

European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education



Multi-Annual Work Programme 2014–2020

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MULTI-ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME 2014–2020

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Preface

The member countries approved the Agency's Multi-Annual Work Programme 2014–2020 in November 2013. The document provides a framework for the work that will be developed during the seven-year period from 2014 to 2020 and presents the rationale behind the developing focus of Agency activities towards supporting policy development, implementation and review in the field of special needs and inclusive education. It describes the activities that will be implemented in order to meet the Agency's member countries' agreed requests while directly supporting European Union (EU) level policy goals and initiatives.

The Agency in brief

The Agency is an international organisation, more specifically an independent association of member countries. It acts as a platform for collaboration for its member countries in the field of special needs and inclusive education.

The Agency has a mandate from its member countries to facilitate collaboration regarding country priorities that are in line with the European Council of Ministers' priorities, as identified in the Education and Training 2020 (ET 2020) strategy, and in accordance with international agreements, such as the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). The aim is to improve educational policy and practice for learners with special educational needs.

At the beginning of the 2014–2020 work programme, the Agency had 28 member countries. During the term of the work programme this number is expected to grow to 31 – comprising all EU countries, plus Norway, Switzerland and Iceland.

The Agency Secretariat is based in Odense, Denmark, and the Agency has an office in Brussels, Belgium.

The Agency is funded by its member countries and supported by the EU institutions. The Agency has a legal basis at European level (Decision no. 791/2004/EC). It is one of six European institutions supported by an operating grant under the Jean Monnet initiative within the EU Erasmus+ education programme (2014–2020).

The focus of the Multi-Annual Work Programme 2014–2020

The 2014–2020 work programme takes into account national, European and international stated priorities for education and training. It aims to ensure coherence between specific country initiatives to promote special needs and inclusive education and the relevant EU and international level objectives. This is achieved by providing ministries of education and other stakeholders in member countries and at European level with evidence-based information that is reliable,



valid and applicable to educational policy planning, implementation, monitoring and review.

All activities within the Agency 2014–2020 work programme directly inform the ET 2020 strategic objective ‘promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship’. In line with this strategic objective, the Agency’s work mainly focuses on inclusive education and the characteristics of effective provision for all learners, including those with disabilities and special educational needs. This requires a consideration of the implications for policy and practice, rather than emphasis on specific provision for learners with different types or categories of disability or learning needs.

The outcomes of the 2014–2020 work programme are also relevant to and will inform key aspects of other ET 2020 strategic objectives, in particular: making lifelong learning a reality for all learners; improving the quality and efficiency of education and training; and enhancing innovation in education and training.

The European Union has clear priorities in relation to meeting the needs of disadvantaged groups and vulnerable learners within education and training. Through its comprehensive work programme activities, the Agency will be well positioned to directly support these initiatives. However, the Agency also has a clear role in ensuring that the needs of learners with disabilities and special educational needs are not overlooked within other, more general, educational policy development work and that their needs are adequately accounted for in all educational policy reform debates.

Because it acts independently of the specific circumstances of individual member countries, the Agency is able to identify key factors that hinder or support positive developments. By using this information in different ways, the Agency provides member countries with recommendations and guidelines for policy and practice and then shares information about the reality of inclusive education across Europe in a realistic and balanced way. Such European level outputs are relevant to specific country policy contexts, but are also applicable within various spheres of EU level policy work, for example country-specific recommendations.

Developments within the Multi-Annual Work Programme 2014–2020

The Agency examines inclusive education within its widest interpretation – that is, dealing with learner difference and diversity in all educational settings as a quality issue. The 2014–2020 work programme is essentially concerned with how the achievements of all learners at all levels of inclusive lifelong learning can be improved in a meaningful way that enhances their employment and life chances, as well as their opportunities for actively participating in society.



The 2014–2020 work programme takes into account that Agency member countries have widely differing educational systems, offering a continuum of provision for learners with diverse needs. In order to allow for the heterogeneity of contexts and approaches in member countries, Agency projects and activities take a broad view of inclusive education as a systemic approach to meeting the needs of all learners, specifically focusing on the particular situation of learners identified as having disabilities and/or special educational needs.

The long-term goal for the 2014–2020 work programme is to support change and development in countries' policy and, consequently, practice for special needs and inclusive education. There will be increased emphasis on working with countries to review changes and developments in their educational policies so as to critically examine implementation of special needs and inclusive education initiatives. Agency work with countries during this period will mainly focus on exploring critical success factors within systems of inclusive education. This will include identifying progress and barriers to progress and actively monitoring and reviewing policy developments in countries.

This review work will aim to identify agreed benchmarks within special needs and inclusive education that countries can aspire to and align themselves with, no matter what systems of educational provision and support they have. Countries should be able to look at themselves against a set of standards for special needs and inclusive education developed through Agency work that facilitates improvement, development and self-analysis and recognises that policy and practice are working towards broadly accepted and theoretically sound goals for all learners.

The 2014–2020 work programme will build upon the perceived strengths of existing ways of working with member countries – in particular, the collection of country-specific information that leads the Agency to develop recommendations for policy and practice that are agreed at the European level. However, there will be increased emphasis on activities that contribute to policy monitoring and review work.

This will result in more focused, evidence-based recommendations to guide policy development linked to new project outputs for supporting policy implementation, such as policy briefs, model policy documents and policy auditing and monitoring tools.

Analysis and review activities

The Agency Summative Impact Study (2013) examined the outcomes of the Agency's 2007–2013 work programme and showed that identifying cross-cutting and specific thematic recommendations for policy and practice directly impacts upon countries' legislation and policy for special needs and inclusive education.



In relation to cross-cutting information, member countries have requested meaningful and applicable data and indicator information that can be used across policy domains. They have also asked that tools be made available to support the monitoring of the implementation of policies for inclusive education, particularly with respect to implementing the European Council of Ministers' strategic objectives and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006).

The analysis and review activities will aim to support countries in their responses to implementing the EU country-specific recommendations – specifically those referring to special needs and inclusive education – but potentially also those focusing on wider, more systemic educational issues.

A number of cross-project activities will be implemented that:

- lead to benchmarks and indicators for guiding policy implementation and monitoring that would not emerge from specific thematic projects in isolation;
- show developments and changes in countries' work; and
- provide practical tools for supporting future change and policy developments.

Country review and analysis activities

The Agency, along with its member countries, will develop procedures for regularly revisiting the findings and recommendations of previous thematic projects and reviewing with country representatives the extent to which these have been implemented, as well as identifying barriers to and supporting factors for implementation. These activities will take into account the EU level country-specific recommendations that impact upon special needs and inclusive education in countries and will aim to support countries in setting national level goals linked to key policy targets.

A period for developing the parameters of review activities with country representatives has been built into the 2014–2020 work programme. In the initial work (pilot phase), the topics of Early Childhood Intervention, Teacher Education for Inclusion, ICT for Inclusion and Vocational Education and Training will be revisited and will be the focus of systematic policy implementation review. These topics are considered to address long-term, on-going national and EU level policy priorities.

Policy guidelines: analysis and development

Drawing upon specific findings from the Agency's thematic project work and data collection activities, this area of activity will involve systematically analysing the available information and subsequently developing concrete tools to support policy implementation, monitoring and review.



These tools will have the joint aims of:

- providing evidence for demonstrating changes and developments in countries (e.g. policy benchmarking, auditing and monitoring tools) and
- providing guidance on addressing policy-specific issues and challenges in special needs and inclusive education (e.g. policy briefs, model policy documents).

Project work

All thematic projects focus upon issues of common concern for policy-makers for special needs and inclusive education. The topics to be examined within thematic projects are identified by systemically collecting information about countries' priorities. Member countries have already identified some of the thematic investigations that will be conducted within the framework of the 2014–2020 work programme.

These include projects focusing on such topics as *Organisation of Provision to Support Inclusive Education, Raising the Achievements of All Learners in Inclusive Education, Pre-Primary Education, Early School Leavers and School Drop-Outs, Financing of Inclusive Education* and *ICT for Information Accessibility in Learning*.

Some 'open space' has been left for topics that will emerge during the term of the 2014–2020 work programme. This is in response to the member countries' clear wish for a flexible work programme that considers emerging country priorities.

The 2014–2020 work programme will reinforce and extend the work and methodologies in a number of areas. Each area is described separately below, but it is important to stress that these activities are highly inter-connected.

Multiple, research-based project methodologies

All Agency member countries have expressed a clear need for evidence-based practice and policy-making in relation to special needs and inclusive education. In order to meet these requests, the Agency will, firstly, build on and extend existing working methods that have proven to be of maximum benefit to countries (i.e. taking participatory approaches to project planning, organising highly structured country study visits, etc.).

Secondly, the Agency will develop its research work capacity and strengthen its connections with and influence on country-based research communities. This will entail developing, in conjunction with countries, new methods for implementing projects that offer parallel activities and lead to different resources in terms of information and data. In order to build its research capacity, the Agency will also need to collaborate with universities and research organisations through



mechanisms such as partnering on national and international level research projects, as well as carry out more targeted dissemination among the research community via academic publishing routes.

Inter-connections between thematic projects

Developing cross-project activities wherever possible creates highly beneficial synergies. Examples of such activities include generic research reviews covering broad themes and topics, and cross-theme conferences, seminars or other events.

Within the 2014–2020 work programme, the Agency will conduct a number of short-term projects that will, as far as possible, be used as a means of investigating specific issues highlighted for further research in long-term projects. Where appropriate, these projects will take an action research-based approach and will focus on the implementation of specific recommendations arising from long-term projects in countries.

Implementation activities throughout thematic projects

The Agency's primary target group is policy- and decision-makers and the ultimate goal of Agency work is to support policy-making in special needs and inclusive education. Therefore, a key task within the 2014–2020 multi-annual work programme is to support policy- and decision-makers in their work by developing activities and products that they can use as levers for change in policy and practice in member countries.

Supporting country representatives in their efforts to use project outputs in their work is the essential focus of project implementation activities. Support for project implementation will be considered throughout the project planning-implementation-dissemination-evaluation cycle. This will involve:

- being clear on country priorities for Agency work;
- working with country representatives to develop concrete tools for supporting the implementation of project recommendations;
- supporting small groups of countries to discuss shared implementation issues;
- developing new tools for dissemination; and
- maintaining momentum in countries *after* project activities have formally ended.

Furthermore, in order to achieve increased implementation of Agency work with country level policy and practice, there may be a need to systematically explore the reasons for gaps between policy and/or research findings and actual practice in countries, as well as the mechanisms that can be used to address these gaps. The



Agency will consider possibilities for establishing a ‘meta’ project involving policy-makers, researchers and practitioners to explore policy-practice implementation issues applicable across thematic projects.

A wider range of outputs aimed at specific target groups

The principle of information accessibility is paramount in the Agency’s work and new approaches to communicating key information will be required. These include easy-to-read summaries of key information and multi-media materials that always adhere to accessibility guidelines.

The Agency will also actively engage in developing the accessibility of all these materials in print and electronic formats. The Agency website aims to be World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) compliant as far as possible. In order to ensure that both print and electronic materials follow recognised international accessibility guidelines, a number of activities involving analysis and development work will be undertaken during the 2014–2020 work programme designed to improve the Agency’s ability to disseminate information resources in the most accessible and effective ways.

The Agency’s website plays a central role in its dissemination work; accordingly, the Agency will work to enhance the website and explore the use of interactive tools. Publications – both printed and electronic – in the official languages of member countries are critically important and the Agency will improve these by incorporating more user-friendly presentation formats, including more photographs, graphics, etc.

As well as developing the use of multi-media outputs and e-publications, extending the range of media used for disseminating project outcomes will be another area for further development. This will involve the use of social media tools for promoting the Agency’s work among different stakeholder groups.

Data collection linked to key indicators for special needs and inclusive education

The Agency will extend its data collection activities in order to provide information on agreed indicators relating to access and participation in special needs and inclusive education. Quantitative data will be supplemented by supporting qualitative data that provides clear and coherent contexts for interpreting statistical indicator information.

These developments will be instituted in response to direct requests from member countries to provide comparable and reliable statistics that can be used for mapping and monitoring provision in the compulsory and post-compulsory education sectors.



New activities will include implementing a revised framework for quantitative data collection and extending data collection from International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) levels 1 and 2 to ISCED level 3 and above. Crucially, this will involve developing new data collection methods and procedures in order to provide heretofore unavailable data on, for example, the school drop-out rates of learners identified as having disabilities and/or special educational needs and said learners' participation rates in higher education.

Conferences, hearings and seminars

The Agency will organise different types of conferences, European Hearings and national level thematic seminars. Furthermore, the Agency will provide professional development opportunities through conferences, seminars and workshops for policy-makers and practitioners.

The following are the main events foreseen within the 2014–2020 work programme:

International dissemination conferences

Within the term of the 2014–2020 work programme, the Agency will organise and host two major international dissemination events. These will serve as opportunities for disseminating Agency work programme outcomes and recommendations among a broad audience. The events will draw on the entirety of the Agency's activities and will aim to provide a synthesis of key messages for European and international policy- and decision-makers, focusing on how inclusive education can support social inclusion.

These events will also give countries the opportunity to showcase their policy and practice in key thematic areas.

The events will be open to organisations and country representatives that are not usually directly involved in Agency work. These events will therefore provide opportunities for maximising dissemination opportunities, as well as increasing Agency impact.

European Hearings

The Agency will organise two European Hearings for young learners within the 2014–2020 work programme period. All the Agency's member countries will be responsible for nominating the young people who will attend.

The two scheduled Hearings will follow on from and pursue the results of three previous European Hearings that the Agency has organised: in 2003 and 2011 in the European Parliament and in 2007 in the Portuguese Parliament, linked to the Portuguese EU Presidency.



With these Hearings the Agency aims to provide a voice to its end users – learners who are vulnerable to exclusion – by listening to them, involving them in a real debate and learning from their experiences and suggestions about how provision can be improved. The results of the Hearings will be presented to key decision-makers at both national and European levels for their consideration and further action.

In terms of the focus of these Hearings, it should be noted that each Hearing will take into account the results of the previous Hearings in order to develop a body of knowledge from the perspective of the learners with disabilities.

National level thematic seminars

Linked to certain Agency bi-annual meetings, thematic seminars will be organised in co-operation with the bi-annual meeting host country representatives. The seminars will focus on priority topics and will be used as opportunities for raising awareness, sharing findings and discussing implementation factors of priority issues at national level.

These seminars will involve all Agency country representatives, as well as national level experts in the topic identified for the seminar. Each seminar will lead to the production of a discussion paper detailing key findings and policy issues and recommendations.

Information dissemination and production activities

The Agency's activities involve much more than the work described in the previous sections.

In the Agency member countries, the ministerial country representatives coordinate the flow of information to and from the Agency. They maintain effective national networks of experts facilitating the input of information to the Agency, as well as the dissemination of outputs within their national contexts.

The project experts that participate in the Agency's projects are nominated from a range of professional backgrounds – policy-makers, practitioners, researchers and, where appropriate, users and their representatives – and are systematically involved in disseminating Agency information and outputs to their representative groups.

Furthermore, the Agency website (www.european-agency.org) is a vast and multi-faceted information resource, which provides country information including overviews of inclusive education provision in member countries, project information resources and databases and Agency publications. In addition, the Agency has



developed specific web-based information services, which will be extended during the 2014–2020 work programme.

Co-operative relationships

The Agency maintains mutually beneficial relationships with other specialist European organisations working in the field of inclusive and special needs education, as well as with key international bodies and organisations, such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and its institutes (International Bureau of Education and Institute for Information Technologies in Education), the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) Central and Eastern Europe/Commonwealth of Independent States region, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the International Labour Organization and the World Bank.

The main principles for guiding decisions to co-operate with other organisations are:

- The input from such collaboration enriches the Agency’s thematic work and activities. The involvement of representatives from these organisations adds perspectives on, and dimensions to, Agency work that would otherwise be lacking.
- Co-operation avoids overlap of efforts in areas of activity where the Agency and other organisations operate. Ensuring that respective activities are mutually supportive is beneficial for the outcomes of the organisations’ work. It is also economically sound for countries which, for the most part, financially support all these organisations in one way or another and therefore need to avoid funding a duplication of activities.
- Co-operation involves a two-way flow of relevant information: it provides opportunities for sharing information on work in Agency member countries with a wider audience, as well as gaining relevant information that can be shared in member countries.

Operational surveys and impact studies

The Agency will conduct a country survey in 2015 and again in 2018 in order for member countries to re-confirm or identify new priorities that have emerged.

These surveys will also take into consideration any changes in the European Council of Ministers’ objectives that may have been identified subsequently. The surveys will not only collect information on what priorities countries have, they will also collect details on why countries have these priorities, what sorts of outcomes they would like to see from Agency activities focusing on the priorities, and how they think these outcomes could be used in their country context.



The Agency has agreed procedures for the on-going collection and processing of evidence of impact data and during the 2014–2020 work programme, the Agency will regularly assess the extent and nature of impact in member countries and at the European level, as well as identify recommendations for future Agency work.

