough the students' needs of choice of studies and guidance at the upper secondary level' (2012a, p. 7). The report adds that 'their great ease of transfer between upper secondary programs and schools, can lead students to a sense of confusion and irrelevance in the education received' (ibid.).

A study was carried out in 2013 on those who left upper-secondary school without finishing their exams (MMR, 2014). The study showed that 21% of those who left were dismissed from the school due to breaking school rules (mostly attendance),



16% transferred to another school, 13% went into the labour market and 10% were due to mental illnesses. Of those who left, 58% were aged 16–20 years and 42% were then older than 20. A second report on ESL (Birgisdóttir, 2015) found that 790 learners – 408 male and 382 female – from 31 schools left school without completing examinations at the end of the autumn of 2014. In this case, the main reasons for school leaving were: going to work, apathy or finding studies meaningless, expulsion from school, attending another school, personal reasons or mental illness.

Increasingly, upper-secondary schools make systematic efforts to reduce ESL through counselling or by increasing the offer within vocational studies, as shown by the recent *White Paper* (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2014a). This *White Paper* proposes a rise from 44% to 60% in the percentage of learners who graduate from upper-secondary school. To move towards this target, the Icelandic government has prioritised certain policies. The planned changes include reorganising and shortening the time needed to graduate from upper-secondary education (from four to three years) and re-organising vocational training. In all upper-secondary schools, a screening for risk factors for dropout will be undertaken for learners beginning upper-secondary school in 2016/17.

Reducing ESL is also one of the EU's priorities. Definitions of ESL might differ from one country to another, and they depend in general on the data collection tools used to measure early leaving. However, only around one third of the European countries have adopted a strategy to tackle this issue (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Cedefop, 2014).

The literature underlines that ESL is a product of 'the interaction between features of initial education that are experienced negatively by the learner, and individual socio-economic and motivational factors' (European Commission, 2013a, p. 79). ESL has a negative impact on the future of young people, particularly regarding opportunities in the labour market. However, it also has a high cost for society as a whole, potentially reducing economic productivity and social cohesion. According to European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Cedefop:

*In the EU-28, on average, 19.7% of young people with lower secondary education at most are in employment, compared to 42.7% of young people who have gained an upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary qualification, and 54.6% of tertiary graduates (2014, p. 49).*

Male learners, learners with disabilities and those belonging to ethnic minority groups are more likely to leave school before the end of upper-secondary education (European Commission, 2015c).



As teachers are key stakeholders in tackling ESL, raising their awareness of ESL is very important, especially through CPD regarding SEN, multi-cultural environments and individualised learning, as suggested by the *Education and Training Monitor* (ibid.).

According to a Welsh study, hidden unlawful forms of exclusion (when a learner is ordered to leave school premises because of serious misbehaviour, but where no record is kept of this and parents or carers not formally informed in writing as required in law) are among the first factors to influence ESL:

*Exclusion from school is likely to have a detrimental impact on a child's life chances, dislocating them from their peer group, depriving them of access to the mainstream curriculum and exposing them to serious risks of under-achievement, and long-term unemployment and poverty* (McCluskey et al., 2015, p. 1).

This highlights the direct link exists between inclusion – understood as the practice of building supportive educational environments – and ESL. Evidence shows that ESL is reduced within an inclusive environment that engages learners and enhances their participation (European Agency, 2016c).

In addressing disengagement, Sodha and Guglielmi (2009) suggest focusing efforts on core academic skills, social and emotional competencies, building aspiration, supporting parents and an engaging educational offer. There is also a need to understand the tools for tackling disengagement – central policy levers, such as national curricula assessment and accountability frameworks, teacher education and then prescriptive and targeted interventions and final looser initiatives often in local contexts. Overall, a strategic approach is needed to address national policy levers and local policy contexts. Sodha and Guglielmi identify five barriers:

- The tendency to prioritise fire-fighting with resources channelled to learners with the highest levels of need. This leads to learners' needs escalating before they can access intervention – by which time they are often more difficult to tackle.
- Short-term political pressures that do not fit the long-term time horizons of successful prevention work.
- Unclear lines of responsibility that exist for many broad, holistic outcomes.
- The financial benefits of intervening early that are often realised later down the line and not by organisations that need to do the upfront spending.
- The tension between the desire to roll out strongly evidence-based initiatives and to foster local innovation (ibid.).



McCrone and Bamford (2016) examined positive approaches to learners at risk of temporary disconnection from learning. They report that young people involved in a variety of support programmes gained skills that helped them remain in learning and prepared them for the world of work. This included seeing the relevance of their school work to the world of work and improvements in the following areas: attitudes to school, attendance, confidence and skills in communicating with others and teamwork. While the support programmes differed, there were key elements that were common to all and contributed to their perceived success. These were: mentoring, a consistent dedicated lead on each project, group support, relevance to the world of work and flexibility.

In general, schools are responsible for the career guidance provided for learners. While this generally works well for secondary learners, only one third of European countries have guidance in place for primary school learners (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Cedefop, 2014). All European countries need to reinforce learner-centred approaches, using guidance, mentoring and individual learning plans or case management for the learners in the vocational sector (*ibid.*).

Further research shows how different European countries develop multi-agency partnerships in order to improve co-ordination between the different local stakeholders as a strategy to tackle ESL. France has, for instance, adopted a new plan (in 2015) that includes the mobilisation of all actors inside and outside schools, increased prevention, and acquisition of qualifications for early school leavers.

Hungary initiated an 'early warning system' for early leavers, while Romania has developed inclusion measures for children from 'at-risk' groups. Ireland also introduced measures to support transition from upper-secondary to higher education (European Commission, 2015c).

In Norway, the legal duty for local authorities to track and offer pathways back into employment and learning for young people up to the age of 25 has acted as a catalyst for the development of local networks of public authorities, non-governmental organisations and employers to fulfil this duty. Similarly, in Portugal, considerable weight has been given to alternative curriculum pathways, by validating learning to lower-secondary level. Equivalent validation at upper-secondary level might give second-chance schemes the weight that is necessary to broaden the educational marketplace for school leavers. However, compulsory school leaving qualifications are often so ingrained in institutional frameworks that such a move would constitute a huge paradigm shift in many other European countries.

Reducing ESL therefore cannot be done through isolated policies or practices (European Agency, 2016c). It depends on a multitude of factors and it is directly



linked to socio-economic disadvantage. As it is not a stand-alone problem, it cannot be reduced by one response:

*As causes of dropout are interrelated, achieving higher rates of completion involves complex solutions to a complex problem... [A]ddressing several risk factors simultaneously is part of the answer and success is more likely if interventions involve action both within and outside of school simultaneously (Lyche, 2010, p. 36).*

Recent findings by the European Agency (2016c) summarise the multiple strands of action that exist to reduce the incidence of ESL:

- Understanding the determinants of ESL at a local level through personalised analysis that includes the diverse experience of professionals and young people.
- Identifying at-risk learners, especially through detailed local knowledge of individuals and the different pathways to ESL.
- Acting to reduce ESL through a broad range of practices involving all stakeholders: learners, schools and families. Action should be taken throughout each learner's education, not only when school leaving is imminent.
- Reducing risks for young people with SEN and/or disability through global support that includes good transitions from one school level to another, family participation and opportunities to attend and validate upper-secondary education.
- Promoting inclusion by giving young people more opportunities in education, strengthening networks and aiming to make schools more effective.

Following up on the final point, the European Commission (2013a) identifies good practices in second-chance education regarding success factors and transferability. The lessons learned are summarised below:

- Partnerships are needed between second-chance and initial education, including common senior management, teaching and other staff working in both environments. Co-operation is also necessary around awarding qualifications.
- Multi-professional co-operation is essential in addressing complex challenges related to re-engaging young people into education – including, for example, career guidance and employment support, health and emotional support, social care institutions and cultural organisations.

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- Initial assessment should focus on learner strengths. Involving learners in decisions and empowering them to take ownership of personal learning plans contributes to the development of their self-esteem and confidence in learning.
  - Opportunities to contextualise learning with work experience provide an alternative to more academic learning pathways. Use of active learning methods, based on participation, learning outside classroom and group activities, avoid young people's disengagement from education.
  - The provision of social and emotional support is crucial and recognises that young people face complex personal situations outside school that affect their learning.
  - Establishing a safe and stimulating environment that addresses bullying and discrimination and supports positive relationships with peers, teachers and staff gives learners the opportunity to socialise, as well as learn. Flexibility in organisation facilitates participation and contributes to increasing performance.
  - Introducing arts and sports into the curricula allows learners to express themselves in different ways and provides opportunities to learn basic or vocational skills.

The report also discusses the transferability of second-chance schemes, noting the need to understand success factors to replicate schemes between different modes of education and different country contexts. The report suggests several approaches to reduce ESL. A transformative approach would, for instance, require adaptation/re-modelling of the entire school system. However, effective elements of schemes could be selectively adapted, especially through the transfer of practice.

### ***Transition opportunities***

Transitions between phases of education can be challenging and can have a major impact on outcomes for learners with the transition from school into work being particularly crucial.

*Making a successful transition through a high quality and valued pathway can mean a successful career. Becoming trapped in poor quality and under-valued alternatives can mean a lifetime of poverty* (House of Lords Select Committee on Social Mobility, 2016, p. 4).

Ebersold (2012a) notes that many young people are dissatisfied with their preparation for transition and that young adults with disabilities in particular feel unprepared for work.



Many countries have individual plans for such learners that extend over the transition period. In Iceland, a report by the Academic Network of European Disability Expert (Ebersold et al., 2011) notes that some support, such as with assistive equipment for educational and training purposes, ceases at the age of 16. After this time, individuals must request grants from the local Offices for the Affairs of People with Disabilities, which appear to be much more limited and restrictive.

Sigthorsson (2012) notes that, in Iceland, there is growing interest in the transition from the lower-secondary stage to upper-secondary schools, at least in part due to concerns about high dropout rates. He outlines several attributes considered to support successful transition between school stages, for example: thinking skills, deep learning, self-efficacy and motivation for learning. The findings of the study, conducted in four compulsory schools, found that the learning culture was predominantly shaped by teachers, who transmitted information from textbooks and asked questions that required recall and application of facts. Such approaches generally require lower order rather than higher order thinking, and surface rather than deep learning.

Rice et al. (2015) suggest that research and practice about transition success should consider both academic and behavioural adjustment, and school bonding. They report that some measures assessed before the transition to secondary school were related to how learners did in both these domains. These were psychological adjustment, self-control, learning motivation, transition concerns, and stressful life events. Consequently, interventions/approaches that focus on learners experiencing difficulties in these areas or that focus on improving these factors have the potential to support successful transition to secondary education in both domains.

A possible 'dip' in academic attainment following transition is a common concern. Problems experienced by learners can also include poor attendance, increased anxiety and disruptive behaviour (ibid.). Research emphasises the need for effective communication between schools to support learners and avoid longer-term effects on academic and psychological adjustment. For instance, West et al. (2008) reported negative effects on self-esteem and academic attainment and also depression at age 18 in learners who described their transition experiences as difficult.

Successful approaches have focused on familiarising learners with the practical routines of secondary school and addressing concerns expressed by young people, such as 'being able to do the work', 'losing old friends' and 'older children' (Rice et al., 2015; Evangelou et al., 2008).

Regarding concerns about the social aspects of transition, high levels of instability in friendships have been reported over the first year of secondary education (Rice et



al., 2015). The use of friendship monitoring and support for social needs were found to have a significant positive effect on academic progress.

A positive effect on academic progress was also seen where there was a focus on providing broad support to learners, for example through extended induction arrangements, environmental support in school and actively finding out about supports available at home. Further strategies included tailoring teaching to learner needs from the start, by setting for some subjects or by actively using information from primary schools. Parents can be an important source of support in preparing children for the transition to secondary school (Rice et al., 2015).

Regarding transition to employment, the delivery of career education and advice is crucial – throughout primary/compulsory and secondary/upper-secondary education. The House of Lords Select Committee on Social Mobility (2016) in the UK context observes that the way that careers advice and education are delivered means that too many young people ‘drift’ into further studies or jobs with no real prospect of progression.

The Mapping the Implementation of Policy for Inclusive Education (MIPIE) project (European Agency, 2011a) stated that monitoring learners’ rights in education requires information to be gathered on the transition opportunities that learners with SEN have from one education level to another, or from education to the labour market. Experts involved in the MIPIE work indicated that collecting data in relation to quality of education requires evidence relating to the whole context of a learners’ environment, including longer-term outcomes of education and learners’ destinations. This means examining the gaps that learners may face during transition periods due to: new demands placed upon them by the education system, eligibility criteria and procedures for support and accommodation, and new responsibilities they may have to assume. These gaps may have a disabling effect by overexposing learners with SEN to segregated settings, unemployment and exclusion (Ebersold et al., 2011).

The MIPIE project report suggests that school-level indicators could focus on the availability of transition support services, their appropriateness to individuals’ needs and their enabling effect in terms, for example, of needs awareness, ability to make decisions on plans for the future, self-confidence in decision-making and the ability to match individual strengths and desires with future goals.

There appears to be a great deal of knowledge about separate ‘components’ of transition – the different perspectives and experiences; different types of transition; different domains; and various factors (often separated in the literature into barriers and supports). However, the various elements and factors that interact with each other have been studied mostly in isolation. Transition to adulthood is a complex



phenomenon and this is leading researchers to study interactions of person and environment, as well as dynamic processes, opportunities and other complexities.

## Summary

This chapter has focused on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Standard: *Policy for inclusive education is effectively implemented at all levels*. It has examined relevant research relating to the core issue: *How adequately stakeholders at all levels are enabled to effectively implement inclusive education policy*.

The research reviewed has pointed to the need to move beyond ‘adjustment’ to whole-system transformation, with a clear theory of change, to ensure effective inclusive practice. This should involve close collaboration between all ministries and various agencies at both national and local level.

Research also shows the need for clarity about what ‘good teaching’ looks like in practice – and the roles of different stakeholders in teaching and learning. As the OECD (2016c) notes, there should be profession-wide standards and a shared understanding of what counts as accomplished teaching.

The importance of flexible curriculum and assessment frameworks that provide access to meaningful learning opportunities and recognise the progress and achievement of all learners has also been discussed. Teachers and other stakeholders must understand the use of different types of assessment information so that it does not distort classroom practice.

Inclusion can serve as a ‘meta strategy’ for raising standards for all learners. However, to bring this about, support must be provided in ways that do not segregate or stigmatise learners. Improving learner engagement through increasing relevance and active involvement – really listening to the learner voice – can contribute to a reduction in ESL, as can ensuring that the full range of post-school pathways are valued.



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#### 4. BUILDING CAPACITY – ENABLING ALL STAKEHOLDERS

The Raising Achievement for All Learners (RA4AL) project (European Agency, 2012a) highlighted that reducing school failure pays off for both society and individuals and can contribute to economic growth and social development (OECD, 2012b). However, too often access to educational opportunities depends on the learners' ability to conform. Learners perceived to be different are marginalised or excluded, further perpetuating social and educational inequalities.

Faubert notes that:

*... the idea that students fail because of their own personal shortcomings (academic or otherwise) is being superseded by the idea of school failure. The cause of – and the responsibility for – student's failure is now seen as deficient or inadequate provision of education by schools, and by extension, school systems. More specifically, it is the failure of schools to provide education appropriate to different needs that leads students to fail. In this way school failure is, therefore, also an issue of equity (2012, p. 3).*

This view of systemic failure highlights the need for capacity-building and support within the education system and within schools to enable all stakeholders to provide high quality education to all learners.

##### **Increasing capacity – providing a quality education for all learners**

In Iceland, research by Gunnþórsdóttir and Bjarnason (2014) found that, while teachers did not lack the competence to teach learners with special needs, they felt that school organisation and the educational structure, the lack of resources and external demands hindered them in responding adequately to learners' additional needs. These findings suggest that the teachers feel that external factors affect their control over the conditions within which they worked, creating a situation where they felt powerless. This also contributed to inclusion being seen as an additional workload.

Winter and O'Raw (2010) suggest that, to build capacity towards the successful development of inclusive schools, it is necessary to understand and acknowledge inclusion as a continuing and evolving process and to:

- ensure the availability of fully transparent and accessible information on inclusive policies and practices within the school for learners, parents, support staff and other people who are involved in the learner's education;
- identify and provide the necessary support for teachers, other staff and learners;
- engage in appropriate training and professional development for all staff.



They also note the need to:

- restructure the cultures, policies and practices in schools to respond to the diversity of learners within the locality;
- create learning environments that respond to all learners' needs to achieve the greatest impact on their social, emotional, physical and cognitive development;
- undertake a broad, relevant, appropriate and stimulating curriculum that can be adapted to meet diverse learners' needs;
- strengthen and sustain the participation of learners, teachers, parents and community members in the school's work;
- provide educational settings that focus on identifying and reducing barriers to learning and participation (ibid., p. 24).

To increase the capacity of the education system, therefore, a change in thinking is needed. It involves moving from compensatory and deficit approaches and a pre-occupation with standardisation and 'norms', to systems that develop pedagogy for all learners and forms of organisation that support all learners.

The conceptual framework for the Organisation of Provision (OoP) project (European Agency, 2013a) states that the inclusion process requires a focus on building the capacity of mainstream schools to cater for learner diversity, rather than distributing additional resources to meet the needs of selected groups. Specifically, in order to make progress towards a rights-based approach to learners with disabilities, countries need to move from organising provision in terms of individual support (often based on a medical diagnosis), to analysing how systems are organised to support mainstream schools to meet the needs – and fulfil the rights – of all learners.

Current Agency work on Raising the Achievement of All Learners in Inclusive Education raises concerns about the pressure faced by schools that are required to respond to the inclusive education agenda, while also responding to demands to raise learners' achievements and fight against school failure (Kalambouka et al., 2005; Muijs et al., 2011). The project conceptual framework, however, stresses the need to move to the implementation of inclusive education as a moral imperative and the recognition that a quality system has every learner on the agenda – always (Barber et al., 2012). Inclusive practice can therefore be seen as a multi-component strategy or a 'mega-strategy' for improving education systems and raising the achievement of all learners (Mitchell, 2014, p. 27).



The OECD (2016b) similarly reports that reducing the number of low-performing learners also improves education systems' overall performance and equity. They suggest that such a policy agenda can include several actions:

- *Dismantle the multiple barriers to learning.*
- *Create demanding and supportive learning environments at school.*
- *Provide remedial support as early as possible.*
- *Encourage the involvement of parents and local communities.*
- *Inspire learners to make the most of available education opportunities.*
- *Identify low performers and design a tailored policy strategy.*
- *Provide targeted support to disadvantaged schools and/or families.*
- *Offer special programmes for immigrant, minority-language and rural learners.*
- *Tackle gender stereotypes and assist single-parent families.*
- *Reduce inequalities in access to early education and limit the use of student sorting (p. 15).*

The OECD publication *Equity and Quality in Education* (OECD, 2012b) recommends that countries avoid system-level policies considered conducive to school and learner failure, such as grade repetition and early tracking and selection. They suggest that countries manage school choice to avoid segregation and increased inequities, make funding strategies responsive to learners' and schools' needs and design equivalent upper-secondary education pathways to ensure completion. They also recommend the following actions to help disadvantaged schools and learners to improve: strengthen and support school leadership; stimulate a supportive school climate and environment for learning; attract, support and retain high quality teachers; ensure effective classroom learning strategies and prioritise linking schools with parents and communities.

Such actions will enhance the progress of all learners – in particular if teachers are well-supported to become innovative and reflective practitioners with a wider repertoire of approaches to benefit everybody.

Dweck (2006) highlights the importance of a 'growth mindset'. She shows how a belief in fixed intelligence undermines resilience and leads to lack of effort in the face of challenge. Hart et al. point out that real equity in learning opportunities 'only becomes possible when young people's school experiences are not organised and structured on the basis of judgements of ability' (2004, p. 3).



Ramberg (2014), after reviewing a range of recent studies, highlights that ability grouping is especially detrimental for lower achieving learners. Recent work by Linklater (2015) similarly shows that inclusive practice involves teachers who:

- reject ability-based pedagogy and recognise the transformability of all children and young people's capacity to learn;
- attend to the individuality of everybody (rather than thinking about 'most' and 'some' learners);
- re-imagine ways of working with other adults and learners in communities.

Persson (2012) examined key elements that make a difference in schools and classrooms in the work with all learners. The results showed that focusing on goal fulfilment through inclusion gave a wider definition to the concept of successful schooling and changed the traditional thought style of the school.

### **Transfer of practice**

The recent Raising the Achievement of All Learners in Inclusive Education literature review (European Agency, 2016b) points out that, despite the clear benefits of networking and sharing educational knowledge, research evidence suggests that spreading good practice is difficult. This is particularly true in the education sector, where there is a series of complex variables involved in the transfer of good practice from one context to another (Auld and Morris, 2014; Bridges, 2014). Harris notes that 'while policy borrowing is far from a new enterprise, the harsh reality is that even the best policies travel badly' (2012, p. 395). Harris et al. (2013) further stress that the selection and implementation of school reform and improvement approaches have poor empirical evidence and are usually disconnected from the context within which they are enacted.

Bridges (2014) suggests thinking about international transfer of educational policy and practice as a form of teaching and learning. Similarly, instead of the 'policy borrowing' approach, Raffe argues for a 'policy learning' approach to practice transfer, which should be guided by the following principles:

- *Use international experience to enrich policy analysis, not to short-cut it ...*
- *Look for good practice not best practice ...*
- *Don't study only 'successful' systems. Studying only successful systems is not the best way to discover the sources of their success ...*
- *Use international experience to understand your own system. International comparisons can 'make the familiar strange' and help us to understand our own system ...*

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- *Learn from history. A policy learning approach combines this cross-national learning with a capacity and willingness to learn from the past ...*
  - *Devise appropriate structures of governance (2011, pp. 3–4).*

Importantly, Ozga suggests that what works in education should be understood in terms of ‘what works for whom and in what circumstances’ (2004, p. 3).

Becheikh et al. (2010) argue that knowledge transfer in education should be based on a social interaction model that puts the emphasis on both researchers’ and practitioners’ strengths and weaknesses. Universities, communities of practice or other agencies can produce knowledge. However, such knowledge must be made clear, understandable and easily accessible to its final users in schools (ibid.). Linkage agents or intermediaries have a role in synthesising information when necessary to make the language easier and more accessible and to promote exchanges between practitioners in the long-term to promote the culture of critical thinking (ibid.) that is needed to foster change.

Finally, the European Agency summarises the main factors that promote the process of change in schools. These include: the school culture and ethos; the leadership styles; the ‘enquiry attitude’ of the staff; the capacity to listen to learners’ voices; and the mobilisation of support, first from within the school and then outside the school (2013a, p. 20). Such factors should be considered before new practices are ‘transferred’.

### **Support to schools – commitment and collaboration**

The Organisation of Provision project visits ([www.european-agency.org/agency-projects/organisation-of-provision](http://www.european-agency.org/agency-projects/organisation-of-provision)) showed the importance to schools of receiving support from local politicians and education administrations. In all project visits, key personnel in the local community showed a genuine commitment to learners’ well-being. The roles played by these people include questioning some assumptions about the way things had been done in the past and trusting school leaders to make decisions, even if there was an element of risk involved. Strong relationships between different stakeholders in the community have led to strong networks of support around the school that have been key in bringing about change.

Ainscow (2015) concludes that school partnerships are the most powerful means of supporting schools to bring about improvements – with engagement with different kinds of evidence being a critical catalyst for change. Close monitoring of the collaborative activities of families of schools led to the identification of the following factors that supported higher levels of involvement and greater impact:

- Collective commitment to improve the learning of every learner in every school



- An analysis of statistical data using professional insights to identify areas that need addressing
- Identifying expertise within the schools that can be used to address these issues
- Collaborative activities involving different people at different levels, including learners
- A small number of head teachers taking the lead in collaborations.

Ainscow (ibid.) also offers some practical suggestions to promote professional learning within and between schools. This includes ‘making the familiar unfamiliar’ as a way of bringing about new ways of working, including:

- Using statistics as starting point for school improvement with support from ‘outsiders’
- Taking a learning walk – with colleagues from partner schools
- Mutual observation and lesson study
- Coaching
- Listening to learners and seeing things differently, e.g. shadowing learners.

Finally, Ainscow (ibid.) states that to achieve greater equity school, strategies have to be complemented by efforts to engage with the wider community.

The OECD similarly notes that school-to-school collaboration is ‘one of the most effective options for developing professional capital and especially social capital among teachers and leaders’ (2014b, p. 77). The report suggests that such collaboration can circulate knowledge and provide a way to support struggling schools without top-down intervention – and develop ‘collective responsibility among all schools for all students’ success’ (ibid.).

In Wales, Estyn (2015) notes that school-to-school working arrangements require commitment from school leaders and attitudes of openness, trust and transparency, with clear objectives and success criteria. In particular, the focus must be on the impact for learners. They point out that there may be financial benefits from sharing expertise, developing consistent approaches and negotiating better deals for services and resources, in some cases rationalising staffing structures.

In Ireland, the Special Education Support Service works with schools using varied models of support. While some work relies on short inputs, in-school support, accreditation pathways and projects take a long-term approach to CPD, with a view to embedding change processes in individual schools.



In countries where special schools have become specialist resource centres, the staff also support both learners and teachers. The Agency Organisation of Provision project found that, within the schools visited, teaching staff worked with professionals from a range of disciplines, for example special education teachers, counsellors, coaches, health professionals and social workers who form a 'network' around any learners in need of support – and also impact positively on teaching practice.

### ***The developing role of special schools***

The education of learners with disabilities in mainstream settings has given way to the development of a *continuum of provision* (Norwich, 2008; Benoit, 2012), from separate provision (full-time, residential special school), to inclusive provision (full-time in a regular class).

Researchers (e.g. Norwich, 2008) argue that an inclusive agenda should re-appraise the role of special schools and develop closer links between the special and the mainstream sectors. While many researchers (Slee, 2010; McMEnamin, 2011) see the presence of special schools as an anomaly of the inclusive education system and argue for them to be totally dismantled, others argue that mainstream schools are not ready to meet the 'needs' of learners with disabilities (Cigman, 2007; Forbes, 2007). While special schools continue, many authors suggest increasing collaboration between the mainstream and special sectors (European Commission, 2007; Meijer, 2010; Ware et al., 2009).

In this regard, 24 special schools in the UK (Northern Ireland) collaborated with local mainstream schools on joint curriculum projects and found that four elements were crucial to successful collaboration:

- *Identifying a clear rationale and strategic approach to collaborative working.*
- *Deploying resources and agreeing shared responsibilities to enable the collaborative work to progress smoothly and to address any difficulties that may arise.*
- *Building a collaborative ethos and school commitment to inclusive planning.*
- *Monitoring and evaluating the impact and establishing the sustainability of further collaborative action and outcomes* (Education and Training Inspectorate, 2012, p. 2).

In terms of increasing capacity, mainstream schools can benefit from support and advice from special schools, where they have expertise in responding to the needs of a specific group of learners (e.g. those with autism or profound and multiple disabilities).



The Agency Organisation of Provision project noted that 12 out of 29 participating member countries are developing the role of their special schools into resource centres (e.g. Norway, Portugal, Germany, Slovenia). Others are developing closer links between special and mainstream provision (e.g. Northern Ireland).

Meijer (2010) suggests that, in countries with a low incidence of special schools, their role in developing inclusion is modest (such as in Norway or Italy). In countries with a strong tradition of special education, special schools are more actively involved in the development of inclusion and support mainstream schools in this process. What becomes crucial is that both types of schools become part of a wider community of support and learning.

Studying special schools as a resource for inclusive education in Armenia, Lapham and Papikyan (2012) suggest that authorities arrange expertise and provision of services to allow for both regularly planned support, as well as ad hoc requests from schools. This gives the resource centre model both specificity and intensity to bring about changes in pedagogical practice. Some barriers within this model are noted, however, including inflexible staff, inappropriate teaching approaches and parental anxiety (Gibb et al., 2007; Head and Pirrie, 2007).

Forlin and Rose (2010) outline the following enabling factors in developing a resource centre model:

- Clear roles are defined for classroom and special education teachers.
- Paraprofessionals are used to support general classroom management, rather than allocating them to specific learners.
- Relationships are established over time with flexibility to provide on-going support.
- Teachers understand the benefits of learner-centred practice for all and create appropriate incentives for mainstream teachers to seek training in special education/inclusion.

Special provision may, therefore, take a variety of forms, from outreach services, to mainstream classes, through to specialist support, advice and/or consultancy to mainstream settings. If special schools are to contribute to increasing the capacity of all schools, their staff will need to develop new attitudes and skills to enable them to collaborate with other educational institutions and service providers and provide consultancy within the local community. CPD should be provided for all teachers in both mainstream and special schools to ensure that they increase their skills for working with more diverse learners, as well as collaborative skills to work with their colleagues. Forbes (2007) notes that teachers must also be supported by school



leaders who understand that, regardless of the setting, quality education is needed by all learners.

Slee (2007; 2010) describes the tenacity of special schools as an example of the resilience of the special sector. This resilience is further shown by the fact that such settings are now occurring within mainstream schools. McMenamin (2011), for example, talks about the 'satellite units' of special schooling within mainstream settings in New Zealand.

Ainscow points out that, while in the short and medium term special schools need to develop into forms of support for the mainstream setting, in the long term special schools are destined to disappear. This, however, implies only a dismantling of special schools 'in bricks and mortar' (2007, p. 138) – the skills and resources that special schools currently provide will need to be maintained.

### ***Interdisciplinary services***

In the majority of European countries, there are support services that can play a key role in improving quality of support and improved outcomes for learners with disabilities, enabling them to participate fully in mainstream schools. In the UK (England, Wales, Northern Ireland), quality standards have been developed for, among others, SEN support and outreach services, for children and young people with sensory and multi-sensory impairments and speech and language impairments and for collaborative working to support learners with SEN.

Multi-agency services in the community need to support all stakeholders, working closely with schools – and with parents – to ensure consistency between settings. To support a move away from a 'medical' model, services traditionally provided under health may be based in schools or in local community centres, both for ease of access and to improve communication among professionals from different disciplines. In any model, the learner must be 'at the centre' of co-ordinated services who should have a role in supporting both schools and families. This was reflected in a statement made by a municipality inspector during the visit to Flensburg:

*... the child with disabilities becomes the centre of the organisation of support and the services are the satellites that rotate around the learner. All the actors of the community collaborate in a continuum and meet on a regular basis to provide the best support for the children with disabilities (European Agency, 2014, p. 17).*

In France, co-operation between medical and social services, health and education has recently been increased to share professional practice and provide greater flexibility for learners with psychological or behavioural difficulties who are provided



with personalised schooling. This may involve reducing time spent in school and providing a range of other support services.

In the Netherlands, school boards of all types of schools – primary, secondary, vocational and special – co-operate at regional level to arrange educational provision for every learner, taking SEN into account. Schools also co-operate with other organisations responsible for the care and well-being of children (e.g. health, youth care, etc.) and require the participation of all stakeholders (school board, management, teachers and parents).

The Organisation of Provision literature review (European Agency, 2013a) notes that there are four main types of services that have traditionally supported learners with disabilities:

- The educational sector (e.g. school, specialist teachers, educational psychologists)
- The health sector (e.g. doctors, physiotherapists, speech therapists)
- The social services (e.g. family, social worker, job coaches)
- Voluntary bodies (e.g. charities, respite care providers, private homes).

The number of services and of professionals involved with learners and families is likely to increase with the severity of the learner's disabilities.

The forms of co-operation among different local stakeholders can vary a great deal. There is, however, wide agreement about the power of collective capacity and the fact that working together generates commitment (Fullan, 2010, p. 72).

Frattura and Capper (2007) indicate that, in order to achieve inclusion and dismantle all forms of segregated provision, it is necessary to act at the level of school organisation to enable the education system to provide integrated comprehensive services (ICS) for all learners. Providing ICS is a way of ensuring that schools, and educational structures in general, work on a preventative basis to avoid learners dropping out from education, rather than focusing on learners' deficits.

The INCLUD-ED reports (European Commission, 2007; 2009) also suggest that closer collaboration between education, social work and health departments is needed for the assessment of learners with disabilities.

In her research on multi-professional working and its impact on the education of learners with disabilities, Soan (2012) discusses commonly used terminology in this area and how it reflects differences in the approaches used to deliver services to support learners with disabilities. First of all, she indicates that there has been a shift from words such as 'multi-agency' and 'multi-disciplinary', where the emphasis was on different adults working together to support learners (but on a separate



basis), to words such as ‘inter-disciplinary’ and ‘inter-agency’, where the different adults start to work across boundaries and professions. Finally, words such as ‘trans-agency’ and ‘transdisciplinary’ (Soan, 2012) have begun to be used to show how different services are working across disciplines to respond to learners with disabilities in a holistic way. Frost (2005 in Soan, 2012) provides a useful hierarchy of terms to describe a continuum in partnership:

*Level 1: co-operation – services work together towards consistent goals and complementary services, while maintaining their independence.*

*Level 2: collaboration – services plan together and address issues of overlap, duplication and gaps in service provision towards common outcomes.*

*Level 3: co-ordination – services work together in a planned and systematic manner towards shared and agreed goals.*

*Level 4: merger/integration – different services become one organisation in order to enhance service delivery (Soan, 2012, pp. 92–93).*

Agency work (e.g. European Agency, 2010; 2011b) reinforces the importance of collaboration between schools and community services, such as health and social services, to ensure a holistic approach to the learner. This support needs to be provided in a way that goes beyond schooling and ensures that pathways to further education and employment are also investigated (European Agency, 2006). Any support should also be provided as close to the family as possible (European Agency, 2010). Theoharis and Scanlon (2015) suggest a visual map of service delivery and human resource distribution including pull-out learners, self-contained spaces and use of paraprofessionals, as well as increasing capacity so that the staff team serves all learners.

However, services are not always available when needed and some tensions emerge that need to be addressed. In particular, the lack of communication (see European Agency, 2010; Glenny and Roaf, 2008) can be a major problem as it may increase the ‘delegation phenomenon’, where each service works independently from others.

What is important is that different services are organised into an effective team or a single service in order to avoid tensions that may arise from the different cultures and conditions of work. It is also helpful if families and schools have a single point of contact.

CfBT (2010) reviewed the international literature on and policies relating to the integration of learners’ services. They found a weak evidence base overall for the impact of integrated services, but the fact that measures varied so widely made any comparison particularly difficult. Many studies focused on process rather than



outcomes. They found some evidence of the effectiveness of integrated services for early years in British, American and Norwegian studies. Work in Norway also suggests that inter-professional collaboration should be included in teacher education programmes and should be explained to all professionals – whose perceptions may differ – as having a particular emphasis on inclusion. Further information on cross-sector policy synergies and inter-professional collaboration in and around schools can be found in Edwards and Downes (2013).

## **Parental involvement**

The benefits of partnership with parents have been well documented, pointing to parental involvement as a key factor in the success of inclusive education as well as learner progress.

The INCLUD-ED project (2012) has defined five types of family and community participation according to level and area of involvement: Informative, Consultative, Decisive, Evaluative and Educative. The latter three imply a greater degree of participation. These are most likely to have a positive impact on pupils' learning and the best guarantee of school success for all (Flecha, 2015). Epstein (in Jeynes, 2012) provides a more specific typology of parental involvement, which includes:

- Parenting (providing housing, health, nutrition, safety; parenting skills in parent-child interactions; home conditions to support study; information to help schools know the child)
- Communicating (school-home/home-school communication)
- Volunteering in school (help in classrooms/events)
- Teaching at home (help with homework, help with educational choices/options)
- Decision-making (members of parent-teacher associations/governors)
- Collaborating with the community (contributions to school).

The benefits of parental involvement for academic achievement are documented in more detail in the Raising Achievement project literature review (European Agency, 2016b).

The OECD (2012c) studied the parent factor in education with particular regard to reading and made practical suggestions for all stakeholders. Goodall et al. (2011) also provide a review of best practice in this area of work. In the UK, Aston and Grayson (2013) have developed guidance for teachers.

Also in the UK (England), the Achievement for All programme ([www.afa3as.org.uk](http://www.afa3as.org.uk)) has involved structured conversations with parents to develop closer relationships



with schools and a better insight into learners' needs, aspirations and lives beyond school. Three conversations per year contributed to a change in the culture of parental engagement with a positive impact on learner outcomes. In the UK, Scotland and Wales have both recently produced materials/toolkits on engaging parents and families<sup>2</sup>.

In the USA, Mapp and Kuttner (2013) developed a framework for family-school partnerships with criteria for development and measuring progress. This was based around four Cs of capacity development: capabilities, connections, confidence and cognition.

Hedeen et al. (2011) reviewed the literature on meaningful parent/educator collaboration and their recommendations include the need:

- for all partners to work to sustain partnerships;
- for every school to define parent/school engagement locally as no two communities are identical;
- for specific training in communication skills and collaborative approaches for all stakeholders;
- to plan informal opportunities for interaction;
- to recognise the need for outside help and resources;
- to consider how technology can be used to support relationships.

Focusing in particular on hard-to-reach parents, Campbell noted the need for school leaders to foster an ethos of communication, to persist in including parents for the benefit of learners' education and to work hard to 'make the shift from the purely critical to the critical friend' (2011, p. 19). The report provides information on ways of working to reach parents and develop partnerships based on trust commitment and determination.

This is summed up by Addi-Racah and Ainhoren who observe that:

*The most positive attitude profiles towards parental involvement were found in schools where both teachers and parents were empowered [and] there is a balance of influence between parents and teachers ... empowering teachers is not enough; parents also need to feel that they can contribute to schools and express their 'voice' ... (2009, p. 811).*

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<sup>2</sup> Wales: [learning.gov.wales/resources/browse-all/family-and-community-engagement-toolkit/?skip=1&lang=en](https://learning.gov.wales/resources/browse-all/family-and-community-engagement-toolkit/?skip=1&lang=en)

Scotland:

[www.educationscotland.gov.uk/learningandteaching/partnerships/engagingparents/engagingparentsandfamiliestoolkit/about.asp](http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/learningandteaching/partnerships/engagingparents/engagingparentsandfamiliestoolkit/about.asp)



## Summary

This chapter has focused on the 4<sup>th</sup> Standard: *All stakeholders, at all levels are enabled to think and act inclusively in their daily practice*. It has highlighted relevant research relating to the core issue: *How effectively the education system enables all stakeholders in education to be inclusive in their day-to-day work*.

It has discussed the need for transparent and accessible information about inclusive education and well co-ordinated support for schools that is linked to a clear inclusive education and school improvement agenda. If the capacity of all schools to meet the full range of learner diversity is increased through effective support and collaboration, there should be a move from reactive to more proactive approaches. Rather than distributing resources to meet the needs of selected groups, efforts should be linked to the effective use of wider resources, including closer working with parents and other schools and services in the local community in more holistic ways (Deppeler and Ainscow, 2016). Such action should empower stakeholders and serve to increase equitable access to services as recommended in the 2015 review of inclusive education in Iceland (Mennta- og menningarmálaráðuneytið, 2015).

This, in turn, should lead to a range of positive outcomes beyond educational attainment. While educational attainment is a necessity and of great value, other wider – and maybe less tangible – outcomes for children and young people should also be taken into account, recognising that the two are often inter-connected.

Finally, the idea of greater collaboration to share both research and practice is noted in order to ‘move expertise around’ (Muijs, West & Ainscow, 2010).



## 5. FUNDING AND RESOURCE ALLOCATION

The Agency Organisation of Provision project (European Agency, 2013a) showed that, in order to support inclusive education, flexibility is needed regarding funding and resource allocation issues. The project showed that many countries are trying to increase the 'permeability' between special and mainstream provision, recognising that all learners need support at different stages of their school career. The need to move to a system of early support and prevention, rather than a system that rewards a lack of success, is increasingly recognised.

The European Agency notes that: 'the implementation of inclusive education is directly influenced by the way funds are distributed' (2016d, p. 27). This report states:

*When support and provision are exclusively based on assessing individuals' needs instead of schools' needs, resources allocated to inclusive education may not incentivise schools to act inclusively (ibid., p. 28).*

It adds that systems associated with a remedial approach based on the labelling of learners may, in fact, involve extra costs (Ebersold and Mayol, 2016).

This chapter will explore funding and resource allocation issues in Iceland and more widely, keeping in mind that 'systems for inclusive education vary among countries since the policy goal of inclusive education does not have a single interpretation' (European Agency, 2016d, p. 38) (Ebersold, 2008; 2014; European Agency, 2015a).

### **Resource allocation in Iceland**

Iceland's funding system follows a 'regional throughput model, with some input elements' (Sieweke, 2016, p. 41). Approximately 63% of local authorities' income is based on municipal income tax. Various service fees account for 18%, property taxes for 11% and income from the Local Authorities' Equalization Fund accounts for 8% of total revenue.

The Local Authorities' Equalization Fund was created in 1937 to equalise local authorities' possibilities to raise revenues and ensure their expenditures. It is managed by the Minister of the Interior, assisted by a five-member advisory committee. The fund is financed by both the State and the municipalities. The budget is largely allocated to local authorities and mostly used to support services for people with disabilities and to support pre-schools and compulsory schools.

The cost of the education system in Iceland is above that of neighbouring countries, while the results of PISA learner assessments are below these other countries. This could indicate a lack of efficiency and lead to concerns about the effectiveness of resource use (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2014b).



In 2015, government expenditure on education was approximately 6.87% of GDP, continuing a downward trend seen over the past 10 years. However, expenditure remains above the OECD average (5.6% in 2012). Iceland was ranked second among the Nordic countries on this measure in 2011. However, it is the only Nordic country with lower public expenditure as a percentage of GDP in 2011 than in 2008.

Icelandic public expenditure on education as a percentage of total public expenditure went from the 4<sup>th</sup> position to the 12<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> position among the OECD countries after the crisis in 2008 (Ragnarsdóttir and Johannesson, 2014, pp. 44–45).

No major changes have been seen in funding education practices in Iceland since 1996. Then, a decentralisation policy was implemented and the municipalities became responsible for the management and the funding of compulsory education and local support services. Around 9% of upper-secondary schools are privately run, but still receive financial support from the State (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2014b). The issue of decentralisation is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

Each municipality determines the amount given to each pre-school and compulsory school. This is done using specific funding models or general budget frameworks determined at a local level. The criteria for funding include, in general, the number of learners, legal requirements and collective labour agreements. Most municipalities establish the financial resources based on the number of generic hours and the number of hours in which supported teaching or teaching of learners with special needs are necessary. The cost estimation criteria appear to be similar between municipalities (ibid.).

Rules regarding the funding of special needs education and support services changed following the education acts of 2008. To make better use of the funding, the system is now based not only on quotas, but also on goals for support and services. Funds from the Local Authorities' Equalization Fund are, however, given to municipalities according to quotas determined with the guidance of the State Diagnostic Centre.

Marinósson and Bjarnason note some issues with funding linked to diagnosis/labelled impairments:

*One of the consequences is that schools try to identify students with disabilities who might fetch extra funds for the school. A system based on diagnostic labels thus has perverse incentives for over identification of disabilities and special needs. Some municipalities are therefore transferring more of their special education resource distribution from the 'bounty' system to a 'base' funding system where schools get a general sum estimated on the basis of the totality of educational needs of its students as observed in the school context at that*



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*time ('difficulty model') as opposed to being based on formal diagnosis only ('disability model') (2014, p. 288).*

In 2014, 19% of the education budget of municipalities was designated for special provisions for learners with SEN (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2014b; Sieweke, 2016). During the 2014–2015 school year, 12,263 pupils received some special education or support, or 28.4% of all pupils – an increase of 60 pupils from the previous year (Statistics Iceland, 2016b).

At the pre-school level, parents pay fees for every child and the municipalities do not have separate funds for special education. Together with the government, the municipalities provide funding for transport, extra staff, specialist teachers and special equipment.

For compulsory schools, municipalities receive funding from the government in order to meet the needs of learners with disabilities. Learners with similar levels of disability should receive the same amount of funding from one municipality to another. Each year, the municipalities decide the provision needed for SEN at the compulsory level.

The upper-secondary sector depends directly on the government. School is free for all learners, but they need to pay for school materials. Funding is provided to learners who need special support on an individual and/or group basis (European Agency, no date-a). In 2016, there was an increase in spending of 139% for the education of learners with SEN for upper-secondary, while there is a decrease of 20–25% for the general education system (interview with the Icelandic head of upper-secondary funding). The rising cost of upper-secondary special provision is a cause for concern.

The report on *Resource Use in Schools* (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2014b) for the OECD highlighted that data collection has improved in recent years. However, statistics are not yet correlated with data on the quality of education or learner performance and thus the effective use of resources. In formal evaluations and monitoring of schools and the education system, the focus has also not been on assessing the effectiveness and efficiency of resource use.

### **Resource allocation in wider contexts**

The Organisation of Provision project summary report (European Agency, 2014) notes that while numerous countries are beginning to move away from using categories of need relating to different disabilities as a basis for funding, this practice is still prevalent. The NESSE report (2012) notes that country systems of classification are underpinned by different conceptualisations of difference and



normality. While systems of ‘classification’ may vary widely, a medical model of disability usually underpins them.

In recognition of this dilemma, different policies and funding practices are emerging in what is increasingly a multi-level responsibility. Shared responsibility among stakeholders may promote flexibility when resource allocation mechanisms combine a high level of autonomy at both the local and school levels. For example, in Norway, Finland and Sweden, municipalities are responsible for allocating additional resources to schools according to local conditions, needs and priorities. Schools then have a high degree of freedom to make decisions about their organisation and the use of resources, including those related to additional support.

The European Agency (2016d) provides many examples of county policies and practices around financing. For example, in the UK (England, Scotland and Wales), local authorities take strategic and operational decisions about the funding of additional support for learning delegated to mainstream and special schools, as well as to individual learners. Schools identify their own needs and select the most appropriate approaches to make appropriate provision for their learners. In the Netherlands, school alliances are responsible for extra funding for special schools and for funding additional resources for mainstream schools.

In Lithuania, schools are responsible for developing learning materials, providing guidance and cognitive learning. The municipal budget funds school maintenance. In Estonia, schools are responsible for the accessibility of buildings, while the state provides special learning materials, alternative technology and pedagogical support. Swedish schools have the duty to provide personal assistants to learners whose need for support falls below 20 hours. Local authorities provide transport, accessible buildings and additional staff.

The percentage share given to local authorities by different national governments clearly affects the degree of autonomy at local level. For example, in Finland, local municipalities contribute 75% of the funding of educational services provided, mainly through a tax levy. This is used to provide schools with materials, extra-curricular support, additional support and teaching staff and to ensure the accessibility of buildings. In Switzerland, cantons fund mainstream education, resource centres, special schools, transport and extra-curricular activities.

A different model can be seen in Luxembourg, where the Ministry of Education is solely responsible for resourcing the development of inclusive education. In Italy, public funds for schools are mostly provided by the central government (80.72%), with the remainder from regional and local levels. In Portugal, the Ministry of Education allocates 74% of the budget for staff (teaching and non-teaching) and for most goods and services in schools.



With regard to funding learners who may require additional support, Lithuania uses the OECD (2005) cross-national categories: A – Disabilities, B – Difficulties and C – Disadvantages. Some Länder in Germany focus on needs relating to motor, perception, cognition, motivation, communication, interaction, emotion and creativity. In Italy, following a pilot of the International Classification of Functioning, this system is to be introduced into all schools.

In most countries, assessment for additional resources is by a multi-disciplinary team or specialist centre, often working with the school and parents. In an attempt to reduce the bureaucracy surrounding a lengthy, multi-agency assessment, however, some countries are introducing an integrated assessment and planning process involving all agencies in the production of a co-ordinated support plan, in particular for learners with more complex needs (for example, UK – Scotland and Wales). In Belgium (Flemish Community), recent research has focused on the use of Unified Plans for Support with learners with intellectual disabilities in mainstream schools. A matrix approach has been developed looking at learner characteristics, as well as the level of curricular adaptation needed. This is described as a needs-based, dynamic contextual system based on a social model of disability taking account of family and school environment factors rather than psychometrics.

Some countries have a staged process (e.g. Austria, Malta, UK – England, Northern Ireland, Wales) and issue a decision or statement of SEN. Other countries, such as Finland, focus on individual needs along a continuum of support.

Work by the European Agency (2013a, 2014) notes that thresholds for ‘additional’ support in any setting will vary depending on the competences of teachers. The effectiveness of teaching should be assessed before deciding that a learner has a ‘special educational need’ requiring additional support. Assessment should not be used to ‘match resources to student deficits in order that they do not disrupt the institutional equilibrium’ (Slee, 2003, p. 63) and support should be matched to the individual, recognising that one size does not fit all.

As the capability of schools and teachers evolves, learners experiencing barriers to learning should be identified early. Their entitlement to support to address their needs within the regular classroom – without the need for diagnosis or labelling – should then be fulfilled. The following section will discuss this issue in more depth and will focus more specifically on funding models that support inclusive development.



## Funding inclusive development

De Beco states:

*Contrary to what is sometimes asserted, an inclusive education system is not more expensive than a segregated education system. There is even unanimity about the fact that the former is more economical than the latter (2014, p. 276).*

The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2007) considers that inclusive educational settings are generally less expensive than segregated systems. However, inclusive education could bring additional costs in the short term. De Beco (op. cit.) makes the comparison with the construction of a well-insulated house which will be cheaper in the long term. To move from a segregated school system to an inclusive one, States Parties have therefore to promote universal design by ensuring that, from the beginning, goods, services, equipment and facilities can be used by everybody, as set down in the UNCRPD.

In a review of inclusive education in the Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CEECIS) region, UNICEF (2012) found that the lack of financial guidelines and limited funds to mainstream schools were key factors inhibiting the implementation of inclusive education in Albania, Serbia, Moldova, Russia and the Ukraine. Ebersold and Meijer (2016) note that funding regimes must incentivise inclusive practices and that a shift is required in funding from special schools or segregated settings to mainstream schools.

In a report providing background information for the Agency's Financing of Inclusive Education project (2016e), information is given about input, output and throughput models of funding for learners with additional support needs which requires careful consideration in any debate about the development of inclusive education systems.

**Input funding** (also known as demand-driven funding, per-capita models or categorical funding) is the most frequently used funding formula for learners with official statements of SEN (UNICEF, 2012). Here, the number of learners with SEN is identified and funding is allocated from central level to regions/municipalities. This may be done through a per-pupil formula, as follows:

- A flat grant (the state provides a fixed amount of money per pupil regardless of local capacity and localities can also add funding to this amount)
- A census-based count of total learner population rather than eligibility for special education (Waller, 2012). With this approach, assessment may lead to the allocation of aids, equipment, additional staff (LSAs), additional SEN hours or possibly a reduced teacher/learner ratio

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- A ‘weighted student formula’ (Petko, 2005). Here, the money follows the learners to whichever school they attend, creating a more equitable system of resource allocation and distribution (ibid.). Per-capita amounts may provide money for specific categories, such as minority languages, social disadvantage and disabilities. This can provide a clear central picture of the money allocated and spent. However, the disadvantages of this model include the focus on disabilities, which can hinder inclusion and lead to the risk of over-identification of learners with SEN (Meijer, 1999; Parrish, 2001), and inflated costs.

In countries using input funding, mainstream schools may receive additional funding for learners identified as having SEN or for those who do not achieve a minimum threshold in test scores (Meijer, 1999). This model, however, does not promote quality in the services provided and can lead to over-labelling and inefficient strategic behaviour.

The **output model** links funding criteria directly to learner performance, low referral of learners with SEN or low rates of challenging behaviour among learners. Mainstream and special schools are funded based on learner achievement, with financial penalties for schools who fail to reach the expected outcomes or to fulfil fixed parameters. Schools are also penalised for learner mobility factors or absenteeism – factors which may not be strictly related to their responsibilities (Peters, 2002). While this model appears to promote learner achievement, it may create competition among schools that can penalise learners with SEN, and lead to test-oriented systems (Meijer, Soriano and Watkins, 2003). It may also reward schools regardless of their effort or involvement in negative practice. In the case of special schools, funding the number of learners with SEN sent to mainstream schools can result in schools with low numbers of learners with SEN receiving more funding than schools with greater numbers of such learners.

The **throughput model** (also called the resource-based model or supply-driven funding) is focused on the services provided, rather than on the number of learners with an official statement of SEN. This system usually identifies the number of learners considered eligible for additional funding (Mitchell, 2010) and then the allocation of financial resources and decisions about their use pass from the central to local level.

In this model, while mainstream schools receive money to support specific SEN provision, the level of funds is often too low to allow for quality school-based provision. Schools may segregate learners, as the funds are not proportional or are strictly related to outcomes (Hegarty, 2001).



Throughput models applied to special schools can lead them to operate as resource centres (Meijer, 1999). Critics point out the risk of adapting learners to programmes, rather than vice versa (UNICEF, 2012). In addition, special schools in areas with a high rate of learners with SEN will receive more funds, while areas where the system is more inclusive will receive less funding. Consequently, the system itself may penalise mainstream schools delivering good practice via a throughput model (Meijer, 1999).

However, a positive is that this model decentralises funds and can foster local initiative (Meijer, 1999; UNICEF, 2012) and clearer lines of accountability. The throughput model takes account of local history and developments and allows for a better-tailored system. However, countries with a more centralised policy may struggle to implement this model.

The European Agency (2016d) suggests that growing expenditure on the education of learners with SEN overall is strongly connected to the diversification of the profile of such learners. This diversification influences resource allocation mechanisms which are linked in many countries to a three-level resourcing model that can be mapped to a framework of support, such as that proposed in Response to Intervention (National Center on Response to Intervention, 2012). This type of throughput model or supply-side approach focuses on the services that schools can provide to enable them to give different levels of support, including intensive support to learners with an 'official label'. These levels aim to prevent school failure and, consequently, result in different levels of spending.

The first level of resourcing includes spending for the education of all learners, i.e. those who do not require additional support in the mainstream classroom.

The second level of resourcing includes extra funding that enables schools to provide intensified support for learners who are having difficulty in coping with school demands and who are at risk of failure. These resources are allocated to schools and may be related to the throughput model described above.

Finally, the third level of resourcing is targeted at learners who require the most intensive support due to long-term challenges. This is for learners for whom the second level of intensified classroom support has proved to be inadequate and who therefore need additional resources and/or external support. Resources may be allocated to learners following formal identification and may be associated with input-based funding (described above).

However, the Agency study (op. cit.) found that many countries subsequently lack data on the learners at the second level of support (i.e. without an official decision) as well as information/evidence about the effectiveness of the support provided (Ebersold and Meijer, 2016).



The Agency report (op. cit.) also pointed out that the responsiveness of a system for inclusive education is underpinned by funding criteria used to allocate resources and support. It suggests that input or needs-based funding mechanisms tend to be less inclusive than those that focus on outputs.

Some countries, however, lack specific funding criteria to support inclusive education at national level. They may provide lump sums to municipalities or local authorities, which in turn define the criteria and allocate funds. As a result, many countries do not have information about criteria used at local level.

Other countries' criteria may favour inclusive schools and hinder those that need help to develop inclusive practice and support learners needing additional support. Some funding criteria may also penalise schools that are committed to inclusiveness. This can occur when resource allocation mechanisms do not take account of the increased cost of making successful provision for learners with SEN and their families. Such mechanisms may also be

*... a source of injustices and inequalities when they are detrimental to remote or deprived areas or to schools that most need support for developing an inclusive school culture and supporting learners with SEN (European Agency, 2016d, p. 68).*

As also noted by researchers in Iceland, Graham and Jahnukainen (2011) write that tying funding to disability categories incentivises the diagnosis of disability and may encourage the 'inflation' of learner impairment. They conclude that tightening eligibility criteria or capping available funding do not seem to curb the perverse incentives that the use of categorical resource allocation methods creates, in particular in the context of high-stakes accountability (Figlio and Getzler, 2002). They contend that the problem is the co-dependence of general and special education, where high-stakes policy works to narrow both what general education is and who it should be for. Their research notes that Finland seems to have mitigated the worst effects of this policy with less competition, together with a 'softer' effect of a psycho-medical model through front-loaded support structures, i.e. proactive, responsive support independent of diagnosis.

In an attempt to move away from an input model of funding or demand-side approach, where resource allocation is linked to an official decision of SEN following educational assessment, Sokal and Katz (2015) report that new funding formulas are being developed in Canada. They describe the practice in Alberta where the Inclusive Education Funding Grant (Alberta Education, 2012) has replaced categorical/individual learner funding, except for learners with extremely complex needs who require multiple services from different agencies. This model provides block funding based on enrolment, socio-economic, diagnostic and geographical



variables. School divisions then have the flexibility to explore creative methods of supporting learners with diverse needs. These might include personalised technology, co-teaching classrooms, smaller class sizes and other supports that have been shown to meet many learners' needs better than the automatic assignment of an educational assistant (Giangreco, 2010b).

In other countries (e.g. Finland, Denmark), additional support is increasingly considered part of regular provision. To increase the flexibility between mainstream and special education in Portugal, special funding is only for learners with autism, who are deaf/blind or who have multiple disabilities. In Sweden, an amount is allocated to schools for special education to be used at the schools' discretion. To support inclusion, a small number of countries reduce pupil numbers in classes where there are learners with disabilities (Estonia, Hungary, Italy).

Latvia and Lithuania, among others, operate a backpack or 'pupil basket' system through local municipalities. Here, funding follows learners. The country report from Austria (European Agency, no date-b) notes that in this type of 'pupil bound' system, only those with identified difficulties who meet the SEN criteria can access additional resources while others who may be in need, are unable to access support.

Studies conducted in Austria (Specht et al., 2006; 2007) point out that input-oriented support – at a flat rate to schools based on the number of learners recognised as having SEN – is not sufficiently responsive, as needs vary among learners and over time. An output model is also seen as problematic, as resources are withdrawn if a programme is successful. There is a need to move from a system that rewards such lack of success to a model of early support and prevention.

Schools, rather than struggling with the limited 'additional' resources available for them, could develop cost-effective networks of support and professional development involving collaboration between local stakeholders and local schools/support centres (Benoit, 2012; Ebersold, 2012b). Such practices are more closely aligned to the development of effective and equitable education systems for all learners – not only to providing access to mainstream for those with impairments/health problems, etc. (European Agency, 2016d).

The European Agency (2016e) concludes that the different funding models produce different strategic behaviours and cannot be judged outside of the context in which they are implemented. The report also recognises the need for accountability and effective monitoring procedures to provide transparency in funding and says:

*... equity in financing inclusive education entails finding a balanced way to distribute the available resources to allow every child to learn, and not just to access and participate in education. The acceptance of the concept of inclusion in society and in school systems requires time, as it involves a societal change of*



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*perspective and priorities, as well as the adjustment of targeted financing mechanisms (ibid., p. 42).*

The European Agency (2016d) presents a framework of resource allocation mechanisms for inclusive education, based on work with 18 Agency member countries. This work shows that such systems should build on cross-ministerial resource allocation mechanisms. Ministries of health and welfare are often responsible for meeting any costs arising from the functional consequences of a disability that may have an educational impact. Such spending may complement the general education framework and be specifically dedicated to implementing inclusive education. Resource allocation may enable local authorities and schools to develop training that increases individuals' ability to act inclusively and addresses non-education issues that have an educational impact (e.g. physical accessibility or access to ancillary services). A move towards inclusive education also requires the resourcing of special provision to support the general education system and build the capacity of all stakeholders.

In conclusion, there is clearly a need for a flexible combination of models that allow for different variables to support effective inclusive education. Any system of financing needs to take account of the factors outlined above, plus the accessibility of buildings and services and the technical, financial and human support needed for each learner's education. A system to support inclusive education must enable stakeholders to meet the full diversity of educational profiles by building capacity and, finally, also take account of special settings and resource centres as part of the service continuum, while moving towards a universal design approach (European Agency, 2016d).

Ebersold and Meijer (2016) stress that funding mechanisms play a key role in convincing stakeholders to see diversity as an opportunity for more efficient and inclusive practices within schools, rather than a burden or means of increasing schools' resources. The current Agency work on Financing Policies for Inclusive Education Systems (FPIES) aims to identify effective funding policy frameworks and produce an open-source policy guidance framework on approaches that work towards reducing disparities in education and enhancing the educational and social inclusion and well-being of all learners.

## **Summary**

This chapter has focused on the 5<sup>th</sup> Standard: *Resource allocation is equitable, efficient and cost-effective*. It has examined relevant research on the core issue: *The effectiveness, equity and enabling effects of resource allocation (including work with other agencies beyond education)*.



The research reviewed here reinforces the need for the development of 'throughput' funding models that support the ideas presented in this report, in particular a move away from models linked to a 'diagnosis' (input models) towards more proactive approaches to reduce the impact of diverse needs that are likely to be more resource-intensive at a later stage if no support or intervention is provided. A move towards responsive support as 'the norm', rather than funding linked to labels, can help to build the capacity to include all learners and reduce the incentives for strategic behaviour.

To increase equity as well as the effectiveness of resource use, support networks and greater collaboration between ministries at national level and with the full range of stakeholders at local level should be explored.

Schleicher (2016) notes that assessing the relative costs and benefits of education reform is particularly difficult, due to large number of variables that influence the nature, size and distribution of benefits. He writes of the difficulty of predicting clear links between policies and outcomes due, at least in part, to the lag between the time at which the initial cost of reform is incurred and the time when the intended benefits of reforms become evident. These factors must be kept in mind when evaluating changes in policy and practice.

However, as evidence from the Organisation of Provision project visits shows, the development of more inclusive practice is not only about funding: '... it is possible to change a school with the resources available' (Head of Education and Social Services, Essunga, Sweden). The OECD also supports this view, noting that: 'excellence in education requires more than money' (2016d, p. 44).



## 6. GOVERNANCE, QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The involvement of a mix of stakeholders in management and governance systems is important, including public authorities at national, regional or local level, third sector organisations and private companies. Interactions between different structures and institutions influence education policy and practice at different levels. There is a need to consider how different governance processes can provide opportunities or limit learners' participation and achievement – through policy and practice on school admissions, progression, organisation of support and teaching, assessment and curriculum development and, importantly, quality assurance and accountability.

### **Iceland – a decentralised system**

Iceland has two administrative levels of government: the State and the local authorities, which play an important role in implementing regional democracy. There are currently 74 municipalities, ranging in size from 120,000 to 53 inhabitants.

The Association of Local Authorities in Iceland was founded in 1945 as a joint advocate for the local authorities. Municipalities are responsible for the operation of schools at pre-school and compulsory level. They have no administrative responsibilities at the upper-secondary level, which comes under the remit of the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. Schools have a high level of autonomy, but goals and learning outcomes are defined centrally.

Discussing the Icelandic context, Jónasson (2016) noted the complexity of the decentralised system. He suggests that the main dilemmas related to the central-decentral issue include top-down initiatives, government responsibilities, learning communities and teacher ownership of change or real partnership therein. He sees issues of central aspiration and ambition, formal responsibility and the potential institutionalisation of mistrust as being at stake. To conclude, he suggests that what is needed is a review of the levels and the actors and dimensions involved and the heterogeneity in each case.

### **What is decentralisation?**

Decentralisation is a term used when responsibility/power is passed to local communities and schools and they can make their own decisions about many aspects of policy and practice. While systematic evaluations of decentralised systems are lacking, effective and efficient government seems to require 'an appropriate balance' of centralisation and decentralisation (both top-down and bottom-up approaches).



Even when national governments decentralise functions:

*... they retain significant responsibility for developing appropriate and effective national decentralization policies and strengthening local institutional capacity to assume new responsibility (Bernbaum, 2011, p. 8).*

The decentralisation models most often discussed in the research (for example, Radó, 2010; Bernbaum, 2011) are delegation, deconcentration and devolution.

**Delegation** is a transmission of tasks and administrative functions related to specific functions, usually defined by central authorities. This type of decentralisation does not result in a shift in power, as the local agents only have to implement decisions made centrally – for example, when a ministry of education delegates authority to a national examination board which prepares, administers and marks national exams.

**Deconcentration** may appear to be a move towards a more democratic model, as some authority and responsibility are passed to ‘lower’ system levels. However, this model usually retains highly centralised operations. The local units may act as agents of central government and be responsible for implementing rules – but not for making decisions or policies. For example, a central office may create district offices to carry out central functions on their behalf, but overall control remains with the central government.

**Devolution** transfers authority and real responsibility from central to local bodies. According to UNESCO (2014), the devolution of authority in key decision-making areas, such as finance and staffing, has the potential to empower local school communities and improve learner outcomes.

Weiler (1993) offers an alternative. He refers to a ‘redistributive model’ dealing with top-down distribution of power, the ‘effectiveness model’ focusing on financial aspects and cost effectiveness of decentralisation, and the ‘learning culture’ model that addresses cultural diversity and curricula adaptability to local needs.

Finally, Jónasson (2016) adds a fourth model: decoupling. This addresses the decoupling between policy directives, implementation and outcomes. It is important for explaining divergent patterns of organisational development in schools.

Decoupling can protect schools from too much external scrutiny, providing more autonomy at the local level. It occurs with the tacit agreement of all players, from the community to school personnel (Meyer and Rowan, 2006).

### ***Strengths and challenges of decentralised systems***

In a move towards a more inclusive system, the idea of transferring responsibility and decision-making to local bodies appears to sit well with more democratic and participatory approaches. However, in complex decentralised systems, it may become more difficult to ensure transparency of funding and equitable



opportunities for all learners. Zajda (2012) notes the ‘necessity to understand who controls and who ought to control education’ (p. 4) and also exactly which functions to decentralise in terms of, for example administration, personnel, financing and curriculum and assessment.

Supporters of decentralised systems argue that they can improve quality and satisfy local demand due to better information about local needs. Such systems can also give more democratic control, participation by all stakeholder groups and choice for families. Other researchers point out that increased competition between localities can lead to greater efficiency (Urbanovič and Patapas, 2012, Busemeyer, 2012) and, in terms of reform, the inertia and bureaucracy of larger systems may be overcome by the creation of smaller and more flexible units.

There is limited evidence that decentralisation alone increases the quality of education. However, the extent to which the process focuses on quality issues and the closer decentralisation actions are to the school/community, the more likely it is that decentralisation, combined with other needed inputs, will contribute to raising education quality (Bernbaum, 2011). Recent Agency work on Financing of Inclusive Education (European Agency, 2016e) also suggests that more decentralised systems appear to create a greater opportunity for developing innovative forms of inclusive education, with more flexible learning and support and strengthened school governance (Stubbs, 2008; NESSE, 2012).

Transferring responsibility and authority for education services to local or provincial governments may result in increased accountability and efficiency by shortening the distance between parent and policy-maker or policy-maker and school. It may also strengthen parental demand for greater quality and/or improve the capacity of managers to implement programmes (Weidman & DePietro-Jurand, 2011).

However, decentralised systems can also present challenges – such as fragmentation and poor co-ordination leading to effectiveness, equity and accountability issues (European Agency, 2016d). Some of these challenges arise due to central ministries not undertaking monitoring and training functions to give real decision-making and management power to lower levels, and also to difficulties in executing decisions at the local level due to lack of funding from the decision-makers (Bernbaum, 2011).

Parreira do Amaral et al. also question whether the existence of smaller administrative units increases efficiency and effectiveness. They point out that the need to balance co-ordination to protect rights and equality and autonomy to meet place-specific needs is ‘one of the most complex problems of educational governance’ (2015, p. 160).



Bernbaum (2011) stresses in particular the need to clarify roles and responsibilities of relevant staff when working with ministries of education and to support capacity-building to assist them to carry out these roles and responsibilities. It is especially important to ensure that there is no duplication in the division of roles between different system levels, that funding is commensurate with responsibilities and that there is action to increase the capacity of local areas. He emphasises that it is important to interact with key actors from other relevant ministries and/or autonomous or semi-autonomous bodies.

Educational governance and policies leading to decentralisation can play a key role in maintaining – or reducing – education inequalities. Increasing school autonomy and competition may exacerbate differences between schools and educational outcomes. Ballas et al. point out that:

*... combinations of national, regional and local circumstances combine to shape material inequalities, forms of capital, educational habitus and issues of recognition and status as well as having direct influences on opportunities to learn (2012, p. 64).*

Many countries attempt to address this risk of inequality in inputs and quality of service by introducing national standards for education services and by redistributing resources in an attempt to neutralise the effects of uneven local taxes (Herbst and Wojciuk, 2014).

Busemeyer (2012) suggests that decentralisation can lead to more, rather than less, bureaucracy and create administrative overload at local level. Local institutions can also be captured by special interests. ‘Gaming’ of the system can occur when performance standards are set at the distant national level. In the context of high quality education for all learners, benefits are seen when the culture both within and between school communities is collaborative – not competitive.

In summary, the three key areas for successful decentralisation are:

1. Ensuring equity
2. Building accountability
3. Developing local capacity across the system at all levels, especially at lower levels.

Without appropriate central government support and regulatory measures, decentralisation can cause more harm than good in education system reform (UNESCO, 2014).

Subsidiarity is one of the important principles that governs decentralisation: planning and management decisions should be taken by the body/organisation that is best placed to implement functions or tasks and be accountable for them.



UNESCO (2014) suggests, however, that some functions related to curriculum, assessment and quality assurance are best kept centralised.

It is evident that countries should have a clear structure for authority, responsibility and lines of accountability, which can be owned by the local authorities who will make decisions.

A number of country examples from centralised and decentralised contexts are available in a forthcoming European Agency paper specifically on the topic of decentralisation (in press-a).

Finally, Barber sees decentralisation – or ‘unleashing greatness’ – as the end point of a process. He stresses that it should not be considered unless standards of performance have first been dragged up from ‘awful’ to ‘adequate’ and then capacity has been built to achieve ‘good’ through centralised action. In his words:

*You can mandate to get the system from awful to adequate but not from adequate to great. To do that you have to unleash potential and creativity. This cannot be centrally mandated but has to be locally enabled (2007, p. 4).*

### **Governance for an inclusive system**

The OECD (2015b) notes that effective governance works through building capacity, open dialogue and stakeholder involvement and that it is a balance between accountability and trust, innovation and risk avoidance, consensus building and making difficult choices. The central level remains important – even in decentralised systems – to trigger and steer education through strategic vision, clear guidelines and feedback.

Peters suggests that to govern requires the public sector to:

- 1. Establish policy goals – determining what government wants to do.*
- 2. Create coherence among these goals – ensuring that the numerous goals adopted within government are compatible with one another.*
- 3. Implement policies designed to achieve those goals – putting government programmes into effect through the public bureaucracy, perhaps with private sector actors.*
- 4. Evaluate the success and failure of programmes and revise them – was the programme implemented properly, did it work, and what lessons can be learned to improve policies in the next round of policymaking? (2012, p. 7).*

Burns et al. (2016) outline five elements that decentralised systems should build on to balance responsiveness to local diversity with achieving national goals. These are:

- A focus on process rather than structures



- Adaptability and flexibility
- Stakeholder involvement and capacity-building
- A whole-system approach
- Harnessing evidence and research to inform policy and practice.

National governments, therefore, have to create the conditions within which local action can be taken with local authorities taking responsibility. Ainscow et al. note that, while local conditions can support schools to develop new and more effective responses to diversity ‘... national policy would itself have to be based on and make explicit the values of equity and inclusion ...’ (2016, p. 35).

It is therefore critical that processes are in place to provide the necessary support and capacity-building for stakeholders in line with their increasing responsibility. A further crucial element is the monitoring and evaluation of practice to hold all stakeholders to account and ensure both equity and excellence for all learners.

### ***Local authority/municipality action***

Following work with schools in the UK, Ainscow (2015) points out that policy-makers must recognise that the details of policy are not amenable to central regulation – but must be dealt with by those who are able to understand local contexts. They should be trusted to act in the best interests of young people and collaborate for the benefit of all. He highlights the need for experimentation to develop more effective ways of working and a ‘sharp local analysis’ to locate and make better use of existing expertise – with networking to move knowledge around. This requires significant structural and cultural change, with local authorities moving away from a ‘command and control’ perspective, towards one of enabling and facilitating collaborative action (Ainscow et al., 2016).

In decentralised systems, local authority or municipality staff have a key role in particular, in making sure that all children and young people are getting a fair deal within an increasingly diverse system of education (Hargreaves and Ainscow, 2015).

Fielding and Moss say the role of the local authority is as:

*... a leader and facilitator of development of a local educational project, a shared and democratic exploration of the meaning and practice of education and the potential of the school (2011, p. 125).*

Such a project involves the entire community and ‘changing the power dynamics ... by creating new civic capacity for previously disenfranchised populations’ (Hargreaves and Shirley, 2009, p. 59).



This requires the participation of learners and parents in governance which, while vitally important, is most often on an informal basis. Some parents are more likely to be involved in school governance, leading to ‘changes achieved through voice ... primarily in the interests of the articulate few’ (Parreira do Amaral et al., 2015, p. 178). Furthermore, parents who can use social capital are better able to maximise opportunities for their children, for example, choice of school.

Mourshed, Chijioke and Barber conclude that sustaining educational improvements in the longer term requires ‘integration and intermediation across each level of the system, from the classroom to the superintendent or minister’s office’ (2010, p. 81). The authors suggest that the specific functions of the mediating layer are: providing targeted support to schools; acting as a buffer between central government and the schools, while interpreting and communicating the improvement objectives in order to manage any resistance to change; and enhancing the collaborative exchange between schools, by facilitating the sharing of best practices, helping them to support each other, share learning, and standardise practices.

Burns et al., in their recent work on governance, make similar recommendations:

- Encourage horizontal accountability and integration of stakeholders in accountability structures – include local politicians, as well as parents and teachers in governing bodies.
- Help decentralised levels to identify and integrate diverse local stakeholders into accountability processes to reflect all relevant perspectives.
- Avoid competing accountability demands between different levels of governance and policy programmes by employing a whole-system approach
- Build capacity to manage competing demands between horizontal and vertical accountability mechanisms (2016, p. 116).

Decentralisation does not necessarily equate to school autonomy – if change is imposed on schools from any system level, potential benefits in terms of school improvement may be lost (for example, due to reduced opportunities for innovation, collaboration and learning from experience). Greany notes that the self-improving system has:

*... unleashed innovation within individual schools and localities, yet the loss of national and local infrastructure for collating and sharing ‘what works’ coupled with the reduced national investment in research and evaluation means that the how of rigorous evidence between schools and localities remains haphazard (2015, p. 4).*



### ***Consistent cross-sector approaches***

A further important strand in the governance of inclusive systems is collaboration across different sectors. Agency work on Teacher Education for Inclusion (European Agency, 2011c) stressed the need for holistic and inter-connected policies and a ‘whole government’ approach, as also advocated by OECD (2010). Further work by the Agency (2010) similarly stressed the critical importance of joint policy-making between departments of education, health and social services. This was reinforced more recently by the Organisation of Provision project (European Agency, 2014).

The European Parliament’s report on *Member States’ Policies for Children with Disabilities* makes the following recommendation on access to assistance:

*A special single national body (with regional offices) responsible for the management of services, budget and assistance of children and their families should be established in order to ensure consistency, coordination, effectiveness, increase accessibility and better guidance for families on the funding support available (2013, p. 142).*

In some countries, services are under the control of different ministries (for example the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health), increasing the likelihood of poor communication among different service providers. This compartmentalisation inevitably impacts negatively on a learner’s educational career (Ebersold, 2012b). Soan (2012) suggests that legislation should underpin the development and the commitment of the different services, so that inter-professional working supports learners with disabilities with all those involved identifying, assessing, monitoring and reviewing provision together.

Jan Trzuszczński, former Director-General for Education and Culture at the European Commission, points out that education policies alone cannot tackle inter-generational cycles of deprivation and educational disadvantage. He notes the need for cross-sectoral approaches to link education and training policies with employment, finance, youth, health, housing, welfare and other services, saying that:

*... a multi-faceted response to vulnerability on and around schools, the only universal service where the well-being of children and young people can be regularly monitored, would seem a wise step to achieving universal active inclusion (Edwards and Downes, 2013, p. 7).*

The European Commission (2013b), in *Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage*, notes that quality services are required to remove inequalities – not only investment in early education and inclusive education, but also in health systems, housing and family support. It stresses the need to strengthen synergies across sectors and improve governance arrangements.



## **Quality assurance, evaluation and accountability**

Overall, strong quality assurance, monitoring and evaluation and accountability mechanisms are required to ensure the implementation of policy goals that safeguard a high quality education for all learners, as well as equity of resource allocation. Burns et al. (2016) note the need for accountability pressures to be aligned within and across governance levels, across programmes and stakeholders – all with a focus on dialogue and transparency. This section considers the influence of high-stakes accountability and marketisation which can work against collaboration and more inclusive practice.

### ***Quality assurance, evaluation and accountability in Iceland***

In Iceland, the Directorate of Education conducts external evaluation of schools. The purpose is to obtain an overall picture of each school's activities or of specific aspects at any given time. The external evaluation is based on the schools' own internal evaluation and national quality indicators. All schools are therefore required to systematically evaluate their quality and outcomes and to involve school personnel, learners and parents. The European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2015a) note that, in Iceland, the trend is to include people with some expertise outside schools in the evaluation team. They also point out that the choice of schools is limited, despite school information being available, so market forces play a smaller role in the Icelandic context.

Each school must publish their internal evaluation and their plans for improvement. Municipalities are expected to monitor the quality of education and provide the Ministry with information. The Ministry of Education, in co-operation with the Association of Local Authorities, prepares guidelines and criteria for municipalities for the internal evaluation of pre-schools.

### ***Quality assurance, evaluation and accountability in wider contexts***

The European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2015a) observe that, in most European countries, both internal and external evaluation is carried out. In most countries, external evaluators also make use of internal evaluation information. Out of 31 countries studied, 27 have a central inspectorate, with some operating on a shared basis between central and regional levels. The criteria are often highly standardised. As is usual practice, the process consists of analysis, school visit and reporting. A small number of countries take a 'risk-based' approach, focusing on schools not performing to expected standards. Others share evidence about what works and in which circumstances. A further distinction can be made between systems which make schools accountable to the market and those which make schools accountable to the state/government.



Leaders at all system levels need to engage with quality assurance processes. However, they should also be aware of the impact that some systems of accountability can have on the development of inclusive practice. Recent Agency work (for example, Teacher Education for Inclusion, Organisation of Provision and Raising Achievement) has discussed this issue and the idea of ‘inclusive’ accountability – a system of accountability that supports and values inclusive practice and wider achievement shown through multiple measures of success. This helps to avoid conflicting policy agendas that, on the one hand, support the development of schools that welcome learner diversity and, on the other hand, align with the pressure to focus on high academic standards.

Inclusive education is widely agreed to be about ensuring both quality education and excellence for all learners. Nevertheless, it is not unusual for achievement to be measured against a set of standards, or for raising achievement to be considered primarily in terms of performance in tests/examinations. Alexander points out that high-stakes testing, punitive inspection and the marketisation of schooling ‘generate considerable collateral damage while not necessarily delivering on standards’ (2012, p. 9). (See also Nichols and Berliner, 2007; Alexander, 2010; Alexander et al., 2010; Ravitch, 2010).

Hargreaves and Braun (2012) found that in Ontario, due to ‘threshold’ performance indicators, teachers experienced pressure to concentrate their efforts on learners who would achieve the easiest threshold gains, rather than on all learners and, in particular, those who had the greatest needs. They note that this phenomenon is common to all systems that assign numerical thresholds to performance targets. This policy may lead to the development of compensatory approaches, rather than a focus on diversity and value seen in wider achievement and personal progress. In a study of accountability in high-performing education systems, Husbands et al. (2008) found that only two out of thirteen countries reported a broad range of outcomes in a holistic way. Accountability-driven policies have therefore created a situation where individual goals are overtaken by standardised content. Content such as applied life skills and social and emotional development may be neglected as ‘academic’ knowledge is prioritised (Rhim and McLaughlin, 2007). Learners’ individual strengths and needs and standardised learning objectives compete for attention (Mayrowetz, 2009; Thorius and Maxcy, 2014).

Such a high-stakes accountability framework may particularly have a negative impact on the education of learners with disabilities, as it excludes those who cannot achieve according to a narrow ‘standards’ agenda, marginalising and excluding many learners (Sodha and Margo, 2010).

Alexander (2012) raises some questions in relation to the increasing influence of PISA. He asks if countries that do well in PISA provide their children with an



education that is ‘about significantly more than passing tests in two or three subjects’ (p. 12) – and whether if the wider curriculum were to be measured, the same countries would still head the league table. He adds a plea that we recover a sense of proportion about what international achievement surveys tell us – and what they cannot tell us. ‘We must develop an account of educational progress and performance that doesn’t arbitrarily restrict itself to what can be measured’ (p. 13). Further discussion of international test scores and educational policy can be found in Carnoy (2015).

For learners with additional support needs more specifically, attempts to raise achievement may be at risk of failure where disability is used to justify the lack of progress. In addition, ‘perverse incentives’ may develop – if learners’ outcomes are poor, then the school or local authority/municipality is allowed to request more support. This practice also fails to address the question of whether the learning and teaching approaches used for learners with disabilities have been effective (Sodha and Margo, 2010). Put briefly, such an accountability system may encourage schools to push learners ‘up the funding ladder rather than reflect on their own practice and, where necessary, change it’ (ibid., p. 109).

Gilbert (2012) suggests that a shift in mindset and culture is required, so that accountability is professionally owned rather than externally imposed. A greater emphasis on formative accountability is required as a complement to summative accountability and increased collaboration within and across schools.

Park (2013) similarly argues that trust within a school – between senior leaders, teachers, learners and parents – improves educational outcomes. He suggests that dialogue and reflection, rather than imposed judgements, would detoxify the systems and engage stakeholders in shaping priorities and a strategy for achieving them.

A climate of competition, supported by the publication of examination results and funding allocated through competitive bidding, makes it hard to develop a culture of collaboration (Muijs et al., 2011).

Hargreaves notes that:

*It is widely held among politicians that competition drives up standards in the system: the challenge is now to recognise that a renewed culture of extended moral purpose is directed to the same end (2012, p. 16).*

Increasingly States, while appearing to relax their hold, actually find new ways of regulating education. Hudson (2007) suggests that they shift the focus of control to the output side of education, with demands for quality controls, standardised testing, evaluations and the introduction of national bodies. In addition, they may



introduce 'soft' forms of control, such as dissemination of information, joint analysis and increased use of evaluation and quality control.

This trend can impact on many aspects of school practice, for example, the function and design of curricula and the use of qualifications. The use of standards which focus on areas which are more easily measured also requires careful mediation.

All of the above areas require expertise to be developed, with strong leadership and internal and external support networks to increase the school capacity to include all learners. Leaders are also the key to developing a culture of collaborative self-evaluation that moves away from blame to revolve around learning. Finally, care must be taken that work to comply with central government initiatives does not detract from the focus on self-improvement.

### **Use of data**

The report on *Resource Use in Schools* (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2014b), produced for the OECD, highlighted that data collection has improved in recent years. However, statistics are not yet correlated with data on the quality of education or learner performance and thus the effective use of resources. In formal evaluations and monitoring of schools and the education system, the focus has also not been on assessing the effectiveness and efficiency of resource use.

In decentralised systems, actors at all levels need clear and relevant information on the academic and financial performance of their schools relative to other schools, including expenses, resource use and education outcomes. With regard to the link between socio-economic background and achievement, it is important to know the impact of the policies put in place, in order to provide insights into the possible consequences of different types of decentralisation on learners' educational outcomes and how these might be optimised (West et al., 2010).

There is also a need to consider the use of education information with wider stakeholders, for example service users. This, in turn, requires action to improve the capacity to use information at the local level, and recognition that this is also likely to increase demand for information.

While Hargreaves and Fullan note the need for schools to be 'evidence-informed, not data-driven' (2012, p. 164), the collection of relevant data remains an important element in the monitoring and evaluation of provision at all system levels. Data is required to track learners and monitor their progress and, at school level, to establish the patterns of achievement across different groups to ensure that interventions/policies are effective, have an equitable impact and to allow any 'achievement gaps' to be addressed. At national level, national and international



tests provide data to monitor standards. However, qualitative and contextual information should be considered along with quantitative data.

Waitoller and Thorius note that, in the USA, an increase in high-stakes accountability has led to the development of sophisticated data systems. They note, however:

*What gets measured overtakes teaching priorities, and students' cultural repertoires are marginalised to focus efforts on academic standards. This type of curricular decision provides racial and linguistic minority students with a reductive education that focuses primarily on learning basic reading and mathematical skills at the expense of valuing and recognising students' cultural repertoires and diverse abilities (2015, p. 28).*

UNESCO-IBE, in their framework for reviewing national development, note the need for effective systems for collecting statistical data regarding the presence, participation and achievement of all learners, along with data analysis and actions to strengthen inclusive practice (2016, p. 16).

In the Agency Organisation of Provision project (2014), some countries indicated that they monitor/evaluate:

- The organisation and operation of educational institutions and the quality and effectiveness provided
- Education standards
- The implementation and effectiveness of programmes, including those for learners with disabilities
- The conduct of assessments of learners' educational needs.

With regard to learners with disabilities/SEN, countries also monitor:

- Equal opportunity and access to education
- Positive school environment/open school atmosphere (effective educational practices, positive teachers' attitudes, co-operation with the local community)
- Teaching to facilitate learning and meet the diverse needs of individual learners (methods, materials, IT, differentiated teaching, adapted tests, etc.)
- The acquisition of academic and soft skills (curriculum-based assessment, on-going formative and summative assessment)
- The use of IEPs as the basis for assessment
- The promotion of learners' personal and social development.

A previous Agency project on Mapping the Implementation of Policy for Inclusive Education (2011a) identified five key policy requirements relating to data collection



that emerge from a consideration of the need for evidence on inclusive education at the national level. These are the need:

- for national level data collection to be anchored within European level agreements;
- to understand the impact of differences in countries' education systems;
- to analyse the effectiveness of inclusive education;
- for data collection to provide evidence relating to quality assurance issues;
- to track learners' progress in the long-term.

To align to the broad concepts of inclusive education, the project also points to:

- the need for a re-interpretation of 'traditional' target groups for data collection in order to consider all learners at risk of exclusion, such as migrants, or learners not attending formal education, as well as those with SEN;
- the need to integrate specific data gathering for inclusive education within all 'usual' educational data gathering activities.

## Summary

This chapter has focused on the 6<sup>th</sup> Standard: *Governance and quality assurance mechanisms ensure co-ordinated and effective implementation of inclusive education policy and practice*. It has examined relevant research relating to the core issue: *The effectiveness of educational governance and quality assurance/accountability processes at all system levels*.

While there are undoubtedly advantages to decentralised systems, this chapter has highlighted the need to address issues around inequity and to improve communication, co-ordination and coherence.

The importance of cross-sector working and of effective accountability frameworks to support inclusive practice has also been stressed. Quality assurance should be about excellence for all learners. It should take account of wider achievement and the attainment of those learners unable to access the framework of high-stakes measures, such as national examinations.

The need for clarity about the use of data with all stakeholders has also been raised. Ainscow et al. note that statistical information alone tells us very little. They say:

*What brings such data to life is when 'insiders' start to scrutinise and ask questions together as to their significance, bringing their detailed experiences and knowledge to bear on the process of interpretation (2016, p. 29).*



Therefore, the need to systematically monitor and evaluate as part of a regular improvement cycle with tools developed at local level is an important consideration, as raised in the 2015 review of inclusive education in Iceland (Mennta- og menningarmálaráðuneytið, 2015).



## 7. EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR TEACHERS AND SCHOOL LEADERS

Evidence suggests that the quality of teachers and their teaching is most likely to have the greatest impact and influence on educational outcomes. The OECD states that: ‘the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers and principals’ (2011, p. 235). In particular, the difference that teachers make is believed to be greater for lower achieving learners (Mincu, 2015).

It follows that enhancing teacher quality is intrinsically linked to the quality of initial and continuing teacher education programmes (OECD, 2012b). Schleicher (2016) stresses that teachers’ development must be viewed in terms of lifelong learning, with ITE seen as providing the foundation. Education policies to support this approach should aim to prioritise activities that have the greatest impact on teachers’ practices and, among other things, strengthen peer collaboration through induction and mentoring.

This section will consider both ITE and on-going professional development for teachers – with a view to developing inclusive practice. It will also discuss the key role of school leaders and, finally, will examine the role and development of teacher educators in various contexts (e.g. higher education, local municipalities and schools).

### **Initial teacher education**

Niemi and Nevgi note that, due to the rapidly changing role of teachers and the increasing heterogeneity of learners, teachers should ‘internalize the attitude of thinking like a researcher, constantly trying to find new solutions and seeking new evidence to improve their work as professional experts’ (2014, p. 141). They must be able to use research knowledge and tools to observe and produce evidence in their work, as well as a capacity for critical questioning.

To be learner-centred in their practice, teachers need experiences that mirror the ones research suggests they provide for their learners. Teachers need to feel ‘competent, related, autonomous, and authentic’ (Toshalis and Nakkula, 2012, p. 33), with sustained focus and compassion, despite challenges that arise in the classroom. For this reason, schools and school cultures need to be *teacher*-centred, with ‘institutional pathways that motivate and engage rather than threaten and punish’ (ibid.).

### ***Initial teacher education in Iceland***

Teacher education for compulsory school teachers has been based in universities since 1971 and for pre-school teachers since 1998. Teacher education for upper-



secondary school teachers, however, has a longer history at the university level. The law in Iceland requires a master's degree to teach in pre-school, compulsory and upper-secondary schools.

Vocational teachers requirements include units in Teacher Certification Studies and a diploma in the vocational field (e.g. master craftsperson in a trade). In special education, a programme has been provided since 1974. It is currently offered as an elective study at master's level at the University of Iceland.

An open recruitment process is generally used for teachers, with individual schools making appointments. At pre-school and compulsory school level, they consult with the local municipality.

Formal induction or a structured support phase for newly qualified teachers does not exist in Iceland. However, new teachers in compulsory schools may be given less teaching hours than other teachers for the first year and there may be some informal support in some schools and municipalities.

Ragnarsdóttir (2010) notes that the teacher population in Iceland does not reflect the increasing diversity in Icelandic society. Although more students from ethnically diverse backgrounds are entering teacher education, universities do not always appear well prepared for diverse groups, to ensure they are not marginalised and to build on the resources and capital that such students bring. In later work, Ragnarsdóttir et al. (2015) make recommendations regarding teacher education on multi-lingualism and multi-cultural education for all teachers that will enable them to take responsibility for immigrant learners.

In a mission concerning the teaching profession, the Teachers' Union of Iceland (2014b) notes the need for an increased period of teaching practice in ITE and also mentoring, counselling and guidance for teachers.

### ***Initial teacher education in wider contexts***

ITE is crucial in developing more inclusive practice to enable all teachers to meet the increasingly diverse needs of learners. The Agency report on *Teacher Education for Inclusion across Europe* (Agency, 2011c) reported that teachers need certain conditions to implement inclusive practice. It emphasised the need to develop teachers in terms of effective skills and competences, as well as values and principles. The report made recommendations about the wider policy context, as well as for ITE.

The Agency's *Profile of Inclusive Teachers* (2012b) stresses the development of the following core values: valuing learner diversity, supporting all learners, working with others, and continuous personal professional development. Hollenweger et al. (2015) developed a tool based on these four areas of competence, expanded to



provide a focus on practice, including access, participation, learning and achievement (learner focus – valuing learner diversity); transforming learning capacity (curriculum focus – supporting all learners); enabling social and physical environments (contextual focus – working with others); and competent inclusive practitioners (teacher focus – taking responsibility for lifelong learning).

The Inclusive Practice Project in Scotland provides further support for the development of inclusive pedagogy. Florian and Pratt (2015) conclude that the following points should be considered in embedding equality and diversity into higher education:

- Barriers to learning are often caused by attitudes and discriminatory practices, where the learner is deemed to be at fault rather than the system.
- Embedding equality and diversity should be inclusive rather than targeted, responsive to the multiplicity of identities embodied in students and groups.
- Student services are essential, but care must be taken to ensure that faculties do not underestimate the role they themselves can play in empowering students to participate in academic programmes.
- Teaching about inclusive practice and teaching in ways that are inclusive are different. The latter involves modelling best practice in ways that may be radical, but which will ultimately support learner progress.
- School placements offer the opportunity to demonstrate and reflect on students' understandings and negotiations of diversities.
- Higher education institutions would benefit from considering equality and diversity to be an important part of the accreditation and review of programmes of study.
- Embedding equality and diversity requires time and space for anticipatory planning, especially in relation to assessment activities and the administrative process of assessment procedures.
- Embedding equality and diversity requires time and space for academic staff development activities.
- Embedding equality and diversity means facilitating students to reflect on their own experiences, skills and understandings. This can be done through adapting curriculum content, refining pedagogical practices and considering assessment content and methods.

Much recent research has focused on the competences that need to be developed in ITE. Jobs for the Future and the Council of Chief State School Officers (2015) set out educator competencies for personalised, learner-centred teaching. These are



organised into four domains: cognitive – need to know; intrapersonal – need to process; interpersonal – need to relate; instructional – need to do. Indicators have been developed for each domain.

Dunn and Certo conclude that:

*... effective teacher education must strike a balance between preparing preservice teachers for the climate that currently exists and the one that we hope they are part of creating. That is, we must strike a balance between showing them the reality of test-based, accountability-driven systems that are currently in place, at the same time that we give them the tools to create a system where creativity, cultural relevance, and student-centeredness are not only recognized but celebrated as valuable pedagogy (2016, p. 106).*

In some countries, a period of induction follows ITE. Induction is defined as ‘a structured support programme for qualified first-time teachers’ (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2015b, p. 42). It mainly involves mentoring in schools by experienced teachers (European Commission, 2014). The *Education and Training Monitor* (European Commission, 2015c) notes that beginning teachers have access to a structured induction programme in only 16 member states. However, it points out that, where formal induction programmes are absent, mentoring support measures for new teachers are generally in place (European Commission, 2014). This topic is discussed in more depth by the European Agency (2015c). This report also provides country practice examples.

### **Continuous professional development**

In order to develop the required competences in all teachers, it is necessary not only to transform ITE, but also to ‘create environments in which all teachers embrace the idea of continuous improvement’ (William, 2013, p. 55). In its work on Empowering Teachers, the European Agency (2015c) put forward eight considerations that could form the basis of a strategic approach to the career-long development of all teachers. These points include providing support for teachers to empower them to take responsibility for all learners, to engage with research and reflect on their practice and to collaborate with others and draw on available social capital.

### ***Opportunities for teachers in Iceland***

Regarding CPD funding, municipalities and schools have the opportunity to apply for funds from different sources at all school levels. These funds provide access to seminars and conferences, study visits, research and development work and teaching materials. Funding is also available for longer-term courses and sabbaticals. Other possibilities include EU funding, such as the new Lifelong Learning Erasmus+ programme (2014–2020) and Nordplus ([www.nordplusonline.org](http://www.nordplusonline.org)).



It is clear that, under the current system, funds are administered in different ways by different organisations. A national advisory board for CPD has recently been established to rationalise arrangements and bring about greater consistency and coherence.

Guðjónsdóttir (2015) describes a graduate course that focuses on changes in education, schools and teachers' work – and in particular prepares teachers to work with diverse learners. The course supports the development of teachers' professional working theory and aims to build their resources to think about the whole person and become responsive teachers. Guðjónsdóttir et al. (2015) describe the course teaching which has been developed in a blended format, creating an engaging online environment alongside face-to-face activities. She concludes that teacher educators also need support with these innovative developments.

Svanbjörnsdóttir et al. (2015) found that teamwork contributed to building a professional learning community in the school through support, reflection and shared practice among teachers and school leaders and by highlighting goals, processes and progress in learning for all. Collaboration influenced new understandings of practice and caused changes in thinking, attitude and actions for many teachers. However, shortcomings were observed, including teacher interactions that were about co-ordination and consultation in which information was exchanged (Stage 2), rather than co-operation or collaboration in which teachers worked together (Stage 3 or 4). Teachers were not comfortable with criticising each other's practice. This is in line with the TALIS findings in Iceland – that teachers would tolerate poor performance of other teachers (Ólafsson et al., 2012). It is suggested that an emphasis on peer coaching and effective ways of giving feedback could build trust, with regular reflection 'in' and 'on' action (Schön, 1991). Teachers wanted to be given 'correct' answers from leaders, rather than to collaborate with colleagues to solve problems through innovation.

Ragnarsdóttir and Johannesson (2014) studied upper-secondary school teachers in Iceland. They report a dramatic rise in occupational stress and workloads following the 2008 economic crash and the introduction of the new curriculum in 2011. They recommend a greater focus on well-being, job satisfaction and investment in quality of teaching, educational reform and professional development to use the professional capital of the teaching profession in traditional subjects and new/integrated subjects and cross-curricular pillars of education (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012).

### **Professional development for inclusive practice**

As described by the Agency Empowering Teachers project (European Agency, 2015c), teacher education should be seen as a continuum and as a lifelong process –



with inclusive education as an embedded element. What is critical is the way teachers ‘think about, evaluate or seek to improve their practice’ (Fielding et al., 2005, p. 56). Practice transfer involves teachers’ professional growth, rather than applying someone else’s ideas and practices to their everyday work. It requires the development of teachers’ existing practice through collaborative development rather than the delivery of pre-formed packages or the reproduction of other teachers’ practice (Fielding et al., 2005).

Cordingley and Bell (2012) note that there is now a robust body of evidence describing the characteristics of professional learning that leads to positive learner outcomes. Such CPD is more likely to benefit learners if it is:

- collaborative – involving staff working together, identifying starting points, sharing evidence about practice and trying out new approaches;
- supported by specialist expertise, usually drawn from beyond the learning setting;
- focused on aspirations for learners – which provides the moral imperative and shared focus;
- sustained over time – professional development sustained over weeks or months has substantially more impact on practice benefiting learners than shorter engagement;
- exploring evidence from trying new things to connect practice to theory, enabling practitioners to transfer new approaches and practices and the concepts underpinning them to practice multiple contexts.

Stoll (2015) provides similar messages about great professional development:

- Think about the learners’ needs and the impact you want to have.
- Help colleagues to think seriously and differently about their practice.
- Provide opportunities for colleagues to engage in deep collaborative learning.
- Ensure access to knowledge and skills from inside and outside.
- Use collaborative enquiry to stimulate professional learning – but not as a quick fix.
- Facilitate the practicalities to encourage a learning culture.

Ware et al. (2011) recommend that CPD should be available in the form of online training opportunities. Teachers are then able to create accommodating classrooms that suit all learners and plan their support in advance to be unobtrusive and natural within the normal flow of the lesson (McLeskey and Waldron, 2007; Waldron and McLeskey, 2010).



The OECD examines support for teacher professionalism which it considers comprises: knowledge base, autonomy and peer networks. While this is a complex area, the report offers some policy recommendations on supporting teacher professionalism:

- Requiring teachers to take part in in-service formal teacher education programmes that expose them to pedagogy and opportunities for practice teaching
- Expand induction and mentoring programmes
- Support teachers in conducting class-based individual or collaborative research
- Encourage teacher participation in networks with other teachers for information exchange (2016c, p. 23).

The OECD (2016c) also notes that effective professional development should be linked to teachers' own development, teaching responsibilities and their school's goals. Schleicher (2016) similarly stresses the need to strengthen links between teacher appraisal and professional development.

The European Commission (2013c) reports that, overall, more training is needed on ICT, special needs and teaching in multi-cultural/multi-lingual settings. Interestingly, it found that teachers involved in collaborative learning report using innovative pedagogies more frequently and also experience higher levels of job satisfaction.

The Organisation of Provision literature review (European Agency, 2013a) notes that the development of school-to-school collaboration has proved to be an efficient way to strengthen the capacity of schools to face new challenges and, therefore, to develop inclusive practice. Hargreaves asserts:

*It has long been known that the most powerful influences on teachers are other teachers, but policies have rarely built on the fact. The best way of exploiting this phenomenon is through regular, face to face encounters among professionals that focus on the improvement of teaching and learning (2010, p. 23).*

Mincu stresses the key role of research through external interventions or on-site collaborative inquiry processes. She continues:

*The greatest beneficiaries of this kind of 'research-rich' approach are likely to be those who are defined as lower achievers and those in marginalised communities. Engagement in the research process is indispensable for securing teachers' morale and in building their professionalism. Finally, such research*



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*fuels the wider school improvement process, one that is heavily dependent on human and social capital in all its forms (2015, p. 265).*

Hinton et al. also note the need for ‘an infrastructure that supports a sustainable interaction between researchers and practitioners’ (2012, p. 19). Without this, there is ‘a gap between research and practice ... often based on history or ideology rather than evidence’ (ibid.). With regard to putting learner-centred learning approaches into practice, the authors state that extensive professional development is required which could be addressed by research schools that could operate as ‘living laboratories’ (ibid., p. 20).

In many countries, the role of the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) – increasingly changed to Inclusion Co-ordinator – has developed over recent years. Lindqvist and Nilholm (2013) studied the SENCO role in Sweden and notes that, while roles vary in different contexts, many SENCOs have only partially established a new role moving away from working with individual learners towards supporting schools to more inclusive practices. They found contradictions about this role between the views of policy-makers and school leaders and the SENCOs themselves.

Earlier work in the UK by Pearson (2008) raised a number of issues, including workload, unmet training needs and lack of additional pay for additional responsibilities. As a result, there appears to be a high turnover of teachers taking this role. Pearson suggests that the role should be re-formulated in line with current thinking and an embedded culture of inclusion, dedicated time and genuine collaboration at all levels (Abbott, 2007).

### **The key role of school leaders**

In Iceland, Hansen and Lárusdóttir (2015) note that principals are now spending considerable time on projects related to management, operations and general administration, at the expense of projects related to teaching, learning and professional consultation for teachers in the field. They say that it is important that school principals spend as much time as possible on professional matters, tied to the core of school operations, i.e. teaching and learning.

Raising the need to provide more proactive instructional leadership to teachers based on reliable data, Svanbjörnsdóttir (2015) notes that, while many schools follow a collegial model, systematic data collection on what happens in classrooms is largely neglected in the Icelandic schools.

The literature on inclusive education underlines the crucial role of leadership in fostering innovation and promoting inclusive change (Ainscow and Sandill, 2010; Mac Ruairc et al., 2013). The Organisation of Provision project (European Agency, 2013a) highlighted the importance of support from school leadership teams to



enable teachers to develop the values, attitudes and skills needed to confidently take responsibility for all learners in their classes – and to be prepared to take risks and innovate to find solutions to new challenges.

Furthermore, research evidence shows that leadership practices are both directly and indirectly connected with learners' outcomes (Mac Ruairc et al., 2013; Silva and Lima, 2011). Osborne-Lampkin et al. (2015) produced a systematic review of the relationship between characteristics of leaders/principals and learner achievement which they say can provide insight into why some leaders are more effective than others.

The nature of leadership is also changing. The current approach goes beyond the traditional approach that focuses on top-down hierarchical styles. In particular, it extends to the role of other teacher leaders (Liasidou and Svensson, 2012) and, in general, to any other staff member who occupies a leading role within the institution. Such actors are important as they act as 'enforcers' or 'drivers' of the process of change and multiply the action of the head teacher. This is often described as 'distributed leadership' (Harris, 2008). Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) cite this as an important element of what they call 'sustainable leadership', which is underpinned by the principles of justice and diversity, among others.

Specifically regarding leadership for inclusive education, Precey and Mazurkiewicz suggest that this should be built around five elements:

1. Adequate actions that are coherent with the context (i.e. constant reflection, regular analysis of trends, needs and expectations; on-going adaptations of objectives, priorities, tasks and actions)
2. Focus on learning as a 'visible priority'
3. Participation of all colleagues (staff, learners and parents/carers) in the deliberation and decision-making process
4. Diversity. 'Respecting autonomy and differences' and dealing effectively with challenging inequity
5. Stewardship (adopting 'an appropriate serving attitude' towards everyone) (2013, p. 116).

Similarly, Theoharis and Scanlon (2015) put forward the following leadership goals for socially just schooling:

- Education opportunities for all
- Ambitious academic goals set and met by all
- Learners and families feel welcome

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- Learners are proportionately distributed across all groupings in school
  - One dimension of identity (e.g. race, language) does not correlate with undesirable aspects of schooling, e.g. bullying, struggling academically, dropping out.

In Hong Kong, Poon-McBrayer and Wong (2013) confirmed that a shared vision and the leaders' partnership with staff are fundamental to changing schools. They suggest incorporating the skills for value building in future principal training programmes, along with the skills to build relationships with key stakeholders.

Wildy et al. (2014) note that it is common for principals to start their principalship with little or no preparation for the role. The demands are great, as they must often divide their time between teaching and administration and need to comply with national initiatives as well as developing staff capacity. This can lead to professional isolation. Wildy et al. suggest that principals should develop the skills and understanding for a culture of enquiry rather than one of acceptance.

According to the evidence presented in the study, head teachers also need empowerment through professional development opportunities and supportive networks, in order to be able to understand the 'politics of difference and diversity' and to 're-conceptualise their professional roles and praxis within the context of a social justice reform agenda' (Liasidou & Antoniou, 2015, p. 359). With such development in mind, a wealth of resources are available from the European Policy Network on School Leadership (2015), including a School Leadership Toolkit for equity and learning.

### ***Leadership for change***

Harris notes that:

*Leading system reform is not about mandating, driving or demanding better performance, it is about creating the conditions where professional knowledge and skills are enhanced, where effective leadership exists at all levels and, most importantly, where the success of every child in every setting is the main driver and ultimate goal of system improvement (2012, pp. 400–401).*

Levin (2012) holds the view that, although the use of change knowledge is increasing, prospects for change remain mixed. He gives three reasons for this – firstly, that the use of change knowledge does not promise the quick fix that political pressures may demand. Secondly, change knowledge is complex and leaders experience high turnover and many competing pressures. Thirdly, lasting improvement requires deep cultural change and effort over many years. Levin provides a checklist of the characteristics of effective ministries of education trying to support improved learner outcomes across a large number of schools.



Regarding building capacity in learners' services, Daniels and Edwards (2012) describe a form of 'intelligent leadership' that includes the following processes:

- Recognition: identifying the specific learning challenge and the nature of the learning required to address it through the use of appropriate forms of intelligence and data
- Response: establishing the best way to promote the learning needed, the form of leadership this requires and the specific leadership actions that need to be undertaken
- Reflection: asking if the learning challenge has been addressed, whether the leadership approach adopted was effective and what improvements could be made in the future.

Hargreaves and Harris (2011) discuss performance beyond expectations and note the implications for school leaders. These include resisting the temptation to 'sweep aside everyone and everything with a new broom' (p. 76). They stress the need to mix external ideas with internal capacities and loyalties and recombine in productive ways, using failure as an opportunity to galvanise self and community. Involving colleagues is seen as a way to invest in the long term, recognising that authentic growth is steady and sustainable. Leaders at all levels must be aware of the time taken to bring about lasting change. As Macleod et al. (2015) record, leaders in successful schools said it had taken around three to five years to see the impact of changes they had introduced feed through to learners' results.

### **The key role of teacher educators**

In the Agency report *Teacher Education for Inclusion across Europe* (European Agency, 2011c), teacher educators were referred to as the 'hidden profession' (European Commission Directorate-General for Education and Culture, 2010, p. 1). As ideas about teacher education for inclusion differ widely, and teacher educators form a disparate group with multiple identities, there is also no agreement about the requirements for recruiting teacher educators who can perform this role. Currently across Europe, teacher educators hold many different qualifications, with different backgrounds and experience.

In many countries, there is no formal induction and few opportunities for development of teacher educators. Levels of involvement in research also differ. Some teacher educators may lack experience in inclusive schools and not regard this as a priority. However, the European Agency (2015c) describes some promising developments.

The Agency (ibid) notes that, across Europe, countries need to increase the profile of and attention to the role of teacher educators and develop a clear idea of the



competences needed for them to contribute effectively to the development of inclusive teachers. This includes:

- The underpinning values and beliefs that support inclusive practice, knowledge and experience of diversity in the classroom and different approaches to pedagogy, curriculum and assessment
- Research skills to support teachers to engage with ideas from research, as well as to use research methodology as a means of evaluating and improving their own practice
- Skills in ICT and knowledge of its use in the classroom to improve access to learning
- Coaching and mentoring skills to improve the effectiveness of the on-going feedback and support to teachers throughout the continuum.

### **Summary**

This chapter has focused on the 7<sup>th</sup> Standard: *Professional development issues at all system levels are effectively addressed*. It reviewed relevant research relating to the core issue: *How stakeholders at all levels are enabled through their initial education and continuing professional development to implement inclusive education as a rights-based approach for all learners*.

This chapter has noted the importance of ITE for diversity, as recommended in the 2015 review of inclusive education in Iceland (Mennta- og menningarmálaráðuneytið, 2015). Co-ordination of provision at national level should involve development opportunities for teacher educators that will make effective use of their expertise within the school system. The need for a coherent framework for teachers' CPD, building on ITE, has also been discussed. Such a framework should enable teachers to undertake training in line with national policy goals and school development targets to support inclusive practice. It could also be linked to teacher appraisal and longer-term career development (OECD, 2016c). Some specialist training should be maintained to provide support to learners with low-incidence disabilities (such as profound and multiple disabilities, sensory impairments, etc.) as well as their teachers/families.

Given school leaders' key role, they should also benefit from opportunities that support and empower them as managers of change, as well as effective leaders of inclusive schools. The research raises the development of networks of leaders and managers as an effective way to share practice.



## EFFECTIVE SUPPORT FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION – THE ECOSYSTEM MODEL

Referring to the work of Sir Ken Robinson, Jakobsen and Crosier say that we are:

*... caught in the trap of conceiving education along an out-dated industrialisation model. We organise our schools like factories, with students harmonised by age groups, taught in specialised subjects according to a standardised curricula and then tested individually using standardised tests. And even when alternative approaches demonstrate superior outcomes the idea of changing this model appears to be too challenging (2016, p. 1).*

The need for transformation goes beyond ‘including’ learners perceived to be different. It should seek to provide a system that reflects 21<sup>st</sup>-century learning, with multiple measures of success, resource equity and evidence-based practice for school improvement (Cook-Harvey et al., 2016). This will produce learners with grit, tenacity and perseverance to meet 21<sup>st</sup>-century challenges (Shechtman et al., 2013).

The OECD (2016b) notes the difficulty of assessing the relative costs and benefits of education reform, due to the high number of intervening variables that influence the nature, size and distribution of benefits. It also notes the difficulty in identifying links between policies and outcomes, given the lag between the time of the initial cost of the reform and the time any intended benefits of the reforms might be seen. As a lot of stakeholders in education consequently have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo, it is essential to have consensus, or at least broad political support, for any proposed reform.

The conclusions that can be drawn from this desk research point to the need for a model that clarifies the main structures and processes and their inter-relationships in an ‘ecosystem’ that is able to support an analysis of the key influences on learning and participation. Such a model is presented below to be considered in the implementation and on-going monitoring and evaluation of any future development of the system for inclusive education.

### **The Ecosystem of Support for Inclusive Education**

The Ecosystem of Support for Inclusive Education (European Agency, in press-b) sets out the main structures and processes that influence the participation of every learner and that need to be considered in order to maximise opportunities for learning.

The model draws on the Agency project on Inclusive Early Childhood Education (IECE), which examined 32 examples of inclusive practice from Agency member countries to develop an ecosystem of support for inclusive education (European Agency, 2016a). This work was inspired by Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1988, 1989; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Bronfenbrenner &



Ceci, 1994) and by the structure-process-outcome model that is widely used in the assessment of the quality of early childhood education (Pianta et al., 2009).

This model has been further developed with reference to the outcomes of the Organisation of Provision project (European Agency, 2013a, 2014) and the conceptual framework of the current work on Raising the Achievement of All Learners in Inclusive Education, outlined in the project literature review (European Agency, 2016b). This work aimed to ensure that the model is applicable to all learners across all phases of education. It also draws on the work of Peters (2004), Hart et al. (2004) and Noonan & McCormick (2014).

In the ecological model, the process of development and learning is regarded as being created by the interactions between the individual and the surrounding environments. The model below views the learner as embedded in a series of inter-related systems that interact with one another. These include:

- The microsystems of all institutions or groups that most immediately and directly impact on the learner's development, including the immediate family and, for most learners, the pre-school, then compulsory and upper-secondary school, peers, wider family and community
- The mesosystem of inter-connections between the microsystems – interactions between family and teachers and between the family and learner's peers and their families, etc.
- The exosystem – the community context that may not be directly experienced by the learner, but which may influence the other microsystems
- The macrosystem – the wider social, cultural and legislative context that encompasses all the other systems.

Alongside these levels, there is also a need to consider the chronosystem (Geldenhuys and Wevers, 2013). Within this model, the time element relates to the realistic timescales required to bring about change and the need to provide support as soon as any barriers to learning are identified.

### ***Key concepts within the model***

The inner circle represents learner engagement and voice. A key concept, according to Hart et al. (2004) is co-agency – provision of choice to increase learner participation in and control over learning, as well as a positive sense of themselves as learners and a willingness to engage in the learning opportunities provided. Learners have a right to express their views and to influence decisions that affect them, so learner voice – genuine feedback from all learners – is crucial.



The chain of small circles surrounding the individual learner contains five processes of positive engagement and interaction within the *microsystem of the education setting*. The learner is directly involved in all of these processes:

- 1. Opportunities for social interaction** – the basis for trusting relationships between staff and learners and learners and their peers within the inclusive ethos of a supportive learning community where everyone belongs. Teachers enable learners to participate and make meaningful use of learning opportunities. They create a learning environment that maximises opportunities for interaction and mutual support.
- 2. Authentic learning activities** have relevance for every learner. Meaningful interdisciplinary learning opportunities should be planned from a flexible curriculum. Beyond the cognitive aspect, the curriculum may focus on physical, social, emotional, expression and communication, language, aesthetic, knowledge about the environment and the world, mathematics, new technologies, ethical and spiritual dimensions.
- 3. Approaches to increase learning capacity** – teachers need knowledge of the internal and external factors affecting learning, the impact of different groupings, the importance of emotional states (growth mindset) and a belief in transformability for every learner. They should ensure active engagement in daily routines and learning activities through personalisation, helping learners become active agents in their own learning.
- 4. Personalisation and assessment for learning.** The role of the teacher is more as a facilitator, in contrast to individualised learning (and also differentiation), where the teacher provides instruction accommodating the learning needs of individuals or a group of learners, respectively. Assessment for learning supports personalisation by providing feedback to inform next steps, involving – or led by – learners themselves. Here, teachers accept that they not able to predict future learning capacity and focus on lifting limits, expecting to be surprised by learner achievements.
- 5. Multiple means of expression**, including ICT. While some learners with disabilities will require accommodations/adaptations, learning opportunities should allow learners to participate and respond in different ways in order to minimise barriers ‘up front’.

The next circle contains the supportive *structures* within the mesosystem in the school environment that are regarded as enabling the inclusive interaction *processes* mentioned above.

- **Continuum of support:** support for all learners, but in particular those with additional support/learning needs, should be seen as a continuum.



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Increasingly, resources should support a move from individual, compensatory support to increasing the capacity of all schools to be proactive and intervene early when barriers to learning become evident. The chronosystem mentioned above is therefore crucial here. Support is seen as the norm for all, not something provided in response to a process that results in labelling of learners. Quality support is also needed for teachers to widen their repertoire for meeting diverse learner needs.

- **Professional development for diversity.** Professional development should support all teachers/leaders to develop appropriate competences for diversity. Teachers should make use of research/evidence and adopt a problem-solving approach to their work – asking for support from specialists when necessary, but using this to enhance provision for all.
- **Leadership.** Inclusive leaders develop a culture of positive and trusting relationships. They engage stakeholders in leadership tasks, as well as in self-review/evaluation, recognising the importance of contextual analysis and use of data for on-going improvement.
- **Collaboration.** Collaborative practice is used to support innovation and professional development. Partnerships are formed between school leaders and staff with parents and other key stakeholders (e.g. local employers, other schools, universities, etc.).
- **Ethic of everybody.** School/provision is structured/organised on this basis with no pre-determined assumptions about ‘ability’. Leaders/teachers take responsibility for all learners and make a commitment to act for – and value – everybody equally. They avoid choices that only benefit ‘some’ learners and work for greater equity. Schools take account of the identity and background of all learners and plan with them to create accessible and culturally responsive opportunities, using appropriate resources.
- **Family involvement.** This is placed partly in the micro-system and partly in the next circle directly connected to the microsystem, as parents may work closely with the school.

The third circle contains additional *structures* within the *exosystem around the school* which also support the processes of learner engagement:

- **Planning for coherence between phases of education and between school/work.** This may refer to a curriculum and pedagogy that attend to progression and continuity within and across phases of education, organisation of support and services that enable smooth transitions, etc.



- **Interagency and interdisciplinary co-operation.** To meet the diverse needs of all learners, services should be available from all agencies and disciplines outside the school setting. These should work together to support learners and also work with school personnel and other stakeholders to increase the capacity of the school and the community.
- **Community commitment.** The local community should share a commitment to quality education for all learners together, seeing inclusion as part of the improvement agenda for all schools. Community members should share their expertise in the school curriculum, as well as in extra-curricular activities/family support.

Finally, the outer circle contains six *structures* within the *macrosystem* identified as necessary to support inclusion:

- **Rights-based legislation and policy to support equity.** This should be the result of a long-term view from politicians, following a national dialogue to secure conceptual clarity around inclusive education and equity.
- **Curriculum and assessment framework.** All learners should have access to a coherent framework (e.g. national standards) as a basis for relevant learning and appropriate recognition of achievement.
- **Access to the local community school with peers.** The system structure should enable all learners to attend their local school with their peer group.
- **Governance and funding.** Clarity is needed around different levels of governance – roles/responsibilities with funding to increase system capacity and support equity.
- **Initial teacher education for diversity.** ITE should develop appropriate competences in all teachers to equip them to work in diverse classrooms.
- **Monitoring – quality assurance and accountability** (efficiency, cost effectiveness and focus on equity). There should be a clear focus on agreed standards for quality education that include multiple success measures, so that stakeholders are held accountable for outcomes that matter and impact on learner achievement.

### ***Using the model***

The ecosystem model brings together information from many sources covered in this desk research – particularly the work of earlier Agency projects (Organisation of Provision to Support Inclusive Education and Raising the Achievement of All Learners in Inclusive Education). The model highlights the key areas for which standards and indicators could be developed to support inclusive education within a



multi-level and cross-sectoral strategy. The inter-connections between these system levels are of particular importance. The ecosystem also highlights where responsibility for various structures and processes is situated.

As Loreman et al. (2014) point out, measuring inclusive education entails the use of a dynamic process with attention to practice, policy and relationships at all levels of the education system – including individual learner experiences. This model could potentially support an examination of barriers to the successful participation and achievement of all learners and, in particular, an analysis of the interactions that influence inclusion, including the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholder groups and the structures and processes that operate at all levels of the education system.

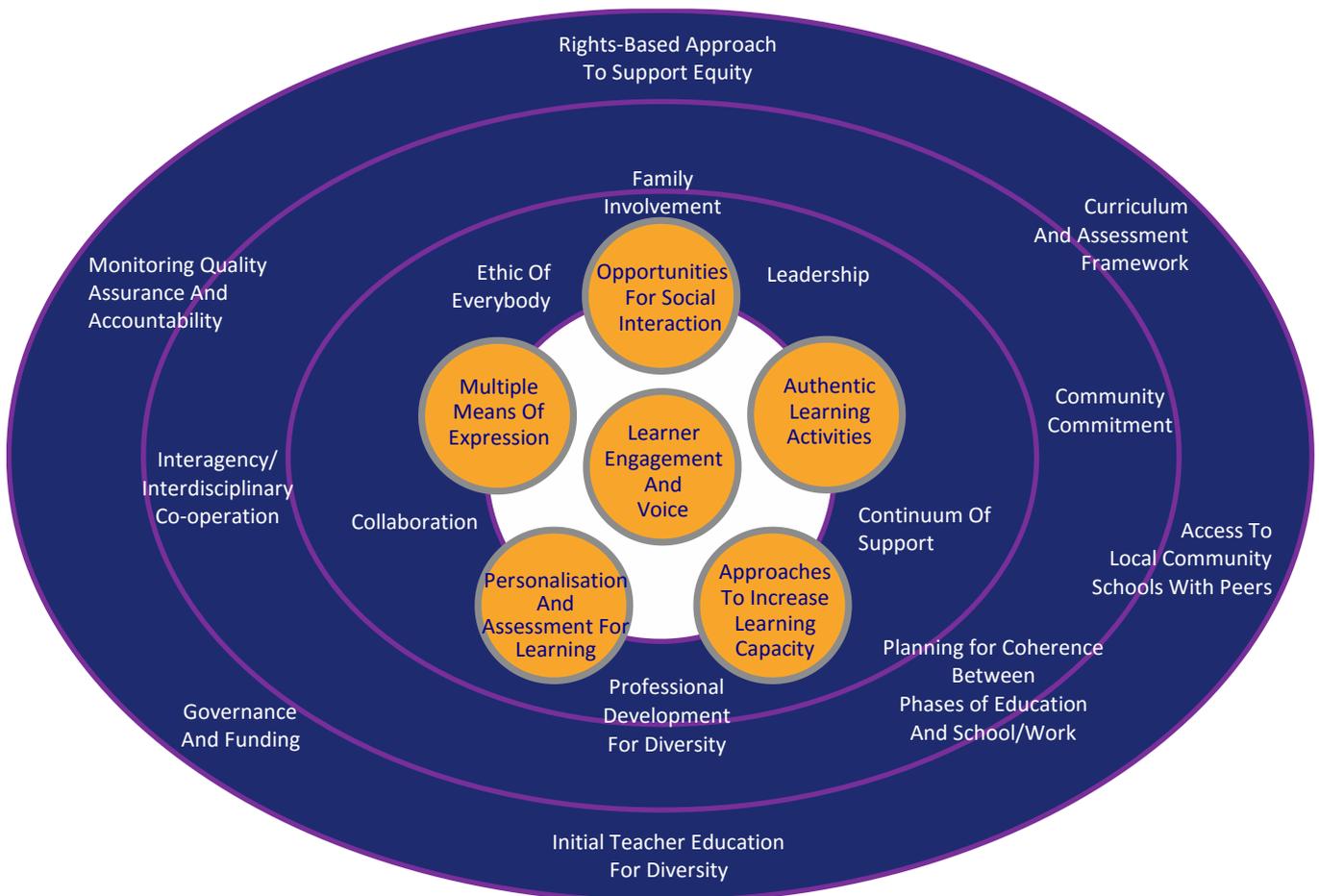


Figure 1. The Ecosystem of Support for Inclusive Education (European Agency, in press-b)



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## **Concluding remarks**

This desk research aims to support a thorough analysis of the context in Iceland and provide a sound basis for future work and the development of a clear rationale for any changes to be made to the system of inclusive education.

The research also provides some information on wider contexts throughout Europe and beyond, that might provide useful information for reflection, in particular regarding what works and why in those areas relating to the Standards and core issues for the Icelandic Audit.

In agreement with Loreman et al. (2014), this research attests to the complexity of the issues surrounding inclusive education – and also their dynamic nature. It is hoped that the document will support future work in Iceland with the engagement of all stakeholders to support continuous improvement of provision for all learners.



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