TE4I

TEACHER EDUCATION FOR INCLUSION
KEY POLICY MESSAGES

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to give an overview of the conclusions and recommendations of the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (the Agency) Teacher Education for Inclusion (TE4I) project and highlight how the project recommendations may also contribute to other EU and international policy priorities.

The issue of teacher education is high on the policy agenda across Europe and globally, and the role of teachers and therefore of teacher education in moving towards a more inclusive education system is being recognised. The *World Report on Disability* (WHO, 2011) stressed that: 'The appropriate training of mainstream teachers is crucial if they are to be confident and competent in teaching children with diverse needs.' They also emphasise the need for this to be about attitudes and values, not just knowledge and skills (p. 222).

Teacher Education Trends at European and International Level

The Agency TE4I project takes account of recent developments in teacher education and in inclusive education at European and international level. The *Council Conclusions on the Social Dimension of Education and Training* (2010) note that education and training systems across Europe need to ensure both equity and excellence and recognise that improving educational attainment and key competences for all are crucial, not only to economic growth and competitiveness but also to reducing poverty and fostering social inclusion.

Teacher Education for Inclusion – equipping all teachers to meet the increasingly diverse needs of learners – has the potential to contribute towards the following policy issues:

Addressing educational disadvantage: In moving towards ET 2020 Objective 3 'Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship', the *Council Conclusions of 12 May 2009 on the Strategic Framework for EU co-operation in education and training* (2009a) highlight the need to address educational disadvantage by providing high quality early childhood education and targeted support, and by promoting inclusive education. The importance of early intervention is increasingly recognised as a way to prevent many of the persistent social problems that are passed from one generation to the next, and to make long-term savings in public spending.

Addressing issues of poverty: The *Council Conclusions on the European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion: A European framework for social and territorial cohesion* (2011a) in particular requires greater efforts to provide support and opportunities for non-traditional and disadvantaged learners and notes that people with disabilities are particularly exposed to the risk of poverty and social exclusion.

Tackling early school leaving: Tackling early school leaving calls for measures such as 'second chance' education and stronger co-operation with families and the local community, as well as close co-ordination between education and training sectors and other related policy areas, including early childhood education, curricula, teacher education and individualised support, in particular for disadvantaged groups.

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> **Improving educational attainment and key competences:** The *Council conclusions on the role of education and training in the implementation of the 'Europe 2020' strategy* (2011b) emphasise the fundamental role of education and training in achieving the objectives of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth by equipping citizens with the skills and competences needed by the European economy and European society and helping to promote social cohesion and inclusion.

> **Breaking down barriers experienced by learners with disabilities:** Many countries and the EU itself have signed and ratified the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, 2006 (UNCRPD) and the Optional Protocol and this is providing a force for change. In particular, Article 24 states that inclusive education provides the best educational environment for children with disabilities and helps to break down barriers and challenge stereotypes.

The UNCRPD states the need to train all teachers to teach in inclusive classrooms and reinforces the importance of improving teacher education in the ways summarised by Ministers of Education in recent years (2007, 2008, 2009b). The TE4I project provides further support for such actions.

The Agency Teacher Education for Inclusion (TE4I) Project[1]

In 2009, the Agency began a three-year project to investigate how mainstream teachers are prepared via their initial training to be 'inclusive'. The project involved fifty-five experts from 25 countries[2], including policy makers responsible for teacher education and inclusive education and both general and specialist teacher educators. The project recommendations draw on the commonalities between policy and practice for teacher education for inclusion in participating countries, on the policy and literature reviews produced as part of the project and information gathered from a wide range of stakeholders during 14 country study visits. In addition to the project report, a key output is a Profile of Inclusive Teachers, outlining the competences required by effective, inclusive teachers.

Project Findings and Recommendations

Teacher education throughout Europe needs to be further developed if it is to effectively prepare teachers to meet the needs of more diverse learners in the classroom. The TE4I project findings reinforce the main concerns highlighted at European policy level and clearly indicate the need to:

- Develop more effective recruitment and selection processes;

- Improve teacher education systems including initial teacher education, induction, mentoring and continuing professional development;

- Strengthen the profession and ensure the quality of teacher educators;

- Improve school leadership.

Most importantly, the TE4I project findings argue for the need to improve teacher competences and promote professional values and attitudes. Four core values relating to teaching and learning have been identified within the project as the basis for the competences for teachers working in inclusive education:

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[1] More information is available from: http://www.european-agency.org/agency-projects/teacher-education-for-inclusion

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

Valuing pupil diversity: pupil difference is considered as a resource and an asset to education;

Supporting all learners: teachers have high expectations for all learners' achievements;

Working with others: collaboration and teamwork are essential approaches for all teachers;

Continuing personal professional development: teaching is a learning activity and teachers must accept responsibility for their own lifelong learning.

A number of recommendations emerge from the project findings. These are directed to professionals working in teacher education, as well as policy makers who will need to provide a coherent policy framework for managing the wider, systemic change necessary to impact on teacher education for inclusion:

Recruitment and retention: Effective approaches to improve the recruitment of teacher candidates and increase retention rates should be explored along with ways to increase the number of teachers from diverse backgrounds and with disabilities.

Evidence of effectiveness of teacher education: Research should be undertaken on the effectiveness of different routes into teaching and course organisation, content and pedagogy to best develop the competence of teachers to meet the diverse needs of all learners.

Professionalisation of teacher educators: The 'profession' of teacher educators needs to be further developed with improvements in recruitment, induction and continuing professional development. The profile of teacher educators in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and school staff with this responsibility should be raised by the appointment of candidates with appropriate expertise and qualifications. Further work should develop a formal induction process and explore ways to maintain recent, relevant classroom experience for college-based staff.

Collaboration between schools and HEIs: As a major part of all ITE courses, teaching practice needs to be supported by a clear understanding of underpinning theoretical issues to ensure that practice does not focus only on the skills that can be most easily observed and measured. Schools and teacher education institutions must work together to ensure good models in practice schools and appropriate placements for teaching practice.

Wider, systemic reform: Teacher education cannot work in isolation. The 'whole system reform' needed to support change will require commitment and strong leadership from policy makers in all sectors and the full range of stakeholders in education. Further work should focus on the development of policy across sectors and multi-agency practice at all levels to support inclusive education as a key part of a more inclusive society.

Clarification of the language that is used when referring to inclusion and diversity: Categorisation and labelling reinforces comparisons, builds hierarchies and can limit expectations and, as a result, learning. Policy reform should support all teachers and key professionals to develop a clear understanding of the underpinning premises associated with and the implications of using different terminology.

Areas for Further Policy Development

Developments in teacher education for inclusion are evident across Europe. However there remains a number of key policy issues that require further examination if all teachers are to be prepared via their initial teacher education to meet a diversity of learners' needs in inclusive classrooms. In considering the European level policy priorities along with the findings of the TE4I project, the benefits of further work in this area are clear. The following four areas can be identified as requiring particular attention in future work and policy development:

ITE courses follow a merged model approach: Inclusion and diversity issues are an integral part of content within ITE programmes for all teachers – regardless of the age range or subject they intend to teach.

A continuum of professional development opportunities on diversity issues are available for all teachers and school leaders: Following coverage of these issues in ITE and provision of a range of relevant experiences, teachers should be able to follow-up specific areas in greater depth throughout their careers.

Professional development opportunities on diversity issues are available for all teacher educators: Increasingly, teacher educators should be appointed who have knowledge and experience of inclusive settings. Research and development opportunities should be available for all teacher educators to encourage collaboration between faculties and contribute to a 'whole institution' approach to diversity.

Data on the recruitment and retention of teachers, in particular data relating to the representation of teachers from minority groups, is collected: Such data should be analysed and used to inform policy-making decisions with the aim of ensuring that the teacher workforce is representative of the population as a whole.

Concluding Comments

The benefits of increasing inclusion, linked to other priorities such as social justice and community cohesion, are long-term and investment in early childhood education and an increasingly inclusive education system is likely to represent the most effective use of resources.

The vision of a more equitable education system requires teachers equipped with the competences needed to meet diverse needs and it is hoped that the work of this Agency project can provide some ideas and inspiration to continue the journey to provide a quality education for all learners.

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