


EUROPEAN AGENCY FOR DEVELOPMENT IN SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION

OUR ORGANISATION

The European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education is an independent and self-governing organisation established by our member countries to act as their platform for collaboration regarding the development of provision for learners with special educational needs.

We are maintained by the Ministries of Education in the participating countries (member states of the European Union as well as Iceland, Norway and Switzerland) as well as supported by the European Union Institutions via the Jean Monnet programme under the EU Lifelong Learning Programme.

We facilitate the collection, processing and transfer of European level and country specific information and offer our member countries the opportunity to learn from each other through different types of knowledge and experience exchange.

Our short and long term work programmes reflect both our member countries' priorities and agreed EU policies regarding learners with special educational needs and the promotion of their full participation within mainstream education and training.

Our ultimate aim is to promote educational policy and practice that works to meet a diverse range of learners' needs – including those who have special educational needs. This aim takes into account issues such as equal opportunities, accessibility, inclusive education and the promotion of quality of education, whilst recognising that there are differences in countries' policies, practices and educational contexts.

OUR HISTORY

The Agency was established in 1996. Its formation should be seen within the context of the increasing collaboration that had evolved between the various European countries in the area of special needs education.

This collaboration was of great value and led, amongst other things, to the implementation of a number of specific programmes for learners with special educational needs as well as for the professionals involved in their education.

These programmes contributed considerably to the development of special needs education across Europe. They also demonstrated, however, that there was a continuing need for a more permanent and systematic structure for pan-European collaboration in this field, facilitating extended exchange of information and experience among and within countries with a view to promoting quality of provision.

It is within this context that the Agency evolved. We aim to facilitate effective transfer of accurate and reliable information that can be related to individual countries' national contexts and enable the identification of strengths and weaknesses of policy and the way in which it is implemented in practice.



CO-OPERATION WITH OTHER ORGANISATIONS

We actively maintain co-operative relationships with other key European and International bodies and organisations in the field of general and special needs education.

These include the European Commission and its institutions – Eurydice, Eurostat and Cedefop as well as other organisations such as the OECD, UNESCO and the Council of Europe. This enables us to direct our users to relevant bodies who can provide information and expertise that we do not necessarily possess ourselves.

The Agency co-operates with the European Commission, the European Parliament and the EU Presidencies, both at the practical level in connection with the organisation of European key events and at the political level in order to ensure that both the Agency member countries' priorities and the EU targets are properly reflected in our work.

OUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES

In all aspects of our work, we take into consideration key international statements on special needs education such as the UN Standard Rules, the Salamanca Statement, the Luxembourg Charter, the EU Council Resolutions concerning inclusive education, the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities and the Lisbon Declaration regarding Young People's Views on Inclusive Education.

At all times, we endeavour to highlight and promote the principles of equal opportunities in terms of genuine access to learning experiences which respect individual differences and quality education for all focused upon personal strengths rather than weaknesses.

OUR KEY OBJECTIVES

- To promote quality in the field of special needs education through the maintenance of a long-term framework for extended European collaboration.
- To provide a reliable reflection of the reality of special needs education across Europe with up to date information that can be related to individual countries' national contexts.
- To identify key factors that hinder or support positive experiences.
- To facilitate effective exchange of knowledge and experience among as well as within member countries.
- To make it easier for policy makers and practitioners to access relevant information by providing mechanisms and services that enable sharing of information and facilitate contact between different users.

We focus on subjects of importance for meeting diversity in education. Priority themes are identified by our member countries and special attention is devoted to educational policy and the way it is implemented in practice including statistics, indicators and policy recommendations.



OUR PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

We provide information regarding a wide range of thematic areas such as Early Childhood Intervention, Assessment in Inclusive Settings, Financing of Education, Inclusive Education and Classroom Practice and Transition from School to Employment.

Our work programme also includes priorities such as Pupils with Special Educational Needs and an Immigrant Background, Teacher Education for Inclusion, Vocational Education and Higher Education Accessibility issues.

The information is distributed by means of newsletters, publications, reports and our website. We also facilitate contact between our different users and arrange seminars, conferences, events, study visits and exchange programmes.

Agency publications are available in print format as well as on the Agency website (www.european-agency.org) which also provides topic databases and comparative information as well as specific web information services and National Pages of country specific information for each of our member countries.

Our working language is English, but as much information as possible is presented in the languages of our member countries.

The aim of all our outputs is to present a reliable reflection of the reality of special needs education in Europe with European and national level information that can be related to individual countries' national contexts.

OUR EUROPEAN NETWORKING

Representative Board

The basic guidelines for the operation of the Agency are determined by the Representative Board. The board members – one from each participating country – are nominated by their Minister of Education and they act as the political level national representatives within the Agency.

Management Board

The Management Board is comprised of the Chairperson and five elected members of the Representative Board and works with the Agency Director to ensure that strategic plans and decisions are implemented in an efficient and effective way.

Agency Staff

The co-ordination of Agency operations is managed by the Staff under the leadership of the Agency Director.

National Co-ordinators and Experts

At the country level, National Co-ordinators appointed by the member countries fulfil the role of co-ordinating the flow of information to and from the Agency and of managing effective National networks. They collaborate with the Staff Teams and are responsible for ensuring that information outputs are processed and disseminated effectively within their National contexts. National Experts are appointed to facilitate the processing, analysis and validation of information linked to the thematic activities undertaken by the Agency.



MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE AGENCY

Questions about situations in our member countries should be directed to the Representative Board members or National Co-ordinators of that country. Their contact details are available on our website.

If you would like more general information about us, the first place to check is our website.

Specific questions about the Agency's work or products can usually be dealt with through our Secretariat in Denmark or our European Liaison Office based in Brussels.

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