



Special Needs Education in Europe (Volume 2)

PROVISION IN POST-PRIMARY EDUCATION

Thematic Publication



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European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education



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Editors: Cor Meijer, Victoria Soriano, Amanda Watkins

Cover picture: Olivier Somme, age 20. Olivier studies at the French Community special school EESSCF, Verviers, Belgium.

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European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education

Secretariat

Østre Stationsvej 33
DK – 5000 Odense C Denmark
Tel: +45 64 41 00 20
secretariat@european-agency.org

Brussels Office

3 Avenue Palmerston
BE-1000 Brussels Belgium
Tel: +32 2 280 33 59
brussels.office@european-agency.org

www.european-agency.org



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PREAMBLE

Provision in Post-Primary Education provides a summary of relevant information collected by the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education. This covers three priority areas within the field of special needs education:

- Inclusive Education and Classroom Practice in Secondary Education;
- Access to and within Higher Education for Students with Special Educational Needs;
- Transition from School to Employment.

Information has been collected through the provision of national reports relating to topic, prepared by the Agency members via questionnaires and, in some cases, analysis of practical examples and expert exchanges. The document has been prepared and edited by the Agency, with contributions from Eurydice National Units. Comments were received mainly from Eurydice National Units in those countries not represented in the Agency; however, all contributions and/or comments from Eurydice units have been included in the following chapters.

The main purpose of this document is to develop the scope of existing information in the three areas focused upon, in order to cover more countries. Materials and results already available from the Agency member countries were sent to the Eurydice national units in order to support their task, asking them to contribute with general comments or relevant specific information on the three priority areas. Their contributions have been included in the document implicitly when the situation they reported for their countries generally corresponded with findings from the Agency analysis. Eurydice unit information is presented explicitly when precise situations relating to countries needed to be highlighted.

The national units in Liechtenstein, Malta, Poland, Romania and Sweden are therefore gratefully acknowledged for their relevant contribution to this publication. The most sincere gratitude is also expressed to Agency representatives for their support and co-operation in the preparation of this thematic publication. This is the




second time that an effective co-operation between the two networks of Eurydice and the Agency has helped to make a thematic publication possible. In January 2003, a first thematic publication *Special Needs Education in Europe* was published as a result of this fruitful co-operation.

This publication does not look at special needs education issues with any one particular definition or philosophy in mind. There is no agreed interpretation of terms such as handicap, special need or disability across the countries. Definitions and categories of special educational needs vary across countries. The approach taken here is to consider all definitions and perspectives within the debates around special needs education practice in the three key areas.

Chapter 1 deals with *Inclusive Education and Classroom Practice in Secondary Education*. Provision of special needs education within secondary education is a complex topic in the special education and curriculum field. The way secondary education is organised in many countries results in some serious challenges for students with SEN. This chapter identifies some of the strategies schools have taken to overcome this problem and describes various approaches to inclusive education. It focuses on key issues and challenges related to student inclusion at secondary school level such as: the effect of a 'streaming' model (or class groupings) in secondary education; the impact of emphasis placed upon educational outcomes; teachers' attitudes and gaps within their training. The analysis is presented combining outputs from national literature reviews, case studies and expert visits.

Chapter 2 deals with *Access to and within Higher Education (HE) for Students with Special Educational Needs*. Students with disabilities do not appear to be equally represented in HE and this raises a number of issues related to barriers and supporting factors for their access to and successful participation within higher education studies. The chapter is based around a framework of issues identified through examining background literature at the European level as well as key information collected from both Agency and Eurydice networks. The aim is to draw up an overview of the types of support structures for students with SEN available within countries that enable them to participate in HE study



opportunities. It needs to be highlighted that some information in this chapter is presented in tabular format, which is the best way to summarise descriptive information. However, this presentation format must not be seen as a means of comparing country situations.

Chapter 3 deals with *Transition from School to Employment*. Transition from school to employment is an important issue for all young people and even more for those with special educational needs. Transition to employment is part of a long and complex process, covering all phases in a person's life, which needs to be managed in the most appropriate way. Young people are very often confronted by human and social factors such as prejudices, reluctance, overprotection, insufficient training, etc. impeding their full participation in open employment. The chapter summarises eight main issues and difficulties identified whilst reviewing the transition-related literature. Six key aspects that emerged from the Agency analysis are presented with a list of recommendations addressed to policy makers and practitioners, aiming to provide guidance on how to improve the development and implementation of the process of transition.

An overview of key issues common to these three areas can be found in the Final Words section at the end of the document.

Chapter 1

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND CLASSROOM PRACTICE IN SECONDARY EDUCATION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Provision of special needs education within the secondary phase of schooling is a complex topic in the special education and curriculum field. Various reports (see Agency studies on provision of special education in Europe, 1998, 2003 as examples) suggest that inclusion generally develops well in the primary education phase, but in the secondary phase serious problems emerge. It can be argued that increasing subject specialisation and the different organisational strategies in secondary schools result in serious difficulties for student inclusion at the secondary level. This situation is reinforced by the fact that generally, the gap between students with SEN and their peers increases with age. Furthermore, in many countries, secondary education is usually characterised by a 'streaming' model: students are placed into different streams (or class groupings) on the basis of their perceived levels of achievement.

Literature review, Sweden: *Older students experience significantly more barriers in school than younger ones (...) Problems are not related to diagnoses and mobility, but more to school activities and organisation.*

Literature review, Switzerland: *The transition from the usually integrative schooling at the primary level to the generally segregated secondary level may be regarded as the decisive selection moment in the students' careers. The transition from the more integrative forms of schooling within a class to the division into achievement groups leaves its mark on the remaining time spent in school – in addition, students with SEN cannot simply set aside their 'baggage' from the time spent in primary school, but bring it along into this sharply segregated form of instruction.*



Comment from Malta: *In Malta, like in other European Countries inclusion within secondary phase education is also a main area of concern. Areas of study in this level of education are more demanding and subjects are more specific. This creates difficulty for teachers who are not equipped with the necessary skills.*

Another complex topic particularly relevant in the secondary phase is the current emphasis on *educational outcomes*. The pressure for increased academic output being placed on education systems can be seen to contribute to student placement in special schools and classes.

Literature review, Spain: *The fact that secondary education is characterised by following an excessively academic curriculum for a homogeneous group of students, makes it difficult nowadays to establish curricular adaptation processes for evidently heterogeneous students.*

Of course, it is not surprising that societies generally demand that far more attention is paid to the outcomes of investments in education. As a result, 'market thinking' is introduced into education and parents start to behave as 'clients'. Schools are made 'accountable' for the results they achieve and the tendency to judge schools on the basis of their academic output increases. It should be stressed that this development poses significant dangers for vulnerable students. In this sense, the wish to achieve higher academic outputs and the wish to include students with SEN could be seen as being mutually exclusive. However, examples from the current study suggest this is not necessarily the case:

Case study, UK: *The head teacher commented on the way that the school had developed since the initial inclusion both in the range of special educational needs, which it was able to address and also in terms of its overall academic achievement. The school had successfully dealt with the tensions between these two developments. Ten months prior to the research visit, the school had been subject to a formal inspection by the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED), which operates a national programme of inspection for all maintained schools in England. The report was extremely favourable and the school was rated as 'good'. The*

OFSTED report stated: "It is justifiably proud of its inclusive and multicultural ethos within which it achieves high standards for its students and fosters a climate of mutual care. Relationships between management, staff and students are very good and the school is led with commitment and integrity. It provides good value for money."

Earlier Agency studies suggest most countries agree that the topic of inclusion within secondary phase education is a main area of concern. Specific problem areas are perceived as being insufficient teacher training and less positive teacher attitudes. Teacher attitudes are generally seen as decisive for achieving inclusive education and these attitudes depend heavily on their experience (specifically with students with SEN), their training, the support available and other conditions such as the class size and their workload.

Literature review, Austria: (...) *it was clearly established that the positive attitude of teachers and the school community vis-à-vis inclusion is the primary driving force for successful inclusion, whatever model is selected. The innovative momentum generated by those schools can even overcome difficult constraints (e.g. insufficient number of hours allowed for related monitoring, poorly equipped classes, too many teachers in the team, etc.).*

Within secondary education, teachers seem to be less willing to include students with SEN in their classes. Dealing with students with SEN does indeed ask for dedication and sensitivity towards needs.

Case study, the Netherlands: *[Referring to a 12-year-old boy with Asperger's syndrome] Once one of his teachers concluded that he hadn't done all his homework. When the tutor asked him, she found out that because of the limited space in his diary he could not write down all the homework in one line. The student refused to use the other lines because he felt these were reserved for the other subjects. Also in the classroom he hadn't corrected all his errors during lessons because there wasn't enough space in his notebook. The tutor suggested to write down his lessons on the right page and to make notes about corrections on the left. Since this solution*



doesn't result in his notebook becoming a mess, the student agreed and the problem was solved. He was very rigid about this.

In this study the focus will be on these and other issues that relate to inclusion at secondary school level. Readers interested in the documents that form the basis of this synthesis report are referred to the Inclusive Education and Classroom Practice area of the Agency website: www.european-agency.org/

1.2 FRAMEWORK, GOALS AND METHODOLOGY


1.2.1 Framework

The focus of the study was effective classroom practice within inclusive education. It was assumed that inclusive education mainly depends upon what teachers do in classrooms. However, what teachers do in classrooms depends on their training, experiences, beliefs and attitudes as well as on the situation in class, school and factors outside the school (local and regional provision, policy, financing and so on).

Literature review, Spain: *It is clear that students' learning problems are not exclusively derived from their difficulties to learn, but from the way schools are organised and the features of the educational response in classrooms are directly related to it [i.e. such learning problems].*

Literature review, UK: *Although the case studies showed variations in understanding of 'inclusion', expected outcomes and the process needed to get there, there was consensus that inclusive practice necessitated whole school reform, the elimination of the concept of 'remedial teaching' and curriculum development by way of content and presentation.*

Compared to the primary educational level, in secondary education the challenge is even greater, as in many countries the organisation of the curriculum is subject-driven and as a result students have to regularly move between classrooms.



Literature review, Austria: *External differentiation implies an organisational separation of the class as a whole, as children do not remain with their core group, but change to different classrooms for joint lessons with other students from parallel classes. In many instances, this has turned out to be a serious disadvantage for the integration of SEN children, since social continuity cannot be ensured.*

The way secondary education generally is organised in many countries results in some serious challenges for students with SEN. It is therefore highly relevant to identify some of the strategies schools have taken to overcome this problem.

The way in which teachers and schools realise inclusion within classrooms can take different forms. It was the stated goal of this study to describe these various approaches to inclusive education and to make information about them more widely available.

In order to achieve this goal, a number of key questions were addressed within the study. The main question was: *how can differences in the classroom be dealt with?* An additional question also had to be considered: *which conditions are necessary for dealing with differences in classrooms?*

The centre of attention for the study was the work of teachers. However, it was also recognised that teachers mainly learn and develop their practice as a result of input from significant key people in their immediate environment: the head teacher, colleagues and professionals in or around the school. These are the professionals who are therefore considered to be the main target groups for this study.

1.2.2 Goals

The main task of this study was to provide key people with knowledge about possible strategies for handling differences in the classroom and school and to inform them about the conditions necessary for the successful implementation of these strategies. The project attempted to answer key questions concerning inclusive education. In the first instance, it was argued that an understanding




of *what* works within inclusive settings was necessary. Furthermore, it was felt that a deeper understanding of *how* inclusive education works was needed. Thirdly, it was important to know *why* inclusive education works (the conditions for implementation).

1.2.3 Methodology

Different types of activities contributed to answering the questions described above. As a first step, the study resulted in a report with literature-based descriptions of the different models of inclusive education and the conditions necessary for those models to be successfully implemented. Both the methodology and the results of the literature reviews are described extensively in the publication: *Inclusive Education and Effective Classroom Practice in Secondary Education*, which is available as a downloadable e-book (Meijer, 2005: www.european-agency.org/). The goal of the literature review phase was to reveal *what* was working in inclusive settings.

For the second phase - the case studies - the focus was on *how inclusion works* and *what is required to make it work*. The member countries of the Agency analysed examples of good practice (case studies) within their countries. They were asked to focus on the classroom practice and to describe the characteristics of the educational programme. In addition, the context and conditions for that programme were taken into account; particularly those conditions and context variables that were regarded as necessary for implementing and maintaining the programme. These conditions and context variables may exist at several levels: the teacher (skills, knowledge, attitudes and motivation); the classroom; the school and the school team; support services; financial and policy issues and so on.

Finally, through a programme of exchanges, experts visited, analysed and evaluated examples of practice in order to reveal the most important features of effective inclusive classroom practice. Through visits to different locations where inclusive education is implemented and discussions with the experts participating in these visits, a more qualitative and broader understanding of what, how and why inclusion may or may not work was achieved.



The following countries acted as hosts for the exchanges: Luxembourg, Norway, Spain, Sweden and UK (England). The exchanges were held during the Summer of 2003.

Different sources of information were used for the findings presented in the summary report: firstly, the findings of the reviews of literature (both national and international); secondly, the descriptions of all the site examples (case studies) in the 14 participating countries; finally, the information regarding the exchange activities. In this way, a holistic approach to the issue of classroom practice was achieved, relying on both research and information from daily classroom practice. It should be emphasized that the case studies and expert visits are merely examples of how to deal with inclusive education and not the result of general, nationally applied rules or working methods.

In the next section, an overview is given of the features of classroom practice in inclusive secondary education schools. An indicative list of conditions for inclusion is presented in section 1.4 below.

1.3 EFFECTIVE CLASSROOM PRACTICE

Dealing with diversity forms one of the biggest challenges within European schools and classrooms. Inclusion can be organised in several ways and on different levels, but essentially, it is the team of teachers who has to deal with an increasing diversity of student needs within their school and classes and has to adapt or prepare the curriculum in such a way that the needs of all students - those with SEN and their peers - are sufficiently met.

***Literature review, Spain:** This is why, if schools intend to go further in [paying] attention to the heterogeneous characteristics of students, it is necessary that they think over such aspects as their organisation and performance, the existence of co-ordination and co-operative work among teachers, the co-operation of the whole educational community, the use of resources and educational practice.*



The overall study points to at least seven groups of factors that seem to be effective for inclusive education. Not surprisingly, some of these were also mentioned in our study on primary education: co-operative teaching, co-operative learning, collaborative problem solving, heterogeneous grouping and effective teaching approaches. In addition, two factors seem to be specifically relevant for secondary education school level: home area system and alternative learning strategies.

In the sections below these seven factors are defined, expanded upon and illustrated with direct quotes from reports from the country exchange visits, the case studies and the literature reviews.

1.3.1 Co-operative Teaching

Teachers need to co-operate with and need practical and flexible support from a range of colleagues. At times a student with SEN needs specific help that cannot be given by the teacher during the daily classroom routine. In such circumstances other teachers and support personnel come on to the scene and the issues of flexibility, good planning, co-operation and team teaching present the challenges.

The study suggests that inclusive education is enhanced by several factors that can be grouped under the heading of co-operative teaching. Co-operative teaching refers to all kinds of co-operation between the class teacher and a teaching assistant, a teacher colleague or another professional. A key characteristic for co-operative teaching is that students with SEN do not have to be removed from the classroom in order to receive support, but that this support can be provided in the classroom. This stimulates the sense of belonging for the student and boosts his or her self-esteem, which in itself is a strong facilitator for learning.

A second feature of co-operative teaching is that it provides a solution for the problem of teachers' feelings of isolation. Teachers can learn from each other's approaches and provide appropriate feedback. As a result, co-operation is not only effective for the cognitive and emotional development of students with SEN, but it also seems to meet the needs of teachers. It is often mentioned in

country case studies of good practice that teachers are eager to learn from approaches used by other colleagues.

Case study, Ireland: *The school has a School Support Team that consists of the Principal Teacher, the Deputy Principal, the guidance teachers, the learning support teacher, the resource teachers and the Home/School/Community liaison teacher. This team meets every week to discuss the needs of students with behavioural and learning difficulties and to plan to meet these needs.*

Case study, Austria: *Teamwork requires an increased capacity for communication and conflict management, for assigning tasks and for consultation with all players. This part of the work is particularly time-consuming. However, teamwork and team teaching are extremely fascinating aspects in the work of all players. The need to work closer together than 'normal secondary general school teachers' was a crucial motivating factor for taking on this task. Teamwork and the related exchange of experience are perceived as immensely enriching.*

Expert visit, Luxembourg: *All teachers wrote down their observations in a book, which is accessible to those who are involved in teaching a specific class. It is a kind of internal communication between the teachers sharing information about behavioural and learning difficulties of the students to those who work with them.*

Comment from Liechtenstein: *Special needs pupils integrated in regular classes are specifically cared for by additional teachers. Pedagogical therapeutic measures are part of special inclusive schooling.*

1.3.2 Co-operative Learning

Students that help each other, especially within a system of flexible and well-considered student grouping, benefit from learning together.



The study appears to show that peer tutoring or co-operative learning is effective in both the cognitive and social-emotional areas of students' learning and development. In addition, there are no indications that the more able students suffer from such situations in terms of lacking new challenges or opportunities.

There are different concepts used to describe educational techniques where students work together in pairs: peer tutoring, co-operative learning and peer coaching. In most of these techniques the teacher forms heterogeneous pairs (and sometimes trios) consisting of roles as tutor and student (and sometimes also an observer). All roles are reciprocal: the less able student also plays the role of tutor.

This approach has a significantly positive effect on the self-confidence of students and at the same time it stimulates social interactions within the peer group. All students benefit from co-operative learning: the student who explains to the other student retains information better and for longer periods and the needs of the student who is learning are better addressed by a peer whose level of understanding is only slightly higher than his or her own level. Findings suggest that co-operative learning approaches not only have positive outcomes, but also that they are relatively easy to implement.

Expert visit, Sweden: *We saw students discussing their tasks not just during the lessons, but also during the breaks. Co-operation with schoolmates with special needs is a natural situation for them to develop and experience empathy. Students experience being together, listening to each other's opinion.*

International literature review: *Class wide peer tutoring sessions were scheduled twice a week for fifteen minutes. Teachers were asked to form heterogeneous teams that included three students of different performance levels. During the sessions each student played the role of tutor, tutee, and observer. The tutor would select a problem or task to be completed by the tutee and the observer provided social reinforcement. The teacher developed assistance procedures.*

Comment from Poland: *One of the teachers in an integrated class stated: “We focus on co-operation and not on the competition. We organise art and technical exercises in pairs (one SEN and one non-SEN pupil) so that the children do not feel weaker or different”.*

1.3.3 Collaborative Problem Solving

Collaborative problem solving refers to a systematic way of approaching undesirable behaviour in the classroom. This includes a set of clear class rules, agreed with all the students alongside appropriate incentives and disincentives for behaviour.

Findings from country reports and the international literature review show that the use of collaborative problem solving techniques decreases the amount and intensity of disturbances during lessons.

It is emphasised that the development of effective class rules are negotiated with the whole class and that these rules are clearly visible in the classroom. In some of the case studies, the set of rules were included in a contract to be signed by the students. There are several ways of developing class rules, but the case studies point at the need for a designated meeting at the beginning of the school year. It is also important that the class rules and the incentives and disincentives are also communicated to parents.

Expert visit, Luxembourg: *Development of a class-contract: Students and teachers negotiate and agree upon ten rules. That is to say that everyone should respect the rules and orientate his/her behaviour according to them. The target of this method was a type of collaborative problem-solving situation.*

Expert visit, UK: *An equal opportunities policy was employed and this was openly displayed on classroom walls. A behaviour code was also shared. Pastoral lessons were held to reinforce these codes. School assemblies were used as a platform for feedback on student behaviour. Classroom and school rules were negotiated with students. Parents were also called upon to support their child’s compliance with the school code of practice. They had to sign an agreement to pledge their commitment. These contracts with parents and students were signed every school year.*



Case study, Germany: *At the end of the week so called 'Friday circles' or the classroom committee takes place. Here the events of the week are reflected upon, problems discussed, and solutions developed together. Teachers, as well as students, can express criticism, but also their joy and experiences of success during the school week.*

1.3.4 Heterogeneous Grouping

Heterogeneous grouping of students refers to the implementation of educational settings where students of the same age stay together in mixed ability classrooms. The basis of the concept of a mixed ability class is to avoid selection and to respect natural variability in characteristics of students.

Heterogeneous grouping and a more differentiated approach to education are necessary and effective when dealing with a diversity of students in the classroom. It underlines the principle that all students are equal and that streaming in secondary education contributes to the marginalisation of students with SEN. Advantages of this organisational approach are obvious at the cognitive and especially emotional and social levels. It also contributes to overcoming the increasing gap between students with SEN and their peers. Furthermore it promotes positive attitudes of both students and teachers towards students with SEN.

This finding is very important given the expressed needs of countries in relation to handling diversity within classrooms. Of course, heterogeneous grouping is also a prerequisite for co-operative learning.

Expert visit, Norway: *Students are grouped in multiple ways for different reasons, all according to what is happening in the school or to the goals the school tries to achieve. At first all the students at the school are grouped by their age into grade levels and then each grade level is grouped into two classes that still collaborate very often. During lessons, learning groups of different sizes - beginning with pairs and ending up with the whole class working together - are formed.*

Case study, Austria: *The students work one third of the lessons with individual weekly plans, subjects like biology or geography are mainly organised in projects, sometimes in a cross-curricular way. Partner and group work dominate the daily work. In German, maths and English students are not separated in three ability levels (3 different rooms) as usual. Most of the time they work together on one topic in a common class according to their abilities.*


Comment from Liechtenstein: *The main task is the common creation of differentiated education, which respects the diversity in a class and permits inclusive measures.*

1.3.5 Effective Teaching

Effective education is based upon monitoring, assessment, evaluation and high expectations. The use of the standard curriculum framework for all students is important. However in many cases adaptation of the curriculum is needed, not only for those with SEN at the lower end of the continuum, but for all students. With regard to students with SEN this approach is defined and set out within the framework of the Individual Educational Plan (IEP).

The case studies highlight important effective education approaches as being: monitoring, assessment, evaluation and high expectations. All students benefit from these approaches, but this is particularly the case for students with SEN. Effective teaching approaches also contribute to the goal of decreasing the gap between students with and without SEN. An important consideration emerging from the country case studies is that the IEP should fit within the normal curriculum framework.

Case study, Spain: *We use the mainstream curriculum as a basis and then introduce substantial modifications, but let the students participate as much as possible in the general learning experiences, thereby they can feel integrated in the school. It is crucial that the students are completely integrated in their ordinary group. To guarantee their integration their participation in the current activities of their group must be fostered and they must share at least three*



basic curriculum subjects, the tutor lessons and the optional subjects with their classmates.

Case study, Iceland: *Although the student spends most of her school time included in the classroom a big part of the classroom teaching and learning organisation is individual teaching and learning. The student mostly works on her own tasks or projects during language, art, Icelandic and mathematics. The tasks and work in the classroom are differentiated both in mathematics and language. Her study material is adapted and modified to her needs.*

1.3.6 Home Area System

In the home area system the organisation of the delivery of the curriculum changes drastically. Students stay in a common area consisting of two or three classrooms where nearly all education takes place. A small team of teachers is responsible for the education provided in the home area.

As pointed out earlier, the increased subject specialisation and the particular organisation of lessons within secondary schools pose some serious difficulties for students with SEN. The case studies show that there are more appropriate ways of dealing with this issue. The home area system is one such model: students stay in their own area consisting of a small number of classrooms and a small group of teachers cover almost all subjects as a group task. For students with SEN in particular, this supports their need to feel a sense of 'belonging'. It also contributes to the wish to provide a stable and continuous environment and to the need to organise education in a non-streamed way. Finally it enhances teacher co-operation and it provides informal training opportunities for teachers.


Case study, Sweden: *The school has about 55 teachers. They are organised in five teams of 10-12 teachers in each. Every team has responsibility for 4-5 classes. Every working team is self-governed economically and has its own educational platform, a concrete plan of the vision of the school. It means that the flexibility of ways of working, schedule (...) and in service training for teachers might be dealt with differently in the five working teams and amongst the*

students. The students are in mixed aged groups and two teachers teach most of the theoretical subjects. Although the teachers are specialised to teach one or two subjects, in this model they teach other subjects as well. The reason for changing numbers of teachers in class was as the principal says: “to get rid of a tough atmosphere and conflicts among students and between teachers and students. You feel there must be other ways of working to make the students safe. At the school we thought it would be a safer setting if the same teacher were with the class as much as possible”. This means that in the school some teachers teach subjects they didn’t have in their exam. But as the principal says it has worked: “Firstly, because teachers have an interest in this other subject. Secondly because these teachers get support from a subject mentor, an expert in the subject of interest”.

Expert visit, Norway: The school emphasizes that each class level must be a physical, social and academic unit where all students have a strong connection to their class. The team of each class level consists of two to three class teachers, a special educator, resource or subject teacher, and social educator and/or assistant. The team shares an office, knows all the children and has a joint responsibility for the class-level. The members of each team support each other, collaborate as they plan the work and co-operate with parents.

Case study, Luxembourg: If possible, the class should remain as the same group of students for three years. There is a restricted number of teachers per class, each teacher can take on several subjects. The number of teachers is reduced to a minimum in order to ensure a good atmosphere. A permanent team of teachers covers the lessons for three years in order to strengthen the group and build up a better relationship between students and teachers. There is a personalised classroom that reassures the students.

Expert visit, Sweden: At the school a two-teacher model is used – in every class there is a team of two teachers who are teaching together most of the time. They teach almost all subjects, although they are not qualified for all of them. Besides common teaching duties they observe children, assess them if it is needed and propose special support for their education. As a result teachers



always have a partner to plan the process and the activities, get feedback and have a competent partner to observe, evaluate and assess students.

Literature review, Austria: *Major elements for successful co-operation are small and manageable teams, even if some subjects are taught by teachers without the necessary formal qualifications, and the willingness and ability to co-operate among the participating teachers.*


Literature review, Norway: *Key to this is also ensuring that all students experience good relationships and a sense of belonging, student participation and influence and good conditions for working together in order to assist the development of good classroom practice.*

1.3.7 Alternative Learning Strategies

The implementation of alternative learning strategies aims at teaching students how to learn and how to solve problems. Associated with this, schools give students greater responsibility for their own learning.

To support the inclusion of students with special needs, several models that focus on *learning strategies* have been developed over the past few years. In such programmes students do not only learn strategies, but also how to apply the right learning strategy at the right time. It is argued that giving students greater responsibility for their own learning will contribute to the success of inclusion in secondary schools. Information from the countries suggests that a greater emphasis on giving the ownership for learning to students is a successful approach.

Expert visit, Sweden: *Students are managers of their own learning process. They plan their working time; choose goals and levels and ways to reach goals (...) Another example of building up the responsibility is the timetable. Starting times of lessons in the morning are not strictly set, but there is a half an hour interval and students can choose, but will stay longer after the lesson if they come later in the morning.*



Case study, Iceland: *The school emphasises enhancing the learning environment and using multiple teaching methods. It is very important to the school staff to have a positive relationship with the students, and that students are responsible and independent in their learning behaviour.*

Case study, Sweden: *The problem for all students has been to ask questions and to ask for support, which they hadn't learned in their earlier school. In this model where the responsibility for learning is more dependent on each student, questioning is of great importance. But as the teacher says: "the students have started to understand that they are here to learn, that the teachers are there to help them understand and that they, for that reason, must ask for help".*

In this and previous sections a number of effective approaches in secondary schools have been described. These approaches contribute to the process of realising inclusive education: education that focuses on providing a curriculum for all. It should be stressed that there are several ways of achieving this goal, but that the case studies have shown that the combination of these approaches is particularly effective. In the next section an indicative overview of conditions for implementing these approaches is presented.

1.4 CONDITIONS FOR INCLUSION

The goal of this study was to identify approaches within the curriculum that appear to work within inclusive classes. However there are also many prerequisites for inclusive education. The (research) literature that has been studied as well as the information from case studies and discussions amongst experts all reveals that a number of conditions need to be met with respect to successful inclusion. An indicative overview of these suggested conditions is presented below.

1.4.1 Teachers

In relation to teachers, there is a need to:

Develop Positive Teacher Attitudes



Literature review, Spain: (...) it seems that some teachers are learning too easily how to 'segregate' our students; to consider that 'these' students belong to the support teacher (...) they are the 'specials' (...) that are to be the charge of other 'specialists'.

Create a Sense of 'Belonging'

Expert visit, Luxembourg: The students with SEN were looked on as people with their own specific and unique histories and identities. Teachers tried to make students feel as members of a family and of a community as well, increasing in this way their self-esteem. There was a constant effort towards building up the students' self confidence via positive interactions between the members of the class (including the teacher).

Literature review, Switzerland: the feeling of 'we' is emphasized within the class, which promotes the social integration of all students. In addition, there must be sufficient situations available in which the students really can work, experience and learn together – too much segregation makes the sense of community impossible.

Introduce Appropriate Pedagogical Skills and Time for Professional Reflection

Case study, Norway: At the same time, taking account of and basing our work on the students' academic and social skills means that we have to allow teachers to develop their own skills. We have therefore offered them courses on (...) preventing reading and writing difficulties. Besides this we plan to provide them with a course about behavioural difficulties – so they know what to do should these arise. We are also interested in ensuring that teachers get the time they need for reflection and to discuss common problems and experiences.

Literature review, France: Training and information are the major prerequisites for success in educational integration. All experiments describe the training and exchanges between teaching, educational, and therapeutic teams and parents and students prior to initiatives and during integration (...) Knowing the challenges of integration, the specificities of the disability, their impact on learning, are all

types of prior information essential in eliminating the usual reservations when a team receives one or more adolescents with SEN and in creating a dynamic process and favouring personal involvement.

1.4.2 School

It is necessary for schools to:

Implement a Whole School Approach


Case study, UK: Whereas it is possible, on account of the way in which most primary schools are organised, for an individual teacher to provide an inclusive classroom in which a group of students can be exposed to the range of the curriculum, this is not possible in secondary schools where there is invariably subject specialism and students move around different teachers in different classrooms. An individual student is not going to have his/her needs met unless all teachers are operating effectively in relation to those needs.

Literature review, Spain: The stronger the feeling of collective responsibility in the high school, the better the educational response towards these students. The collective awareness about some students' difficulties is more effective than the personal will of many teachers that are concerned with providing an appropriate response to their particular issue.

Provide a Flexible Support Structure

Literature review, Switzerland: The instructional form of team-teaching by regular teachers and special education teachers offers many advantages. The students remain in their class without having to leave it for special education measures. Even the other children can profit from and become acquainted with the special education teacher. Both of the teachers can profit from one another professionally, support one another mutually in difficult situations, and derive personal gain from it.

Case study, Greece: The co-operation between the support teacher and the class teacher improved gradually over time. The



dynamics of the class had changed sufficiently and the class had responded positively. The class teacher was not alone and the exchange of thoughts and the reflection on the methods used helped to modify and conceptualise strategies with respect to the students' needs.

Comment from Malta: *All students with a statement, attending mainstream Secondary Schools are supported with a facilitator. The facilitator in class supports the students according to the recommendations issued by the Statementing Moderating Panel. These may include modifications of lessons, enlargement of print, appropriate teaching aids to facilitate learning, development, implementation and monitoring of IEP programmes, ensures social interactions with peers, support participation in all school activities, so as to ensure maximum support for the success of students with special needs.*

Develop Leadership within the School

Expert visit, UK: *The principal is a very professional, skilled and visionary leader. He contributes to a good school ethos. He has been there for a long period of time and thus he knows the school very well. He served as an ordinary classroom teacher at the school and thus appears empathetic with the conditions under which teachers teach and the learning environments of students.*

Case study, Portugal: *The Executive Council of the school has a strong leadership/authority, which is perceived by all. All the internal rules for the development of the school's work are settled in the pedagogic council of the school and belong to an internal regulation act that is strictly applied.*

1.4.3 External Conditions

The role of policy makers should be to:

Implement a Clear National Policy

Case study, Iceland: *The Reykjavik Education Service (RES) has a newly established policy for special education. The policy for*

special education builds on theories of inclusive schooling and practice where each school provides services for all students with or without disabilities. To meet students' needs in general classrooms the RES recommends that schools provide alternative teaching methods, and co-operative teaching, differentiate instruction for all students, use multi-level tasks and projects and create an individual curriculum for students with special needs.

Case study, Ireland: *Successive Irish governments have adopted a 'comprehensive' approach to post-primary schooling, as opposed to the dual approach favoured in other European countries. This policy encourages the enrolment of all students within second-level schools and seeks the provision of a broad curriculum suitable to the aptitudes and interests of the student group.*

Comment from Poland: *The Regulation of 18 January 2005 on organising education and care of the disabled and socially maladjusted children guarantees the disabled children integrated education at every stage near their place of living.*

Provide Flexible Funding Arrangements that Facilitate Inclusion

Expert visit, UK: *The school exercises its right to decide on how to distribute its available funding. Money is allocated to addressing more immediate needs. For example, employing additional teachers takes priority over building maintenance, repairs and increasing accessibility.*

Develop Visionary Leadership on the Level of the Community

Expert visit, Norway: *The following conditions have a positive influence on the practice at the school: visionary leadership on the level of the school and the level of the municipality and a shared vision and approach to students with SEN. National and local support from policymakers is important.*

Case study, Denmark: *The municipality has adopted a development programme on inclusion and children's development and well-being. The main objective is to keep as many children and young people as possible in ordinary day-care centres and in the*



mainstream education system, and to create here the necessary framework for their development and well-being.

Create Regional Co-ordination

Case study, Portugal: *The Specialised Education Support Services are composed of specialised support teachers, of the Psychology and Guidance Services and by Social Education Support Services and there is a good co-operation between all the professionals (e.g. preparing transition from students' primary-secondary school, description and discussion of cases, development of an IEP and evaluation).*

Case study, Ireland: *It is envisaged that the National Educational Psychological Service will play a major role in the development of a comprehensive system of identifying and assisting all students with learning difficulties and disabilities. An important operating principle for the NEPS is close liaison with psychological and other services provided and funded by Regional Health Boards.*

Comment from Romania: *County Centres for Resources and Educational Assistance provide specific services for school mediation, co-ordinate, monitor and evaluate, at county level, the educational services and activities offered by school centres for inclusive education, logopedic centres, or centres for psycho-pedagogical assistance.*

1.5 CONCLUSIONS

Through an international literature review, case studies in 14 European countries, expert visits in five countries as well as various discussions involving experts and the Agency's National Co-ordinators, inclusive classrooms in secondary schools were extensively studied.

The study showed that many of the approaches that appeared to be effective in primary schools also contribute to effective inclusion in secondary schools: co-operative teaching, co-operative learning, collaborative problem-solving, heterogeneous grouping and effective teaching. Additionally, the introduction of a home area

system and a re-structuring of the learning process seem to be crucial approaches at secondary school level.

The case studies highlighted the importance of each single factor. However it should be emphasized that some of the case studies seem to demonstrate that *the combination* of some of these approaches is important for effective classroom practice within inclusive secondary schools.

In particular, the ‘home area system’ – an area that consists of two or three classrooms and where a (small) group of teachers delivers the whole curriculum within a stable environment - appears to be important and effective.

The study also showed that inclusion in secondary schools is a reality: many countries have submitted reports which demonstrate that students with learning difficulties and other special needs can benefit from approaches within mainstream secondary schools.

Case study, Germany: *The passion and the strong will of the parents are the reason for getting an integrative education for N. If she had stayed at the school for mentally disabled children, the challenge she would have been offered would have been inappropriately low for a girl of her ability, which would have had subsequent cognitive consequences.*

Literature review, Spain: *Other experiences point out that inclusion in regular classes, with support adjusted to the students’ special needs in the group context, has a positive influence on their learning process, self-esteem and self-concept and, at the same time, improves their relationship with their friends.*

A final remark needs to be made about the management of change within the secondary education sector. Many of the schools described in the case studies and in the exchange reports have undergone processes of developmental change over many years. The change processes in these secondary schools have sometimes been extensively documented and these reports are a rich source of information for every school that is planning to become more inclusive.



Case study, UK: *The school is unique in that a record of its initial move towards inclusion, which resulted from its response to the Education Act 1981, was published as a book by the head teacher and the head of Learning Support who were at the school through the 1980s (Gilbert and Hart, 1990).*

It has been the intention of this Agency study to provide findings and raise issues that are worthy of discussion at national, local or school level. The study demonstrates that inclusion is a reality at the secondary education level and there are many ways to take the first steps towards implementing effective inclusive education within secondary schools. It is hoped that this study has provided some ideas of how and where these steps might be taken and under which conditions these steps need to be taken if they are to be truly effective for students with special educational needs.



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Details of the Agency representatives and experts who contributed to this chapter can be found on the National Pages of the Agency website: www.european-agency.org/ and: www.european-agency.org/iecp/iecp_intro.htm/

Chapter 2

ACCESS TO AND WITHIN HIGHER EDUCATION FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter of the Thematic Publication has been especially prepared in order to complement the chapters on secondary education and transition from school to employment. Various aspects of Agency work - in particular Agency involvement in the Higher Education Accessibility Guide (HEAG) network of Higher Education (HE) disability support experts - has shown that this is a developing area of concern that deserves special attention. At present experts from 28 countries are involved in HEAG activities with partners from the EU member states (with separate representation from the French and Flemish speaking communities of Belgium) Iceland, Norway and Switzerland.

The aim of the chapter is to highlight issues for students with special educational needs (SEN) in relation to their *access to* higher education as well as issues of *access within* Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The chapter is based upon a framework of issues identified through work within the HEAG network and specifically an examination of information available on the HEAG database: www.heagnet.org/

Additional information was provided by the Eurydice Units and was also collected via a brief review of literature. Specific examples and updates of HEAG database information were provided by the HEAG experts from Belgium (Flemish speaking community), Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain and Switzerland.

2.2 STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS (SEN) IN HIGHER EDUCATION (HE)

Across Europe, policy initiatives aimed at increasing the numbers of students entering and completing higher education are being




implemented. These can be seen at the European level within the Council of Education Ministers' statements regarding participation within Higher Education as part of the 2010 Objectives for Education in Europe (2004). At National level different countries have different foci for their initiatives to increase participation rates, one common area however being the increased participation of students from 'non-traditional' backgrounds. An example of this is the UK's AimHigher project, a Department for Education and Skills supported project that has a stated aim of widening: ... *participation in UK higher education – and particularly among students from non-traditional backgrounds, minority groups and disabled persons ...* (www.aimhigher.ac.uk/about_us/index.cfm/).

David (2004) states that: ... *Equity and/or equality in higher education are terms with increasing currency internationally, but quite how they are conceptualised and determined is a much more complex issue ...* (p 813). In relation to students with SEN in HE, this is most certainly the case across Europe.

It is extremely hard to identify how many students with disabilities there are in HE in European countries. During the evaluation of the SOCRATES programme (2000) an investigation into the potential participation rates was conducted (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2000). From a sample of approximately 28% of the number of institutions receiving Erasmus support in 1995/96 there were 2,369,162 students enrolled at the institutions. Of these, 7,143 (0.3%) were identified as having some form of self reported disability. During 1998/99, 2,829,607 students were enrolled. Of these, 13,510 (0.48%) were identified as having disabilities.

These figures may be extremely misleading, as over half of the countries participating in this study stated that students with disabilities do not have to self-identify their difficulties. As an example, during the year 2003/2004 the National Disability Team in the UK stated 5.4% of all under-graduates self reported as having some form of special need. They estimate from their work however that the actual figure is closer to 10% (National Disability Team, 2005).



This is supported by information from the EuroStudent report (2005) where as many as 11% of students in some countries participating in this study self reported as having some sort of impairment that effected their studies in HE. Similarly, data from 2000 in Germany indicated that the proportion of students with disabilities was 2%, and those with a long-term/chronic illness was as high as 13% (Federal Ministry of Education and Research, 2002).

If other sources of data on the numbers of people with disabilities across Europe is looked at, then the suggestion that the potential number of students with disabilities in HE *should be* higher, is supported. About 10% of the population of Europe has some form of recognised disability (European Commission, 1999) and it is estimated that there are 84 million pupils and students – approximately 22% or 1 in 5 of the total school aged population - who will require *special educational provision* either in a mainstream classroom, as part of a special class or within a separate institution (Eurydice, 2000). Depending on the way a child is identified and assessed in the countries of Europe, pupils with special educational needs (SEN) make up between 2% and 18% of the school age population (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2003).

Anecdotal evidence and information from disability support workers in HE suggests that the numbers of students with different forms of special needs in HE are far higher than available data suggests and are also increasing. However if the conservative estimate of 10% of the people as having some form of disability is used, it can be argued that participation rates of students with disabilities in HE is still - by any measure - well below what should be expected.

Although most countries report growing numbers of students with SEN in HE (OECD, 2003) students with disabilities do not appear to be equally represented in HE and this raises a number of issues in relation to continuing barriers and supporting factors for their access to and successful participation within higher education study programmes.

The OECD 2003 study on Disability in Higher Education documents how different countries have very different numbers and 'profiles' of



students with SEN in HE provision. There appear to be various reasons for these differences: the first, most obvious reason is that European countries have differing general policies towards all student admissions to HE (ADMIT, 2002). A second potential reason highlighted by the OECD study is differences in disability policies and entitlements at National level and how these in particular impact upon organisations – such as HEIs – to make buildings and services accessible to all people, including those with disabilities.

However, a further, less obvious but perhaps more significant factor is highlighted by the HELIOS, Group 13, (1996) as well as the OECD study: inclusion within educational structures in the compulsory education has been developing in most European countries for well over two decades and far greater numbers of pupils with SEN attend mainstream provision. Inclusion in mainstream education in the primary and secondary sector leads to an expectation – held by students, their families and the educational professionals who have worked with them – that access to HE should be a natural progression for some students.

Whilst expectations regarding access to HE have risen, opportunities for young people with SEN who have been in inclusive settings in secondary education to progress to HE have not always kept pace. The Fedora/HELIOS study focusing on study abroad opportunities for students with SEN (Van Acker, 1996) highlighted the disparity in services offered to students with SEN across Europe as a continuing obstacle to meeting students' expectations for access to HE.

The work of the HELIOS Group 13 and the 2003 OECD study are two clear examples of an analysis of issues relating to HE and disability. This chapter is not so far reaching or detailed as these studies, but the intention is to supplement the previous findings with updated information relating to a number of key areas – these are outlined in the next section.



2.3 HIGHER EDUCATION ACCESS – KEY ISSUES

The intention of the information gathering for this chapter was to collect country information about two aspects of access:

- *Access to HE* or opportunities to gain initial entry into an HEI;
- *Access within HE* or support for full participation in all aspects of studying within HE.

In order to consider both of these, information from two levels is required:

- *National*: legislation and policy outlining entitlements for people with disabilities and structures and/or organisations for supporting them;
- *Institutional*: services and facilities within individual HEIs available to students with SEN.

The aim of exploring these different aspects of access was to provide an overview of information about the types of support structures for students with SEN available within countries that enable them to participate in HE study opportunities. Information from countries can be combined into three areas:

1. Entitlements to access and support within HE;
2. National level support for students with SEN;
3. HE institutional level support.

The information collected for this chapter provides descriptive statements relating to situations in participating countries at present. The information is indicative of possibilities in these countries; all countries indicated that there were major developments in this field and the situation regarding legislation, entitlements and different forms of support is not static.

One intention of this chapter is to highlight possible trends in access to HE for students with SEN. This is presented in the form of a brief analysis in relation to each of the three areas outlined above, but also in a consideration of barriers to studying in HE still faced by students with SEN. This information is considered in the final section of the chapter.



2.3.1 Entitlements to access and support within HE

All countries indicated that there was some form of legislation that protected the rights and entitlements of students with SEN in terms of their access to and within HE as well as support during their studies. Legislation outlining entitlements appears to take different forms.

General Disability Legislation

Such legislation covers all public services, organisations, etc. and guarantees rights of access to services. In some countries – Iceland for example – international legislation such as the UN regulations on Equalisation of Opportunity for people with disabilities is applicable. The Parliamentary Commissioner in Denmark has based his two preliminary inspections of universities on the regulations of the UN. Other countries have national level legislation covering all aspects of public services. Support for students with SEN in Malta, Romania and Switzerland is covered under such forms of legislation.

Countries may have more than one act or regulation covering equality of opportunity. An exemplar of such a situation is Germany where there is a range of anti-discrimination laws, but in relation to HE, the student is responsible for accessing the services they require via the entitlements they may have as a person with a disability. The law that sets the framework for all 16 Federal states (Länder) states that all HEIs have to cater for the particular needs students with SEN in such a way that they do not have disadvantages in their studies and are given the opportunity to make use of HEI - if possible without depending on the help of others. Moreover this law states that modifications of study and examination regulations have to be made, according to the individual needs of students with SEN.

At the present time there is a discussion about reforming the German Federal system. As a consequence the law may be repealed and this means that the 16 Länder - which are responsible for policies - will get more rights with the consequence that for students there will be different regulations which will make it more

difficult for them to get equal rights, particularly when they change their study location and move from one Land to another.

General Disability Legislation with Specific Elements that refer to HE

This is evident in the UK where Part 4 (Education) of the Disability Discrimination Act makes it unlawful for education and training providers and other related services to discriminate against people with disabilities. Essentially, there are three elements to this legislation: an extended definition of disability; an outline of general duties of organisations to promote equality and specific duties for HEIs.

In France, the new law of February 2005 protects the general rights of people with disabilities, but there are Décrets d'Application relating to aspects of studying in HE, for example the decree of December 2005, which covers regulations for examinations (other decrees will follow).

Italy has a similar law (No. 104 of 1992) that protects the general rights of people with SEN and it has specific parts relating to HE. In particular it states that Universities have to: nominate a Delegate of the Rector to deal with all matters concerning disability (students, teaching and administrative staff, architectural barriers, special examination arrangements, etc.) engage professional interpreters for sign language and establish specialised tutoring services for students with SEN.

Specific Legislation relating to HE

This can take different forms. In some countries, *legislation dictates that HEIs should enrol a certain percentage of students with SEN each year*: for example, in Greece and Spain 3% or above. In Portugal 2% of places are 'earmarked' for students with SEN who fulfil the academic requirements to access HE although it is not mandatory to enrol 2% of students with SEN on each course. In the general prescriptions of the annual budget document from the Swedish the Government, HEIs are required to reserve 0.3% of



their budget for basic education to finance special (compensatory) support for students with SEN.

In Spain, students with SEN are entitled to access to the HE under the same conditions as any other student. This is also the case in Italy: in case of an entrance examination, students with severe disabilities have the right to have extra time (up to 50%) and use assistive technologies. Students with SEN have fee exemption (depending on the extent of their disability: total exemption for between 66 and 100%) and have specific assessments of their university career when they apply for university grants. In Greece students with SEN are enrolled in the HEIs unless there is a particular prohibitory decision of the Education Department, i.e. blind students are not accepted in medicine.

Specific legislation also exists that gives *the possibility for additional grants and financial support being made available to students with SEN*. This is the case in of example Estonia, Poland and Portugal. Students in Denmark with a severe disability can receive an additional ‘allowance’ as a supplement to their usual student grant (SU-styrelsen). In Germany according to a Federal Education and Assistance Act students with SEN can get extra financial assistance for their ‘normal’ costs of living when they have to study for a longer period than students without disabilities. For disability related costs students with SEN can apply for special support via the SGB II and SGB XII – two of twelve ‘new laws enacted in 2005 in which social assistance in different fields is codified.

Such legislation can also take the form of *setting out specific entitlements to support for example exemptions/alternative arrangements in examinations*. This is the case in Austria, Cyprus, Denmark, Hungary and Italy. A clear example of such legislation is evident in, the Flemish speaking community of Belgium where Article II.6 of the Decree encourages HEIs to implement a policy: *... to ensure the accessibility of higher education – materially and immaterially – for students with a disability or chronic disease and for students coming from sections of the population that can be objectively marked out, and that have a significantly lower degree of participation in higher education than other sections of the*

population ...

This article stipulates that each HEI must have regulations on education and examinations, however in practice, the institutions have freedom on how they implement specific measures.

A Range of General and Specific Laws all Influencing Entitlements within HE

Netherlands, Norway, Spain and Sweden all indicate that there are a range of general laws and regulations protecting the rights of people with disabilities that cover HE. However in addition there are specific regulations focussing upon HE provision and support for example under the Law on equal treatment for students with handicap and chronic illness in the Netherlands, HEIs are required to offer an education that is accessible to all students, including students with SEN. In Sweden, the Equal Treatment of Students at Universities Act (2001: 1286) aims to promote within the higher education sector equal rights for students and to combat discrimination based on gender, ethnical group, religion, sexual orientation or disability. In Norway, the Law for Universities and University Colleges has the core principles of accessibility and universal design. A law has been passed in Denmark concerning support for students with disabilities in higher education. The support is not financial as such, but gives compensation in the form of benefits according to the current directives. This support is funded by the government grant system (SU-styrelsen).

In Spain, the Constitution has articles about disability rights, as well as a specific law on social integration for people with disabilities. Other aspects of general legislation have specific elements that refer to HE: the Law for the Universities is an organic law that has a specific article dedicated to equality of opportunity for students with SEN. Finally, other specific legislation provides the possibility for obtaining additional financial support to meet special needs.

Overall, it appears that there are ongoing developments in legislation – both general disability related legislation that also covers HE as well as HE specific regulations. It can be seen that changes in some countries' legislation has dual, inter-connected



aims: improving individual rights and entitlements and balancing this with the responsibilities of HEIs. In some countries, HEI responses to legislative changes have been positive developments in making learning environments more easily accessible in all respects (Hurst, 2006).

Changes in societal views of disability are one impetus for change as is the raising of expectations for different progression pathways for students who have experienced inclusive provision in compulsory education. However, two comments made by countries also indicate other factors driving change in legislation.


The first from the Flemish speaking community of Belgium relates to the influence of European Union declarations that have led to fundamental changes with HE generally. There is now, for example, a regulation that enables students to enrol in an HEI via different qualification routes: diplomas, credits, examinations, etc. This means that there can be a higher level of flexibility in meeting the needs of students with SEN.

The second example relates to litigation, instigated by a student with SEN against their HEI in order to access support required for their access to study opportunities available to other students. Whilst litigation as a means of securing educational support is a growing phenomenon in some countries within the compulsory education sector, at present it is not so prevalent within the HE sector, but could have an impact upon legislation in the near future.

2.3.2 National level support services

National level – so-called umbrella – support services or organisations providing support and advice for students with SEN exist in different forms in countries. In the Flemish speaking community of Belgium, the ‘VEHHO’ (Flemish Centre of Expertise for Disability and Higher Education) and in the Netherlands ‘handicap+studie’ offer specific and highly specialised support to students with SEN as well as for staff in HEIs.

Similarly specialised guidance and advice is offered by ‘SKILL’ (the National Bureau for Students with Disabilities) in the UK and ‘DSW’



(Deutsches Studentenwerk) in Germany. The target groups of the DSW advice centre are HE applicants and students, as well as staff of HEIs and local student services organisations especially the coordinators of disability support. The DSW is also a platform for organisations, institutions and self-help groups in the field of education and disability with the aim being to exchange ideas and develop new projects.

Both Italy and France have National structures – the National Conference of Delegates (of Rectors) for Disabilities and a coordinating unit with the Ministère de l'Education Nationale respectively – that oversee and make recommendations regarding the support work done at institutional level. In the French speaking community of Belgium the 'AWIPH' (Walloon Agency for the Integration of Handicapped People) offers support via payment of some additional expenses incurred by students with SEN.

Iceland, Portugal and Sweden have more general national level, publicly funded services that are able to inform students about legislation, rights and support available to them. In Sweden, there are also various public authorities that have specific responsibility for specific measures in this field; for example 'SISUS' (the National Agency for Special Educational Support) provides certain services in the area of personal assistance.

Hungary, Norway, Poland, Romania and Spain all have national organisations or NGOs that offer support and advice to students with SEN in HE. In Norway the two main organisations for people with disabilities, have specific policies covering higher education and in Poland, the Polish Council for Students with Disabilities operates in co-operation with the Association of Polish Students.

In Switzerland, whilst there is no national organisation providing support and advice for students with SEN or staff in HEIs, there is one support service involving three HEIs (University of Zurich, University of Basel and the Technical University of Zürich).

The different services provided by national level organisations focus upon the provision of different forms of specialist information and advice information. In most cases this is directed to students with



SEN themselves; in others, information is also provided to HEIs and particularly teaching staff working with students with SEN.

However, there appears to be other national level tasks that different services are involved in to differing degrees:

- General awareness raising regarding the rights and entitlements of students with SEN;
- The co-ordination of different sources of information available to students with SEN and HEIs to ensure accuracy and availability;
- The networking of disability support staff working at an institutional level;
- Provision of a forum for different interest groups and stakeholders to meet and exchange information on issues relating to access to and within HE for students with SEN.

One key issue that a number of countries are debating is not just who should fulfil these functions and tasks, but how they can be co-ordinated in the best possible way in order to meet the varied support requirements of individual students with SEN in HE.


2.3.3 HE institutional level support

A consideration of the possible support for students with SEN at an institutional level requires not only a description of possible types of support (please see later sections), but also an indication of institutional policies on support and how this is organised.

Statements or Action Plans for Students with SEN

Increasingly HEIs across Europe are making explicit, publicly available statements (i.e. through websites or prospectuses) regarding their policies and/or action plans for supporting students with SEN. Such statements of policy are highlighted by the OECD (2003) as a crucial means of raising awareness and providing transparency regarding the support available within an HEI. In Sweden and Norway these are obligatory and in Norway there is also a specification that these statements must be regularly updated to reflect changes in need and provision.

Although not obligatory, it is usual for HEIs to have action plans and



statements in France, Hungary, Iceland, Italy and the UK. In Hungary, as a rule, it is obligatory for every institution to develop their own regulations about students with SEN, to regulate the types of the technical and personal assistance provided by the institutions (under the order of the Minister of Education (29/2002 OM (V.17))).

In Cyprus and Spain, some HEIs have such statements whilst in Portugal in a survey of 349 HEI's with websites, only 3 had clear statements of SEN support.

Such statements are not usual in the Czech Republic – although some, for example Brno do have them – as support is negotiated at the individual student level. In the Czech Republic, agreement for support would be specified in the individual education plan for each student with SEN.

In Germany Statements and Action Plans for students with SEN are not usual in the HEI themselves, but on a national level there are such statements: the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder (KMK) made recommendations for a code of practice in 1982 and a similar recommendation was made by the German Rector's Conference in 1986.

There appears to be a movement both at national as well as institutional levels to encourage HEIs to make public statements regarding the support they offer students with SEN. In the Netherlands, at present some HEIs have action plans, but as a result of new legislation during the next 3 years, all institutions will develop them. Both Poland and Switzerland have HEIs – Jagiellonian University and the University of Zurich respectively – working on developing such statements on a project basis. Aarhus University in Denmark is the only Danish university that has a declaration and quality assurance support statement for students with special needs.

Support Service, Office, Team or Person providing Support for
Students with SEN

Support within HEIs can be organised in very different ways in



terms of services, teams and even individual disability support officers from different professional backgrounds. However, describing the variety of possible services available at institutional level is extremely difficult; the situation in Germany typifies that of a number of countries - there are no cross-institutional standards for providing services or support and so access to support is on an institutional basis. Similarly, in the Flemish speaking community of Belgium and Romania, in practice HEIs have great autonomy over how they integrate support for SEN within their general policies and then the subsequent development of services for students with SEN.

Although all countries have different ways of organising support, three main forms of organisation are apparent:


- Contact person and co-ordinator working with issues relating to educational support and advice;
- Support team, department or office;
- Multi-disciplinary service with teams of tutors and advisors from different professional backgrounds.

The following countries usually have a named contact person and co-ordinator for SEN support as a minimum level of support within HEIs: Austria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, the Flemish speaking community of Belgium, France, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Norway and Sweden.

Due to its small size, Liechtenstein has a very restricted HE sector and therefore the HEIs do not have support services as such, but rather offer support and advice on an individual student basis.

In Germany, nearly every HEI and local student services organisation has a named contact person and co-ordinator for SEN. In Norway, a named contact person is required by law, with the development of support teams being the increasing norm.

In Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Poland, Portugal, Romania and Switzerland, some HEIs offer a named contact person and co-ordinator for SEN support as a minimum level of support, but not all. Within a number of countries – Austria, the Flemish speaking community of Belgium, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain and



Sweden – it is usual for the larger universities to have a department or office that includes a team of professionals with a multidisciplinary profile who can provide support and advice for students with SEN.

As the numbers of students with varying types of needs increases in HEIs, then the need for support to be organised on a team basis and expanded in the range of services offered, also increases. In the Netherlands, the move is for all HEIs to develop their support teams into more multi-disciplinary based services. However complicating factors working against this positive trend are highlighted by some countries. Similarly, Aarhus University, Denmark has set up an advisory and support centre consisting of a team of professionals with inter-disciplinary and specialist backgrounds.

However complicating factors working against this positive trend are highlighted by some countries. How additional aids, services and personal support are financed is one factor. In Germany, there are special services in some HEIs, but this is not the norm as the system of support for students is based upon the individual receiving financial support to pay for necessary services which they then have to organise for themselves.

In Austria, HEIs are not responsible for funding and/or providing some specialist support services i.e. mobility training. Similarly, the complexity of funding for Finnish students with SEN is also an issue for individual students and also HEIs.

Complexity in sources of funding and services is an issue, but a further complicating factor is highlighted by the Flemish speaking community of Belgium who suggest that depending upon where support is 'coming from' in terms of funding source and designation – i.e. health, social services – may have an impact upon how that resource can be used within an 'educational' context. Specifically, staff who are linked to social services may not have a mandate to support students within classes. Issues relating to effective co-ordination of services also multiply with the increase in the availability and professional complexity of support offered to students with a wider range of needs.


The Focus of HEI Support Services

The types of support offered to students with SEN differ depending upon needs. It is possible to identify different categories of support that are often made available to students.

Type of support	Usual in ...
Academic support	Cyprus**, Czech Republic, Denmark, the Flemish speaking community of Belgium, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Malta, Netherlands*, Norway, Poland, Spain, Sweden (compensatory measures), Switzerland (Zurich University only)
Providing specialist study support materials	Cyprus**, Czech Republic, Denmark, the Flemish speaking community of Belgium*, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Malta, Netherlands*, Norway, Portugal, Spain
Accommodation /Housing	Cyprus**, the Flemish speaking community of Belgium, France, Germany, Hungary*, Iceland, Italy (not at all HEIs), Netherlands*, Norway, Portugal*, Poland, Switzerland (Zurich University only)
Health services	The Flemish speaking community of Belgium, France, Hungary*, Iceland (mental health services only), Italy (not at all HEIs), Netherlands*, Norway, Portugal*
Financial	The Flemish speaking community of Belgium, Denmark, France, Hungary*, Italy, Netherlands*, Norway*, Portugal*, Spain (in relation to taxes), Switzerland (Zurich University only)
Advice and counselling	Czech Republic, the Flemish speaking community of Belgium, France (sometimes via specialists associations), Germany, Hungary (sometimes via specialists associations), Iceland, Italy (not at all HEIs), Malta, Netherlands*, Norway, Portugal*, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland (Zurich University only)

* As elements of general services offered to all students

** Offered by The Academic Affairs and Student Welfare Service at the University of Cyprus. Private Institutions of Tertiary Education, through their Academic Affairs Services, also offer similar support and assistance to students with special needs.



This table should be viewed as being *indicative of possible support* in countries – it is clear from most countries' information that not all HEIs always provide all services or types of support. For example in the Czech Republic, some HEIs such as Brno University provide a support co-ordinator and a range of almost all types of support described above. However this is not the norm for all HEIs in the Czech Republic.

Other forms of support are also available in countries: Austria and Portugal offer mobility training; Cyprus offers assistance with access to usual university facilities; the Flemish speaking community of Belgium sometimes offers specialist sport facilities; Hungary and Spain offer personal assistants; Italy provides support for information technology training; Norway and Switzerland offer mediation and student representation with, for example, the public social welfare system; Poland is sometimes able to provide specialist transport facilities. Finally, Sweden stated that the creation of fair study conditions for students relating to the curriculum and programmes of study was a major focus of necessary support.

Support for teaching staff was also raised as an indirect form of support to students with SEN by Switzerland and Sweden suggested that the creation of an accessible university environment was another form of support. Such an environment requires collaboration with, and involvement of, other university staff - teachers, librarians, administrative and support staff, etc. – and so the professionals directly supporting students with SEN require a range of personal and professional skills to allow them to work within as well as often co-ordinate inter-disciplinary teams.

Despite the range of services on offer, an issue raised by Hungary is most likely to also be the case in a number of, if not all, other countries. A recent survey of students with SEN in Hungary showed that most of them were supported practically, financially and personally by their families. In addition these students had a so-called 'informal, unpaid network' of fellow students who helped them by students for example copying material, reading out aloud, etc. These informal means of support appear to be invaluable and



on the basis of anecdotal information, it is surmised that they are extremely necessary for students with SEN in most countries.

2.4 BARRIERS TO AND WITHIN HE

The study conducted by the OECD in 2003 covered five countries (as well as drawing on literature from research conducted in other European countries) and identified the following factors as potentially presenting barriers to students with SEN:

- Funding, in particular lack of coherence in funding models and sources;
- Attitudes towards SEN and disability at decision maker level as well as HEI staff level;
- The lack of partnerships and co-operations between HEIs and other educational sectors, especially the secondary sector;
- Lack of flexibility in providing alternative, differentiated forms of learning for many students;
- Physical accessibility to buildings; mismatch of programme aims and content and individual needs;
- Lack of understanding that SEN is the result of an interaction between a student's difficulties and the environment they are in;
- Lack of reliable information on which research and recommendations can be based.

To one degree or another, all of these issues were highlighted by the countries participating contributing to this chapter. They were also issues voiced by a number of students with SEN taking part in the European Parliament Hearing organised by the Agency as an event within the European Year of People with Disabilities (2003). These key issues are now considered below with information collected from countries as well as exemplar statements from the young people participating in the Parliament Hearing. The issues are grouped around five key factors: physical barriers, access to information, access to support, attitudes and finally entitlements.

2.4.1 Physical Barriers

The issue of access to chosen places of study was highlighted by a delegate from the Netherlands during the European Parliament Hearing: ... *Some of us can't study what or where we want and*

what we have the capacities for. Sometimes because buildings are inaccessible ...

Problems associated with gaining appropriate physical access to buildings was highlighted as a key factor in Estonia, Hungary, Italy, Portugal and Spain. Estonia highlighted a fact that could apply to a number of countries – new buildings meet accessibility guidelines, but the 'old, historic' HEIs have not been adapted. Access to HE in terms of travel to locations because of an accessible infrastructure in the country can also be a factor (Hungary).

However, it appears that physical access to HEIs is an area where developments are being made, possibly due to increased anti-discrimination policies in countries designed to promote accessibility in all public services. Whilst still presenting problems in some respects, physical access to HEI buildings is not the main barrier to access to HE for some students – others factors can present far greater difficulties.

2.4.2 Access to Information

The availability of different forms of necessary information was highlighted by the HEAG project network of partners in the evaluation report (2002) as an area requiring further attention. This appears to remain the case with different areas of information highlighted as being necessary: information to students with SEN, information about students and the support they require.

The issue of the correct types of information being available to students is summed up by a delegate from the Parliament Hearing: *... It is very hard to know what is possible and available for you - what assistive aids and support are available - as a disabled student and how to get it ...* (The Netherlands).

Knowing what is possible and what support is available can also be an issue for staff supporting and advising students with SEN during their studies (France) and different types of information for all staff working with students may be required if students are to be guided to make the correct choices and decisions for their educational future.




Information for staff who support students often focuses upon information about students and the support they may require. The lack of availability of such information was raised as an issue by Hungary, Norway, Romania, Sweden and Switzerland. Information may be unavailable – for a variety of reasons – on numbers of students with SEN. However, all of these countries referred to the lack of extensive research into support for students with SEN in HE that can be drawn upon to guide practice. Some countries indicated that research is now being initiated at a National level (the Netherlands as an example), but overall, it is suggested that more research and systematic examination of the area needs to be undertaken.

A further point to be made here relates to the coverage of studies considering developments in HE provision generally. Studies such as the Eurydice *Focus on the Structure of Higher Education in Europe 2004/05* (2005) and the *OECD/UNESCO Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross Border HE* consider relevant and important aspects of HE for all students, including those with SEN. However specific consideration of students with SEN is extremely rare and so although findings and/or recommendations may be highly applicable, this fact is not made explicit and the relevant, specific aspects of studying for students in HE are not highlighted.

2.4.3 Access to Support

In a recent study by the Adaptech Research Network (2004) in the USA, exploring obstacles and facilitators to post compulsory further and higher education, students with and without SEN were asked about what made their studies easier and harder. While students with disabilities indicated that SEN focussed support was an important facilitator, for the most part these students mentioned the same facilitators as their non-disabled peers. Similarly, students with and without SEN shared most of the same obstacles, the main difference here was that students with SEN suggested that disability related issues - such as health - were major obstacles.

Specialist support for students takes many forms. Physical accessibility and information are means of support in themselves, but most countries indicated that access to specialist educational



intervention, technical aids, counselling and guidance was essential for most students with SEN. The Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, the Netherlands and Portugal all highlighted the availability of different aspects of specialist educational support – both at National service and institutional levels – as being crucial for students with SEN to successfully participate in HE. Access to specially trained support staff and teachers was also raised by a delegate of the Parliament Hearing: ... *It is very important that we have professional teachers and support personnel. They need education and good training ...* (Finland).

In addition to support and advice regarding housing, funding and possibly health services, access to specialist and/or adapted study materials (the Netherlands and Portugal), assistive technologies (Greece) alterations in study arrangements (Estonia) modifications to exams (Hungary) and vocational counselling (Estonia) are all concrete forms of educational support required by students at different times in their HE study careers. Accessing specialist and/or adapted study materials is an area where much work has been done. However, access to adapted assessment – i.e. tasks are modified to compensate for a special need - is not always so widespread (Poland, the UK). The Czech Republic highlighted the importance of HEIs developing partnerships with organisations/NGOs offering specialist services if comprehensive support for students with different types of SEN is to be provided across individual HEIs.

A potentially important aspect of support relates to the provision of specialist counselling for students with SEN (Estonia, Portugal as two examples of countries highlighting this). Work by Heiman and Kariv (2004) suggests that students with SEN experience far higher levels of work, social and combined stress and they therefore require more targeted support than students without SEN. Anecdotal information collected via the HEAG project as well as comments from countries participating in the current survey (Czech Republic) tends to support this: the social and cultural aspects of studying in higher education are as important to a students' successful experience as the educational aspects of student support.




Finally, it is easy to overlook the potential barriers to learning that are intrinsic to teaching and learning situations themselves. The material being studied, the expected form of group/peer interaction, the methods expected for studying as well as used in teaching – all of these potentially present barriers for students with different types of SEN. One developing focus of support in countries is to look at and analyse these barriers intrinsic to the learning situation. The focus of support attempting to remove these barriers then has two necessary aspects: direct support for students in developing coping strategies, as well as advice and strategies for teachers on how to reduce these barriers in their teaching.

2.4.4 Attitudes

Problems associated with attitudes held by and also held with respect to students with SEN were highlighted by countries as presenting as many if not more obstacles than physical access or lack of support. A comment from Germany sums this up: ... *the hardest barriers are in the minds!*

Negative perceptions and attitudes that have direct consequences on the success of students can be held by teaching as well as all staff working in HEIs. However, the attitudes of institutional leaders are likely to have the most direct impact. A statement from Switzerland exemplifies many comments: ... *there are the “barriers in the head” of people [with] decision-making functions. They say, of course, students with disabilities have the same right to study as all the others but [they] do not realise that study for these students is a form of active and equal participation, which is possible only through the removal of technical and architectural barriers. This step of giving people with disabilities equal rights ... to treating them as equally entitled is often harder than it should be ...*

Many countries suggested that legislation alone will not change attitudes; work is also needed to raise awareness and provide examples of positive practice as a starting point for changing the culture of HEIs. Johnston (2003) cited by Hurst (2006) very clearly points out that: ... *a law cannot guarantee what a culture cannot give.*



Attitudes towards students with SEN can lead to a form of social isolation that for students with SEN themselves is a major barrier to overcome. In Iceland a research project involving detailed interviews with students with SEN showed that all students agreed that the most difficult barrier they faced was social isolation and lack of communication with other students and teachers. These students raised far more concerns about 'social connections' than for example physical access. The crucial aspect of social adaptation in inclusion in HE is also highlighted in a project conducted by the Canadian National Educational Association of Disabled. The project emphasised the need for HEIs to make the social aspects of studying in HE as accessible as the educational aspects if real inclusion of students with SEN is to occur.

2.4.5 Entitlements

The evaluation of the HEAG network's activities concluded that the main barrier students with SEN face in accessing HE centres upon their entitlements to support. This view was supported by a young delegate taking part in the Parliament Hearing: ... *We believe that laws demanding accessibility and equal rights for disabled people are extremely important because they will often be the only motivation for organisations to make something accessible or to give disabled people equal rights ...* (The Netherlands).

At European and National levels, there are policies and strategies that establish rights to public services for people with disabilities. However, as the 2003 OECD study highlights, the separation of policies directing HE and general disability rights still leads to gaps in terms of entitlements to services and support actually being made available in HEIs. A specific example of this is provided by Konur (2002) who suggests that in the UK there appears to be a laissez-faire approach in relation to the provision of adapted assessment services for students with SEN, with a result that there are no statutory duties to ensure all programmes have adapted assessments.

Similarly, the work of Lazzeretti and Tavoletti (2006) examining recent 'governance shifts' in higher education across several countries, suggests that there could be implications for access as



there is an increasing change in style and focus of HE management policy and funding both at central government level and institutional level. This change means that HEIs increasingly set their own entrance 'standards' and policies, which has implications for all students, including those with SEN.


The Flemish speaking community of Belgium presents a concrete example of how legislation in countries can provide a clearer framework of policy that establishes entitlements for students in HE. In the Flemish speaking community of Belgium, three legislative developments are being enacted: firstly a federal anti-discrimination act will be made applicable to all public organisations (including HEIs); secondly there will be a new financing decree for higher education and whilst not certain, there is a political willingness to financially reward provision for broader student diversity, including students with SEN, where institutions of higher education can prove that they have taken sufficient initiatives in this area. Finally, there is a recognised need for well-founded research data on the topic and political signals have been given to put more money into research.

The three co-ordinated tenets of anti-discrimination legislation, policies for promoting participation and support for research appear to be vital elements in establishing and then supporting access to HE based upon entitlements and not chance (HEAG Evaluation, 2002). However, with such rapid change and development in legislative terms in some countries, the need for an evaluation of impact of legislation should not be overlooked.

2.5 POSSIBLE WAYS AHEAD?

One of the key recommendations of the HEAG project evaluation (2002) was that more information on best practice in policy and provision for supporting students with SEN is required at European and National levels. Information from countries may take this suggestion even further – there is not only a need to share this information, but also work towards guidelines that make certain minimum levels of provision an entitlement.

Work examining effective inclusive practice in other educational sectors is in some ways more advanced and well established than



in HE and so main messages from other sectors may give a lead in directing future work and research in the HE sector. The main findings and recommendations of work relating to inclusive education in the secondary phase and also in the process of transition from school to work are reported in depth in other chapters of this publication and readers are referred to these for more details. However, some key points of potential overlap with the HE sector will be highlighted here.

A main finding of the inclusive education and effective classroom practice in secondary education project was that *what is good for students with special educational needs (SEN) is good for all students*. Co-operative teaching and learning, heterogeneous grouping and alternative ways of learning are specific aspects of successful inclusive practice that need to be examined, considered and studied within the HE sector.

Similarly, recommendations relating to lack of data, completion rates, expectations and attitudes, work place accessibility, implementation of existing legislation and – most importantly – the involvement of young people themselves in decision making regarding their future, identified in the study of the transition process should also be looked at within the context of the HE sector.

Lessons already learned in compulsory and post compulsory sectors whilst not being directly generalisable to other sectors of education can potentially give a lead in promoting successful participation of students with SEN in HE. One trend within inclusive settings in the compulsory sector that can already be seen in some HE settings focuses upon the role of support services for learners with SEN and the development of their centre of attention from supporting learners to supporting ‘mainstream’ teachers to support all learners in their classes. Initiatives such as specific projects to encourage all teaching staff to become more responsible and able to respond to the needs of students with SEN are evident in some countries, for example the UK, specifically Scotland (Hurst, 2006).

Responsibility is also the focus of one findings of the Transition from School to Employment report. It suggests that young people



should be given responsibility for decision making and this is equally applicable within the HE sector – students with SEN need to be given possibilities for taking and developing responsibility for their learning decisions and situations.

The achievements of students with SEN in other sectors of inclusive education can only reach their full potential if there are real opportunities for continuation of studies in inclusive settings. Comments from two young delegates of the Parliament Hearing support this suggestion: ... *Education is important for everyone, for the disabled and the non-disabled ...* (Switzerland).

... *All who have come here and are attending mainstream or special schools would like to continue studying in one or another way. If people are happy with their jobs then they are also happy with their life and may achieve good results in their career. Disabled people are not an exception ...* (Lithuania).

In preparing the material for this chapter, the same difficulties as encountered within the HEAG project and also expressed within the 2003 OECD study have been faced. Providing meaningful information at a country level regarding a topic that is so institutionally focussed is not easy. It is hoped however that this chapter will add to the debates and raise awareness of the issues with 'non-experts', especially when looked at in light of educational possibilities for students with SEN in the post compulsory education sectors overall.

The intention of presenting the information in this chapter has been not only to inform readers of possibilities and issues, but also reinforce the message most clearly expressed by Van Acker (1996): ... *accessibility for people with disabilities to Higher Education is not a 'luxury' but a duty for society that offers everyone equal rights.*

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Details of the Agency representatives and experts who contributed to this chapter can be found on the National Pages of the Agency website: www.european-agency.org/

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Their full contact details can be found on the opening page of the HEAG database: www.heagnet.org/

Chapter 3

TRANSITION FROM SCHOOL TO EMPLOYMENT

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Transition from school to employment is an important issue for all young people and even more so for those with special educational needs. They are much more confronted to such human and social factors as prejudices, reluctances, over-protection and insufficient training and related qualifications. All these factors impede or complicate their full access to employment.

The concept of transition from school to employment or working life is referred to by several international documents, each with slightly different definitions.

The Salamanca Framework for Action (UNESCO, 1994) states that:
... young people with special educational needs should be helped to make an effective transition from school to adult working life. Schools should assist them to become economically active and provide with the skills needed in everyday life, offering training in skills which respond to the social and communication demands and expectations of adult life ... (page 34).

The International Labour Office (1998) defines transition as:
... a process of social orientation that implies status change and role (e.g. from student to trainee, from trainee to worker and from dependence to independence), and is central to integration into society... Transition requires a change in relationships, routines and self-image. In order to guarantee a smoother transition from school to the workplace, young people with disabilities need to develop goals and identify the role they want to play in society ... (pages 5 and 6).

The OECD (2000) suggests that transition to working life is just one of the transitions that young people must go through on the way to adulthood. In a lifelong learning context, the transition from initial education, whether upper secondary education or tertiary education



is seen as simply the first of many transitions between work and learning that young people will experience throughout their lives. The Labour Force Survey (EC, 2000) argues that transition from school to work is not linear, that leaving education is not necessarily followed by the beginning of work. It is gradual, and young people experience interspersed periods of studying and working.

Within the framework of the work developed by the Agency on this topic, it appears that transition to employment is part of a long and complex process, covering all phases in a person's life, which needs to be managed in the most appropriate way. 'A good life for all', as well as 'a good job for all' are the ultimate goals of a successful overall transition process. The types of provision, or the organisation of schools or other education locations should not interfere with or impede the achievement of such a process. Transition from school to employment should include the on-going participation of the young person, involvement of their family, co-ordination between all the services involved and close co-operation with the employment sector.

3.2 MAIN ISSUES


The main issues and difficulties identified whilst reviewing the transition-related literature can be grouped into the following eight themes.

3.2.1 Data

Data in this field is very limited, so any comparison between countries is difficult. Despite the different ways used by countries to identify young people with disabilities or special needs, the average population presenting special educational needs can be identified as 3 to 20% of young people under 20 years of age (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 1999).

3.2.2 Completion Rates

In 1995, the percentage of young people from 20 to 29 years old without a final upper secondary school qualification was around 30% (Eurostat, 1998). This percentage is even higher for young



people with special educational needs. It is difficult to estimate the number of young people, who will leave education immediately after the compulsory phase, but it is possible to state that many will never go beyond compulsory education. Data, even if not precise enough, reveals that a large number of students with special educational needs start post-compulsory education, but a large proportion will never finish secondary education (OECD, 1997). In some countries, almost 80% of adults with disabilities have either not progressed further than primary education or can be considered functionally illiterate (Helios II, 1996).

3.2.3 Access to Education and Training

In theory, young people with special educational needs are presented with the same educational choices as other young people, but in practice it is only programmes oriented towards social welfare or low paid work that are mainly offered to them (OECD, 1997). They are not necessarily interested in the choices proposed; education and training programmes are not always suited to their interests and needs. This places them in a disadvantageous position on the open labour market (ILO, 1998). Making educational programmes more relevant and adapted to students could be one solution for a number of different problems including those encountered in the transition phase (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 1999).

3.2.4 Vocational Preparation

Vocational training is often not related to real employment practice; it often takes place in segregated provision and it is not usually oriented towards complex professions. People with disabilities do not receive the appropriate qualifications required for employment; training initiatives need to be more tailored to the current demands of the labour market (ILO, 1998).

3.2.5 Unemployment Rates

The unemployment rate amongst people with disabilities is two to three times higher than amongst the non-disabled (ILO, 1998). National data from countries only includes registered unemployed



people, but a high percentage of people with special needs are not registered - they do not have a chance to obtain a first job (Helios II, 1996). Unemployment maintenance for people with disabilities has become the third highest item of social protection expenditure, after old age pensions and health expenditure (EC, Employment, 1998). Employment growth requires an offensive strategy - an active policy that promotes an increase in demand - rather than a defensive strategy, or passive policy. This requires investments in physical productive capacity, human resources, knowledge and skills. In this sense, young people with disabilities should have a proactive role in planning their own future (EC, 1998).

3.2.6 Expectations and Attitudes


All documents agree on this issue: teachers, parents, employers as well as the public in general underestimate the abilities of people with disabilities. Co-operation is very important to develop a realistic view of a student's skills in all sectors of education (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 1999), including the phase of transition to work.

3.2.7 Workplace Accessibility

There are still problems related to physical accessibility to work places, as well as access to personal and technical support. Information and support to employers is also a key issue referred to in many documents.

3.2.8 Implementation of Existing Legislation

Legal frameworks regarding transition to employment in some countries are absent, or they may lead to an inflexible system. Setting employment quotas as a support measure in favour of employment of people with disabilities seems to present degrees of failure regarding application and enforcement. Most countries have a combination of measures in place that are perceived to be effective to differing degrees. There are no examples where quota systems achieve their targets. However, supporters of this system point out that resources gathered via levies or fines allow other employment measures to be developed. Anti-discrimination



legislation also presents problems. At times there is the impression that such legislation is more about communicating messages to people with disabilities and to employers than about providing effective remedies for individuals (ECOTEC, 2000).

3.3 RELEVANT ASPECTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

According to the analysis of the documentation provided by professionals from the countries involved in the Agency project, six key aspects emerged with regards to the concept of transition. These aspects take into account existing problem areas and outstanding questions. They are presented with a list of recommendations, addressed to policy makers and practitioners, and aiming to provide guidance on how to improve the development and implementation of the process of transition.

Transition is a process that must be supported by the existence and implementation of legislation and policy measures.

Recommendations for Policy makers:

- Promote and/or effectively improve co-ordinated policies between different services, avoiding creating new legislation that is in contradiction to or overlapping with existing legislation;
- Ensure concrete measures for effective implementation of adopted legislation, in order to avoid differences and/or discrimination as a result of unequal human or technical resources;
- Systematically consult, taking into consideration and respecting the opinions expressed by voluntary organisations working with and for people with disabilities;
- Search for and promote active policies in order to reinforce employment and personal autonomy;
- Ensure more focussed control and evaluation of any 'facilitating' measures in favour of people with disabilities, such as quota systems, tax facilities, etc. and ensure effective functioning of services at national, regional and local levels;
- Ensure the availability of extensive information concerning any legal or policy measure addressed to employers;
- Ensure the creation of local networks, involving all the partners, in order to implement national policy.



Recommendations for Practitioners:

- Obtain all the necessary information, strategies and skills in order to implement existing legislation and ensure there is an adequate methodology for applying it;
- Regularly evaluate local innovative projects and disseminate their results in order to achieve a *facilitator* effect;
- Set up a local network in which all partners (employment, social, educational services and families) are represented, in order to discuss, plan and implement the national policy;
- Have convenient methods for communicating their needs to administrators whenever new measures are being implemented.

Transition needs to ensure a young person's participation and respect his/her personal choices.

Recommendations for Policy makers:

- Plan for the necessary resources (time and budget) for schools in order for them to implement work with the young person and their family;
- Ensure that resources have been used effectively in order to guarantee this collaborative task is achieved.

Recommendations for Practitioners:

- Have and spend the necessary time with the young person and their family in order to better understand their wishes and needs;
- Develop a written transition plan as early as possible, open to the young person, their family and the practitioners involved at further stages inside and outside the school;
- Modify and adapt the transition plan whenever needed together with the young person;
- Encourage the young person as much as possible to discover her/his own skills and competences;
- Provide young people and their families with as much information as they might need, or direct them to the relevant services;
- Ensure that both individual education plans and individual transition plans are in an accessible format for young people with, for example, limited reading abilities.

The development of an individual educational plan focussed on the young people's progress and on any change to be made in the school situation should be part of the transition process.

Recommendations for Policy makers:

- Provide schools with the necessary resources to ensure that individual educational programmes are developed. In particular, teachers should have sufficient time and receive the necessary guidance for their tasks;
- Ensure that a transition programme is included in the individual educational programme;
- Provide quality standards concerning individual educational programmes;
- Ensure that qualifications achieved by young people are reflected in the certificates they obtain and that discriminatory situations are avoided.

Recommendations for Practitioners:

- Ensure that the young person is at the centre of the process of developing an individual education plan and an individual transition plan;
- Receive the necessary help in order to develop an individual educational programme as a team based task;
- Ensure that the individual educational programme is regularly evaluated in a written form by the young person, their family as well as by the in- and outside school practitioners involved;
- From the outset, develop a 'portfolio' or an equivalent tool, which will contain both an individual educational programme and all records of all changes introduced;
- The portfolio should include assessment of attitudes, knowledge, experience and the core (main) skills of the young person (e.g. academic, practical, daily living, leisure, self-determination and communication).

Transition must be based upon the direct involvement and co-operation of all parties concerned.

Recommendations for Policy makers:

- Ensure practical measures for co-operation between services, as well as ensure a follow-up of this co-operation;



- Allocate clear responsibilities amongst services, in order to ensure effective co-ordination;
- Ensure that co-ordination and distribution of responsibilities are evaluated, thus allowing for any required changes;
- Ensure that all services fulfil their obligations and participate in the co-ordination task;
- Motivate employers and trade unions through specific measures to be directly involved;
- Encourage co-operation and co-ordination between all departments involved at the national level.


Recommendations for Practitioners:

- Have an efficient support network to which other practitioners can address their demands for support and information;
- Have official recognition (in terms of budget, or at least in terms of time) of the co-ordination tasks, required by other services;
- Receive further training, in order to better define tasks within the framework of co-ordination and to learn how to share responsibilities.

Transition requires close co-operation between the school and the labour market.

Recommendations for Policy makers:

- Ensure that all young people experience real working conditions;
- Guarantee access to some type of practical training for all young people, respecting their different needs;
- Organise flexible training measures, for example, setting up preparatory periods before getting trained on the job;
- Promote formal and informal incentives for companies (e.g. tax reductions, social recognition, etc) to encourage them to provide working/learning places for young people;
- Emphasise and demonstrate the mutual benefits arising from the evaluation of good transition examples;
- Involve employers in these types of initiatives, in co-operation with employment services, by means of information campaigns, networks of employers and trade unions;
- Recognise the need for formal co-operation between education and employment services;

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- Provide resources available for an on-going professional development of teachers.

Recommendations for Practitioners:

- Be open to and better informed about labour market possibilities;
- Have time to visit enterprises, to organise meetings with them and other services from the employment sector, provide the means for in-company training periods for teachers in order to keep them in touch with daily practice;
- Acquire the competences available in the school, for making contacts and arrangements with companies;
- Invite practitioners from the employment sector to educational settings in order to meet young people as well as educational staff members;
- Ensure follow-up of young people after leaving school.

Transition to employment is part of a long and complex process.

Recommendations for Policy makers:

- Put into place all the necessary measures for ensuring successful transition, identifying and solving barriers or difficulties in this process;
- Avoid rigid educational procedures (e.g. regarding assessment);
- Facilitate co-operation between and within services and recognise the time spent by practitioners on co-operation and co-ordination tasks;
- Ensure that transition plans are developed early enough in a young person's school career, not just at the end of compulsory education;
- Recognise the need for one specific professional, acting as an *advocate* or a reference person and supporting the young person in the transition process.

Recommendations for Practitioners:

- Use efficient means for facilitating this process (e.g. adequate guidance, flexible support, good co-ordination, etc). The time spent on these duties needs to be officially formalised and recognised.




3.4 INDIVIDUAL TRANSITION PLANNING FROM SCHOOL TO EMPLOYMENT

Not all European countries use the term Individual Transition Plan (ITP) - a diverse range of terms exists. ITP is used in a few countries, while in others Individual Educational Programme is used, or Individual Integration Project, Education Plan, Personalised Intervention Plan, Individual Career Plan, Individual Profile, etc. Different terminology refers to slight differences in concepts. In spite of these differences, a clear consensus emerges among the countries with respect to the need for and the benefit of creating this working tool, perceived as an *individual portrait*, in which the wishes and the education and training progress of young people are recorded.

An Individual Transition Plan is an instrument, a tool, in a form of a document in which the past, the present and the desired future of young people is documented. It should include information concerning the young person's life space: family circumstances, medical history, leisure time, values and cultural background, as well as information on their education and training. It will contribute to the achievement of the following results:

- To increase the young person's chances to get a sustainable job;
- To match the interests, wishes, motivations, competences, skills, attitudes and abilities of the young person with the requirements of the profession, job, working environment and companies;
- To increase a young person's autonomy, motivation, self-perception and self-confidence;
- To create a win-win situation for the young person and employers.

A transition plan is closely related to an educational plan and should be prepared as early as possible before the end of compulsory education. It aims to close the existing gap between school and employment. An ITP provides a framework that aims to ensure better entry into employment. It reflects a dynamic process, involving:

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- The characteristics of young people (skills, abilities, competences and expectations),
 - The demands and requirements from the employment sector, and
 - Permanent revision of an action plan.

A distinction needs to be made between an individual education programme (IEP) and an individual transition plan (ITP) or its equivalent. It needs to be stated that, as with the case of the ITP, countries use different terms to define the development of an individual education document that broadly corresponds to the following definition: ... *An IEP builds on the curriculum that a child with learning difficulties or disabilities is following and is designed to set out the strategies being used to meet each child's identified needs ... IEP should record only that which is additional to or different from the differentiated curriculum plan, which is part of provision for all children ...* (UK, Department for Education and Employment, 1995).

It needs to be mentioned that the purpose of an ITP, as well as an IEP, is not to duplicate documents, or to increase the number of administrative tasks to be completed by professionals. On the contrary, both documents should be used to record and to keep:

- Reflections about the pupil/young person's situation;
- Agreements made concerning the objectives to be achieved;
- Fixed educational/vocational strategies, and
- An overview of a pupil/person's progress at any point in time, even when educational (e.g. moving to another school) or geographical (e.g. family moving to another location) changes take place.

Effective transition planning follows the principles that are in agreement with the goals of transition, respecting the differences related to the characteristics and values of families. Transition is a process that can take more or less time depending on the needs and possibilities of the individual. Basic guiding principles of an ITP planning process are:

- The person with special needs must actively participate in the planning of her/his ITP;
- Families should be involved;



- Planning should involve inter-agency co-operation and collaboration;
- Planning should be flexible, responding to changes of values and experiences.

Young people with special needs should have all the required opportunities and support in order to play a key role in their ITP planning, as they are the ones most concerned about their own life. An ITP has to guarantee that the optimum process is achieved in order for young people to get the counselling and support they require before, during and after the transition period. Families also need to actively participate as they will become both advocates and support partners. In order to do so, the family situation (cultural values as well as resources) needs to be taken into account by professionals.

A number of actions need to be incorporated into the ITP process and fulfilled by the parties involved: the young person, the family, the school professionals, the community services professionals and the employers. Actions will be included into three phases:

Phase 1: Information, Observation and Orientation

A preparatory phase, taking place while the ITP is being prepared. The goal is to help the young person to make an individual choice of a job and to find a suitable training place.

Phase 2: Training and Qualifications

This phase is mainly focussed upon actions to be undertaken during the training process. The goal is for the young person to obtain qualifications, competences and corresponding certifications.

Phase 3: Empowerment, Employment and Follow-up

This phase is focussed upon the required results. The goal is for the young person to succeed in getting and keeping a job, to benefit from an increased quality of life and to ensure and maintain employment integration.

Throughout the three phases, the following aspects need to be considered:

Competences to be acquired - implies making a clear analysis of the young person's possibilities, assessing her/his present abilities, identifying and discussing her/his wishes and planning and preparing a consequent career plan with her/him and the family. Young people and families need to be aware of the content of the vocational training programmes.

Qualifications to be obtained - need to reflect young people's achievements and should have real status, even in the case of 'non-formal' certificates delivered by educational centres or employers.

Involvement of different professionals in the ITP process - requires the involvement of everyone concerned: professionals, families and students (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2002). Responsibilities and roles need to be clarified, established and accepted by all parties concerned. One professional (such as vocational counsellor, teacher, etc) needs to act as a contact person during the process of development, implementation and assessment of the ITP. However, it is important to identify her/his qualifications and responsibilities.

Work possibilities and experiences - implies preparing a young person for a real job situation and follow-up at the work place, at least for a period of time. The young person, her/his family and the contact person need to be well aware of the demands and requirements of the labour market.

Validation of the process - all parties involved (professionals, young people, families) need to participate in continuous evaluation of the young person's progress and development, which will secure and will help monitor the quality of the process. Evaluation needs to be conducted on a regular basis as part of a 'contract' between the young person and the nominated contact person. Three different levels of validation can be considered; they are part of the three phases described above:

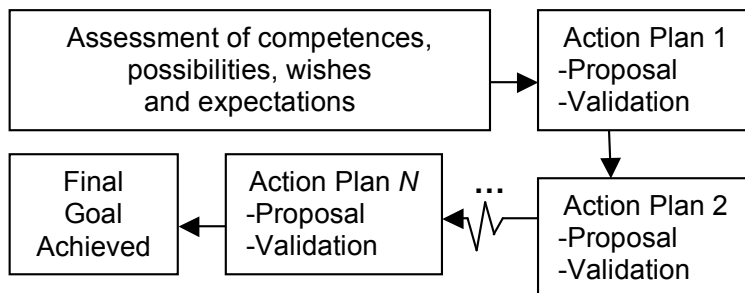
1) Initial assessment: mainly related to the young person's abilities and expectations. According to Lerner et al (1998), assessment



refers to gathering of information to make critical decisions about a young person in order to identify the necessary special services to plan instruction and to measure progress.

2) Validation of objectives and actions: all proposals for action need to be validated until the moment the final goal is achieved, that is finding and keeping a satisfactory job, as depicted in the figure below.


Figure 1. Validation of Objectives and Actions



3) Evaluation of the results achieved - is to be undertaken by all parties involved during the entire process. Two elements need to be taken into account:

- There should be enough time for the young person to get information and to acquire experience from different working places and educational possibilities in order to make right decisions;
- Support for transition planning should last at least until first employment is secured; just finding a job is too limited a parameter to be able to ensure proper follow-up of results. Follow-up implies that somebody (usually, the contact person) should be responsible for supporting the young person as long as required after transition to work.

The practical implementation of the aspects and characteristics described above is focussed upon in the following recommendations. They need to be considered for what they are, that is a 'guidance tool' – a focus for reference and reflection for all those involved, in order for them to develop an ITP, according to different education and social contexts. The recommendations can be used as a model for implementation of the ITP process.



Recommendations are presented corresponding to a series of questions presented in a sequential way. For the purpose of these recommendations, it is assumed that an IEP (or a similar document) has been prepared by a school in order to meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs during compulsory education.

When to Start

It is impossible to fix a precise moment for all young people in all countries. Differences in the individual needs of young people and the educational systems must be respected. However, professionals agree that two or three years before transition to working life might be the best time to prepare such a document. This can help young people avoid impossible situations, e.g. deciding in the last year of schooling what to do next, or being refused entry into the training area she/he might be interested in, or missing the information needed to make any choice. A situation that must be avoided is where young people simply follow what adults think is best for them.

It is important to find the right time to start in a flexible manner, with the agreement and participation of all parties concerned, in order to be able to later decide on who (people and services) is responsible for what, how resources are funded and how the overall co-ordination is guaranteed.

How to Proceed

During compulsory/general education and before the last year, the teacher, the young person and her/his family, the advisor and other professionals need to sit together and reflect upon and plan the young person's future. This common clarification of the situation needs to be prepared very carefully, taking into account the following key steps:

Organisation of a 'round table' meeting: including all parties involved in the planning and development of the young person's ITP and aiming towards the creation of a guidance team.



Setting-up a guidance team: the team should meet at least once or twice a year, according to the age of the young person, importance of her/his needs, problems they face or any other circumstances.

Composition of the guidance team: the young person and/or the family are the permanent members of this team, together with the young person's tutor and, among other professionals, the nominated contact person. The guidance team members should allocate clear roles and responsibilities (e.g. who is responsible for what, during which period of time, in accordance with existing legislation and/or school rules, etc).

Nomination of a contact person: the nominated person should, preferably, remain the same through the entire process, in order to be well informed and adequately follow the process. Nomination of a contact person should take into account her/his personal and professional profiles. At a personal level, he or she should have good contact and relationships with all parties. At a professional level, the contact person will be expected to:

- Have a good knowledge of both the education and training fields;
- Work on building networks between employers, families, social workers, etc;
- Search for jobs or to co-operate with the person in the team responsible for searching for work placements;
- Activate and motivate the young people during the transition phase.

The role of the contact person is to act as a reference person for the team, getting in touch and involving external professionals whenever necessary and acting as a moderator during the team meetings. She/he will also be in contact with the person responsible from the employing organisation before and during the young person's placement and ensure a follow-up in the workplace.

Securing the resources and funding procedures required: it is essential to clarify and agree upon the estimation of costs and the funding responsibilities (how much it will cost and who will pay).

How to Organise the First Meeting

A difference needs to be made between the first meeting and the following ones. All parties involved will provide inputs to the first meeting:

- The young person will bring and describe her/his wishes, competences, interests and needs, as part of her/his self-perception and self-assessment;
- The family will express their expectations and perceptions of their daughter/son's future;
- The young person's teacher will bring the youngster's portrait (her/his personal and educational history);
- The advisor and other professionals (depending on the young person's situation) will explain the required competences by the labour market in relation to the young person's wishes;
- The contact person will moderate the meeting, ensuring that everybody is expressing thoughts and feelings. She/he will search for the needed information and note down the agreed tasks to be discussed and evaluated in the next meeting.

Regarding the required competences, three main areas of equal importance need to be considered:

- Academic competences: the curriculum he/she follows at school;
- Vocational competences: acquisition of knowledge and skills necessary to perform a vocational task. These can be very different, depending on the chosen employment and are directly related to the work experience;
- Personal competences: the individual achievements of the young person at both personal and social levels. These competences are very important, as they support the autonomy and empowerment of the person. They include social and emotional skills (to be independent, to follow rules, to respect timetables, etc); personal abilities (to know how to interact with others, to, introduce her/himself, to be able to anticipate and plan, etc); physical skills (related to motor or psychomotor skills).

If an agreement is reached, the objective of the first meeting is achieved and an action plan with a list of tasks to be discussed and evaluated in a second meeting will be planned. In the case of



disagreement, more information, reflection and discussion are needed. The contact person should be in charge of organising a second meeting, providing the required information or contacts in order to prepare the corresponding action plan.

Following Meetings

Organisation of further meetings needs to be carefully prepared, as for the first meeting. The objective has to be clearly understood by all parties. Timing is also to be considered: there should not be more meetings than necessary and they should not last longer than needed.

An agreed action plan should be recorded by the contact person. They are all included in the ITP and should be completed, modified and permanently assessed during the entire process. Young people need to use a simple form in order to register and self-evaluate their progress.

3.5 FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to ensure an efficient implementation of such guidance, the following two recommendations are addressed to the policy level. They are based upon and complete the recommendations already listed in the first part of the document regarding the key aspect of *close relationships between the school and the labour market*.

Policy makers need to be aware of and develop a legal framework that will:

- Ensure that co-operation between the education and the employment services is organised through an agreed document, i.e. an ITP or its equivalent;
- Contribute to establishing clear responsibilities and financial resources to be allocated across the different services involved in the development of an ITP.



3.6 CONCLUSIONS

It is important to highlight that challenges - similar to those summarised in the Agency analysis - were also identified by countries not involved in this project. Challenges, expressed by all countries, relate to:

- Lack of information;
- Employers' prejudices and reluctant attitudes;
- Over-protection of young people by professionals and families;
- A limited number of jobs for people with low skills;
- The need for efficient networks involving services and professionals from different sectors;
- The importance of provision of education and training opportunities for young people who have not completed secondary education.

At the same time, it is important to emphasise a number of improvements in many countries, such as increased availability of various training pathways as well as equal recognition of qualifications provided by either specialised or mainstream training institutions.

This analysis resulted in a number of recommendations, intended as guidelines facilitating further improvement. It can be said that practitioners, policy makers and representatives of employers and trade unions involved in the Agency project came to the conclusion that the implementation of the suggested recommendations would undoubtedly improve the process of transition and minimise problems that young people currently face when they leave school and are confronted with issues related to securing employment.

It is also important to highlight that all of the listed recommendations, presented in this chapter, are to be used as guidance for practical implementation of and reflection upon professionals' own practice. These recommendations cannot respond to all possible practical questions, therefore, professionals need to use them in a flexible way, adapting them to their working situations.



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Transition from School to Employment Online Database
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Details of the Agency representatives and experts who contributed
to this chapter can be found on the National Pages of the Agency
website: www.european-agency.org and
[www.european-
agency.org/transit/](http://www.european-agency.org/transit/)

National information sent by the Eurydice Units can be found in the
Agency dedicated web area for Transition: [www.european-
agency.org/transit/](http://www.european-
agency.org/transit/)



FINAL WORDS

How to deal with diversity in post-primary provision is not an easy issue. Several factors, such as the complexity of the organisation of educational provision in the post-primary sector among others, need to be taken into consideration in order to examine as well as understand the challenges faced by students with special educational needs.

Improvements in education aimed at developing the quality of education for students with special educational needs in inclusive settings are evident, but there are still educational challenges. Physical barriers, negative attitudes, prejudices and stereotypes still persist, as do many doubts and questions in the minds of professionals, families and even young people themselves.

It needs to be recognised that the inclusion of students with special educational needs in all sectors of mainstream education, is a sensitive area. Any consideration of inclusion needs to be made with full respect being paid to countries' diverse situations, resources and histories.

This document raises a number of relevant considerations relating to the three fundamental issues discussed in this document: how can inclusion in secondary education be implemented and supported; how can access to and within higher education for students with special educational needs be increased and supported; how can access to employment for young people with special needs be improved.

This document does not set out to provide the solutions to these questions. Rather the intention has been to provide policy makers and practitioners with some reflections that may help them address some of the challenges, so that they are better able to facilitate the best possible provision for students with special educational needs in post-primary education.

Cor Meijer
Victoria Soriano
Amanda Watkins



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Provision in Post-Primary Education provides a summary of relevant information collected by the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education covering three priority areas within the field of special needs education: Inclusive Education and Classroom Practice in Secondary Education; Access to and within Higher Education for Students with Special Educational Needs; Transition from School to Employment.

The document has been prepared in close co-operation with the Eurydice network of National Units. It develops the scope of existing information in the three thematic areas focused upon, specifically by presenting information from more European countries.

This document considers a number of relevant issues relating to the three aspects of post-primary education examined: how inclusion in secondary education can be implemented and supported; how access to and within higher education for students with special educational needs can be increased and supported; how access to employment for young people with special needs can be improved.



European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education

