

MENNTUN FYRIR ALLA Á ÍSLANDI

Úttekt á framkvæmd stefnu um menntun án aðgreiningar á Íslandi

EDUCATION FOR ALL IN ICELAND

External Audit of the Icelandic System for Inclusive Education

Final Report



EUROPEAN AGENCY
for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

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This document is the Final Report of the External Audit of the Icelandic System for Inclusive Education.

The European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education has prepared this report on behalf of the Icelandic Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (Mennta- og menningarmálaráðuneytið).

The report and all accompanying materials have been developed as a result of work conducted throughout 2016 by a team of staff and consultants from the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (the Agency).

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- The Teachers' Union
- The National Home and School Association
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- The participants of the Focus Groups
- The school teams hosting school visits



- The respondents to the On-line survey.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND FIGURES

Abbreviations	Full Version
Agency:	European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education
CPD:	Continuous Professional Development
ESL:	Early School Leaving
ET 2020:	Education and Training 2020
EU:	European Union
FG:	Focus Group
GDP:	Gross Domestic Product
ICT:	Information and Communication Technology
IE:	Inclusive Education
IEPs:	Individual Education Plans
ISCED:	International Standard Classification of Education
ISK:	Icelandic Króna
ISO:	International Organization for Standardization
ITE:	Initial Teacher Education
LSA:	Learning Support Assistant
NGO:	Non-Governmental Organisation
NQF:	National Qualifications Framework
OECD:	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PISA:	Programme for International Student Assessment
QA:	Quality Assurance
SEN:	Special Educational Needs
SNE:	Special Needs Education
UNCRC:	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNCRPD:	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
UNESCO:	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF:	United Nations Children's Fund
VET:	Vocational Education and Training



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FOREWORD

The Agency is an independent association of European member countries, acting as a platform for collaboration in the field of special needs and inclusive education. It aims to improve educational policy and practice for learners with disabilities and special educational needs. As of December 2016, the Agency member countries are: 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, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and United Kingdom (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales).

Iceland has been a full member country of the Agency since its inception in 1996.

The Agency works with all member countries on various topics of shared interest. It also works on a consultancy basis for individual countries that wish to examine particular aspects of their systems for inclusive education that are not specifically covered in the agreed Agency work programme. Such assignments are undertaken at the direct request of the Minister for Education in the country.

In early 2015, representatives from the Icelandic Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (Mennta- og menningarmálaráðuneytið) approached the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (the Agency) with an initial enquiry regarding an External Audit of the Icelandic System for Inclusive Education. The Audit would build upon the previous internal evaluation of the implementation of the policy of inclusive education, entitled *Mat á framkvæmd stefnu um skóla án aðgreiningar*, conducted in 2015 (Mennta- og menningarmálaráðuneytið, 2015).

Extensive discussions were held throughout 2015 with different stakeholder groups from the Ministries of Education and Welfare, municipalities and professional associations in Iceland. It was agreed that the Audit scope would cover pre-, compulsory and upper-secondary schools. Furthermore, the active participation and engagement of school, local and national-level actors would be a crucial factor for the work.

The agreement to conduct the External Audit of the Icelandic System for Inclusive Education was formalised on 3 November 2015, when the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture and the Agency signed a contract. At the same time a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, the Ministry of Welfare, the Icelandic Association of Local Authorities, the Teachers' Union, the National Home and School Association and the Head Teachers' Union of the Upper-Secondary Schools.



The Agency implemented the External Audit during 2016, working in co-operation with, but independently from, any stakeholders within Iceland. The External Audit Team comprised Agency staff working with consultants who had specialisms relevant to the Audit issues.

The Audit work directly involved:

- All responsible funding bodies involved in inclusive education: the municipalities, the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, the Ministry of Health and Welfare, and the Ministry of the Interior (Local Authorities' Equalization Fund)
- All school stakeholders: learners and their families, school staff, support services, school funders and operators, national teacher organisations and teacher education institutions, and local and national-level decision-makers.

Given the physically dispersed nature of Iceland's population, as well as the decentralised education system, a wide geographical coverage for the Audit was essential. Therefore, the regions of Reykjavík, Akureyri, Egilsstaðir, Árborg, Borgarbyggð and their surrounding municipalities were involved in the main fieldwork activities of 27 focus groups, 11 school visits and 9 one-to-one interviews. The on-line survey (in Icelandic and English) for parents, teachers, support staff and school leaders had a national reach. It received 934 replies.

This document presents the findings and recommendations arising from all the External Audit activities.

At the Audit launch event on 3 November 2015, Mr Illugi Gunnarsson, the Minister for Education, Science and Culture at that time, stated that the main motivation for the Icelandic stakeholders in requesting an Audit was to gain an external view of the operation of the Icelandic system for inclusive education. He quoted an Icelandic maxim that says 'The eye of the guest is keenest'.

The Audit Team and I are confident we have been able to bring a 'keen eye' to the Audit process. We are also confident we have been able to provide a 'voice' for a range of Icelandic stakeholders to give their views and opinions on how the system is working for them.

Dr Cor Meijer, Agency Director



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Executive Summary presents the main findings, recommendations and critical levers for ways forward presented in the **Final Report: *Education for All in Iceland: External Audit of the Icelandic System for Inclusive Education***. The full Audit **Reporting Package** consists of the **Final Report** and six associated **Annexes**. Each of the Annexes presents detailed information on different areas – methodology, literature review and data analysis – that have served as the basis for this report.

The External Audit of the system for inclusive education should be seen within the wider context and processes of on-going development work being undertaken in Iceland, in particular the previous internal evaluation of the implementation of the policy of inclusive education (*Mat á framkvæmd stefnu um skóla án aðgreiningar*) conducted in 2015 (Mennta- og menningarmálaráðuneytið, 2015).

The Audit focused on exploring the implementation of the Icelandic policy for inclusive education. To achieve this, the Audit scope covered:


- pre-school through to the end of upper-secondary education;
- all responsible funding bodies involved in inclusive education;
- all school-level stakeholders, including learners and their families.

The Agency's work used a standards-based audit model, which is a quality assurance approach; standards can be considered as quality assurance indicators and/or benchmarks for self-evaluation and review.

The key Icelandic stakeholders undertook a Critical Reflection process, which identified seven focus areas. These seven areas provided the framework for identifying the Standards and Descriptors that can be seen as *Icelandic stakeholders' aspirations for their system*. They highlight policy and practice factors that are all crucial in ensuring a quality system for inclusive education. These Standards and Descriptors served as the basis for Audit data collection and analysis.

Audit data collection activities ran from March to August 2016. They focused upon three separate, but mutually supporting activities:

1. Background information collection in the form of policy documents, reports, articles and web links in either English or Icelandic.
2. Fieldwork for the External Audit, carried out during April 2016. It included: 27 focus groups involving 222 participants; 11 school visits; 9 individual face-to-face interviews with high-level decision-makers for the local and national levels.

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3. An On-line survey with 934 responses across four surveys (available in both English and Icelandic language versions).

Data analysis by Audit team members highlighted issues underpinning key areas of policy and practice that required attention and suggested areas of strength that could be built upon when planning improvement.

Findings

The main body of the report is structured around seven findings, with one chapter focusing upon each of the seven Standards and sets of Descriptors:

1st Standard: Inclusive education is defined by all stakeholders as an approach for improving the quality of education of all learners. Stakeholders across and between system levels do not have a common understanding of inclusive education. There is generally a lack of clarity around the concept of inclusive education and how it should be implemented in practice.

2nd Standard: Legislation and policy for inclusive education has the goal of promoting equal opportunities for all learners. Legislation and policy do support the goals and aims of inclusive education. The majority of stakeholders, across all system levels, agree upon these goals and aims. However, stakeholders require more concrete guidance on how the policy aims and objectives should be translated into local- and school-level action plans and then put into practice. Stakeholders also need guidance on how practice should then be monitored and evaluated in line with national legislation and policy.

3rd Standard: Policy for inclusive education is effectively implemented at all levels. Stakeholders at all system levels, despite their commitment, are not as effectively enabled to implement inclusive education policy as they could be. Some mechanisms for support are in place, but stakeholders consider that a range of more flexible opportunities should be widely available. All stakeholders see the full achievement of this Standard as being highly dependent upon the achievement of other standards proposed by the Icelandic Team, in particular the effectiveness of support systems, funding mechanisms and governance and quality assurance procedures.

4th Standard: All stakeholders, at all levels are enabled to think and act inclusively in their daily practice. Many school staff do not feel that the education system fully enables them to think and act inclusively in their daily practice. Stakeholders across all system levels suggest that there are examples of innovative practice in relation to school organisation, curriculum, assessment, pedagogy, support for learners, development opportunities for all stakeholders and effective communication between stakeholders. However, these ways of working are not widespread or usual



practice. Further work is needed to ensure that all stakeholders, including learners and parents, view the availability of support for school and class-level work as both appropriate and effective.

5th Standard: Resource allocation is equitable, efficient and cost-effective. The majority of stakeholders across all system levels believe that current funding mechanisms and the resource allocation framework are not equitable or efficient in any school phase. Rather than enabling stakeholders to implement inclusive education, current funding processes are seen as a barrier to developments in inclusive practice. For many national and local-level stakeholders, changes to the current funding mechanism linked to a diagnosis of SEN/disability would be a critical lever in moving the system for inclusive education forward in Iceland.

6th Standard: Governance and quality assurance mechanisms ensure co-ordinated and effective implementation of inclusive education policy and practice.

Stakeholders at national, local and school levels do not view the current educational governance and quality assurance/accountability processes as effective. Stakeholders at national and local levels suggest that current governance mechanisms do not effectively support their work. Stakeholders at school level suggest that current quality assurance mechanisms do not always inform their work in a way that promotes school development and improvement.

7th Standard: Professional development issues at all system levels are effectively addressed. Many school-level stakeholders question the degree to which their initial education and/or on-going continuous professional development opportunities prepare them for the realities of inclusive education practice. Many national and local-level stakeholders question how far initial and professional development opportunities are aligned with national and local policies and therefore to what extent they enable school staff to implement inclusive education as a rights-based approach for all learners.

Evaluation of the Standards and Descriptors

The evaluation of the Standards and Descriptors was based on all available evidence considered by the Audit Team. The overall evaluation of Standards and Descriptors which reflects the team's unanimous decisions can be summarised as follows:

- 7 Descriptors were identified as being at the stage of ***to be initiated***, with planning being at an early stage or practice yet to be started and, consequently, needing attention.
- 31 Descriptors were identified as ***requiring development***, with implementation being partial, or inconsistent across schools, phases and municipalities, but having possibilities for existing practice to be built upon.



- 1 Descriptor was identified as being **fully embedded**, established and sustainable in policy and practice across schools, age phases and municipalities.
- All seven Standards overall were identified as **requiring development**.

This pattern of evaluation is to be expected. The Standards developed by the Icelandic Team and stakeholders are by nature aspirational. Therefore, there was no expectation for a high number to already be embedded in the current system. The fact that the majority of Descriptors, as well as all Standards, are considered as 'requiring development' should be interpreted as positive. It indicates that work is underway and should form a good basis for future improvement.

Audit recommendations

Seven main recommendations are proposed, one for each of the seven Standards that served as the basis for all the Audit activities:

1. Ensure that all stakeholders understand inclusive education as the basis for high-quality education for all learners. This will require national and local-level dialogue about the kind of schools and learning communities that stakeholders want and the best ways to achieve/develop these.

2. In light of the shared dialogue, ensure that legislation and national and local-level policy promote a rights-based approach to inclusive education. Legislation and policy for inclusive education at all levels should aim to support the active participation and engagement of all learners and maximise their learning opportunities.

3. Within the policy framework for inclusive education at national and local levels, embed governance and quality assurance mechanisms that support effective implementation at all system levels. Greater clarity is needed around the different levels of system governance – that is, the processes and structures that ensure co-ordinated operations between different levels and actors in the system.

4. To support the effective implementation of policy at all system levels, develop flexible resource allocation mechanisms that increase the system's capacity to be inclusive. This requires a shift away from compensation to intervention and prevention approaches and a complete rationalisation of all funding mechanisms. The aim should be to reduce the use of formal needs identification procedures that involve the labelling of learners as the main means to access support for learners experiencing difficulties in school.

5. Develop initial and continuing professional training opportunities that are aligned with national and local-level policy goals and school development plans to support the ability of all stakeholders to effectively develop inclusive practice. For this to be achieved, minimum levels of service provision in line with national and



local policies for inclusive education must be introduced to guide the work of all training providers. This should ensure coherent initial and continuing education and development pathways and opportunities that develop positive attitudes and values, as well as knowledge, understanding and skills for all stakeholders working at all system levels.

6. Build the capacity of support systems at all levels to provide inclusive learning environments through an integrated continuum of support and resources. The support system must address age phase and geographical inequities in accessing provision and resources. Learners, families and schools should be guaranteed a minimum level of support no matter where they live or which school they attend.

7. Develop the capacity of all pre-, compulsory and upper-secondary school stakeholders to think and act inclusively in their daily practice and build inclusive learning communities. All school-level stakeholders should be supported to take individual and collective responsibility for meeting the needs of all learners. The possibilities for supporting all forms of on-going self-review and development among schools and support services should be further explored.

These seven recommendations are linked to actions that are considered necessary to ensure that the Standards and Descriptors become embedded within policy and practice in the Icelandic system.

Critical levers

It is not possible – or necessarily effective – to implement the recommendations simultaneously. Priority short-term actions that are crucial for ensuring effectiveness in the system have been identified. Three inter-connected priority actions are seen as critical levers, considered necessary to build a foundation for longer-term actions and to specifically address the Descriptors identified within the Audit as requiring initiation. These critical levers are considered key to ensuring that all other Standards and Descriptors become embedded within Iceland's system for inclusive education. They are seen as having the most potential to promote wider system change:

- **Initiate a widespread stakeholder debate on *what inclusive education should look like in practice* across all municipalities, school phases and schools.**
- **Review and *rationalisation of the current resource allocation mechanisms* with a view to improving effectiveness and cost-effectiveness.**
- **Initiate discussions leading to the *agreement of minimum levels of service provision* for supporting inclusive education in all schools.**

The three critical levers have been proposed with the clear intention of stimulating continuing debate and supporting longer-term system development work. They



have the potential to be used as a discussion tool for agreeing with all stakeholders at all levels:

- the necessary system inputs, or minimum levels of provision, to be made available;
- the mechanisms for supporting innovation and system quality improvements;
- the system monitoring mechanisms and areas of responsibility for ensuring effective implementation of all forms of provision;
- the aspirations and goals that can be seen as the desired outputs for the system of inclusive education;
- a revised set of Standards and Descriptors to be used to guide future work of all stakeholders in the Icelandic system for inclusive education.



INTRODUCTION

This **Final Report** of the External Audit of the Icelandic System for Inclusive Education provides a rationale and context for the Audit work. It also presents the main findings and recommendations. It is part of the overall **Reporting Package** for the External Audit that consists of this document and **six Annexes**:

1. External Audit Methodology
2. Critical Reflection Document
3. Desk Research Report
4. Fieldwork Illustrative Evidence Report
5. Eco-Maps Analysis Report
6. On-line Survey Analysis Report.

The Annexes are all stand-alone documents presented separately to this report. Each of the Annexes presents detailed information on different areas – methodology, literature review and data analysis – that have served as the basis for this **Final Report**.

This **Final Report** draws on each of the accompanying Annexes. This report does not repeat the detailed content in the Annexes, rather it presents a synthesis of the data analysis and results, structured around the framework of seven Standards identified for the Icelandic system for inclusive education. The Annexes have been prepared so that they can be read alongside this report and consulted for more specific information and data sources.

In this report and all accompanying Annexes, bold text is used to indicate additional sources of information that should be consulted for more specific content/detail on the issue in question. For each of the seven chapters on findings, the direct and indirect sources of Audit evidence are clearly listed. Where appropriate, cross-references are also provided to related discussions in the different sections and chapters of this report.

Throughout this **Reporting Package**, the terms ‘Icelandic’ and ‘Audit’ Teams are used. The Icelandic Team refers to representatives from the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture and the Icelandic Association of Local Authorities who acted as a co-ordinating team on behalf of the wider Icelandic stakeholder groups involved in the Audit. The Audit Team refers to Agency staff members and external consultants appointed to conduct the Audit activities.



External Audit approach

The External Audit of the system for inclusive education should be seen within the wider context and processes of on-going development work being undertaken in Iceland. One goal for the External Audit approach has been to build upon the previous internal evaluation of the implementation of the policy of inclusive education (*Mat á framkvæmd stefnu um skóla án aðgreiningar*) conducted in 2015, in order to:

1. further support evidence- based practice and decision- making;
2. foster self-review across all system levels;
3. promote longer-term development work in Iceland.

The External Audit in Iceland has been guided by the principle of the Agency working *for* the Icelandic Ministry, *with* Icelandic stakeholders. Implementing an External Audit involved the Agency in systematically conducting agreed activities in co-operation with, but independently from, any stakeholders in Iceland in order to produce independent recommendations for future action, and to identify potential benchmarks for monitoring developments and progress.

The work conducted by the Agency has taken a standards-based audit approach, centred on a quality improvement cycle of review and reflection phases and actions. Within the standards-based audit approach, the key question for consideration is: ‘Are we doing what we believe is the right thing – and in the right way?’ The standards-based audit model is a quality assurance approach; standards can be considered as quality assurance indicators and/or benchmarks for self-evaluation and review.

An audit aims to be a transparent and non-judgmental examination of system stakeholders’ views on how current practice and/or provision compares with stated policy goals and objectives. Standards take the system policy goals and objectives at the national level as a starting point. They are statements of aspiration for specific aspects of the education system held by key national and local-level stakeholders (i.e. ministry and municipality-level decision-makers).

In the audit, first-hand information relating to the Standards is collected from representatives of different system stakeholder groups. All data collection activities aim to give voice to as many different stakeholders as possible on the range of pre-identified key issues.

The standards-based audit model has proved – in previous Agency work and elsewhere – to be an effective methodology that leads to meaningful, practical and applicable findings and recommendations for stakeholders (please refer to the *next chapter* and **Annex 1: External Audit Methodology** for more details). Such



recommendations have the potential to guide future work within a system development approach, based on stakeholder ownership of issues and challenges, actions and responses.

A standards-based audit is based on a cyclical process. It involves defining standards, collecting data to measure policy and practice against those standards, reviewing the data and then implementing changes to improve policy and practice in line with the standards.

This cycle is presented in Figure 1 below.

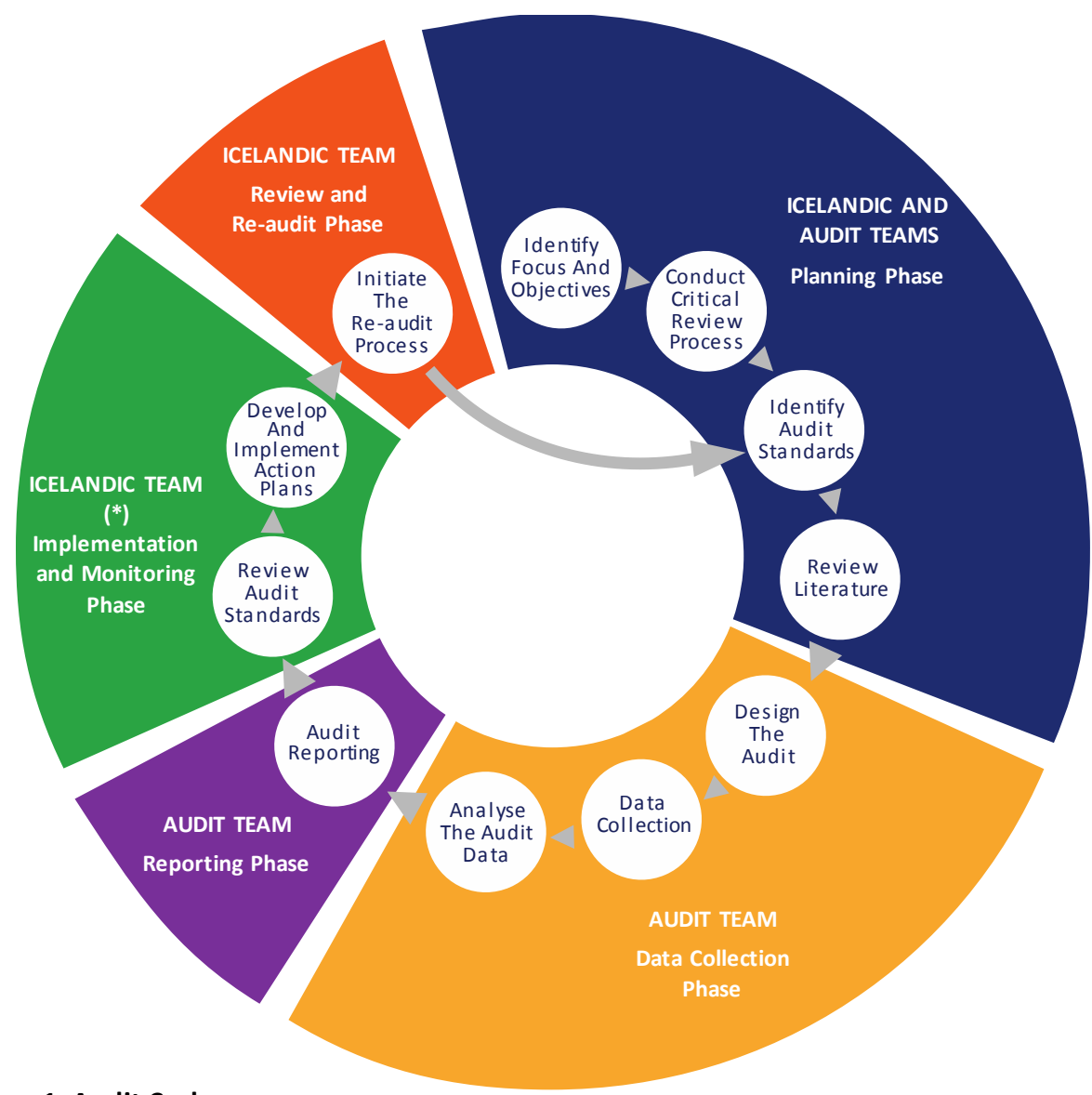


Figure 1. Audit Cycle

The white circles within the Audit model indicate the main tasks for completion in sequence. The outer ring indicates the main phases of Audit activities and who is responsible for implementing the activities in each phase. (* indicates that the Audit



Team could *potentially* be involved in different forms of development and follow-up at this stage).

The External Audit in Iceland focused on the first three of the five Audit phases:

- *Planning* – identifying the topic and objectives, reviewing literature and setting Standards.
- *Data collection* – designing the Audit, collecting and analysing data.
- *Reporting*.

All activities conducted during the Audit aimed to inform the implementation of two further phases of the complete Audit cycle in the longer term: *implementation and monitoring*, and *review and re-audit*. The Audit considered structure, process and outcome factors in order to identify recommendations that can be used to plan long-term systematic improvements for the system in Iceland.

Annex 1: External Audit Methodology presents a full description of the methodology used in the Audit.

The Audit Reporting Package

The final **Audit Reporting Package** consists of this **Final Report** and **six accompanying Annexes**.

This **Final Report** presents a synthesis of the overall Audit findings, based on the different stakeholders' perspectives and shared concerns on key issues for the Icelandic system for inclusive education.

In this report, stakeholders are referred to as being linked to one of three levels:

- *School level* – learners, their parents and families, teachers, support staff, school leaders and members of the wider school support community, such as support service, university and teacher union personnel whose work directly impacts upon school teams
- *Local level* – policy- and decision-makers at municipality level
- *National level* – policy- and decision-makers at national level.

Where relevant, groups of stakeholders are specifically identified to reinforce issues and findings.

Within this report and the six accompanying **Annexes**, all data sources are anonymous. For purposes of confidentiality, it is not possible to track responses back to individual respondents.



The seven areas of Standards and Descriptors, identified by the Icelandic Team, are a critical component of the Audit and also this **Final Report**. The Standards and Descriptors have served as the framework and basis for:

- Audit data collection
- Audit data analysis
- Structuring the **Reporting Package** (i.e. this report and the three Annexes presenting data analysis).

Appendix 1 at the end of this report presents the Standards and Descriptors in full. The Standards and Descriptors were designed to be as comprehensive as possible. They cover all potential areas for examination by the Audit of the system of inclusive education in Iceland.

The **Desk Research Report (Annex 3)** and three data analysis **Annexes (4, 5 and 6)** provide the detailed information for this **Final Report**. They should be referred to when considering the main findings presented here.

The three data Annexes present explanations and descriptions of the data. No attempt to interpret the findings is made in the Annexes. However, the data has been presented with the intention of being used in more detailed ways by Icelandic stakeholders, including supporting further data interrogation as required.

For ease of reading, the specific sources of data – focus groups, interviews, school visits, on-line survey, eco-maps or desk research – are not specifically listed for all findings. They are only referred to in specific instances to highlight findings in relation to particular stakeholder groups.

This **Final Report** is structured as follows: after the *Executive Summary* and this short *Introduction*, there is a chapter summarising the methods and milestones in *Implementation of the External Audit in Iceland*. This is followed by a chapter highlighting key factors impacting upon the Audit work from the *Wider Context for Inclusive Education in Iceland*.

These chapters provide the context for the main body of the report, which is structured around *seven findings chapters* – a chapter focusing upon each of the seven Standards and sets of Descriptors, as well as the underpinning core issues for the Audit.

The titles and subtitles used in each of the findings chapters are the Standard and Descriptors concerned re-framed as questions. Each chapter outlines the Standard and Descriptors, the underpinning core issue, the key question used to explore the core issue, and the direct and indirect sources of information. Direct sources of information are those where specific core issues and related questions were explicitly explored with stakeholders. Indirect sources of information are where



stakeholders were asked questions relating to other areas, but highlighted issues relating to specific Standards and Descriptors.

The body of each chapter sets out the main findings in relation to the Standard and Descriptors and presents in relation to each:

- A summary of the perceived main strengths in relation to the Standard
- A discussion of the perceived challenges faced by different stakeholders in relation to each of the Descriptors.

Each findings chapter concludes with the Audit Team's final evaluation of the Standard and Descriptors discussed in that chapter.

The final chapters of this report focus upon:

- *Specific Audit Recommendations linked to the Standards*, in the form of proposals for moving the system for inclusive education towards embedded Standards.
- The *Identification of Critical Levers* for system development, highlighting the critical areas for change that can be used to support system developments for inclusive education in Iceland in the short and medium term.

The main body of the report ends with *Concluding Comments*.

There is then a *References* list and an *Overview of the Annexes to the Final Report*. Finally, there are **three Appendices** within the report, each focusing upon different aspects of the Standards and Descriptors:

- *Appendix 1*: the full Standards and Descriptors
- *Appendix 2*: evaluation of the Standards and Descriptors
- *Appendix 3*: proposals for revisions to the Standards and Descriptors.

Throughout the report, internal bookmarks (indicated with italic font) provide hyperlinks between material cross-referenced in the text.



IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EXTERNAL AUDIT IN ICELAND

This chapter summarises the main tasks and activities implemented during each of the three phases of the Audit cycle – planning, data collection and reporting – that constitute the External Audit conducted by the Agency on behalf of the Icelandic Stakeholders.

Within each of these Audit phases, a number of key activities were implemented. Figure 2 presents a summary of the key tasks undertaken within the Audit. These are then developed in the sections below.

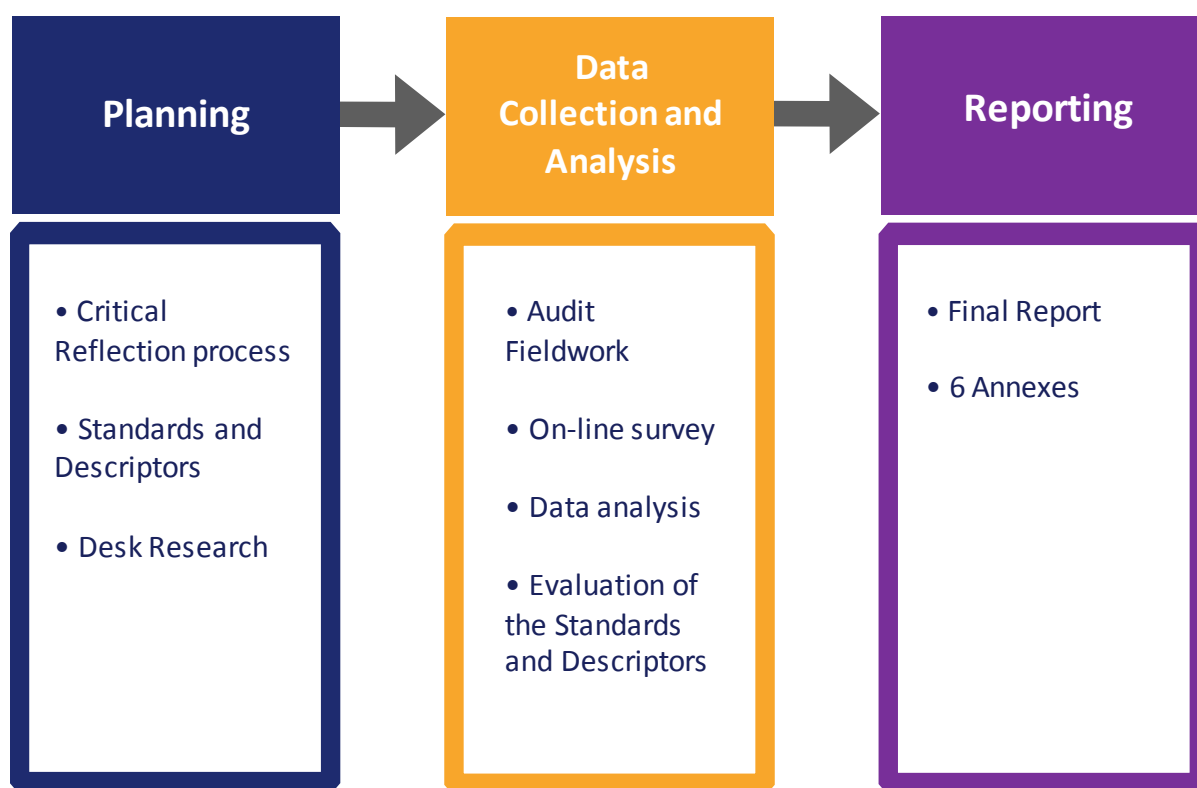



Figure 2. Summary of Audit Methodology

Planning phase

During late 2015 and early 2016, the Icelandic Team and the Agency Audit Team held several planning meetings to discuss and identify the focus, scope and specific objectives for the Audit work.

The Audit’s main focus was to explore how successful the implementation of the Icelandic policy for inclusive education is in practice. To achieve this, the Audit’s scope was identified as:

- Pre-school through to the end of upper-secondary education, including a consideration of the special units and the support system in upper-secondary



schools, as this school level was not covered in the 2015 evaluation work in Iceland

- All responsible funding bodies involved in inclusive education, i.e. the municipalities; the Ministries of Education, Science and Culture; Health and Welfare; and the Interior, including a consideration of the Local Authorities' Equalization Fund
- All school-level stakeholders, i.e. learners and their families; pre-, compulsory and upper-secondary school staff; support services; school funders and operators; national teacher organisations; universities and teacher education institutions and providers; local and national-level decision-makers, including those from the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture and the Ministry of Welfare.

Discussions between the Icelandic Team and Agency Audit Team led to the identification of eight specific objectives for the work:

1. Situating the current system in Iceland within a wider international and European context of policy and practice for inclusive education
2. Building upon the findings of the evaluation of the implementation of the policy of inclusive education *Mat á framkvæmd stefnu um skóla án aðgreiningar* (Mennta- og menningarmálaráðuneytið, 2015), to work with Icelandic stakeholders to refine the study's findings to develop a critical reflection on the implementation of policy for inclusive education in current practice
3. Building upon existing work in Iceland, particularly the previous evaluation study, to work with Icelandic stakeholders to identify a framework of process and outcomes Standards for their system for inclusive education
4. Preparing independent data collection methods in line with the framework of Standards and then collecting data to identify areas of strength and challenge, as well as to inform issues of alignment between the agreed Standards and practice in schools and supporting services
5. Identifying examples of innovative, high-quality practice in implementing policy for inclusive education from the Icelandic as well as the international and European contexts, that will inform policy development and implementation
6. Identifying key levers for ensuring effectiveness in the system
7. Considering short- and long-term investment issues by exploring system added-value issues alongside cost issues



8. Preparing focused and practical recommendations for implementing and monitoring future action plans aimed at developing the system for inclusive education policy and practice in Iceland.

Team discussions also led to an agreement that the Audit would take a systemic approach and examine:

- system factors impacting upon equity, efficiency and effectiveness;
- co-operation at and between local and national levels;
- the evidence and reasons for the perceived policy-practice gap across different educational sectors and forms of provision;
- the monitoring of policy implementation via existing mechanisms (school inspections and information on learning outcomes);
- stakeholders' perceptions of the effectiveness of schools in terms of promoting achievements for all learners.

The premise for the Audit's systemic approach was that a fully inclusive education system is a stated policy goal for Iceland. However, in working towards this goal, it must be recognised that Iceland currently has a multi-level and multi-stakeholder system of financing and support. This covers both mainstream and specialist provision and involves cross-ministerial, -territorial and -sectoral work that impacts both positively and negatively upon access to high-quality inclusive education for all learners.

Critical Reflection process

In spring 2016, the Icelandic Team members conducted the essential critical reflection upon Iceland's current system for inclusive education. This involved discussing and documenting the Team's perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of key areas within the system for inclusive education. The 2015 evaluation report findings (Mennta- og menningarmálaráðuneytið, 2015) were a starting point for the critical reflection process.

The critical reflection process enabled the Icelandic Team to clearly articulate what, in their view, were the main issues to be examined in the Audit. The critical reflection was the basis for preparing and implementing all other Audit tasks.

The document highlighted seven priority areas:

1. The notion of inclusion
2. Policy and guidelines on inclusive education
3. Inclusive education in practice



4. Support for schools
5. The use of resources
6. Governance and quality assurance
7. Teacher education and continuous professional development.

For each of these areas, previous work in Iceland was used to identify critical issues for examination. **Annex 2: Critical Reflection Document** presents the Icelandic Team's identification of critical issues in full.

Standards and Descriptors

The seven areas identified through the critical reflection process were the framework for identifying the Standards and Descriptors to serve as the basis for Audit data collection and analysis.

The operational definition of 'standard' used within the Audit work is:

A statement that indicates levels of quality or attainment that can be used as a measure, norm or benchmark in comparative evaluations.

Identifying and then drafting the Standards and Descriptors involved work between both the Icelandic and Audit Teams. The Icelandic Team proposed initial Standards, based on existing policy for inclusive education in Iceland. The Audit Team then proposed amendments, drawing on the initial desk research information. The Icelandic Team then re-drafted the Standards and circulated them to various representative stakeholder groups for their comment and input.

In March 2016, all stakeholder representatives agreed on the final **Critical Reflection Document (Annex 2)**, incorporating the framework of Standards and Descriptors, as the basis for data collection and analysis.

The Standards and Descriptors identified at this stage can be seen as *Icelandic stakeholders' aspirations for their system*.

They highlight a framework of policy and practice factors that are all crucial in ensuring a quality system for inclusive education.

Appendix 1 presents the final framework of seven Standards and 39 Descriptors.

It is important to note here that the seven areas of Standards and Descriptors must be viewed within a whole-system approach. While they are presented here – and, to a certain degree, have been dealt with – separately within the Audit activities, they are highly inter-dependent.

The critical reflection process ensured that all Audit activities clearly focused upon the issues identified by Icelandic stakeholders. Stakeholders led the process of developing the framework of Standards and Descriptors. This also ensured that the



critical issues evaluated during the Audit were those identified by Icelandic stakeholders.

Data collection phase

As outlined above, the critical reflection process ensured that Icelandic stakeholders played a key role in identifying the focus and benchmarks for the External Audit. The role of the Audit Team was, in consultation with the Icelandic Team, to develop a framework of methods and procedures for collecting data that could be used to evaluate policy and practice against the Standards and Descriptors.

All data collection aimed to examine the stakeholders' perceptions of the Standards and the core issues underpinning the Standards.

In order to provide a framework for data collection and analysis work, the Icelandic and Audit Teams identified a main data collection question for each core issue that underpinned the seven Standards. The data collection questions were common to all stakeholders.

- 1. Inclusive education is defined by all stakeholders as an approach for improving the quality of education of all learners**

Clarity and common understanding of inclusive education

What does inclusive education mean for you?

- 2. Legislation and policy for inclusive education has the goal of promoting equal opportunities for all learners**

How far legislation and policy supports an equitable education system for all learners

How far do you feel that current legislation and policy supports an equitable inclusive education system for all learners?


- 3. Policy for inclusive education is effectively implemented at all levels**

How adequately stakeholders at all levels are enabled to effectively implement inclusive education policy

How well do you feel that policy for inclusive education is being implemented in practice?

- 4. All stakeholders, at all levels are enabled to think and act inclusively in their daily practice**

How effectively the education system enables all stakeholders in education to be inclusive in their day-to-day work



In your role, how well supported do you feel to ensure that learners' diverse needs are met?

5. Resource allocation is equitable, efficient and cost-effective

The effectiveness, equity and enabling effects of resource allocation (including work with other agencies beyond education)

In what ways do you feel that the current systems of resource allocation enable you to support all learners in equitable, efficient and cost-effective ways?

6. Governance and quality assurance mechanisms ensure co-ordinated and effective implementation of inclusive education policy and practice

The effectiveness of educational governance and quality assurance/accountability processes at all system levels

What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of the current quality assurance processes for informing improvement in inclusive education?

7. Professional development issues at all system levels are effectively addressed

How stakeholders at all levels are enabled through their initial education and continuing professional development to implement inclusive education as a rights-based approach for all learners

How well prepared do you feel through your initial education and continuing professional development to meet all learners' rights to a high-quality inclusive education?

The data collected within the Audit should therefore be seen as an expression of different respondents' opinions on the seven core issues underpinning the Standards and Descriptors.

Audit data collection activities ran from March to August 2016. They focused upon three separate, but mutually supporting activities, outlined in the sections below.

Annex 1: External Audit Methodology presents more details on each of the activities described here.

Background information collection

The Icelandic Team provided background information in the form of policy documents, reports, articles and web links in either English or Icelandic. This information covered the following areas: the education system in Iceland; special needs and inclusive education system; staffing and resourcing; pupil information; explanation and regulations regarding the Equalization Fund; description of systems for initial teacher education and continuous professional development.



All of this information is summarised and integrated into **Annex 3: Desk Research Report**.

Audit Fieldwork

Fieldwork for the External Audit was carried out during April 2016. The Icelandic Team agreed in advance upon the criteria for identifying the fieldwork locations, venues and participants.

Over the course of four days, the six Audit Team members conducted:

- 27 focus groups involving 222 participants (including two held by Skype, one shortly after the main fieldwork period). Meetings were held in schools (often combined with school visits), universities and municipality offices;
- 11 school visits – four to compulsory schools, three to pre-schools, three to upper-secondary schools and one to a special school;
- 9 individual face-to-face interviews with high-level decision-makers for the local and national levels.

All of these activities involved a wide range of stakeholders in the Icelandic education system. These included learners – with and without identified special needs – their parents, teachers, support staff, school leaders, teacher trainers and researchers, and local and national-level decision-makers.

Prior to the Audit, it was agreed that participants in all fieldwork activities would be anonymous and that it would not be possible for individuals or groups to be identified in any data analysis or subsequent reporting.

Data was collected using agreed protocols and recording procedures. Focus groups and interviews were audio recorded and all team members kept personal notes using agreed pro forma. In addition to taking notes of discussions, during school visits Audit Team members used an observation schedule for recording notes on key aspects of the school environment.

The fieldwork generated a wealth of data for analysis (procedures for which are described in the *Data analysis* section of this chapter). **Annex 4: Fieldwork Illustrative Evidence Report** presents a collation of the main findings emerging across all of the fieldwork data collection, along with indicative quotes of stakeholders' responses.

In order to provide a more precise view on collaborative approaches evident in schools, a further strand of information was collected during focus groups. This involved the completion of 234 personal eco-maps (please refer to **Annex 5** for more details) by participants from 22 focus groups. The eco-maps explored: working



with other stakeholders, teaching approaches, contacts/support networks for parents and support provided for learners.

The eco-maps information collection aimed to complement the findings from all other data sources. It has been specifically used to inform the 4th, 5th and 7th Audit Standards. It should be noted that there was some additional qualitative information from the eco-maps for learners that was not specifically linked to any question. This was used as evidence of learner voice within the Audit.

Annex 5: Eco-Maps Analysis Report presents full details of the eco-maps usage and data.

On-line survey

In order to connect the examination of policy for inclusive education with stakeholders' perceptions of the support provided in the system for them to implement policy, the Audit work included an on-line survey. The aim was to provide first-hand information from school-level stakeholders about their perceptions of how well enabled they feel in relation to the seven areas of Standards and core issues for inclusive education in Iceland underpinning Audit data collection.

The survey was distributed to four different stakeholder groups: teachers, support staff, parents and school leaders. It was available in English from 9 May to 24 June 2016 and in Icelandic from 21 May to 24 June 2016. The Icelandic Team ensured that the wording in the Icelandic translation was as close as possible to the preferred wording in English.

The survey was built as a series of statements. Respondents were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed/disagreed with each one – 'fully', 'partially', 'not really', or 'not at all'.

All survey replies were anonymous and unattributable.

There were 934 responses to the survey in total across all surveys and language versions. These included:

- 351 teachers
- 422 parents
- 57 support staff
- 104 school leaders.

Respondents included stakeholders from pre-, compulsory and upper-secondary schools.



Annex 6: On-line Survey Analysis Report presents the details of the survey responses and the full analysis of results. It provides an analysis of all 934 survey responses.

Data analysis

Data analysis was conducted from July to October 2016. It considered system structure, process and outcome factors contributing to the Audit's overall goal – identifying findings and then recommendations that can be used to plan improvements in the Icelandic system for inclusive education.

The data sources analysed included the on-line survey, focus groups, school visits, interviews, eco-maps and desk research. A mapping of Standards, core issues, key questions and potential data sources was developed to guide the data analysis. This mapping exercise indicated the relevant data sources and whether each would provide information/evidence directly (i.e. the question was asked in data collection activities) or indirectly (the question was not specifically asked, but the issue was likely to be addressed in discussions) relating to the core issues and questions.

This mapping is presented in **Annex 1: External Audit Methodology**.

Data analysis by team members took place on an individual, working pair and then whole Audit Team level that cumulatively:

- highlighted issues underpinning key areas of policy and practice requiring attention;
- suggested areas of strength that could be built upon when planning improvement.

The findings were structured to inform the seven core issues for the Audit and highlight specific issues for consideration in this **Final Report**.

Evaluation of the Standards and Descriptors

In October 2016, all data analysis information was circulated to all Audit Team members. Each team member then undertook an individual evaluation of the complete set of agreed Standards and Descriptors indicating whether, based on all available evidence, they considered each Standard and Descriptor as:

- ***Embedded in policy and practice*** – established and sustainable;
- ***Requiring development*** – implementation being partial, or inconsistent across schools, phases and municipalities;
- ***To be initiated*** – planning being at an early stage/practice yet to be started.



The individual team members' evaluations were then combined. Using a modal calculation, the Audit Team identified, discussed and agreed on a final team-level evaluation for each of the Standards and Descriptors. **Appendix 2** of this report presents the final evaluation of each of the Standards and Descriptors, unanimously agreed upon by the Audit Team members.

In order to clearly highlight the factors within the Icelandic education system that have influenced the External Audit's design and implementation, the *following chapter* discusses the wider context for inclusive education in Iceland.



THE WIDER CONTEXT FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN ICELAND

This chapter highlights the features of the educational system and context in Iceland that impact upon policy and practice for inclusive education. These factors have also influenced the External Audit's design and implementation.

In addition to general information about the Icelandic context and the current education system, this chapter outlines findings from recent reviews by Icelandic stakeholders that provided a foundation for the Audit work. **Annex 3: Desk Research Report** provides more detailed information, sources and references relating to the Icelandic context. The full references for the materials used in this chapter can also be found in **Annex 3**.

Background

Iceland became a republic in 1944, with a written constitution and parliamentary government. The Parliament and President jointly exercise legislative power, both being elected for four years through a system of proportional representation. The present coalition government was formed in early 2017 and is composed of 11 ministers. Five of the ministers are women.

Iceland has two administrative levels of government: the State and the Local Authorities, which play an important role in implementing regional, local-level democracy. Following the municipal elections in the spring of 2006, the number of municipalities reduced from 150 to 74.

Within the 74 municipalities, there are 332,529 inhabitants. The municipalities range in size from 120,000 to 53 inhabitants. There are:

- 41 municipalities with fewer than 1,000 inhabitants;
- 33 municipalities with more than 1,000 inhabitants, six of these having over 10,000 inhabitants, five having over 5,000 inhabitants and the rest having less than 5,000 inhabitants.

The Icelandic Association of Local Authorities was founded in 1945 as a joint advocate for the local authorities. Municipalities are responsible for the operation of schools at pre- and compulsory school level. They have no administrative responsibilities at the upper-secondary level, which comes under the remit of the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. Schools have a high level of autonomy, but goals and learning outcomes are defined centrally.

Population

Iceland's total area is approximately 103,000 km², of which only about 23% is covered by vegetation. Until the 20th century, the population of Iceland was almost



all rural. By 2012, however, approximately 93.6% of the population lived in communities of over 200 inhabitants (60 localities), with around 63% of the population living in the Greater Reykjavík area. As of 1 January 2013, the population of Iceland was 321,857 (please refer to *Eurydice, 2016*). According to Statistics Iceland (2016), the population of first- and second-generation immigrants has grown from 2% in 1996 to 9.4% in 2014. In 2013, 11% of all pre-school children and 6.5% of all compulsory school children had mother languages other than Icelandic. Poles and Vietnamese represent the largest immigrant groups.

There is a strong sense of community and high levels of civic participation in Iceland. Voter turnout, a measure of citizens' participation in the political process, was 81% during recent elections; higher than the OECD average of 68%. In general, Icelanders are more satisfied with their lives than the OECD average.

There is freedom of religion in Iceland. The National Church of Iceland, according to the constitution, is Evangelical Lutheran. As of 1 January 2013, 76% of the population were members of the National Lutheran Church, while approximately 5.2% did not belong to any religious community.

Employment

In 2012, Iceland's employment rate for 25–64-year-olds was one of the highest overall among OECD countries that year; notably, this high rate persists across all levels of educational attainment (OECD, 2014).

These rates remained fairly constant between 2009 and 2012 for those who had attained tertiary, upper-secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education. However, the employment rate for Icelandic individuals with less than upper-secondary education fell by 4 percentage points over that period.

Education in Iceland

The education legislation comprises: the Preschool Act of 2008, the Compulsory School Act of 2008, the Upper Secondary Education Act of 2008, and the Act on the education and recruitment of teachers and administrators of pre-schools, compulsory school and upper-secondary schools of 2008.

According to the Constitution of the Republic of Iceland, 'everybody shall be equal before the law and enjoy human rights regardless of gender, religion, beliefs, origin, race, skin colour, economical status, ancestry and other status' (Government of Iceland, 1944, §65). This is stated clearly in the 2008 law on compulsory schools, which states that inclusive compulsory schools should seek to meet the learning needs of all learners regardless of their physical or mental abilities.



Inclusive education is defined in regulation nr. 585/2010 (§2), in accordance with laws on compulsory schools (2008). The National Curriculum Guides for Compulsory Schools (2011, 2013) note that: ‘At the compulsory school level, all pupils have the right to compulsory education in common inclusive schools which all children are entitled to attend’ (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2014a, p. 41). The Guide continues:

Inclusive school means a compulsory school in the pupils’ municipality or local community where the educational and social requirements of each pupil are met with emphasis on respect for human values and social justice. The inclusive school assumes that everyone has equal or equivalent study opportunities and the education is appropriate for each individual. The attitude of the inclusive school is characterised by respect for the rights of all pupils to participate in the learning community of the local school regardless of their attainment or status. This basic principle in school operations in Iceland involves universal involvement, access and participation of every pupil in school activities. Inclusive education is a continuous process that aims at offering good education for everyone. Respect is shown for the diversity and different needs, abilities and characteristics of the pupils and an effort is made to eliminate all forms of discrimination and disintegration at school (ibid.).

In 2012, the learner-to-teacher ratio for pre-school education in Iceland was 6:1, tying with Sweden for the lowest ratio among the 27 OECD countries for which data were available. The overall staff-to-learner ratio is even lower, at around 4:1. Iceland also had the lowest learner-to-teacher ratio in compulsory education, tying with Norway at a ratio of 10:1.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture is directed by a Permanent Secretary and is divided into five Departments: Education and Science, Cultural Affairs, Policy-making and Financial Affairs, Legal Affairs and Public Administration, and Central Administration.

The Directorate of Education, established under the Ministry, develops and publishes educational materials for learners at the compulsory level. It organises national examinations at the compulsory level in 4th, 7th and, as of spring 2017, 9th grade. The Directorate carries out international comparative research in the field of education.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture issues National Curriculum Guides for pre-school, compulsory and upper-secondary education, as well as for music education and dance. These Guides lay down the schools’ pedagogical role and objectives, the structure of school activities and general policy in teaching and



instructional organisation. However, they are not prescriptive about teaching methods.

Children's rights and well-being

In October 2013, Iceland became one of the first states to incorporate the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into national law. Iceland's Ombudsman for Children has the role of safeguarding children's interests, needs and rights.

Most Icelandic children enjoy good material and environmental well-being. However, 11.6% live in households with no employed adult. This is above the OECD average of 9.5% (OECD, 2015).

Icelandic children enjoy a very good social and family environment: 91% of learners report that they like school, the highest in OECD countries. The life satisfaction of Icelandic children is among the highest in OECD countries and Iceland is ranked 3rd out of 29 countries according to UNICEF (2013) in terms of child well-being.

Pre-school education

In 2015, 19,362 learners attended 251 pre-schools. The largest number was in Reykjavík and the capital region: 12,462 learners (approximately 64%) attended 139 pre-schools (approximately 55%). Iceland's North-Western region has the lowest number, with 384 learners (approximately 2%) in seven pre-schools (approximately 2.75%) (Statistics Iceland, 2016).

Usually, pre-school education starts at age 2. Enrolment in early childhood education and care for ages 3, 4 and 5 had a very high level in 2013: 96% of 3-year-olds, 97% of 4-year-olds and almost 100% of 5-year-olds were enrolled in pre-schools. The OECD average was 74% for 3-year-olds and 88% for 4-year-olds (OECD, 2016a).

The level of training of personnel in pre-schools is variable, with a high number of unskilled staff (around 2,700), and around 1,700 pre-school teachers (including those who are part-time). Around 990 staff members have other educational training (Statistics Iceland, 2016).

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture sets the pre-school national curriculum which states the main objectives and the educational role of the pre-schools. The national curriculum for pre-schools was reviewed during the period 2008 to 2011 to provide greater continuity between the different school levels and reflect the six basic fundamental pillars of literacy, democracy and human rights, equality, health and well-being, sustainability and creativity.



Each pre-school is responsible for preparing the curriculum. Schools also take the municipality's policy into consideration. Local authorities are responsible for establishing interactive co-operation between pre-schools and compulsory schools.

Parents contribute towards the operating costs of pre-schools, although this varies from municipality to municipality and may depend on the parents' circumstances.

It is possible to attend pre-school teacher training at the School of Education in the University of Iceland and at the University of Akureyri. However, there is a shortage of pre-school teachers. The training admissions and graduation of new teachers show that numbers are likely to decline further.

Pre-schools are required to have a parents' council to support school activities, ensure learner welfare and promote positive relations between school and home.

Compulsory education

In 2015, 43,854 learners attended compulsory schools. The number of learners has been increasing slightly since 2010 (42,630 in 2010, 42,503 in 2011, 42,504 in 2012, 42,845 in 2013 and 43,250 in 2014) (Statistics Iceland, 2016).

Virtually all 15-year-old learners in Iceland – 99.5% – attend public schools (OECD, 2016a).

In 2011, 171 compulsory schools operated in Iceland. Four of the five biggest schools (approximately 700 pupils) were located in municipalities in the capital region. The smallest school, located in the West Fjords region, had four pupils.

Parents are responsible for ensuring that their children register for and attend school. Local municipalities must ensure that instruction is given as set out in the Compulsory School Act of 2008. A pupil may graduate from compulsory school before completing the 10-year compulsory education, provided they fulfil the requirements according to the description of learning outcomes in the National Curriculum Guides 2012 and 2014.

Compulsory schools operate for 180 school days each year and at least 170 of these days are for instruction. The remaining 10 days can be used flexibly according to each school's operational plan.

Compulsory schools are funded 100% by the local municipality.

Private compulsory schools receive funding from municipalities for at least 75% of the estimated average total operational cost. Around 2–3% of learners attend private schools.

Municipalities may charge for extra-curricular activities, such as music, sports, etc.



All compulsory schools are required to set up a school council, for co-operation between the head teacher and the school community, and a 'pupils' association' to address learners' interests and social and welfare issues.

Upper-secondary education

Upper-secondary education is not compulsory, but anyone who has completed compulsory education has the right to enter an upper-secondary school. The upper-secondary school offers learners a choice of different study programmes which provide a range of preparation and rights regarding general education, artistic studies, academic and vocational studies. As of 2013, upper-secondary education is mainly aimed for learners between 16 and 19 years of age. General academic education is primarily organised as a three-year course leading to a matriculation examination. However, there is also a high ratio of older learners and in December 2012, there were 8,180 upper-secondary school learners aged 21 and older (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2014b).

The numbers of learners in upper-secondary school have been diminishing since 2011: 26,194 in 2011, 25,514 in 2012, 24,688 in 2013 and 24,104 in 2014 (Statistics Iceland, 2016).

In 2012, 45% of Icelandic learners completed upper-secondary education within four years, in comparison with the OECD average of 68% (OECD, 2016a).

In 2014, 21.9% of Icelandic 15–19-year-olds were not in education. The OECD average was 13.7%. Some 61.7% of all 15–19-year-olds were employed, compared to the OECD average of 23.8% (OECD, 2016a).

Everyone has the legal right to attend upper-secondary school until age 18, irrespective of their results at the end of compulsory schooling. Each upper-secondary school is responsible for the admission of pupils.

The head teacher manages the administration of upper-secondary schools and ensures compliance with acts, regulations, national curriculum guidelines, etc. The head teacher is also responsible for the school budget and personnel. They serve as director of the school board. The school board has five members: three representatives nominated by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture and two representatives nominated by the municipality. The teachers' assembly, pupils' association and parents' council nominate observers. The head teacher also serves as chair of the school council.

Upper-secondary schools are required to organise a school assembly of all school personnel and pupils' representatives to discuss school matters at least once every school year. All upper-secondary schools also operate a pupils' association and a parents' council.



Career guidance

Career guidance is acknowledged in Iceland as a key factor supporting effective transition to work and reducing unemployment. All learners at the compulsory and upper-secondary levels have the right to receive educational and career guidance and counselling within the compulsory school from appropriate specialists (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2014c).

All upper-secondary schools have career guidance available. However, in 2010, career counsellors were only present in about half of compulsory schools; in 54 schools no such service was available (Guðmundsdóttir, 2010).

National Qualifications Framework

The Icelandic National Qualifications Framework (NQF) aims to cover general education, academic studies, VET, art studies, special education and adult education. It has seven levels, two of which (5 and 6) are split into two sub-levels. The quality of its implementation is under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education. While the NQF attempts to be inclusive, there is some debate about the lower levels and how far they are able to address the (diverse) education, training and learning needs of the entire population. Every study programme and every course unit has to be assigned to an NQF-level through a certification process.

The systematic use of learning outcomes set out in the Curriculum Guides for compulsory and upper-secondary schools aims to clarify the balance of knowledge, skills and competences for different programmes at different levels. Every course description for upper-secondary and higher education level is required to be learning outcome-based.

Early school leaving

Iceland has a relatively high rate of early school leaving from upper-secondary education, at around 20% (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2014c). The Directorate of Education, under the authority of the Ministry of Education, has been tasked with reducing early school leaving, as well as strengthening VET and increasing co-operation between schools and industry.

Initiatives – including the collection of screening information regarding early school leaving – are being implemented. In addition, the need for strengthened co-operation between the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Welfare, the unemployment offices, and actors from the labour market and upper-secondary schools, has been recognised.



Curriculum

The educational policy, as detailed in the National Curriculum Guide of 2011 for the three school levels, rests on six fundamental pillars: literacy; sustainability; health and welfare; democracy and human rights; equality; creativity. The Guide emphasises that all learners have equal study opportunities and a chance to select subjects and learning approaches. All school activities should encourage a healthy lifestyle and take into account the differences in personality, development, talent, abilities and interests of each individual pupil, preventing discrimination of all kinds.

Assessment and performance data

According to the Compulsory School Act, assessment of learners' results and progress should be a regular part of school activities. It serves to monitor whether learners fulfil the objectives laid down in the National Curriculum Guide and determine which learners may need special support. Assessment is not standardised between different schools and teachers.

Learners and their parents are entitled to information about assessments and the examinations in 4th, 7th and 9th grades. Upon completion of compulsory school education, learners receive a certificate recording their final-year assessment.

Iceland has participated in PISA since 2000. Recent data shows a decline in reading comprehension between the years 2000 and 2012, both for native Icelandic and immigrant learners. Maths literacy has also declined in all regions of Iceland (OECD, 2016b).

The 2015 PISA results (OECD, 2016b) show the average learner in Iceland scored 482 in reading literacy and 488 in maths and 473 in sciences. This is lower than the OECD averages of 497, 493 and 490 and a decrease in relation to previous results for Iceland.

It is also lower than the other Nordic countries. On average, girls out-performed boys by 20 points, much more than the average OECD gap of 8 points. The average difference in results between learners from the highest socio-economic background and learners from the lowest socio-economic background is 65 points. This is much lower than the OECD average of 96 points and one of the smallest gaps among OECD countries. However, learners from an immigrant background under-perform compared to learners from a non-immigrant background. The performance of immigrant learners is lower than the OECD average. This finding has been stable since 2006.



Quality assurance/evaluation

The Directorate of Education conducts external evaluation for pre-school and compulsory schools and, since 2014, for upper-secondary schools. The purpose of external evaluation is to obtain an overall picture of each school's activities or of specific aspects at any given time. External evaluation is based on the school's internal evaluation report, a site visit, classroom observations in compulsory schools and interviews with the administrators, staff, parents and pupils' representatives.

The Directorate evaluators base their judgments on the data and the use of quality indicators. Every three years, the Minister for Education, Science and Culture delivers reports to the Parliament on pre-school, compulsory and upper-secondary education based on this information, evaluation and research (both national and international) (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2014b).

The Ministry of Education in co-operation with the Icelandic Association of Local Authorities also prepares guidelines and criteria for municipalities for the external evaluation of compulsory schools.

Teacher education

Although the total number of students at university and doctoral level increased between 2007 and 2014 (16,851 in 2007; 19,163 in 2014), the total number of student teachers enrolled at the three universities offering teacher education programmes decreased – in compulsory teacher education (937 in 2007; 610 in 2014) and pre-school teacher education (376 in 2007; 194 in 2014). In 2014, 177 students registered for a master's degree in compulsory school teacher education and 94 students for a master's degree in pre-school teacher training (Statistics Iceland, 2016).

In 2015, the proportion of licensed teachers was 94.6% in compulsory schools and 29.4% in pre-schools.

In 2011, the highest proportion of licensed teachers was in the capital region of Reykjavík (97.5% of teachers hold a teaching licence). The proportion was 88.0% in the North-West, 87.8% in the East, and 84.3% in the West Fjords.

The law in Iceland requires a 180-credit bachelor's degree and a 120-credit master's degree to gain a licence to teach in pre-school, compulsory school and upper-secondary school. A teacher education programme in special education has been provided since 1974. It is currently offered as an elective study at master's level at the University of Iceland. In 2014, 79 registered students attended university in Iceland for a master's degree in special education teaching (Statistics Iceland, 2016).

The educational requirements for teacher educators at universities are a doctoral degree and relevant experience/recognition in their field of study.



For vocational teachers, educational requirements include 60 credit units in Teacher Certification Studies and a final diploma in the vocational field (e.g. master craftsman in a trade).

Formal induction or a structured support phase for newly qualified teachers does not exist in Iceland. Some municipalities and some upper-secondary schools provide informal support. New teachers may be given less teaching hours than other teachers for the first year in compulsory level only. A range of funds are available for professional development at the different school levels and teachers may travel abroad to access professional development opportunities.

Special educational needs

The European Agency Statistics on Inclusive Education (European Agency, 2016a) indicate that for the school year 2012–2013, 98.71% of learners in compulsory education were enrolled in inclusive education (i.e. spending 80% or more of their time with their mainstream peers).

Some 6,955 learners – 16.43% of the whole school population – were identified as having a special educational need. Of these, the majority (6,407 or 15.14%) were enrolled in inclusive settings, with 405 (0.96%) in separate special classes and 143 (0.34%) in separate special schools.

The data shows that almost twice as many boys (10.98%) as girls (5.45%) are formally identified as having SEN. There are far more learners with recognised SEN studying within ISCED level 1 (10.89%) than ISCED level 2 (5.54%).

There are currently three special schools that provide services for the whole country at the compulsory level: one for learners with severe disabilities and two for learners with psychiatric and social difficulties.

The Ministry of Education sets out through regulations the specialist services that should be provided for pre-schools and compulsory schools. Around 10% of learners in pre-schools and 20–25% of compulsory school learners receive some kind of short- or long-term teaching and learning support.

Municipalities are expected to emphasise preventive measures in order to enhance the general welfare of the learners and avert difficulties (Statistics Iceland, 2016).

According to the Upper Secondary Education Act, learners with special needs should be provided with specialised assistance and appropriate facilities, as considered necessary by the Ministry of Education. However, a new needs identification and diagnosis is often requested on a learner's transition from compulsory to upper-secondary education.



Learners with special needs/disabilities should study with other learners, but many schools offer special programmes.

The amount of support at pre-school and compulsory level for each learner is usually determined by the special support services of the municipalities, often based on diagnosis by one of the four main national agencies: the State Diagnostic and Counselling Centre, the Icelandic Organization of the Visually Impaired, the National Hearing and Speech Institute and the Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Department of the National Hospital. Each agency works in consultation with the parents.

Most large municipalities have one or more special classes within their catchment area, within mainstream schools.

Learners with exceptional learning ability also have a right to challenging learning experiences. Programmes for more able children are often organised on a municipal level or in particular schools, rather than at national level.

At the upper-secondary school level, many of the special units include preparation for adult life – for example: training for a job, sheltered workshops or facilities for those with disabilities. Mainstream and special units in schools introduce employment opportunities and the rules of work to their final year learners with special needs, to support a successful transition from school to work.

Financing of education

In 2015, government expenditure on education was approximately 6.87% of GDP, continuing a downward trend that has been evident for the last ten years (8.2% in 2004; 8.35% in 2008; 7.2% in 2012; 7.66% in 2013) (Statistics Iceland, 2016). The decreases since 2008 are largely attributable to the economic crisis of 2008. However, educational spending remains above the OECD average (5.6% in 2012). Iceland ranked second of all Nordic countries on this measure in 2011. However, it is the only Nordic country whose public expenditure as a percentage of GDP was lower in 2011 than in 2008 (OECD, 2014). Icelandic public expenditure on education as a percentage of total public expenditure went from 4th position to 12th/13th position among the OECD countries after the crisis in 2008 (Ragnarsdóttir and Johannesson, 2014).

No major changes have been seen in funding mechanisms for education in Iceland since 1996, when a policy of decentralisation was implemented. At that time, the municipalities became responsible for the management and funding of compulsory education and local support services.

Approximately 63% of local authorities' income is based on municipal income tax. Various service fees account for 18%, property taxes for 11% and income from the



Local Authorities' Equalization Fund accounts for 8% of total revenue (Sieweke, 2016).

The Local Authorities' Equalization Fund was created in 1937. Since then, it has been used to bring about greater equity across municipalities. Both the State and the municipalities finance the fund.

In 2014, the Equalization Fund's operational budget was around ISK 36 billion; in 2016, the estimated budget was ISK 43 billion, with around 95% being allocated directly to local authorities. In 2015, the total public spending for pre- and compulsory schools was ISK 115.4 billion.

In 2015, public spending for upper-secondary schools was ISK 20 billion.

Each municipality determines the amount of funding given to each pre-school and compulsory school. This is done using specific funding models or general budget frameworks determined at local level. The criteria for funding include, in general, the number of learners, legal requirements and collective labour agreements. The majority of municipalities establish the financial resources based on the number of generic class hours and the number of class hours in which supported teaching or teaching of learners with special needs are necessary. The funding criteria appear to be similar between municipalities (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2014b), although the strategies then implemented may differ.

Financing linked to meeting special educational needs

In 2014, 19% of the education budget of municipalities was designated for special provision for learners with SEN.

Within the Local Authorities' Equalization Fund, there are three areas of funding linked to meeting SEN. In 2016, the estimated amounts include ISK 2 billion for grants to meet diagnosed SEN, ISK 1.2 billion to support the three special schools in Reykjavík and a ISK 300 million contribution for immigrant education.

At the pre-school level, the municipalities do not have separate funds for SNE. They finance pre-schools on a general basis for all learners. Fees can be charged for a child's pre-schooling. The municipalities provide funding for transport, extra staff, specialist teachers and special equipment.

At compulsory school level, municipalities receive funding from the central government via the Equalization Fund to meet the needs of learners with recognised SEN. Each year, the municipalities decide on their provision for SEN at the pre-school and compulsory level.

At the upper-secondary school level, the Ministry of Education provides funding to learners who need special support. Provision in upper-secondary education has



been the focus of recent attention in Iceland. The 2011 evaluation of special units in upper-secondary schools highlighted the rising cost of these units in recent years and made recommendations for potential reform.

The Directorate of Education

The Directorate of Education was established on 1 October 2015, following the adoption of Act no. 91/2015. The Directorate is an administrative institution in the field of education. Its main objective is to improve quality and support progress in education in accordance with law and government policies, best evidence and international standards.

The Directorate of Education has taken over responsibilities from the former Education Testing Institute and the National Centre for Educational Materials. The Directorate has also assumed responsibility for certain administrative tasks from the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture and for new projects, such as implementation of the national agreement on literacy and reducing dropout in upper-secondary education.

The Directorate's main tasks are to:

- provide all school children with diverse and quality education material in accordance with the Icelandic National Curriculum Guide;
- monitor and evaluate school progress; conduct national co-ordinated examinations and international studies such as PISA;
- collect, analyse and disseminate information on education and provide educational authorities, professionals and the public with information and guidance in educational matters;
- conduct administrative tasks related to the implementation of the national curriculum and qualifications, accreditation of private schools, licensing of teachers and services to learners.

Overarching educational priorities and challenges

The 2014 *White Paper on Education Reform* states:

The vision is for young people in Iceland to be on even footing with their counterparts in those countries that have the best education, and to have the same opportunities for participation in the society and economy of the 21st century (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2014c, p. 7).

Progress has been made through reforms – such as the improved curriculum offer and more flexible assessments – an action plan to improve standards in literacy and developments in upper-secondary education. However, many challenges remain.



The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture has outlined these in the recent *White Paper*. The *White Paper* proposes two main goals for the Icelandic system to achieve by 2018: 90% of learners in compulsory education will meet minimum reading standards (currently 79%); 60% of learners complete their upper-secondary studies on time (currently 44%).

Challenges for the system for inclusive education

In 2014, the OECD conducted a *Review of Policies to Improve the Effectiveness of Resource Use in Schools* (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2014b). The Country Background Report for Iceland presents a comprehensive overview of current challenges in the pre-, compulsory and upper-school education system. A key finding in relation to inclusive education was that there exists a significant challenge in relation to: ‘The policy on inclusive schools where, while there is general agreement that the policy itself is justified, school administrators and staff feel that the implementation is not sufficiently managed or funded’ (p. 11).

From 2013 to 2015, a working group in Iceland conducted an evaluation of the implementation of inclusive education policy. The findings were presented in the final report, *Mat á framkvæmd stefnu um skóla án aðgreiningar* (Mennta- og menningarmálaráðuneytið, 2015). They found that there was general agreement with the ideology of inclusive education, but many stakeholders felt the need for more resources, improved professional development and support for schools, as well as more research to enable effective implementation. A key finding was that there appeared to be many different understandings of inclusive education – hence the urgent need for further clarification of this policy.

In particular, many teachers expressed the view that inclusive education leads to additional workload. Furthermore, teachers did not feel adequately equipped to deal with the demands arising from greater diversity in the classroom.

The working group recommended that discussions be held to raise awareness of the importance of inclusive education. It also recognised the need to improve assessment and support to learners, with an emphasis on early intervention. This, in turn, requires the waiting time for services to be reduced and information and support for parents to be improved.

To address issues raised by teachers, the recommendations included changes to teacher education and support for greater innovation and developmental work in schools. Finally, the working group noted the need to address the ‘grey areas’ around the roles and responsibilities of the Ministry and Municipalities in this key area of work which, at its heart, requires co-operation and collaboration at all levels.



Summary of factors impacting upon the Audit focus and design

This chapter has identified a number of issues within the Icelandic context that had implications for the design and implementation of the Audit. These factors can be grouped around five headings:

1. **The high level of administrative decentralisation.** In addition to the State level of government, there are 74 municipalities, ranging in size from 120,000 to 53 inhabitants, with around 63% of the population living in the Greater Reykjavík area.
2. **The strong sense of community and a policy goal of providing high-quality education for all learners.** The *White Paper on Education Reform* (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2014c) presents ambitious aims for all learners, with a curriculum focused on six fundamental pillars (literacy, sustainability, health and welfare, democracy and human rights, equality, and creativity) and legislation and policy that aim to embed inclusive education across the education system.
3. **The relatively high levels of educational resourcing.** Despite recent decreases, educational spending remains well above the OECD average and Iceland has one of the lowest learner-to-teacher ratios in pre-school and compulsory education. Iceland is also ranked 3rd out of 29 countries by UNICEF (2013) in terms of child well-being.
4. **The high level of educational decentralisation.** Schools have a high level of autonomy, in line with the national curriculum and local municipality policy. There is little standardisation of teaching and assessment approaches. Quality assurance within and across schools is a developing area of work for the recently established Directorate of Education which works under the Ministry of Education.
5. **The high level of awareness of the challenges of implementing an inclusive education system.** Recent reviews and evaluations have identified these challenges. So too has the Icelandic Team as part of the critical reflection process for the Audit. These issues include the high rates of early school leavers from upper-secondary education, the high numbers of learners in compulsory schools receiving some kind of short- or long-term teaching and learning support, and the rising cost of additional support both in compulsory and upper-secondary schools.

The External Audit of the Icelandic System for Inclusive Education has taken all of these factors into account. The critical reflection developed by a team from the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, in collaboration with representatives of



the main stakeholder groups in Iceland, is available in **Annex 2: Critical Reflection Document**.



1. DO ALL STAKEHOLDERS HAVE A COMMON UNDERSTANDING OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION?

This chapter focuses upon the 1st Standard:

Inclusive education is defined by all stakeholders as an approach for improving the quality of education of all learners.

The core issue underpinning this Standard and the Descriptors is:

The clarity and common understanding of inclusive education shared by all stakeholders.

The main question used to explore the core issue with stakeholders was:

What does inclusive education mean for you?

This question was explored directly through the:

Focus Groups, School Visits and On-line Survey.

This question was explored indirectly through the:

One-to-one Interviews and Desk Research.

Main findings in relation to the 1st Standard

Perceived strengths in relation to the Standard

Across all forms of Audit data collection, it is evident that stakeholders understand that the concepts of democracy and issues of social justice underpin the concepts of social and educational inclusion. The majority of stakeholders share the view that inclusive education is an important goal for economic and social well-being in Iceland: that all children should have their needs met and opportunities to succeed within a system that enables them to achieve academically and be socially included.

Stakeholders at all education system levels – national, local and school – share a perception that most Icelandic citizens understand the benefits for all of a diverse society and diverse education system. The level of consensus with the policy goals for inclusive education is high and stakeholders feel that this level of agreement is something that can and should be built upon. The responses during the Audit also show that most stakeholders agree that inclusive education should involve all learners, not just particular groups with additional needs. Many stakeholders also understand inclusive education as involving a whole-school approach, with all learners and staff participating in a wider learning community.

However, a wide range of stakeholders raise the pressing need to clearly define the concept of inclusive education within the Icelandic context. This widespread



recognition of the need for greater conceptual clarity regarding inclusive education and plans for its successful implementation can be viewed as a strength.

Perceived challenges in relation to the Standard

1.1 Is the concept of inclusive education and its implications well understood by all stakeholders, including parents and pupils?

The first Descriptor to be considered within the Audit work potentially has the most impact, as the degree of shared understanding of the concept of inclusive education among stakeholders underpins the findings in relation to all other Standards.

The on-line survey indicates that the majority of school-level stakeholders – including parents – agree that inclusive education is about the rights of all learners and their parents/families and should be an approach for improving the quality of education of all learners. The majority of stakeholders from the national and local levels participating in all other forms of data collection also share such an understanding. In addition, it appears that there is widespread acceptance across all stakeholder groups of the national policy goals for inclusive education.

However, there is also widespread agreement that greater clarity around the concept of inclusive education is required. For the majority of stakeholders at all levels, the importance of specifically clarifying the concept of inclusive education within the Icelandic context – as recommended in the 2015 review of inclusive education (Mennta- og menningarmálaráðuneytið, 2015) – cannot be over-stated.

Some stakeholders find the term ‘inclusive education’ problematic, as there is no equivalent term in Icelandic. As a result, other terms are being used in different contexts. School-level stakeholders in particular point to the gaps between what parents, teachers and school leaders may interpret as inclusive education and the actual intentions behind national-level policies.

The lack of consensus results in differences between understandings of inclusive education within education policy and what it currently means in practice. Many stakeholders highlight the gap between inclusive education ideology and actual practice. Both decision-makers and practitioners are sometimes viewed by other stakeholder groups as adopting the term ‘inclusive education’ as a label for their work, without implementing any changes to their actual practice. For many stakeholders – including parents – educational policy in recent years has promoted inclusive education as a goal. However, local and school-level stakeholders are unsure what this means for their daily work. According to numerous stakeholders, the language around inclusive education may have changed, but educational practice has not. Many school-level stakeholders in particular are unsure how



practice could and should be changed given current funding and resource mechanisms and structures.

The lack of consensus about what inclusive education means in terms of schools' daily work leads many national and local-level stakeholders in particular to call for a detailed and widespread discussion involving all educational stakeholders at all levels about inclusion in society as a whole, not just within schools.

Stakeholders suggest that such a debate needs to be transparent and conceptually clear, as it is recognised that there are difficulties for policy-making and subsequent implementation if stakeholders remain unclear about the concepts, goals and intentions behind policy. For stakeholders at all levels, greater conceptual clarity around the concept of inclusive education in practice is needed in order to:

- eradicate the 'current disputes' over definitions of inclusive education that have developed within different discourses as well as different sectors in the education system;
- clarify the respective roles and responsibilities of different stakeholder groups with regard to policy implementation, monitoring and evaluation;
- support the development of more explicit and effective guidance for putting the policy of inclusive education into practice within local and organisational contexts.

1.2 Is inclusive education understood by all stakeholders as being an approach for all pupils?

Stakeholders at all levels believe that the current lack of clarity around the term 'inclusive education' results in a range of interpretations of what inclusion may and may not mean in practice. The Audit work has clearly identified that there are very different views within the system about how inclusive education should be implemented in all schools (mainstream and special schools) – and across phases (pre-, compulsory and upper-secondary). Inclusion is being relatively defined within different schools' contexts. There are calls from stakeholders for more dialogue – across the education sector and beyond – to increase understanding that inclusive education is about quality and equity issues.

For some local and school-level stakeholders, inclusive education is generally equated with the attendance of learners who have identified special needs (SEN/disability) at mainstream schools and classes, rather than as an approach for all learners. Other learners – for example, those who are gifted, those from immigrant or low socio-economic backgrounds, learners considered at risk and others with learning needs – who do not get a 'diagnosis' are not always taken into account within inclusion debates.



This reflects what some stakeholders suggest is a fundamental incoherence within the policy goals for inclusive education – there is a clear policy of inclusive education, but one of the main funding mechanisms within schools is based on a disability diagnosis approach. This reinforces the conception of inclusion as being primarily about learners with additional needs. (Please refer to sections 5.1 and 5.3 for more details on this issue.)

Confusion is also evident in some stakeholder discussions around the view that inclusion is about the needs of ‘each and every child’, resulting in individual education programmes and schedules for all learners. This is seen as an impossible task. Many school-level stakeholders in particular feel that the emphasis on individual teaching makes inclusion seem an unrealistic goal.

For many stakeholders, the concept of inclusive education is mainly related to SNE practice – i.e. additional ‘special educational provision’ to meet identified learning needs – instead of high-quality education for all learners. There are many discussions around the provision of individual or small group support, special groups and classes and special schools within an inclusive system. The role of special teaching within an inclusive system is unclear for many stakeholders. Numerous voices questioned the relationship between specialist provision and support for individual learners and also capacity-building for mainstream school staff.

Stakeholders at all levels highlighted the existence of different conceptions of inclusive education at pre-school, compulsory school and upper-secondary school levels. The differences in thinking about inclusive education lead to different types of practice and the development of different forms of provision across the sectors. Many stakeholders suggested that it is easier to implement inclusive education with younger children, as the learning demands placed upon these children are different from those faced by older learners. Also, it is argued that differences in development and learning are expected within younger age groups and that difficulties will be overcome with age.

However, many local and school-level stakeholders hold a negative view of the different ways that policy for inclusive education is being interpreted in practice, particularly between the compulsory and upper-secondary sectors. Some voices suggest that, despite a single policy for inclusive education, there are different expectations and requirements within different phases. For example, upper-secondary schools use forms of streaming and separate provision that would not be accepted in compulsory schools. Many stakeholders see these different expectations as being inequitable.

Some stakeholders concluded that an understanding of inclusive education as an approach for all learners must be supported by a systemic approach. However, for



many stakeholders, while individual schools are trying to be as inclusive as possible, the overall system is not inclusive enough to effectively support their efforts. A dialogue is required to ensure that the education system at all levels assumes responsibility for all learners. However, many stakeholders argue that increased support, follow-up and resources are also required across all system levels.

1.3 Is research on inclusive education supported by all stakeholders?

There appears to be widespread recognition among stakeholders at all levels that research can make a valuable contribution to developing inclusive education in Iceland. However, there also appears to be a perception that there is too little research on inclusive education in the Icelandic context. Many stakeholders link this to the on-going need to undertake an open debate on ideology involving ministries, municipalities, unions, schools and parents. Some stakeholders – particularly those at national and local levels – suggest that Iceland is quite focused on looking out, towards international research. Therefore, there is a need to also look in and foster more research within and about the Icelandic system.

Stakeholders at all levels suggest that there is a need to increase the internal capacity in Iceland to conduct research that supports evidence-based practice within inclusive education. Increasing capacity requires that dedicated resources from national and local levels be provided to universities and schools. It also involves the more effective and targeted use of the research expertise currently available in universities and schools.

All stakeholders agree that the process of identifying and learning from best practice in inclusive education is crucial. However, many of them acknowledge that, at present, the ‘theory’ of inclusive education and reality in terms of school practice is most often separate and there is little evidence of what works within the Icelandic context. School-level stakeholders in particular refer to a disconnect between research work in universities and the reality of school practice. This disconnect has implications for how well current research is able to stimulate innovative inclusive practice in schools.

The disconnect also has implications regarding how well schools are supported to use research in order to make their tacit (implicit) knowledge on effective inclusive practice, more explicit. There are some innovative examples of school-based action research being undertaken in pre-, compulsory, upper-secondary and special schools. Examples of joint university-school action research initiatives also exist. However, in the main, these initiatives are relatively few in number, small in scale and appear to depend on informal initiatives, or the interests of small groups or individual staff members. Stakeholders involved in such initiatives acknowledge that



innovative action research is not being scaled up and used to increase knowledge, understanding and skills within wider contexts.

Responses across the different stakeholder groups indicate that there are different perceptions of what the most valuable and applicable research topics might be. Some stakeholders at school level, as well as those representing universities, suggest that decision-makers at national and local levels do not always pay sufficient attention to findings from research studies. However, stakeholders at the national and local level suggest that more targeted research is needed on effective inclusive practice that can inform their work, as well as the work of all schools in Iceland.

Summary

The findings for this Standard suggest that, in relation to the core issue, stakeholders across and between system levels do not have a common understanding of inclusive education. There is generally a lack of clarity around the concept of inclusive education and how it should be implemented in practice.

This main finding is fully in line with the issues raised in the **Critical Reflection** conducted by the Icelandic Team and presented in **Annex 2**.

Based on the Audit findings, the evaluation of the *Descriptors* is as follows:

1.1 The concept of inclusive education and its implications is well understood by all stakeholders, including parents and pupils, is considered as:

Requiring development.

1.2 Inclusive education is understood by all stakeholders as being an approach for all pupils, is considered as:

Requiring development.

1.3 Research on inclusive education is supported by all stakeholders, is considered as:

Requiring development.

Overall, the 1st Standard, **inclusive education is defined by all stakeholders as an approach for improving the quality of education of all learners,** is considered as:

Requiring development.



2. DOES LEGISLATION AND POLICY SUPPORT EQUITY FOR ALL LEARNERS?

This chapter focuses upon the 2nd Standard:

Legislation and policy for inclusive education has the goal of promoting equal opportunities for all learners.

The core issue underpinning this Standard and all the Descriptors is:

How far legislation and policy supports an equitable education system for all learners.

The main question used to explore the core issue with stakeholders was:

How well do you feel that current legislation and policy supports an equitable inclusive education system for all learners?

This question was explored directly through the:

Focus Groups, One-to-one Interviews, On-line Survey and Desk Research.

This question was explored indirectly through the:

School Visits.

Main findings in relation to the 2nd Standard

Perceived strengths in relation to the Standard

A main strength of Iceland's system for inclusive education is that it is built upon a strong foundation of legislation and policy that is in line with international conventions relating to learners' rights. There is a democratic approach to education that has broad support across all stakeholder groups in Iceland.

The wider societal culture in Iceland actively promotes stakeholder involvement in civic activities. Within all school phases, the educational culture provides opportunities for stakeholder engagement and collaboration.

Schools have a high level of autonomy. This is a strength for embedding inclusive education within local contexts and adapting the curriculum and teaching practices as far as possible at school level to meet learners' needs.

There is strong commitment to inclusive education at school level from all stakeholders. This is particularly evident in pre-schools and, to a lesser extent, in compulsory schools. Many school teams aim to promote inclusion on a daily basis by embedding the values and principles defined at national level in their schools' practice.



The majority of stakeholders view inclusive education as a right for all learners. Aligned to this, mainstream school is seen as the best place to educate all learners and support them to fulfil their potential. Schools are clearly seen as having a responsibility to be inclusive in order to benefit all members of their community.

Perceived challenges in relation to the Standard

2.1 Does legislation clearly articulate rights to appropriate education for all children?

During the Audit, many stakeholders agreed that the legislative framework for inclusive education is supportive and that the values underpinning inclusive education are highlighted in a way that schools can take on board and make their own.

However, some stakeholders point to apparent contradictions in the existing legislation, which covers children rights, but does not comprehensively cover the rights of all minority groups.

While a democratic approach to education is a clear strength, many stakeholders highlighted the fact that there is a need to clarify the benefits of diversity to society generally and to education specifically.

It can be seen that, beyond a general aim of receptiveness towards diversity in education, the concept of inclusive education is not clearly defined or well understood by stakeholders. Consequently, inclusive education is narrowly framed and there is a lack of clarity about inclusive practice.

2.2 Do policies provide operational definitions of what is understood by access and appropriateness?

(The findings presented here should be cross-referenced to the discussion of findings relating to *section 1.1* in the previous chapter.)

The majority of stakeholders across all system levels suggest that there is a lack of functional definitions of the key concepts underpinning legislation and policy for inclusive education. Concepts such as access, appropriateness, inclusive education and inclusive practice are not operationally defined in policy or guidelines from the national or local level in a way that stakeholders can understand and use as a basis for their work. This has clear implications for every stage of policy implementation.

For some stakeholders involved in the 2015 evaluation study of inclusive education (Mennta- og menningarmálaráðuneytið, 2015), the failure to agree on a working definition of inclusive education is a main stumbling block to the implementation of inclusive education.



Many stakeholders involved in the Audit indicate that there has never been a widespread stakeholder dialogue on what is meant by inclusive education and why it is so important within the Icelandic context. As a result, there are no shared agreements and/or understandings of key concepts underpinning inclusion and there has been a ‘recycling’ of old ideas and ways of working.

This point is supported by the findings of the on-line survey. They suggest that the day-to-day work of most school-level stakeholders is not fully guided by national or local policy on inclusive education, and that the current policy for inclusive education does not fully enable their schools to develop inclusive practice. School leaders appear to feel more supported in this respect than other school-level stakeholders.

Due to the absence of agreed and shared definitions, many stakeholders see inclusive education as access to mainstream schools – that inclusive education requires learners to be in the same place and is about individualised learning (i.e. individual programmes/teaching). Many school-level stakeholders suggest that they are working in the best way possible, but that, from this viewpoint, inclusive education is almost impossible to put into practice, as it is not practical to provide individualised teaching to all learners who require additional support.

There is also a widespread tendency to view inclusion as being mainly concerned with learners with diagnosed disabilities who require special educational support. The lack of guiding operational definitions from an educational perspective has resulted in the perpetuation of a medical approach to defining educational needs – a ‘diagnosis’ is the ‘ticket’ to services and support for the school, teachers and individual learners. The predominant model of resourcing that provides funds on the basis of a diagnosis reinforces this thinking (please refer to *section 5.1* for a more detailed discussion of this issue).

Overall, for the majority of stakeholders, educational policies at national, local and school levels do not make it sufficiently clear that the goal of inclusive education is active participation and engagement in meaningful learning opportunities for all learners.

2.3 Do all schools and municipalities have policies and action plans detailing how national-level policies on inclusive education will be implemented and funded?

This can be considered one of the main areas of challenge within the Icelandic system for inclusive education which impacts upon many other areas of implementation and school-level practice.



The majority of stakeholders perceive the legislation and national-level policy for inclusive education as being clearly focused and comprehensive. However, there are difficulties in subsequent implementation of the policy.

Stakeholders across national, local and school levels express, in different ways, that national policy is not effectively translated into municipality and school-level policies. Reykjavík is the only municipality that has a formal policy for inclusive education.

The successful implementation of national-level policy goals and objectives is not the main focus of attention for local-level stakeholders. Rather, the focus is upon the difficulties faced with regard to local-level implementation and practice (for example, issues with funding, staffing, problems for the smaller municipalities, geographical factors, absence of research studies and evidence, etc.).

Across school-level stakeholder groups, there is a clear perception that national-level policy for inclusive education does not guide day-to-day work to a very large extent, but that school-level policy for inclusive education is most important for their work. For other stakeholders in the system – particularly those working with education policy at local or national levels – this has clear consequences in terms of:

- how effectively national and/or local-level policy is being translated into school-level policies;
- how effectively the implementation of school-level policies is being monitored and how this monitoring information is fed back into the local and national levels.

(The issue of monitoring is further considered in section 6.3.)

The process of decentralisation within the education system is a strength, in that there is freedom to adapt national policy to local contexts. However, not all municipalities are perceived as doing this. Many stakeholders highlighted the issue of variation between municipalities as being problematic in a number of ways.

Stakeholders do not always see local-level policy for inclusive education as transparent. It is considered incoherent across the country, with clear differences in the conceptions underpinning policy implementation between regions and communities. (This point is related to the discussion presented in *section 2.2* above.) The Audit work indicates that differences in policy and resulting practice within and between municipalities exist without a clear rationale – or clear lines of accountability information – to explain these differences.

Many local and school-level stakeholders perceive that there is inequity between regions of the country, as well as municipalities, in terms of service provision. This fact is partly seen as a result of 'political will' at local level. However, it is also



perceived as resulting from a lack of reference points in terms of agreed service levels and/or there being no established norms for allocating support. Political will is seen as a determining factor in the time available to effectively implement policies. This is because municipality decision-makers are elected for a fixed period of time that may not allow the embedding and evaluation of a given policy before amendments are introduced due to changes in political thinking/leadership.

A range of stakeholders argue that national-level policy should be accompanied by guidance on minimum standards for its implementation within all local contexts.

As the biggest municipality, Reykjavík has more learners, more schools and, therefore, more resources at its disposal. Reykjavík's policy for inclusive education seems to inspire a number of smaller municipalities across the country. However – despite the possibilities offered by decentralisation – geography, demography and system factors mean they are not always in a position to develop or implement policies and action plans to provide the same level of service provision as offered within Reykjavík.

The regional inequities relating to policy and practice for inclusive education result in strategic behaviour among some families who are in a position – socially and financially – to move to Reykjavík for their child to receive a particular type of educational provision.

Many stakeholders view the degree of freedom within the national curriculum as offering potential, but also presenting challenges as regards developing local and school-level policies. Flexibility within the curriculum is seen to present a large degree of freedom for municipalities to interpret and then implement policies and action plans.

This degree of freedom is also seen as being available to:

- different school sectors – pre-, compulsory and upper-secondary;
- individual schools within those sectors.

Overall, the Audit results suggest that there are real differences in the way national policy for inclusive education is being interpreted and implemented within pre-, compulsory and upper-secondary schools' policies and practice for inclusive education.

The perceptions of a number of national and local-level stakeholders support this finding. They suggest that policy implementation must be better planned and supported at national level. Policy documents outlining what must be done already exist. However, clear action plans relating to how policy should be interpreted and implemented at different levels are not in place and/or well disseminated. Many stakeholder groups recognise that inclusive education policy implementation must



be more effectively guided (potentially by minimum standards for service provision as outlined above) and then supported at the national and local levels.

2.4. Is legislation fully in line with international normative instruments, in particular the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and EU policy directives and policy guidelines?

In October 2013, Iceland became one of the first states to incorporate the UNCRC into national law. It was then adopted unanimously in the Icelandic parliament – an important milestone in ensuring children’s rights in Iceland. This means that the UNCRC can be directly invoked in the Icelandic courts.

Education in Iceland broadly shares EU 2020 goals and benchmarking indicators. Current priorities align with policy levers noted in the EU *Education and Training Monitor* (European Commission, 2015a), in particular efforts to improve early childhood education and care, the modernisation of school education and the goal of reducing early school leaving.

The UNCRPD was ratified in September 2016. Iceland is a signatory to the optional protocol, but has not yet ratified this. As such, the articles of the Convention, including Article 24 on the right to education for people with disabilities, are not yet enshrined in Icelandic law.

An examination of available background information supports the perception many stakeholders express that there is a need for more comprehensive equal treatment legislation protecting the rights of all minority groups in Icelandic society.

A cross-ministerial policy working group has been established to look at legislation, specific articles and implementation issues. However, participating stakeholders suggest that this way of working needs developing in the short and long term.

Summary

The findings for this Standard suggest that, in relation to the core issue, legislation and policy do support the goals and aims of inclusive education. The majority of stakeholders, across all system levels, agree upon these goals and aims. However, stakeholders require more concrete guidance on how the policy aims and objectives should be translated into local- and school-level action plans and then put into practice. Stakeholders also need guidance on how practice should then be monitored and evaluated in line with national legislation and policy.

This main finding is in line with the issues raised in the **Critical Reflection** presented in **Annex 2**.



Based on the Audit findings, the evaluation of the *Descriptors* is as follows:

2.1 Legislation clearly articulates rights to appropriate education for all children, is considered as:

Embedded in policy and practice.

2.2 Policies provide operational definitions of what is understood by access and appropriateness, is considered as:

Requiring development.

2.3 All schools and municipalities have policies and action plans detailing how national-level policies on inclusive education will be implemented and funded, is considered as:

To be initiated.

2.4. Legislation is fully in line with international normative instruments, in particular the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and EU policy directives and policy guidelines, is considered as:

Requiring development.

Overall, the 2nd Standard, **legislation and policy for inclusive education has the goal of promoting equal opportunities for all learners, is considered as:**

Requiring development.



3. ARE STAKEHOLDERS ENABLED TO IMPLEMENT POLICY FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION?

This chapter focuses upon the 3rd Standard:

Policy for inclusive education is effectively implemented at all levels.

The core issue underpinning this Standard and all the Descriptors is:

How adequately stakeholders at all levels are enabled to effectively implement inclusive education policy.

The main question used to explore the core issue with stakeholders was:

How well do you feel that policy for inclusive education is being implemented in practice?

This question was explored directly through the:

Focus Groups, School Visits, One-to-one Interviews and On-line Survey.

This question was explored indirectly through the:

Desk Research.

Main findings in relation to the 3rd Standard

Perceived strengths in relation to the Standard

The physical environment of the majority of Icelandic schools is a strength area. Most school buildings are accessible, flexible and welcoming buildings. From a pedagogical perspective, a key strength of the Icelandic system that all stakeholder groups recognise – including many parents – is the curriculum framework. This is built upon ‘pillars’ that encourage cross-curricular approaches to teaching and learning and provide schools with a degree of freedom to innovate in their practice.

The degree of freedom within the curriculum has led to numerous examples of innovative and effective leadership, pedagogy, school development and practice in schools that can be built upon. Many school teams aim to be innovative in their daily practice. Innovative ways of thinking have led some stakeholders to use new technologies to develop alternative forms of support in order to overcome the constraints learners face because of their geographical location, or the climate.

There are further positive examples of universities supporting innovations in schools – through action research projects and the development of professional learning communities involving school and university teams.

This commitment and sense of innovation is generally supported by what can be seen as quite a high level of self-confidence in school teams’ teaching skills and



competences. This self-confidence is often communicated through school policies that aim to develop an inclusive ethos for the school community. Schools provide a welcoming atmosphere for the learners. Many of the learners who the Audit Team members met describe their classmates as friendly and helpful and their teachers as 'good'.

Some schools place great emphasis on a whole-school approach, where all school community members work together and value differences. Such approaches promote parents' understanding of the social benefits of inclusion for all learners. In addition, parents and school team members view the various parental support networks very positively.

In schools at all levels, there is a clear commitment by staff teams to provide all learners with opportunities to develop and learn. This is particularly noticeable within pre-schools, where the general pedagogical approach taken is more clearly articulated as one that is based on the right of all children to participate and be included. Many pre-schools presented examples of staff working as a team around the child with the parents, support staff and external experts when needed.

Perceived challenges in relation to the Standard

3.1 Is every member of the school community made to feel welcome and valued?

The strengths of the Icelandic system, as outlined in the *previous section*, result in a widely shared belief that all school community members are welcomed and valued and stakeholders work towards this. At the school level, school teams appear to accept and implement the principle of valuing the contributions and achievements of all members of the school community.

However, stakeholders suggest that there are two factors at system level which potentially lead to school community members not being valued as much as they could be.

The first of these system factors relates to how inclusive education is interpreted and implemented within upper-secondary schools. Some stakeholders, particularly from the local and compulsory school levels, suggest that upper-secondary schools are given greater operational freedom and therefore work differently from pre-and compulsory schools as well as from each other. As a result, there are perceptions of inequity in provision and practice within the upper-secondary phase, with what some stakeholders describe as 'unofficial student selection' by some schools. The operation of special, segregated units by some upper-secondary schools is also being questioned in light of national policy. The challenges and benefits of learner diversity are seen as being addressed and built upon by some schools, but not others.



For many stakeholders, the relatively high dropout rate at the upper-secondary level is a signal that some learners may not be getting what they need or want from their education. Some stakeholders question whether this is because learners do not value their education, or because the education system does not sufficiently value some learners.

The second of these system factors relates to the role of specialist provision within an inclusive system. There are many discussions between stakeholders around the provision of individual or small group support, special groups and classes and special schools and the relationship between different forms of specialist provision and support for individual learners and capacity-building for mainstream school staff.

Some stakeholders view provision oriented to individual needs as incongruous with the goals of inclusive education. However, there is continuing demand for different forms of separate provision, especially from some parents who feel that their children do not receive the learning and socialisation provision and support that they require in mainstream schools. Such a trend may be exacerbated when school staff do not feel adequately empowered by school-level policies or existing support.

Stakeholders at school level indicate that there is a perception of ‘separation’ between specialist and mainstream provision. This calls into question how much special provision is valued in the education system. Stakeholders from special schools and units identify a degree of professional isolation from their colleagues in the mainstream sector. This has implications for them, as well as for mainstream school teams. Stakeholders at national and local levels in particular highlight the need to face the challenge of a system with different types provision by initiating a wider debate on specialist provision’s role in achieving Iceland’s goals for inclusive education.

3.2 Are there high expectations for all pupils?

All stakeholder groups clearly agree that every learner should have their learning needs met. However, how this should be implemented and how this is linked to the aspiration of high expectations for all learners is not so clear.

For the majority of stakeholders, holding high expectations is a feature of the Icelandic system. However, stakeholders suggest that there is an increasing debate around the focus of such aspirations. This is particularly the case within upper-secondary education, where success is often centred upon academic educational achievements and formal qualifications. Non-academic routes and options are often seen as lower status achievements. Some stakeholders suggest that expectations for learners who are good at practical subjects are too low and there is insufficient support for them to excel in the areas where they have particular aptitudes. This suggestion is often linked to a perception that, for many school-level stakeholders,



the priority is on delivering subjects and the level of high grades, not meeting all learners' wider learning and social needs.

Stakeholders across all levels indicate that many learners in upper-secondary education are encouraged to follow an academic route without sufficient advice and/or consideration of their longer-term completion or employment prospects. For some stakeholders, this situation is contributing to school dropout. Different forms of provision need to be seen as being of equal status and linked to other forms of learning, achievement and accreditation to keep learners engaged.

Many school-level stakeholders highlight a perceived gap between having high expectations and meeting learning needs at both ends of the ability spectrum. Learners with recognised needs – especially those with additional learning needs, but no formal diagnosis – are viewed by many as being at risk of low expectations. Similarly, learners who are recognised as 'highly academic', or gifted and talented, are often seen as not being sufficiently challenged to fulfil their maximum potential.

Many stakeholders believe that schools and school teams are not always as ambitious for all learners as they could be. This leads to two inter-related areas of concern:

- Regarding the quality of inclusive education: the concept of inclusive education may be understood as a system for all learners, but it may not be connected with high-quality education for all learners.
- Regarding participation: there is a tendency to interpret inclusion as a question of attendance and not participation or active engagement of learners with their peers and in their learning.

The issue of engagement is one that learners themselves highlight in different ways. In discussions and through the completion of eco-maps, many learners taking part in Audit activities indicated how important it is for them to feel welcome in their school and class, but also to be involved in activities that are interesting and relevant for them. Some learners report feelings of boredom when work is perceived as unchallenging or unimportant.

Many stakeholders at national and local levels indicated what they saw as the crucial role played by school leaders in setting a school culture that promotes high expectations for all learners. School leaders need to develop and implement school-level policies that place high expectations for all learners at the centre. They also need to be leaders of learning who take responsibility for what is happening in their schools and classrooms and who are able to support the professional development of all staff to improve inclusive practice across their schools.



3.3 Do schools have formal and objective procedures that assist in the early identification of students' individual needs?

In relation to the identification of learners' individual needs, stakeholders highlighted two sets of issues: those around the system of formal needs identification and those around school-based procedures for assessing learning needs. Stakeholders at all levels are clear that the effectiveness of early school-based needs identification impacts upon later requirements for formal diagnosis and identification of SEN. (Discussions around these two issues are also covered elsewhere in this report – school-based assessment in sections 3.7 and 6.5 and the system of formal needs identification in *section 5.1.*)

Stakeholders across all system levels see the quality and effectiveness of school and class-level assessment for learning as crucial. However, many stakeholders are unclear on the requirements and procedures for formative assessment that supports decision-making about teaching and learning and the clear identification of individual learning needs. Some school-level stakeholders question whether early needs identification risks the early labelling of learners and ask for guidance on conducting effective assessments in a way that avoids such practice. Other stakeholders point to the consequences that occur when assessment identifies learning needs that schools do not feel equipped to handle. The screening introduced as part of the national literacy strategy implemented by the Directorate of Education is cited as an example where there has been an increase in requests for 'specialist' support that is not an effective use of resources or in line with inclusive education policy.

Many stakeholders perceive appropriately resourced early intervention as being more effective. This is because it provides support as soon as learning problems develop and is seen to work best for learners, their families and school teams. This 'proactive' approach to inclusion is evident across school phases, but appears to be most prevalent within pre-schools. Here, a fundamental principle for the work of school teams is that early intervention provides quality support early on in life, but is also implemented as soon as possible after learning needs are identified.

Stakeholders clearly suggest that if the identification of learning needs and subsequent intervention come too late, this leads to higher costs. For many school-level stakeholders, the issue of 'too late' often applies to learners described as being in the 'grey zone' – their needs are identified at school level, but they have no formal diagnosis of needs and so are not eligible for support.

Within many Audit discussions at all stakeholder levels, a main theme was that, without a formal diagnosis of learning needs, little or no support and funding is provided for learners and school teams. Many stakeholders – particularly those



operating at school level – interpret such a situation as meaning that the school team’s identification of learners’ needs does not have as much weight as ‘experts’ (i.e. those professionals working in the national diagnosis centres). There are, therefore, widespread calls for more emphasis to be put upon school-level judgments regarding learners’ needs, instead of only taking account of decisions made by professionals working outside the school. Stakeholders recognise that, while there are some examples of innovative practice in this perspective:

- more widespread support is needed for school teams to develop more effective school-based needs identification procedures;
- there needs to be a wider range of mechanisms for linking resource allocations to school assessment evidence and requests.

3.4 Do all schools have well educated staff fit for their purpose?

The topic of staff training and development is discussed in detail in *section 4.4* and *Chapter 7*. Readers are referred to the specific sections in this chapter for more detail on key issues around professional development and training.

This section focuses upon specific issues raised by different stakeholders in relation to the availability of individuals and teams of staff with a range of skills to meet the challenges of diverse learning needs in schools.

Stakeholders at all system levels agree that a school staff team that is effective and fit for the purpose of meeting all learners’ needs must be comprised of well-educated individuals with a range of different professional and personal skills. However, there also appears to be consensus among all stakeholders about difficulties in implementing policy due to a lack of such staff teams who can effectively meet the demands of inclusive education. Three inter-connected issues can be highlighted in this respect:

- Training of individual school team members
- Possibilities for developing shared school team competences
- Access to support from trained professionals working outside the school.

Stakeholders at all levels recognise that more trained staff are needed within all school phases, but particularly the pre-school phase where there is a recognised shortage of trained teachers. However, some stakeholders point to an apparent confusion over the understanding of inclusive education and how it should be implemented (please refer to *section 1.1* for more details on this topic). It is acknowledged that calls for access to more specialists are justified. Nevertheless, many stakeholders argue that school staff teams require teachers who are more



confident and competent in meeting the needs of all learners in their classes, rather than more specialists whose role is to work with a few individual learners.

Many stakeholders believe that the lack of confidence and competence within many teaching teams results in the increasing calls for more practical support within the classroom context. Stakeholders highlight a number of innovative and successful school-based examples of collaborative professional development. However, they point to the lack of widespread effective professional development opportunities for whole school team members as directly impacting on the development of a school's ability to be inclusive. For some stakeholders, this highlights the need to strengthen the bridge between theory and practice and to integrate the practice perspective and the school team's tacit knowledge with professional development theory to support experience transfer and team development.

For many stakeholders, a school's access to different forms of professional support based on their geographical location within larger or small communities has a major impact upon their ability to implement the goals of inclusive education policy. In schools with more limited access to external support services, staff adopt pragmatic solutions, often taking on multiple roles and responsibilities. While some stakeholders working in such situations recognise that this presents some opportunities and strengths, it is also an equity issue. Depending on the location in the country, the support possibilities for schools and learners vary greatly. Stakeholders are clear that, for some families, the reality is that to get the services and support they feel they need, they have to move to a different, often larger, municipality (i.e. Reykjavík).

In smaller municipalities without designated resource centres and at a distance from the services available in Reykjavík, stakeholders point to the need to keep families together by providing support close to the local community. However, to do this effectively, they have to be innovative with the resources that are available and establish different modes of working with external professionals, for example via the internet. A common statement from such stakeholders is 'we do the best we can' under the circumstances.

3.5 Is the division of labour between different types of teachers within schools clear and does it promote successful implementation of inclusive education policy?

The eco-maps analysis exploring who school staff work with shows that school-level stakeholders are supported in different ways through professional collaboration to think and act inclusively in their daily practice. Stakeholders' responses showed a complex system of formal or informal, individual, collective or professional relationships, indicating various forms of professional interactions and exchanges



with school colleagues, but also with professionals from other areas, such as the health and care sector, teaching, or policy decision/implementation personnel.

The eco-maps analysis supports the other sources of Audit evidence that suggest there are many examples of successful inter-disciplinary collaboration and practice. At the pre-school level, examples of staff from various disciplines working together develop a common view about how the children develop and learn. This common basis and perspective is seen by the stakeholders involved to facilitate their work with the children.

However, stakeholders across all system levels indicate that taking a multi-disciplinary, shared approach to meeting all learners' needs is often undermined by a lack of clarity over the roles and responsibilities of the different professionals working within schools. School-level stakeholders argue that, as staff from more disciplines work in school, even greater role clarity is needed and more skills for inter-disciplinary collaboration are required.

Team approaches and the division of labour between teachers, support teachers and professionals depend upon the clarity of individual schools' policies and strategies. When school-level policies are not sufficiently clear, there is the potential for a number of negative consequences, including:

- Confusion for the professionals concerned, but also for parents and sometimes learners
- Feelings of isolation for individual teachers and support staff who are unsure how their roles interact with others, or who they can go to for support
- Possibilities for individual professionals or small teams in schools to identify their own rigid role descriptions that result in them taking a silo approach to their work.

Stakeholders across all levels believe a lack of role clarity results in some teachers passing on responsibility for learners with special needs to other teachers or professionals, as they do not feel that this is within their role description.

Stakeholders from all levels suggest that all teachers should be supported to see that meeting the needs of all learners is their professional responsibility. However, for them to accept this responsibility, more flexible, collaborative working practices are needed within school teams. Increased flexibility in working practices needs to be coupled with different forms of in-school support from school and resource service teams. This should give teachers access to professional teams with different skills, but shared perspectives about developing inclusive learning opportunities. Many stakeholders see increasing collaboration between professionals as a



challenge. There are calls for more support for school teams and individual staff to enable them to work successfully within multi-professional collaborative teams.

The results of the on-line survey show that around 65% of teachers feel CPD opportunities only 'partially' or 'not really' prepare them to work with other professionals and agencies.

3.6 Do all pupils have access to good teaching materials that suit their needs?

The eco-maps analysis indicates that teachers and support staff who work in schools use a variety of approaches and associated materials in their teaching practices. The range of examples presented includes: small group; one-to-one teaching; team teaching; peer tutoring; direct instruction; metacognitive strategies; visual techniques; whole-class teaching; group or project work; and ICT.

Some school-level stakeholders suggest that there have been some positive developments in relation to the availability of teaching materials, particularly at pre- and compulsory school levels. Many cited the increasing availability of different forms of ICT as an example. Others also reported that some schools are introducing more accessible teaching materials and approaches to support all learners' individual needs. However, a perceived over-reliance on subject textbooks is also identified as a concern.

However, some stakeholders hold negative views. They suggest that the challenges and benefits of learner diversity are being recognised and built upon by some schools, but not others. Stakeholders from all levels state that, for many learners, education is not based on identifying individual learning needs. Rather, there is an expectation that all learners will work with the same materials and do the same things at the same times.

3.7 Are there clear and objective procedures implemented for monitoring the achievements of pupils who are at risk of exclusion?

The issue of monitoring learner achievements for different purposes is covered as an element of other Standards. Readers are referred to *Chapter 6* for an overview of related issues.

Outside the national – summative assessment – system of examinations and tests, stakeholders across all system levels perceive the on-going, formative monitoring of learner achievements as a crucial issue. Learner assessment practice differs across school phases, municipalities and schools. While stakeholders can identify examples of innovative practice in relation to assessment for learning, most stakeholders at all system levels agree that there is a lack of information on all learners' achievements.



This lack of assessment information creates difficulties for stakeholders at school level with regard to monitoring individual learners' progress. It is also difficult for stakeholders at the local and national levels to monitor the achievements of vulnerable groups. Some stakeholders suggest that current data cannot be meaningfully applied or used for monitoring purposes.

For many stakeholders, there is no recognised system for monitoring the progress of learners with complex needs. They require greater clarity about what to measure and how. This issue links to a perception among many stakeholders that IEPs for learners with identified special needs are not as effective as they could be in guiding teaching and learning. Almost half of the teachers replying to the on-line survey state that learners' IEPs are 'not really' or 'not at all' regularly evaluated or effectively monitored. Teachers are quite hesitant when considering how far they feel that school-based assessments allow appropriate decisions to be made regarding support allocation (19.5% fully agree and 51.5% partially agree). Around one third suggest that IEPs do 'not really' or 'not at all' describe meaningful learning targets for the individual learner.

3.8 Do all students have a voice and are they appropriately involved in school-level decision-making, as well as decision-making about their learning programme?

The issue of learner voice and involvement in decision-making indicates wide differences in attitudes and practice at school level. Some stakeholders suggest that there is not an established 'culture' of listening to learners and that involving learners in decision-making about their programme is not an integral requirement of the system. Stakeholders point to innovative examples of school organisation where learners are supported to take decisions concerning how they work and who they work with. However, they also suggest there are many more examples of traditional 'delivery' approaches to teaching. These provide few opportunities for learner involvement and do not see the learners themselves as a main resource for teaching.

Stakeholders at all system levels agree that listening to the voices of learners is crucial. The analysis of eco-maps completed by learners (please refer to **Annex 5: Eco-Maps Analysis Report**) indicates that learners see being able to talk to their teachers about their schoolwork as one of the most important forms of support for their learning.

However, the results of the on-line survey show that all stakeholders working in schools groups are hesitant – mainly replying 'partially' or 'not really' – about how effective school policy for inclusive education enables all learners to be involved in decision-making about their learning.



For many national and local-level stakeholders, ensuring learner involvement is a challenge. Stakeholders perceive that great variation exists across school phases, with opportunities for learner involvement decreasing as learners get older. Variation is also perceived between municipalities, with too much depending upon individual school policy and/or school leader and teams' commitment to involving all learners in decision-making processes.

3.9 Do all national government bodies and agencies work collaboratively to ensure joined-up policy delivery?

Stakeholders at national and local levels point towards two forms of collaboration in operation within and across system levels: informal and formal. Most of these stakeholders suggest that there is good informal co-operation between individuals and teams working in different national and local government bodies and agencies. This informal collaboration is an essential tool in facilitating policy delivery, as well as addressing problems and issues as they arise.

However, these stakeholders also highlight a range of difficulties in relation to what they interpret as formal collaboration across and between bodies and agencies at different levels. Many suggest that there is no clear consensus on how national and local-level authorities should work together. This results in difficulties for them, as well as for school-level stakeholders. These difficulties centre on issues relating to:

- Areas of agreed responsibility. Stakeholders at all levels point towards the so-called 'grey zones' where it is not clear which authority – national or local – is responsible for ensuring effective implementation. The lack of clear distinctions between the roles of national and local authorities hinders effective collaboration and increases possibilities for implementation gaps.
- Differences in the interpretation of inclusive education between different bodies. Stakeholders highlight differences in conceptions of and attitudes towards inclusion which lead to differences in policy emphasis and focus. Many school-level stakeholders in particular perceive a lack of clarity around policy, resulting in a gap between what is advocated on a national level and what is required at the municipality level.

The majority of stakeholders working at national and local levels call for more formal co-operation and more frequent communication across and between the ministries and municipalities. Many stakeholders across all levels also argue that more co-operation between the Ministry and schools would facilitate the effective implementation of policy for inclusive education.



Summary

The findings relating to the Standard considered in this chapter indicate that stakeholders at all system levels, despite their commitment, are not as effectively enabled to implement inclusive education policy as they could be. Some mechanisms for support are in place, but stakeholders consider that a range of more flexible opportunities should be widely available. All stakeholders see the full achievement of this Standard as being highly dependent upon the achievement of other standards proposed by the Icelandic Team, in particular the effectiveness of support systems, funding mechanisms and governance and quality assurance procedures.

The findings in relation to this Standard are very much aligned with the issues raised by the Icelandic Team in relation to the implementation of policy for inclusive education.

Based on the Audit findings, the evaluation of the *Descriptors* is as follows:

3.1 Every member of the school community is made to feel welcome and valued, is considered as:

Requiring development.

3.2 There are high expectations for all pupils, is considered as:

Requiring development.

3.3 Schools have formal and objective procedures that assist in the early identification of students' individual needs, is considered as:

Requiring development.

3.4 All schools have well educated staff fit for their purpose, is considered as:

Requiring development.

3.5 The division of labour between different types of teachers within schools is clear and promotes successful implementation of inclusive education policy, is considered as:

Requiring development.

3.6 All pupils have access to good teaching materials that suit their needs, is considered as:

Requiring development.

3.7 There are clear and objective procedures implemented for monitoring the achievements of pupils who are at risk of exclusion, is considered as:

Requiring development.



3.8 All students have a voice and are appropriately involved in school-level decision-making, as well as decision-making about their learning programme, is considered as:

Requiring development.

3.9 All national government bodies and agencies work collaboratively to ensure joined-up policy delivery, is considered as:

To be initiated.

Overall, the 3rd Standard, **policy for inclusive education is effectively implemented at all levels, is considered as:**

Requiring development.



4. DOES THE EDUCATION SYSTEM ENABLE ALL STAKEHOLDERS TO BE INCLUSIVE IN THEIR DAY-TO-DAY WORK?

This chapter focuses upon the 4th Standard:

All stakeholders, at all levels are enabled to think and act inclusively in their daily practice.

The core issue underpinning this Standard and all the Descriptors is:

How effectively the education system enables all stakeholders in education to be inclusive in their day-to-day work (i.e. school organisation, curriculum, assessment, pedagogy, support for learners, development opportunities for all stakeholders, effective communication across and between system levels).

The main question used to explore the core issue with stakeholders was:

In your role, how well supported do you feel to ensure that learners' diverse needs are met?

This question was explored directly through the:

Focus Groups, School Visits and On-line Survey.

This question was explored indirectly through the:

Eco-maps (who have you worked with?), One-to-one Interviews and Desk Research.

Main findings in relation to the 4th Standard

Perceived strengths in relation to the Standard

The underpinning strength in relation to this Standard is the fact that the majority of schools across all phases genuinely support the ideals of inclusive education. Other strengths include supportive parents and wider school communities and possibilities within the curriculum framework for developing the social dimensions of education for all learners.

Across all school phases, there are qualified, experienced, motivated and committed educational personnel who are open to innovative approaches to curriculum and teaching. Examples of innovative teaching practice are evident within schools, often initiated and supported by the various opportunities for in-service training that are available. Teachers in particular have access to a range of in-service training opportunities provided in schools, higher education institutions and even internationally.



The degree of system flexibility means that there are opportunities for schools to develop and deliver ‘joined-up’ initiatives. The system flexibility also provides possibilities for developing new approaches to external support, for example the use of ICT to deliver different forms of support and input for learners and their families living in geographically remote areas.

Perceived challenges in relation to the Standard

4.1 Do support services have the ultimate goal of empowering students, families and teachers?

Discussions with school-level stakeholders from different regions and areas indicate that the various support services available to schools often have different goals, or ways of interpreting how learners, families and teachers can be enabled and empowered. Consequently, there are differences in how the various support systems and services work with schools.

Due to regional differences in the availability of services, stakeholders do not view access as being equitable across the country. The areas in and around bigger cities, such as Reykjavík, are clearly perceived as having more comprehensive services that learners, families and schools from other, more remote areas are not always able to access.

However, even in areas where there are comprehensive services, stakeholders raise issues relating to the effectiveness of their co-ordination. Debates about responsibility and funding agreements between education and health are seen as major points of contention. Many stakeholders highlight gaps between the provision available from the health and education systems. They note that smaller municipalities in particular are not always able to provide equitable, comparable services. There are calls for professionals from health services to be included in local support teams in order to support a broader range of learners’ needs, including mental health issues. Many stakeholders suggest that the roles of schools, healthcare centres, social and education services need further clarification. Communication between services and the evaluation of the effectiveness of services also requires improvement.

Stakeholders indicate that most support services involve teamwork and the concept of a team around the child, including parents, teachers, school support staff and local support service staff. However, they also identify differences in how support services in different areas are established and composed, with the range of professionals that are employed and available to support schools differing.

Some services are perceived as following a ‘disability expert model’, with staff acting as consultants, intervening on a one-to-one basis only with learners with diagnosed



needs. Such an approach is seen as encouraging parents and schools to refer learners for official needs identification as this is the only way to receive support. The provision of such targeted support does not promote the development of schools' pedagogical responses, increase their capacity to meet a range of learner needs, or encourage teachers to see all learners as their responsibility. In addition, it does not promote interaction in everyday school life between learners in need of special support and their peers.

An underlying issue for some school stakeholders is that support service staff do not always understand the work that is being undertaken in schools. Therefore, their suggestions for meeting learner needs do not always match the reality of everyday working situations.

Stakeholders from the local and national levels also recognise the problems faced by schools in the variability of provision offered through support services across the country. Many of them highlight the period from 1996, when compulsory schools entered municipality control, as a turning point, when a number of critical decisions were made that still have consequences today. For some stakeholders, one such crucial decision was closing the system of eight district support offices for compulsory schools and moving resources directly into municipalities. Some see support – especially in smaller municipalities – as being diluted and too thinly spread. Some national and local-level stakeholders call for a simplified system for all users through the development of designated resource centres that can offer 'one-stop shops' of support for learners, parents and school teams.

4.2 Are schools effectively supported by the specialist/school services as appropriate in delivering the provision required by students with individual educational needs?

The results of the on-line survey indicate that the majority of teachers (86.3%) and support staff (93%) work with learners who have a formal assessment and diagnosis of SEN and/or disabilities. The majority of the teachers (61.8%) and support staff (63.2%) also work with learners who are receiving learning support, but do not have a formal assessment and diagnosis of SEN and/or disabilities.

The issue of availability of effective support to meet individual learning needs is therefore one that affects the majority of schools and teachers in Iceland.

The on-line survey shows that many teachers and support staff do not feel enabled to work collaboratively with other professionals and stakeholders. More than half of the teachers state that they either feel 'not really' or 'not at all' enabled to work collaboratively with professionals from different disciplines. Other sources of Audit data suggest that different school-level stakeholders – but particularly teachers – feel isolated in their work. There is a perception that mechanisms for support in



schools are being reduced while the numbers of learners identified as having special needs is increasing.

Over half of the teachers who replied to the on-line survey do 'not really' or 'not at all' agree with the statement that support from a multi-professional team effectively helps them with planning and problem-solving relating to programming for learners with individual education needs. In addition, more than half of the teachers do 'not really' or 'not at all' feel enabled to work collaboratively with professionals from different disciplines.

School-level stakeholders in particular argue that more support is needed from the specialist/school services to meet the needs of learners with particular difficulties. Stakeholders from the national and local level suggest that the counselling and mainstream sector capacity-building functions of the special schools and units should be re-focused and developed in this regard. In addition, the availability of specialist expertise in supporting low-incidence special needs is highlighted as an equity issue, with perceived differences in the availability of support in different regions and areas.

In line with this issue, the role of special schools and units in providing support for mainstream schools is highlighted. Stakeholders at local and school levels – including stakeholders working in specialist provision – believe that opportunities for different ways of working across sectors should be developed. This could include joint working, more flexible placements between specialist provision – schools and classes – and mainstream classes, and the use of expertise in specialist provision as a support for mainstream capacity-building.

There are also calls for the focus of the support service to move away from individual learners' difficulties towards supporting teachers to increase their capacity to meet a broader range of needs. Some local-level as well as school-level stakeholders indicate that support services often work to short-term solutions centring upon individual learners' needs, rather than longer-term solutions centred on developing all teachers' skills to manage the diversity of all learners.

The on-line survey indicates that, for school-level stakeholders – including parents – the most important factor in terms of how far learners with a formal assessment and diagnosis of needs are enabled to be successful at school is the flexibility of teaching methods used by teachers and support staff. There appears to be an increasing recognition by stakeholders at all system levels that new ways of working in schools and classrooms are needed.

Numerous school-level stakeholders argue that the fact that many learners, parents and school team members see education as too 'old-fashioned' and rigid should be recognised. Several of them suggest that schools need a new way of working with



more flexible teaching methods and greater personalisation of learning for all learners, rather than individualisation of learning for a few (please refer to **Annex 3: Desk Research Report** for more details on this distinction). Crucially, there are calls from stakeholders at all levels to support the involvement of learners in decision-making about their learning programmes.

National and local-level stakeholders suggest the need for more dialogue around and agreement upon what is understood by the terms ‘effective and appropriate’ in relation to service provision. Local-level stakeholders in particular call for more guidance on the types and levels of services that should be available across municipalities and regions. (This issue is also discussed in *section 2.2.*)

4.3 Is the support system co-ordinated and easy to understand?

For the majority of stakeholders across all system levels, support co-ordination mechanisms at national, local and municipal level are unclear. School-level stakeholders especially are unclear about the responsibilities of municipalities and relevant ministries regarding responsibilities in relation to support service provision.

Many stakeholders suggest that personal contacts between professionals from different services are often very positive and beneficial. However, they call for better co-ordination of services, suggesting that they are fragmented between schools, services and resource centres. For some stakeholders, the disconnect and difference in the type and focus of services and resources provided in compulsory and upper-secondary schools exacerbates problems for learners and their families. The variations in service provision across school phases leads to differing expectations and raises issues of differences in the quality of the provision available.

School-level stakeholders in particular find it difficult to differentiate between the respective responsibilities of the education and health sectors, with grey areas between these systems impacting on work in schools. Calls for increased co-operation and openness between the systems are evident from stakeholders at all system levels.

4.4 Is appropriate training available for all staff in order to ensure all staff can respond positively to student diversity?

Chapter 7 deals with the issue of staff training in detail; readers are referred to *section 7.4* in particular. This section specifically focuses upon stakeholders’ views on the availability of school-based professional development opportunities that enable school teams to meet diverse learning needs.

Stakeholders from across system levels believe that schools have a high level of freedom in their work. Policy implementation can therefore be viewed as being too



reliant upon school team and individual staff member choices. Some stakeholders believe that this leads to inequalities and inequity across the system.

For many stakeholders, the starting point for discussions regarding professional development is the need to ensure that all school staff, particularly teachers, are fully aware of their responsibilities in relation to meeting a wide range of learners' needs. Stakeholders suggest that there are widespread examples of professionals with the least training being given responsibility for the learners with the greatest needs.

Stakeholders argue that a range of school-based professional development strategies must be initiated and/or further developed if school teams are to be effectively supported to meet diverse learning needs. These centre upon:

- the provision of more direct school-based practice and other forms of practical training within ITE courses;
- the availability of a school-based support system for inexperienced teachers, linked to formal induction for newly graduated teachers;
- wider availability of specialist training that prepares all staff to meet the diverse needs of all learners;
- more support possibilities for developing and building upon the successful examples of professional learning communities involving school and university teams in shared projects and action research;
- the provision of shared/joint training across teams of teachers and all support staff.

Stakeholders at all levels suggest that, in general, all forms of ITE and CPD for all staff should be more closely aligned with actual work being conducted in schools.

4.5 Are the staff and resourcing levels of resource services at all levels adequate to meet the needs of the schools and pupils?

The information from stakeholders on the issue of adequate resourcing levels is somewhat contradictory, as the perception of what 'adequate' might mean in terms of actual resourcing levels varies considerably. Stakeholders indicate that there are no agreed guidelines for staffing and resourcing levels, or for the focus and methods of working to be used by support service staff.

The system decentralisation in Iceland has led to different models of provision being developed and, consequently, there are different expectations and views regarding resourcing levels:

- at different system levels (national, local and school);



- in different regions and localities;
- across sectors (education, health, welfare);
- across different school phases.

Stakeholders representing pre- and compulsory schools generally appear to be more positive towards the support available from the local system. Representatives from upper-secondary schools are more vocal in calls for increased resourcing in order to ensure that different support options are possible in different schools.

Overall, there seems to be widespread agreement among school-level stakeholders that more resources are needed. Many of these stakeholders appear to feel disempowered by the lack of funding and what they see as weaknesses of the support services. Such feelings partly explain the drive to push learners with special needs for formal assessment and diagnosis in order to get additional financial resources that can be used for the whole school community. (This issue is discussed in more detail in *section 5.1*).

However, some stakeholders put forward the argument that different ways of organising in-school and local support service provision could make more effective use of financial and human resources. There are calls from stakeholders across system levels to review current models of support and provision with the aim of identifying more flexible models and developing more guidance for local-level providers on equitable service provision.

4.6 Is there adequate access to diagnoses in the health and the welfare system?

The current system of needs diagnosis can be seen as problematic at the individual learner level. For many stakeholders – but parents and representatives of families in particular – the current system is not considered adequate. Rather, it is seen as problematic and inequitable, as it often takes too long to get a referral and any form of input to address the child's needs. For many school-level stakeholders, the 'speed of diagnosis' and identification of needs takes too long and does not enable immediate learning needs to be met.

However, identifying individual learners' needs through a formal diagnosis is potentially the most critical issue for review at the system level. The information from stakeholders at all system levels is clear: the current system of heavy resource allocation linked to identifying individual learners' needs has negative consequences, in that it perpetuates 'medical model thinking' in relation to educational challenges. For many stakeholders, there is a need to focus upon learners' abilities and functioning in everyday life, not disabilities. However, the current system does not facilitate this way of thinking or working.



Crucially, the emphasis upon diagnosis acts as a barrier to meeting learner needs as, through the current system, support is mainly provided to learners with a formal diagnosis. Stakeholders across all system levels see such an approach as being inherently inequitable and, in the short and long term, unsustainable.

It leads to a situation where there can never be 'adequate access'. Demands for diagnosis will always increase, as it is a means of obtaining 'necessary' support for learners and school teams. The current model of support linked to diagnosis is not cost-effective. Stakeholders at all levels are aware of the resulting shortage of resources across the system.

It also exacerbates the problems of co-operation between the health, welfare and education systems. Increased demand for referrals places pressures on resources and may lead to entrenchment and a 'disowning' of responsibility for dealing with shared issues and challenges.

4.7 Are school administrators able to act as leaders in inclusive education settings?

All stakeholders at all levels stress the importance of administrators in schools, as well as decision-makers in municipalities, being able to effectively lead inclusion as a critical factor in successfully implementing inclusive education. However, stakeholders also all agree that this complex task is heavily dependent upon the local political context, financing possibilities and the system for school management.

School and local-level stakeholders suggest that there is potential for a lack of trust between the levels, as increasing amounts of time on both sides are taken up with administrative tasks, rather than pedagogical leadership. School leaders are seen as being widely committed to the principles and goals of inclusive education. However, they require support in making it a reality within their school contexts. The results of the on-line survey show that they feel their work is guided primarily by their school-level policies, which they see as having a positive impact upon inclusive practice. They then feel that their work is guided by national-level policy, rather than local-level policies for inclusive education.

There are general fora for school leaders to meet and some small-scale examples of informal networks of leaders focusing upon inclusion issues. However, many stakeholders stress that school leaders need more systematic support, including formal training opportunities to develop their thinking and attitudes regarding inclusive practice. This would then enable them to support school staff to change their thinking and practice.

Almost three quarters of school leaders responding to the on-line survey had no formal training in inclusive or special needs education. The Audit did not explore the



availability or otherwise of specific training on inclusive education issues for leaders at national or local level.

Local and school-level leaders also require support to develop professional learning communities. They suggest that they need input on preparing teachers and wider school teams to work in different ways, including within more flexible teaching teams. For this, stakeholders suggest that the involvement and input of national-level – primarily ministerial – stakeholders is crucial. Municipalities and schools need dialogue with and feedback from national-level leaders for inclusive education who can provide guidance on school development and innovation in line with policy goals.

4.8 Is there is a recognised forum for teachers to meet and share experiences?

Across the Audit work, there were some examples of sharing innovative inclusive practice within schools and between schools, as well as between schools and other educational organisations (support services and universities). However, the opportunities for stakeholders to share interesting and potentially useful examples appear to be limited and based on informal networks and initiatives. Stakeholders suggest that, at all system levels, there is room for more collaboration and more specific opportunities for teachers to interact and share experiences and examples of their work.

Current opportunities for such exchanges appear to exist mainly within individual schools or via in-service training organised within schools. However, school-level stakeholders indicate that even these possibilities are limited, due to time constraints placed upon teachers and inflexible working routines. All school-level stakeholders, including parents, suggest that there appears to be too little time or flexibility for teachers to work more together, in collaborative teams.

The perception that most teaching is conducted in isolation appears to be reinforced by the lack of formal expectations and opportunities for teachers to meet and discuss their practice with peers and other professionals. Stakeholders suggest that more formal exchange opportunities were required:

- for newly qualified teachers in particular, as a support for their induction into the teaching profession;
- for staff teams within schools to meet and discuss problems and issues and identify collective solutions;
- for staff members from different schools to develop collaboration between teaching teams;



- for school and university teams to develop formal links and communities of practice.

Local and national-level stakeholders indicate that they also feel there are insufficient mechanisms to recognise and share innovative inclusive practice across the system. This includes within and between different phases and types of schools and different geographical locations.

4.9 Is there is a recognised forum for training providers to meet, share experiences and facilitate effective co-ordination of service provision?

The universities, as well as local support services, provide initial and professional development training for school teams. In discussions with stakeholders, it appears that there is no recognised forum for training providers. Many teacher educators identify the need for support for their work, particularly in relation to developing their own skills in specialist areas, for example inclusive education and technology.

Stakeholders from different system levels highlight the differences in the content of professional development programmes, but also the approaches taken between the universities. The co-ordination of training services offered to schools is seen as an area requiring improvement.

4.10 Do parents understand the philosophy of inclusive education?

Local and school-level stakeholders, but also parents themselves, suggest that most parents agree with ideology of inclusive education – particularly at the pre- and early compulsory school levels. However, it is hard to implement and many parents are influenced by the need to get a diagnosis to secure additional resources for their children (please refer to sections 4.6 and 5.3 for more details).

Some parents believe that expertise is lacking in mainstream classes. In-class support is not well understood. Therefore, specialist provision – in settings outside the mainstream classroom – appears to be better for their child and is seen as offering a different quality of education. For some school-level stakeholders, more work needs to be done to support parents to recognise that individual one-to-one support is not always the most effective way to meet ‘special’ needs.

Many parents suggest that the most challenging problems their child faces are not academic, but social: being with friends and playing with other children. For parents and other school-level stakeholders, this aspect of participation and engagement is not always sufficiently prioritised in mainstream schools.



4.11 Do parents have the opportunity to participate in the decisions that affect their child's education?

Different stakeholders appear to have quite different views and perspectives upon this issue. Many school team stakeholders suggest that parents do have opportunities to participate in decision-making processes. However, many parents hold different views and appear to see their involvement in decision-making quite differently.

One example of such a difference of perception is in relation to parental involvement in the development of IEPs. Almost two thirds of parents replying to the on-line survey state that they are 'not really' or 'not at all' enabled to be involved in developing and implementing their child's learning programme. About 45% of teachers state that IEPs do 'not really' or 'not at all' support parents' engagement in their child's learning. However, around three quarters of the school leaders replying to the survey state that learners' IEPs support parents' engagement in their child's learning. There is a discrepancy in what parents, teachers and school leaders feel about the issue of IEPs and parental engagement.

The eco-maps completed during the Audit fieldwork examined who participating parents have talked to about their child recently. The eco-maps analysis shows examples of different resources and mechanisms for parental involvement and support, including support groups and counselling services.

However, the differences between parents' responses were evident, which seems to indicate the disparities in local resource availability. Parental involvement and information provided to parents may not always be enough to inform or reassure them about the quality of education their child is receiving.

The eco-maps analysis also underlined reports from some stakeholders regarding the isolation some parents feel in relation to their child's education. Parents and other stakeholders talked about the 'struggles' some parents face, particularly in trying to ensure that their rights and the rights of their children are being fulfilled.

Summary

The findings in relation to the 4th Standard suggest that many school staff do not feel that the education system fully enables them to think and act inclusively in their daily practice. Stakeholders across all system levels suggest that there are examples of innovative practice in relation to school organisation, curriculum, assessment, pedagogy, support for learners, development opportunities for all stakeholders and effective communication between stakeholders. However, these ways of working are not widespread or usual practice. Further work is needed to ensure that all



stakeholders, including learners and parents, view the availability of support for school and class-level work as both appropriate and effective.

These findings are very much in line with the issues raised in the **Critical Reflection Document** developed by the Icelandic Team and presented in **Annex 2**.

Based on the Audit findings, the evaluation of the *Descriptors* is as follows:

4.1 Support services have the ultimate goal of empowering students, families and teachers, is considered as:

Requiring development.

4.2 Schools are effectively supported by the specialist/school services as appropriate in delivering the provision required by students with individual educational needs, is considered as:

Requiring development.

4.3 The support system is co-ordinated and easy to understand, is considered as:

To be initiated.

4.4 Appropriate training is available for all staff in order to ensure all staff can respond positively to student diversity, is considered as:

Requiring development.

4.5 The staff and resourcing levels of resource services at all levels is adequate to meet the needs of the schools and pupils, is considered as:

Requiring development.

4.6 There is an adequate access to diagnoses in the health and the welfare system, is considered as:

Requiring development.

4.7 School administrators are able to act as leaders in inclusive education settings, is considered as:

Requiring development.

4.8 There is a recognised forum for teachers to meet and share experiences, is considered as:

To be initiated.

4.9 There is a recognised forum for training providers to meet, share experiences and facilitate effective co-ordination of service provision, is considered as:

To be initiated.



4.10 Parents understand the philosophy of inclusive education, is considered as:

Requiring development.

4.11 Parents have the opportunity to participate in the decisions that affect their child's education, is considered as:

Requiring development.

Overall, the 4th Standard, all stakeholders, at all levels are enabled to think and act inclusively in their daily practice, is considered as:

Requiring development.



5. IS THE RESOURCE ALLOCATION SYSTEM EFFECTIVE, EQUITABLE AND ENABLING?

This chapter focuses upon the 5th Standard: **Resource allocation is equitable, efficient and cost-effective.**

The core issue underpinning this Standard and all the Descriptors is: **The effectiveness, equity and enabling effects of resource allocation (including work with other agencies beyond education).**

The main question used to explore the core issue with stakeholders was: **In what ways do you feel that the current systems of resource allocation enable you to support all learners in equitable, efficient and cost-effective ways?**

This question was explored directly through the:

Focus Groups, School Visits and On-line Survey.

This question was explored indirectly through the:

Eco-maps (for parents – who have you talked to?), One-to-one Interviews and Desk Research.

Main findings in relation to the 5th Standard

Perceived strengths in relation to the Standard

Despite the economic difficulties from 2008 onwards and some resulting cuts within the overall education budgets, it can be argued that Iceland's general education system is relatively well-resourced. Expenditure on education is higher than in other OECD countries. A comparatively high proportion of the overall education budget is allocated for meeting the needs of learners with SEN.

There are parents who report they are happy with the support that their children – both with and without an official diagnosis of SEN – receive at school. It can be seen that in many municipalities, including the smaller ones, efforts are being made to offer the health, welfare and educational support that families need, as well as to ensure continuity in care when learners change their school level.

Funding mechanisms are clearly recognised as critical levers for developing the system for inclusive education in Iceland. National and local-level stakeholders in particular argue that policy thinking has to be forward-looking and that there is a need to think about the economic arguments for inclusive education looking 20 years ahead.

A main strength from the perspective of the Audit work, however, is the widespread awareness among all stakeholder groups at all education system levels that the current funding and resource allocation framework has limitations and difficulties.



This shared awareness and desire to examine alternative solutions provides a good foundation for initiating developments and improvements to the current system that can address the issues outlined in the following sections.

Perceived challenges in relation to the Standard

5.1 Do funding mechanisms support successful implementation of the policy of inclusive education?

The financing of the overall system for inclusive education in Iceland involves the municipalities, the Ministry of Education and – via the Equalization Fund – the Ministry of the Interior (Ministry of the Interior, 2016). In 2016, the estimated allocation for education within the Equalization Fund included ISK 7 billion for the general running of mainstream schools, ISK 300 million to support the education of learners from an immigrant background, ISK 1.2 billion to support the special schools in Reykjavík and ISK 2 billion in grants to meet individual SEN on the basis of a formal diagnosis. The current indications are of a steady and continuing increase in costs relating to grants to meet individual SEN on the basis of a formal diagnosis. However, there is no clear evidence if the resources available are being used in the most effective ways.

The policy framework for inclusive education in Iceland has a vision of the provision of a shared, high-quality education where all learners can achieve their full potential. The inclusive education policy is clearly focused upon all learners within the system. However, the current funding mechanisms do not support the local or school levels in implementing the principles underpinning the policy. There are significant differences in policy and practice within municipalities. The current funding mechanisms place great emphasis upon providing financial and material resources to a few learners – i.e. those with diagnosed disabilities and/or SEN – and not on providing resources that can be used flexibly to support all the learners in a school community.

The Equalization Fund is seen as a main contributory factor to this situation in compulsory education. It uses two basic parameters for allocating funds for education: demographics and diagnosis by one of the four main national agencies: the State Diagnostic and Counselling Centre, the Icelandic Organization of the Visually Impaired, the National Hearing and Speech Institute and the Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Department of the National Hospital. Allocation of funds from the Equalization Fund builds on an individual assessment of need carried out at a diagnosis centre, leading to the provision of additional (individual) support to the child's school.



The majority of stakeholders argue that diagnosis is driving the system. Clear incentives exist for parents, schools and municipalities to push for learners to be diagnosed as having a disability. The Equalization Fund is perceived as being used strategically by some stakeholders to address their organisational needs, rather than learners' educational needs.

In line with this perception, many stakeholders suggest that the effectiveness or otherwise of the Equalization Fund is hard to judge, as there is no monitoring or evaluation information available to confirm or disprove suggestions that it is not working as it should. This assertion is in line with the 2008 report on the evaluation of the outcomes of the Equalization Fund (OECD, 2014).

Many stakeholders argue that focusing high levels of funding on disability or individual SEN, rather than on wider learning needs, is influencing the thinking and practice of many stakeholders. This includes local-level decision-makers, school leaders and staff, as well as parents. Labelling learners as having a disability is seen as 'the' route to additional funding and/or resources. Stakeholders across the system recognise this and recognise the negative consequences of such practice. These negative consequences include:

- An over-reliance on learner diagnosis with ever-increasing numbers and associated costs as learners are formally diagnosed as having SEN, particularly in the later stages of compulsory and upper-secondary schools.
- Many local and school-level stakeholders acting strategically to compensate for cutbacks within the general education system through the labelling of learners at risk of failure.
- The perpetuation of a needs identification system that is based on a deficit model. This results in a failure to explore more inclusive pedagogical approaches to needs identification.
- School-level stakeholders being encouraged to equate inclusive education with increased funding and more money, rather than a different, more innovative way of thinking, acting and allocating existing resources.
- The increasing difficulty in resourcing support for less severe needs and for other groups of vulnerable learners.

In short, many stakeholders are clear that the current funding mechanisms do not support successful implementation of the policy of inclusive education. Instead, they foster and promote a focus on special needs rather than an inclusive educational approach.

Stakeholders at local and school levels in particular highlight the current funding mechanisms' impact on meeting the needs of learners who are often described as



‘grey-zone pupils’. These are learners who school teams recognise as having an additional need, but not one severe enough to warrant formal assessment and diagnosis. Many stakeholders are clear that there is not enough support available for these learners at school or local level.

Where additional support is perceived as only being possible through the allocation of additional funding, this group of learners is often seen as ‘missing out’, with their needs not being met.

Various stakeholder groups call for increased resources for education generally and inclusive educational support specifically. However, many stakeholders also argue that, while costs can be viewed as a central issue, inclusive education can be made more efficient.

In line with this, it should be recognised that, comparatively speaking, education in Iceland remains a well-resourced system. Rather than putting more money into the system per se, there is an issue of using existing resources in different, more efficient and cost-effective ways.

The current funding and resource allocation mechanisms directly influence local and school-level stakeholders’ attitudes, thinking and behaviour regarding inclusive education. Many stakeholders recognise them as affecting schools’ flexibility to increase their capacity and make their provision inclusive. The on-line survey shows that stakeholders are very hesitant regarding the enabling effect of the quality assurance mechanisms that govern the system’s financing. Overall, the current funding system is not considered to effectively support the stated policy for inclusive education in Iceland.

5.2 Is there a strong inter-ministerial co-operation in the financing of the policy of inclusive education?

Clear and effective governance mechanisms to support efficient resource allocation are essential foundations for an effective system for inclusive education. Within the Icelandic system, inter-ministerial as well as inter-system level (i.e. ministerial – municipality) co-operation are essential for effective system governance.

Stakeholders at the national and local level in particular identify the lack of governance and co-ordination on funding across and within the ministry and municipality levels. They point to a lack of information and transparency on what is being spent, by whom and how in relation to inclusive education. This lack of clarity on funding issues results in little or no information on effectiveness issues – some local-level stakeholders indicate that they are unable to answer questions relating to system effectiveness and efficiency (these issues are more fully discussed in *Chapter 6*).



At the national level, stakeholders believe that the importance of communication between ministries cannot be over-estimated. Numerous national-level stakeholders point towards many positive examples of informal co-operation between ministry teams regarding inclusive education. However, formal procedures and mechanisms for inter-ministerial co-operation are lacking. Many national-level stakeholders argue that, at ministerial level, there is insufficient joint working/co-operation around matters that impact on equitable education provision for all learners.

This lack of formal co-operation is perceived as being due to different sectoral working perspectives and practices. The health, welfare, social affairs and education sectors are widely believed to have different mindsets, priorities and professional approaches. This is recognised at both national and local levels as presenting challenges that must be addressed. However, many national-level stakeholders indicate that informal co-operation has shown that these differences are actually more a perception than a reality and that cross-sectoral working does lead to shared ways of thinking and working.

Despite these informal possibilities, stakeholders from across national, local and school levels point towards a compartmentalisation of the different sectors. Some stakeholders indicate a 'silo approach' within some ministries. This results in funding policy and practice gaps because of limited, or non-existent, inter-ministerial co-operation.

Stakeholders from the local and school levels highlight gaps between the health and education systems that impact upon families and schools. They highlight examples of some learners with additional needs, particularly mental health issues, not having their needs met as they 'fall between the gap' of two systems – health and education.

Stakeholders from both the national and local levels indicate that the positive engagement of decision-makers from the health sector in educational issues – particularly funding and provision matters – is a particular on-going challenge.

It should be noted here that it was not possible for any representatives from the Ministry of Health to be involved in any of the Audit activities and this Ministry's viewpoint is not reflected within this Report or the accompanying Annexes.

Problems in agreeing the exact funding responsibilities appear to exist at national level – i.e. between ministries – but also between system levels – i.e. ministries and municipalities. Within the relevant stakeholder groups, many questions are raised regarding who does – and does not – pay for what and why (please refer to *section 6.5* for more details).



While there is widespread agreement on the policy for inclusive education, some local-level stakeholders are clear that municipality and local authority representatives had very little input into policy development. Some indicate that the cost assessment conducted during development was insufficient and that this has exacerbated issues around financial responsibility.

There is an on-going review of the Equalization Fund administered by the Ministry of the Interior. One proposal is for revised procedures for the identification and diagnosis of SEN, based on a model of intensity of intervention requirements. It is not clear how other ministries are contributing to this review. However, some local-level stakeholders state that a clear mechanism is needed to involve municipalities to ensure that any revised procedures clearly move away from medical models and thinking.

Stakeholders at national level indicate that the 'grey zones' in relation to the division of tasks and responsibilities for specific decision-makers require further clarification. Local and school-level stakeholders also identify the need to clarify potential grey areas where the continuing division of responsibility between funding allocations via the Equalization Fund and the funding of upper-secondary schooling are leading to increasing problems.

Local-level stakeholders in particular highlight a perception that the Ministry of Education has, through the policy, set ambitious goals for the work of municipalities in line with inclusive education in pre-school and compulsory education. However, these stakeholders also suggest that the Ministry is less ambitious for policy implementation within upper-secondary education, where the belief is that inclusive education is not funded in the same way or always implemented in line with the stated policy.

The majority of stakeholders across all levels indicate that, in relation to financing issues, but also wider policy for inclusive education, co-operation between and within ministries, municipalities and wider stakeholder groups – such as the teachers' unions – is an area for short- and long-term improvement.

5.3 Are school resources distributed in a fair and equitable way to support inclusive education?

The system for allocating resources to schools was possibly the most frequently discussed issue within the Audit fieldwork. For many school-level stakeholders – particularly school leaders and managers – there is a lack of transparency about the funding system. In their replies to the on-line survey, many school leaders and school team members indicate that they have negative views regarding the resource allocation system. The on-line survey indicates that, in general, many respondents are negative regarding the resource allocation system. About 60% state that the



resource allocation system does not really or does not at all effectively enable their school or local support service to deliver the provision required by all learners.

For many school-level stakeholders – including parents – the need for a diagnosis and label as eligibility for support is unfair and ignores the needs of learners who do not have a label. It also ignores the wider work of schools striving to make their practice for all learners inclusive, as it is an incentive to focus attention and resources on those learners who have a label.

Stakeholders indicate that potential inequities exist at different system levels:

1. The individual learner and their family:

Many stakeholders argue that funding mechanisms promote inequalities in relation to the access that learners and their families have to resources. Many parents feel they have to fight to get support for their children and some parents who are less informed or less articulate may miss out within a system that is seen as inequitable. Some parents perceive the resource allocation system as the ‘survival of the fittest’ – parents who can fight get things, while others do not. Some parents suggest that this is one reason for the relatively high number of support groups across Iceland. Schools are often seen as ‘encouraging parents to fight with municipalities’ to get extra resources. There is a perception among many parents that children’s needs are often identified, but there is then a lengthy waiting time for support to be provided. Some parents also raise the issue of the availability and co-ordination of different forms of resource provision. For some, there are questions about whether it is cheaper to pay for inclusive education rather than to provide different forms of specialist provision.

2. The school level:

School-level stakeholders – particularly those in the compulsory and upper-secondary sectors – indicate that they feel under-resourced to develop more inclusive education in the way they believe it should be done. This under-resourcing includes physical resources, with different schools having access to different types of resources and facilities, but also access to training and teacher ‘know-how’. As with parents, some school-level stakeholders suggest that, under the current system, the delay in providing support in the medium and long term exacerbates problems and eventually makes meeting learner needs more expensive. School-level stakeholders have different perceptions of the flexibility given to school teams to decide how earmarked funding for ‘diagnosed’ learners is used. Some see it as a problem when funds meant for identified needs are spent on other learners. Others see this flexibility as essential for providing support for some learners who would not otherwise receive it. All agree that the current system of funding ‘labelled’



learners is not working for all, while the rights of some learners – the least and most able in particular – are being called into question.

3. The level of municipalities:

Differences between municipalities are highlighted depending on their attitudes and political priorities for schools. Resource allocation mechanisms are seen by many to depend on local policy contexts and concerns, as well as the size of the municipality. Some stakeholders report that families move to the ‘right municipality’ in order to get support for their child. All stakeholders agree that smaller municipalities do not have the resources to create support systems similar to those offered in larger municipalities and there are less qualified personnel to support schools. There appears to be potential for municipalities to work collaboratively in order to establish and offer ‘shared services’. However, it seems that such schemes are undertaken on the basis of local authority initiative, rather than through formal co-operation arrangements and requirements.

4. The school phase level:

Many local and school-level stakeholders highlight differences between funding mechanisms, availability and usage across different school phases. There are perceptions that the pre-school sector in particular is under-resourced, especially in comparison with the upper-secondary school sector. The pre-school sector is also seen to be operating with a lack of qualified staff. Stakeholders from the local level, as well as compulsory and upper-secondary schools, suggest that the funding mechanisms for upper-secondary schools do not act as an incentive for inclusive education. They promote different views on how to meet learning needs and lead to the establishment of separate programmes and provision that is not available within the compulsory sector, and is not in line with the current policy for inclusive education.

Summary

The findings for this Standard suggest that the majority of stakeholders across all system levels believe that current funding mechanisms and the resource allocation framework are not equitable or efficient in any school phase. Rather than enabling stakeholders to implement inclusive education, current funding processes are seen as a barrier to developments in inclusive practice. For many national and local-level stakeholders, changes to the current funding mechanism linked to a diagnosis of SEN/disability would be a critical lever in moving the system for inclusive education forward in Iceland.

These findings are fully in line with the critical issues raised by the Icelandic Team, presented in **Annex 2: Critical Reflection Document**.



Based on the Audit findings, the evaluation of the *Descriptors* is as follows:

5.1 Funding mechanisms support successful implementation of the policy of inclusive education, is considered as:

Requiring development.

5.2 There is a strong inter-ministerial co-operation in the financing of the policy of inclusive education, is considered as:

To be initiated.

5.3 School resources are distributed in a fair and equitable way to support inclusive education, is considered as:

Requiring development.

Overall, the 5th Standard, **resource allocation is equitable, efficient and cost-effective**, is considered as:

Requiring development.



6. ARE EDUCATIONAL GOVERNANCE AND QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCESSES EFFECTIVE?

This chapter focuses upon the 6th Standard:

Governance and quality assurance mechanisms ensure co-ordinated and effective implementation of inclusive education policy and practice.

The core issue underpinning this Standard and all the Descriptors is:

The effectiveness of educational governance and quality assurance/accountability processes at all system levels.

The main question used to explore the core issue with stakeholders was:

What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of the current quality assurance processes for informing improvement in inclusive education?

This question was explored directly through the:

Focus Groups, One-to-one Interviews and On-line Survey.

This question was explored indirectly through the:

School Visits and Desk Research.

Main findings in relation to the 6th Standard

Perceived strengths in relation to the Standard

Assessment of learner progress against the curriculum objectives described in the National Curriculum Guide is part of the legislative framework for education in Iceland. Assessment procedures to monitor learner achievements, as well as to identify those who may need special support, is an expected way of working for all schools across all phases.

There is a comprehensive framework of criteria for quality education for use in external evaluation in compulsory schools. These are used for internal school review, as well as external evaluation. The Directorate of Education carries out external evaluation in schools across all phases. The external evaluation is based on the school's own internal evaluation report and also includes a site visit involving a range of information gathering activities with learners, parents, teachers and the wider school staff team. Stakeholders suggest that one of the main benefits of the current system is that it permits teachers' and learners' voices to be heard.

There are some concrete examples of collaboration between university and schools on innovative school review and development projects. There are also examples of cross-sectoral collaboration involving representatives from the Ministry,



municipalities and the Teachers' Union (the 2015 evaluation being one such forward-thinking example).

Such examples have the potential for further examination, dissemination and scaling-up. There are also examples of schools undertaking additional forms of self-review and evaluation. For the stakeholders involved in these processes, schools' self-review – often involving action research – is seen as a powerful tool for supporting innovation and development.

Perceived challenges in relation to the Standard

6.1 Is there a national evaluation and assessment framework that covers the needs of all pupils, including those with the most complex needs?

Stakeholders across all levels indicate that the current assessment mechanisms within schools are unclear and insufficiently precise to effectively support teaching and learning. Many see the national assessment framework as being limited and limiting, as it encourages schools to work towards high-stakes, summative assessments linked to national tests and examinations.

Stakeholders from all system levels believe that there are differences in assessment practice across the country. Assessment is not standardised between different schools and teachers. Teachers' own assessments for learners are not co-ordinated on a local or national basis. Schools have a great deal of freedom to develop their own assessment practice. Many stakeholders, across all levels, assert that assessment practice has often not been adapted to support new ways of teaching and learning. While there are examples of summative, high-stakes assessments being balanced with formative, class-based assessments by school teams, many school-level stakeholders say they feel unsupported in developing new assessment processes.

For many school-level stakeholders, the current assessment framework relies heavily on tests and examinations that are not appropriate for all learners and have a negative impact upon some learners' self-esteem. School-level stakeholders in particular suggest that the national evaluation and assessment framework does not cover the needs of all learners, especially those with the most complex needs and those who are gifted and talented. Schools and – in the upper-secondary phase – special units make adaptations to the national curriculum and assessment processes. However, these adaptations differ between school levels and schools and organisations providing support. For end-of-programme tests, special examination arrangements can be made for some learners, but this also differs between schools and does not always happen for all learners.



6.2 Do external evaluation standards address directly the diversity of pupils' needs and the means to address them in schools?

Stakeholders from the national and local levels indicate that the current evaluation framework is not well aligned with inclusive education. This is directly related to the lack of clarity within the system around the concept and practice of inclusion (please refer to *Chapter 1* for more details). Many stakeholders perceive the evaluation standards as being out of date, as they focus on tangible/concrete aspects of school management, rather than on quality classroom practice. Evaluation standards are also perceived as lacking a focus on innovative practice. School success is seen as being judged based on an old system, rather than innovative thinking about effective teaching and assessment practice.

For stakeholders across system levels, the current information used at local and national levels to monitor learners' progress and make judgements regarding the impact of support, is inadequate. The current information places emphasis on formal test results that do not include all learners. There is a need to clearly align evaluation standards with what is genuinely valued in education if these standards are to effectively identify learners' needs and support schools in addressing them.

The on-line survey indicates that school staff are generally unsure how well processes and procedures for monitoring and evaluating school-level practice work. Many school-level stakeholders feel that current quality assurance procedures are bureaucratic and do not provide them with information that can direct school development and improvement, especially for developing inclusive practice. Relatively few schools have been externally evaluated and stakeholders suggest that there is limited external involvement in school development.

Within upper-secondary education, there is a five-year cycle of external evaluation. However, relatively few pre- and compulsory schools have been externally evaluated and stakeholders suggest that there is limited external involvement in school development. Many stakeholders argue that changes to teaching practice are expected and then implemented before evaluation has been conducted to constructively inform the change.

The absence of robust quality assurance processes that ensure that school teams are able to meet diverse learner needs is seen as a weak link within the system by stakeholders at all system levels. There is also a widespread acknowledgement across all system levels that school teams require far more external support to develop their competences in establishing and implementing school-based quality assurance processes.



6.3 Is systematic monitoring conducted to ensure compliance with all quality assurance standards?

Many national and local-level stakeholders state that the current external evaluation and school-level quality assurance procedures do not provide them with the information they require to evaluate whether or not policy for inclusive education is being successfully implemented in schools. Many stakeholders recognise that comprehensive monitoring is needed to ensure a quality system. However, they suggest that it is difficult to ascertain whether national-level policies are effective, as there are no clear monitoring mechanisms for system inputs, processes or outcomes.

The current evaluation cycles and processes are not viewed as effective in supporting school, local or national-level work. In particular, current information does not address local and national-level decision-makers' questions regarding cost-effectiveness. Many national and local-level stakeholders acknowledge that Iceland has a well-resourced system, but lacks evidence on whether system outcomes justify this expenditure.

Stakeholders from these levels argue that there is a need for clear evidence that inclusive education improves the quality of education for all learners. They feel that this evidence needs to be linked to clear operational concepts against which factors can be measured and evaluated and decisions made (this assertion should be considered in line with the discussion presented in *Chapter 1*). These stakeholders recognise that an effective school system cannot be measured by single factors – quality is a hugely complex factor. They suggest that a better description of and better measures for inclusive education are necessary for identifying the extent to which schools are successful in implementing the policy. Many local-level stakeholders refer to the need for monitoring tools to better inform their work.

For many stakeholders across system levels, the expectations for inclusive education in terms of schools' work processes and learner outcomes are unclear. Local and school-level stakeholders suggest that local authorities and individual schools have a high degree of freedom to choose how to implement national regulations. While this is seen as a system strength, it leads to a call for guidelines on implementation and monitoring in relation to two key factors.

Firstly, there are calls for comprehensive guidelines on schools' obligations and a clear definition of the 'baseline' to be fulfilled by all schools in terms of inclusive provision and practice. Stakeholders indicate that this baseline should be linked to transparent self-review, monitoring and external evaluation processes that would inform the work of schools, local and national authorities.



Secondly, there are calls for more systematic monitoring of the effective use of the resources provided to meet individual educational needs (i.e. through formal diagnosis) and how these resources can be considered within overall cost-effectiveness debates (please refer to *Chapter 5*). Stakeholders at all levels identify a range of difficulties that they face in trying to ascertain the effectiveness of equalization funding allocations made as a result of state diagnostic centre assessments. The responsibility for monitoring the effectiveness of funding is unclear, which results in a lack of monitoring in the short and long term. While all stakeholders suggest that the current system for identifying needs and allocating resources is not working well, the initiatives to address difficulties appear to be fragmented and un-coordinated between different national (ministries) and local (municipalities) level stakeholder groups.

Many stakeholders across all system levels consider quality assurance in terms of review, monitoring and evaluation as a weakness within the Icelandic system. Most stakeholders are clear that there is no real culture of self-review in education and that more effort is needed to evaluate the system's quality at different levels:

- At the school level, while some schools are developing a clear focus on promoting self-development and review, this is not widespread. The local and national-level authorities need to support school-level initiatives more systemically.
- At the local level, there is a need to develop evaluation procedures to identify and respond to problems while simultaneously promoting a shared learning culture across the local community.
- At the national level, there is a need to put in place procedures for regular system review of policy thinking, implementation and outcomes.

For many stakeholders across system levels, effective leadership is the critical issue underpinning the development of systematic monitoring processes at different system levels. School, local and national educational leaders are understood to be the critical actors in fostering the required self-review and development cultures, policies and practice.

6.4 Are results of assessment procedures communicated and explained to parents by teachers and others involved with pupils' learning programmes?

Reports from stakeholders suggest that, for the majority of learners with recognised SEN, the information flow between parents, schools and other professionals following needs assessment is generally satisfactory. However, some school-level stakeholders refer to an information gap between the diagnostic centres and schools that may hinder an adequate information flow to parents.



Some stakeholders note differences in reporting procedures and practices depending upon locality, but also school phase. Many school-level stakeholders indicate that parents of learners in pre-schools are better informed than parents in compulsory or upper-secondary schools, as there is more contact between parents, teachers and support staff in this sector.

Differences are also apparent in the information flow relating to learners receiving additional support, but without a formal identification (diagnosis) of needs. School-level stakeholders in particular suggest that information sharing regarding these learners' needs is not always as effective with either parents or families, or across schools and school phases (i.e. during transition periods).

6.5 Are mechanisms developed for collecting and sharing data across ministries to ensure compliance with agreed standards?

The issue of collecting and sharing data across responsible bodies is a main focus of attention for stakeholders at national, but also local, levels. These stakeholders all argue that there is a need to improve the collection and use of data on school effectiveness, learner outcomes and financial information across ministries and municipalities in order to support more holistic planning. In particular, stakeholders suggest that the current lack of co-ordination of school-based assessment information makes it difficult to identify meaningful data to inform monitoring of equity and cost-effectiveness issues at local or national levels.

Many national and local-level stakeholders highlight that the lines of communication are often good at an intra-professional level. However, within and between system levels, communication and information sharing have to be improved to promote system accountability and support appropriate policy monitoring. Some stakeholders refer to a 'silo approach' being taken by individual ministries and municipalities. Change and collaboration within and across ministry and municipality sectors is seen as being too focused upon individuals. Stakeholders from different ministries and municipalities highlight the need to share 'individual sector knowledge' so it becomes shared system knowledge.

Stakeholders across the national and local levels indicate that there is a lack of governance. This promotes a fragmented inclusive education system, where efficiency and cost-effectiveness are essentially dependent upon work being done at school level, rather than the co-ordinated efforts at local and national levels.

Governance in terms of:

- information sharing,
- clear lines of responsibility,
- collaborative work and



- shared processes and procedures for quality assurance.

is viewed by many stakeholders at local and national levels as being an area for improvement between ministries, between ministries and municipalities and between municipalities.

Summary

The findings relating to the 6th Standard indicate that stakeholders at national, local and school levels do not view the current educational governance and quality assurance/accountability processes as effective. Stakeholders at national and local levels suggest that current governance mechanisms do not effectively support their work. Stakeholders at school level suggest that current quality assurance mechanisms do not always inform their work in a way that promotes school development and improvement.

The findings are all in line with the main issues highlighted in the critical reflection. However, there are additional issues raised by stakeholders in relation to intra- and inter-sectoral working that were not explicit in the **Critical Reflection Document (Annex 2)**.

Based on the Audit findings, the evaluation of the *Descriptors* is as follows.

6.1 There is a national evaluation and assessment framework that covers the needs of all pupils, including those with the most complex needs, is considered as:

Requiring development.

6.2 External evaluation standards address directly the diversity of pupils' needs and the means to address them in schools, is considered as:

Requiring development.

6.3 Systematic monitoring is conducted to ensure compliance with all quality assurance standards, is considered as:

Requiring development.

6.4 Results of assessment procedures are communicated and explained to parents by teachers and others involved with pupils' learning programmes, is considered as:

Requiring development.

6.5 Mechanisms are developed for collecting and sharing data across ministries to ensure compliance with agreed standards, is considered as:

To be initiated.



Overall, the 6th Standard, **governance and quality assurance mechanisms ensure co-ordinated and effective implementation of inclusive education policy and practice**, is considered as:

Requiring development.



7. ARE STAKEHOLDERS ENABLED THROUGH THEIR PROFESSIONAL TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT TO IMPLEMENT INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AS A RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH FOR ALL LEARNERS?

This chapter focuses upon the 7th Standard:

Professional development issues at all system levels are effectively addressed.

The core issue underpinning this Standard and all the Descriptors is:

How stakeholders at all levels are enabled through their initial education and continuing professional development to implement inclusive education as a rights-based approach for all learners.

The main question used to explore the core issue with stakeholders was:

How well prepared do you feel through your initial education and continuing professional development to meet all learners' rights to a high-quality inclusive education?

This question was explored directly through the:

Focus Groups, School Visits and On-line Survey.

This question was explored indirectly through the:

Eco-maps (what teaching approaches have you used?) One-to-one Interviews and Desk Research.

Main findings in relation to the 7th Standard

Perceived strengths in relation to the Standard

Iceland has a range of highly trained professionals working in the education system. These include teachers, as well as support staff with a range of specialised training. All teachers for all school phases now undertake five-year master's level initial training, although it should be noted that there is a recognised shortage of trained pre-school teachers and staff.

Iceland has a well-established system of teacher education. There are three main higher education centres for initial teacher education (ITE) and continuous professional development (CPD), two in Reykjavík and one in Akureyri. A range of initial education as well as postgraduate and short-term courses are available for teachers, support staff and school leaders.

Stakeholders at all system levels see the value of school staff – particularly teachers – having access to a variety of CPD and lifelong learning opportunities.



The Teachers' Union is a key stakeholder in discussions regarding the development of ITE and CPD opportunities.

Funding in the form of dedicated working time is allocated for up to 150 hours CPD a year for all school teachers at compulsory level. For teachers in upper-secondary schools, this is 80 hours. There is no allocation for pre-school teachers.

In addition to this funding, the municipalities contribute 1.72% of teachers' salaries to the CPD fund administered by the Teachers' Union at both pre-school and compulsory level. The State also contributes 1.72% of teacher salaries for CPD at the upper-secondary level. The State provides funding to institutions offering CPD programmes for teachers in compulsory and upper-secondary education.

This is a relatively high allocation in comparison with many other European countries. CPD funding can be used in different ways – including international study visits – and there are many examples of innovative school practice as a result of targeted use of CPD funding opportunities.

A main strength within the current system is the widespread understanding among school, local and national-level stakeholders that staff professional development is perhaps the most critical lever for improving the quality of inclusive education in Iceland. At the national level, a National Advisory Board is developing proposals for re-organising all CPD at the system level, aligning policy-making with teachers' professional development needs.

Perceived challenges in relation to the Standard

7.1 Is teacher education viewed as a lifelong continuous process?

Among the majority of stakeholders, there is a clear view that teacher education is a lifelong learning process and that initial education cannot fully prepare a teacher or school staff member for their developing role.

There is also a recognition of the need to bridge the current gap between ITE and CPD. School, local and national-level stakeholders all identify a long-standing problem in the discontinuity between the different stages of professional development – in particular ITE and then CPD.

Current CPD opportunities have developed in different ways across the system. CPD is funded and/or offered by different providers: higher education institutions offer long courses, in addition to ITE; municipalities provide short-course, in-service training opportunities; the Teachers' Union funds individual teachers' professional development.

Teachers have a great deal of flexibility to make their own decisions on further training opportunities – from any of the providers. Many teachers view teacher



education as a lifelong continuous process. However, it is also seen as an area for personal decision-making, not always linked to the wider needs of the school or local educational community.

Numerous school, local and national-level stakeholders assert that these individual decisions are not always well aligned with wider school development needs, etc.

Many stakeholders highlight the overall co-ordination of CPD across school teams as a real issue. This is especially true of school-level stakeholders, who often perceive CPD as being un-coordinated and fragmented, with a disconnect between schools' needs and the CPD possibilities on offer. School leaders in particular indicate that school development planning could be linked more closely to CPD of staff and vice versa.

It is unclear how school leaders, school teams or municipalities can co-ordinate individual teachers' CPD opportunities so that staff professional development is more coherent and aligned with school development needs.

The current methods of funding CPD are not widely viewed as an effective use of resources. In particular, some stakeholders see the 150 hours of CPD allocated to teachers as problematic and suggest that only around 10% is currently used. They see CPD funding, including for study trips abroad, as meeting the needs of a few individual teachers and not 'reluctant' teachers who may be most in need of further development.

The current system of allowing teachers to organise their own CPD presents some opportunities at a personal level. However, for many stakeholders, this is leading to inequities in relation to geography but also school sector (pre-, compulsory and upper-secondary schools) and subjects. There are repeated calls for the system to be made fairer. Overall, most stakeholders do not view this form of CPD as effective in terms of supporting policy implementation, or as cost-effective.

Many system decision-makers – i.e. school leaders and policy-makers at local and national level – highlight the potential for improving school development if the existing resources linked to individual teachers' CPD could be 'freed' to work more flexibly.

School-level stakeholders highlight the need for increased flexibility, coupled with the great variety of course content, in relation to the availability of CPD courses offered within universities. Many current CPD opportunities are viewed as being too similar or too rigid. More diversity (especially for age range specialisms) is needed.

Alongside this, school and university-level stakeholders indicate the need to build upon and further explore possibilities for supporting more whole-school oriented professional development models based on school development plans. Such models



could draw more effectively on existing research and training expertise and resources in universities to offer more opportunities ‘tailored’ to schools’ professional development needs.

Many stakeholders argue that teachers are not sufficiently prepared through their initial training for the realities of working in inclusive schools. Some stakeholders perceive that teachers undertaking the five-year training route are better prepared for inclusive education generally, but there are calls for ‘top-up’ courses for all teachers not trained to master’s level.

The need to train teachers on using diverse teaching methods – especially within upper-secondary education – is highlighted. Some stakeholders suggest that, within this sector in particular, there may be differing views and understandings of a teacher’s role and mission in relation to being a teacher of ‘subject content’ or a teacher of all learners.

Stakeholders from across the system levels note the need to develop a mindset of lifelong learning within education to further ‘professionalise’ the role of all teachers, support staff and school leaders. This increased professionalisation is linked to the call for more school, local and national-level recognition of achievement in relation to staff professional development and for schools’ innovative practice.

7.2 Do all professional development opportunities aim to develop a framework of attitudes and values, knowledge and skills that are aligned with national policy goals for inclusive education?

The majority of stakeholders hold the view that inclusive education primarily builds upon values, beliefs and commitment. This view is clearly mirrored in the opinions expressed by some learners when discussing how their learning is best supported in schools. One learner makes clear that ‘supportive teachers are best [they are] friendly and you can go to them’, while another says ‘the best thing at school [is] when everyone works together’.

However, the majority of stakeholders suggest that teachers in particular are not being effectively prepared for their future role within inclusive education, or to work in line with local-level policy and national legislation. Stakeholders from all levels argue that teachers require more school-based practice in their initial education and studies. Overall, inclusive education is not seen as being fully embedded within initial teacher training opportunities. These are not seen as being aligned with national or local-level policies for inclusive education.

Currently, many teachers do not feel enabled to meet diverse learning needs. Those replying to the on-line survey suggest they are very hesitant in considering how their initial training has enabled them to manage learner behaviour (52.7% partially agree



and 22.2% do not really agree), take responsibility for all learners' learning needs (47.6% partially agree and 25.6% do not really agree) and meet learners' diverse needs (51.3% partially agree and 21.1% do not really agree).

The survey indicates that the support staff who responded are more positive than teachers about their ITE and CPD. This is especially in relation to issues such as work with parents, meeting learners' diverse needs and working with other professionals and agencies.

Generally, stakeholders at all levels call for more school-based practice linked to more 'evidence-based' training opportunities for all school staff, as well as for local and national-level stakeholders. This approach should be clearly aligned with policy and legislation for inclusive education. There is a clear need for more widespread and detailed discussion with the training providers about the quality and focus of ITE and CPD, as the majority of school, local and national-level stakeholders do not believe current training opportunities are in line with education policy.

7.3 Is inclusive education an embedded element within all training for school leaders and teachers?

There is a widespread perception that training on inclusive education as a general approach, as well as specific training for meeting the needs of learners with SEN, should be provided for all school staff members and considered vital for all teachers. This view is especially prevalent among parents who, in different ways, argued that it is the teachers' responsibility to meet different learning needs.

Some stakeholders perceive differences between the two universities in Reykjavík and Akureyri in both the approaches and the content and focus of teacher education. Access to different approaches and specialisms is seen as positive. Nevertheless, the perceived differences between institutions in terms of conceptual and practical approaches to inclusive education are highlighted as potentially difficult in terms of ensuring that initial and continuing teacher education are fully aligned with national and local-level policies.

For many stakeholders – including parents, school leaders, local policy-makers and teachers themselves – teacher education is 'too theoretical'. The realities of inclusive education need different forms of preparation, including the development of inclusive teaching approaches through actual practice in schools with different learners. All stakeholders argue that more school teaching practice time is needed within ITE. In addition, a number of national-level stakeholders highlighted the fact that the benchmark of spending 20% of the overall time within ITE courses on school placement is not currently being met.



Many stakeholders hold the view that newly qualified teachers require opportunities for co-ordinated induction and longer-term 'learning by doing' opportunities via, for example, mentoring schemes. The on-line survey indicates that school leaders and teachers only feel partially prepared by their initial and on-going training to meet the demands of inclusive education. Currently, training opportunities do not appear to enable all teachers to feel confident and skilled in working in inclusive environments.

School-level stakeholders are clear that both ITE and CPD for inclusive education are essentially optional for individual staff members. When such training is undertaken, it is most often optional, discrete and separate, not embedded within other study areas or courses. Numerous stakeholders view the content of many ITE and long-course CPD programmes as perpetuating a view that inclusive education is about meeting the special needs of some learners, rather than effectively meeting the needs of all learners. Moves within university programmes to embed inclusive teaching within general education courses have highlighted the need to further support teacher educators to introduce, for example blended teaching, etc., that combines on-line digital media with traditional classroom methods, with some element of learner control over the time, place, path or pace of their learning.

7.4 Are appropriate general and specialist training available for all staff in order to ensure all staff can respond positively to student diversity?

The on-line survey results show that, of the 351 responses from teachers, the majority (around 80%) do not have formal training in inclusive education and/or special education. At the same time, about 86% of teachers state that they work with learners who have a formal assessment and diagnosis of SEN and/or disabilities. About 62% state that they work with learners who are receiving learning support, but do not have a formal assessment and diagnosis of SEN and/or disabilities. This suggests that, while most teachers work with learners with educational needs, the availability of teacher training may not fully meet their CPD needs.

Other school-level stakeholders may also lack adequate CPD support. Over 70% of school leaders have no formal training in inclusive education and/or special education. It can also be noted that about half of the school leaders replying to the survey have not undertaken any formal training in educational leadership.

Among the survey respondents, support staff are proportionally more likely to have a formal qualification in inclusive education and/or special education. However, nearly a quarter of them do not have any form of formal qualification. The on-line survey also indicates that, while about 23% of support staff have no formal qualification at all, they have, proportionally, the highest level of formal training in



this area. This finding is potentially linked to perceptions that support staff are often responsible for supporting learners with the most complex needs, as they are seen as ‘better able to deal with them’ (*section 3.5* discusses this finding in more detail).

Representatives from school staff and parent stakeholder groups voice the need for more training opportunities covering different school development needs (one example repeatedly cited is training on the needs of learners with social, emotional and/or behavioural problems). Aligned with this, a view is expressed that teacher education programmes are too similar. While there must be alignment of different forms of training for different professionals, there also needs to be diversity in the courses on offer to school staff.

Some school-level stakeholders who are considered to be working innovatively at school level, argue that many of the formal training opportunities available offer ‘more of the same’ and are not relevant for them as they are ‘behind’ their own school practice. There are calls for more innovative forms of CPD that support practice exchanges between schools and that ‘think outside the box’ in relation to addressing school-level – not individual staff-level – development needs. There are innovative examples of supported school development involving university staff providing targeted school development opportunities. However, stakeholders indicate that there needs to be more collaboration and co-ordination of such opportunities at the national level, in order to make the best use of the existing expertise.

Summary

The findings in relation to this Standard suggest that many school-level stakeholders question the degree to which their initial education and/or on-going CPD opportunities prepare them for the realities of inclusive education practice. Many national and local-level stakeholders question how far ITE and CPD is aligned with national and local policies and therefore to what extent it enables school staff to implement inclusive education as a rights-based approach for all learners.

The findings in relation to this Standard are fully in line with the issues raised by the Icelandic Team within the **Critical Reflection Document (Annex 2)**.

Based on the Audit findings, the evaluation of the *Descriptors* is as follows:

7.1 Teacher education is viewed as a lifelong continuous process, is considered as:
Requiring development.



7.2 All professional development opportunities aim to develop a framework of attitudes and values, knowledge and skills that are aligned with national policy goals for inclusive education, is considered as:

Requiring development.

7.3 Inclusive education is an embedded element within all training for school leaders and teachers, is considered as:

Requiring development.

7.4 Appropriate general and specialist training are available for all staff in order to ensure all staff can respond positively to student diversity, is considered as:

Requiring development.

Overall, the 7th Standard, **professional development issues at all system levels are effectively addressed, is considered as:**

Requiring development.



AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings relating to the seven areas of Standards and Descriptors, presented in the previous chapters, provide a comprehensive and detailed insight into stakeholders' perceptions of strengths and weaknesses in the Icelandic system for inclusive education. Following an examination of these findings, the Audit Team has identified the following factors as crucial starting points for identifying meaningful Audit recommendations:

1. The majority of stakeholders across all system levels and school phases view inclusive education as a positive that they want to 'do well' and they 'do their best they can'. This is a fundamental strength of the Icelandic education system.
2. Stakeholders clearly recognise the issues they are facing in putting policy for inclusive education into practice. The quality of the analysis in the 2015 evaluation study, the **Critical Reflection Document** presented in **Annex 2** and the overall degree of alignment between the issues highlighted in these documents and the Audit findings are testament to this fact.
3. Many stakeholders have relevant ideas on how to overcome the difficulties in putting policy for inclusive education into practice. There is a high degree of agreement about these issues within and across different system stakeholder groups. However, many stakeholders perceive a lack of opportunities and/or resources to implement these solutions effectively.
4. A variety of financial, technical and human resources are available within the system to support stakeholders. However, these are not always organised and co-ordinated in the most effective way to achieve desired outcomes.
5. A range of initial and further/continuing training/professional development opportunities are available for stakeholders. However, these are not always considered to be effective in meeting individual staff, school or system-level needs.
6. There are many positive examples of practice at different school, phase and system levels. These examples are mostly at individual school or local level. As such, they require further analysis with regards to the learning opportunities they present, as well as further support to enable scaling-up and transfer to other situations.
7. There are many constructive, informal networks and lines of communication and co-operation between professionals. These can be built upon and further developed. However, they need to be formalised to increase transparency and accountability.



8. There are differences in the approaches taken to inclusive education and in the demands and expectations for inclusive practice across school phases. The reasons for and impact of these differences require careful consideration in relation to learners' needs, activities in schools and school staff attitudes and values, if the overall system is to be strengthened.
9. The overall evaluation of Standards and Descriptors can be summarised as follows:
 - 7 Descriptors (2.3, 3.9, 4.3, 4.8, 4.9, 5.2, 6.5) were identified as being at the stage of *to be initiated* and, consequently, needing attention.
 - 31 Descriptors were identified as *requiring development*, with possibilities for existing practice to be built upon.
 - 1 Descriptor (2.1) was identified as being *fully embedded* in policy and practice across schools, age phases and municipalities.
 - All seven Standards overall were identified as *requiring development*.

(Please refer to **Appendix 2** for full details and the collated evaluation of Standards and Descriptors).

This pattern of evaluation is to be expected. The Standards developed by the Icelandic Team and stakeholders are by nature aspirational. Therefore, there was no expectation for a high number to already be embedded in the current system. The fact that the majority of Descriptors, as well as all Standards, are considered as 'requiring development' should be interpreted as positive. It indicates that work is already underway and should form a good basis for future developments.

All of the Audit recommendations have been formulated with the aim of supporting future development work in Iceland. This approach is a fundamental and integral part of the overall Audit model and rationale. The recommendations have been formulated in line with two key areas of work that are considered relevant for developing the system for inclusive education in Iceland:

- Policy promoting high-quality education for all learners
- Conceptions of inclusive ecosystems of education.

These two areas are considered in the sections below.

Current international policy debates around high-quality education for all learners

There is increasing research evidence that indicates that high-performing education systems are also the most equitable (e.g. OECD, 2012). Policy-makers at the international and European levels increasingly recognise that underachievement



and school failure incur long-term costs for their countries and communities, as well as for their individual citizens.

The Communication on *Improving and Modernising Education* asserts that: 'Providing high-quality education for all is one of the best investments a society can make' (European Commission, 2016, p. 2).

The Communication argues that:

Quality of education should be a reality for all students. A particular cause for concern is that students with a vulnerable socio-economic background are over-represented among students showing low achievements (ibid.).

It goes on to suggest that:

Even the countries that show good performance have no reason to rest on their laurels. Ensuring high quality education is a task that is never finished: it needs constant attention, improvement, and adaptation (ibid., p. 3).

The 2015 Joint Report on *New priorities for European cooperation in education and training* argues that: 'education and training systems face the challenge of ensuring equal access to high-quality education, in particular by reaching out to the most disadvantaged' (European Commission, 2015b, p. 3).

The World Education Forum's *Incheon Declaration* puts forward the view that:

Inclusion and equity in and through education is the cornerstone of a transformative education agenda ... No education target should be considered met unless met by all (World Education Forum, 2015, p. 2).

The notion of high-quality education also underpins Goal 4 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals: 'Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all' (United Nations, 2015).

In the light of this evidence, the Audit recommendations have been formulated to support the wider policy goal of promoting high-quality education for all learners, recognising that any system considered high-quality must also be inclusive.

An 'ecosystem' model of support for inclusive education

The **Desk Research Report** presents research findings and key concepts that underpin an inclusive education system. The overall conclusions of the desk research have been synthesised within a model that identifies the main structures and processes and their inter-relationships – an 'ecosystem' of the key factors impacting upon learners and their engagement and participation in educational opportunities. Such a system model supports thinking about how to overcome the policy-practice gap, as it clearly highlights crucial system elements that need to be



taken into account when implementing inclusive education from a rights-based perspective.

This model of an ecosystem of support for inclusive education (European Agency, in press) is described in full in **Annex 3: Desk Research Report**.

In the ecological model, the process of development and learning is understood to be based upon the interactions between the individual learner and their surrounding environments. Such a model encompasses the experiences of and interactions between all learners and families, all teachers, support staff and school leaders and all decision-makers at all levels.

The model in Figure 3 views the learner at the centre of a series of four inter-related systems that interact with one another.



Figure 3. An Ecosystem model of support for inclusive education (European Agency, in press).

The model of the ecosystem of support for inclusive education sets out the main structures and processes that influence the participation and engagement of every learner and that need to be considered in order to maximise opportunities for



learning. This model proposes that learner engagement and success is supported by four inter-related systems:

- The *microsystems* of all institutions or groups that most immediately and directly impact on the learner's development, including the family and, for most learners, the pre-school, then compulsory and upper-secondary school, peers, wider family and community
- The *mesosystem* of inter-connections between the microsystems – interactions between family and teachers and between the family and learner's peers and their families, etc.
- The *exosystem* – the community context that may not be directly experienced by the learner, but which may influence the other microsystems
- The *macrosystem* – the wider social, cultural and legislative context that encompasses all the other systems.

The findings of the **Desk Research Report (Annex 3)** lead to the overall conclusion that the ecosystem model would provide a sound basis for the planning, implementation and on-going monitoring and evaluation of future developments in Iceland's system for inclusive education.

Consequently, the Audit recommendations proposed in this **Final Report** all aim to support and develop the different aspects of the ecosystem of support for inclusive education, as presented in *Figure 3*.

The recommendations are also in line with the assertion that systems for inclusive education are most effectively supported by a complementary combination of prevention, intervention and compensation policy actions. These are designed to:

- *prevent* different forms of educational exclusion before they happen;
- *intervene* to ensure that good quality inclusive education is available for all learners at all times;
- *compensate* with specific actions and provision when prevention and intervention are not enough to ensure learners' needs are adequately met in inclusive settings.

Long-term, sustainable developments towards high-quality inclusive education can be identified by 'movements away from mainly compensatory policy actions, towards more intervention- and prevention-focused policy actions' (European Agency, 2016b, p. 19).



Recommendations linked to the seven Audit Standards

The recommendations in line with the Audit Standards are based upon all sources of evidence from the data collection and analysis. They take account of current policy and practice and the concepts and principles from international policy and research literature, as detailed in the **Desk Research Report in Annex 3**.

All recommendations have been formulated in line with the stated system goal of ensuring that policy and practice for inclusive education is more effectively implemented at national and local levels and in schools across all sectors and phases.

In the sections below, seven main recommendations are proposed, one for each of the seven Standards that served as the basis for all the Audit activities. These main recommendations are linked to actions that are considered necessary to ensure that the Standards and Descriptors become embedded within policy and practice in the Icelandic system.

The recommendations are presented in line with the ecosystem model of support systems (please refer to *page 117*), beginning with an overarching recommendation that underpins the entire support ecosystem.

For each recommendation, the involvement of different stakeholder groups is indicated. This includes:

- The main stakeholder groups involved in implementing the recommendation.
- The stakeholder group or groups that should take a lead role and assume responsibility for maintaining the necessary links between different levels and sectors to ensure harmonisation, coherence and effective policy implementation.

The recommendations proposed for each of the seven areas are presented in a priority order of actions to be taken as a result of the recommendations. This also emphasises the possible inter-connections.

Within the recommendations, the term 'schools' applies to all pre-, compulsory and upper-secondary schools, unless specifically stated otherwise.

1. Ensure that all stakeholders understand inclusive education as the basis for high-quality education for all learners

This recommendation provides a basis for all other recommendations. It encompasses all elements of the inclusive education ecosystem – micro, meso, exo and macro.



This recommendation mainly involves system stakeholders working at national, local and school levels. Stakeholders from the national level should assume the lead responsibility for co-ordinating the implementation of this recommendation.

The essential focus is upon clarifying the concept of inclusive education as a precursor to developing a shared mindset, ensuring that all stakeholders understand inclusive education as an approach for all learners.

This will require national and local-level dialogue about the kind of schools and learning communities that stakeholders want and the best ways to achieve/develop these. This dialogue should also:

- develop a shared conception of inclusive education as a means for improving quality and equity for all stakeholders;
- lead to a shared idea of what high-quality, equitable inclusive education looks like in practice.


The dialogue should lead to the development of agreed operational definitions of key concepts such as access, participation and engagement.

These agreed operational definitions should be used as the basis for collaborative work across system levels (national and local) and across sectors (education, health, welfare, etc.), including:

- the development of legislation and/or policy across all sectors and system levels;
- dialogue with stakeholders from across all sectors and system levels regarding implementation of policy goals and service provision;
- the delineation of clear lines and areas of responsibility for all stakeholders working at all levels;
- the development of a common structure for inclusive education leading to guidance documents which outline goals, procedures and monitoring mechanisms.

In order to embed the concept of inclusive education in practice as an approach for all learners, these operational definitions should also be used as the basis for:

- identifying the competences and skills that all school teams require to successfully implement inclusive education;
- identifying innovative examples at all school levels where practice is learner-centred/personalised in a way that demonstrates how diversity can be accommodated without an 'individual' focus;

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- commissioning evidence-based research exploring innovative approaches to inclusive education at all school levels.

2. In light of the shared dialogue, ensure that legislation and national and local-level policy promote a rights-based approach to inclusive education

This recommendation focuses upon the macro element of the inclusive education ecosystem. It mainly involves system stakeholders working at national and local levels. Stakeholders from the national level should assume the lead responsibility for co-ordinating the implementation of this recommendation.

The essential focus of this recommendation is upon promoting system equity and equitable opportunities for all learners.

All legislation across all sectors that impacts upon the system for inclusive education should be underpinned by a rights-based approach. Legislation should be reviewed to ensure that it clearly articulates the right of all learners to quality education and effective support to maximise their learning participation and engagement.

This articulation of rights will include:

- consistency with all relevant international agreements – such as the UNCRPD and UNCRC;
- clarity and consistency regarding the effective protection of rights of all minority groups;
- inclusive education as an integral part of all legislation across all relevant social, health, welfare and financial sectors.

Policies for inclusive education at all levels should aim to support the active participation and engagement of all learners and maximise their learning opportunities. This requires that national-level policy:

- is developed through a process that engages and actively involves stakeholders from all system levels and sectors in shared dialogue;
- clearly articulates the rights all learners in relation to: attending school, being taught by a qualified teacher, receiving support from other services in their local school/community, being involved in decisions about their learning and having equitable opportunities to participate in meaningful learning;
- provides clear guidance on what the enactment of rights looks like in practice;
- reinforces the idea that inclusive education and equity are an integral part of all education policy;



- describes how the effective implementation of delegated responsibilities will be supported;
- provides clarification of the mechanisms for ensuring effective collaboration among all system stakeholders, as well as consistency and correspondence among and within system-level policies;
- details a clear vision for inclusive education, based upon shared conceptions and mindsets;
- provides guidance on what high-quality, equitable inclusive education looks like in practice in different school phases;
- provides clarification of the degrees of freedom and flexibility available for municipalities and schools within the given framework;
- describes the mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of national-level policy.

Local (municipality) level policy should aim to reduce system inequities and fragmentation across regions and promote more equitable and effective provision for all learners in Iceland.

This requires the clear articulation of:

- the individual and collective responsibilities of all stakeholders in meeting the diverse needs of all learners within the local context;
- transparent accountability procedures at local level, including for appeals and arbitration;
- possibilities at local level for financial incentives to encourage all schools to address accessibility issues and become more inclusive;
- the mechanisms for supporting schools to develop school-level policies and action plans for inclusive education;
- guidance on what high-quality, equitable inclusive education looks like in practice within the local context;
- the mechanisms for promoting innovation in supporting the engagement of all stakeholders in the local context;
- benchmarks and milestones for policy implementation review and evaluation;
- the mechanisms that will be used for examining and monitoring the alignment of national, local-level and school-level policies.



All national and local-level stakeholders need support to ensure they have the capacity to work together and make decisions using available evidence to achieve shared goals for inclusive education. This requires:

- the implementation of strategies to improve the links and communication between ministries, municipalities and schools so that personnel at each level understand the practical issues experienced at each level through direct dialogue;
- the development of existing and new networks of support between, as well as across, different levels: ministries, municipalities, school phases (pre-, compulsory and upper-secondary), support services and schools;
- the allocation of resources for joint working across ministries, municipalities, school phases (pre-, compulsory and upper-secondary), support services and schools to ensure whole-community responses to the challenges presented by inclusive education.

3. Within the policy framework for inclusive education at national and local levels, embed governance and quality assurance mechanisms that support effective implementation at all system levels

This recommendation focuses upon the macro element of the inclusive education ecosystem. It mainly involves system stakeholders working at national and local levels. Stakeholders from the national and local levels should assume joint responsibility for co-ordinating the implementation of this recommendation.

The essential focus of recommendation is upon promoting quality assurance to support development and improvements at all system levels.

Inter-agency and inter-disciplinary collaboration at and across national and local levels are essential pre-requisites to meeting the diverse needs of all learners. Functional co-operation between different national and local authorities – ministries, municipalities, the teachers' unions, etc., – should be improved through:

- the clear delineation of the respective roles and responsibilities of each authority;
- formal mechanisms that effectively support the co-operation of actors from different disciplines and/or agencies at all system levels;
- the establishment of transparent formal mechanisms that support actors at different system levels to effectively co-operate within and between bodies and levels;



- the identification of strategies to support all authorities and bodies to shift the basis for their co-operation away from working in opposition (with totally independent goals and working procedures) towards working in parallel (with shared goals, while maintaining independent working procedures) and eventually to working in alignment (towards shared goals and through shared and collaborative working procedures and monitoring mechanisms).

Greater clarity is needed around the different levels of system governance – that is, the processes and structures that ensure co-ordinated operations between different levels and actors in the system. All system stakeholders should agree on governance and accountability mechanisms that:

- engender trust between stakeholders;
- have the goal of increasing system capacity and ensuring regional and local-level equity;
- delineate the roles and responsibilities of all authorities with respect to funding;
- identify the mechanisms to collect and share requisite data on cost-effectiveness and efficiency issues;
- provide clear indications of the effectiveness of national and local policies for inclusive education;
- provide clear indications of the enabling effects of school-level practice.

In addition, the specific and respective quality assurance roles of the Ministry of Education and the municipalities within the decentralised system must be transparent and clearly communicated to all national, local and school-level stakeholders.

National and local-level stakeholders should centre their work around agreed standards for high-quality inclusive education. This will require:

- a clearly articulated vision of what high-quality inclusive practice looks like;
- school evaluation criteria that reflect high-quality inclusive pedagogy and practice, including support for all vulnerable learner groups;
- clear guidance for schools on what should be measured and how the progress of all learners, including those from vulnerable groups, should be monitored.

Schools require access to and support in using a range of different success measures that contribute to school self-review and evaluation processes. These measures should:

- help schools to identify progress in learning;



- be learner-centred and consider factors that impact on learning and achievement in order to ensure personalisation;
- cover a wide range of academic and social achievement/outcomes;
- indicate the effectiveness of provision and support.

There should be a framework of quality assurance processes and procedures that applies to all schools in all phases – pre-, compulsory and upper-secondary – across all regions and communities. Shared quality assurance mechanisms should ensure greater coherence and continuity:

- between phases of education, school education and higher education, education and employment, as well as between local communities and individual schools;
- for learner progression within and across the phases of education;
- within the organisation of support that enables smooth school transitions for learners and their families.

In order to achieve greater coherence and continuity, shared quality assurance processes should:

- identify specific strategies to ensure equitable learning opportunities across all regions and communities;
- build school capacity across all school phases;
- engage all school stakeholders in a shared quality assurance process that is supportive and leads to the further development of their understanding and skill levels;
- ensure that all stakeholders are involved in developing and implementing a quality assurance system that incorporates measures and processes that are meaningful for them;
- agree procedures for monitoring, evaluating and disseminating the results of innovative examples of practice as a mechanism for further developing evidence-based practice.

4. To support the effective implementation of policy at all system levels, develop flexible resource allocation mechanisms that increase the system's capacity to be inclusive

This recommendation focuses upon the macro element of the inclusive education ecosystem. It mainly involves system stakeholders working at national and local



levels. Stakeholders from the national and local levels should assume joint responsibility for co-ordinating the implementation of this recommendation.

This recommendation focuses on redirecting funding mechanisms away from compensatory support approaches (see *page 119*) towards those underpinned by intervention and prevention approaches in order to increase the system's capacity to be equitable, efficient and cost-effective.

The shift away from compensation to intervention and prevention approaches requires a complete rationalisation of all funding mechanisms. This will require the involvement of all potential funders of support to schools: municipalities, ministries of education, interior and health and welfare. This rationalisation process should aim to reduce the use of formal needs identification procedures that involve the labelling of learners as the main means to access support for learners experiencing difficulties in school.

It will necessarily involve:

- a shift within all existing funding mechanisms away from mainly input funding approaches based on the identification of individual learning needs;
- implementing strategies to support schools to use general base allocations more flexibly;
- a move towards throughput funding mechanisms that provide a wider range of support possibilities in schools for all learners;
- the establishment of flexible frameworks of provision that effectively support capacity-building within the individual school and local community.

The shift from compensatory approaches to funding and support mechanisms that focus on early intervention and prevention, requires:

- formal collaboration that fosters synergies between ministries, as well as ministries and municipalities on an on-going basis;
- processes for open communication and building trust between ministries, ministries and municipalities and municipalities and schools;
- structured dialogue about the levels of funding available and criteria used for additional resource allocation on the basis of local/school population;
- parents' involvement in such dialogue to ensure understanding about necessary change in ways of delivering support.



Collaborative work within and across system levels should start with a review of current funding approaches to identify:

- mechanisms addressing any potential imbalance in funding allocations across regions, municipalities, school phases, services and schools;
- strategies for addressing the financing mechanisms that appear to increase SEN identification rates, labelling of individual learners and limited support options for all learners in schools;
- strategies for building upon and developing the financing mechanisms that are seen to be most effective in promoting inclusive education;
- ways of increasing flexibility for schools to support a wider range of needs in classrooms without the need for diagnosis;
- possibilities and opportunities for funding mechanisms to encourage innovation in inclusive practice.

The review should clearly identify how the current system for needs identification and support allocation can be moved towards promoting early intervention and prevention. It should clarify:

- the strategies for the early identification of all learners' learning needs and the provision of flexible support in the classroom from the school's existing resources;
- the mechanisms for systematically monitoring learners who are at risk of exclusion from learning opportunities;
- the mechanisms for supporting the early identification and necessary advance planning for learners with more complex needs;
- the range of summative and school-based formative assessment evidence that should be considered to determine eligibility for formal assessment for small numbers of learners with the most complex needs;
- the procedures for monitoring and regular review of any support provided for learners to ensure that it is effective, appropriate, sustainable and meets the identified needs;
- the role of the four main national agencies – the State Diagnostic and Counselling Centre, the Icelandic Organization of the Visually Impaired, the National Hearing and Speech Institute and the Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Department of the National Hospital – in supporting early needs identification work in schools that avoids the need for formal assessment and diagnosis procedures.



5. Develop initial and continuing professional training opportunities that are aligned with national and local-level policy goals and school development plans to support the ability of all stakeholders to effectively develop inclusive practice

This recommendation focuses upon the meso and macro elements of the inclusive education ecosystem. It involves system stakeholders working at all levels – national, local and school. Stakeholders from the national level should assume responsibility for co-ordinating the implementation of this recommendation.

The direct involvement of the teachers' unions is crucial for effecting this recommendation.

The essential focus of this recommendation is upon increasing stakeholders' capacity to be inclusive in their practice.

For this to be achieved, coherent initial and continuing education and development pathways and opportunities are required that develop positive attitudes and values, as well as knowledge, understanding and skills for all stakeholders working at all system levels.

Such training opportunities should be:

- clearly aligned with national and local-level policy goals for and understandings of inclusive education;
- based on formal dialogue between ministries, municipalities and training providers to agree the requirements of ITE and CPD;
- developed with the aim of supporting school development planning and self-review.

All training opportunities must be geared towards supporting:

- effective leadership for inclusive education across the system at national local and school levels;
- the establishment of a comprehensive base of local expertise that schools can draw upon for advice and support;
- schools' ability to operate as professional learning communities;
- further collaboration between schools and universities.

Minimum levels of service provision in line with national and local policies for inclusive education should be introduced to guide the work of all training providers involved in ITE and CPD programme development and outcomes for all system stakeholders. A comprehensive review and mapping of all ITE and CPD training



possibilities should be undertaken to develop these minimum levels of service provision. The review and mapping exercise should also aim towards:

- the provision of a clear rationale demonstrating how inclusive thinking and practice underpin all training routes for all professionals;
- the mapping and alignment of different forms of training provision, with removal of any overlap and coverage of identified gaps;
- the alignment of core competences that underpin education and training for different school-based professionals;
- greater clarity over the respective roles of the different actors who support CPD (local authority support services and other institutions) for school teams;
- coherence with the current review of CPD for teachers and school leaders being undertaken by the National Advisory Board on CPD.

The goal for the career-long professional development of teachers must focus on effective teacher education for diversity. For this the goal to be achieved:

- There must be a clear view of the competences for inclusive education needed by all teachers, i.e. what they should know and be able to do in relation to meeting learners' diverse needs.
- ITE should develop these competences in all teachers to equip them to work in diverse classrooms.
- There must be effective forms of teacher induction, school-based mentoring and longer-term support.
- All CPD routes should build on ITE to develop competences in all teachers to further enhance their practice in diverse classrooms.
- CPD should enable teachers to make use of research/evidence and adopt problem-solving approaches to their work.
- There must be different forms of professional development routes for members of school leadership teams, and head teachers specifically, to support inclusive school cultures and practice.
- There must be flexible professional development opportunities for teacher educators to support their attitudes, knowledge, skills and ability to model inclusive teaching practice in their work.



In order to support the more effective provision of CPD opportunities, current funding mechanisms for different forms of CPD should be reviewed. Increased flexibility in CPD resources should be targeted at:

- community-wide CPD that works to address local capacity-building issues;
- school-wide CPD that works to address each school's identified development needs and issues;
- collaborative work between universities and schools that centres around action research and school-based initiatives to improve pedagogy and practice;
- developing technology supported/blended learning CPD opportunities that provide more flexible access opportunities.

In the long term, a more sustainable model for professional training must be agreed by stakeholders, including ministries, municipalities, teacher unions and professional associations, training providers and universities. A more sustainable model will:

- specify agreed mechanisms and benchmarks for monitoring the content, quality and effectiveness of all ITE and CPD, in line with the minimum levels of service provision for inclusive education;
- make use of clear service-level agreements between the ministry and municipalities with all training bodies and providers;
- aim to develop a network of institution-based trainers/educators and school-based mentors with knowledge and experience of inclusive education to ensure the quality and consistency of ITE and CPD for a range of stakeholders;
- reduce the need for professionals to travel abroad to undertake relevant training.

6. Build the capacity of support systems at all levels to provide inclusive learning environments through an integrated continuum of support and resources

This recommendation focuses upon the meso and exo elements of the inclusive education ecosystem. It mainly involves system stakeholders working at local and school levels. Stakeholders from the local level should assume responsibility for co-ordinating the implementation of this recommendation.

The essential focus of this recommendation is upon the provision of a continuum of support and resources that enables school teams to, in turn, enable learners.

This continuum across all school phases would comprise in-class support through the flexible organisation of teaching and assessment, to provision from inter-



disciplinary support services that empower school-level stakeholders working across all school phases to deal with diversity more effectively in their work.

The support system should aim to:

- ensure that school leaders have the capacity to support school teams and effectively organise provision for all learners in their schools;
- provide leaders and school teams with a range of flexible support, including opportunities for collaboration with peers and other professionals;
- support teachers to acquire the skills and abilities needed to meet a diverse range of learning needs;
- support school teams to monitor the effectiveness of their practice to meet learning needs;
- support learners' individual needs through the provision of specialist input and resources to respond to specific challenges faced by school teams and families;
- support learners' involvement in decision-making about their learning and school experiences.

The support system must address age phase and geographical inequities in accessing provision and resources. Learners, families and schools should be guaranteed a minimum level of support no matter where they live or which school they attend. Current local-level provision should be reviewed and support services reorganised to form:

- service centres that work with all schools across all phases in the wider local community;
- co-ordinated inter-disciplinary teams that work under pedagogical leadership.

Service centres and inter-disciplinary teams should be transparent and cost-effective, and administered through service-level agreements that are monitored and reviewed on a regular basis. Support systems that build capacity by up-skilling all local schools across all phases will require:

- mechanisms for the provision of support that move away from individual, compensatory resource provision towards enabling school teams to be proactive and intervene early when barriers to learning become evident;
- support for the development of school networks to enable collaboration and collegial support within and across schools;



- strategies for engaging with the local community so that community members share a commitment to quality education for all learners and see inclusive education as part of the improvement agenda for all local schools;
- support for school teams to examine their practice through dialogue and structured investigations such as action research;
- the provision of ICT to support school development (e.g. on-line videos/webinars, peer support and feedback, etc.), particularly in areas where expertise is limited or not available in the local community.

The development of support systems that focus upon capacity building will necessarily involve a review of the role of current specialist provision – separate schools and classes/units – across all school phases. This review should aim to identify possibilities for:

- clarifying the role of the special schools and units within an integrated framework of service provision;
- building the capacity of specialist staff teams to expand their work towards mainstream outreach and consultation services;
- developing transparent procedures for specialised staff and technical resources within specialist provision to be made available as a support for school teams to meet the complex needs of learners in mainstream settings;
- increasing involvement and close liaison with social/health teams (including those working in the state diagnostic centres) to provide on-going preventative work in schools;
- clarifying the role of the national and local support associations and groups in providing specialist support and expertise to mainstream school teams.

7. Develop the capacity of all pre-, compulsory and upper-secondary school stakeholders to think and act inclusively in their daily practice and build inclusive learning communities

This recommendation focuses upon the micro, meso and exo elements of the inclusive education ecosystem. It mainly involves system stakeholders working at the school level. Stakeholders from the national and local levels should assume joint responsibility for co-ordinating the implementation of this recommendation.

The essential focus of this recommendation is upon supporting all school-level stakeholders to take individual and collective responsibility for meeting the needs of all learners.



Inclusive learning communities are guided by inclusive school leaders who are able to:

- develop a culture of positive and trusting relationships within the school;
- build the capacity of the whole school team to see inclusive education as an approach for all learners and diversity as a resource;
- communicate a clear policy vision for inclusive education as high-quality education for all learners;
- take a proactive universal design approach to all school development, the school environment, curriculum and pedagogy, teaching and assessment for and of learning.

Inclusive school leaders should be supported to lead the development of school-level policies for inclusive education. These policies should:

- describe how school policy is aligned with and supports the implementation of local and national-level policies for inclusive education;
- aim to remove barriers to learning and maximise the engagement and participation of learners;
- aim to actively support family involvement that engages parents and caregivers in work with school teams;
- provide a clear conception of the meaning of quality and effectiveness within the school's unique community context and a vision of what this looks like in practice;
- outline how school stakeholders should work together to reach common goals;
- provide opportunities for collaboration on school policy development, to build greater understanding, increase ownership of and commitment to policy initiatives.

School leaders should enable school teams to work as professional learning communities, developing collaborations between all stakeholders and other schools in the local community, together with researchers, local area leaders and policy-makers. Different mechanisms for promoting collaborative practice should be available for school leaders to:

- develop collaborative partnerships with parents and other key stakeholders;
- support innovation and professional development that leads to flexible approaches to teaching and assessment;



- ensure role clarity within school teams in line with responsibilities for meeting learning needs;
- promote and formalise communication, information flow and transition processes between different schools and school phases.

School leaders should lead the development and implementation of a school improvement strategy that focuses upon inclusive pedagogy and includes:


- school action plans that set out small steps towards more inclusive practice, recognising that school-wide change takes time and investment;
- clear mechanisms for whole-school team self-review and evaluation;
- the collection of school and teacher-level assessment data that informs on-going improvement;
- collaborative initiatives involving school teams, other schools, support services and organisations (i.e. universities) that provide opportunities for examining evidence-based strategies for responding to diversity and developing active approaches to learner and family engagement.

In line with these recommendations, the possibilities for supporting all forms of on-going self-review and development among schools and support services should be further explored.

All school team members should be supported in their work to develop the 'ethic of everybody' – taking personal and collective responsibility for all learners and avoiding choices that disadvantage some learners. Their work should put into practice the belief that all learners can achieve learning goals and become better learners. Teams of teachers and support professionals should work together to develop flexible frameworks for curriculum and assessment, together with teaching approaches that engage all learners and support their active engagement and participation in learning.

In order to promote effective learner engagement and participation:

- Classrooms and the wider school environment should be places with varied opportunities for social interaction, where all learners are supported to participate and make meaningful use of learning opportunities.
- Teaching teams need to increase learning capacity by understanding and managing the internal (e.g. learners' emotional states) and external (e.g. the impact of different groupings) factors affecting learning.
- All learning activities should be authentic (meaningful and relevant) for every learner, engaging them in cognitive, social, emotional and physical dimensions of learning.

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- All learning opportunities should support multiple means of expression, including the use of ICT and adaptive devices, that allow learners to participate and respond in different ways.
 - Teaching teams should ensure the engagement of all learners in daily routines and learning activities through personalisation and assessment for learning, helping learners become active agents in their own learning.
 - Members of teaching teams should see their role as leaders and facilitators of learning where they provide teaching that accommodates the various learning needs of individuals or groups of learners.

Inter-connections between the recommendations

The importance of recognising and understanding the inter-connections between the individual recommendations must be clearly highlighted. These inter-connections underpin the ecosystem of support and are explicit within the model presented in *Figure 3*. This also highlights where responsibility for the various structures and processes is situated.

Inclusive classroom practice operating at the micro system levels cannot be developed in isolation from developments at other system levels. Promoting developments in inclusive practice based on a culture of collaboration and continuous improvement requires developments in the legislative and policy context, professional development opportunities and on-going support both from colleagues within the school and from local community services.

The recommendations presented in this chapter can be used by stakeholders as the basis for a comprehensive development plan for the system of inclusive education in Iceland. However, it must be recognised that not all recommendations can be implemented at once. Development plans need to set out the incremental steps required for providing high-quality inclusive education for all and recognise that systemic change takes time and requires long-term political and financial commitment.

In line with the External Audit's overall goal of providing support for future development work in Iceland, this report's *final chapter* identifies a number of immediate priority actions that can be considered as critical levers for medium- and longer-term system developments.



IDENTIFICATION OF CRITICAL LEVERS FOR SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT

The seven main recommendations presented in the *previous section* outline the actions that are considered necessary to ensure that the overall system for inclusive education in Iceland is in alignment with the framework of Standards and Descriptors identified within the Audit.

However, it should be recognised that it is not possible – or necessarily effective – to implement the recommendations simultaneously. A process of prioritisation and sequencing of the recommendations should be undertaken, involving all stakeholders in the Icelandic system. To support this process, this section identifies a number of priority actions for short-term implementation that are crucial for ensuring effectiveness in the system. These priority actions are seen as critical levers, considered the most likely to have maximal impact in building a foundation for longer-term actions.

These critical levers specifically address the seven Descriptors (2.3, 3.9, 4.3, 4.8, 4.9, 5.2, 6.5) identified within the Audit as requiring initiation. They are seen as key actions necessary to ensure that all other Standards and Descriptors become embedded within Iceland’s system for inclusive education.

Based on the findings and recommendations, it is possible to highlight three critical levers that are likely to have the greatest potential to promote wider system change. These levers are inter-connected and mutually supportive, as Figure 4 shows.

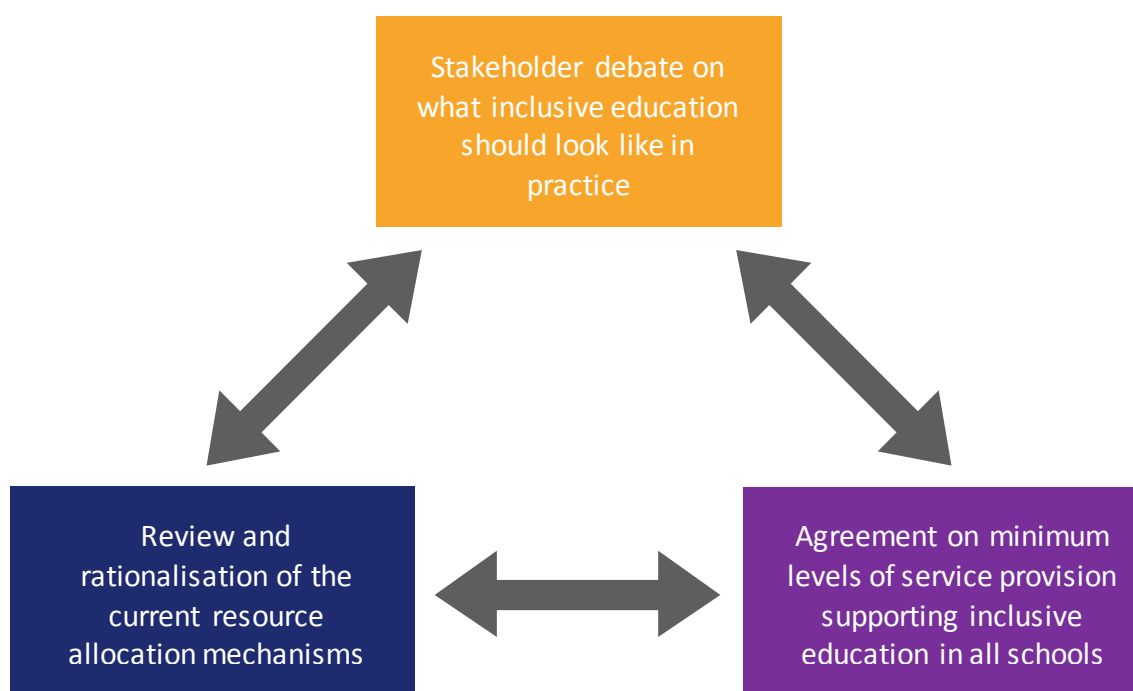


Figure 4. Three inter-connected critical levers for system development



These critical levers build upon existing areas of strength or opportunity within the system. They have the potential to simultaneously address a number of recognised areas for development.

Each of these critical levers is presented in the sections below.

Initiate a widespread stakeholder debate on what inclusive education should look like in practice across all municipalities, school phases and schools

The Audit process has shown that there is a high degree of stakeholder engagement with the issue of inclusive education. There is also a high degree of consensus that inclusive education is an approach that benefits all learners and wider society. However, there is also a high degree of confusion regarding how it should be implemented and what it essentially looks like in practice in Icelandic schools.

The Audit work has generated a degree of interest and momentum in considering the issues around inclusive practice. It has also reinforced some of the existing informal connections between different stakeholder groups. These have clear potential to be built upon through continuing and extending the dialogue on what inclusive education should look like in practice.

There is a need to establish an agreed mechanism or forum for discussions, so that all stakeholders can give concrete inputs to national and local-level debates on what inclusive education means and how it can be recognised. The discussion and inputs should be used as the basis for reaching shared agreements on:

- operational definitions to be used;
- outcome and process goals to be worked towards;
- mechanisms and criteria for identifying progress towards the agreed goals;
- benchmarks and milestones indicating successful policy implementation.

Such a debate should actively involve all stakeholders – including learners – across all system levels and social sectors. It should be clearly seen as a co-ordinated, shared initiative between ministry and local-level authorities. Representatives from both of these levels should assume responsibility for initiating, implementing and evaluating this priority action.

There is a need to establish a platform for sharing examples of innovative practice and fostering collaboration between all system stakeholders (e.g. developing professional learning communities of schools, support teams and universities). This platform would support national and local-level debate on what inclusive education should look like in practice.



The development of such a platform would address two Descriptors identified as to be initiated: there is a recognised forum for teachers to meet and share experiences (4.8) and there is a recognised forum for training providers to meet, share experiences and facilitate effective co-ordination of service provision (4.9).

Review and rationalisation of the current resource allocation mechanisms with a view to improving effectiveness and cost-effectiveness

The Audit work has clearly shown that stakeholders at all system levels agree that changes are required to the main mechanisms that enable schools to access resources. Two Descriptors were identified through the Audit as to be initiated in this respect (4.3 and 5.2). Both of them indicate areas that could be improved and rationalised: making the support system more co-ordinated and easier for stakeholders to understand, and ensuring there is strong inter-ministerial co-operation in the financing of the policy of inclusive education.

The widespread agreement on the need for change to existing resource allocation mechanisms should be built upon. Stakeholders across all system levels are clear that there should be a shift away from resource allocation based on the identification of individual learners' SEN (a mainly input model), to more flexible resourcing that allows schools to support all learners' needs in more responsive ways (towards a throughput model).

One concrete opportunity for implementing such a change is the current Equalization Fund review work. This review could be used as a forum for the different ministerial and municipality-level stakeholders to consider possibilities for increasing the added value of the funding available to schools.

A further opportunity is linked to the *White Paper on Education Reform* (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2014c), which has initiated work to reduce school dropout in the upper-secondary sector as well as extend and develop possibilities for VET. An examination of how reforms to the resource allocation mechanisms in upper-secondary schools could positively impact upon these on-going reforms would lead to synergies of stakeholders' efforts.

Overall, a review of resource allocation mechanisms should lead to greater clarity around the roles and responsibilities of different funding bodies and agencies, as well as concrete proposals for new funding mechanisms. It may involve piloting mechanisms to explore different funding models that shift the resource allocation focus away from individual learners. Proposals could be based on an exploration of existing approaches and examples of coherent 'one-stop' models of inter-disciplinary support services (for example, the integrated service available for learners with visual impairments). Such innovative and well-received examples



could be examined as potential models for funding scaled-up services that work around each school community and offer support in meeting all learners' needs.

Initiate discussions leading to the agreement of minimum levels of service provision for supporting inclusive education in all schools

The Audit work has clearly indicated that there are inequities within the availability of support and provision across regions, local communities, school phases and individual schools. Stakeholders at all levels are requesting more guidance on the minimum levels of service provision that should be used to inform the implementation of policy for inclusive education within all schools and local contexts.

The starting point for the development of such guidance is the initiation of a transparent dialogue between national and local-level stakeholders to agree minimum levels of service provision for inclusive education. Following this, ways forward in meeting those agreed levels could be identified. They could be used as a basis for further promoting quality developments within inclusive education.

Such a discussion would be a starting point and basis for moving work forward linked to three Descriptors identified within the Audit as to be initiated: all schools and municipalities have policies and action plans detailing how national-level policies on inclusive education will be implemented and funded (2.3); all national government bodies and agencies work collaboratively to ensure joined-up policy delivery (3.9); and mechanisms are developed for collecting and sharing data across ministries to ensure compliance with agreed standards (6.5).

It would also work towards addressing one of the main recommendations of the 2015 evaluation study, namely to systematically break-down the 'grey' areas of responsibility for learners who require additional support.

A framework of minimum levels of service provision, that all stakeholders have discussed and agreed upon, also has the potential to serve as a basis for identifying minimum standards for other, inter-connected areas of system support, such as the provision of ITE and CPD.

The Standards and Descriptors identified for the Audit work present a concrete opportunity for stimulating such a discussion with stakeholders. Taking full account of the Audit findings and recommendations, amendments to the Standards and Descriptors have been proposed based on the Audit Team's critical reflection upon the Audit work. **Appendix 3** presents the proposed framework of revised and developed Standards and Descriptors that could be used in this respect.



Summary

The three critical levers have been identified with the clear intention of stimulating continuing debate following the Audit work and supporting longer-term system development. They have the potential to be used as a discussion tool for agreeing with all stakeholders at all levels:

- the necessary system inputs, or minimum levels of provision, to be made available;
- the mechanisms for supporting innovation and system quality improvements;
- the system monitoring mechanisms and areas of responsibility for ensuring effective implementation of all forms of provision;
- the aspirations and goals that can be seen as the desired outputs for the system of inclusive education;
- a revised set of Standards and Descriptors to be used to guide future work of all stakeholders in the Icelandic system for inclusive education.

The external Audit work in Iceland has used a standards-based model to implement a process of examining and deconstructing three main questions relating to inclusive education: why is it considered important, what is being done to implement it, and how well is it currently being implemented. The critical levers identified in this chapter attempt to highlight immediate steps that could be taken to not only move stakeholders' thinking and action with regard to these questions forward, but also to continue work that builds upon the standards-based approach.

The areas of actions linked to the three critical levers are considered likely to provide a firm foundation for possible medium- and long-term action, as indicated in the *full recommendations presented in the previous chapter*.



CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Iceland has a framework of ambitious policy goals for its system for inclusive education, as well as for supporting all the stakeholders operating within that system: learners, parents and families, school teams, support professionals and decision-makers working at local and national levels. These ambitions for the system are evident in the degree of system-level reflection regarding the effectiveness of policy and practice for inclusive education. This reflection is clear within the 2015 evaluation study, as well as in the decision to undertake the External Audit of the Icelandic System for Inclusive Education, as reported on here.

Many of the findings of the 2015 evaluation are closely aligned to those of the Audit, due to the fact that both sets of findings draw directly on the perspectives of Icelandic stakeholders. The Audit process has given stakeholder representatives from the national, local and school levels a further opportunity to express their views.

The Audit process must, however, be viewed as one element within the wider system development process that is being undertaken in Iceland. It constitutes an external view that confirms and/or questions different stakeholders' perceptions of their system following systematic examination by the Audit team.

The Audit findings and subsequent recommendations have the clear goal of supporting further system review. It is considered that the **Reporting Package** has the potential to support such development work in a number of ways:

- Audit data (presented in the accompanying Annexes) has been analysed here in line with the Audit Standards and core issues. However, it has the potential to be interrogated in other ways.
- The proposals for revised Standards and Descriptors (presented in **Appendix 3**) can serve as a concrete tool for stakeholder dialogue regarding system effectiveness, quality assurance mechanisms and desired system outcomes.
- This Audit **Final Report**, presenting the findings, recommendations and identification of critical levers for system development, can be a basis for on-going stakeholder dialogue on priorities for changes to policies and practice, in line with the overall Audit model.

In concluding this report, the Audit Team would like to cite one stakeholder who requested that the report should 'not be too polite – tell the truth about us'. This has been done to best of the Audit Team's ability in representing Icelandic stakeholders' views on the strengths and weaknesses they see in their system within the Audit findings and recommendations.



The Audit Team would finally like to return to Mr Illugi Gunnarsson's suggestion that 'the eye of the guest is keenest' and further suggest 'but the understanding of the host is clearest'. In taking the next step in the Audit cycle, the stakeholders in Iceland now need to make the external observations made during the Audit process meaningful for their context and reflect on their future use. Throughout the Audit process, the team members have heard many calls from stakeholders about the need for an 'inclusive ideology debate'. It is hoped that the Audit process and subsequent **Reporting Package** can contribute to and stimulate this important policy and practice debate in Iceland.



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OVERVIEW OF THE ANNEXES TO THE FINAL REPORT

This **Final Report** of the External Audit of the Icelandic System for Inclusive Education is a stand-alone document. However, it should be cross-referenced with the six Annexes that, together with the **Final Report**, make up the overall Audit **Reporting Package**:

Annex 1: External Audit Methodology

This Annex provides an account of the methodology used to conduct the External Audit of the Icelandic System for Inclusive Education. It includes descriptive information cross-referenced to the more detailed sources available in the Audit **Final Report** and other Annexes.

Annex 2: Critical Reflection Document

A main task for the Icelandic stakeholders was to develop a critical reflection on the implementation of policy for inclusive education in current practice. This Annex presents a short critical assessment of the current situation, developed by a team from the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture in collaboration with stakeholders. It also presents the Standards and Descriptors identified by the Icelandic stakeholders to be used as the basis for the Audit.

Annex 3: Desk Research Report

This Annex aims to set the work of the External Audit in a broader context. It considers international conventions and European-level developments, as well as recent research and Agency thematic project work. This Annex specifically addresses the first Audit objective: situating the current system in Iceland within a wider international and European context of policy and practice for inclusive education.

Annex 4: Fieldwork Illustrative Evidence Report

This Annex presents the main findings alongside illustrative evidence from the Audit fieldwork of 27 Focus Groups, 11 School Visits and 9 One-to-one Interviews. These main findings present key issues emerging from the Audit Team members' analyses of fieldwork data. Direct quotes from Audit participants are used as illustrative evidence against each of the specific Descriptors.

Annex 5: Eco-Maps Analysis Report

During the Audit fieldwork focus groups, participants completed eco-maps. The eco-maps are an additional data collection tool that enabled the Audit Team to examine respondents' views on their working environment and their interactions with the other people. This Annex presents the full analysis of over 220 eco-maps.



Annex 6: On-line Survey Analysis Report

This Annex presents the details of the on-line survey in English and Icelandic carried out during May to June 2016. The survey targeted four groups of school-level stakeholders: parents, teachers, support staff and school leaders. Over 900 replies to the survey were received. The Annex includes details of respondents, all responses and a breakdown of the results.



APPENDIX 1: STANDARDS AND DESCRIPTORS

1st Standard: Inclusive education is defined by all stakeholders as an approach for improving the quality of education of all learners

Descriptors:

- 1.1 The concept of inclusive education and its implications is well understood by all stakeholders, including parents and pupils.
- 1.2 Inclusive education is understood by all stakeholders as being an approach for all pupils.
- 1.3 Research on inclusive education is supported by all stakeholders.

2nd Standard: Legislation and policy for inclusive education has the goal of promoting equal opportunities for all learners

Descriptors:

- 2.1 Legislation clearly articulates rights to appropriate education for all children.
- 2.2 Policies provide operational definitions of what is understood by access and appropriateness.
- 2.3 All schools and municipalities have policies and action plans detailing how national-level policies on inclusive education will be implemented and funded.
- 2.4 Legislation is fully in line with international normative instruments, in particular the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and EU policy directives and policy guidelines.

3rd Standard: Policy for inclusive education is effectively implemented at all levels

Descriptors:

- 3.1 Every member of the school community is made to feel welcome and valued.
- 3.2 There are high expectations for all pupils.
- 3.3 Schools have formal and objective procedures that assist in the early identification of students' individual needs.
- 3.4 All schools have well educated staff fit for their purpose.
- 3.5 The division of labour between different types of teachers within schools is clear and promotes successful implementation of inclusive education policy.
- 3.6 All pupils have access to good teaching materials that suit their needs.
- 3.7 There are clear and objective procedures implemented for monitoring the achievements of pupils who are at risk of exclusion.



3.8 All students have a voice and are appropriately involved in school-level decision-making, as well as decision-making about their learning programme.

3.9 All national government bodies and agencies work collaboratively to ensure joined-up policy delivery.

4th Standard: All stakeholders, at all levels are enabled to think and act inclusively in their daily practice

Descriptors:

4.1 Support services have the ultimate goal of empowering students, families and teachers.

4.2 Schools are effectively supported by the specialist/school services as appropriate in delivering the provision required by students with individual educational needs.

4.3 The support system is co-ordinated and easy to understand.

4.4 Appropriate training is available for all staff in order to ensure all staff can respond positively to student diversity.

4.5 The staff and resourcing levels of resource services at all levels is adequate to meet the needs of the schools and pupils.

4.6 There is an adequate access to diagnoses in the health and the welfare system.

4.7 School administrators are able to act as leaders in inclusive education settings.

4.8 There is a recognised forum for teachers to meet and share experiences.

4.9 There is a recognised forum for training providers to meet, share experiences and facilitate effective co-ordination of service provision.

4.10 Parents understand the philosophy of inclusive education.

4.11 Parents have the opportunity to participate in the decisions that affect their child's education.

5th Standard: Resource allocation is equitable, efficient and cost-effective

Descriptors:

5.1 Funding mechanisms support successful implementation of the policy of inclusive education.

5.2 There is a strong inter-ministerial co-operation in the financing of the policy of inclusive education.

5.3 School resources are distributed in a fair and equitable way to support inclusive education.



6th Standard: Governance and quality assurance mechanisms ensure co-ordinated and effective implementation of inclusive education policy and practice

Descriptors:

- 6.1 There is a national evaluation and assessment framework that covers the needs of all pupils, including those with the most complex needs.
- 6.2 External evaluation standards address directly the diversity of pupils' needs and the means to address them in schools.
- 6.3 Systematic monitoring is conducted to ensure compliance with all quality assurance standards.
- 6.4 Results of assessment procedures are communicated and explained to parents by teachers and others involved with pupils' learning programmes.
- 6.5 Mechanisms are developed for collecting and sharing data across ministries to ensure compliance with agreed standards.

7th Standard: Professional development issues at all system levels are effectively addressed

Descriptors:

- 7.1 Teacher education is viewed as a lifelong continuous process.
- 7.2 All professional development opportunities aim to develop a framework of attitudes and values, knowledge and skills that are aligned with national policy goals for inclusive education.
- 7.3 Inclusive education is an embedded element within all training for school leaders and teachers.
- 7.4 Appropriate general and specialist training are available for all staff in order to ensure all staff can respond positively to student diversity.



APPENDIX 2: EVALUATION OF STANDARDS AND DESCRIPTORS

This Appendix presents the agreed collation of the six Audit Team members' individual evaluation of the seven Standards and 39 Descriptors.

All six Audit Team members worked through several steps to evaluate policy and practice against the Standards and Descriptors.

As a first step, each team member analysed all data sources – background information, fieldwork data, eco-maps analysis and on-line survey results – to identify evidence of the extent to which the Standards and Descriptors were being met and to highlight issues arising in relation to each of them.

Every team member then completed an individual evaluation of policy and practice against the agreed Standards and Descriptors. Using a grid, team members indicated whether, based on all available evidence, they considered each Standard or Descriptor as:

- *To be initiated* – planning is at an early stage or practice is yet to be started
- *Requiring development* – implementation is partial, or inconsistent across schools, age phases and municipalities
- *Embedded in policy and practice* – work in this area is established and sustainable across schools, age phases and municipalities.

Taking into account all available evidence, this evaluation should be considered a 'best fit judgement'. The main chapters of this **Final Report** highlight and discuss details regarding potential differences between phases of education and sizes of municipality.

Discussions within the Audit Team led to agreements on how the judgements were to be made in the evaluation of policy and practice against the Standards and how individual Standards were interpreted. For example if, within a Standard, the focus was upon all learners, unless *all* was clearly evidenced, the evaluation could only be 'some evidence' or, at best, 'requiring development'.

The six individual team members' evaluations were then combined into a team-level analysis. Using a modal calculation of four or more team members – above 66% rating – an overall evaluation against each of the Standards and Descriptors was reached. When the team individual evaluations indicated a split, the original data was reviewed, an appropriate rating was discussed and then agreed upon.

Using this method, only three of the Descriptors – *5.1 Funding mechanisms support successful implementation of the policy of inclusive education*; *6.3 Systematic monitoring is conducted to ensure compliance with all quality assurance standards*; *7.4 Appropriate general and specialist training are available for all staff in order to*



ensure all staff can respond positively to student diversity – did not lead to a clear majority, the split being between to be initiated and requiring development. Requiring development was agreed upon for these three Descriptors, as the review of Audit data indicated there were some limited examples of these issues being addressed.

All team members agreed upon the compilation and overall evaluation of Standards and Descriptors presented below.

The overall evaluation can be summarised as follows:

- 7 Descriptors were identified as being at the stage of *to be initiated* (2.3, 3.9, 4.3, 4.8, 4.9, 5.2, 6.5).
- 31 Descriptors were identified as *requiring development*.
- 1 Descriptor was identified as being *fully embedded* in policy and practice across schools, age phases and municipalities (2.1).
- All seven Standards overall were identified as *requiring development*.

This evaluation of policy and practice demonstrates that much work has already been started in relation to the seven core areas covered by the Standards. However, further short-, medium- and long-term development work is required for the seven key policy areas underpinning the Standards to be embedded in practice.

Standards and Descriptors	Embedded in policy and practice	Requires development	To be initiated
1st Standard – Inclusive education is defined by all stakeholders as an approach for improving the quality of education of all learners	–	✓	–
1.1 The concept of inclusive education and its implications is well understood by all stakeholders, including parents and pupils.	–	✓	–
1.2 Inclusive education is understood by all stakeholders as being an approach for all pupils.	–	✓	–



Standards and Descriptors	Embedded in policy and practice	Requires development	To be initiated
1.3 Research on inclusive education is supported by all stakeholders.	–	✓	–
2nd Standard – Legislation and policy for inclusive education has the goal of promoting equal opportunities for all learners	–	✓	–
2.1 Legislation clearly articulates rights to appropriate education for all children.	✓	–	–
2.2 Policies provide operational definitions of what is understood by access and appropriateness.	–	✓	–
2.3 All schools and municipalities have policies and action plans detailing how national-level policies on inclusive education will be implemented and funded.	–	–	✓
2.4. Legislation is fully in line with international normative instruments, in particular the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and EU policy directives and policy guidelines.	–	✓	–
3rd Standard – Policy for inclusive education is effectively implemented at all levels	–	✓	–
3.1 Every member of the school community is made to feel welcome and valued.	–	✓	–
3.2 There are high expectations for all pupils.	–	✓	–



Standards and Descriptors	Embedded in policy and practice	Requires development	To be initiated
3.3 Schools have formal and objective procedures that assist in the early identification of students' individual needs.	–	✓	–
3.4 All schools have well educated staff fit for their purpose.	–	✓	–
3.5 The division of labour between different types of teachers within schools is clear and promotes successful implementation of inclusive education policy.	–	✓	–
3.6 All pupils have access to good teaching materials that suit their needs.	–	✓	–
3.7 There are clear and objective procedures implemented for monitoring the achievements of pupils who are at risk of exclusion.	–	✓	–
3.8 All students have a voice and are appropriately involved in school-level decision-making, as well as decision-making about their learning programme.	–	✓	–
3.9 All national government bodies and agencies work collaboratively to ensure joined-up policy delivery.	–	–	✓
4th Standard – All stakeholders, at all levels are enabled to think and act inclusively in their daily practice	–	✓	–
4.1 Support services have the ultimate goal of empowering students, families and teachers.	–	✓	–



Standards and Descriptors	Embedded in policy and practice	Requires development	To be initiated
4.2 Schools are effectively supported by the specialist/school services as appropriate in delivering the provision required by students with individual educational needs.	–	✓	–
4.3 The support system is co-ordinated and easy to understand.	–	–	✓
4.4 Appropriate training is available for all staff in order to ensure all staff can respond positively to student diversity.	–	✓	–
4.5 The staff and resourcing levels of resource services at all levels is adequate to meet the needs of the schools and pupils.	–	✓	–
4.6 There is an adequate access to diagnoses in the health and the welfare system.	–	✓	–
4.7 School administrators are able to act as leaders in inclusive education settings.	–	✓	–
4.8 There is a recognised forum for teachers to meet and share experiences.	–	–	✓
4.9 There is a recognised forum for training providers to meet, share experiences and facilitate effective co-ordination of service provision.	–	–	✓
4.10 Parents understand the philosophy of inclusive education.	–	✓	–
4.11 Parents have the opportunity to participate in the decisions that affect their child's education.	–	✓	–



Standards and Descriptors	Embedded in policy and practice	Requires development	To be initiated
5th Standard – Resource allocation is equitable, efficient and cost-effective	–	✓	–
5.1 Funding mechanisms support successful implementation of the policy of inclusive education.	–	✓	–
5.2 There is a strong inter-ministerial co-operation in the financing of the policy of inclusive education.	–	–	✓
5.3 School resources are distributed in a fair and equitable way to support inclusive education.	–	✓	–
6th Standard – Governance and quality assurance mechanisms ensure co-ordinated and effective implementation of inclusive education policy and practice	–	✓	–
6.1 There is a national evaluation and assessment framework that covers the needs of all pupils, including those with the most complex needs.	–	✓	–
6.2 External evaluation standards address directly the diversity of pupils’ needs and the means to address them in schools.	–	✓	–
6.3 Systematic monitoring is conducted to ensure compliance with all quality assurance standards.	–	✓	–
6.4 Results of assessment procedures are communicated and explained to parents by teachers and others involved with pupils’ learning programmes.	–	✓	–



Standards and Descriptors	Embedded in policy and practice	Requires development	To be initiated
6.5 Mechanisms are developed for collecting and sharing data across ministries to ensure compliance with agreed standards.	–	–	✓
7th Standard – Professional development issues at all system levels are effectively addressed	–	✓	–
7.1 Teacher education is viewed as a lifelong continuous process.	–	✓	–
7.2 All professional development opportunities aim to develop a framework of attitudes and values, knowledge and skills that are aligned with national policy goals for inclusive education.	–	✓	–
7.3 Inclusive education is an embedded element within all training for school leaders and teachers.	–	✓	–
7.4 Appropriate general and specialist training are available for all staff in order to ensure all staff can respond positively to student diversity.	–	✓	–



APPENDIX 3: PROPOSALS FOR REVISIONS TO THE STANDARDS AND DESCRIPTORS

This Appendix proposes amendments to the Icelandic Standards and Descriptors based on the Audit Team's critical reflection during the Audit work. These revisions are suggested taking full account of the Audit findings and recommendations.

Using the original Standards and Descriptors as a starting point:

- changes in wording are indicated with italicised text;
- text deletions are indicated by [deletion];
- notes on moved or merged Standards and Descriptors are listed as [Moved from/Merged with];
- new Standards and Descriptors are highlighted as [New].

In addition, to clarify the underpinning focus of each Standard, the following factors are identified:

- The main groups of stakeholders from national, local or school level involved in implementing the Standard
- The element(s) of the ecosystem of support for inclusive education (as described on *page 117*) – micro, meso, exo or macro – the Standard is essentially concerned with.

The seven Standards have been ordered to reflect the different levels of the ecosystem of support.

The proposals for amended Standards and Descriptors have been developed with the clear intention of stimulating continuing debate following the Audit work and supporting the on-going system development work. The hope is that stakeholders in the Icelandic system can use them as a discussion tool, promoting further reflection on system developments and innovations.

Standard – Inclusive education is defined by all stakeholders as an approach for improving the quality of education of all learners

This is an underpinning Standard. It encompasses all elements of the inclusive education ecosystem – micro, meso, exo and macro – and involves system stakeholders working at national, local and school levels.

Descriptors:

The concept of inclusive education and its implications are well understood by all stakeholders, including parents and *learners*.

Inclusive education is understood by all *system* stakeholders as being an approach for all *learners*.



Parents understand the philosophy of inclusive education [Moved from 4.10].

Research on *developments within* inclusive education *is widely available for all stakeholders to inform their evidence-based policy-making and practice.*

Standard – Legislation and *national* policy for inclusive education has the goal of promoting *system equity and equitable opportunities for all learners*

This Standard encompasses the macro elements of the inclusive education ecosystem. It mainly involves system stakeholders working at national and local levels.

Descriptors:

Legislation clearly articulates *the right to high-quality inclusive education* for all children.

National policies provide operational definitions of *inclusive education, quality education, equity and equitable learning opportunities* agreed upon by all stakeholders.

Legislation is fully in line with international normative instruments, in particular the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and EU policy directives and policy guidelines.

All national government *and local-level* bodies and agencies work collaboratively to ensure joined-up policy delivery [Moved from 3.9].

There are transparent plans detailing procedures, timescales and criteria for reviewing and evaluating national-level policy for inclusive education to support with local and school-level practice developments and innovations [New].

Standard – Governance and quality assurance mechanisms ensure co-ordinated and effective implementation of inclusive education policy and practice [Moved from 6]

This Standard encompasses the macro element of the inclusive education ecosystem. It mainly involves system stakeholders working at national and local levels.

Descriptors:

There is a national framework and mechanism for monitoring the effective implementation of national policy for inclusive education in all municipalities and schools [New].

There is a national framework guiding school-based formative and summative assessment that considers the needs of all learners, including those with the most



complex needs, and that informs national and local-level quality assurance processes [New].

There is a national school evaluation and *quality assurance* framework that considers the diverse needs of all learners and the means to address *and support* them in schools.

Systematic monitoring *at national and local levels* is conducted to ensure compliance with all quality assurance standards.

Mechanisms are developed for collecting and sharing *quality assurance* data across ministries *and municipalities* to ensure compliance with agreed standards.

Standard – Resource allocation is equitable, efficient and cost-effective [Moved from 5]

This Standard encompasses the macro elements of the inclusive education ecosystem. It mainly involves system stakeholders working at national and local levels.

Descriptors:

Funding mechanisms support the successful implementation of the policy for inclusive education.

There is strong and effective co-operation between all funding bodies at national and local levels in the financing of inclusive education [New].

School resources are distributed in a fair and equitable way to support inclusive education.

All funding mechanisms have the goal of increasing schools' capacity to meet all learners' needs [New].

Minimum standards of resourcing levels and service provision are in place to ensure equity of provision [New].

Standard – Professional development issues at all system levels are effectively addressed [Moved from 7]

This Standard encompasses the meso and macro elements of the inclusive education ecosystem. It involves system stakeholders working at all levels: national, local and school.

Descriptors:

All stakeholders view staff professional development as a lifelong continuous process.



All *ITE and CPD* opportunities aim to develop a framework of attitudes and values, knowledge and skills that are aligned with national policy goals for inclusive education.

All ITE and CPD opportunities for all professionals are fully aligned with each other, as well as with national and local-level policies for inclusive education [New].

Inclusive education is an embedded element within all ITE and CPD opportunities for all teachers *and support professionals* [Merged with the previous 3.4].

Appropriate [deletion] specialist training opportunities, including training on low-incidence disabilities, are *available for staff* in order to ensure system capacity is maintained and schools can effectively respond to learner diversity [Merged with the previous 4.4].

A range of on-going training and support opportunities are available for school leaders to support their work in promoting inclusive policy and practice at school level [New].

School leaders are supported to ensure that staff training opportunities are aligned with staff career development, as well as with school improvement requirements [New].

A range of on-going training and support opportunities are available for local-level decision-makers to support their work in promoting inclusive policy and practice at school level [Merged with the previous 4.7].

A range of on-going training and support opportunities are available for teacher educators to support their work in developing and providing inclusive staff professional development [New].

There is a recognised forum for training providers to meet, share experiences and facilitate effective co-ordination of service provision [Moved from 4.9].

All forms of ITE and CPD are monitored and evaluated in order to ensure the effective co-ordination and use of funding/resources and alignment/consistency with policy and practice developments [New].

Standard – *Local-level support services enable all stakeholders* [deletion] **to think and act inclusively in their daily practice** [Moved from 4].

This Standard encompasses the meso and exo elements of the inclusive education ecosystem. It mainly involves system stakeholders working at local and school levels.



Descriptors:

All municipalities have local-level policies and action plans detailing how national-level policies on inclusive education will be resourced, implemented, monitored and evaluated in the local context [New].

Support services empower learners, families, teachers and staff from other agencies through capacity-building that increases knowledge and skills and breaks down professional barriers [New].

All schools are effectively supported by the *local support* services to deliver the provision *required to meet all learners' needs*.

There is *equitable* access to well co-ordinated *education, health and welfare services to effectively identify and support individual learners' additional learning needs*.

Local services effectively support schools' early identification of individual learners' additional learning and support needs [New].

There are recognised forums for different stakeholder groups to meet both virtually and in person, to share experiences and examples of practice.

Standard – Policy for inclusive education is effectively implemented in all pre-, compulsory and upper-secondary schools [Moved from 3].

This Standard encompasses the micro, meso and exo elements of the inclusive education ecosystem. It mainly involves system stakeholders working at the school level.

Descriptors:

All schools have policies and action plans detailing how national-level policies on inclusive education will be resourced, implemented, monitored and evaluated in the school's context [New].

Every member of the school community is made to feel welcome and valued.

There are high expectations for all *learners*.

Schools have formal and objective procedures that assist in the early identification of *learners' individual additional learning needs*.

The roles of different staff members and teams working in schools are clear and promote the successful implementation of inclusive education policy.

All learners have access to a high-quality curriculum and assessment framework and flexible teaching approaches that meet their individual needs.

Schools are supported to use assessment for learning approaches to personalise learning for all learners [New].



There are clear and objective procedures for monitoring the *progress of all learners, including those with the most complex needs and others at risk of exclusion from learning opportunities.*

Results of *summative and formative* assessment procedures are communicated and explained to parents by *school teams* [Moved from 6.4].

All *learners* have a voice and are appropriately involved in school-level decision-making *that directly affects them, including* decision-making about their learning programme.

Parents *are engaged in a range of opportunities to contribute to* their child's education [Moved from 4.11].

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