

# Raising the Achievement of All Learners in Inclusive Education

Lessons from European Policy and Practice



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





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Lessons from European Policy and Practice





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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

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<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Full version</b>
Agency:	European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education
EENET:	Enabling Education Network
ET 2020:	Education and Training 2020
EU:	European Union
LC:	Learning community
OECD:	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
Organisation of Provision:	Organisation of Provision to Support Inclusive Education
PISA:	Programme for International Student Assessment
RA:	Raising the Achievement of All Learners in Inclusive Education
SEN:	Special educational needs
TE4I:	Teacher Education for Inclusion
UK:	United Kingdom
UNESCO:	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF:	United Nations Children's Fund
USA:	United States of America
WHO:	World Health Organization







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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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This report provides an overview of the Raising the Achievement of All Learners in Inclusive Education project, conducted by the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (the Agency) between 2014 and 2017. The project involved a full range of education stakeholders and set out to explore the following key questions:

- What pedagogical strategies and teaching approaches best support learning and are effective in raising the achievement of all learners?
- How can school leaders best support:
  - the development, implementation and monitoring of inputs and processes for raising achievement?
  - the participation of learners and parents/carers in the learning process?
  - the ‘measurement’ of all forms of achievement and analysis of outcomes to inform further development?

The project considered these questions in the context of countries’ national and local policy. Three learning communities, from Italy, Poland and the United Kingdom – UK (Scotland), received support to undertake organisational development, particularly through collaborative approaches.

Besides the practical work undertaken by the learning communities, information on raising achievement was complemented by the Raising Achievement (RA) country survey. This provided information on policy and practice related to raising learner achievement in 23 participating countries.

The analysis of the survey showed that many country policies include measures to support disadvantaged learners and promote positive outcomes for learners at risk of marginalisation and underachievement. Other policy approaches include refining curriculum frameworks, emphasising core competences and transversal skills, attending to learner health and well-being, and ensuring parental/family involvement and close links with local communities.





Countries are beginning to respond to the challenge of finding a balanced approach to evaluation and assessment, which measures other valuable aspects of the system beyond academic attainment. Most countries collect school-level data for quality assurance and accountability purposes, usually through internal measures and external evaluations, such as school inspection. However, only a few countries reported the systematic use of stakeholder surveys for quality assurance purposes, even though these can contribute significantly to school improvement processes.

Country policies also focus on strengthening the professions of teaching and school leadership, recognising the benefits of collaborative practice in professional development and support. The country information shows that focusing on continuous support for teachers and school leaders can be a strategic way to increase schools' capability to raise the achievement of all learners.

Countries also reported numerous policy challenges related to raising achievement. Key challenges discussed in this report include:

- working towards inclusion along with promoting attainment and achievement;
- increasing learner participation and engagement;
- improving quality assurance and accountability mechanisms;
- measuring learner achievement;
- collecting national data;
- providing professional development opportunities for teachers and school leaders;
- negotiating issues of school governance and funding.

The RA project suggests possible ways which can help to address some of these challenges. It reinforces the need to move from individual support (a compensatory approach), to increasing all schools' capacity to provide quality support to all learners more pro-actively (an intervention and prevention approach). The project supports a view of inclusive education as an overarching strategy for raising the achievement of all learners which can provide challenges that develop teacher practice and school leadership and organisation.

Specifically, the work of the project learning communities has shown the benefits of:

- measures to address the health and well-being of all learners;
- support for learners that enables them to recognise that skills and qualities can be developed through appropriately focused hard work and persistence;
- flexible learning opportunities that provide continuity and progression through the phases of education and ensure the relevance of learning for life and work;
- shared leadership and increased collaboration among school staff;
- partnership with parents, carers and families, in order to raise learner aspirations and participation;
- local community and employers' involvement to increase curriculum relevance and work opportunities.



Project work also highlighted:

- the need to focus on equity across all school structures and processes (e.g. learner grouping, staff allocation, access to curriculum/activities, accreditation of learning and qualifications, resource allocation);
- the need to consider wider measures of achievement, moving beyond narrow measures of attainment;
- ways to build teachers' professional knowledge and expertise to meet more diverse learner needs;
- the importance of school self-review.

Based on the findings set out above, the project makes specific recommendations for school leaders and teachers and for system leaders and policy-makers which can contribute to raising learner achievement. According to these recommendations, school leaders and teachers should:

- Build a strong leadership team and distribute tasks among stakeholders to ensure sustainability and secure engagement.
- Develop a school ethos that supports respectful interactions between all stakeholders.
- Ensure evidence-informed teaching and learning.
- Provide a flexible curriculum to ensure relevance to all learners.
- Develop 'assessment literacy' among teachers and other stakeholders.
- Build structures/processes that support collaboration with families and specialist services (e.g. professionals from health, social services, etc.) to improve support for all learners.

System leaders and policy-makers should:

- Develop ways to gather and share information on 'what works'.
- Facilitate national dialogue to develop a shared understanding of inclusive education.
- Increase collaboration between ministries/departments at national level that have a key role in education and support for learners and their families.
- Ensure clarity regarding the functions of formative and summative assessment and work towards an integrated assessment system that is fit for purpose and includes all learners.
- Ensure that policy for initial teacher education and continuous professional development focuses on equity and diversity.
- Undertake a review of accountability and quality assurance mechanisms to ensure they are coherent and support inclusive development.



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By supporting school and system leaders to raise the achievement of all learners, this report, along with other [project resources](#), aims to enhance the efforts of Agency member countries to ensure inclusion, equity and excellence in their national education systems.



## 1. INTRODUCTION

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The high cost of school failure for individuals – and for society more widely – is increasingly being recognised across Europe. Raising the achievement of all learners is seen not just as a policy initiative, but as an ethical imperative.

This report provides an overview of the Agency’s Raising the Achievement of All Learners in Inclusive Education project (2014–2017). It brings together information collected from participating member countries and a synthesis of findings from the project practical work and recent research, including contributions from project experts.

The Raising Achievement (RA) project, in response to requests from Agency member countries, aimed to explore approaches that could increase learners’ motivation and capacity to learn. Beyond academic attainment, it focused on the key competences needed for personal development, active citizenship, social inclusion and employment, in line with the new European Union (EU) Strategic Framework for Education and Training (ET 2020). The project considered these competences crucial to increase participation and engagement, reduce the number of early school leavers and, ultimately, raise the achievement of all learners.

The *Council Conclusions on Inclusion in Diversity to achieve a High Quality Education For All*, agreed under the Maltese Presidency of the Council of the EU in February 2017, invite member states to:

*... provide a stimulating and nurturing environment allowing all learners to realise their full potential ... [and] encourage the provision of opportunities for all learners to engage in flexible pathways ... [with] the use of curricula and pedagogical approaches that reflect social, cultural and other diversities of learners (Council of the European Union, 2017a, pp. 5–7).*

A real commitment to social justice requires consideration of wider social and economic policies. Nevertheless, education clearly plays a key role in providing opportunities that are relevant to all learners and which enable participation and build aspiration. To achieve relevance, schools and communities must value diversity rather than adopting ‘one-size-





fits-all' approaches. When learners are perceived as different and are not included in schools and communities, opportunities for participation and engagement are reduced – with consequences for achievement and life chances.

This report, along with other [project outputs](#), provides information to support school and system leaders to provide such opportunities.

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## Project aims

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The Raising the Achievement of All Learners in Inclusive Education (RA) project aimed to provide evidence of effective practice in raising achievement and building capacity to meet a diverse range of learner needs.

It set out to explore the following key questions:

- What pedagogical strategies and teaching approaches best support learning and are effective in raising the achievement of all learners?
- How can school leaders best support:
  - the development, implementation and monitoring of inputs and processes for raising achievement?
  - the participation of learners and parents/carers in the learning process?
  - the 'measurement' of all forms of achievement and analysis of outcomes to inform further development?

The project considered these questions in the context of countries' national and local policy. It involved a full range of education stakeholders. These included learners, teachers, school leaders, researchers, parents<sup>1</sup> and other community members, as well as local and national policy-makers.

More specifically, three learning communities, from Italy, Poland and the UK (Scotland) received support to undertake organisational development, particularly through collaborative approaches. In the project, the term 'learning community' (LC) refers to collaborations of stakeholders around clusters of schools involving school and community staff, researchers, local area leaders and policy-makers. Parents and other stakeholders in the wider community (e.g. employers, health professionals) play a key role in the learning and support network around the schools. Raising achievement becomes possible within an LC where stakeholders share common values and vision as well as responsibility for pupil learning. In a climate of mutual trust and respect, all members of the LC contribute and share knowledge and skills, enabling the most effective use of resources to benefit all learners.

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<sup>1</sup> In this report, the term 'parent' refers to mothers, fathers, foster carers, adoptive parents, step-parents and grandparents.



The project also looked at challenging issues, such as raising the achievement of vulnerable groups and increasing collaboration with a focus on the structures and processes linked to raising achievement. It attempts to move from the ‘what and why’, to ‘how’ LCs can progress beyond a focus on inclusion itself, to a focus on valued outcomes for each and every learner.

## Country information

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In addition to the findings of the RA project practical work, this report outlines policy and practice in many of the Agency member countries that took part. Participating countries include: Austria, Belgium (Flemish and French speaking communities), Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and UK (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales).

Detailed information about raising achievement was received from 23 countries via the project country survey: Austria, Belgium (Flemish speaking community), Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden and UK (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales). This information forms the basis for the summary of country approaches to raising achievement. It covers:

- definitions of raising achievement in national policies;
- descriptions of national policies that aim to raise achievement;
- collection of data on attainment and achievement;
- school evaluation and quality assurance and support for teachers and school leaders.

The report then discusses the particular challenges that countries raised, with reference to both recent literature and project findings. It makes some recommendations to address these challenges. The Annex describes the project methodology.

While the project findings may be relevant to all stakeholder groups, the main audience is key decision-makers working to ensure that education policy at all levels supports inclusive classroom practice and success for all learners.







## 2. PROJECT BACKGROUND

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The Raising Achievement project conceptual framework states that a change of culture and different pedagogy are needed to support a human-rights approach. Education systems should increase schools' capability to recognise and meet the needs of all learners. This entails moving from a focus on individual support and compensatory approaches (i.e. based on a medical diagnosis or labels), to more preventive measures and pro-active forms of teaching and learning.

This approach aims to identify institutional barriers at all levels and sees diversity as helpful in developing more innovative pedagogy. It focuses on personalised approaches to raise the achievement of all learners who are working together in inclusive settings.

In this project, inclusion is considered an organising principle and a 'mega-strategy' (Mitchell, 2014, p. 27) to raise the achievement of all learners through a system that ensures both equity and excellence. According to the *Agency Position on Inclusive Education Systems*:

*The ultimate vision for inclusive education systems is to ensure that all learners of any age are provided with meaningful, high-quality educational opportunities in their local community, alongside their friends and peers* (European Agency, 2015a, p. 1).

The RA project conceptual framework states that inclusion relates to:

- the ability of class teams to take responsibility for all learners and to collaborate to see and understand what is needed to support their learning and the skills to adapt the curriculum, teaching and support;
- the ability of those responsible for the school (principals, leadership teams) to organise and lead the school staff constructively and pro-actively and support the development of their competences to raise the achievement of learners.

However, what works in one country or policy context may not transfer to a different situation (please refer to European Agency, 2016a, section 8.3: 'Practice transfer'). The project considered not only what approaches work, but also how, when and in which





situations they work. It acknowledges that learning about school development starts with self-awareness and critical reflection on the context in each individual LC. (For more about this issue, please refer to the Organisation of Provision project's ['Increasing Inclusive Capability' resource](#)).

What is crucial here is that an inclusive education system recognises, values and builds upon the talents of all learners and effectively meets diverse individual learning needs and interests through personalised opportunities. Such practice can only be achieved through shared stakeholder commitment and collaboration to innovate, share practice and make best use of available resources.

With regard to the process of raising achievement, the RA project follows the definition provided by the *Agency Position on Inclusive Education Systems*, which notes:

*... raised achievement for learners encompasses all forms of personal, social and academic attainments that will be relevant for the individual learner in the short term, while enhancing their life chances in the long term* (European Agency, 2015a, p. 2).

The RA project has taken this wide view of achievement that goes beyond standardised measures of attainment from tests/examinations or performance of skills.

More specifically, the terms 'attainment' and 'performance' are used to refer to the results of tests and examinations. The term 'achievement' is used more widely to refer to learners' success at any point during the academic year, in any level of education. It also includes personal and social learning. Finally, the term 'outcome' is used with reference to longer-term educational goals.

During the project, learners' attainment was measured through each country's examination and/or formal school assessment system. Wider achievement was 'measured' through teacher judgements and school assessments, as well as the perceptions of learners and other stakeholders.



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## 3. CURRENT COUNTRY POLICY AND PRACTICE ON RAISING ACHIEVEMENT

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The Raising Achievement project country survey examined policies and practices relating to the achievement of all learners in inclusive settings. This includes targeted policies, as well as some broader policies that affect learner achievement. For the purposes of this report, information has been summarised under themes identified during the project as the ‘levers for change’ most relevant to raising achievement. The Annex contains further information about the methodology used to collect this information. This chapter provides a summary of country information, including vignettes (in boxes) chosen to illustrate some key policies from national education systems.

### Definition of raising achievement in national policies

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Several country policies define raising achievement as a process that enables all learners to promote their learning and development and achieve their full potential (e.g. Croatia, Denmark, Sweden, UK (Northern Ireland)). It is also seen as a goal that involves providing quality support to all learners in order to overcome any barriers to learning, to allow them to learn in their own way and at their own pace (e.g. in Cyprus).

In other countries, such as Finland, raising achievement is structured around the idea of educational equity. Most Finnish policies aim to raise achievement by ensuring a system that provides individually tailored support as soon as possible for everyone in need of it. Similarly, Belgium (Flemish speaking community) seeks to raise achievement by focusing on talent development and well-being, to make sure that every learner is being challenged and has equal opportunities. In Denmark, one of the main objectives of the recent *Folkeskole* reform (2014) is to promote well-being.

In the Netherlands and the UK (England, Northern Ireland and Scotland), raising achievement is linked to a vision of educational excellence. Improved learner outcomes are



supported by setting high education standards and promoting equity and the participation of all learners. For example, the plan for education in the UK (England), published in the White Paper *Educational Excellence Everywhere*, sets out the government's holistic vision to raise standards, measured in terms of improved learner outcomes. Likewise, the UK (Scotland) values both excellence and equity in education, as described in its 'National Improvement Framework'.

The aim of policies for raising achievement varies across countries. Portugal, for example, promotes pre-primary education, integrating all learners, enhancing professional and artistic education, addressing inequalities and focusing on teaching and enhancing professional skills. In Spain, the process of raising achievement aims to avoid 'early dropout' and/or to help learners to achieve the compulsory secondary education certificate, which gives access to further education or the labour market.

Many countries also refer to specific European objectives and the goal of reducing the dropout rate and improving results in international assessments, such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). For example, in Luxembourg, raising achievement policies have two main targets: reducing early school leaving rates to below 10% and increasing tertiary education rates to 66%. Belgium (Flemish speaking community), Hungary and Malta have similar action plans to reduce early school leaving, following the EU 2020 strategy. Finally, the Croatian 'Strategy of Education, Science and Technology' includes measures in line with principles such as respect for interculturalism and the European dimension of education to reduce inequality and prejudice against members of other cultural groups.

In most countries, therefore, raising achievement is a policy priority which refers to and targets all learners. Some countries are introducing policies which focus on tackling educational inequalities. More countries now consider inclusion as a way to raise achievement and promote excellence for all. Chapter 4, '[Key Challenges of Raising Achievement](#)', further discusses the potential of inclusion as an effective strategy to promote learner success (please refer to the section called '[Inclusive education and raising achievement](#)').

## National policies which target raising achievement

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The majority of countries aim to raise achievement through policies which may focus on changes to the curriculum, assessment, pedagogy and/or school organisation. Some countries develop specific programmes. Following an analysis of the materials, the country policy information in this chapter has been organised according to the following themes:

- Increasing engagement and school attendance
- Reducing attainment gaps between different groups of learners
- Increasing attainment in core competences
- Improving learner health and well-being
- Providing additional support for schools with lower learner outcomes



- Improving transition between phases of education
- Increasing the involvement of parents and local communities.

For each theme, policy information with country examples is summarised below.

### **Increasing engagement and school attendance**

Countries increasingly believe that promoting engagement and supporting young people to complete their education are essential to improve outcomes for the individual and society (European Agency, 2016b). A growing number of countries have policies in place to increase engagement and reduce early school leaving in order to avoid school failure. These countries include Belgium (Flemish speaking community), Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Iceland, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, Spain and UK (England). For example, Latvia's 'Education Development Guidelines 2014–2020' include preventive and compensatory measures for children and young people at risk of poverty and early school leaving. In Malta, the Social Services Department gives vulnerable families a financial parental allowance, which is linked to regular school attendance.

The Icelandic Government's recent reforms aim to reduce the high dropout rate and address its consequences. Reforms in teacher education, the organisation of compulsory and upper-secondary education, a new national curriculum and a new national qualifications framework are designed to increase the relevance of education. At the same time, the Icelandic Ministry of Education, Science and Culture has been in close contact with international organisations, such as the OECD and EU working groups, in order to reduce dropout.

Some of Spain's autonomous communities have introduced measures aiming to reduce the number of compulsory secondary education learners at risk of exclusion in an inclusive context. These include second-chance and counselling programmes. Some educational authorities track learners who leave their training early and use digital literacy to give access to distance learning opportunities that can improve learners' personal, social and working lives.

In Estonia, the legal framework of the Basic Schools and Upper-Secondary Schools Act supports measures to reduce early school leaving. These include: assessing readiness for school, supporting learners' development and providing individual support and alternative options for education. Local governments also organise training for parents to help them to fulfil their duty and ensure that their children attend school.

Finland uses flexible basic education as a policy to avoid dropout. This involves the collaboration of professionals. It targets learners in grades 7–9 who show signs of underachievement and poor motivation, and who are at risk of exclusion from further studies and working life. The education of these learners is organised in small teaching groups in schools, workplaces and other learning environments.

Other countries focus on policies that support a smooth transition between education levels or different types of education, in order to prevent early school leaving. For example, in Italy, the reform of upper-secondary education in 2010, with a full roll-out in 2014/15, provides a more coherent and flexible framework of pathways in general, technical and vocational education (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2016).





Another policy measure to reduce dropout rates is the extension of compulsory education. For example, Hungary has introduced mandatory kindergarten from the age of three, instead of the age of five, in line with the Act on Public Education. Similarly, the UK (England) requires all young people to participate in some form of education or training until they reach the age of 18 (in the 'Raising the Participation Age' policy).

### **Reducing attainment gaps between different groups of learners**

The OECD (2012) notes that almost one in every five learners does not reach a basic minimum level of skills due to personal or social circumstances (indicating a lack of fairness). Some countries are applying measures that benefit these disadvantaged learners. For example, the Scottish Government's mission is to close the poverty-related attainment gap through targeted activity in literacy, numeracy and health and well-being. The UK (England) provides additional funding for state schools (the 'Pupil Premium') to raise the attainment of disadvantaged learners of all abilities and to close the gaps between them and their peers. In the UK (Northern Ireland), additional funding is provided for schools based on entitlement to free school meals through the 'Targeting Social Need' fund. Schools have discretion in how this is spent to improve outcomes for all learners. Likewise, Malta's 'Education for All' framework aims to close the attainment and achievement gaps between diverse learners.

Many national policies set out schools' specific duties and responsibilities to address different learner needs and reduce attainment gaps. In Austria, for example, the 'Guidelines for Monitoring Inclusive Quality' (2016) provide standards for inclusive classroom practice, teaching and school development, taking account of learner diversity.

Denmark and Finland, unlike most countries, do not have specific legislation regarding the education of learners with special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. Instead, general legislation highlights that teaching should be accessible to all. It must be organised and performed with consideration for learners' different needs.

The UK (England) has a new *Special educational needs and disability code of practice* (Department for Education, 2015). It sets out statutory guidance for everyone working with children and young people with SEN and disabilities aged 0 to 25. It states that the voices of parents, carers and learners must be central in shaping decisions about their lives. The Special Educational Needs and Disability Order in the UK (Northern Ireland) also states this. Malta has recently launched several policies within the 'Education for All' framework structure, which aim to eliminate 'deficit' thinking around SEN and bring about change.

Recent policy developments in the additional learning needs system can also be found in the UK (Wales). In December 2016, the Minister for Lifelong Learning and Welsh Language introduced the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal Bill. It outlines changes to the system for supporting children and young people with additional learning needs. These reforms focus on inclusion and put children and young people at the centre, ensuring that they are supported to reach their full potential.

In Sweden, schools must also attend to all learners' needs through an action plan for provision which is continuously evaluated. Similar measures are in place in Luxembourg, where each school offers learners with SEN an individualised educational achievement plan. Additionally, specific support centres provide services for learners who experience



difficulties in following the mainstream curriculum. The support centres offer special programmes for learners (aged 11 to 15) with emotional and behavioural problems, support for the transition between primary and secondary education and second-chance classes.

In Cyprus, the ‘School and Social Inclusion Actions’ project aims to support people living in or at risk of poverty and social exclusion. It aims to reduce early school leaving, improve learning outcomes and reduce school failure and delinquency. The project’s measures include, among others, programmes for reinforcing learning and creativity, providing psychosocial support, and staff training. The project schools/clusters of schools are selected based on specific objectives and measurable criteria, regardless of the geographical area. The project will be extended to cover 15% of the total pupil population. Participating schools work closely with their local communities to develop synergy with all stakeholders.

Some countries (e.g. Belgium (Flemish speaking community), Cyprus, Finland, Italy, Netherlands) provide support for immigrant learners. This usually involves integrating language and subject learning from the earliest grades. For example, in Belgium (Flemish speaking community), the ‘Welcoming education for non-Dutch speaking children’ policy (2016) provides additional teaching hours for non-Dutch speaking learners in primary and secondary education. In Italy, language support for newly-arrived migrant learners is an essential policy measure to raise achievement and reduce the risk of early school leaving (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2016). Likewise, in Estonia, language immersion programmes reduce the attainment gaps between learners in Estonian-language schools and Russian-language schools.

Another example of immigrant education can be found in Finland. Learners from immigrant families are supported in various ways, such as preparatory instruction (900 hours for six- to ten-year-olds and 1,000 hours for older pupils), remedial instruction in both mother tongue and Finnish/Swedish language and versatile and flexible methods of assessment. Similarly, Iceland promotes equal opportunities for the growing number of immigrant learners by providing additional support to enable them to reach the same proficiency in reading comprehension as other learners.

Finally, some countries (Austria, Denmark, Finland, Luxembourg, Poland and Sweden) provide lessons or help in the migrant learners’ mother tongue. For example, in Poland, mother tongue teaching may be carried out in minority languages (e.g. Belarusian, German, Lithuanian and Ukrainian) for learners aged three and over, at the parents’ request. The right to mother tongue teaching for specific languages is based on the idea that fluency in the mother tongue increases learners’ ability to master the language of instruction (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2016).

### **Increasing attainment in core competences**

The development of higher-level skills and competences that meet the demands of the labour market is crucial for effective social integration and cohesion (European Commission, 2016). Some countries have policies to increase achievement in core competences, mainly targeting literacy and numeracy skills. Iceland, Ireland, Malta and the UK have specific national numeracy and literacy strategies. More specifically, in the



UK (Scotland), the ‘National Improvement Framework’ sets out to achieve excellence by ensuring that every learner achieves the highest standards in literacy and numeracy. Similarly, in Ireland, the ‘National Strategy on Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life’ 2011–2020 sets a clear vision for raising standards in these core areas in early years, primary and post-primary settings by 2020.

Iceland’s education reforms aim to improve reading performance by 2018; all pre-primary and compulsory schools are required to have a literacy policy in line with the 2013 ‘National Curriculum Guide’. Standards are being developed for the reading proficiency levels to be attained by learners at each stage of compulsory schooling. Literacy will be measured regularly from pre-primary school to the end of compulsory school.

Many countries are re-designing their curriculum policies, by focusing more on developing core competences, rather than subject content. The RA literature review highlighted numerous ways to enhance learner achievement, including the use of a flexible and inclusive curriculum (European Agency, 2016a). Examples of such curricular frameworks can be found in Croatia, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia and UK (Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales).

### Key competences in Iceland’s ‘National Curriculum Guide’

According to the 2011 ‘National Curriculum Guide’, the fundamental pillars of education in Iceland are divided into six categories, which are interrelated and interdependent.

They are:

- Literacy in the widest sense
- Education towards sustainability
- Equality
- Creativity
- Health and welfare
- Democracy and human rights.

The ‘National Curriculum Guide’ also defines key competences in five categories with competence criteria for learners completing grades 4, 7 and 10. These are:

- Expression and communication
- Creative and critical thinking
- Independence and co-operation
- Using media and information
- Responsibility for and evaluation of one’s own education.

Competence criteria emphasise the ability to use methods, practices and logical thinking. The fundamental pillars aim to promote equality and democracy to ensure well-educated and healthy citizens who can participate in and change and improve society.



In Croatia, the new 'National Curriculum Framework' supports the transition to a system based on competence and learner achievement (learning outcomes). This differs from the previous framework, which focused on content. The new framework helps teachers to move beyond subject specialisation and to take part in developing learners' core competences through interdisciplinary themes. These themes include personal and social development, health, safety and environmental protection, learning to learn, entrepreneurship, civil education and the promotion of learner-centred education.

Multidisciplinary learning modules are also part of Finland's new 'National Core Curriculum'. The new curriculum requires teachers to collaborate, crossing the borders of traditional school subjects in order to increase transversal and thinking skills. Finland also has a web-based service, called [LukiMat](#), that includes information about learning difficulties in reading and mathematics for educators, other school staff and parents.

Estonia provides another example of a flexible curriculum, where schools and teachers are free to choose the study material or to develop their own. Digital focus is one of the five strategic aims of the Estonian 'Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020'; textbooks are available in digital form and teachers can choose and get feedback on materials online.

### **Improving learner health and well-being**

Mental health problems are a growing concern in Europe (WHO, 2015), so countries are increasingly focusing on education to prevent and address associated issues. Several countries (e.g. Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Sweden and UK (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland)) emphasise the promotion of learner health and well-being by providing different support services. For example, in Belgium (Flemish speaking community), the pupil guidance centres and the pedagogical counselling services aim to ensure learners' well-being by providing appropriate mentoring, from a physical, psychological, pedagogical and social perspective. Similarly, Finland's welfare reform requires the many professional groups working in schools and education to act together to develop pupils' learning and well-being more holistically.

In Sweden, health service professionals and psychologists are part of a school pupil-welfare team that supports educational staff, pupils and parents in dealing with education issues. In Ireland, the Child and Family Agency is a dedicated state agency responsible for improving well-being and outcomes for learners. It delivers an integrated model for educational welfare. In addition, specific guidelines have been developed to support learner well-being in schools. These guidelines adopt a comprehensive, whole-school approach to mental health and well-being.

Denmark has developed a tool which enables municipalities and schools to work systematically to increase pupils' well-being. This tool supports inclusive learning communities and is based on the guidelines produced by the Danish Centre for Educational Environments.

Finally, the UK (England) is taking steps to significantly improve the support available to schools to help promote children's mental health. At the heart of this was a consultation launched in December 2017, *Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Provision: a Green Paper* (Department of Health and Department of Education, 2017).



The UK (Northern Ireland) has also identified learner emotional health and well-being as a priority for action. Since 2007, the Department of Education has been working in partnership with all key statutory, voluntary and community sectors to develop the ‘Pupils’ Emotional Health and Well-Being Programme’. The programme focuses on prevention by building coping skills and complements the personal development strand of the Northern Ireland revised curriculum. Schools also have access to counselling support and the services of the Education and Welfare Service.

### The ‘Interesting School’ initiative in Estonia

The *Huvitav Kool* (interesting school) initiative by the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research aims to reflect society’s expectations of school and education in order to make the learning experience interesting to learners, teachers, parents and other education stakeholders.

An interesting school is characterised by openness and a learning process that encourages creativity and intellectual effort, by offering a wide range of choices. The initiative covers four connected fields in general education:

- Community involvement
- Professional teachers
- Optimal curricula
- Supportive external evaluation processes.

This initiative sends a clear message to all stakeholders that school attendance must be interesting. It stresses the importance of developing learners’ natural curiosity and creativity.

Source: [Huvitav Kool](#)

### Providing additional support for schools with lower learner outcomes

In many low-performing, disadvantaged schools, teachers, school leaders and the wider community fail to offer a quality learning experience for the most vulnerable learners. This is because they frequently lack resources, internal capacity or appropriate support to improve (OECD, 2012).

In some countries (e.g. Finland, UK (Northern Ireland)), extra funding is devolved to local authorities or municipalities to support schools in disadvantaged areas or schools with lower learner outcomes. For example, Helsinki (Finland) has a system that provides additional resources to schools working under difficult circumstances.

Likewise, in the UK (Northern Ireland), schools can use the ‘Extended Schools’ funding policy for enrichment activities to overcome the effects of disadvantage (e.g. booster classes, music, sport, public speaking activities, etc.). Low-achieving schools in Northern Ireland can receive targeted support for any areas of weaknesses identified by the



Education and Training Inspectorate, the national body responsible for inspecting the quality of provision across a range of education providers.

In Ireland, the main policy initiative to tackle educational disadvantage is the Action Plan for Educational Inclusion, 'Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools' (DEIS). The Action Plan focuses on addressing the educational needs of learners from disadvantaged communities (aged 3–18 years). It includes an overarching programme to provide a more integrated and effective range of educational interventions which support inclusion in schools and communities.

### The TEIP programme in Portugal

In Portugal, the government launched the 'Priority Intervention Educational Territories' (TEIP) programme in 137 groups of schools located in socially and economically disadvantaged areas. These areas experience poverty, social exclusion, violence and indiscipline, with high rates of early school leaving and school failure. TEIP's central goals are to prevent and reduce early school leaving and absenteeism, to reduce indiscipline and to promote the educational success of all learners.

One example is a cluster of five schools, located in a suburban area close to Lisbon, where many families have severe financial difficulties. The schools' practice includes targeted interventions in particular subjects, specific classes to prevent grade retention, teacher pedagogical meetings and reflective conversations, interventions on learners with or at risk of developing disruptive behaviour, etc. This school group promotes inclusive education by ensuring that the learners acquire key competences.

### Improving transition between phases of education

The importance of well-designed transition approaches in supporting learners and raising their achievement has been widely recognised (e.g. Hanewald, 2013). Some countries (e.g. Austria, Belgium (Flemish speaking community), Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Ireland, Luxembourg and UK (England and Northern Ireland)) emphasise transition practices from pre-primary to basic education, and from basic to upper-secondary education. These practices might include specific programmes or might take the form of career counselling and guidance. In Hungary, for example, career guidance and counselling services operate within the public education system at school level and beyond.

In Estonia, career counselling is conducted by specialists who work in county educational support service centres to improve transition. Other transition measures include additional studies for one year for learners who have completed basic education and action plans for learners with SEN.

The UK (Northern Ireland) has a transition programme, which delivers teacher professional learning with a literacy and numeracy focus. This supports transition from key stage 2 to key stage 3 (i.e. from primary into secondary education).



## Increasing the involvement of parents and local communities

The RA project has highlighted the importance of schools receiving support from external stakeholders, such as parents/carers and local employers. Some countries have policies which specifically aim to increase community involvement. In Sweden, for example, the 'National Curriculum' states the importance of parents' participation in planning learners' education. Similarly, in the Netherlands, the 'Suitable Education' policy focuses on parental engagement in primary and secondary education.

In the UK (Northern Ireland) the 'Extended Schools' policy and the 'Full Schools Network' encourage schools to connect with their local communities. In particular, schools must seek parents' views and provide an annual written report at each key stage/phase of education. Parents' associations are also encouraged. Elsewhere in the UK, the Welsh Government is aiming to embed person-centred practice across all education settings to ensure that the views of the learner and their family are included in decisions. This includes the use of tools that reflect individual strengths and interests (Please refer to: [Person-centred practice in education: a guide for early years, schools and colleges in Wales](#)).

In Finland, the Finnish Parents' League involves parents in building a good learning environment for all children and young people. The League has started many projects to increase parents' participation in schools. It works to influence national opinion and decisions (for example, regarding the curriculum). Another relevant Finnish initiative is the 'Power Families' project, developed by the University of Turku in 2010–2014. It involves an evidence-based model for early intervention for learners with behavioural problems and includes parent counselling through internet and phone contact.

Finally, since 2012, some autonomous communities in Spain (e.g. Andalusia) have converted schools into learning communities (LCs), open to every member of the community. Both the school management procedures and the pupils' learning and development incorporate the active participation of families, associations and volunteers. Overall, the results indicate that LCs are an effective way to address educational inequalities and make learners more committed to learning.





## The 'Achievement for All' programme in the UK (England)

'Achievement for All' (AfA) is an evidence-based whole-school improvement framework which helps schools to identify good practices and highlight areas of challenge (Department for Education, 2011).

The programme targets four key areas:

- Leadership
- Teaching and learning
- Wider opportunities
- Parental engagement.

AfA is a not-for-profit organisation that provides resources and support to enable teachers to strengthen their links with the parents of vulnerable learners. Teachers develop the skills to hold 'structured conversations' with parents/carers, increasing engagement and creating a school culture of mutual listening.

AfA has worked with over 2,500 schools (3–19 years) in England and Wales, along with schools in Latvia, Lithuania, Norway and the USA. Recent data from an independent evaluation in England showed that learners vulnerable to underachievement in AfA schools made more progress annually than similar learners in other schools (for more information, please refer to the ['Achievement for All' website](#)).

## Attainment and achievement data

Education stakeholders increasingly note the need to view learners' progress holistically and consider areas of learning beyond attainment assessed by traditional tests or examinations. This involves 'measuring' outcomes that may better reflect the success of the education system, such as learner destinations.

Discussions among stakeholders also extend to the use of assessment information for different – and sometimes conflicting – purposes. As Wiliam notes: 'the challenge is to realise the benefits of testing while avoiding the significant negative effects that testing can have' (2017, p. 9). This section provides information about countries' use of tests to measure attainment, as well as the use of wider measures of achievement.

### National tests in core subjects and qualifications

Numerous countries (e.g. Austria, Denmark, Estonia, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Portugal, Slovakia, UK (England and Scotland)) collect results from national tests in core competences, usually literacy and numeracy. For example, in Hungary, the 'National Assessment of Basic Competencies' assesses learners' reading ability and mathematical skills in grades 6, 8 and 10 in every school. This assessment is





based on the new ‘National Core Curriculum’ (Government Decree 110/2012), which defines the key competences and skills to be acquired. It also examines the relationship between the learners’ performance and their background characteristics.

Many countries (e.g. Austria, Belgium (Flemish speaking community), Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Ireland, Luxembourg, Slovenia, Sweden) also take part in international comparative assessments, including the OECD’s PISA. National decision-makers take the PISA results into account and, in some cases (e.g. in Sweden), they have resulted in a range of reforms. Likewise, the PISA results in 2012 and 2015 prompted Iceland’s measures to address declining literacy rates among learners leaving compulsory school.

In some countries, specific public institutions are responsible for preparing tests and collecting national attainment data. For example, in the Netherlands, the National Institute for Educational Measurement (CITO) operates as an important national developer of exams, tests and assessment methods. In Ireland, the Educational Research Centre periodically collects information about literacy and numeracy achievement through assessments of samples of learners at primary level. Similarly, in Cyprus, the Centre of Educational Research and Evaluation prepares tests each year for learners in the third and sixth grades in public schools to identify those at high risk of literacy difficulties. The Centre also maintains a database on the education system.

In Croatia, the National Centre for External Evaluation of Education sets the state graduation exam for secondary learners in core subjects (Croatian language, mathematics and a foreign language). It provides results for comparison through a transparent procedure. Learners from vocational and art education programmes are assessed through a separate final exam, but they can also take the state exam if they wish.

In the UK (Scotland), national qualifications data is additionally gathered through ‘Insight’. This national benchmarking tool for all teachers includes leavers’ destinations, attendance statistics, exclusion statistics and performance of learners who are in targeted groups. Secondary schools and local authorities use the tool to identify areas of success and areas for improvement.

Finland is one of a few countries participating in the RA project which does not use national tests or exams for whole age cohorts to monitor performance trends. The [Finnish Education Evaluation Centre](#) co-ordinates national monitoring of learning outcomes and draws national-level indicators from sample-based assessments. Education outcomes are organised into three categories:

- Efficiency (i.e. functioning of the education system)
- Effectiveness (i.e. learner outcomes)
- Economy (i.e. resource allocation).

Along with the national data on core subjects and qualifications, some countries collect wider ‘measures’ of achievement. For example, the UK (Northern Ireland) gathers attendance data, information about suspensions and exclusions from school, data on learners in alternative education and participation rates in extended school activities. Denmark requires schools to provide annual reports about learners’ well-being, which is regulated in the *Folkeskole* reform. Finally, in the UK (Scotland), schools collect data relating to achievements both inside and outside school at local and national levels (for



example, data on sporting activities, drama activities, musical success, volunteering, fundraising activities, etc.).

In the UK (England), the government publishes data from assessments taken by learners with particular SEN, as well as data for all learners. In Iceland, Statistics Iceland (the centre for official statistics) collects and disseminates data on the hours in special education, the number of school days and time used for individual subject areas. Similarly, in the UK (Scotland), information and evidence relating to learners with additional support for learning needs across five years are collected and reported to the Scottish Parliament in the form of statistical information and qualitative information from a range of sources.

### A balanced approach to evaluation and assessment in the Netherlands

Learner assessment in the Netherlands is largely the responsibility of schools and classroom teachers who use formative tools, supported by standardised assessment. Evaluation and assessment are key elements of the 'results-oriented work' national policy, which aims to raise the achievement of all learners. This policy supports goal-directed work with ambitious learning targets. Primary and secondary schools must monitor learners and use standardised end-of-primary-school tests.

CITO has developed instruments to track the development of individual learners, classes and schools. This is done twice per academic year: in the middle of the school year (January) and at the end of the school year (June/July).

These teacher-based (formative) and central (summative) assessments focus on clarifying reference levels for pupil learning and strengthening results-oriented work in schools.

Overall, the evaluation and assessment system in the Netherlands combines school-based and central elements, quantitative and qualitative approaches, formative and summative assessment improvement and accountability functions, and vertical and horizontal responsibilities of schools.

## School evaluation and quality assurance at national and local level

Standards-based systems should include a range of measurements that provide information for both policy-makers and practitioners. These include aggregated data to show trends in learner achievement and to identify schools performing at high and low ends of the spectrum, as well as classroom-level information on individual learners that allows teachers to adjust instruction (Looney, 2011). In the RA survey, many countries reported using a combination of standardised assessment and school-level information. These different approaches are discussed below.



## School self-evaluation

Standardised assessment is often combined with school-level data, in the form of reports on various activities and results (e.g. of teacher assessment). Most countries collect school-level data for accountability purposes (e.g. Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Iceland, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Netherlands, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, UK (England, Northern Ireland and Wales)).

In Lithuania, schools use self-evaluation tools which focus on: learning progress and career planning, general competences and competence in learning to learn, communication, personal skills, initiative, creativity and socio-civic activities.

In Italy, the National System for Evaluation of Schools has introduced mandatory school self-evaluation, which takes account of learner performance data, among other elements (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2016). From the 2015/16 school year, the school self-evaluation report will be followed by an external evaluation. The school self-assessment report and the results of the improvement process over a three-year evaluation cycle will be made public.

Moreover, Law 107/2015 – known as the Good School Reform Act – has introduced internal evaluation of teachers to recognise teachers' competence. The school manager evaluates teachers and gives them a bonus according to criteria established by each school's Committee for the Evaluation of Teachers (Eurydice, 2016a).

All schools in Slovakia have a duty to produce an annual evaluation report that particularly examines proposed school development for the next two years, educational activity and outcomes and financial management. Reports are submitted to the school board for approval.

In Belgium (Flemish speaking community), schools can determine, according to their own needs, which data they collect and how they analyse and process it to assess their internal quality. The government invests in developing tests to support schools in their internal quality assurance. Some educational networks also organise tests – for instance, at the end of elementary school. In Spain, school staff carry out internal evaluations with support from regional education authorities, with the collection of school data on basic competences. This process, however, may be different in each of the 17 autonomous communities.

In Poland, internal evaluation must be carried out every school year. Its scope may vary depending on each school's needs. Internal quality assurance covers three aspects: evaluation, compliance auditing and support. The school head carries out pedagogical supervision, in co-operation with other management staff and teachers. External evaluation considers the internal evaluation results (Eurydice, 2016b).

In the UK (Scotland), schools use several documents to evaluate their work (e.g. [How Good Is Our School?](#)). These documents, which inspectors develop in partnership with practitioners, propose questions to address in the self-evaluation process. They offer a set of quality indicators against which the schools can evaluate their work. In the UK (Northern Ireland), schools use documents produced by the Education and Training Inspectorate which also include quality indicators. Similarly, in Ireland, standards for teaching and learning as well as for leadership and management are available to schools through the



revised 'School Self-Evaluation Guidelines in 2016' and the quality framework for primary and post-primary schools 'Looking at Our School 2016'.

In Estonia, the Centre for Ethics at the University of Tartu has developed a school model, which considers both educational and character-building responsibilities (the 'Good School' project). The 'Good School' model focuses on self-evaluation and self-analysis. Between 2009 and 2015, 46 schools from all over Estonia sent self-analysis reports. Nine schools have received the 'School of Values' education award. This acknowledges their effective work in creating an environment that supports holistic growth.

Finally, in Iceland, a small web-based project, named *Skólapúlsinn* (the school pulse), helps school administrators to monitor what is happening in their school. This project is designed to move testing and surveying into a streamlined service. Schools can choose to be part of this data collection process and compare their results with other participating schools.

### **External evaluation**

School-level data is also gathered from external evaluations, usually through the inspection process. In some countries (such as Belgium, Croatia, Lithuania and Sweden), specific agencies are responsible for carrying out inspections and use pre-determined indicators or criteria to evaluate schools. In Belgium (Flemish speaking community), the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training inspects a number of schools and centres in Flanders and Brussels each year. Each school must be inspected at least once every 10 years. An agency for quality assurance in education and training (AKOV) conducts quality assurance at the system level. In Croatia, in addition to school self-evaluation, the quality assurance system includes external evaluation based on objective standards and criteria. This is implemented by an independent agency, the National Centre for External Evaluation of Education.

In Lithuania, the external evaluation procedure for each school is organised and carried out at least every seven years. The National School Evaluation Agency conducts the evaluation. It uses a system of 67 indicators in five areas of activity: school culture, education and learning, achievements, aid to learners, and strategic management of schools. In Slovakia, an independent state authority carries out external evaluations of schools. Evaluation criteria for each school year are published on its website.

In the UK (Scotland), Education Scotland has been established to promote improvement in the quality of experience, achievements and standards for all learners. External evaluations are carried out by the local authority (or board of governors for independent schools) and inspections by Her Majesty's Inspectors within Education Scotland (Eurydice, 2016c).

In Malta, education officers (equivalent to education inspectors) visit teachers in the classroom to provide support and to evaluate teaching, including subject content. On a national level, the Quality Assurance Department conducts a school audit every five years to evaluate the whole school system. Similarly, in Sweden, the Swedish Schools Inspectorate is responsible for inspecting all schools. The Swedish National Agency for Education evaluates the school system to identify and highlight those areas where national development is needed.

In Italy, the National System for Evaluation of Schools is responsible for quality assurance in the education and training system (Eurydice, 2016a). School self-evaluation reports are followed by an external evaluation, co-ordinated by an inspector, which involves external



teams visiting up to 10% of all schools each year. The school self-assessment reports, along with the results of the improvement process over a three-year evaluation cycle, are made public (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2016).

### **Analysis of learner achievement**

Countries collect and analyse learner-level data in a variety of ways and for different purposes. For example, in Latvia, each pupil's learning is analysed twice a year during the meetings of the Methodical Commission (MC) and Pedagogical Council (PC). Test results are recorded, compared with the average ratings in the country, analysed during the meetings of the MC or PC, and discussed individually in the meetings of the board and of teachers of particular subjects. School self-evaluation reports, including a section on learning outcomes and marks, are publicly available on regional websites.

In Denmark, an annual quality report serves as the basis for dialogue at municipal level (between municipal administration and school principals) regarding learners' academic development.

Finland, which does not have a school inspection system, typically monitors effectiveness through systematic observation, screening and discussions between the learners, parents, teachers and school welfare professionals. Similarly, in Luxembourg, where school evaluation is mostly conducted through self-evaluation, the Ministry of Education has allocated a detailed project plan to schools in order to evaluate school development and educational success.

In Portugal, schools participating in the TEIP programme usually collect data regarding parents' involvement, learner progress, staff training and learner satisfaction.

### **Stakeholder surveys**

Some countries (such as Estonia, Finland, Malta and UK (England, Northern Ireland and Wales)) carry out stakeholder surveys for quality assurance purposes. Estonian schools, for example, have conducted surveys on the availability of support specialists. In Finland, the School Health Promotion study is carried out nationwide every second year to monitor the health and well-being of learners in the first, fifth and eighth grades and of 14–20-year-old learners.

Malta has developed an online profile for measuring core competences in English. It is currently used to assess migrant learners.

In Poland, the Education Information System gathers information about the total number of learners (up to the age of 18) who drop out of school in a given year. The data is collected twice a year and aggregated at central, regional, local and school level. It is used for several purposes:

- Policy-making at all levels of educational administration
- Supporting an effective funding system
- Analysing the efficiency of the use of public resources on education
- Co-ordinating the pedagogical evaluation system across the country



- Enhancing the quality of education (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2016).

Finally, in the UK (England, Northern Ireland and Wales), along with the self-evaluation and inspection procedures, stakeholder surveys are carried out frequently throughout the school year for school improvement purposes. The stakeholders might include learners, staff, parents and other educational agencies.

## Support for teachers and school leaders

Some countries have invested in support for teachers and school leaders to improve school effectiveness through legislation on teacher education and targeted initiatives. Iceland, for example, emphasises the development of the teaching profession as a central goal in its reform agenda. The Academic Council on Professional Development of Teachers, established in 2012, is working on lifelong learning and professional development for teachers in pre-primary, primary and secondary schools. Schools can also apply for funds to support school development and in-service training for teachers.

In Belgium (Flemish speaking community), pedagogical services and universities support the school team through a professional development programme on the Decree regarding measures for pupils with special educational needs (the 'M-decree'). The programme aims to develop more inclusive schools in partnership with all local stakeholders (i.e. parents, pupils, pupil guidance centres, pedagogical counselling services, special education teachers and other experts). Tutoring is used to professionalise and broaden staff competencies. In each of the 60 participating schools, a core team of five to ten professionals focuses on inclusive pedagogy and inclusive school policy and promotes strategies such as collaborative team practice, coaching and inclusive leadership.

### Raising standards through professional development in the UK (Wales)

The UK (Wales) is currently undertaking an ambitious education reform programme to raise standards. The Welsh Government has introduced programmes to support teachers, leaders and support staff with their professional development, focusing on three levels:

- Core skills development within schools
- Advanced skills development
- Specialist skills development.

The Welsh Government has also launched a professional learning programme to support all practitioners to successfully meet the opportunities and challenges arising from the new curriculum. This programme supports practitioners to develop effectively and to improve outcomes for all learners, including those with additional learning needs.





In Hungary, professional teaching staff are involved in the planning and organisation of public educational institutions. Their opinion is taken into account in teacher qualification. In Portugal, the 'National Programme to Promote School Success' provides training for school leaders and teachers.

In Croatia, the National Centre for External Evaluation of Education has established a committee to develop a 'Model teacher licensing system' for primary and secondary school teachers and student teachers. This licensing system is based on the defined qualification standard. It aims to prepare teachers to compete in the labour market in Croatia and other EU member countries. In Cyprus, the Department of Teachers' In-Service Training at the Pedagogical Institute supports teachers at all levels. It offers training courses which promote creative learning practices and encourage innovation and critical reflection.

In Ireland, the Professional Development Service for Teachers is a national support service offering professional learning opportunities to teachers and school leaders in a range of pedagogical, curricular and educational areas. In addition, the National Council for Special Education supports teachers in the area of SEN and inclusion. Recognising the importance of effective leadership in schools, the Department of Education established the Centre for School Leadership in 2015. It provides services ranging from pre-appointment training and induction of newly-appointed school leaders, to continuous professional development throughout the leaders' career.

Finally, in the UK (Northern Ireland), mentor support programmes are in place to support newly-appointed leaders. Leaders are encouraged to develop professional partnerships and critical friends and networks to support them in their work. The district inspector and boards of governors are responsible for both challenging and supporting the principal's work. This programme is based on the distributed leadership approach and emphasises the key role of all senior staff in the school's success.

#### West Belfast Area Learning Community, UK (Northern Ireland)

West Belfast includes Northern Ireland's most disadvantaged and deprived communities. Nine schools in the area are collaborating to raise the achievement of all learners in several key areas. Schools started working together through a 'forced relationship' – a small amount of funding was given to encourage this. Principals met five to six times per year to discuss areas of common interest and concern.

Gradually, the sub-groups established have enabled staff to share and learn from one another, pooling ideas and expertise. All the schools have made excellent links within the West Belfast Partnership Board, which provides access to a range of services and agencies that work in the local community.

The West Belfast Area Learning Community is now recognised for its good practice, as most schools have shown significant improvement. One of the schools was the highest performing school in Northern Ireland, while another was also among the top performers (2013 data).



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## Other policies which may influence attainment and achievement

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In addition to the country information set out in the sections above, some countries provided information about school organisation and the role of specialist support/consultancy centres in raising learner achievement. These policies are discussed below.

### School organisation

Many countries have reported on other policies which can affect learner achievement. Some countries, for example, focus on school organisation and increasing school autonomy as a way to promote school effectiveness and achieve better learner outcomes. Such a development can be found in Austria, where education is increasingly decentralised. Likewise, in the Netherlands, decentralisation is an aim of the 'Suitable Education' policy; school boards, as local stakeholders, can influence attainment levels by providing quality inclusive education.

Estonia has a high level of school autonomy. Teachers have flexibility in selecting learning content and teaching and assessment strategies. Another example of increased school autonomy is Scotland's 'School Improvement Partnership Programme' – a solution-focused approach that aims to tackle educational inequality. Teachers and school leaders lead the school improvement efforts, which are characterised by a shared commitment to improving outcomes for all learners.

### Specialised consultancy centres

The *Organisation of Provision – Synthesis of Country Information* highlighted that:

*Skilling up teachers through collaborative working, with input from voluntary organisations and other agencies in the local community can be more cost effective, with the added benefit of greater coherence of services around learners and families* (European Agency, 2013a, p. 5).

Countries in the RA country survey provide examples of specialised consultancy, which help to improve opportunities for learner success. For example, in Budapest (Hungary), a resource centre which provides education for learners with physical disabilities also serves as a resource centre to support mainstream schools. Likewise, in Denmark, the National Board of Social Services co-ordinates specialised social service and special education. A special unit (VISO) is responsible for providing consultancy by monitoring and collecting knowledge on different target groups and developing specific professional procedures.

In Sweden, schools and teachers receive help from local resource centres, supported by the Swedish National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools. This agency also runs four national resource centres with specialised knowledge. In Ireland, the National Educational Psychological Service supports the development of the academic, social and emotional competence of all learners. It prioritises its support for learners at risk of





educational disadvantage and those with SEN. By adopting a consultative model of service, it particularly focuses on empowering teachers to intervene effectively with those learners.

Cyprus has also stressed the valuable support of educational psychologists who provide services to learners, parents and teachers. Furthermore, Estonia supports the work of schools by providing educational and career counselling services, as well as specific services for learners with SEN from Pathfinder Centres.

In the Netherlands, regional centres for tailored education, named the Alliance for Suitable Education, support several mainstream primary schools that include learners with special needs through a service centre. These schools have piloted specific models to assess the needs of learners with learning and/or behavioural problems. This assessment process focuses on the learning environment, peer group, teacher strategies, school and parents, as well as learners.

Some countries have argued for a change in the role of special schools. They suggest that special schools move from providing segregated education, to working as partners with mainstream schools to provide quality education for all learners. In most countries, closer links have been built between mainstream and special schools, or special schools have been developed into resource centres. For example, Lithuania has reported the re-organisation of special schools into multifunctional centres offering additional services (e.g. social, community, public, virtual) to meet the expectations of local communities.

Finally, some other countries (e.g. Finland, Malta, Netherlands) have reported that special programmes, targeting particular learners or areas, also have the potential to influence attainment and achievement levels. Malta, for example, is investing in a number of after-school programmes which support learners and their parents/carers in attaining further learning. These programmes, run by the Foundation of Educational Services and by the National Literacy Agency, target both vulnerable and other learners and enhance their literacy and numeracy skills.

## Summary points

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The Raising Achievement survey has provided information on policy and practice designed to address early school leaving and raise learner achievement. Many such policies include measures to support disadvantaged learners and promote positive outcomes for learners at risk of marginalisation and underachievement. Other approaches include refining curriculum frameworks, emphasising core competences and advancing transversal skills. The importance of attending to learner health and well-being is also increasingly recognised, along with parental/family involvement and close links with local communities.

Countries are beginning to respond to the challenge of finding a balanced approach to evaluation and assessment, which measures other valuable aspects of the system beyond academic attainment. Most countries collect school-level data for quality assurance and accountability purposes, usually through internal measures and external evaluations, such as school inspection. However, only a few countries reported the systematic use of



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stakeholder surveys for quality assurance purposes, even though these can contribute significantly to school improvement processes.

Country policies are also focusing on strengthening the professions of teaching and school leadership and are recognising the benefits of collaborative practice in professional development and support. The country information above shows that focusing on continuous support for teachers and school leaders can be a strategic way to increase schools' capability to raise the achievement of all learners.

Finally, along with the main policy developments, countries have reported numerous policy challenges related to raising achievement. The following chapter discusses these in more detail.







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## 4. KEY CHALLENGES OF RAISING ACHIEVEMENT

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In the Raising Achievement project survey, participating countries reported on the key policy challenges which, from their perspective, impact on reducing inequality and raising learner achievement. This chapter discusses these challenges. It draws on information from survey responses, the work of the project LCs, communications on the project online forum and expert contributions during project visits and meetings. Recent research is also used in discussing potential solutions to the challenges raised. This chapter aims to help countries to develop evidence-informed strategies to raise the achievement of all learners.

### Inclusive education and raising achievement

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The analysis of country information has shown that Agency member countries increasingly see inclusion as a strategy for raising achievement and promoting excellence for all. Previous Agency work (European Agency, 2012a; 2013b) has documented the benefits of inclusive practice for all learners. National and international policy mandates call for the full participation of all learners in their local schools. However, many countries are voicing concerns regarding the quality of education provided in inclusive settings.

In the project survey, several countries (e.g. Austria, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Iceland, Luxembourg, Spain, Sweden, UK (England)) reported various challenges in developing and implementing policy on inclusive education. Areas of concern include:

- the number of learners with identified SEN/disabilities still not participating in mainstream education;
- educators' lack of knowledge and skills around inclusive education;
- the lack of cohesion across educational, health and social support measures for learners with SEN/disabilities.



In some countries, there are wide municipal and regional variations in the quantity and quality of support, with differences in school cultures regarding support allocation, time for joint planning and the use of digital learning.

Challenges can arise from a lack of clarity around the concepts of inclusive education and raising achievement and the relationship between them. Some countries have no clear guidelines about what is expected with regard to inclusive education and no shared concepts or common language around inclusive education and diversity. A narrow view of inclusion, primarily focusing on the placement of learners with additional support needs in mainstream classrooms, is still common. Teachers and other stakeholders see a need to offer ‘individualised’ approaches (and maybe staffing) to such learners. Unsurprisingly, many believe that inclusion requires additional resources and is therefore unrealistic and unworkable. For this reason, some countries have not yet fully implemented reform in schools, even though it is set out in national policies.

These challenges point to the need for a paradigm shift and change of attitudes and values in all stakeholders. A key principle of the Raising Achievement project was that inclusive education should be seen as an organising principle, underpinning school work on equity that gives all learners the opportunity to learn and discover their strengths and talents.

In terms of raising achievement, country responses to the project survey show that relevant policy initiatives aimed at tackling educational inequalities and closing the gap between higher and lower attainers include:

- focusing on developing core competences (literacy/numeracy);
- supporting learners vulnerable to underachievement;
- ensuring effective transition between phases of education;
- increasing engagement and reducing early school leaving;
- attending to learner health and well-being as fundamental to learning;
- increasing the involvement of parents, carers and communities.

However, initiatives to develop inclusive practice are often ‘additional’, rather than an integral part of education policy and practice. The Raising Achievement project findings highlight the need to focus on specific structures and processes to ensure that they support all learners equitably. These might involve:

- different learner groupings;
- staff and resource allocation;
- access to the curriculum;
- participation in wider school activities;
- opportunities for recognition and accreditation of progress and achievement.

Many challenges can be addressed most effectively by measures that benefit **all** learners. The project has stressed the effectiveness of inclusive learning communities (LCs) in increasing equity, ensuring that all learners receive the opportunities and support that they need to achieve. Within LCs, stakeholders support each other to increase their capacity and capability to take responsibility for and value all learners. The project has recognised the



need to avoid practices which lead to new and more subtle forms of segregation in mainstream settings (Florian et al., 2017). Instead of this, LCs can increase flexibility in terms of organisation, learning and teaching approaches and the use of specialist support, co-teaching and/or small-group teaching to benefit all learners. Other examples from the project include recognising the importance of health and well-being in the learning process (particularly developing a ‘growth mindset’), the need for co-operation with wider support services and the increased involvement of parents and the local community. *Key Actions for Raising Achievement: Guidance for teachers and school leaders* (European Agency, 2018) provides further information and examples of measures that benefit all learners.

### **Learner participation and engagement**

Inclusive practice enables genuine learner participation and gives each individual equitable opportunities for personal progress. In the project survey, countries reported several policy initiatives targeted towards learners considered to be vulnerable to underachievement. However, these initiatives do not always take account of the wide variation that can occur within groups organised according to designated labels. Therefore, they may benefit some learners more than others. This highlights the need to focus on each individual learner’s participation and engagement.

Learner engagement is often referred to as a key factor in successful learning. There is no agreement about a precise definition of ‘engagement’. However, the OECD notes that it refers to the ‘extent to which students identify with and value schooling outcomes, and participate in academic and non-academic school activities’ (2003, p. 8). Regarding the term ‘participation’, UNICEF describes it as: ‘an ongoing process of children’s expression and active involvement in decision-making at different levels in matters that concern them’ (2013, p. 7).

Considering the definitions above, it becomes clear that in order to increase engagement and participation, practice must be learner-centred. This equates to personalised learning, which differs from the approaches of differentiation or individualisation. Although many teachers differentiate activities for different learners or groups, teaching is still often led by the teacher rather than the learners themselves. Personalised learning means increasingly giving the learner control over their learning, rather than using ‘one-size-fits-all’ content and activities that may disadvantage or marginalise some learners. Personalisation requires teachers to see learners as individuals and plan with them, offering options for everyone. Rather than individual teaching, flexibility is key to provide a menu of opportunities to allow for personalisation and appropriate support.

In this process, learner voice is crucial when planning learning and providing support. Rather than categorising learners (often according to perceived deficits), a sound starting point may be recognising that all learners have a number of needs in common. For example, these may be regarding the curriculum, cognition, the management of learning and motivational and personal factors. UNESCO (2017) notes that learners themselves are an under-used resource that can overcome barriers to participation in lessons and contribute to improved learning opportunities for all class members. Please refer to the [RA literature review](#) for more information about personalised teaching and learning (European Agency, 2016a, section 6.2: ‘Personalised learning’).



Further findings from the RA project focus on the curriculum and, in particular, the need for curricular flexibility. While recognising the importance of subject knowledge, the project LCs explored the benefits of ‘deep learning’ with a focus on core competences. This involves a move away from ‘subject silos’ towards carefully planned opportunities that address issues of progression and continuity, particularly during transition between phases of education. Poor planning across subjects may lead to frequent repetition in classroom activities. This fails to provide the necessary challenge to develop core competences and can lead to learner disengagement.

The RA project LCs used a variety of approaches to address the issues discussed in this section. *Key Actions for Raising Achievement: Guidance for teachers and school leaders* provides further information and examples (European Agency, 2018).

The discussion above highlights a clear policy implication for countries: the need for a rights-based approach to education and learner participation and engagement within an inclusive school system. Inclusion should be established as a principle that underpins the development of a more equitable learner-centred system.

## Quality assurance and accountability

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The RA project work has recognised the challenge set out by the Council of the European Union (2017b), which notes the need to find a proper balance between autonomy and accountability. It is necessary to further develop quality assurance systems, including self-evaluation and quantitative and qualitative assessment, based on an understanding of school development established and shared with stakeholders.

Importantly, all quality assurance and accountability models should be based on objective judgements and grounded in valid evidence in a process that is clearly communicated to all stakeholders. National systems may include one or more different models. However, overall, they need to ensure that the pressure to align practice to identified standards and/or to achieve certain outcomes does not undermine professional accountability.

In the project survey, only a few countries explicitly expressed concern about their national quality assurance and accountability mechanisms. However, the literature shows that this issue is a continuing challenge across Europe and beyond.

Countries raised the particular issue of the inspection process hindering the co-operation needed to work towards quality improvement. Although inspections have traditionally been part of national quality assurance mechanisms, there is research evidence at European level that warns against unintended consequences. These include narrowing the curriculum or discouraging teachers from experimenting with new teaching methods (Ehren et al., 2015).

Some countries (e.g. Finland) seem to avoid such consequences through a system of professional accountability built on trust. In other countries (e.g. UK – all jurisdictions), self-evaluation is used (as a stand-alone approach or alongside inspection) to empower schools to take ownership of school and learner success. In fact, the European Commission (2015) notes that a high level of stakeholder involvement in designing and implementing quality





assurance at all levels (system, local and school levels) is, in itself, a quality assurance measure. In other words, when all stakeholders take responsibility for the quality of the education they provide and commit to continuous improvement, decisions on quality assurance are more likely to be put into practice. The RA project findings highlight the importance of involving all stakeholders in school self-evaluation. For more information about this issue, please refer to the paper *Raising the Achievement of All Learners: A Resource to Support Self-Review* (European Agency, 2017a).

### **‘Measuring’ learner outcomes**

The Raising Achievement project work has shown that standardisation and a strong academic focus are still dominant in many countries. This approach poses significant challenges in today’s increasingly diverse classrooms, as it may limit learning opportunities and negatively affect vulnerable learners. In some countries, the examination system has led to a narrowing of the curriculum, with the risk of some subjects (for example, drama, art, design) being marginalised. A further issue includes the narrowing of subject experience through teaching to exam or test syllabi. This leaves less time for formative feedback and developing learners’ personal competencies.

During the project, discussions focused on ways to ‘measure’ learner achievement and longer term outcomes. The project community recognised that, while grades or tests scores can provide a summary or comparative measures, there is a need for more in-depth information. This information can help teachers to identify misunderstandings and support the planning of next steps in the learning process, based on what learners know, understand and can do.

Another challenge related to high-stakes assessment concerns learners with SEN/disabilities. They may be disadvantaged by the lack of adjustments that allow them to participate in examinations. National efforts to reach higher PISA scores may similarly lead to learners with SEN/disabilities being excluded from mainstream schools, because of the fear of lowering test scores.

In 2017, during the Raising Achievement final project conference in Malta, the Maltese Minister for Education and Employment, Evarist Bartolo, critiqued the excessive influence of PISA international evaluations. He pointed out the following:

*You cannot have achievement without failure. The school model that punishes failure is failing its students. We need somehow to create the conditions in schools that we actually nurture [in] people [that] failing is human (Bartolo, 2017).*

Evidently, policy-makers need to acknowledge that ‘one size does not fit all’. They should also recognise and address the potentially competing functions of formative and summative assessment and develop a fit-for-purpose integrated system of assessment. The Raising Achievement literature review stressed that formative assessment and feedback are the best way to promote achievement, as they put the learner at the centre of the assessment process (European Agency, 2016a). A coherent assessment framework should be developed as a result of collaborative school-based planning (Kefallinou and Donnelly, 2016), linked to the effective use of both formative and summative assessment at national level.



Finally, it is important that policy-makers support the development of a range of accreditation opportunities that are both valuable to individuals and valued by others. Such opportunities should include ‘wider’ learning (Kefallinou and Donnelly, 2016), more practical and vocational routes and different options for learners who are not able to access national examinations. *Key Actions for Raising Achievement: Guidance for teachers and school leaders* provides examples of such practice from the project LCs (European Agency, 2018).

### **National data collection**

According to the project survey, country assessment and evaluation systems pay particular attention to national attainment and achievement data, specifically in core subjects and qualifications. However, a more coherent approach to quality assurance and accountability should go beyond collecting learner-level data and combine it with data on the quality of teaching and learning. Countries should also pay special attention to collecting data which focuses on identifying learners who may be at risk of underachievement. RA project findings show that collecting such evidence is essential to examine the effectiveness of approaches to tackle low performance and promote equity and success for all learners.

While ethical issues and privacy around data collection need consideration, it is important that countries develop ways of counting all learners sensitively and respectfully. These ways should also take account of national contexts, while allowing some comparability. Decision-makers should also be aware of the potential consequences of classification. These may include over-identification of learners from some minority ethnic or socio-economic groups, lower expectations, stigmatisation and impact on peer relationships.

Decision-makers must consider the longer-term consequences of accountability systems (e.g. teaching to test, a narrower curriculum, barriers for learners with disabilities). As the previous section of this report discussed, countries should take account of the impact of over-reliance on a single measure, such as high-stakes tests. They should work towards a more balanced approach to evaluation and assessment.

In 2013, speaking at the Agency’s International Conference, Lani Florian (2014) stressed the importance of information about access and equity. However, she noted limitations in country data that can be used to answer questions about inclusion. She suggested that, to avoid the distortion of teaching and learning or the marginalisation of vulnerable learners as outlined above, data on approaches and pedagogical practices is also needed (ibid.).

There is a clear need for accountability at individual, school and system level to inform decisions about value for money and quality. This should also include information on inputs, processes and outcomes, as described in previous Agency work on indicators for inclusive education (European Agency, 2009). This may include the following:

- Inputs: learners’ starting points, teachers’ experience and qualifications, other staff and resources, schools/provision, buildings, legislation and policies, funding allocation and amounts.
- Processes: programmes/interventions, curriculum, pedagogy, assessment organisation, ethos.



- Outcomes: academic and non-academic outcomes, transitions, destinations, programme completion, health and well-being.

As part of any review of national accountability systems, therefore, it is important that countries draw on multiple measures to monitor both quality and equity of opportunities, outcomes and resources (Cook-Harvey and Stosich, 2016). Local communities and schools should develop assessments to reflect their own context and measure all aspects of their practice. This may include self-evaluation, which can support on-going improvement when used alongside relevant performance data. As the Agency stresses:

*Crucially, self-evaluation should – combined with other sources of evidence, such as external inspection, learner attainment and achievement results – contribute to the evidence base for decision-making. Such information can provide a basis for shared, critical reflection on practice and contribute to aspirational improvement plans, leading to school and system improvement (European Agency, 2017a, p. 5).*

Adequately resourced support systems for schools and communities are required to increase capacity and bring about change, enabling stakeholders to take collective responsibility for raising the achievement of all learners. *Key Actions for Raising Achievement: Guidance for teachers and school leaders* (European Agency, 2018) provides examples of leaders who engage with the accountability framework to ensure it supports school development and learner success.

In short, as Ainscow puts it:

*... there is a need to ‘measure what we value’, rather than what is often the case, ‘valuing what we can measure’ ... evidence collected at the system level needs to relate to the ‘presence, participation and achievement’ of all students, with an emphasis placed on those groups of learners regarded to be ‘at risk of marginalisation, exclusion or underachievement’ (2016, p. 148).*

A deeper analysis of assessment and accountability issues is available in ‘Inclusive Assessment: Issues and Challenges for Policy and Practice’ (Kefallinou and Donnelly, 2016). More information about self-evaluation processes is provided in *Key Actions for Raising Achievement: Guidance for teachers and school leaders* (European Agency, 2018) and in *Raising the Achievement of All Learners: A Resource to Support Self-Review* (European Agency, 2017a).

## Teacher and school leader education and professional development

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Another major system-level challenge that countries raised in the project survey relates to teacher and leader training and professional development. Many countries (such as Belgium, Finland, Latvia, Malta, Netherlands, Sweden and UK (England)) have stressed the need to strengthen the professionalism of teachers and leaders and to further develop the career structure. Teachers and leaders need to increase their capacity, skills and motivation



in order to provide all learners with equitable opportunities for academic and wider success.

Information from the project survey shows that some countries are placing particular significance on educating teachers to work with immigrant learners (e.g. Slovakia) and learners with additional learning needs and disabilities (e.g. UK (Wales)). In particular, they focus on developing teachers' core competences on assessing, adapting material and setting goals for diverse learners.

The Agency's Teacher Education for Inclusion (TE4I) project studied teachers' education and development for dealing with diversity issues. In particular, the TE4I work produced a *Profile of Inclusive Teachers*. It identifies four core values as the basis for all teachers' work, associated with specific areas of competence:

- *Valuing Learner Diversity*
- *Supporting All Learners*
- *Working With Others*
- *Personal Professional Development* (European Agency, 2012b, p. 7).

The *Profile* can serve as a reflection tool for increasing the workforce's capacity to ensure that they feel confident in supporting all learners. It was designed for use in initial teacher education. However, it could be used as a basis for collaborative, school-based professional development which, as the RA project findings suggest, is required for all teachers.

The RA work has highlighted the need for practical, work-based opportunities for teachers and high-quality continuous professional development that supports research and innovation, rather than expert inputs or single, short courses. This requires professional development practice to move from seeing teachers as users of research produced by others. Instead, teachers should be seen as collaborative problem-solvers who share potential solutions and actively consider the relevance of various approaches for different learners and different situations.

The Agency's work on *Empowering Teachers* (European Agency, 2015b) noted that professional development and support should include various models of collaborative, evidence-based practice and should involve leaders, external experts and the local community within a supportive political context. *Key Actions for Raising Achievement: Guidance for teachers and school leaders* provides further examples of such practice (European Agency, 2018).

Countries responding to the project survey recognised the importance of school leaders as agents of change and key figures in system improvement. Countries also stressed the need for school leaders to receive appropriate professional development to promote school improvement. They suggested that this should include a focus on professional collaboration, parental engagement and community involvement, as stated above. It should also include training on monitoring and feedback and the effective use of resources, particularly in relation to disadvantaged learners and those at risk of underachievement. It



is clear that leaders also need on-going support – for example from head teacher peers – who can share practice in supporting both teacher and pupil learning within schools.

The RA project has recognised the importance of distributed leadership and flexible school organisation as further effective strategies for improved learner outcomes. These strategies should be embedded in leadership training. As the project literature review (European Agency, 2016a) notes, leaders should be competent in distributing roles and responsibilities, taking ownership of building teacher capacity, assuming responsibility for learner success, listening to learners' voices and establishing the necessary conditions for teachers to improve their practice. *Key Actions for Raising Achievement: Guidance for teachers and school leaders* contains specific examples of successful leadership actions (European Agency, 2018).

## School governance and funding

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School governance and funding was not a particular focus of the RA project. Nevertheless, it clearly affects the development of schools and education systems and was mentioned as a challenge in the project survey. Some countries (e.g. Slovakia, UK (Northern Ireland and Scotland)) reported on schools' inability to meet the demands of policy frameworks in light of current financial constraints.

In times of austerity, schools are challenged to do more with significantly less. Governments with severe financial constraints may move towards decentralisation to increase school effectiveness. However, decentralisation remains complex, as it requires that many diverse functions work effectively together. Austria, for example, has reported that increasing school autonomy can reduce schools' attention to national obligations. The dichotomy of 'top-down' with 'bottom-up' approaches remains and there are many details that need to be examined on a country-by-country basis. The Agency's [seminar report on Decentralisation in Education Systems](#) offers more detailed discussion of this topic (European Agency, 2017b).

There is a clear need for more effective resource distribution in order to provide more equitable opportunities and improve outcomes for all learners. The OECD (no date) *School Resources Review* proposes four main issues for analysis to improve the effectiveness of resource use in schools:

- Effective resource governance within the school system
- Effective distribution of resources across the system
- Effective use of resources once they have been allocated to different priorities and programmes
- Effective management of resources at different system levels.

Recent Agency work on financing also recognised the significant challenge of identifying the most cost-effective interventions to improve learner outcomes, taking account of different learners' needs in inclusive systems (European Agency, 2016c).



The Financing of Inclusive Education project also found that:

- modes of funding incentivise the labelling of learners;
- the increasing number of learners identified as requiring additional support is directly linked to the ability of the system for inclusive education to enable stakeholders to implement the ambition of inclusiveness;
- governance mechanisms promote fragmented systems for inclusive education and fail to support inter-institutional co-operation and co-ordinated provision;
- the lack of data for monitoring inclusive education policies hinders policy-makers in identifying academic and social outcomes (ibid.).

As the Organisation of Provision project (European Agency, 2014) notes, rather than struggling with limited ‘additional’ resources available to them, schools could develop cost-effective networks of support and forms of professional development involving collaboration between local stakeholders. Using resources differently by ‘undoing’ segregating practices, such as separate units and classes, can lead to more effective use of funds for learner support. At the same time, it improves school and stakeholder capacity to meet increasingly diverse learner needs.

As recommended in previous Agency projects (e.g. TE4I, Organisation of Provision), the RA project emphasises the need for greater collaboration at ministry as well as local levels (e.g. between health, social services and education), as this can support more effective resource use. Developing a more holistic approach to investment can lead to greater effectiveness and efficiency in the longer term. For example, funding early years’ provision has been shown to lead to improved learner outcomes in later phases of education (OECD, 2017).

Similarly, investment in family and community involvement in schools/learning communities has been shown to have significant benefits in terms of learner outcomes (for more information, please refer to European Agency, 2016a). *Key Actions for Raising Achievement: Guidance for teachers and school leaders* provides specific examples of family and community engagement with schools (European Agency, 2018).



## 5. RESPONDING TO THE CHALLENGE – LEARNING FROM PROJECT ACTIVITIES

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The practical work undertaken by the RA project learning communities focused on some of the key challenges of raising achievement. This section summarises the learning from these project activities. It also draws on country survey information and is supported by project research and contributions from country participants. *Key Actions for Raising Achievement: Guidance for teachers and school leaders* provides further information about the project findings, together with practical examples (European Agency, 2018).

The RA project created a European-wide learning community, bringing together different perspectives. It encouraged participants to go beyond providing information and instead to critically examine policy and think creatively about the rationale for their own practice. Studying the project LCs highlighted the need to make best use of resources by using intellectual and social capital for organisational development, change and growth.

The project builds on earlier Agency work, particularly the [Organisation of Provision project](#). Accordingly, it reinforces the need to move from individual support (a compensatory approach), to increasing all schools' capacity to provide quality support to all learners more pro-actively (an intervention and prevention approach) (European Agency, 2014). The project supports a view of inclusive education as a 'mega-strategy' for raising the achievement of all learners (Mitchell, 2014, p. 27) by providing challenges that develop teacher practice and school leadership and organisation.

The work of project LCs has shown the benefits of:

- measures to address the health and well-being of all learners and support them to recognise that skills and qualities can be developed through appropriately focused hard work and persistence;
- flexible learning opportunities that provide continuity and progression through the phases of education and ensure the relevance of learning for life and work;
- shared leadership and increased collaboration among school staff;





- partnership with parents, carers and families, in order to raise learner aspirations and participation;
- local community and employers' involvement to increase curriculum relevance and work opportunities.

The project also highlighted the need to monitor school development through an 'inclusive lens'. There should be a focus on equity across all school structures and processes (e.g. learner grouping, staff allocation, access to curriculum/activities, accreditation of learning and qualifications, resource allocation). The project findings suggest that learner attainment and achievement should also be analysed to ensure equitable opportunities to achieve outcomes that matter for their future success.

The RA project work also raises the issue of accountability and the need to resolve the conflict between market-based reforms and equity, with wider measures of achievement beyond tests. Such measures include personal, social and wider achievement, as well as academic attainment. When learners were consulted at the RA final project conference, their views of success differed widely. This reinforces the need to move away from a reliance on narrow, standardised measures of attainment, towards wider and more authentic learning outcomes and multiple measures of achievement.

The RA project survey highlighted that focusing on continuous support for teachers and school leaders can increase schools' capability to raise the achievement of all learners. Project practical work also showed ways to build teachers' professional knowledge and expertise to meet learners' diverse needs. This will enable teachers to develop more innovative ways to organise learning for all. Such knowledge can be introduced through networking both within the LC and beyond (e.g. with local universities, other schools/colleges and local specialists) to increase the capacity for evidence-informed practice within the school.

In the RA survey, only a few countries reported the systematic use of stakeholder surveys for quality assurance purposes, even though these can contribute significantly to school improvement processes. During the project, school leaders and teachers were encouraged to work with others on a cyclical self-review process (for more information, please refer to the [Resource to Support Self-Review](#)). This project has reinforced the idea that monitoring the quality of school policy and practice is essential for school improvement. It leads to a deeper understanding of structures and processes and their impact on outcomes for all learners.

Finally, the importance of school leaders in engaging other stakeholders to support all learners and manage change with and for the whole school and local community has become evident throughout the project.

These findings have led to the development of a set of key actions for raising achievement, which form the basis of *Key Actions for Raising Achievement: Guidance for teachers and school leaders*.

The following chapter presents the final project recommendations.



## 6. PROJECT RECOMMENDATIONS

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The RA project work has shown that to achieve both excellence and equity in high-quality education systems, specific measures need to be put in place. These include:

- providing resources to schools and systems to enable them to intervene as early as possible to support under-achieving learners and those at risk of dropping out;
- offering innovative approaches and personalised pathways to diverse learners;
- supporting strong strategic leadership which places high importance on equity and improved outcomes for all learners.

The above measures point to the need for a comprehensive overview of the whole system to ensure consistency between different system levels and policy areas. It is important to remember that school-level recommendations need a supportive policy context at regional/national level if they are to be successfully put into practice.

The RA project activities have reinforced the idea that inclusion – and raising achievement – in schools is influenced by many factors. These include for example, pedagogy, support for learning, leadership, learner well-being and participation, curriculum, collaborative working, school organisation and support systems. These key areas were explored during the project and this work has provided examples of how policy and practice could be taken forward at both national and local/school levels. The project focused on policy and practice to develop the collective capacity of all stakeholders and, importantly, the learners themselves to drive school improvement.

The project recommendations below focus on two main target groups:

- School leaders and teachers
- System leaders (at local/regional or national level) and policy-makers.

The RA project findings reinforce the findings and recommendations of previous Agency work, which are also highlighted below.









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## Recommendations for school leaders and teachers

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The RA work has emphasised inclusion as an underpinning principle or ‘mega-strategy’ for raising the achievement of all learners through effective pedagogy, strong leadership and collaborative working across learning communities.

School leaders play a key role in any educational reform. They must prioritise equity and excellence for all through their decision-making which affects learner grouping, staff allocation, access to curriculum, accreditation opportunities and resource allocation. It follows that they must also show commitment to on-going professional learning for all teachers and other stakeholders.

According to the project recommendations, school leaders and teachers should:

- **Build a strong leadership team and distribute tasks among stakeholders to ensure sustainability and secure engagement.** Key tasks include the effective use of internal and external data/information to ensure that developments (in teaching and learning, curriculum, assessment and school organisation) provide equitable opportunities for all learners and that all stakeholders are involved in school review and development.
- **Develop a school ethos that supports respectful interactions between all stakeholders.** Language used to talk about learners should avoid labelling/categorisation. All staff should take responsibility for the success and well-being of all learners within flexible forms of organisation. Dialogue should focus on ‘intentionally planning for the success of all students’ (EENET, 2017) to provide personalised opportunities for progress. It should also include listening to the learner voice and, through this, increasing participation and engagement.
- **Ensure evidence-informed teaching and learning.** Schools should actively engage with research to support innovative approaches to enable all learners to progress. Systems/partnerships should be developed to ensure access to current research evidence. They should also support school-based research activity, with appropriate time allocated for this form of collaborative professional learning and development.

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< Photos on page 56:

**Top: Young learners from Italy, Malta, Poland and UK (Scotland) who presented their thoughts on achievement at the final project conference, pictured with Mr Cor Meijer, Agency Director, Mr Per Ch Gunnvall, former Agency Chair, and Mr Evarist Bartolo, Malta’s Minister for Education and Employment**

**Middle: Learners from Calderglen High School, East Kilbride, UK (Scotland)**

**Bottom: Learners from Istituto Tecnico Agrario Sereni, Rome, Italy, working on the school farm**



The RA project activities, in line with past Agency projects, encourage school leaders and teachers to:

- **Provide a flexible curriculum to ensure relevance to all learners.** This should move beyond academic content to include wider skills in preparation for life, work and personal development (e.g. personal/social skills, arts, sports, etc.). Schools should create opportunities for learner choice to increase engagement.
- **Develop ‘assessment literacy’ among teachers and other stakeholders** to enable them to:
  - use assessment information with learners to support further learning;
  - work with colleagues to share their understanding of standards and judgements about learner progress to maintain high expectations for all.
- **Build structures/processes that support collaboration with families and specialist services** (e.g. professionals from health, social services, etc.) to improve support for all learners, particularly those with disabilities and more complex support requirements. Specialist knowledge should be shared to build capacity/capability among all stakeholders in the learning community and to avoid stigmatising/segregating learners.

## Recommendations for system leaders and policy-makers

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According to recent research and project evidence, system leaders and policy-makers should support collaborative approaches within and between schools. They must also ensure that school leaders are enabled to work strategically to build capacity in all staff. The appointment and allocation of staff to schools/learning communities must remain stable over time to sustain effective relationships and ensure more equitable outcomes and higher achievement for all learners.

System leaders and policy-makers should:

- **Develop ways to gather and share information on ‘what works’** to ensure that evidence is a starting point in formulating policy development, implementation and evaluation. Schools/learning communities should collaborate to develop evidence-informed practice, leadership development and teacher continuous professional development.

The RA project activities, in line with past Agency projects, also encourage system leaders and policy-makers to:

- **Facilitate national dialogue to develop a shared understanding of inclusive education.** Inclusive education should be considered a principle that underpins the progress and achievement of all learners in a system that ensures learning opportunities for all, instead of focusing on placement issues or compensatory approaches.



- **Increase collaboration between ministries/departments at national level that have a key role in education and support for learners and their families.** Such collaboration should facilitate policy for joint working between services at local level to ensure effective teamwork around learners/families with high levels of need in each community. National policy should also support learning communities in their endeavour to work more closely with parents/families, recognising this as a key factor in learner success.
- **Ensure clarity regarding the functions of formative and summative assessment and work towards an integrated assessment system that is fit for purpose and includes all learners.** Assessment and accreditation systems should be developed to recognise wider learning and success, as well as academic attainment, and ensure that different ‘pathways’ are equally valued. This should include appropriate opportunities for learners who experience more complex barriers to learning (such as cognitive disabilities).
- **Ensure that policy for initial teacher education and continuous professional development focuses on equity and diversity.** Initial teacher education and continuous professional development should develop teachers’ attitudes, values and competences and enable them to use evidence and effectively reflect on and evaluate their own work to secure improvement with a focus on positive outcomes for all learners.
- **Undertake a review of accountability and quality assurance mechanisms to ensure they are coherent and support inclusive development.** Such structures and processes should provide information about access and equity regarding inputs, processes and outcomes in ways that do not distort practice or marginalise vulnerable learners. They should also empower schools to focus on the progress and achievement of all learners, and not only on what can easily be measured.

Following this project overview, guidance for leaders, teachers and policy-makers will provide further concrete suggestions and examples of practice to bring about change and raise the achievement of all learners (European Agency, 2018).









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## 7. CONCLUDING REMARKS

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Despite countries' efforts to provide high-quality education, significant differences in learner outcomes persist (OECD, 2012). Many learners still fail to access quality education, which in turn strongly influences their progress in life and the progress of society more widely.

At the Agency's International Conference, Per Skoglund noted:

*As long as the terms 'integration' and 'inclusion' are blurred, those sceptical about the development of a society that is able to see, understand and meet the needs of all its members in a 'community' will gain ground. We will continue to have separate forms of dealing with 'different people', which cost a huge amount of money but lead to poorer outcomes (Skoglund, 2014, p. 47).*

The RA project findings are very much aligned with the *Conclusions on Inclusion in Diversity to achieve a High Quality Education for All*. These note the importance of engaging with the local community, promoting a democratic and inclusive school ethos that values diversity and the provision of flexible pathways for all learners (Council of the European Union, 2017a).

In bringing about such developments, it is important to keep in mind a realistic timescale for reforms and the need to invest in the short term, which can potentially save money in the longer term. This has implications for decision-making within political cycles which may be too short to see the impact of any changes introduced. Such changes need to address

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< Photos on page 60:

**Top: The school orchestra performing at Istituto Comprensivo Antonio Rosmini, Rome, Italy**

**Bottom: Learners and staff at the Group of Schools in Łajski, Commune of Wieliszew, Poland, welcoming the Raising Achievement visit participants**



social and educational inequality holistically through larger-scale transformation. Small-scale interventions cannot compensate for inequities in a system that is basically unjust.

The RA project, in response to the call by the Council of the European Union, has worked to:

*... promote the exchange of good practices and innovative approaches on how to achieve inclusive and equitable high quality education for all ... [to] deepen mutual learning on inclusion in diversity (2017a, p. 8).*

As a result, the RA project has highlighted practices that go beyond equality of opportunity to ensure inclusion in diversity and progress towards equity. A common characteristic of such provision is that all stakeholders – teachers, learners, leaders – develop a ‘growth mindset’.

As Verity Donnelly stressed at the Raising Achievement final project conference in Malta: ‘We are on a learning journey. There is a lot we can do. And a lot we can’t do ... yet. We carry on’ (Donnelly, 2017).



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## 8. ANNEX: METHODOLOGY

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This Annex sets out the methodology used in the Raising the Achievement of All Learners in Inclusive Education project (2014–2017), from preparatory activities, through the project practical phase, to the collection and analysis of information for project outputs.

### Raising Achievement project design

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#### Decisions on expert profiles

All Agency member countries were invited to participate in the RA project. Each country was asked to nominate two participants to be involved: a school leader and a researcher (either based in a university or involved in national/local area education, but with a research role). Both participants were nominated with the aim of providing information about recent national work in the area of raising achievement for all learners in inclusive settings, as well as to disseminate project findings. The following Agency member countries nominated participants: Austria, Belgium (Flemish and French speaking communities), Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and UK (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales).

#### Project kick-off event

The project kick-off meeting was held in Athens on 17–19 June 2014 as an event under the Greek Presidency of the Council of the EU. All participating countries sent their nominated participants. This meeting set out the project's conceptual framework, with workshops on key topics (e.g. information and communication technology, including learners with disabilities, leadership, organisation of provision).



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## **Project management**

In general, the project followed established Agency project management and quality assurance procedures. It was managed by a team of Agency staff, supported by a Project Advisory Group (PAG). This group comprised Agency Representative Board members and National Co-ordinators. The PAG was actively involved in project planning and monitoring the implementation of project activities.

Following the selection of the three project learning communities (LCs) (please refer to 'Preparatory activities' below), two representatives (leaders) from each LC joined to form an Extended PAG. This provided valuable opportunities for the LC leaders to exchange ideas and information, as well as to plan project activities. Early in the project, one learner from the Polish LC attended the Extended PAG meeting in Glasgow as an extra representative (February 2015).

The programme of visits and activities and the introduction of an online forum aimed to provide opportunities for project participants to collaborate and share practice within and beyond the three LCs.

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## **Preparatory activities**

### **Call for participation**

Following the kick-off meeting, member countries were invited to nominate LCs from their country to take part in the practical school-based phase of the project.

Through the school-based activities, the project aimed to explore strategies that appear to be effective in raising the achievement of all learners. It would also consider how schools monitor and evaluate the impact of such strategies and use this information to further improve.

### **Selection procedure**

The selection process had two phases. For the first phase (initial expression of interest), countries were asked to submit summary information only. During this phase, candidate LCs were asked to provide a profile identifying areas that they considered as priorities for development. In phase two, some of the countries were asked to provide more details and further evidence in line with the criteria.

The project staff team particularly looked for LCs around a cluster or group of schools that involved a wide range of stakeholders, including learners, parents, members of the local community, other schools and professionals from different agencies. LCs were also required to have a link with a university or other external partner to input recent research and introduce new knowledge.



The criteria stated that each LC should have:

- explicit ambition towards raising achievement for all learners in inclusive settings (classrooms with diverse learners);
- a commitment to shared leadership and a shared (school/community) vision of supporting all learners;
- a living community of practice within the school (i.e. evidence of collaborative practice and listening to learners);
- an active role in further developing schools' capacity/capability to raise the achievement of all learners in inclusive settings.

Thirteen applications were received (from Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Sweden, UK (England), UK (Northern Ireland) and UK (Scotland)). The staff team and PAG reviewed the applications against the criteria. Each country's involvement in other recent Agency projects was taken into account, along with the need for geographical diversity and practical organisation of visits.

Three LCs were finally selected. Each nominated participant was assigned to one of these LCs to form a stable group that would visit the LC twice during the project.

### **The project learning communities**

Three LCs were chosen to take forward school-based work during the project:

*Istituto Tecnico Agrario Sereni (I.T.A. Sereni) and Istituto Comprensivo Antonio Rosmini, Rome, Italy*

Istituto Comprensivo Antonio Rosmini is a primary and lower-secondary school in the Rome Lazio region. The lower-secondary site has around 800 learners. The school mission includes respecting the individuality of each learner and developing future European citizens.

Istituto Tecnico Agrario Sereni is an LC composed of three schools, two of which are located in Rome with the third in San Vito Romano municipality. There are over 1,100 learners, approximately 153 of whom have disabilities. Sereni's leadership team builds networks with local employers to plan a programme for transition to employment for all learners, including many with disabilities.

*The Group of Schools in Łajski, Commune of Wieliszew, Poland*

The Group of Schools in Łajski consists of a primary and a lower-secondary/middle school. In total, it has 363 learners, of which around 25 have certified disabilities. For 11 years, the school has been working successfully in accordance with a programme of inclusive education. Learners with disabilities are included in mainstream classes with support from learning support assistants and supplementary programmes.



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*Calderglen Learning Community, East Kilbride, UK (Scotland)*

Calderglen High School, a mainstream secondary school with approximately 1,400 learners, shares a campus with Sanderson High School, a special school with approximately 105 learners. The two schools have combined their culture and qualities to create an LC that is able to support the different learner needs. Active parent councils operate in both schools. The leadership teams focus on expanding the LC through co-operation with local services, organisations and businesses.



## Project activities

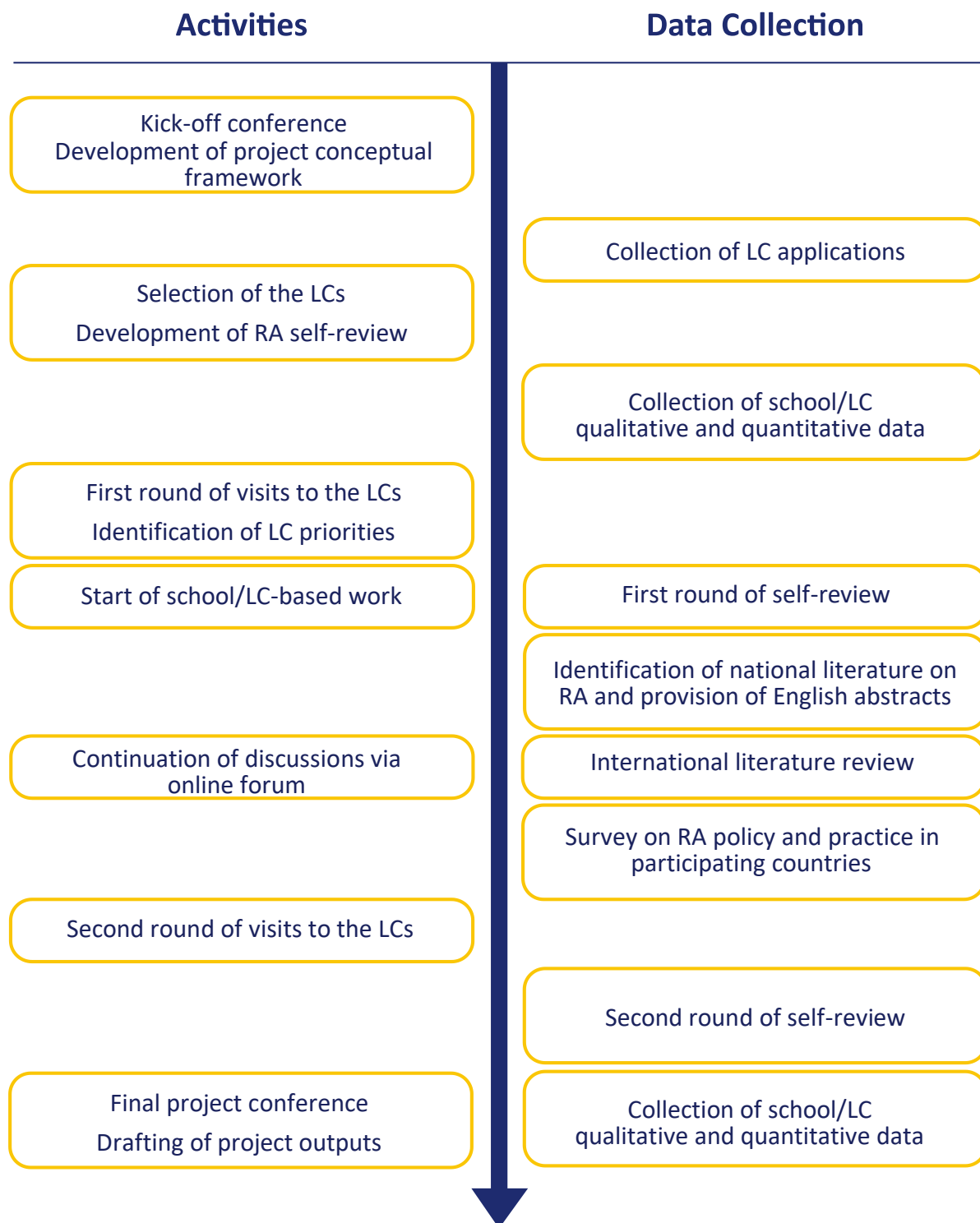


Figure 1. Summary of project activities





## Collection of baseline information

### *School- and LC-specific qualitative and quantitative data*

At the start of the project activities, each LC provided an analysis of its current position, developments that had taken place and key questions for exploration. At this point of the project, the following was collected: information on attendance, on-going assessment practice and learner achievement (e.g. test/examination results), development plans and official/inspection reports, along with more details about prior/current work in this area.

### *Development and use of the self-review tool*

To provide additional information from different stakeholder perspectives, a project self-review was developed. This drew on past Agency work and self-review documents from a range of countries published in English (from Australia, Canada, New Zealand, UK and USA), and some materials from Scandinavian countries. It was designed to assess 'harder to measure' areas considered to be important in both inclusive practice and raising achievement.

The focus areas of the self-review included key input- and process-related variables on:

- pedagogy for all learners;
- support for learning;
- leadership roles and approaches;
- learner well-being and participation;
- curriculum development;
- partnerships and collaborative working;
- support systems.

More details about the self-review tool are available in a separate document (please refer to *Raising the Achievement of All Learners: A Resource to Support Self-Review* (European Agency, 2017a)).

In 2015, the project LCs completed the self-review to gather the views of a range of stakeholders on the seven focus areas.

## Activities in LC-specific thematic areas

### *First round of LC visits*

In 2015, project participants selected one of the LCs to visit. The link to this LC was maintained throughout the project. The three-day visits gave participants the opportunity to learn about the LC and to gain an understanding of the policy context at local, regional and national level. Participants met key stakeholders from the LC and created personal links which developed further during the project. The visit programme was designed to enable LCs to engage in dialogue about their work, to receive information and feedback from visitors and, through this, to provide a stimulus for planning a range of activities relating to the project themes of pedagogy, leadership and collaboration.



### *Identification of LC-specific thematic areas*

Based upon their own analysis, the results from the self-review and feedback from the visit participants, the LCs planned activities that they expected to have an impact on different structures and processes (e.g. forms of school organisation, networking, community engagement, leadership approaches, assessment, curriculum, pedagogy and support strategies) that would raise learner achievement.

Specifically, Sereni school – from the Italian LC – identified the following challenges as the focus for this project:

- developing the workforce’s capacity to support all learners;
- strengthening pedagogical approaches and strategies to develop broader competences for life and work and to increase autonomy in all learners;
- working with parents/community.

Rosmini school (Italian LC) identified the following issues:

- adapting the curriculum and pedagogy to allow all learners to show their strengths and talents and become increasingly independent in their learning;
- effectively assessing all learners’ needs and using counselling and coaching to support engagement and good choices regarding future education;
- working with parents and community services to build and manage a network to ensure an effective response to all learners’ needs and measure the school’s inclusiveness.

The initial project focus of the Polish LC included:

- developing strategies to support staff to encourage independence in learning;
- moving to assessment for learning;
- providing mentoring and guidance for choices after school and to support engagement with upper-secondary/vocational studies.

Finally, the Scottish LC identified the following challenges:

- making development sustainable, consolidating progress and managing ‘innovation fatigue’ through continued teacher engagement and increased opportunities for professional development;
- monitoring outcomes and developing strategies to close the gap for vulnerable learners;
- developing pedagogical approaches which are applied consistently within and across subject areas to ensure ‘deep learning’.

### *Online discussion forum*

To bridge the time between the two visits and to support the continuation of exchange that started with the first visits, a non-public online discussion and exchange forum was established. It contained information about the project, the three LCs and the visits



(including presentations, videos, pictures and documents). Later in the project, country literature and a literature review (please refer to next section) were added. Discussion sections were established on this platform on two levels:

- Within the LCs: Each LC was supported to run discussions in their national language in a separate section of the platform. The aim was to motivate and involve stakeholders who may not be fluent in English, but whose involvement was crucial to project activities. The Italian LC used this forum intensely for an exchange, discussion and documentation of teaching plans among staff. The Scottish and Polish LCs used these discussions primarily for external communications.
- Between the LCs and among the ‘international learning zone’: This section dealt with cross-national topics around the priorities identified by the LCs to actively ask for external input, advice and further information. Topics included: assessment for learning; strategies to support staff; guidance for transition; engaging and innovative pedagogical approaches; parents and community; co-operation between curricular and support teachers; what is raising achievement?; competences for life and work; how to keep engagement and innovation high; and raising the achievement of the most vulnerable and disengaged.

Overall, the forum had 184 subscribers, including teachers, school leaders, researchers, policy-makers, administrative staff and learners.

#### *Literature collection and review*

The RA literature review (European Agency, 2016a) provides background information to support the development of evidence-based strategies and promote innovation in schools. In the review, inclusion is presented as an organising principle and a ‘mega-strategy’ (Mitchell, 2014, p. 27) to raise the achievement of all learners. More specific school improvement strategies are discussed in the areas of teaching approaches, curriculum, assessment, learner voice, leadership and collaboration.

To complement the expanding dialogue, the project gathered systematic information from all participating countries to ensure that materials would not be restricted to English-language publications. Country participants were asked to provide literature – in the form of English abstracts – that had been produced in their own country. Country literature included academic research, investigations by the ministry and national agencies or other relevant written material focusing on the project themes. About 200 documents were identified and made available on the project’s closed discussion forum.

The [RA literature review](#) (European Agency, 2016a) considers these publications, as well as previous European-level work.



## *Country information collection*

The project survey was developed to provide evidence for raising the achievement of all learners in inclusive settings. It builds upon the [Agency overviews of country information](#) and takes account of the Agency's current Country Policy Review and Analysis (CPRA) work<sup>5</sup>. The survey collected specific information and practice examples on raising achievement to complement the in-depth information and data that the three LCs collected throughout the project. In this way, added-value was provided to all participating countries.

Each participating country was asked to complete the survey, designed to collect information on: 'What policy and practice is effective in raising the achievement of all learners?'. This survey focused on legislation, policies, strategies, approaches and actions that can best support school effectiveness, considering the increasing diversity of today's classrooms. In total, 23 countries responded to the survey. Chapter 3, '[Current Country Policy and Practice on Raising Achievement](#)', provides an analysis of the information gathered through the RA project country survey. Full country reports can be found on the [RA project web area](#).

## **Reviewing LC developments**

### *Second round of visits*

In 2016, second LC visits were held with the same groups of project participants. The purpose of the second visit was to learn from the LC experiences and work completed since the 2015 visit. Furthermore, the visiting groups supported the LCs in local or regional networking events through presentations and discussion rounds that aimed to disseminate project learning.

### *Second self-review*

In April/May 2017, the LC stakeholders completed the second round of the self-review. The rationale was to collect stakeholders' views on the key dimensions since the project began and assess whether the LC activities had a noticeable impact.

### *Final project conference*

The Raising the Achievement of All Learners in Inclusive Education International Conference took place in Malta on 5–7 April as an official event of Malta's Presidency of the Council of the EU. It ran in parallel with the Agency's bi-annual meeting of ministerial representatives from 30 member countries, who joined the plenary sessions.

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<sup>5</sup> The CPRA work aims to aid country reflection on developing policy for inclusive education. It provides opportunities for countries to discuss and reflect on their current policy frameworks with their peers. It makes recommendations for priorities to be addressed in the context of ET 2020 strategic objectives and European Council Country-Specific Recommendations. For more information, visit the [CPRA project web area](#).



During the conference, all three LCs presented a summary of their activities during the project. They also ran workshops in which they detailed their progress in the three project focus areas and discussed their results with participants from other Agency member countries. The country information and practice examples provided more robust findings for discussion in the workshops.

#### *Process evaluation*

Feedback had been gathered throughout the project to immediately adapt project processes and implementation to the needs of all stakeholders involved. Along with this formative evaluation, a final survey summarised the opinions of all nominated participants regarding:

- the study visit and conference design and implementation;
- networking with external participants in projects;
- creating impact at local level;
- LC-based networking.

The survey results will primarily be used in a project process evaluation to contribute to planning future Agency projects.



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