WORK PROGRAMME 2017

European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education
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Introduction

This work programme outlines the main Agency activities scheduled for 2017. The principal focus is on inclusive education and the implications for policy and practice.


The programme aims to ensure coherence between the Agency’s work and European Union (EU) priorities by providing countries, as well as stakeholders at European level, with evidence-based information, tools and recommendations that are reliable, valid and applicable to educational policy planning, implementation, monitoring and review.

For detailed information about the Agency, its work and work programmes, please visit its website: www.european-agency.org

Organisation and finances

**Member countries**

The Agency currently has 29 member countries: Austria, Belgium (Flemish and French speaking communities), Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales).

Twice each year, the Agency holds bi-annual meetings. Member country representatives meet to review on-going activities and discuss and approve plans for future work, including project plans, work programmes and budgets.

The bi-annual meetings for 2017 will be:

- Spring bi-annual meeting in Valletta, Malta (5–7 April)
- Autumn bi-annual meeting in Lisbon, Portugal (dates to be agreed).

**Finances**

Membership fees from the member countries and an operating grant under the EU Erasmus+ education programme (2014–2020) fund the work programme. Together,
these contributions make up the Agency’s operating budget. Country membership fees will remain at the same level as in 2016.

On top of their membership fees, the member countries contribute to the Agency’s functioning by meeting the costs of their nominated Representative Board members (RBs) and National Co-ordinators (NCs) in establishing and maintaining national networks, information dissemination and awareness raising activities at national level, as well as their participation in Agency meetings and activities. Furthermore, they cover the costs (man-hours) of their nominated experts participating in content-related project work.

As well as the activities financed by the main operating budget, the Agency will conduct a number of additionally funded activities. These activities will complement the activities within, but be independent from, the operating budget. They will be non-profit based and will only make up a small proportion of the Agency’s total activities in 2017. Further information about these activities appears in the section on additionally funded activities.

Country Policy Review and Analysis activities

The Agency’s Country Policy Review and Analysis (CPRA) work focuses on how the general recommendations developed in Agency projects apply within individual country situations. The CPRA activities will be continuous and on-going within the MAWP 2014–2020. They were launched in 2015 via a pilot activity involving RBs from eight countries as well as Agency staff members.

The results of the pilot work were presented to all RBs in March 2016. It was agreed to roll out the analysis activities to all countries, using a phased approach. Belgium (French speaking community), Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain will take part in the second phase of CPRA work.

In 2017, the focus will be on the various policy analysis activities with phase 2 countries. More Agency staff team members will be involved in this work and there will be a number of working meetings for the staff team as well as with country representatives.

At the end of the phase 2 work, there will be a full review meeting. All countries and staff members involved will attend in order to identify developments and improvements to the CPRA processes and outcomes.

Thematic project work

The main aim of the Agency’s thematic project work is to provide member countries with information, tools, guidelines and recommendations focusing on special needs and inclusive education.
All projects directly or indirectly support the agreed EU priorities for education and training. These include the Europe 2020 headline targets of ‘reducing school dropout rates to below 10%’ and ‘removing at least 20 million people from the risk of poverty and social exclusion’, as well as the ET 2020 strategic objectives 2 ‘improving the quality and efficiency of education and training’ and 3 ‘promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship’. Furthermore, project activities directly inform the Opening up Education initiative within the ET 2020 strategy.

Brief descriptions of the Agency’s current projects follow below.

**Policy to support inclusive school leadership**

This new three-year project will run from 2017 to 2019. It will examine how policy-makers can support school leaders to implement inclusive practice and how different policy approaches at national and regional levels impact upon school leaders’ work. A number of different activity tracks will be developed for groups of interested countries to opt into.

Information collection and analysis in this project will focus on school leaders’ work. The project will build upon the extensive literature that is available in countries, as well as specific points of departure identified in past Agency work.

The main target group for the project outcomes will be national level policy-makers responsible for implementing inclusive education in schools.

The project plan will be presented and approved at the 2017 spring bi-annual meeting.

**Evidence of the effects of inclusive education in supporting long-term social inclusion**

A one-year desk research project, Evidence of the effects of inclusive education in supporting long-term social inclusion, will explore:

- the research evidence indicating a link between inclusive education and longer-term social inclusion;
- what current research says about inclusive education’s potential as a tool for promoting social cohesion.

The main target group for this project’s outcomes will be national level policy-makers responsible for implementing inclusive education in schools.

The project plan will be presented and approved at the 2016 autumn bi-annual meeting.
The changing role of special schools/provision in supporting inclusive education

Starting by the end of 2017, this project will run for two full years. It will examine the following issues:

- How can policy effectively support the different roles that special provision (schools, units and classes) has in supporting mainstream schools to be inclusive?
- How can learners’ rights be promoted in the best way through the development and reformation of different forms of support centres and services?
- A number of different activity tracks will be developed for groups of countries that have different approaches to special provision. These tracks could potentially consider:
  - the examination of comparable measures for identifying quality within different forms of provision;
  - the impact of official needs identification processes;
  - issues surrounding the provision of care and para-educational support in mainstream schools.

The project plan will be presented and approved at the 2017 spring bi-annual meeting.

Inclusive Early Childhood Education

The overall goal of the three-year IECE project (2015–2017) is to identify, analyse and subsequently promote the main characteristics of quality inclusive early childhood education (ECE) for all children. The focus is on the structures and processes that ensure a systemic approach to providing high-quality inclusive ECE.

In order to ensure consistency with other European and international initiatives in this area of work, the project is taking place in co-operation with the European Commission, Eurydice, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the International Society on Early Intervention.

The project focuses on five thematic areas:

- Access to quality ECE for all children
- Workforce quality
- Quality curriculum/content
- Evaluation and monitoring
• Governance and funding.

Case study visits to eight sites in eight countries ran throughout 2016. Key personnel and local stakeholders were involved and the visits explored in depth the project themes and how early childhood programmes work. A questionnaire collecting country information on policy and practice in relation to ECE for all learners has been distributed to participating project experts.

The Project Advisory Group (PAG) has developed a self-assessment tool that practitioners can use. It consists of sets of questions about the inclusivity of the ECE environment. These sets of questions were used as an observation tool during the case study visits. They will eventually be developed into a self-assessment tool, translated into all the Agency languages.

In 2017, the project activities will focus on:

• Analysis and validation of the self-assessment tool
• A synthesis report based on the information collected during the project’s lifetime to support policy-makers and practitioners in promoting IECE provisions. The synthesis report will be accompanied by the final versions of the following IECE project outcomes:
  o The IECE literature review
  o The ‘State of the art report on policy and practice in IECE in Europe’
  o The ‘Ecosystem for inclusion in early childhood education model’
  o The qualitative analysis of example proposals
  o The IECE self-assessment tool.
• Organising a final project conference in October 2017.

**Raising the Achievement of All Learners in Inclusive Education**

This three-year thematic project, running from 2014 to 2017, targets decision-makers at national and local levels. The project focuses on increasing schools’ capacity to raise achievement by providing a high-quality education for all learners. Working with learning communities in Italy, Poland and the UK (Scotland), the project participants (researchers and school leaders from 30 countries) have explored different pedagogical approaches and leadership strategies. In particular, work has focused on collaboration and networking as support both within learning communities and from external sources.

Following participant visits to the learning communities in autumn 2016 to discuss the progress to date and outstanding challenges, the activities in 2017 will include:

• Publication of the project synthesis of country information
• Online discussion on measuring achievement (project forum)
• Amendment of the project self-review as a tool for use by school leaders
• Development of further tools/guidance for school leaders and teachers
• Drafting of policy paper to consider implications for policy-makers
• Evaluation of the project process, considering the methodology’s effectiveness, in particular networking, collaboration and ways of working with learning communities.

The final project event will take place in Malta in April 2017 as an event of the Maltese Presidency of the European Union. This Presidency event will be a working meeting to share and discuss emerging findings and finalise the content of project outputs.

**European Agency Statistics on Inclusive Education**

The EASIE activities in 2016 focused on finalising the first EASIE dataset (presenting data from the 2012–2013 school year), publishing it on a new dedicated web area, producing a methodology report, drafting a data analysis report, developing the data collection tools and launching the 2016 data collection exercise.

Work in 2017 will build on all of these activities. The new dataset will be finalised, cleaned and checked by experts, then approved by RBs before being launched via the web area. A further data analysis report will be produced, providing detailed country breakdowns of the available data.

As a result of discussions in the PAG and then the experts’ workshop, in 2017 there will be a joint workshop for the nominated data experts as well as RBs or their representatives. This joint workshop of data experts and policy-makers will be used to identify future developments in the EASIE work, including new items for data collection and additional elements for data analysis.

**Impact analysis**

*Improving Internal Procedures to Collect Examples of Impact*

Within its MAWP 2014–2020, the Agency is continuously collecting and processing evidence of the impact of its work.

In 2017, the Agency will undertake a study aiming to develop a systematic approach for collecting examples of impact as well as their categorisation. Information will mainly be collected from Agency staff, but member countries will be involved through a questionnaire.
Events and thematic seminars

**Bi-annual meeting thematic sessions**

Both 2017 bi-annual meetings will be linked to final conferences of Agency thematic projects, with RBs and NCs joining parts of the conference programmes.

The spring bi-annual meeting in Valletta, Malta, will be linked to the Raising the Achievement of All Learners in Inclusive Education Dissemination Conference. The conference and bi-annual meeting will be an event of the Maltese Presidency of the European Union.

The autumn bi-annual meeting will take place in Lisbon, Portugal. It is linked to the final conference of the Inclusive Early Childhood Education project.

**Additionally funded activities**

The Agency will conduct a small number of activities funded via additional grants from the EU and other sources to complement the work included in the main work programme. These additional activities enable the Agency to undertake work which complements and reinforces the activities agreed by member countries within the framework of the work programme. An outline of the additional activities that are planned for 2017 follows below.

**Financing Policies for Inclusive Education Systems**

Financing Policies for Inclusive Education Systems (FPIES) is a three-year project (2016–2018). It is co-funded by the European Commission’s Erasmus+ Key Action 3 ‘Forward-Looking Cooperation Projects’ framework. Through work with policy-makers and detailed case studies, the project examines different approaches to educational financing. The Ministries of Education from Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal and Slovenia are country partners in the project. Universitat Ramon Llull (Barcelona) is involved as an evaluator partner, giving feedback to project partners during the whole project period.

Each of the six partner countries will host a country study visit. National and local policy-makers and key stakeholders will participate to examine the countries’ different models and approaches to financing inclusive education. The first visit took place in November 2016, and the following five will be held throughout the spring of 2017. A country thematic report will be developed on the basis of each visit.

The FPIES findings will lead to the development of concrete policy tools to guide further policy developments for inclusive education in European countries.
Country consultancy work

At the time of writing, the Agency is negotiating an audit of the inclusive education system in Slovenia. Furthermore, in the beginning of 2017, the Agency will present the outcome of the audit of the Icelandic inclusive education system conducted during 2016 for the Icelandic Ministry of Education, Science and Culture.

Co-operative relationships

The Agency will maintain its co-operative relationships with other key European bodies and organisations, such as the European Commission and its institutions – Eurydice, Cedefop and Eurostat – and the European Parliament’s committees, as well as with international organisations such as UNESCO and its institutes, the OECD, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the World Bank.

Such co-operation enriches the Agency’s work. Furthermore, it prevents 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. The co-operative relationships also provide 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.

The Agency will also continue co-operating with the EU Presidencies. This is both at the practical level, with regard to organising European key events, and at the political level, in order to raise awareness about the important issues the Agency is addressing on behalf of its member countries.

Information dissemination and production activities

Agency news updates and content information

News updates and information on publications and key events will be published in the News section of the Agency website and will be sent out electronically to eBulletin subscribers. The eBulletin will be made available approximately every three months.

In 2017, the Agency will continue to share member countries’ news and content information more widely via the eBulletin and the News section of the Agency website.
**Dissemination figures and web statistics**

A detailed report on the annual dissemination of printed and electronic materials, as well as website usage statistics, will be presented at the 2017 spring bi-annual meeting. The report will include descriptive information, as well as possible trend information that will afford insights into potentially effective strategies for dissemination work generally.

**Social media**

The digital media strategy to increase the Agency’s online presence through different social media tools will be further implemented in 2017.

The Agency Wikipedia article will be continuously expanded and the Director’s blog will continue with Agency news and updates. Meanwhile, videos of Agency events and projects as well as presentations will be added to the Agency’s YouTube channel as they become available.

**Website and InfoDesk**

Throughout the year, the Agency’s website and internal intranet, InfoDesk, will be updated with new information as soon as it becomes available. The accessibility and structure of the Agency website will be updated in 2017. The focus will be on accessibility, as well as a technical and future-oriented redesign.