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# EDUCATION FOR ALL

## Special Needs and Inclusive Education in Malta

### Annex 2: Desk Research Report

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**EUROPEAN AGENCY**  
for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

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**European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education**



## ANNEX 2: DESK RESEARCH REPORT

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## **Introduction**

This Annex aims to set the work of the external audit conducted in Malta in a broader context and take account of, in particular, international conventions and European level developments. It also draws on recent research and Agency thematic project work, in particular Key Principles for Promoting Quality in Inclusive Education - Recommendation for Policy Makers (2009), Key Principles for Promoting Quality in Inclusive Education – Recommendations for Practice (2011), Raising Achievement for all Learners in Inclusive Education (2012) and Organisation of Provision to support Inclusive Education (2013, 2014).

## ***Methodology***

The main areas for the desktop research were identified from the initial critical review of this area of work by the Malta Student Services team. These focus areas were used as search terms to provide an initial overview of relevant issues. Information was collected from academic articles, books and internet databases and journal sources.

From the first synthesis of research, further key areas of policy and practice were identified and used to inform the development of standards and collection of data during the audit fieldwork.

Further searches of relevant terms aimed to provide a breadth of knowledge and set out some principles of quality inclusive education that should be explored as part of any further development of practice in Malta. In this way, the research also supports the judgements and final recommendations made to the Minister for Education.

## ***Context***

Since Malta has few natural resources, economic growth is overwhelmingly dependent on the skills of its population and Malta spends over 6% of GDP on education - slightly above average spend in EU countries. Malta is noted to have experienced only a relatively mild economic crisis.

Malta has one of the highest proportions of students with disabilities attending mainstream education amongst the 18 EU Member States. According to Agency data, there are just 54 learners in segregated settings plus 11 in special classes out of a total school population of nearly 50,000 learners. However, Malta also has a high rate of early school leavers (22.6% in 2012).

The Maltese government has invested heavily in ICT-related infrastructure and hardware in schools that are all connected to the web. There is also an e-learning platform to support collaboration between teachers and learners.



While the ICT skills of the population are close to the EU average, levels of other basic skills are low with maths and Science both shown as below the international average by the 2011 Trends in Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) data. The figures for foreign language skills are positively influenced by the fact that English is Malta's second official language. A National Policy and Strategy for the Attainment of Core Competences in Primary Education has been in place since January 2009 and a new National Literacy Strategy for all learners was introduced in June 2014 to support dual literacy.

A new Framework for the Education Strategy for Malta 2014-2024 was launched in February 2014 aiming to address all cycles of education from early years to adult learning. The consultation period ran until May 2014 and a plan will be developed for the next 10 years aiming to raise achievement, support the educational achievement of children at risk of poverty and reduce early school leaving.

Reform to introduce co-education in state secondary schools is to be phased in over 5 years from 2014/2015 and a further programme is in place to improve the integration of third country nationals into education.

With regard to recent social change, a report by the Equality Research Consortium (Pisani et al. 2010) notes that the past decade has been marked with important social changes: *... which have left an impact on the way issues of diversity, non-discrimination and equality are perceived. These have included the arrival of persons of African origin, coming to Malta to seek asylum, greater visibility for particular groups including LGBT, as well as greater awareness of discrimination and remedies to combat it. All of these changes make the promotion of equality through the education system more important, as whilst the realities have changed, the education system plays a role in how these changes are received. It is in a position to combat stereotypes and promote mind-sets open to a diverse society.* p9



## 1. Legislation and policy

### ***International normative instruments***

Malta signed and ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990 and signed the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in March 2007 (ratified 2012). Malta has dualist legal system, where international agreements require ratification for their incorporation into domestic law. Neither of these Conventions is included in Maltese Law so implementation depends on extent to which they coincide with existing national law.

There is also no clearly identifiable legal definition or reference to the systematic consideration of the best interests of the child in Maltese law, however numerous articles make reference to the 'welfare of the child', 'the interests' or, on occasion, 'best interests of the child'. (Best) interests of the child are referred to in case law as being 'paramount' or 'supreme' in matters which affect the family.

Regarding the right to education and inclusion (Articles 23(3), 28 and 29(1)(a) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC); Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), the European Parliament report on Children with Disabilities (2013) notes that although Malta has no consideration of the child's best interests, it has fully implemented the requirement of reasonable accommodation and takes account of evolving capacities and the right to be heard. The Maltese system also fully reflects the obligation to provide special support and reasonable accommodation in field of education and legislation.

The European Parliament report on Children with Disabilities (2013) notes that children with disabilities are not specifically catered for under Maltese law – that national legislation focuses on people with disabilities or children not children with disabilities. Equal opportunities legislation covers people with disabilities while the Commissioner for Children Act covers children's rights. The current system focuses on discrimination issues rather than child rights.

A recent report by the National Commission for Persons with Disability on working towards the implementation of the UNCRPD notes that: *Ratification is a dead letter unless the laws of the country allow for implementation of the obligations which the CRPD requires if it is to be truly effective.* p4.

The report points out that some changes could take place almost immediately as has been shown by the Disability Matters (Amendments) Act of 2012 which made adjustments to local legislation to bring it more in line with the thinking underpinning the Convention. With regard to Article 24 (Education), the report makes some recommendations, including, among others, professional development





on the inclusion of disabled students for all staff including LSA's and the appointment of staff to cover when regular LSAs are absent.

The Equality Research Consortium (2010) report provides an overview of the legal framework in Malta and points out that the existing framework, to varying degrees prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability, gender and race, However, it continues: *In line with the limitations of EU law in the field of equality, no similar provisions exist with regards to the other grounds of discrimination (sexual orientation, religion and age). This is possibly one of the biggest weaknesses in the legal framework, in that it creates a hierarchy of grounds, prohibiting discrimination (in education) for some grounds but not for others. The challenge, therefore, is in ensuring that any future changes to the NMC will ensure that the legal requirements emanating from the existing legal framework is interpreted in such a way as to ensure the highest degree of equality for all grounds. p17.*

This means that in practice two different institutions have competence to investigate claims of discrimination within educational establishments and within the education system itself (that is the National Commission for Persons with Disability and National Commission for the Promotion of Equality). In addition, the provisions currently do not require the promotion of equality.

The document recommends extending the prohibition of discrimination in education as well as setting up and promoting positive action measures in order to achieve equality of opportunity, with the appointment of an Equality officer within the Ministry and a network of officers in each college to oversee implementation of policy, provide advice and take steps in cases of alleged discriminatory treatment.

Information gathered for the Agency Organisation of Provision project shows that in the majority of Agency member countries, legislation regarding the education of learners with SEN/disability has developed separately from mainstream education. In a number of countries and, as in Malta, the focus is on discrimination rather than rights.

In a small number of countries, equality legislation focuses on the duty not to discriminate and also on the need to provide auxiliary aids and services as part of 'reasonable adjustments'. The law requires local authorities and schools to plan strategically to improve access to buildings, curriculum and information and equality legislation covers sexual orientation, religion and age as well as race, disability and gender.

Many of the challenges faced in Malta are similar to those faced by many other countries across Europe. Only a minority of countries made reference to the UNCRPD or UNCRC in the information submitted for the Organisation of Provision



project and rights-based approaches are being systematically developed in only a small number of countries.

While increasingly countries are developing initiatives that emphasise early intervention and provide support as part of the 'general' provision in regular schools, legislation and policy is often fragmented, overlapping and poorly coordinated.

### ***EU policy guidelines***

In the Maltese national level documentation, there are few references to any recent European level communications, strategies etc. such as the European Social Charter (articles 15 and 17), the Council of Europe Disability Action Plan 2006-2015 (action line 4), the European Disability Strategy 2010-2020 (action area 5) and Europe 2020 (social cohesion objective) that may support moves to a rights-based approach and a more inclusive education system. In particular, the European Disability Strategy aims to raise the share of persons with disabilities working in the open labour market. Grammenos (2011), in a report for the Academic Network of European Disability experts uses Eurostat data on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) to show that in 2009 only 32% of disabled people aged 20-64 in Malta were in employment. This report also shows that in 2009, Malta had the highest rate of early school leavers in Europe with a high percentage of these (48.9%) having a disability.

A recent report by the European Commission (2013) sets out key lessons learned from Second Chance education and suggests that the good practices identified are best implemented in everyday teaching and learning in order to reduce school drop out. These practices include multi-professional working, developing positive relationships between teachers and learners (providing social and emotional support), increasing the flexibility of curriculum and school organisation, focusing on individual learner assessment and the validation of progress and outcomes.

The Council Conclusions on enhancing the social inclusion of young people not in employment, education or training (2014) also makes relevant proposals in the areas of prevention and education, training and non-formal learning.

The Conclusions of the Council of Ministers on the social dimension of education and training (2010) note that education systems across Europe need to ensure both equity and excellence and recognise that improving educational attainment and key competences for all are crucial not only to economic growth and competitiveness but also to reducing poverty and fostering social inclusion. Along with the European Commission work on 'Re-thinking Education: Investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes' (2012) and the accompanying document 'Supporting the



Teaching Professions for Better Learning Outcomes' (2012) the document could provide support to the further development of inclusive thinking.

### ***National policy***

The European Parliament report on Children with Disabilities (2013) points out that the State in Malta invests heavily in an inclusive system where the vast majority of children with disabilities attend mainstream school. However, it also recognises that this does not mean that all children with disabilities are fully included in mainstream schools and notes that their presence is often dependent on the good-will of persons involved. Children with learning disabilities and challenging behaviour remain at particular risk of exclusion and possible institutionalisation.

The European Parliament Report observes that inclusion appears to be unsystematic with 'responsibility for the education of children with disabilities left in the hands of LSAs' (p28). Children with disabilities are tolerated in classes and do not receive adequate attention. The report identifies some issues including: the absence of children with disabilities not being reported and children being sent home if the LSA is absent. This may be construed as discrimination or as a minimum as inadequate support.

Work to examine the issue of early school leavers (set out in the previous section) has included work by the Maltese Statistical Office and University of Malta as well as the Ministry for Education and Employment. This resulted in a report and public consultation in December 2012. A director with specific responsibility for this area of work was appointed in November 2013 to develop and implement a strategic plan. There is also an inter-ministerial committee and working group to focus on meeting the ET 2020 target of reducing ESL to 10% by 2020.

The range of measures being taken to prevent ESL include implementing the National Curriculum Framework, validating non-formal and informal learning and developing new forms of teaching and learning, such as e-Learning. To improve the relevance of skills for the labour market, Malta is introducing vocational subjects in secondary schools and different career paths through vocational educational training and higher education in those sectors in demand by industry.

Intervention measures include a multi-stakeholder approach to address the needs of particular groups of students at risk of early school leaving and improving career guidance in compulsory education. Compensation measures focus on a review of second chance and re-integration programmes and Malta has also improved early childhood education and care, which is likely to have longer-term impact on ESL.

Overall, the European Commission Education and Training Monitor (2013) notes that the issue of early school leaving still has not been fully addressed and states



that, in particular, a comprehensive system for collecting and analysing data/information on early school leaving is not sufficient to inform policy and practice (for example monitoring in relation to gender, social class and assessing the impact of different strategies, for example ability grouping etc.). However, a National Referral System for absenteeism, which aims to improve the referral process and enable multidisciplinary teams to work together when required, was piloted in 2012/13 and should be implemented in all schools at the beginning of school year 2013/14. Further work is planned in the new education strategy 2014-2024 and, as the report Education and Training 2020: Responses from EU Member States notes, Malta's phasing out of its dual secondary education system which placed learners according to their ability as shown in the standardised examinations which took place at the end of primary education will be complete by 2015.

Malta has recently undertaken a review of the curriculum and noted a bias towards knowledge and content as well as the need to establish a value system (attitudes and beliefs). The Curriculum Framework document also notes that the curriculum should not primarily aim to satisfy economic need but should support students to develop to their maximum potential, minimise drop out and allow student voices to be heard (p6). The need for diverse learning pathways and flexibility with a move from traditional curriculum and structures to more active co-construction of meaning is also stressed together with the fact that this requires approaches that empower teachers to be innovative.

The new general principles in the curriculum include: entitlement; diversity; a continuum of achievement; learner-centred learning; quality assurance; teacher professional support and more use of cross curricular themes (such as learning to learn, co-operative learning, education for entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation and education for diversity). The important role of parents is recognised and 8 working groups have been set up to formulate a strategy document including one focusing on additional needs.

### ***Conceptions of inclusion***

Although it is widely understood that there is no singular definition of inclusive education, many researchers talk about inclusion as a response to disciplinary exclusion where barriers to presence, participation and achievement are identified and overcome. Countries across Europe are slowly moving towards a concern with all groups vulnerable to exclusion rather than a focus on children with special educational needs/disabilities. For example in Denmark, inclusion is seen as a principled approach to education and society in general. Other countries talk about developing a school for all, or having a right to support in mainstream classes.



While there are moves in Malta to develop an understanding of inclusion as meaning all learners, the underpinning thinking seems primarily to view inclusion as being about the placement of learners with disabilities into mainstream schools. This leads to a concern with learners who are disabled or have SEN with a lack of clarity about where responsibility for such learners lies and concern over the possible impact of inclusion on standards.

There have been attempts to introduce new terminology that try to reflect a change from the idea of charity towards those who are less fortunate to an understanding that each person has a right to a quality education and life and equal respect as human being (Bezzina, 2007).

The National Minimum Curriculum for Malta (2002) Principle 8 - An Inclusive Education states: *An inclusive education is based on a commitment, on the part of the learning community, to fully acknowledge individual difference and to professing as well as implementing inclusionary politics. This concept recognises the full range of educational interests, potential and needs of students.*

*The implications of a commitment towards diversity extend beyond the educational domain. Society has a moral responsibility to affirm diversity, if it believes in the broadening of democratic boundaries, in the fostering of a participatory culture, in the defence of the basic rights of children, in the constant struggle against all those factors that prevent the students' different abilities from being brought to fruition and in the safeguarding and strengthening of our country's achievements in the social and cultural fields. p22.*

The document reports that at that time, teachers did not feel sufficiently prepared and supported to address the challenge of inclusion. The need to carry out an educational campaign among parents intended to bring about a change in the social perception of education was also recognised.

To quote the Guidelines for the Implementation of National Curriculum (2002): *Inclusion is a National Minimum Curriculum (NMC) commitment that concerns the education of all students. Issues of inclusive education have arisen from a consideration of the difficulties faced by students with Individual Educational Needs (IEN) to participate fully in mainstream education. However, the same issues are now seen as of concern to all students and the education system as a whole. Thus, inclusive education is an essential part of the first principle underlying the whole NMC exercise for ensuring "a quality education for all". p16.*

However, the amended Education Act (2006) states that the state should provide resource centres whose role should also include provision for children with individual educational needs who would benefit from such provision rather than attending a mainstream school.



While such thinking is informed by a medical or deficit model rather than a rights-based approach, work is on going at the University of Malta regarding training for teachers and LSAs that encourages a broader idea of inclusion. The University of Malta was involved in the coordination of a Comenius project on responding to student diversity. The project materials (2007) are motivated by a concern for social justice in education: *a need to promote openness to student diversity...an assumption that it is normal to be different and to provide a differentiated curriculum and learning experience* (Preface xiii).

In 2005 the Inclusion and Special Education Review in Malta noted that the objectives of inclusive education policy were not being effectively implemented through the systematic provision of support to satisfy the spectrum of needs. For example, if the LSA for a child on full time support is absent, a child with complex needs could be sent to a resource centre. Such practice gives a clear message about 'belonging' and whether - or not - children are seen as valuable members of the class/school. It appears that, to quote Ainscow (2011): *the preoccupation with individualised responses that have been a feature of special needs education, continue to deflect attention away from the creation of forms of teaching that can reach out to all learners within a class and the establishment of school conditions that will encourage such developments*'. p56.

Latimer and Siska (2011) observe that, while inclusive education is achieved for some learners who are in mainstream schools with the support they need, there has not been systemic change. Such change should lead to inclusion focusing on school improvement and quality for all learners.

### ***Consistency of policies***

Recent Agency work on Teacher Education for Inclusion stressed the need for holistic and inter-connected policies and a 'whole government' approach as also advocated by OECD (2010). Work by the Agency (Agency, 2010a) similarly stressed the critical importance of joint policy-making between departments of education, health and social services and this was further reinforced by the recent Agency Organisation of Provision project.

The European Parliament Report on Member States policies on Disabled Children (2013) makes the following recommendation on Access to assistance: *A special single national body (with regional offices) responsible for the management of services, budget and assistance of children and their families should be established in order to ensure consistency, coordination, effectiveness, increase accessibility and better guidance for families on the funding support available*. p61.



### ***Inter Ministerial work***

In some countries, services are under the control of different ministries (for example the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health), increasing the potential for poor communication among different service providers. This compartmentalisation inevitably impacts negatively on a learner's educational career (Ebersold, 2012). Soan (2012) suggests that legislation should underpin the development and the commitment of the different services, so that inter-professional working supports learners with disabilities with all those involved identifying, assessing, monitoring and reviewing provision together.

Recently, Malta has moved towards such practice with the inter-ministerial group set up to tackle early school leaving.

### ***Summary***

The research reviewed in this section stresses the need to take account of international normative instruments and EU level guidelines in the development of national legislation and policy. The importance of a coherent approach, supported by a shared understanding of inclusion and 'connections' between system levels is also highlighted.



## 2. Building capacity within mainstream schools

### *School organisation*

The process of inclusive education requires both a transformation of mainstream settings as well as a reconsideration of the role of special schools.

The Organisation of Provision literature review (European Agency, 2013) states that change does not necessarily result from the application of new techniques or the introduction of new organisational arrangements in schools (Ainscow, 2007), and that policy-makers often struggle to change schools by using new regulations and legislation (Pijl and Frissen, 2009).

The literature indicates that the consequences of such action is not real change – schools may show that they comply with the new guidelines (for example, by welcoming learners with disabilities into their classrooms), but only through minor adjustments (e.g. creating resource rooms and special units within the mainstream) and without really transforming the way in which schooling (i.e. teaching and learning) is structured.

In an Agency report on inclusive assessment, Watkins (2007) concludes that an organisational culture is needed that promotes inclusion and leads teachers and school leaders to re-think and re-structure their teaching and assessment practice to improve the education of all learners. The Agency's work on Key Principles (Agency, 2009) also notes the need for an organisational culture guided by leaders with a vision that includes clear thinking regarding school development, accountability and responsibility for meeting a diverse range of needs.

The Agency's Profile of Inclusive Teachers (2012b) suggests that the school culture should be aligned with the following core values: valuing learner diversity; supporting all learners; working with others; and continuing personal professional development. Regarding school ethos, Hart et al. (2006) introduce the 'ethic of everybody', explaining that there is no room in an inclusive classroom for learning opportunities that only benefit some people. Everyone shares responsibility for a productive working atmosphere and contributions from everybody in the learning community will be valued.

Cooper and Jacobs (2011) summarise research indicating the importance of personal warmth as a professional quality of teachers. This quality as the basis for strong relationships, in turn promotes emotional security and resilience in all learners and, along with good communication skills can increase positive student engagement. (Kreminizer, 2005, Flem et al., 2004, Poulou, 2005, Rimm-Kaufmann et al., 2014). The 2011 review also notes the importance of whole school approaches and





interventions that can improve student behaviour and engagement and raise attainment (Lassen et al., 2006, Sorlie and Ogden, 2007).

In Malta, the 2005 report “For all Children to Succeed” recognised that: *Networks are now the most important organisational form of our time, reshaping the activities of families, governments and businesses. They are increasingly fundamental to successful enterprise and they challenge our notions of leadership* (Hannon, 2004).

The college system in Malta has consequently been organised to facilitate networking between schools. Borg and Giordmaina (2012) in a report commissioned by the Malta Union of Teachers note: *Essentially the College Reform is based on the firm belief that school networking must be at the heart of a meaningful transformation of our educational system from one that celebrates the educational success of some children at the expense of others into one that is geared at enabling the success of all children. It sees school networks as the vehicle by which learning communities can be fostered that will be in a better position to address the needs of every child.* p3.

This reform sees partnership working, sharing of resources and joint problem solving as a way to create new practices as well as to ensure a smoother ‘flow’ between phases of education.

### ***Partnership with parents***

The INCLUD-ED project (European Commission, 2009) indicates that schools and teachers need to create ways to involve families and community members. It suggests five types of family participation: informative (i.e. families are informed about what learners do at school); consultative (i.e. families take part in the school’s statutory bodies); decisive (i.e. families are required to make decisions); evaluative (i.e. families participate in their children’s evaluation process); and finally educative (i.e. families participate in children’s learning and their own learning). The latter three models of participation – decisive, evaluative and educative – have proved to be the most effective for promoting inclusion and success in learning (European Commission, 2009).

Many sources, for example Cooper and Jacobs (2011), Winter and O’Raw (2010) and Department for Children, Schools and Families (2008) point to parental involvement as a key factor in the success of inclusive education and learner progress. Goodall et al. (2011) provide a review of best practice in this area of work and Aston and Grayson (2013) have developed guidance for teachers.

The 2011 TIMSS report provides some background on parental involvement in Malta and identified that parents generally hold low expectations for their children compared to the international average, with 33% expecting their children to



complete secondary education or less. However, the proportion of Maltese parents who often carried out early numeracy activities with their children is significantly higher than the national average.

The value of parental involvement is increasingly being recognised in Malta as a way to increase engagement with learning and there have been several initiatives and parent empowerment projects. However, these have largely been externally funded and have not become an integral part of daily practice in most schools. The new national literacy strategy supports training for parents/caregivers and family friendly measures to enable families to support learning including e-learning - in particular for children who face difficulties.

### ***School Leadership***

Recent work by the Agency on the Raising Achievement for all Learners (RA4AL) (2012b) and Organisation of Provision projects has highlighted the importance of school leadership as critical factor in the provision of quality support for all learners and the ability to respond flexibly to diverse needs.

The Agency work on Key Principles for Promoting Quality in Inclusive Education (2011d) similarly states the need for visionary school leaders who value diversity among staff as well as learners, encourage collegiality and support innovation.

Fielding et al. (2005) refer to the process of creating a learning school and stress the importance of mutual professional learning and the need to instil confidence in teachers as being fundamental to the transfer of new knowledge and skills. They note that head teachers should be supported to maintain cultures in the long term in order to achieve structural changes and minimise risks from turnover of staff and resistance towards change. School leaders also determine whether collaborative arrangements develop and/or are effective for the school (Ainscow, 2005; 2007).

Recent views about leadership have identified limitations in the old, managerial approach and extended the leadership role to teacher leaders and other staff who occupy a leading role within the institution. This distributed leadership and/or leadership partnership (Burnett, 2005; Harris, 2008) should focus on the learning of both school staff and learners, rather than on targets driven by an accountability or a standards agenda. Thomas (2009) suggests that effective leadership teams are 'self-evaluative, reviewing past achievements, and constantly looking to improve both themselves and their schools' (2009, p.2).

The complexity of the role of the school leader suggests the need for rigorous preparation regarding knowledge of school change and the development of learning communities (Hoppey and McLeskey, 2013).



Kugelmass and Ainscow (2004) found that leaders in inclusive schools modelled collaborative practice in everyday interactions with staff and arranged formal and informal opportunities for staff collaboration. They supported and enabled collaborative school development, but were able to make key decisions when needed. Hargreaves and Fink (2006) add that leaders also need personal characteristics such as commitment, resilience, passion and understanding, as these affect their ability to apply the necessary practices successfully.

Work by Pont and colleagues (2008) notes that effective school leadership is essential to improve both the efficiency and equity of schooling. Their work across 22 countries identified four main policy levers to improve school practice: (re) define school leadership responsibilities; distribute school leadership; develop skills for effective school leadership; and make school leadership an attractive profession.

Robinson et al. (2009) identified eight dimensions of leadership practices, including: promoting and participating in teacher learning and development; planning, co-ordinating and evaluating teaching and curriculum; establishing goals and expectations; strategic resourcing; and ensuring an orderly and supportive environment.

Shepherd and Hasazi (2007) set out a series of factors that can support school leaders in the process of developing inclusion: developing school cultures that include all learners; promoting effective instructional practices; creating professional learning communities, in particular bringing together special and mainstream school teachers; and increasing the participation of parents and local community in school activities.

The Agency's work on Key Principles (European Agency, 2009) also notes the need for an organisational culture guided by leaders with a vision that includes clear thinking regarding school development, accountability and responsibility for meeting a diverse range of needs.

Regarding the recruitment and retention of school leaders, Malta has moved away from a system that tended to promote long serving staff - or maybe 'good' teachers to one where wider capabilities suited to the leadership role are taken into account. According to a report by NLQ on Leadership in Education, head teachers in Malta are expected to have a Diploma in Educational Administration and Management and to be prepared to take on further studies. They are also expected to have good communication skills and be able to delegate and share leadership tasks as well as to empower others. However, workload is increasingly seen as an issue with pay not commensurate with the responsibility of the role (p178).



The TIMSS report (2011) notes that heads of schools in Malta participate in professional development less than the international average (26% in Malta compared to an international average of 39%).

Regarding leadership in the area of special needs education in Malta, the Standard Operating Procedures (DES-HRDD001-09, March 2010) set out the role of the Inclusion Co-ordinator (INCO) who is responsible for ensuring coherence within the system to address student's individual educational needs. This role includes liaising with all stakeholders concerned, developing college-wide SEN policy and developing programmes for students with SEN to ensure their achievement (p52).

In many countries, the role of special needs co-ordinator (SENCo - increasingly changed to Inclusion Co-ordinator) has developed over recent years. Lindqvist (2013) studied the SENCO role and notes that while roles vary in different contexts, many SENCos have only partially established a new role moving away from working with individual learners towards supporting schools to more inclusive practices. They found contradictions about this role between the views of policy makers and school leaders and the SENCos themselves.

Earlier work by Pearson (2008) raised a number of issues for SENCos including workload, unmet training needs and lack of additional pay for additional responsibilities. As a result, there appears to be a high turnover of teachers taking this role. Pearson suggests that the role should be re-formulated in line with current thinking. Abbott (2007) concludes: *Without an embedded school culture of inclusion, proper resources, dedicated time and genuine collaboration at all levels, though, a toll will be exacted not only on the SENCo—Cole's (2005) 'powerful and professional advocate', but on inclusion itself.* p404.

### ***Co-ordination between state and non-state services***

In recent years, the public sector in a number of countries has been characterised by the devolution of powers from central to local government with governments becoming 'commissioners' of services (Muijs, Ainscow, Chapman and West, 2011). This trend of devolution in public policy has led to the increased participation of the private sector in the delivery of services (including the voluntary sector, NGOs and charities). Work by the Agency (2013) suggests that when provision for learners with disabilities is being discussed, it is important to consider the role of voluntary bodies as providers of support and services and investigate whether the engagement of private bodies strengthens the work of local providers and mainstream schools or whether it contributes to the delegation of responsibilities from the public to the private sector.

The voluntary sector may sometimes be viewed negatively due to its patronage in the form of charity that can be seen as patronising and disempowering for



individuals. Disability movements now prefer self-representation and often reject the interposition of the traditional disability charities between themselves and government (Drake, 2002).

Oliver and Barnes (2006) note that both the numbers and influence of organisations controlled by disabled people have declined, with a resurrection of big charities, often supported as the 'supposed legitimate voice' of disabled people. They also note an increase in government organisations, which are not accountable to people with disabilities.

Morris states that while it used to be possible to distinguish between organisations 'of' and organisations 'for' disabled people (with the latter term referring to charities, often impairment-specific, that provide services to, and campaign on behalf of, disabled people), most of these now: ... *have disabled people on their management committees and in many cases have aligned themselves with the campaigns initially pioneered by the more grassroots organisations of disabled people* (2011, p3).

The voluntary sector's role in developing inclusive policy and practice remains complex with a need to avoid specific agendas and develop a coherent contribution to a continuum of services. In Malta, the voluntary sector appears to play an important role in providing support for learners with disabilities and their families.

### ***Collaboration with other agencies***

The Organisation of Provision project visits (<http://www.european-agency.org/agency-projects/organisation-of-provision>) showed the importance to schools of receiving support from local politicians and education administrations. In all project visits, key personnel in the local community showed a genuine commitment to the well being of learners. The roles played by these people include questioning some assumptions about the way things had been done in the past and trusting school leaders to make decisions even if there was an element of risk involved. Strong relationships between different stakeholders in the community have led to strong networks of support around the school that have been key in bringing about change.

The forms of co-operation among different local stakeholders can vary a great deal. Frattura and Capper (2007) indicate that in order to achieve inclusion and dismantle all forms of segregated provision, it is necessary to act at the level of school organisation to enable the education system to provide integrated comprehensive services (ICS) for all learners. Providing ICS is a way of ensuring that schools, and educational structures in general, work on a preventative basis to avoid learners dropping out from education, rather than focusing on learners' deficits.



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## **Summary**

This section presents evidence regarding the need for strong leadership at system and at school level. Leaders must work with others following democratic principles to ensure the development of well co-ordinated, collaborative services in schools and local communities.



### 3. Specialist provision as a support to the mainstream sector

The education of learners with disabilities in mainstream settings has given way to the development of a *continuum of provision* (Norwich, 2008; Benoit, 2012). Educational settings fit along this continuum that goes from the most separate provision (full-time, residential special school) to the most inclusive provision (full time in a regular class). Hall (2002) suggests that the term *array* replace *continuum*, as the latter connotes an ordered sequence of placements from most to least segregated, suggesting a hierarchy of classes in which students 'get promoted' to higher (more segregated) levels. An *array* implies a range of services, 'none inherently better than any other', from which a person can choose the service to best meet their needs (2002, p151).

Researchers (e.g. Norwich, 2008; Rose and Coles, 2002) argue that an inclusive agenda should re-appraise the role of special schools/specialist provision and develop closer links between the special and the mainstream sectors.

Rustemier (2002) and Bunch and Valeo (2004) among others, believe segregation to be discriminatory and damaging to young people and society and in breach of the principles underpinning the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the UN CRPD (2006). Others (e.g. Dyson and Millward, 2000; Slee, 2006; 2011; Gordon and Morton, 2008; McMenamin, 2011) similarly see the presence of special schools as an anomaly of the inclusive education system and argue for them to be totally dismantled. However, there is concern that mainstream schools are not yet ready to meet the needs of learners with disabilities (Warnock, 2005; Cigman, 2007; Forbes, 2007).

Ainscow (2007) points out that, while in the short and medium term special schools need to develop into forms of support for the mainstream setting, in the long term they are destined to disappear. This, however, implies only a dismantling of special schools 'in bricks and mortar' (Ainscow, 2007b, p.138) – the skills and resources that special schools currently provide will need to be maintained.

McMenamin (2011) points out, therefore, that policy-makers cannot ignore the role of special schools and, as a result many countries are moving such schools from providers of segregated education to partnerships with mainstream schools in the provision of education (e.g. Gibb et al., 2007; Ware et al., 2009) or to resource centres for local mainstream schools (e.g. Allan and Brown, 2001; Head and Pirrie, 2007) to give support and advice, in particular where they have developed expertise in responding to the needs of a specific group of learners (e.g. those with autism or profound and multiple disabilities). Other authors suggest increased collaboration between the mainstream and special sectors (European Commission, 2007; Meijer, 2010).



Slee (2001; 2007; 2011) describes the tenacity of special schools as an example of the resilience of the special sector and suggests that such resilience is further shown by the fact that such settings (separate 'units' or classes) are now occurring within mainstream schools.

Ware et al. (2009) indicate that the future role of special schools will be concerned with, on the one hand, addressing the complex needs of learners with disabilities in a continuum of provision and, on the other hand, supporting the work of mainstream schools in a two-way collaboration and exchange of expertise. They note, however that there is a need to ensure continuous professional development for all teachers in both mainstream and in special schools to ensure that they develop specialist skills appropriate to particular groups of pupils, as well as collaborative skills to work with their colleagues.

Hunter and O'Connor (2006) describe a survey of the role of special schools that recommended the development of outreach services, shared enrolment of pupils, specialist and short-term support, video-conferencing and e-support and inter-disciplinary planning and co-ordination of services.

Lapham and Papikyan (2012) suggest that authorities arrange expertise and provision of services to allow for both regularly planned support, as well as ad hoc requests from schools. This gives the resource centre model both specificity and intensity to bring about changes in pedagogical practice. Some barriers within this model are noted, however, including inflexible staff, inappropriate teaching approaches and parental anxiety (Gibb et al., 2007; Head and Pirrie, 2007).

The recent Agency Organisation of Provision project noted that 12 out of 29 participating member countries are developing the role of their special schools into resource centres while others are developing closer links between special and mainstream provision.

In Malta, the Department of Student Services of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport has moved to change special schools to resource centres. In its consultation document (2009) it found that, as special school numbers decreased some challenges became evident: special schools had to cater for a wide range of ages and levels across a small number of pupils, putting a strain on specialisation in the curriculum. Head and Pirrie (2007) similarly noted that as more learners attend mainstream schools, there is an increase in the diversity and complexity of learners attending the special school. Small special schools also fail to provide appropriate experience for different phases of education, as learners attended the same school from primary through to secondary and possibly beyond. Maintaining special schools while placing increasing numbers of learners in mainstream schools also requires replication of resources and leads to insufficient opportunities for staff to





share practice. Special schools in Malta have therefore been developed into resource centres (for primary/secondary learners).

However, in practice the work of the resource centres in Malta appears to centre around links with mainstream schools such as curriculum projects and awareness raising/experience rather than specific support to teachers/learners in mainstream schools. Many learners are placed in resource centres on a part-time basis, spending the remaining time in a mainstream school. Others attend the Resource Centres (often with a Learning Support Assistant) from their mainstream schools to receive particular services provide by a range of other agencies.

In moving such developments forward - from special-mainstream collaboration to a resource centre model, Forlin and Rose (2010) outline the following enabling factors:

- Clear roles are defined for classroom and special education teachers;
- Paraprofessionals are used to support general classroom management, rather than allocating them to specific students;
- Relationships are established over time with flexibility to provide on-going support;
- Teachers understand the benefits of child-centred practice for all and create appropriate incentives for mainstream teachers to seek training in special education/inclusion.

Collaboration and the building of partnerships between special and mainstream schools is not always easy. Ofsted (2006) reports on the difficulties of mainstream schools in establishing effective collaboration with special schools and, equally, the problems experienced by special schools in providing adequate responses and services to mainstream settings.

Burnett (2005) identifies gains for mainstream and special schools as a result of a partnership between the two sectors, as both benefit from collaboration and experiences of diversity. Learners who have been segregated for many years are able to attend the mainstream school and interact with their peers while staff, from both mainstream and special schools are able to share strategies for teaching a diverse range of learners. Burnett also indicates that partnerships among special and mainstream schools improve learner outcomes: *the stronger the partnership, as in the case of most co-located or satellite provisions, the greater the productivity and ability to meet the needs of the pupils with SEN* (2005, p14). Another important factor is service delivery and the quality of educational opportunities offered to learners with disabilities, and these also appear to increase along with the wider range of partnerships established (Burnett, 2005).



Forbes (2007) emphasises that inter-dependent and collaborative models of working between special and mainstream schools are particularly important because the rapid disappearance of special schools could result in a lack of specialised personnel able to meet the specific requirements of learners with disabilities in mainstream settings.

Other researchers (Warnock, 2005; Cigman, 2007) have also reported on the possible consequences of a gradual loss of specialised knowledge and personnel while mainstream teachers are not yet ready to meet the needs of all learners.

A one-year project by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI, Northern Ireland, 2012) provides information about the processes of collaborative planning and joint working and found that four elements were crucial to successful collaboration:

- Identifying a clear rationale and strategic approach to collaborative working.
- Deploying resources and agreeing shared responsibilities to enable the collaborative work to progress smoothly and to address any difficulties that may arise.
- Building a collaborative ethos and school commitment to inclusive planning.
- Monitoring and evaluating the impact and establishing the sustainability of further collaborative action and outcomes (ETI, 2012, p2).

### ***Support services***

In the majority of European countries, there are support services that play a key role in improving the quality of support and improved outcomes for learners with disabilities, enabling them to participate fully in mainstream schools. In some countries, quality standards have been developed for among others SEN support and outreach services, for children and young people with sensory and multi-sensory impairments and speech and language impairments and for collaborative working to support children with SEN. Such services aim to intervene early with learners and provide on-going support not only working with learners and their families but also with teaching and support staff in schools.

In order to provide such support, the roles and responsibilities of all personnel involved must be clearly set out in contracts or service agreements (Lacey 2000, Frattura and Capper, 2007). Such agreement should record for example the timing of regular meetings and the expertise to be shared to contribute to a process of joint problem solving that will further build the capacity of schools. Deppeler et al. (2005) stress that schools should be supported to 'avoid the creation of barriers and difficulties in the first instance' (p120) and be empowered by the development of collaborative contexts.



## **Teacher Support**

The recent Agency report on *Teacher Education for Inclusion across Europe* (Agency, 2011a) reported that teachers need certain conditions to implement inclusive practice and emphasised the need to develop teachers, in terms of effective skills and competences, as well as in terms of values and principles. As part of their responsibility for all learners, it follows that teachers monitor not only their own practice but also that of support staff and others working with learners in their classes.

Increasingly, countries across Europe are taking a longer-term approach to professional development in order to more effectively embed changes in school practice. Short courses for individuals or groups of staff do not represent effective use of resources and require sustained follow-up in collaboration with external advisers and school staff.

The Agency Organisation of Provision project found that within the schools visited, teaching staff worked (on an on-going basis) with professionals from a range of disciplines, for example counsellors, coaches, health professionals and social workers who form a 'network' around any learners in need of support - and also impact positively on teaching practice. Team teaching (pairing mainstream and special educators) was felt by teachers to be a particularly effective form of professional development.

Forbes (2007) states that teachers in the mainstream schools should be provided with direct support – not only consultancy – from specialised personnel. In such a model, teachers can work 'shoulder to shoulder' with peer teachers and have clear directions on the knowledge and skills to be taught to learners.

In addition to support from external sources, the Organisation of Provision project highlighted the importance of teacher support from school leadership teams to develop the values, attitudes and skills needed to confidently take responsibility for all learners in their classes - and to be prepared to take risks and innovate to find solutions to new challenges.

## **Summary**

The research reviewed in this section points to the need to maintain expertise in the specialist sector but to use it effectively in a system of flexible support that both meets the needs of learners in mainstream schools while also increasing the capability of schools by upskilling all teachers and support staff.



#### **4. Training and professional development for school leaders, teachers and LSAs**

While a wide range of professionals work with children and young people with special educational needs, there is evidence that the quality of teachers and their teaching are most likely to have the greatest impact and influence on educational outcomes. Teachers need to reconsider their assumptions about teaching and learning to bring about a deep cultural change at the level of the school staff and of the local community (Watkins, 2007; Council of the European Union, 2009; Agency, 2011). Winter and O’Raw (2011) state: *This may present a challenge since the underlying assumption has been that students identified as having special needs belong in a different place, as well as a different pedagogical category, and thus could not be taught successfully by ordinary teachers.* p29 (Avramidis et al., 2000). The importance of initial teacher education and on-going professional development is therefore a crucial factor in developing more inclusive practice.

##### ***Professional development routes***

A study conducted by Ware et al. (2011) has shown that teachers require adequate training – both in initial teacher education and continuous professional development – to meet the requirements of learners with disabilities in mainstream schools (Ware et al., 2011; Agency, 2011a).

In Malta, the University is largely responsible for overseeing training and has made progress in introducing courses for both teachers and learning support assistants. This development has been helped by a EU Comenius 2.1 project in 2004–2007 on preparing teachers for student diversity (<http://www.dtmp.org>). A Master of Education (MEd) in Responding to Student Diversity was launched in 2005 followed by a programme for culturally responsive education in 2006 (Bartolo, Galea and Azzopardi, 2008). The faculty is also 1 of the 15 research partners in the EU FP6 project ‘INCLUD-ED – strategies for inclusion and social cohesion in Europe from education’, co-ordinated by the University of Barcelona (<http://www.ub.es/includ-ed>).

However, the TALIS report on Malta (OECD, 2009) notes that although a high percentage of teachers participated in professional development, the number of days was well below the TALIS average. The greatest development need was teaching students with special learning needs, followed by school management and administration and teaching in a multicultural setting.

With regard to continuing professional development, Ware et al. (2011) recommend the development of online training opportunities, so that teachers can take the courses when they are relevant for their own teaching. Teachers are then able to create accommodating classrooms that suit all learners and plan their support in advance to be unobtrusive and natural within the normal flow of the lesson



(McLeskey and Waldron, 2000; 2007; Waldron and McLeskey, 2010). Supportive arrangements should: ... *fit into the on-going details of the daily classroom instruction, be perceived by teachers as effective for students with disabilities as well as other students in the classroom, and enhance and build on the teacher's current repertoire of instructional practices* (Waldron and McLeskey, 2010, p37).

Such opportunities do not seem to be widely available as many teachers take courses outside the country, predominantly in the UK or trainer may be bought in to provide short courses on specific priorities. While this has led to a number of highly qualified and skilled individuals, both types of training, without coherent follow-up have limited impact on the school/system as a whole.

In initial teacher education, the input on inclusive education at the University of Malta has been increased in the Bachelor of Education programme, but with some concerns about teaching practice and supervision to provide a balance of theory and practice. However, as the European Agency report *Teacher Education for Inclusion across Europe* (2011a) points out: *preparing new teachers to be inclusive requires much more than the addition of a special education course or module ..... teacher educators must develop expertise to deal with contentious issues and address their own personal deeper values and attitudes.* p63. The report also quotes Hagger and Macintyre (2006) who state: *whatever student teachers need to learn to do as teachers in schools for their future careers, it is in schools that they need to learn to do these things.* p65.

Thus, the importance of providing experienced mentors, role models and school-based supervisors for school practice as well as college-based teacher educators in order to address the theory to practice gap must also be considered.

### ***Roles and responsibilities***

The European Agency report *Teacher Education for Inclusion across Europe* (2011a) notes that *Teacher educators are key players in assuring a high-quality teaching force; yet many European countries have no explicit policy on the competencies they should possess or how they should be selected or trained.* p63. The project recommendations include a focus on the development of the 'profession' of teacher educators with attention to recruitment, induction and professional development.

The Agency's *Profile of Inclusive Teachers* (2012a) identified 4 core values as the basis for the work of all teachers in inclusive education: valuing learner diversity; supporting all learners; working with others; and continuing personal professional development. Areas of competence were then identified for each core value, along with principles for implementation.



As suggested above, such values and competences are only likely to develop when student teachers and newly qualified teachers are supported by school leaders and experienced mentors able to provide example of effective inclusive pedagogy in an inclusive environment.

Regarding 'sharing' effective practice, Ozga (2004) argues that the following points need to be considered in the transfer of knowledge and skills: firstly, that effective knowledge transfer needs preparation from both partners in the process; secondly, that effective knowledge transfer is not linear, but requires discussion, problem-solving and joint development; thirdly, that teaching is a practical activity rather than a technical one and is strictly connected to the context in which it takes place. It is difficult, therefore, for research to provide a universal solution to specific problems.

While the debate continues about what content and experiences can effectively prepare all teachers to work with all learners, the absence of behavioural and cognitive behavioural skills among front line staff has been shown to be associated with poor outcomes, not only for students with SEN, but for all students (Blatchford *et al* 2009). A further key factor is the development of the skills necessary for collaborative practice - with both teacher colleagues and LSAs - for whom teachers should take responsibility.

The Organisation of Provision literature review (2013) notes that the development of school-to-school collaboration has proved to be an efficient way to strengthen the capacity of schools to face new challenges and, therefore, to develop inclusive practice. Research conducted by Ainscow, Muijs *et al.* (2006) also highlights the benefits of schools working together.

The TALIS report (2009) notes that the relative use of collaboration for professional development is lower in Malta than in other countries and that few teachers (less than 8%) at that time had received feedback on their work.

In Malta, the networking opportunities provided by the college system may provide a useful vehicle for further collaborative professional development with teachers noting in particular the need for training focusing on mixed ability classes.

### **Summary**

The work reviewed in this section emphasises the need to train all teachers in inclusive education so that they develop the attitudes, values, knowledge and skills to take responsibility for all learners. To support this aim, training must also be provided for teacher educators and school-based mentors, as well as those involved in the training of LSAs.



## 5. Teaching, learning, curriculum and assessment

### *Raising achievement for all*

The types of teaching approaches provided to learners with disabilities in mainstream settings are similar across the majority of Agency member countries. These include additional teaching time, small group/individual coaching and teaching/support from a learning support assistant. Team teaching or co-teaching (pairing a mainstream subject teacher with a teacher who has a SEN specialism) has been introduced in a number of countries and this strategy appears to provide a number of benefits. For example, teachers interviewed during the Agency's Organisation of Provision (OoP) project found this approach invaluable as a form of professional development and felt that having two teachers in the classroom forced them to think more about what they were doing and to improve. Co-teaching has helped to change teacher attitudes and learners too expressed favourable opinions as they felt that everyone was able to benefit from the additional input and support. In other examples from the project, team teaching and partner classes were used to good effect with an emphasis on reflection, teamwork and communication, helping staff teams to accept that they are responsible for all learners in the class.

In other Agency member countries, efforts have been made to increase the number of specialist teachers and psychologists working in mainstream schools and to develop collaborative approaches, to create rich learning environments for learners with and without disabilities.

As schools strive to improve the basic education that they offer, a certain level of support is considered the norm for all learners at different times during their education. Structure may be used to enhance the use of time and ensure that all learners understand what is expected of them. Increasingly, learners are provided with coaching and engaged in more active learning - methods found to benefit all learners.

Elboj and Niemela (2010) argue for the development of interactive groups of learners as a way of promoting the learning process and turning student diversity into an opportunity for academic success. Many others (e.g. Racionero and Padrós, 2010) agree that learning is a social process based on the dialogic and egalitarian interactions between learners and their peers, as well as between learners and adults.

Meijer (2005) underlines that the development of co-operative learning, with a particular focus on peer tutoring, co-operative teaching, collaborative problem-solving, heterogeneous grouping and alternative ways of learning, such as programmes that teach students how to learn and to solve problems, are key elements in the provision of individual support for learning.



More recent Agency work on Raising Achievement for all Learners (Agency, 2012a) cites the work of Higgins et al. (2011), who found that effective feedback, meta-cognition and self-regulation strategies, peer-assisted learning and early intervention were among the most effective learning strategies.

Nind et al. (2004) also highlight the effectiveness of peer-interactive approaches for the inclusion of learners with SEN, along with co-operative learning – an important factor being that learners are active in the construction of personal knowledge.

In a meta-analysis of research on co-teaching, Scruggs et al. (2007) refer to the work of Hargreaves (2003) and suggest that teacher collaboration can lead to increased confidence, more experimentation and risk-taking and, ultimately, continuous improvement. Wilson and Michaels (2006) found that post-primary pupils saw a number of advantages associated with team-teaching, including a wider range of instruction, teaching styles and perspectives that made more skill development possible. Wilson and Michaels also noted that team-teaching appeared to expand the learning opportunities for all students. O’Murchu (2011), discussing co-teaching between general and special educators, notes the need for these to be equal partners. He examines the possibilities offered by team-teaching to reposition learners previously withdrawn from classes and ‘reframe’ special provision.

Teachers then need to see learning as a negotiated and shared process and be able to use a variety of strategies to meet the needs of learners with disabilities. Ware et al. (2011) state that this may include the use of additional or different resources, the modification of the content of the lessons and sometimes the application of a specialist pedagogy.

In general, however, Davis and Florian (2004) concluded that teaching approaches and strategies used for learners with disabilities were not sufficiently differentiated from those used to teach all children to justify a distinctive ‘special needs’ pedagogy. They state that this does not diminish the importance of special education knowledge, but highlight it as an ‘essential component of pedagogy’ (p 6).

Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) explore three assumptions about the requirements for inclusive pedagogy: a shift in focus from ‘additional needs’ to learning for all; rejection of deterministic beliefs about ability; and ways of working with and through other adults that respect the dignity of learners as full members of the classroom community.

In later work on inclusive pedagogy, Florian and Linklater (2010) identified the following themes:

- Developing an appreciation of the impact of ability labelling;
- New ways of thinking about teaching;





- Responding to individuals and offering choices;
- Taking risks, adapting the curriculum, and being surprised;
- New ways of working with others (p. 374).

Baglieri et al. (2011) suggest that research in inclusive pedagogy should focus on the development of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) as a way of analysing all teaching situations that can be useful to teachers (Hitchcock, 2002). What is paramount, however, as indicated by Dyson et al. (2004) is a setting where all teachers feel responsible for the education of all learners. In Malta, Bartolo (2010) suggests that, in general, classroom teaching still relies on whole-class methods particularly in secondary education with many teachers still in favour of streaming.

Dumont et al. (2010) identify that schools inadequately use research on learning science and set out the following principles that should be present in any learning environment for it to be truly effective: learner centred; structured and well-designed; profoundly personalised and inclusive and social.

Work by Vieluf (2012) on pedagogical innovation draws on OECD TALIS data to show that a combination of clear, well-structured classroom management, supportive student-oriented classroom climate and cognitive activation (challenging content that promotes deep reflection) have been shown to be effective. High quality teaching requires a balance between challenging tasks and content, student oriented supportive practices and teacher directed practices that provide structure and clarity.

OECD (2013) in their work on innovative learning environments, identified core elements (learners, educators, content and resources) that can be subject to innovative practices. This might mean for example considering the re-grouping of teachers, the re-grouping of learners, re-thinking the use of learning time and innovating pedagogy and assessment. OECD also stress the need to develop learning leadership, extend capacity through partnerships and implement the innovative learning principles below:

- Make learning and engagement central.
- Ensure that learning is social and often collaborative.
- Be highly attuned to learner motivations and emotions.
- Be acutely sensitive to individual differences.
- Be demanding for each learner but without excessive overload.
- Use assessments consistent with learning aims, with strong emphasis on formative feedback.



- Promote horizontal connectedness across activities and subjects, in and out of school.

In a study of curriculum access, Ware et al (2011) point to flexibility and differentiation to provide for diverse learning needs but also highlight the issue of over-reliance on LSAs as the agency of differentiation. They notes some key challenges: the lack of support for teachers in differentiation, difficulties in collaboration between staff, tensions between mixed ability teaching as opposed to focused interventions and the change between withdrawal and in class support.

In particular when learners require a higher level of support, the following quote from the RA4AL synthesis report should be kept in mind: *The process of differentiation may also be associated with individualisation and personalisation and seen as a way to meet more specific individual or group needs. However, it often remains teacher-centred rather than learner-led.* p25. As the OoP project literature review points out, differentiation can be seen as an attempt to fit the learners into an existing system rather than contributing to the transformation of settings and routines.

Sebba (2010) and Baglieri et al. (2011) similarly suggest that differentiation may risk reproducing the same limits it purports to avoid (e.g. adaptation by teachers, rather than transformation of settings and teaching and learning routines putting the learner at the centre). Persson (2012) also reports on the risk of adopting differentiation, individualisation and ability grouping as ways of responding to learners' diversity. Research indicates that such procedures may impact negatively on learners' self-perception as well as teachers' expectations and there may be a focus on differentiated materials rather than pedagogy.

Increasingly, the idea of Universal Design for Learning is gaining ground, with emphasis on designing the curriculum and lesson content with options for all learners rather than 'retrofitting' (Thousand, Nevin et al. 2006). To achieve this, it is crucial to personalise learning, taking inputs from learners and parents into consideration. Agency work (for example: Meijer, 2005; Watkins, 2007; Agency, 2009; 2011) also provides further evidence that involving learners and giving them greater responsibility for their own learning is key in the development of inclusive practice.

Hrekow (2004), quoted in Frankl (2005), believes that schools must have a commitment to high quality teaching and learning for all pupils, otherwise they: ... *merely support an inappropriate curriculum by providing incremental amounts of support for individual pupils with SEN to ensure IEP targets are met.* p77.

Research (Ianes, 2005) further indicates that a link between the IEP for learners with disabilities and the general class programme is needed to support access to the



curriculum. In order to ensure that such a link is maintained, collaboration between the mainstream teacher and the support teacher is needed. Lanes underlines how the provision of pedagogical support should: substitute the way in which information and communication are provided to learners (for example the use of Braille and computers); facilitate the provision of information (e.g. different contexts, people and use of examples that are experience-based); simplify learning objectives either at the level of understanding, processing and/or output of information; identify the core objectives of the discipline and present them in different ways (e.g. teaching history by referring to students' personal life stories); and, finally, focus on social participation.

The Agency OoP project found that many countries are attempting to introduce more flexibility into their curricula. Both country information and visits show that a focus primarily on academic achievement/national standards may present a barrier to inclusion. In countries where the curriculum is under-going reform, there is an emphasis on access to the framework of the curriculum - but also an acknowledgement that, for some learners, in particular those with intellectual disabilities, there will be a need to adapt content or even to use the curriculum areas as contexts for learning where the knowledge is not considered relevant/appropriate.

In some cases, time pressures created by a heavily prescribed curriculum can create difficulties for schools as teachers may feel the need to adhere to 'traditional' methods of teaching and assessment that may not be learner-centred. The research, however, points out the need to balance any potential benefits of flexibility against the need for students to meet standard criteria for accreditation and certification, and to prevent adapted curricula from becoming too narrow.

In Malta, the National Minimum Curriculum (1999) was followed up by Guidelines in (2002) based on the use of the Index for Inclusion. However, as a report on Equality in the NMC (2010) stated, this appeared to be an 'ad hoc' measure rather than a consistent requirement on schools and lacked clarity regarding specific measures to take and management of any data collected.

In Malta's new curriculum framework (NCF, 2012) issues of diversity and inclusion are more integrated throughout the general principles that include entitlement, diversity and learner-centred learning. Education for diversity is also included as a cross curricular theme. Work on the curriculum is on-going, but reflects the consideration of a range of learner needs to address:

- gifted and talented learners
- learners with special educational needs
- learners with severe disabilities



- learners from disadvantaged social backgrounds
- learners from diverse social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds including children of refugees and asylum seekers

The NCF states that the development of a national inclusion policy is necessary and should be embedded in all educational processes and outcomes within the NCF, in all schools. It also recognises the need for a supportive infrastructure to enable all learners to achieve their full potential and for teachers and administrators to implement the curriculum effectively with on-going support and professional development, student services and human resources.

### ***Student engagement and participation***

Agency work on participation (2011b) states that participation of students at its most basic level refers to 'being there' for example being admitted to a school or other educational programme, remaining in and completing an educational programme and leaving or terminating with something to show for the time spent in the programme. However, they add that: *Being physically present in a specific educational programme is a necessary but not sufficient condition for full participation and that three components need to be understood regarding participation: the relevance or importance of activities to the individual, the comparability of activities to activities expected of, or carried out by children in general, and the general relevance or importance of activities in the context of social, developmental or educational goals.* Notable examples of indicators are: participation regarding admission (being there); participation in assessment, in lessons and in school-related activities (p29).

Ware et al. (2011) identify access to the mainstream curriculum as a key factor for the participation of learners with disabilities and highlight the following forms of support that are considered to be crucial in facilitating curriculum access: support for the class teacher in the form of other teachers with expertise in special needs education; support from visiting teachers and other outside professionals; and support from parents. Other factors include: resource availability, including the special needs assistant; generalised support from the school principal and other colleagues with a leading role; the possibility of planning in advance the provision needed within the school; and, finally, collaboration with parents and other specialised staff to plan and implement the IEP.

Being engaged is an important component of participation and work by the Agency (2011b) puts forward the view that a key indicator of engagement is that students with disabilities participate in education in an equal way to their non-disabled peers.



Chapman (2003) makes a distinction between school process engagement and engagement in specific learning tasks. The former refers to a willingness to participate in routine school activities: attending classes, submitting required work and following teacher directions in class. In contrast, the latter is more specifically linked to effort and interest in actual learning tasks, and Chapman breaks these down into cognitive engagement (the extent to which students are attending to and expending mental effort in the learning tasks encountered), behavioural engagement (the extent to which students are making active responses to the learning tasks presented) and affective engagement (the level of students' investment in, and their emotional reactions to, the learning tasks, e.g. high levels of interest or positive attitudes towards the learning tasks).

Work on engagement, in particular for learners with more complex needs suggests that sustainable learning can occur only when there is meaningful engagement which connects a child and their environment (including people, ideas, materials and concepts) to enable learning and achievement. In particular for this group of learners, the level of engagement in lessons/activities should be monitored alongside any IEP targets.

The process of being involved or engaged is internal and cannot be observed or captured in indicators but it is reflected in (generalised and specific) activity patterns of engagement/involvement or disaffection/withdrawal (Connell, 1990). These patterns are understood as inputs and outcomes of having experienced fulfilment or frustration of the basic needs for competence, autonomy and relatedness. Participation therefore also reflects the extent of engagement in the full range of activities that accomplish a larger goal such as those set by education systems.

From an inclusive perspective, it is crucial to listen to the learners themselves when providing individual support, rather than planning according to any normative system of categorisation. Gibson (2006) notes that the voices of learners with disabilities are often silenced, with parents (and adults in general) often being asked to speak on their behalf, although such practice may not accurately convey the learners' experiences. Tools such as student passports can help learners to record for staff what helps them in their learning and provide information about their support requirements.

On a school level, participation in school councils etc. can support engagement when learners feel that they are listened to and that their views can make a difference. This, in turn strengthens their relationships with staff.

Kettlewell et al. (2012) note that strong relationships between students and staff are particularly effective in engaging the disengaged. Other interventions include:



personalised, flexible provision (including practical/vocational elements), flexibility to meet individual needs and 1:1 support.

### ***Funding issues***

The Agency Organisation of Provision project showed that flexibility is needed with regard to funding of additional support. A number of countries are trying to increase the 'permeability' between special and mainstream provision, recognising that all learners need support at different stages of their school career. This should be provided without a label and be reduced when no longer needed. The need to move to a system of early support and prevention rather than a system that rewards lack of success is increasingly recognised.

Most countries fund the education of learners with disabilities from central government while in others funding is devolved to local authorities or municipalities. In a third group, there is a mix of central and local funding. Regarding special education, in most countries central funds are provided for additional staff, specialist equipment and transport.

When funding is devolved, local authorities may distribute resources using a locally agreed formula. It is then for schools to decide how to spend their available resources, including spending on SEN. Some money may be retained centrally for support services.

Most countries provide some additional funding for different groups, felt to be disadvantaged e.g. learners from lower social economic groups, learners looked after by a local authority. For learners with disabilities, funding is usually linked to the assessment of learners and in most countries a statement or formal decision is written by a specialist/multi agency team or resource centre in order to secure additional funds.

Following assessment, most countries allocate a number of additional SEN hours or Learning Support Assistant (LSA) time. Many countries provide additional funding via the Municipality for aids, equipment or additional staff (LSAs). In order to support inclusion, a small number of countries reduce pupil numbers in classes where there are learners with disabilities.

A minority of countries operate a backpack or 'pupil basket' system through local municipalities. Here, funding follows learners. However, in this type of 'pupil bound' system, only those with identified difficulties who meet the SEN criteria can access additional resources while others who may be in need, are unable to access support. Other countries who allocate funding to regional co-operatives of schools or special centres may create greater flexibility.



Providing funding to schools based on the number of learners recognised as having SEN is not sufficiently responsive, as needs vary among pupils and over time. An output model is also seen as problematic as resources are withdrawn if a programme is successful. There is a need to move from a system that rewards such lack of success to a model of early support and prevention.

A further consideration is that support given to individual learners does not improve the capacity of the school system. If schools focus on the quantity rather than the quality of resources, they are unlikely to make the necessary changes to the way that mainstream systems and school staff respond to learners (Frattura and Capper, 2007).

Schools, rather than struggling with the limited 'additional' resources available for them, could develop cost-effective networks of support and professional development involving collaboration between local stakeholders and local schools/support centres (Ainscow, Mujijs et al., 2006; Benoit, 2012; Ebersold, 2012). In this case, schools do not have more resources but find more innovative ways to use available funding.

### ***Monitoring all students' progress***

At school level, an assessment framework that informs teaching and learning and involves learners themselves (as recommended by Agency work on inclusive Assessment, 2009b) is more likely to support inclusive practice. In the most effective examples of practice, the emphasis is on what learners can do, listening to learner feedback and providing comment on their work/performance rather than giving grades. Providing learners with access to a flexible assessment framework with a common structure and principles is needed rather than a detailed or prescriptive framework that assumes that one size fits all.

Claxton et al. (2011) note the need for a: *multi faceted portfolio of indicators rather than a single metric* (p150). Evidence may be provided by learner views about themselves as learners, teacher observations as well as other evidence - from peers, parents and out of school activities - day-to-day, monthly, termly or on an annual basis.

To support a move towards inclusive assessment, all stakeholders should be clear about the different functions of formative and summative assessment. Both can make a positive contribution to learning but whereas formative assessment focuses on individual learners' on-going achievement, summative assessment draws on a range of evidence over time to make a judgement against common criteria, such as specified levels within the curriculum. Formative assessment for learning should relate to summative criteria, but not be 'driven' by them (e.g. by use of hierarchical checklists etc.) as this may 'narrow' the focus of teaching and curriculum



opportunities. Teachers need to develop the skills and knowledge to ensure that they use assessment tools that are fit for purpose. Recent research (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2011) notes that, in particular for learners with more complex needs, there is evidence that assessment tools may be used as a curriculum, with consequences for both teaching and curriculum entitlement.

For national tests and examinations, most countries operate a system of special arrangements that allows learners with disabilities to access standard papers through adapted materials (e.g. Braille, large print, use of signers, scribes etc.). The TIMSS report (2011) notes that Maltese schools tend to place a high emphasis on academic attainment compared to other countries and as a result many resources are given to providing access arrangements to enable learners with disabilities/SEN to take part in the national tests and examinations. Ghirxi (2013) recommends a shift from summative assessment to formative and also suggests that alternative forms of assessment need to be considered, such as computer based testing.

EACEA/Eurydice (2009) also report that 'high stakes' assessment can impact on teaching, possibly narrowing the curriculum. They suggest that combining test results with other assessments enables teachers to have a say in decisions affecting their pupils and also addresses the concern that tests represent a snapshot of pupil attainment at a particular time.

From an inclusive perspective, it is important that research focuses on the importance of evaluating the engagement, progress and outcomes of learners with disabilities in order to understand if the support provided for them fully meets their needs. Douglas et al. (2012) note that international bodies tend to collect data that provides information about performance against given standards (for example in literacy and numeracy) or about pupil attendance. They suggest that educational outcomes in relation to learners with disabilities could be grouped into: attainment-related outcomes, attendance-related outcomes, happiness-related outcomes and independence-related outcomes. As also indicated in Agency work (Watkins, 2007), different countries assess and collate young people's educational engagement, progress and outcomes in different ways. Within an inclusive approach, however, assessment should be carried out for all children and young people for academic and non-academic areas. The data generated from such assessments should be appropriately disaggregated as required and as is useful (e.g. to show outcomes for different groups of learners).

Although a great deal of resources have been devoted to access arrangements for national tests and examinations in a number of countries, few have developed alternative accreditation for learners with more complex learning disabilities – or given consideration to what progress means for such learners.





Other measures of progress may include that which:

- Closes the gap in attainment between the student and his/her peers – or stops the gap growing
- Is similar to that of peers starting from the same baseline
- Matches or improves a student's previous progress
- Ensures access to the curriculum
- Demonstrates increased independence, behaviour, or social or personal skills
- Is likely to lead to appropriate accreditation
- Is likely to lead to participation in further education, training and/or employment.

### ***Transition opportunities***

The Agency Mapping the Implementation of Policy for Inclusive Education (MIPIE, 2011c) project stated that monitoring learners' rights in education requires information to be gathered on the transition opportunities that learners with SEN have from one education level to another, or from education to the labour market. Experts involved in the MIPIE work indicated that collecting data in relation to quality of education requires evidence relating to the whole context of a learners' environment, including longer-term outcomes of education and learners' destinations. This means examining the gaps that learners may face during transition periods due to: new demands placed upon them by the education system; eligibility criteria and procedures for support and accommodation and new responsibilities they may have to assume. These gaps may have a disabling effect by overexposing learners with SEN to segregated settings, unemployment and to exclusion (Agency, 2006; Ebersold et al.2011).

The project identified a data gap on transition issues, although more and more countries do include transition in both their education and their inclusive education policies in line with the Salamanca Framework for Action which states that schools should support learners with SEN to make an effective transition from school to adult working life (UNESCO, 1994; Agency, 2006; Ebersold, 2011).

The MIPIE project report suggests that school level indicators could focus on the availability of transition support services, their appropriateness to individuals' needs and their enabling effect in terms, for example, of needs awareness, ability to make decisions on plans for the future, self-confidence in decision making and the ability to match individual strengths and desires with future goals.



In a study of transition to adulthood for youth with disabilities, Stewart et al. (2010) identified six common elements for best practice in transition services and supports:

- Collaboration among everyone involved, with youth at the centre;
- Building capacity of all persons involved in transition and also within the environments of communities and society at large;
- Navigation to support youth and families through the transition;
- Information that is accessible and useful to everyone involved;
- Education at all levels including youth, families, community members, service providers and society; and
- On-going research to provide the evidence needed to move forward.

While there appears to be a great deal of knowledge about separate 'components' of transition: the different perspectives and experiences; different types of transition; different domains; and various factors (often separated in the literature into barriers and supports), the various elements and factors that interact with each other have been studied mostly in isolation. Transition to adulthood is a complex phenomenon and this is leading researchers to study interactions of person and environment, as well as dynamic processes, opportunities, and other complexities.

### ***Summary***

The research reviewed in this section highlights the need to use research evidence to develop assessment practice and inclusive pedagogy in order to engage all learners and ensure their active participation in learning. It is also necessary to develop a culture of monitoring and reflection to ensure that information is used to inform work with learners and develop practice. Responsive funding mechanisms should also encourage early intervention and capacity building.



## 6. Identification of additional needs and allocation of support

### *Early identification*

Early identification refers not only to the identification of young children in need of additional support but also to learners at any stage of their education who experience difficulties – for any reason and for short or for longer periods of time. As the capability of schools and teachers increases, learners in need of any form of additional support should be identified and their needs addressed within regular classroom provision – without the need for diagnosis or labelling.

### *Assessment of individual learning needs*

While a number of countries are beginning to move away from using categories of need relating to different disabilities, this practice is still prevalent. Florian and colleagues (2006) point out that while systems of classification may vary a great deal between different countries, a medical model of disability usually underpins them. More recently, the NESSE report (2012) notes that country systems of classification are underpinned by different conceptualisations of difference and normality. On one hand, the labelling process justifies the allocation of extra resources and ensures that reasonable adjustments are made; on the other hand, labelling may lead to ‘social segregation and the development of a spoiled identity’ (NESSE, 2012, p. 20).

In an attempt to reduce the bureaucracy surrounding a lengthy, multi-agency assessment, some countries are introducing an integrated assessment and planning process involving all agencies in the production of a co-ordinated or unified support plan, in particular for learners with more complex needs. This is described as a needs-based, dynamic contextual system based on a social model of disability taking account of family, school environment factors rather than psychometrics.

Assessment is usually by a multi-disciplinary team or specialist centre, often working with the school (and parents) in the assessment process. Such centres/teams (often working on a regional basis) provide support in terms of pedagogical advice and resources and in some countries also make placement decisions.

Assessment can often be requested by schools or by parents, who are increasingly involved in decision-making. Some countries have a staged process and issue a decision or statement following a full assessment. This process can take a long time and may also include a provision for parents to appeal if they do not agree with the decision or placement recommended.



## ***Statementing procedures***

A number of Agency member countries are moving away from statements to Individual Development Plans for learners from 0-25 years that include a duty for agencies to collaborate and improve integrated planning. There is also a move towards a greater focus on support for learning rather than special educational needs and a concern with quality not quantity of support. The need to make such processes less bureaucratic and adversarial has also been identified with greater involvement of learners and parents and improved information to help their decision-making.

At classroom level, work by the Agency on inclusive assessment shifts the focus from assessment procedures that focus on diagnosis and resource allocation, often conducted outside the mainstream school, to on-going assessment that is conducted by class teachers to organise individual educational planning. Such assessment procedures allow schools and teachers to take responsibility for all their learners and to effectively address their needs. As the schools' capability increases so the need for statements to secure additional resources should reduce. Where statements or similar do exist, the quality of assessment information should support better targeted support.

Thresholds for 'additional' support in any setting will vary depending on the competences of teachers and the effectiveness of teaching should be assessed before 'labelling' learners and seeking a statement. Assessment should not be used to 'match resources to student deficits in order that they do not disrupt the institutional equilibrium' (Slee, 2004) and support should be matched to the individual recognising that one size does not fit all.

Finally, a possible negative effect of statementing has been highlighted by Webster and Blatchford (2013) who found that pupils with a Statement often had a lower quality pedagogical experience, with teaching being provided by teaching assistants.

## ***Placements***

The arguments around special versus mainstream school placements are well-documented and were recently summarised in the Agency RA4AL report (2013). As awareness of the UNCRPD (2006) develops, countries are moving on from justifying placements in mainstream schools to considering how best to support such inclusive practice. Increasingly, as shown in the Agency Organisation of provision project, parents want their children with disabilities to attend the local school with siblings and peers. However, this 'right' is not always fulfilled by placement alone, if learners do not receive the support needed to enable them to participate and achieve. While parents may have a right to choose, there may be little choice if the available expertise is only within specialist provision.



## ***Support allocation***

Classroom support is a key area for the development of inclusive practice (Rose and Coles, 2002; Waldron and McLeskey, 2010; Vianello and Lanfranchi, 2009; Ware et al., 2011). Researchers (McLeskey and Waldron, 2007; Waldron and McLeskey, 2010; Ware et al., 2011) suggest that withdrawal from mainstream classrooms and lessons should be reduced to a minimum. However, research also shows that if inclusive environments are poorly designed and organised, the chances of any improvement for learners with disabilities are drastically reduced (Waldron and McLeskey, 2010).

Increasingly schools set out what support they can provide in provision maps ( e.g. teaching approaches, interventions, resources, learner groupings and organisation and ways of 'graduating' support) and this can provide an overview of possible responses at different levels of system to meet different needs, identify allocation of resources and monitor effectiveness. It can also support joint working between services, helping consistency and transparency. Rieser (2008) provides a checklist of reasonable adjustments that shows some of the practical classroom arrangements that teachers have found useful.

Currently in Malta, support that can be provided through the statementing process is set out in Schedule 1 of the Inclusion Policy (Ministerial Committee on Inclusive Education, 2000) The support includes: facilitators; LSA - full time or shared (also note takers, sign language/communication support); personal assistance; peripatetic teacher support; special school placement; additional services such as physiotherapy, occupational therapy, medical and social work support; mobility training and behavioural support. There is a reference to specialised educational programmes and this is the only means of support not dependent on additional personnel. However some of these forms of support, although listed in the policy are not used in practice.

The Inclusion and Special Education Review (Spiteri et al., 2005) notes the rising outlay on support and suggests that it does not provide value for money. The review notes the excessive pressure on expanding the mainstream individual support arrangements to address the needs of any child who is not coping with a rigid curricular system and raises the need to break the expectation of 1:1 or shared support to promote independence and not dependency. A Ministry Circular (16 Feb 2012) also stressed the need for LSA's to work with others in class and promote independence. This idea finds further support in recent literature. New Brunswick Association for Community Living (2007) suggests that paraprofessionals must work to support teachers in classrooms rather than with specific students with disabilities and Takala (2007) similarly asks if LSA support is for the learner or for the teacher.



Any additional support should therefore be regularly reviewed and changed, reduced or increased as necessary in consultation with learners/parents as well as any external sources of expertise. Within each school a balance of skills and competences (e.g. SEN staff working with others) should be available with external expertise used to increase school capacity not just to support individual teachers/learners.

Recent research questions the ‘conventional wisdom’ of 1:1 support. Giangreco and Suter (2009) found evidence that the delivery of paraprofessional support is often not well implemented. They suggest that many paraprofessionals are not adequately trained, although they are often required to assume teacher-type responsibilities and duties at the level of instruction and curriculum. Giangreco (2010) says that over reliance on 1:1 support is conceptually flawed, in particular assigning the least qualified, lowest paid, inadequately supervised staff to learners with the most complex needs. ‘Inadvertent’ detrimental effects include dependency, stigmatisation and interference with peer interactions. Such arrangements can also shift concerns such as teacher attitudes, engagement, curriculum issues and collaboration between special/general teaching staff without addressing them.

Mortier et al. (2011) report that, in some cases, learners themselves consider adult support to be a barrier. Such support may also be perceived as a form of control that does not allow them to experiment, but rather increases their feelings of inadequacy and dependency. The study indicates that learners appreciate support that allows them to take part in classroom activities and the school community, but do not like support that makes them feel ‘different’ from their peers. Learners with disabilities report that they appreciate support when it reduces impairment effects. Overall, computers are not considered to be as stigmatising as other supports and learners prefer to work as much as possible without the use of an adult helper or support (Broer, Doyle and Giangreco, 2005).

Other researchers similarly found that a close relationship with the learning support assistant may be a barrier to the participation of learners with disabilities (Ware et al., 2011; Giangreco, 2010), as it reduces the learner’s opportunities for developing independence and interaction with peers without disabilities. Rose and O’Neill (2009) suggest that when the role of learning support assistants is focused on working with individual learners with disabilities, they may inhibit the inclusion process by isolating the learner from his/her peers. Broer (2005) noted the primacy of the relationship between students and LSAs who could be seen as mother, protector, friend or teacher and Webster and Blatchford (2012) also note this ‘discourse of care’ and nurturing role.



Some of the challenges in the use of learning support assistants can therefore be linked to their role changing (termed 'role creep' by Blatchford et al., 2012) from caring and assistance to a role more aligned with teaching activities. There is a need for caution here as MacBeath et al. (2006) suggests: *If inclusion means anything it is the right to be taught by a suitably qualified teacher.* p65.

Bourke (2010) reports that mainstream teachers are often confused about what to do when there are other adults in their classrooms and they often tend to delegate the 'problem'. Tutty and Hocking (2004) noted that shared responsibility was the missing link - LSAs protect teachers from the 'burden' of students and subsequently become the expert in that pupil.

Other researchers (Ainscow, 2000; Giangreco and Doyle, 2007) indicate that learners with disabilities supported by learning support assistants tend to learn less well than those learners without assistants. Blatchford et al. (2012) found problems when teaching assistants took on teaching tasks, leading to a 'separation' of individuals from the teacher and a possible reduction in teacher-led learning. They found that, in general, the more support pupils received from teaching assistants, the less progress they made. They found that many assistants were more concerned with the completion of tasks than with learning and understanding, being reactive rather than proactive. Causton-Theoharis (2009) notes the need for support to be 'faded' and opportunities to work with peers increased.

Webster et al (2010) identified a negative correlation in secondary schools between the amount of contact students with special educational needs had with teaching assistants and the interactions they had with their teachers. In addition, the majority of supported students spent most of their time working on tasks different to those of their peers. This led the authors to conclude that too often, teacher assistant support was used as an alternative to attention from teachers. This being the case, they recommended that:

- Schools should examine the deployment of support staff to ensure they do not routinely support lower attaining students
- There should be equity of access to qualified teachers, teachers working outside area of expertise
- Teachers must take lesson planning responsibility for all students in their classes, including those supported by support staff.

Other researchers however have noted some positive impact from LSA support. Rose and O'Neill (2009) note that learning support assistants are often helpful to maximise the time that learners with disabilities spend in the mainstream classroom and that, despite the drawbacks, their presence can help in the learning process. Farrell (2010) looked at the impact of LSAs on standards and found that where



supported and trained they can have an impact on primary age pupils' academic progress. LSAs therefore have more impact in targeted interventions.

Ware et al. (2011) note that LSAs have some success in maintaining on task behaviour, simplifying/re-explaining lesson content but again emphasise task completion rather than skill development. Blatchford et al. (2012) found that, in some cases, support staff reduced teacher workload and stress levels, increased attention to individual children and improved class control. In secondary schools, the study results showed that assistants could have positive effects on relationships, following instructions and independence in learning. Saddler (2013) notes the need for further research focusing on the impact of LSAs on social rather than academic achievement.

In other studies LSA were found to contribute to effective organisation and management of schools, raising the need to:

- Examine activities where LSAs can support learning
- Train teachers to work effectively with them
- Ensure that LSAs don't reduce input from teachers and that they focus on learning not task completion
- Evaluate the impact of different ways of deploying LSAs.

Blatchford et al (2012) discussing the effective deployment of LSAs, recognised the need for time for meetings to allow for planning and audit of practice. They note that LSAs should add value to and not replace teachers, working with different groups, not only learners with SEN/disabilities and also that further work is needed to improve LSA's use of language with learners.

In the Making a Statement project in England, Webster and Blatchford (2013) stress the need to consider organisational and structural factors that LSAs work in. They say that any negative impact cannot be attributed to them as they often have no control over situations. The project found that one third of LSA time was spent listening to teachers teach and suggest that explicit LSA roles are outlined by teachers in lesson plans, together with learning outcomes.

Schools and teachers may rely too heavily on learning support assistants and the roles of support staff should be critically analysed (by senior managers) in order to better understand the influence they may have on the inclusion process (Giangreco and Doyle, 2007). Kerry (2005) identified 11 potential roles for LSAs highlighting the need for clarity so that their potential can be fulfilled (Groom, 2006). It will not, however, be possible to establish one single model of effective provision that can be used internationally as flexibility will be required for different contexts, schools and learners (Rose and O'Neill, 2009)





Finally, Webster and Blatchford (2012) caution that, as the need for LSA support is often specified in a Statement of SEN, this may be conflated with the overall legal status of the Statement itself.

### ***Individual educational programmes (IEPs)***

In the majority of Agency member countries, some form of individual education/support/learning plan is in place and although the names given to these vary, the function is broadly the same. The plans set out pedagogical support, personalisation, environmental factors and coordination of services, along with plans for regular monitoring and review. IEPs should also link to the issue and review of statements in countries where such a system is in place.

Very often, the IEP includes information about the medical conditions and needs of the learner with disabilities. Ideally, such a tool will also include all information that safeguards the social inclusion of learners with disabilities in the different phases and aspects of life (see for example, Agency, 2002; 2005; 2009b; 2009c; 2010). It should therefore involve a range of staff from the school (e.g. teachers), resource centres (e.g. specialised personnel, peripatetic teachers) and, where necessary, local health units (e.g. medical personnel), as well as personnel from voluntary organisations. Most importantly, it should involve the learners with disabilities and/or their representatives and advocates.

Such plans are considered to be of particular importance at times of transition between phases of education. Careful management is required to ensure that individual plans do not lead to an emphasis on 'individual' teaching or a narrower curriculum and that they support an effective use of resources by guiding support which is an integral part of classroom life. As Norwich and Lewis (2001) state, they should not imply that learners require a 'different educational diet'.

Frankl (2005) notes that IEPs can lead to increased bureaucracy and workload and may be 'bolted on' to the provision on offer, with a focus on behavioural principles where learning is seen as linear and incremental. She suggests that group plans may encourage teachers to take more responsibility for learners and better integrate planning.

Ware et al (2011) found that where IEPs did exist, these were often seen as being the province of the resource teacher, and had been prepared by her/him. In some cases the class teacher was unaware of their content.

McCausland (2005) studied IEP policy in 5 countries and made recommendations regarding identification and assessment, and planning. He writes that the effectiveness of an IEP should be evaluated in terms of: student performance and



progress; implementation issues (e.g. time/staff available); team co-ordination issues; and any additional outcomes, positive or negative.

Some writers suggest that the IEP may just be a piece of paperwork, with little relevance to practice in the classroom. It is therefore worth asking the question of whether the IEP is necessarily the best way forward especially in the light of developments such as provision mapping (see page 42). It is essential that IEPs are seen as working documents and that the targets set out are an integral part of classroom teaching - and recording and reporting - keeping paperwork to a minimum but maximising impact on support for learners.

Peters (2004) states that: *Individualised/personalised education is a universal right not a special education need* (p 42). Increasingly, a continuum of support is seen as the norm, allowing all learners to receive the right support at the right time to facilitate their learning. Arguably, all learners should therefore have a flexible (individual or group) learning support plan.

### ***Recording and reporting procedures***

In order to support learner progress, manageable systems of recording and sharing information are needed. Increasingly, schools/other agencies are developing IT based systems that can be accessed by all parties involved (subject to safeguards around confidentiality). Such information is also crucial to the allocation of support and subsequent review of any decisions made so should be regularly updated (see information on IEPs above).

When multiple services are involved with learners, a lack of communication (see Roaf, 2002; Agency, 2005, 2010a; Glenny and Roaf, 2008) can be a major problem as it may increase the 'delegation phenomenon', where each service works independently from others. Coherent support for learners and their families is also dependent on accurate records to avoid families and learners being repeatedly 'assessed' and asked for information by different agencies.

### ***Multi-agency collaboration***

Multi agency services in the community need to work closely with schools - and with parents - so that support is consistent between settings. Personnel who know the child and family can provide support in education and community settings. To support a move away from a 'medical' model, services traditionally provided under health maybe based in schools or in local community centres both for ease of access and to improve communication among professionals from different disciplines. In any model, the child must be 'at the centre' of co-ordinated services who should have a role in supporting both schools and families.



In a number of Agency member countries co-operation between medical and social services, health and education is increasing to share professional practice and provide greater flexibility for learners with difficulties or disabilities who are provided with personalised schooling. This may involve reducing time spent in school and providing a range of other support services.

In other countries, school boards/governors of all types of schools - primary, secondary, vocational and special - co-operate at a regional level to arrange educational provision for every child taking into account special educational needs. Schools also increasingly co-operate with other organisations responsible for the care and well-being of children and require the participation of all stakeholders (school board, management, teachers and parents).

Many writers (Lacey, 2000; 2001 and Ainscow, Muijs et al., 2006) have noted that the number of professionals involved with learners is likely to increase with the severity of the learner's disabilities. The OoP Literature review notes that there are four main types of services that have traditionally supported learners with disabilities: the educational sector (e.g. school, specialist teachers, educational psychologists), the health sector (e.g. doctors, physiotherapists, speech therapists), the social services (e.g. family, social worker, job coaches) and voluntary bodies (e.g. charities, respite care providers, private homes).

The INCLUD-ED reports (European Commission, 2007; 2009) also suggests that closer collaboration between education, social work and health departments is needed for the assessment of learners with disabilities.

In her research on multi-professional working and its impact on the education of learners with disabilities, Soan (2012) discusses commonly used terminology in this area and how it reflects differences in the approaches used to deliver services to support learners with disabilities. First of all, she indicates that there has been a shift from words such as 'multi-agency' and 'multi-disciplinary', where the emphasis was on different adults working together to support learners (but on a separate basis), to words such as 'inter-disciplinary' and 'inter-agency', where the different adults start to work across boundaries and professions. Finally, words such as 'trans-agency' and 'trans-disciplinary' (Soan, 2012) have begun to be used to show how different services are working across disciplines to respond to learners with disabilities in a holistic way. Frost (2005 in Soan, 2012) provides a useful hierarchy of terms to describe a continuum in partnership:

*Level 1: co-operation – services work together towards consistent goals and complementary services, while maintaining their independence.*

*Level 2: collaboration – services plan together and address issues of overlap, duplication and gaps in service provision towards common outcomes.*



*Level 3: co-ordination – services work together in a planned and systematic manner towards shared and agreed goals.*

*Level 4: merger/integration – different services become one organisation in order to enhance service delivery (Soan, 2012, pp. 92–93).*

Agency work (e.g. Agency, 2005; 2010a; 2011d) reinforces the importance of collaboration between schools and community services, such as health and social services, to ensure a holistic approach to the learner. This support needs to be provided in a way that goes beyond schooling and ensures that pathways to further education and employment are also investigated (Agency, 2006). Any support should also be provided as close to the family as possible (Agency, 2010a).

Lacey (2000; 2001) suggests that the services that provide support to learners with disabilities can be divided into the team and the network. She writes that the former refers to the people who work closely with the learner with disabilities (e.g. the teacher, the parent and the teaching assistant), while the latter is concerned with the work of different experts who work in a consultative role to provide brief and often intermittent services. Both groups need to be investigated in more detail in order to understand what can be done to promote the inclusion process.

Lacey (2001) notes that different services have tended to work in a fragmented way, with each one focusing on a specific aspect of the learner's difficulties or needs (for example, the doctor on the health condition, the teacher on the intellectual development and the social services on the social integration after school).

There may also be difficulties in accessing services due to excessive bureaucracy and confusion between different organisations that have different regulations and administrative procedures. There may also be constraints in the use of funds that can undermine the availability of resources when and where they are needed (Lacey, 2001).

What is important is that different services are organised into an effective team or a single service, in order to avoid tensions that may arise from the different cultures and conditions of work etc. It is also helpful if families and schools have a single point of contact.

In Malta, an example of inter-disciplinary working (the SEN Team) was described by Zammit et al. (2004). However, Attard-Baldacchino (2013) notes that, despite available literature on the nature of collaborative work, there has been limited application in the Maltese context. He comments that collaboration in Malta is mostly unstructured with elements of interdisciplinary practice and is characterised by the sharing of information and also sometimes resources and skills.



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## **Summary**

The evidence presented in this section highlights the need for a 'continuum of support' to provide early support to learners and reduce the need for statements and 1:1 assistants. Such support should however include a range of professionals (inter-disciplinary services) to meet the needs of both school staff and individual learners.



## 7. Monitoring and evaluation

Leaders at all levels of the system will be aware of the need for monitoring and evaluation to ensure quality provision, but they should also be aware of the impact that some systems of accountability can have on the development of inclusive practice.

Forbes (2007) argues that an inclusive model should be based on an accountability system that measures ‘what students know and can do, rather than placement and inputs’ (p. 68). However, while inclusive education is widely agreed to be about ensuring both quality education and excellence for all learners, it is not unusual for achievement to be measured against a set of standards or for raising achievement to be ‘equated with the improvement in test performance’ (Booth and Smith, 2002, p. 6). The drive to raise standards may therefore be in opposition to an inclusive view of raising achievement and some initiatives may provide an incentive to ‘teach to the test’ (Gillborn and Youdell, 2000; Lloyd, 2007).

Such an accountability framework may have a negative impact on the education of learners with disabilities, as it excludes those who cannot achieve according to a narrow ‘standards’ agenda, marginalising and excluding many learners (Sodha and Margo, 2010).

According to Bourke (2010), the focus on raising ‘academic’ standards also risks counteracting attempts to promote equity. Alexander points out that high-stakes testing, punitive inspection and the marketisation of schooling: *generate considerable collateral damage while not necessarily delivering on standards* (2012, p. 9). (See also Nichols and Berliner, 2007; Alexander, 2010; Alexander et al., 2010; Ravitch, 2010).

Inclusive education, therefore, may be challenged by conflicting policy agendas that, on the one hand, support the development of schools that welcome learner diversity and, on the other hand, align with the pressure to focus on high academic standards. This aspect of the accountability agenda shows schools caught in a loop of having to support inclusion while being forced to fit into standardised achievement tests that do not take into account the diversity of the student population.

Hargreaves and Braun (2012) found that due to ‘threshold’ performance indicators, teachers experienced pressure to concentrate their efforts on students who would achieve the easiest threshold gains rather than on all students and, in particular, those who had the greatest needs. They note that this phenomenon is common to all systems that assign numerical thresholds to performance targets. This policy may lead to the development of compensatory approaches rather than a focus on diversity and value seen in wider achievement and personal progress. In a study of



accountability in high-performing education systems, Husbands et al. (2008) found that only two out of thirteen countries reported a broad range of outcomes in a holistic way.

More specifically, attempts to raise the achievement of learners with disabilities may be at risk of failure where disability is used to justify the lack of progress. In addition, ‘perverse incentives’ may develop – if learners’ outcomes are poor, then the school or local authority /municipality is allowed to request more support. This practice also fails to address the question of whether the learning and teaching approaches used for learners with disabilities have been effective (Sodha and Margo, 2010).

Sometimes, additional incentives, such as extra personnel, have had little impact on improving the outcomes of learners with disabilities (Giangreco and Doyle, 2007). This results from a focus on the quantity of provision rather than on the effectiveness and the quality of the incentives provided. Put briefly, this accountability system may encourage schools to push children: *up the funding ladder rather than reflect on their own practice and, where necessary, change it.* (Sodha and Margo, 2010, p109).

Another crucial problem relating to accountability has been the climate of competition that has developed in some countries. The publication of examination results and funding allocated through competitive bidding make it hard to develop a culture of collaboration (Muijs, Ainscow, Chapman and West, 2011). Hargreaves notes that: *It is widely held among politicians that competition drives up standards in the system: the challenge is now to recognise that a renewed culture of extended moral purpose is directed to the same end* (2012, p16).

In the Agency Organisation of Provision project, countries indicated that they monitor/evaluate:

- the organisation and operation of educational institutions and the quality and effectiveness provided
- education standards
- the implementation and effectiveness of programmes including those for learners with disabilities
- the conduct of assessments of the educational needs of learners

With regard to learners with disabilities/SEN, countries monitor the following areas:

- Equal opportunity and access to education
- Positive school environment/ open school atmosphere (effective educational practices, positive teachers’ attitudes, cooperation with the local community)



- Teaching to facilitate learning and meet the diverse needs of individual learners (methods, materials, IT, differentiated teaching, adapted tests, etc),
- The acquisition of academic and soft skills (curriculum based assessment, on-going formative and summative assessment)
- The use of Individual Educational Plans as the basis for assessment
- The promotion of learners' personal and social development.

The Agency project on 'Mapping the Implementation of Policy for Inclusive Education (MIPIE, 2011c) provides further information on which countries have quantitative and qualitative information in different areas.

### ***Monitoring and evaluating action plans for educational policy implementation***

Gilbert (2012) suggests that a shift in mind-set and culture is required so that accountability is professionally owned rather than externally imposed, with a greater emphasis on formative accountability and increased collaboration within and across schools. Such a model would provide information on the implementation of policy/action plans that could be used to plan further improvement.

If no systematic monitoring and evaluation takes place, not only will opportunities for learning from experience be lost, but unsuccessful initiatives may be continued/repeated leading to fragmentation and ineffective use of resources.

### ***Data availability***

While Hargreaves and Fullan note the need for schools to be 'evidence-informed, not data-driven' (2012, p164) the collection of relevant data is an important element in the monitoring and evaluation of provision at all levels of the system. Data is required in order to track learners and monitor their progress and, at school level, to establish the patterns of achievement across different groups to ensure that interventions/policies are effective, have an equitable impact and to allow any 'achievement gaps' to be addressed. At national level, national and international tests may provide data to monitor standards. However, qualitative and contextual information should be considered along with quantitative data to gain a 'rounded' picture of policy and practice.

### ***Quality Assurance standards***

Many countries are in the process of developing quality standards for education. In Malta, a new external review document has been published to supplement internal reviews and performance appraisals in the school improvement framework. Focus areas include education leadership, internal evaluation and development, effective





school management, learning and teaching, assessment, school ethos and climate and parental involvement.

The process of developing standards should involve all stakeholders in discussions to agree the key features of a quality education, based on research evidence and previous experience/evaluation of work. According to UNESCO, the concepts of equity, access and quality are inter-related. A system cannot be considered to be of high quality if some learners are out of school or not fully participating. This is a principle underpinning the current Agency work on statistics to inform inclusive education (EASIE, in press). Although a specific focus on the inclusion of vulnerable groups may be necessary in short term, in the longer-term quality systems will include all such considerations as an integral part of the quality assurance process for all schools.

### ***Compliance with standards***

The quality standards that have been developed in a number of Agency member countries are not usually mandatory but are designed to be used as 'suggested markers' against which services provided can be evaluated (for example, Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2008). Many of the standards available highlight what is considered to be effective practice and aim to guide development as well as support monitoring and evaluation. A key feature is the involvement of all stakeholders in their development to ensure wide ownership of the proposed outcomes. In this way, commitment - and compliance - are more likely to be achieved. New Jersey Coalition for Inclusive Education (2010) highlight that their quality indicators can be used as a basis for discussion to challenge underlying assumptions, beliefs and values as well as to identify priorities as well as evaluate progress.

Centrally imposed accountability systems may leave schools with the illusion of being in charge of the education of learners, when in reality they have to comply with centralised requests (Ball and Junemann, 2012). Pij and Frissen suggest that, from an inclusive perspective, policy-makers could better support the development of inclusive schools by: *... stating what is expected from schools without prescribing how it should be done, by removing all hindrances in regulations and funding, by stimulating forms of additional training for teachers and by avoiding as much as possible funding systems requiring formal labelling procedures* (2009, p373).

Fullan (2011) talks about the need for vertical accountability, with transparency at classroom, school and district levels being essential for sustainable progress. He stresses the need for capacity building, engagement and trust-building to also produce lateral accountability and collaboration among peers that is critical for whole-system reform.



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## **Summary**

The literature reviewed here stresses the importance of learning from experience and building evidence-based practice. All stakeholders should play a part in developing and implementing policy and reviewing their own work and that of colleagues. Inclusive education should be an integral part of any quality assurance system.



## **Concluding remarks**

This document aims to support a thorough analysis of the context in Malta and provide a sound basis for future work and the development of a clear rationale for any changes to be made to the existing systems of support for learners with disabilities/special educational needs.

The document also provides some information on the bigger picture across Agency member countries and, although practice from other countries cannot necessarily be 'imported', a great deal can be learned by reflecting on the experiences of others, in particular regarding what works and why.

It is hoped that this document will encourage the further development of the standards in Malta with the engagement of all stakeholders leading to continuous improvement of provision for all learners. In order to strengthen this aspect of follow-up work, the research evidence presented has been synthesised into a number of key principles that may inform and guide future developments.

## **Legislation and policy**

- Promote a rights-based approach to support the active participation of all learners in line with international agreements
- Create conceptual clarity around the idea of inclusion to ensure correspondence/consistency between levels of the system and all stakeholders

## **Building capacity of mainstream schools**

- Develop strong leaders able to communicate a vision and create a culture at national/policy and local/school levels in order to:
  - ensure that all stakeholders take responsibility for all learners - at all levels of the system (national, local college, school and classroom);
  - enable flexibility to encourage innovation and support collaboration between policy makers and between national/local education leaders and local communities;
  - provide professional development and support for learning at all levels (staff and pupils).

## **Specialist provision as a resource for the mainstream sector**

- Create a continuum of support for teachers, learners and their families by developing the role of specialist provision as part of a coherent inter-disciplinary support service around each mainstream school community.



## **Training and professional development for school leaders, teachers and LSAs**

- Provide training in IE for all teachers to develop positive attitudes, values, knowledge and skills;
- Develop a network of college-based teacher educators and school-based mentors with knowledge/experience of IE to ensure quality ITE/CPD, including practice in inclusive settings.

## **Teaching, learning, curriculum and assessment**

- Raise awareness of inclusion as a mainstream issue that is about quality education and raising the achievement of all learners;
- Draw on research evidence to develop policy and practice in assessment for learning and inclusive pedagogy;
- Provide a flexible curriculum framework to engage all learners and support active participation.

## **Identification of needs and allocation of support**

- Support teachers/LSAs to develop an understanding of the assessment process and the effective use of a range of approaches and tools;
- Create flexible ways to resource schools that provide an 'incentive' to include all learners in mainstream schools without labelling;
- Develop a 'continuum' of possible supports for learning – from in-class support (e.g. through flexible organisation and differentiated teaching) to support through external agencies (within the school community).

## **Monitoring and evaluation**

- Develop a model of monitoring and evaluation for all new initiatives to learn from experience and build evidence-based practice in context;
- Ensure that all stakeholders are involved in the development and implementation of a quality assurance system that goes beyond 'easy to measure' areas and covers (as an integral part) inclusive policy and practice.



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