

# **Young Views on Inclusive Education**

European Parliament Hearing  
Brussels, November 2011





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Editor: Victoria Soriano, Staff member, European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education

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Secretariat  
Østre Stationsvej 33  
DK-5000 Odense C Denmark  
Tel: +45 64 41 00 20  
[secretariat@european-agency.org](mailto:secretariat@european-agency.org)

Brussels Office  
3 Avenue Palmerston  
BE-1000 Brussels Belgium  
Tel: +32 2 280 33 59  
[brussels.office@european-agency.org](mailto:brussels.office@european-agency.org)

**[www.european-agency.org](http://www.european-agency.org)**



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## FOREWORD

In November 2011, the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education once again had the great pleasure and honour of organising a European Hearing. It was held at the European Parliament in Brussels and involved young people – both with and without special educational needs and/or disabilities – from secondary and vocational education, who discussed what inclusive education means to them.

The Hearing was the third of its kind that the Agency has organised. The first event, entitled ‘European Hearing for Young People with Special Educational Needs’, took place at the European Parliament in Brussels in 2003 and involved 23 country delegations. It was supported by the Ministries of Education and the European Commission, as a key event within the framework of the European Year of People with Disabilities. The second event, ‘Young Voices: Meeting Diversity in Education’, took place in Lisbon in 2007 within the framework of the Portuguese Presidency of the European Union and involved 29 country delegations.

For the 2011 Hearing, all Agency member countries contributed to the organisation of this event and were represented through the full participation of 88 young people from 31 delegations.

The aim of the Hearing was for the organisers and invited guests to listen to the young people’s views, as well as consider the progress that has been made in inclusive education in the respective countries since the last Parliament Hearing in 2007.

Every learner was able to highlight significant issues relating to the implementation of inclusive education, as well its benefits and challenges, from their personal experience. The importance of inclusive education was mentioned repeatedly throughout the discussions and is clearly a common theme in the educational lives of the young people.

We wish to thank all the member countries for their valuable support before, during and after the Hearing. We would also like to thank the officials who actively participated in the opening and closing sessions of the event and moderated the young delegates’ results session: Mr Milan Zver, Member of the European Parliament; Mr Harald Hartung and Ms Ana Magraner from the European Commission; Mr Jerzy



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Barski, spokesperson from the Polish Presidency of the European Union; Ms Emilia Wojdyła, Deputy Director of Education, Poland; Ms Aleksandra Posarac from the World Bank and Ms Kari Brustad from the Norwegian Ministry of Education.

Above all, we would like to thank the 88 young delegates, as well as their families, accompanying people, teachers and support staff. Without them this important event would never have been possible and we will work to ensure that their views are not forgotten.

Per Ch. Gunnvall

Cor J.W. Meijer

Chair

Director

European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education





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## INTRODUCTION

On 7 November 2011, 88 young people from 31 delegations<sup>1</sup> presented their views on inclusive education at the European Parliament. This was the third time that such an event had been organised by the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (the Agency) at European level.

The purpose of the Hearing was to once again fully involve young people aged between 14 and 19 years in discussions on inclusive education. Each Agency member country was invited to nominate up to 2 young delegates with special needs and/or disabilities and 1 without, from secondary and vocational education. It is important to highlight that the nominated delegates represented a broad range of different needs, but the majority of young delegates came from mainstream educational settings and attended the Hearing with their classmates.

The event aimed to provide young people from across Europe with an opportunity to make their voices heard. It gave them a platform to express their own views on their education, explain their needs and requirements and share their hopes for the future. The Hearing also enabled the young people to share their personal experiences and discuss what inclusive education means and brings to them in their daily lives.

Just as in 2007, the young participants received a preparatory question document in advance of the Hearing for reflection and discussion in their respective educational settings. On Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> November, the young delegates participated in seven working groups in which they discussed these questions, contributed with comments and proposals and prepared a short summary of their discussions to be presented the following day at the European Parliament.

The questions discussed were:

- In your opinion, what is inclusive education?

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<sup>1</sup> Austria, Belgium (French and Flemish Communities), Czech Republic, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales)



- Can you describe how inclusive education is, or should be achieved at a practical level in your school? For example, how is the class organised, what programmes are in place, what type of support is in place, etc.
- In your opinion, what are the main benefits and challenges that inclusive education brings, or could bring to your education?
- Do you have any other comments?

A summary of the young delegates' discussions was presented at the European Parliament and the results of these discussions constitute the basis of this report.

The pages that follow detail the common ideas and issues the young delegates shared and agreed upon. The maturity and in-depth level of their discussions is immediately evident; there is no need to 'interpret' what they said, but simply to record their comments and suggestions. The ideas and proposals from every group are mainly presented without reference to the level of education (secondary or vocational) of the young delegates, or whether they have a special educational need or not. The inputs are instead grouped according to the replies to the four questions listed above: what is inclusive education; how is it implemented in practice; benefits and challenges; further comments. As far as possible the original words and phrasing of the young delegates have been used; very little editing to their agreed statements has been made.

A number of key issues and themes ran through the discussions of every working group. These included:

- The right to a quality education and to equality of opportunity in education;
- Combating discrimination;
- The provision of necessary support;
- The elimination of the physical, social and educational barriers that exist;
- The mutual benefit inclusive education can offer all learners.

In addition to the preparatory questions, each country delegation was asked to design a poster to illustrate how inclusive education is viewed in their respective educational settings. All kinds of materials were used by the delegates to create their posters – visual, tactile



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and even auditory. The posters were presented outside the European Parliament meeting room during the Hearing and are now available in the 'Poster Collection' publication, together with short descriptions of the posters and further details about the young delegates and their schools.

All information relating to the 2011 Hearing can be found on the Agency website: <http://www.european-agency.org/agency-projects/european-hearing-2011>





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## INPUTS FROM YOUNG DELEGATES

### **In your opinion, what is inclusive education?**

The young delegates discussed rights – the right to quality of education, to choice and to equality and respect. They stated that inclusive education is not just about being together in the same place, but about having friends and good relationships with their peers.

They raised the point that inclusive education is beneficial for all: it creates the opportunity to learn and share experiences. They emphasised the important role to be played by teachers and their peers and highlighted that inclusive education is the first step in being full members of society.

Here are some of their inputs:

Everybody has the same right to study. It is a human right to study and to have access to good quality education. If somebody has a problem, he needs guidance to help him. Inclusion is done by the whole community: family, school, etc. You have the right to get assistance if you are different, no matter how different you are (Dagur).

Inclusive education is being/learning together with everyone. We are all equal and we are different; we have the right to choose what we want to do – the subjects, how they are taught (James). Inclusive education is having the chance to choose your education (John, Nana-Marie).

Inclusive education means all people being in the same school and in the same class (Fé, Josette, Kanivar). It is having lessons in an ordinary school; having friends, not just learning together; everyone doing all activities. But it is also about having special units in mainstream schools; having the possibility to attend some lessons in small groups with other pupils with similar disabilities (Michalis, Andreani, Maria).

Inclusive education is for all children. Normal schools should be near their homes. This experience promotes meeting people from the neighbourhood (Waclaw).



Inclusive education is being part of a 'normal' class and being 'normal'. Everybody is included. It is a young person with a disability feeling welcome in the class and the students without special needs being respectful. In a 'normal class', if pupils have other needs, for example needing a sign interpreter, the school has to provide one. The idea is that everybody can participate (Lise).

It is not just about being part of a normal school; it is being part of society. Every disabled person has a right to be taught in a normal school if he thinks so and is able to. You still have to give him an option if he is not capable of doing it (Jere). It is about the right to be included, with options, but always being included in society (Fabian, Pedro, Diogo, Josette).

Inclusion means more respect, connections, new friends and new information – in all areas of life (Rolands).

Inclusive education is a wide approach; it is not only about good grades, it is about good social contacts and relationships. School is more than learning from books – it is about social relationships. Inclusive education is not just about school, it is also about the wider community (Bethany, Gemma, Sophie).

It is learning to live together and respecting everybody with and without disabilities (Emile). Whatever your race, your gender, your special need, everyone helps and supports each other. For me, a key principle is a society of solidarity (Maria). It is important we all accept each other, even if we have a special need or a different culture or religion (Francesco). It is about people in schools learning about different special needs, especially the ones they cannot see (Mathias). Inclusive education is not only about disabilities or disorders, but different cultural backgrounds, etc. (Elin).

All members of the school community must treat everyone with respect. Accepting and respecting each other; this is where it starts. Inclusive education needs other students to contribute as well as teachers (Barbara, Mirjam, Triin).

The starting point for inclusive education is teacher awareness and education (Sophie and Gemma). Teachers must be aware of what everyone needs and give opportunities for successfully reaching goals. We all have our talents – together we make a better working community (Klara).



Teachers must be there for all – inclusive education requires additional resources like time and money but each pupil must get the education they want (Philipp). Inclusive education helps to develop the skills in which they are good and have help in things where they have difficulties (João). Inclusive education also means getting the materials you need (Carlo, Melania).

The focus is often on practical things (like buildings), but inclusion is mostly in people’s minds. Everybody must have the habit of thinking about different disabilities, not discriminating or dividing. There is a lot of work to do here among teachers and pupils to find talent and possibilities. Dividing by disability leads to bigger obstacles (Mei Lan).

Inclusive education should be about breaking down barriers (Wessel). We need to remove barriers in the widest sense; we must change people’s mentalities (Jens). Everyone has the right to a good education, some need more support than others, but everyone’s rights must be met (Francesco).

Inclusive education is the successful inclusion of students with disabilities (Daniel).





## **Can you describe how inclusive education is, or should be achieved at a practical level in your school?**

The young delegates described some characteristics of their educational settings and expressed some concerns they had.

Here are their contributions:

In my high school there are special programmes for kids with disabilities, with special rooms where they have help. Helpers are with them there, sometimes the students are also with everybody in the classroom if it is better for them. Students in wheelchairs get more comfortable areas in the classroom. I have ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) and I need to leave the classroom now and then. This is something other students do not understand (Dagur).

I think students feel very integrated; the teachers help us if necessary and the other students are very helpful too (Claudia). It helps us to feel like everybody else (Claudia, Chiara, Yohana). I am in a catering school; I am with my friends. In my class, there is a special support person but he helps everybody. Sometimes students are envious as well, but it is very rare (Chiara). Sometimes students with disabilities are taken out of the class, if necessary (Yohana).

Inclusion starts in the kindergarten. There are regular discussions with everybody (teachers, parents, students): is the situation good as it is? Where do you need help? As long as the situation is good for everybody, the student stays in the class. At the beginning of the year, the class is prepared for having a student with disabilities – they are told about the type of disability that student has. In our school people have the choice of where they want to be. In our country there is an organisation that provides special materials and IT. The school can borrow the aids from the organisation and the students can also take them home. When they do not need these aids anymore these can be used by other students in the same or other schools. It is very important to have technological aids as a support (Melania, Carlo).

I am in a catering school. There are two separate departments in the school, one for students with disabilities and one for students without disabilities. I am in the one with disabilities, but I would prefer to be in the one with everybody else. I think that students should have the choice to be where they feel more comfortable. In my country school





premises are not designed for people with disabilities; wheelchair users cannot study there. Something needs to be done by the government. Also, there are not enough personnel. Before it was very difficult for me; men had to be strong in the country and men with disabilities were weak and not very well seen, but now it is getting better. Being at school makes me feel stronger and braver; it is easier for me to communicate with the others now (Artūras).

I am in the catering industry, I have cooking classes, catering classes, waiting staff classes etc. The goal is to get a job in the catering industry, but it is difficult: people with a disability are sometimes badly treated. A lot of changes still need to be made. The regular curriculum can sometimes be confusing for students with disabilities. The teachers are stressed for national exams and do not pay enough attention to students who need more help (Stefanos).

I am in a mainstream school, in a class with nine other students with disabilities. The teachers are there for both types of students. Sometimes I feel a little segregated, because I need to ask the teachers to be with the others. I am together with the other students only when they have lunch. I have a special curriculum, a special schedule in a specialised programme (Audrey).

At the beginning of secondary school I had only two schools to choose from – there were not enough trained staff to teach students with disabilities. I have a positive experience with two teachers – I used to have one teacher and now the new one explains in a better way. In the school they should build an elevator (Zsófia).

I have studied in a special programme and teachers follow that over the years. Now in the new school I am not in a special programme and I am doing fine. But teachers have no training and not enough working hours; in Maths there are 28 people in the classroom with one teacher; there is a lack of staff. In the school there are many people with learning disabilities. It is decided in schools that young people will receive only vocational subjects (e.g. cleaning) and not have the chance to study professional subjects (such as Maths, etc.). Groups are too large because there is not enough funding to handle more groups. Elevators are missing (Ingre).

Basic skills are taught in school. I was put into a 'bridging' class and found out that I could not take the childcare subject. I want to take classes at the same level as everyone else, even if my grades would be lower. In my country there is a lot of support; a person should be



allowed to take subjects that they want or the GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education). But it is unfair that not everyone gets the same support (Leanne).

I knew that I could catch up in various subjects and had to tell and prove it to teachers – who would not believe me; I felt disrespected. We are all the same, we all have problems. Every teacher has a different opinion, they explain things differently – this is confusing (Rolands).

My school needs to have a more flexible programme, based on what is more significant for the student. It is important to leave the classroom for a short time, to have short breaks, to have a place to rest and relax (João).

I attend a mainstream secondary school. I think it is necessary to improve teaching methods; to have more technology, visual aids and different exams (Andreani).

I attend a special unit. There is a need for more care assistants and pupils with the same difficulties to be in the same group. We should do games and sport and feel safe and satisfied (Michalis).

We attend a comprehensive school. We wish there were different classes for different levels and more options. We would like to have the same classes for people with the same disability (Elmo and Kanivar).

We are in the same mainstream secondary school (Pedro and Fabian). I would like to have more people with disabilities in school so that people can better understand each other (Pedro). The canteen should be improved. I wish to learn more and better (Fabian).

I am in a mainstream secondary school. The school should be adapted for the materials they have and teachers should be prepared (Aure).

I attend a mainstream secondary school. I think there should be disabled people in schools in order to understand them better; there are none in my school (Fé).

We attend a mainstream comprehensive school (Sam and Charlotte).



It is important that learning support is provided. But teachers are strict and they take decisions without asking. A strong learning support department is beneficial, but it is not always good (Sam).

I attend a special school and I feel ok. There is a need for elevators in schools – they are often missing (Jere).

I attend a gymnasium. I have great teachers and I do not know what could be improved (Maria).

We attend a mainstream secondary school. The school provides sign interpreters, elevators and lights indicating breaks. There needs to be more technology and a change in teachers' and students' mentalities (Diogo and Josette).

In my class there was one student with SEN who didn't feel happy in the class ('he was learning nothing'), but there is another friend in my secondary school who feels inclusive education is a really good and useful experience. In my class there is a teacher and an accompanying person. The second one is very helpful. Each person should know what is best for him/her (Nika).

I have one assistant and I feel good with them as they follow what I say. If we are speaking about classes with only people with SEN, it will be OK that there are small classes. I am in a special school and I feel happy there because I feel that the teachers understand students with SEN. But I think that it is better if students with SEN stay in a normal class with help-assistance (Domen).

In my country a normal class is composed of 26 students and I wanted to be in a normal classroom. In the regular class other students tell me 'don't do that'. It is nice to do what is normal in the normal world. I feel that it is harder as I have special machines that take a longer time, but I feel it is good to have friends that can see and help. All students have the right to be supported and to receive help from their teachers after their classes, for example during lunch-time. The teacher and students in my classroom know how to work with me. I know that there is a centre that provides support for teachers (Sofie).

You need to choose whether you want to be in inclusive education or whether you want to have full attention and if you decide on the second choice you will be better in a small classroom. I participate in a project in which they inform others about people with disabilities in



education. The project is based on students training students and teachers training teachers (Laima).

I am glad that I have two teachers; one of them is helping me. I participated in a project where everybody can watch films and after that speak about problems in a group discussion. I get support from an assistant to do my homework (Wacław).

I feel that I am in a normal situation having two teachers in my class (Orlando).

It is important to have the support of a speech therapist. I keep in contact with my teachers through SMS or by emails with my speech therapist. Teachers sometimes forget that I need to lip-read when my translator is not in the class; they turn their back to me while speaking and use difficult vocabulary that I do not understand (Méryem).

I have the experience of being in a school where children with SEN are included. My school is made for them. Also other students help each other without 'having to' – they just 'do it' (Edgars).

I got better rehabilitation support and advice in the special centre than in my regular school, but I question how it is for those who have more severe handicaps. I am at a special school because the nearest school wasn't the best for me (Tuomas).

I feel that being with other students that have the same needs makes me feel normal with my classmates. I am in a class of 8 students and all have hearing impairments (Kamilla).

I felt that in my 'inclusive' school I was bullied by other students. I like that in my special school there are many computers available in one specific room that is open in the evenings in order for students to complete their homework (Rebeca).

Teachers sometimes only focus on the things I cannot do, not on my skills (Þórdur).

I am in the mainstream school and there are pupils who have Asperger's syndrome in the class (Marie).

In our school there are people with visual impairments and blind people. We have special teachers in the school. For maths classes we have a special teacher who helps small groups of visually impaired students. Braille technology is very important (Dean,



Robert). We have dedicated staff members looking after the needs of young people with a disability (Daniel).

In my country, the wheelchair users have special assistants and there are also special architectural features such as ramps and handles to help them. In my school, teachers are aware about the needs of the students. We have learning support assistants. If I am sick, there is no problem getting the courses and the homework. During exams, I have extra time and I can have a break if needed (Maria).

I am in a mainstream school and I receive additional support. I feel integrated. I feel the same as a student without special needs. In my country there are special teachers in mainstream schools helping us (Pauline).

I am in a secondary school where there are no people with special needs (Emile).

I am in a mainstream school, but I am also part of an inclusive education unit. I receive a lot of help and extra time for the exams (Honoré).

I enjoyed resources such as fewer questions, or more time during exams. It is necessary to provide adaptation to my needs (Jakub).

I don't benefit from additional support in my school. My classmates support me and help me by bringing me my homework. They understand me better sometimes than the teachers. I am in a mainstream school, and in my class, I am the only one with a special need. They don't really help me as I am in a 'normal' school (Melanie).

I am in a 'normal' class and my life at school is adapted to my needs. I benefit from a computer, a bigger table and transport to go to school and come back home. I have been very lucky with my teachers. But some teachers don't want to understand; if it is not in the curriculum, they don't want to help and adapt the programme (Lise).

I didn't need a special school, but didn't get a choice because mainstream school didn't have the access I need (Bethany).

Mainstream school made me a tougher person; it prepared me for the real world. Preparing inclusive education properly is crucial, proper materials in proper formats are crucial. You need to raise



awareness and have tools to help change attitudes towards people with different needs (Gemma).

Support from people outside of the school staff who can act as mediators for students with special needs is good. There were teachers who didn't want to co-operate in making inclusive education work for me and others; teachers should accept everyone in their classes. For some students, special schools can prepare them for mainstream schools later on; special school prepared me for mainstream high school (Wessel).

Having school-mates who support me and having the right support during work placements is very important (Jože).

In my school there were no students with disabilities until the last year; peers were anxious about the difference (Keenan).

I had a person with a hearing impairment in my class – the teacher asked us to support her, but it was like babysitting – being too protective does not help pupils with disabilities, it is not natural. My school is accessible for wheelchair users and also supports students with visual/hearing impairments. We have seminars where the young people talk about their disability and get greater peer support (Asgerdur).

I attend mainstream classes once a week – this is very important. Helpful teachers and classmates are crucial – in primary this was not the case, now in secondary I am satisfied (Łukasz).

We had a separate department for additional support needs, but were also supported by auxiliaries to help us read from the board etc. A teacher for visual impairment provided equipment (Katrina).

There are 38 boys in my special school so there are fewer subjects and more practical work. Classes are very small but some materials are not suitable, e.g. DVDs with no subtitles. It is always difficult when a new teacher starts working as it takes time to build up mutual understanding. Schools should be mixed (boys/girls) (Simon).

The ICT teacher in my school is disabled, too – this helps him understand special needs better – he is more familiar with the problems of his students (Áron).

Different disabilities need different support. In my school microphones were used and some teachers signed in smaller classes. The school was single storey (accessible to wheelchairs).



There were also technical aids for students with visual impairments, such as enlargers, and ‘time out’ space for those with ADHD, etc. (Elin).

I write very slowly and need extra time for tests, etc. (Philipp).

I have a friend with dyslexia who had good help with a computer and extra time. Audio files or peer support were used but not consistently provided (Klara).



**In your opinion, what are the main benefits and challenges that inclusive education brings, or could bring to your education?**

The young delegates expressed what they consider to be the main *benefits* that inclusive education brings, or could bring to them. These included, among other factors, being better prepared to find a job later on, being stronger and more independent, knowing what real life is like, fighting against discrimination and stereotypes, having more friends, feeling ‘normal’ and breaking down barriers.

Here are some of their inputs:

It is easier to get a job because you have a general diploma. It is also easier to be integrated into the community if you are in a mainstream school than if you are in a class with disabled persons (Melania, Carlo).





The main purpose of schools is to prepare young people for real life. Working/learning together makes a more beautiful future (Jonas). In special schools they don't know how to live in a normal society (Wacław). It is important for everybody to have the same diploma when they finish school. This initiative will give them the chance to be included in the modern society (Laima and Kamilla).

Having good social relationships is nice, but having opportunities to get a good job is critical; inclusive education gives those opportunities (Jože).

Inclusive education gives students with special educational needs practice in explaining their needs – they need to do this in society and when they have a job (Barbara). Experience is sometimes more important than qualifications. Once we sort out our education, other things in society will fall into place (Leanne).

It is really important that people with special needs are included in the mainstream school because the other students can learn about disabilities. Students with and without special needs can learn from each other and exchange their knowledge (Efsthathios).

It is important to learn about other people and their lives; learning from others through exchanging experiences (Charlotte, Diogo, Méryem, Zineb). It opens people's minds and helps there to be less discrimination (Aure). Others can reflect (Pedro) and we learn to accept people different to us (Andreani).

It is good for us – good for them (Barbara). It is important to recognise the benefits to everyone in the class (Sophie). Inclusive education helps mainstream children to become more tolerant, with more open minds (Sára).

In order to remove all barriers you must change mentalities; you are a part of a bigger picture. Other young people must develop their understanding: we live in an ignorant world (Gemma).

Everyone is included, no matter what difficulties they have (Robert). Everyone should have the chance of inclusive education and a better life (Tomáš).

Inclusive education helps everyone to feel that they are part of one good system (Triin). It gives you the possibility to study and not have the feeling that 'I am different' (Lucie). Everyone is emancipated (Elmo). It also helps in overcoming everybody's limits (Maria).





You have experiences that eliminate stereotypes. Inclusive education changes people's attitudes towards disability (John). It increases tolerance and understanding towards disabled people (Dean).

If everyone has an awareness of different disabilities and people's personal circumstances there is no problem with inclusive education. Bullying happens because of difference – once this is explained bullying stops. Inclusive education helps everyone to reach their full potential (Katrina).

Inclusive education doesn't have anything to do with being in an environment that facilitates learning; in fact this should be the same for everybody. People prefer to learn in small classrooms and it should be like this for everybody (Kamilla). People who are in big classes fall asleep and therefore nobody notices them. In these settings teachers have only two minutes per student while everybody might need ten. Being through the normal system gives you the opportunity to choose and be able to explore what you want and what you are able to do (Kamilla).

Inclusive education is good for friendships (Bethany). It is having friends – 'a gang of good mates'. Not just learning together, but messing around as well (Sam).

It brings improvements in communication and better interaction (Markos). It also brings improvements in education. School needs to become more learner-friendly (Alexandra).

Inclusive education must become 'normal', but special skills must be learned by a lot of people to make that happen (Francesco).

Simple things like having all the technical arrangements in place – like laptops being allowed – are important (Bethany). Teachers' awareness of simple things – like noise levels in classrooms – can make a big difference (Mathias). Individual work possibilities such as personal learning programmes are good – special support in some lessons is important (Lucie). Taking into account different approaches to learning – for example visual learning approaches – is important (Tomáš).

It gives me the opportunity to interact in 'normal' groups at a higher level. An individual education plan is very important, but teachers need to be directed – pupils must be proactive (Tomáš). It is difficult to have the correct support, but it can be overcome (Francesco).



Changing the physical layout of classrooms to help social relationships is good (Robert). The social atmosphere in the school is really important for achieving inclusive education (Jens).

The more we mix disabled people with others – the quicker we will have positive attitudes. Not enough aids are provided – this needs to be the core initiative to make people more autonomous. For those who are included, it brings a very important social meaning to life and creates support for homework after classes and in and out of school activities. Sport is an important way of being included in social life (François).

If disabled students are separated, it might be harder to increase awareness. Some smaller groups could be used, but joined together where possible (Keenan). Smaller classes are easier to handle for hearing impaired pupils as there are too many distractions if the environment is noisy. Being together with my hearing impaired peers makes me feel like a ‘normal’ person (Elin).

A balance is needed between group sizes and needs. People with disabilities need to feel comfortable in bigger groups, but society needs to adapt. Mainstream and disabled students need to learn to live together – with access for all (Mei Lan).

Inclusive education is quite often claimed to be expensive, but in trying to save, we end up paying more to handle problems anyway (Daniel). Even if a country doesn’t have many resources, inclusive education needs to be done in the best way. Inclusive education is an investment, we must invest in people; people are the only resource. Inclusive education helps us get past our history – it strengthens us (Jens).



The young delegates also discussed the main *challenges* they consider are faced within inclusive education, including a general lack of understanding of disabilities on the part of teachers and students, the need for a change of mentality and attitudes relating to diversity, the limited expertise of teachers, negative attitudes, physical access to buildings and the need for more adapted learning materials and adequate learning environments.

Here are some of their inputs:

Integration in kindergarten, when the children are younger, is very difficult (Dagur).

Some people have a lack of understanding about the differences in their own country. People without disabilities have two ways of coping with people with disabilities: they just go away, they don't care and don't try, or, even if they don't understand, they try to ask questions and to understand. My father used to have problems when I was younger because people did not know what ADHD was and my father did not know how to explain it. It is important that people know about all different types of problems. Especially in countries like mine, the problem with disabilities is cultural. We used to be a country of warriors. We were Vikings and the people who were weak were not accepted by the community and sometimes they were killed and that type of culture is still present in my country (Dagur).



Inclusive education in general society is still difficult; it can, for example, be dangerous for us to cross the street because the street lights are not adapted for visually impaired people (Carlo and Melania).

Children are labelling each other for being in a special programme. A problem of inclusive education is connected with all social problems (Ingre).

Bullying is a problem in mainstream, as well as a lack of acceptance (Leanne).

There is progress in social attitudes towards inclusive education, but it is still not a main priority (Jonas).

Understanding everybody's problems is also a challenge. Schools and staff should understand people's difficulties and give them the support they need to do well. We should get to the point where there is no difference in the way people are treated and there is no discrimination, but there is understanding (Sam, Charlotte, Jere).

Teachers and parents need to know how to use technical support in school and at home; more support materials are needed (Elmo, Kanivar, Fé, Aure).

Inclusive education can create new barriers that have to be overcome, such as: teachers attitudes (Wessel); learning and social barriers (Bethany); the social effects and pressures from parents (Triin); bullying (Sophie); a student's social background and learning conditions outside of school (Gemma); public facilities like transport (Francesco).

Teacher training is really critical (Sophie). Teacher training does not provide enough and the right information on inclusion issues. People with special needs are already in trouble; getting more support sometimes causes them more problems (Wessel). Sometimes teachers are not interested in learning about special needs (Méryem).

The government is the one in charge of paying teachers for their jobs and they get paid for 'being a teacher', but they are not interested in 'dealing with something more'. Therefore most of the teachers do not care about learning about SEN (Laima).

Approaches must be consistent among teachers (Elin).



Teachers might be worried about paying more attention to the young people with disabilities (Robert). In a class with few students with disabilities, the teacher shouldn't give too much attention to students with disabilities. Teachers need to find a balance between supporting the students with and without disabilities (Daniel).

In my country, people help too much (Kamilla).

We don't have support assistants at the university level. We also need to eliminate discrimination and bullying. Some students are aware of disabilities and they still make fun of me because of my ADHD (Maria).

We always have the impression that we need to ask for help. It is not something that comes automatically. It is a long process until you get what you need (Pauline).

Teachers should speak to pupils about disabilities – mainstream students cannot decide what they can do to help and support (Áron). Disability awareness should be part of the curriculum (Katrina).

Two or more teachers (assistants) in an inclusive classroom must work as a team; this is an extra skill these teachers should be trained to have. The teacher should get support from specialists to decide how much additional time is needed by disabled pupils (Philipp).

Government cuts are already impacting on some support – people like mediators are losing their jobs. Money is going to schools, but it is so dysfunctional as it means 'normal' teachers have to do the support and they have no clue (Wessel).

Different professionals must work together. The new generation of teachers are better educated to understand people with disabilities and make the classes better – we are developing in the right direction. The law is good, but teachers need knowledge and understanding of visual impairment/other disabilities. More technical aids are needed to make sure disabled people get accessible information (François). Physical access of buildings is important (lifts, automatic doors, accessible switches, etc.) (Thomas). In the case of tests, extra time is needed (Łukasz). Internal support systems are needed to support students with disabilities. External support can make them feel different and isolated (Mei Lan). More e-books and audio-books are needed for those with poor sight (Łukasz, Áron).



The biggest challenges are people's attitudes and people's knowledge – it is like living in a dark place (Triin). It is a real challenge having to keep explaining what you need to others – it is difficult to make others aware of your limits. It's very difficult when you have to do it over and over again. There is often too limited social contact between students with and without special needs (Barbara).

Society doesn't want to accept people with some types of difficulties, but social acceptance is crucial (Robert). There is a perceived stigma around disability which should be removed. In our Youth Parliament we have had training, for example about epilepsy and how to give support. In mainstream settings pupils with disabilities must explain their problems again and again to new teachers and peers. Continuity of assessment information is needed as well as sensitivity to feelings (Keenan).

People don't always know how to communicate effectively, or in different ways (Tomáš). Inappropriate behaviour of peers is bad for everyone (Lucie). Simple things can be a battle all the time (Bethany). Communication is important – some people have bad habits – it must be 'taboo-free'. Blind people do not all have the same problems – it is very complex (Sára).

On the way towards inclusive education, psychological issues should be considered more than practical issues. With a 'hidden' disability like Asperger's syndrome, people need reminding – they make assumptions. Education needs to be delivered according to needs – small groups are also helpful for people with Asperger's. In inclusive education knowledge and experiences about a certain type of disability are harder to gain than in special schools for pupils with the same disability. Even professionals don't always have the knowledge and ask 'what are your problems?' We are all individuals – my autistic way of thinking interacts with who I am (Daniel).

Everybody understands inclusive education differently; a common definition of inclusive education doesn't exist and this is a challenge. Greater awareness is needed – we can't move on until everyone is aware of disability (Katrina).



## Comments and proposals

Young delegates were also asked to contribute some general comments and proposals. These were:

Diversity is positive; it is important to prepare people from the beginning, to work with the kids to build up a better generation (Dagur).

Students must not be discouraged in any way (Robert). There is a need for confidence in oneself (James). It is important that teachers believe in me (Efstathios). Teachers must pay more attention to what pupils can do, instead of what they can't do. People must see behind the disability. I am hearing impaired – that's not me, just my ears. There is a difference between me and my disorder. Teachers need knowledge about disability. We need more activities together – out of school, leisure, sport, etc. – for fun (Elin).

There are not enough opportunities to spend time in volunteer groups, or on social activities after a school day. There is life after school (Arvydas).

We need to be prepared for the future. In school, teachers know who the students with disabilities are. In the 'real' world, people have to take care with people with special needs (Melanie). People with disabilities have to learn about how to behave in society (Marie).





Teachers have to be open to understanding what the student wants and how to support him (Nana-Marie). You can be good at one subject and bad at another one, but the criteria should not stop you studying certain areas (Daniel).

Teachers must make it as easy as possible for everyone to learn to the same standards. Disabled young people must be involved in decisions. They are at the forefront of decisions for themselves (Keenan). Everyone must be involved, whether or not they are different – everyone is who they are (Katrina).

We should look at the person – not the disability – and use everything we have to make things better (Asgerdur).

Students with disabilities must make their own decisions and have the same opportunities to be involved in questions about their education – a right to a voice in things concerning education (Klara). It is our right to make our decisions (Wessel).

People who will be supported should be on the recruitment board for new learning support staff; they should be involved in general decision-making. They should have inspirational role models with disabilities (Sam, Charlotte, Jere).

We need to have 'Schools without Barriers'. Everyone can benefit from inclusive education, including those without disabilities (Elmo, Kanivar, Aure, Fé). We need to change the attitudes of students without special needs towards disabilities (Emile).

Inclusive education is just a good idea – a new world is opened (Lucie).

Finally, there were a number of opinions shared by many delegates, such as:

- In terms of inclusive classes, the young delegates expect that teachers and the 'other students' make more effort to understand and include students with disabilities;
- Young delegates acknowledge that it is important to reduce the number of students, or to have small class sizes and to promote universal design in buildings and facilities in society generally;
- It is important to receive support without needing to fight for it;
- Training for school peers should take individual needs and attitudes into more account;





- 
- Inclusive education varies across different countries, as well as within a country.

In conclusion, the quality, openness and in-depth nature of the young delegates' discussions must be highlighted. The maturity of the opinions they expressed was evident, as was their interest in contributing to the implementation of what inclusive education is really about: equal access to education, quality of education for all and respect for differences.

The complete transcripts of each group's discussions can be found on the Agency website: <http://www.european-agency.org/agency-projects/european-hearing-2011/results-files>



## LOOKING BACK AND LOOKING FORWARD

Now in 2012, it seems the right time to reflect upon the inputs provided by all the young delegates since the first Hearing in 2003. The three events have involved 238 young people in total who were all invited to provide comments and proposals on inclusive education. The objective for all three Hearings has been to listen to the views of young people, in order to better understand how inclusive education is implemented in practice from the perspective of the end user.

The views on inclusive education held by young people should not be considered less relevant than those expressed by trained professionals or academics. The results of the three Hearings clearly demonstrate that young people can easily and concisely express the same kinds of observations that are made by experts in the field.

This document does not attempt to offer a longitudinal analysis of developments since 2003; different young people have been nominated for each hearing, different levels of education have been represented and young people without special needs or disabilities were only involved for the first time in 2011. The main concern here is to underline the similarities and differences between the comments and concerns expressed since 2003, as well as highlight the main proposals made across all hearings.

Over the years the young people have expressed satisfaction with their education overall, regardless of whether they come from mainstream or special educational settings. They all emphasised the importance of receiving quality education and training and stressed its key role in supporting them to find a job, broaden and strengthen their social relationships and generally prepare them for their future life.

All the young people have been in favour of inclusive education and – despite the negative experiences of a few – they highlighted the fact that inclusive education is beneficial for all learners. The 2011 participants in particular provided precise explanations of what inclusive education should be, what it means for them and the benefits it can offer everyone. Young people without special needs or disabilities were also able to clearly describe the way in which inclusive education is an enriching experience, as it opens minds and helps to break down stereotypes.



The majority of participants have come from mainstream settings and they acknowledge the differences in inclusive education across and within countries, as well as the existence of areas for improvement. They nevertheless consider that inclusive education is a right. This right encompasses equal access to educational opportunities, receiving the necessary support to make the most of these educational opportunities and being treated with respect.

The right to inclusive education also means being involved in and being given free decision-making opportunities regarding any further educational placement. Indeed, a theme running through all three Hearings has been the young people's clear wish to be fully involved in any decisions concerning them.

In 2003 the participants stressed this in the context of not facing their future being spent at home without a job. This sentiment was again expressed in 2007, as a shared desire to live as independently as possible. In 2011, young delegates stressed that one of the main benefits of inclusive education is receiving a good education that better prepares you for independent life.

For young people, inclusive education is a celebration of diversity and concerns not only schooling, but also society as a whole. It can only be fully achieved when barriers are broken down and attitudes are changed. In this respect, two particular areas continue to be highlighted by the young people as ongoing challenges – access and the attitudes and expertise of teachers.

Access encompasses not only the physical accessibility of buildings, but also the provision of necessary and accessible technical support and efficient, readily available educational support.

The participants also commented that teachers are not always aware of, or do not pay attention to, the existence and range of learning needs. Teachers do not have the requisite expertise and they too often focus on learners' weaknesses instead of their strengths.

Despite these comments, the young people are not negative about their teachers, but instead ask a new type of teacher: one who is well prepared and comfortable working in an inclusive education system.

In light of these challenges, the participants in the 2011 Hearing made concrete and practical proposals for improvements to support inclusive education at both the school and classroom level. They asked decision-makers to ensure that all schools have the necessary



physical accessibility and adequate resources and support, which includes the availability of classroom support workers who can respond to all learners' needs.

They highlighted the advantages of small class sizes and individual learning programmes and having additional, well-equipped rooms for rest or extra support where necessary. They also highlighted the need for adapted examinations (such as providing extra time) as well as the possibility of extending the duration of study by one year, so that all learners can reach the same level of achievement without the need to provide some of them with additional support. In this respect they stressed that the same education means obtaining the same qualifications.

There can be no doubt that the three Hearings are directly beneficial for the young people involved – this has been confirmed by the feedback received since 2003. This benefit extends beyond the young people to their schools and teachers and the learners involved in preparatory discussions. The various outputs produced following the 2011 Hearing clearly demonstrate this impact: the young people and accompanying professionals have taken various steps following the Hearing, such as writing articles in magazines and newspapers and using and creating e-tools such as Facebook and Twitter pages and dedicated web pages on school websites.

The Agency will take steps to ensure the widest possible dissemination of this report and will not forget the serious proposals and requests expressed by all of the young delegates.

Together with the delegates, their families, professionals and decision-makers, the Agency will work towards the implementation of quality education without barriers, where everybody is different and respected and where, as the young delegates themselves said: *we are all different colours, but together we can make a rainbow.*



## YOUNG DELEGATES IN THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT HEARING 2011

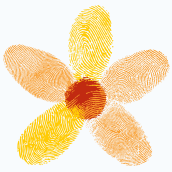
Below are the names of the 88 young delegates who participated in the European Parliament Hearing 2011:

Aure AFLALO	Keenan ALEXANDER
Carlo ANDERHALDEN	Maria BARANDUN
Efstathios BEKYRAS	Méryem BELGHAZI
John BENNINGTON	Markos BOTSOS
Robert BOYLE	Elin Johanna BRANDT KORALL
Pauline BRASSEUR	Chiara BRIZZOLARI
Wessel BROEKHUIS	Maria BUGEJA
Claudia BURATTINI	Fabian CAMARA ALCAIDE
Jens CAMILLERI	Tomáš ČERNÝ
Alexandra CHRONOPOULOU	Rolands CINIS
Leanne Alice COLE	Nana-Marie DALE REICHEL
Charlotte DARBY	Yohana Angelica DEL PINTO
Honoré D'ESTIENNE D'ORVES	Samantha DRYDEN-SILLARS
Wacław DZIĘCIOŁ	Klara Linnea Astrid ELFSTEN
Zsófia FAZEKAS	João FONSECA
Barbara GEHER	Sára GERGELY
Josette GRAÇA SILVA	Melania GROTTI
Kanivar GÜLER	Andreani HADJISTERKOTI
Sophie Bethan HANNAWAY	Asgerdur HEIMISDÓTTIR
Lucie HRDINOVÁ	Ingre IMALA
Jakub JARMUŁA	Diogo JESUS NETO
Dagur JÓHANSSON	Þórdur JÓNSSON
Domen KAISER	Dean KELLY
Orlando KROHN	Thomas KROYER



Joži KUMPREJ	Robert LÄTT
Mei LAN NG	Marie LAURITZEN
Artūras LAURYNAS	François LE BEL
Laima LIEPINA	Fé LINDEN
Rebeca LÓPEZ RUANO	Nika LUŠNIC
Mathias MACHIELSEN	Gemma MACKINTOSH
Jere Nicholas MAHLAKAARTO	Emile MAINKA
Tuomas Kimmo Johannes MANNI	Daniel MARTIN
James MARTIN	Simon MCDOUGALL
Stefanos MELAS	Audrey MESUREUR
Sofie MONGGAARD CHRISTENSEN	Jonas NENORTAS
Michalis NICOLAOU	Melanie NIELSEN
Áron ÓCSVÁRI	Elmo PESIN
Triin PUUSEPP	Pedro ROMERO JIMÉNEZ
Zineb SAOUI	Daniel Alexander SCHOUTEN
Francesco SCICLUNA	Edgars ŠENINŠ
Łukasz ŚMIETANA	Kamilla SØLYST BJØLSETH
Bethany STALEY	Philipp STEINBERGER
Katrina THOMSON	Lise TØRLEN
Mirjam WOLFF	Arvydas ZAGARAS





**EN**

In November 2011, the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education hosted a Hearing at the European Parliament in Brussels. The Agency's member countries nominated 88 young people, both with and without special educational needs and/or disabilities, from secondary and vocational education, to discuss what inclusive education means to them.

The aim of the Hearing was for the organisers and participants to listen to the young people, as well as take note of the progress made in inclusive education in the respective countries since 2007. Every learner can highlight important issues regarding how inclusion is implemented, as well its benefits and challenges, because they are all involved in what inclusion is. In light of how frequently it was mentioned in their discussions, the importance of inclusion is clearly a common theme in the educational lives of the young people.



European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education

