LEARNING FROM EACH OTHER AT THE EUROPEAN LEVEL

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European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education

Aims of the session

- Introduce the Agency
- Present an overview of:
  - Current Agency work
  - How we operate

*Please refer to our website for more info on everything presented here*
Agency History

- 1996 - established as an initiative of the Danish Ministry of education following the end of the EU HELIOS programme
- 1999 - the original 15 member countries ‘took ownership’ of the Agency
- 2003 - the Agency obtained a legal basis at the European level that was approved by the European Parliament

The Agency

- 14th year of operations
- Secretariat based in Odense, Denmark
- Centre of Activity in Brussels, Belgium
- National networks in 27 European countries
Agency Member Countries

Austria, Belgium (Flemish and French speaking communities), Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales)

Funding

The Agency is financed by:

- The member countries' Ministries of Education
- The European Commission Lifelong Learning Programme as one of the 6 institutions pursuing an aim of European interest in the field of education (Jean Monnet Programme)
The Agency’s Mission

- Member countries’ platform for collaboration between professionals and decision-makers at both national and European levels, on policy and practice for inclusive education
- The ultimate aim is to improve educational policy and practice for learners with special educational needs
- This aim takes into account issues such as equal opportunities, accessibility, diversity education, the promotion of quality of education and respect of differences, whilst recognising that countries’ policies, practices and educational contexts also differ

Contributions to International Debates

- The Agency has a role in representing member countries in a collective way in international arenas
- Due to its position within Europe, the Agency provides an opportunity for member countries to give input to EU level debates in accordance with Council priorities
- The Agency maintains co-operative and mutually beneficial relationships with other key International bodies and organisations in the field of education, inclusive and special needs education – for example UNESCO and OECD - enabling the Agency to direct its users to relevant bodies who can provide relevant information to its members
**Agency Activities**

- The Agency works to a multi-annual work programme (2007 – 2013)
- All Agency activities are in alignment with European Council priorities and objectives for education
- Specific projects and activities are identified via Agency representatives as being priority for their countries
- *Different types of activities*

**Agency Information Resources**

The Agency offers various information resources, which can all be accessed via the website [www.european-agency.org](http://www.european-agency.org)

- Thematic Reports
- Thematic Databases
- Newsletters and Electronic Bulletin

Agency publications can be downloaded in up to 22 member languages
Agency Publications

Information dissemination activities

- Thematic seminars (i.e. Gifted Learners)
- Occasional papers (i.e. Legislation Updates)
- Exchange sessions and subsequent reports (i.e. on Classification Systems in countries)
- Key Principles – recommendations for policy makers
- Higher Education Accessibility Guide
- Special Events
- SNE data collection
Shorter Term Projects

- Early Childhood Intervention Project Update (2009 - 2010)
- Indicators for Inclusive Education (2009 - 2011)
- Inclusive Education in Action (2009 – 2010) a project conducted in collaboration with UNESCO
- ICT for Inclusion (2011 – 2012)
- Mapping the Implementation of Policies (application)

Long Term Projects

- Vocational Education and Training (2010 - 2012)
- Teacher Education for Inclusion (2009 - 2011)
- Organisation of provision for Inclusion (2011 – 2013)
Future work

- 2014 onwards work will be in alignment with the Council priorities of:
  - Reducing school drop out
  - Raising achievements for all
  - Increasing participation in post compulsory sectors

Working parameters

- Countries are at different starting points and have different ‘histories’ in terms of education generally and inclusion specifically:
  - There is a need to account for that and see it as a strength
- No-one has all the answers:
  - Many countries have clear examples of good practice, but all countries are still ‘moving ahead’
- Learning from diversity is a principle for all Agency work:
  - As well as being an aim for inclusive education itself
International Policy Context

At all times, the Agency works to guiding principles as outlined in:

- Council Resolutions concerning inclusion of children and young people with disabilities into mainstream systems of education
- UN Convention on Rights of People with Disabilities (2006)

UN Convention on Rights of People with Disabilities (2006)

- Article 24 - Education
  - “States Parties recognise the right of persons with disabilities to education. With a view to realising this right without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity, States Parties shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels ...”
  - “… The full development of human potential and sense of dignity and self-worth, and the strengthening of respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and human diversity…”
Inclusion as systemic change

- Understood to concern a far wider range of pupils vulnerable to exclusion than those identified as having SEN
- Involves a curriculum for all that considers academic and social learning
- Inclusion is a process and not a state and educators will always need to move their work forward to enable the learning and participation of all pupils

Movements towards inclusion

Developments
- A wider range and more flexible provision
- Developing funding models
- The development of resource centres

Challenges
- Academic achievements (output) versus SEN
- Secondary education
- Preparing all teachers for inclusive education
- 2% of pupils in separate settings across Europe
### Percentage of pupils in the compulsory school sector recognised as having SEN in 2008 (in all educational settings)

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<th>&lt; 2.0%</th>
<th>2.01% - 4.0%</th>
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### Percentage of pupils with SEN in segregated settings

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Member Country Perceptions

● *What the Agency does*
  ● The provision of good and applicable information and products translated into all national languages
  ● The development of networking opportunities that go beyond the immediate work of the Agency

Member Country Perceptions (2)

● *How the Agency operates*
  ● Use of a participatory / bottom up approach
  ● The effective arrangement of the work - involving experts and country representatives working with Agency staff
Member Country Perceptions (3)

- *Why* is Agency work significant for member countries
- The European focus of Agency activities and quality information provided by the Agency
- The Agency as a mechanism for developing thinking
- Agency work incorporated into national guidelines/policies
- The Agency as a lever for change in countries

Benefits of International Exchange

- Strengthening co-operation at all levels is a prerequisite for developing quality in education
- This involves:
  - exchange of experiences that informs policy and practice
  - ‘bottom up’ approaches that explore new methods
  - ‘top down’ initiatives that support innovations
- The conference statement will be a useful tool for committing to co-operation and future work
European Hearing in Portugal

- European Hearing of Young People with Special Educational Needs organised by the Agency, within the framework of the Portuguese Presidency of the European Union and the European Year of Equal Opportunities
- The event took place in Lisbon within the framework of the Portuguese Presidency of the European Union
- The Lisbon Declaration ‘Young People’s Views on Inclusive Education’ is the main result of this event

‘Inclusive education is mutually beneficial to us and to the others’

We see a lot of benefits in inclusive education: we acquire more social skills; we live more experiences; we learn about how to manage in the real world; we need to have and interact with friends with and without special needs
More information

www.european-agency.org

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