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

Annex 1: External Audit Methodology

EUROPEAN AGENCY
for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

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INTRODUCTION

This Annex describes 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 that are available in the **Final Audit Report**. The report also contains a full discussion of Audit findings and recommendations.

The Agency Audit approach

The Agency's work in Iceland during 2015–2016 has taken a standards-based audit approach. This approach has the potential to:

- promote a cycle of review and reflection that supports further improvement;

- support evidence-based practice and decision-making.

The audit model provides a structured approach to quality assurance, with clear steps that can be applied to different social sectors and services (Duff, 2004). Such approaches have been widely used in the financial sector. However, the audit model is increasingly being developed and applied within social policy sectors, for example in health provision. Institutional peer audits (for example, Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2009) and self-audit approaches are also becoming popular in the education sector.

Standards – aspirational statements for the education system held by key stakeholders – are a crucial feature of this audit approach. In this case, the Icelandic Team developed standards against which current practice can be measured. While the standards stem from aims and objectives, they tend to be more specific. They can provide more detailed information about what the system for inclusive education seeks to provide, what might enable such a system and ways to monitor and improve system performance. It follows, therefore, that standards should be based on the best available evidence. This is where the Audit desk research plays a key role. This process will be considered in more detail (please refer to the section on *Reviewing the literature*).

Wodon (2014) stresses the importance of setting quality standards for education. He argues that clearly identifying what matters for monitoring and assuring quality, promotes more effective policy-making through targeted data collection.

The use of standards developed by key personnel at national level (in consultation with stakeholders) as the basis for the Audit, along with the specific focus upon the system for inclusive education, are the main differences between this approach and other forms of country education system review (for example, those conducted by the OECD). The Audit model has the potential to add value in relation to policy development work at national and local levels, both in terms of focus and methods.

A standards-based audit is a transparent examination of how current practice and/or provision compares with desired standards. It centres on a cycle that involves first defining standards, then collecting data to 'measure' practice against those standards and, finally, reviewing the data to plan further system improvements with and for all stakeholders.

This cycle comprises five main phases:

1. Planning

2. Data collection

3. Reporting

4. Implementation and monitoring

5. Review and re-audit.

The External Audit of the Icelandic System for Inclusive Education has focused on the first three: planning, data collection and reporting.

A team from the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education has carried out the activities in each of these phases. The team has worked in co-operation with, but independently from, stakeholders in Iceland. This external approach to data collection and analysis is in line with the original request from the Minister for Education, Science and Culture. He called for an independent, external audit of the system for inclusive education, leading to a set of clear recommendations for future action and development work in the short, medium and long term.

The External Audit approach has involved two key tasks:

1. The internal definition of desired standards for the system for inclusive education by key staff from Iceland.

2. External data collection by the Agency Audit Team to compare current policy and practice with the agreed standards.

The External Audit process also aims to inform the implementation of the final two phases of a complete audit cycle in the longer term: implementation and monitoring and review and re-audit.

The following sections describe the specific activities conducted within the External Audit in relation to the planning and data collection phases. The reporting phase focuses on the preparation of the main report and accompanying Annexes and will not be discussed here.

PLANNING PHASE ACTIVITIES

The planning phase has consisted of a number of activities, running concurrently. Each activity has informed and supported the development of all other activities.

Identifying the priority topic and objectives

The Agency Audit Team and members of the Icelandic stakeholder group held formal planning meetings in late 2015 and early 2016. These initial meetings clarified the scope, focus and objectives of the External Audit. It was agreed that the Audit would consider structure, process and outcome factors. It would provide information that could be used to plan systematic improvements for Iceland's system in the long term.

The Audit's main focus was to explore the extent to which the Icelandic policy for inclusive education has been successfully implemented.

Following extensive discussions, the *specific objectives* for the External Audit were agreed as follows:

1. To situate the current system in Iceland within a wider international and European context of policy and practice for inclusive education;

2. To build on the previous evaluation of the policy of inclusive education (Mennta- og menningarmálaráðuneytið, 2015) and work with Icelandic stakeholders to refine the study's findings and critically reflect on the implementation of inclusive education policy in current practice;

3. To build on existing work in Iceland, in particular the previous evaluation study and work with Icelandic stakeholders to identify a framework of process and outcome standards for the system for inclusive education;

4. To prepare independent data collection methods in line with the framework of standards and then collect 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. To identify examples of innovative, high quality practice in implementing policy for inclusive education from the Icelandic, as well as international and European contexts, that will inform policy development and implementation;

6. To identify key levers that will increase effectiveness in the education system;

7. To consider short- and long-term investment by exploring system added value issues alongside cost issues;

8. To prepare focused and practical recommendations for the implementation and monitoring of future action plans that aim to develop the system for inclusive education policy and practice in Iceland.

The scope of the Audit was identified as:

- Pre-school through to the end of upper-secondary education, including a focus on the special units and the support system in upper-secondary schools, as this school level was not covered in the recent evaluation and analysis in Iceland.

- All responsible funding bodies involved in inclusive education, i.e. the municipalities; the Ministries of Education, Science and Culture; Welfare; and the Interior. To include a consideration of the Local Authorities' Equalization Fund (www.jofnunarsjodur.is/english).

- All school stakeholders, i.e. learners and their families; school staff; support services; school funders and operators; national teacher organisations; teacher education institutions; national parent associations; and local- and national-level decision-makers, including those from the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture and the Ministry of Welfare.

The Audit examined:

- System factors impacting upon equity, efficiency and effectiveness
- Co-operation at and between regional 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 the achievements of all learners.

It was agreed that the 2015 evaluation report findings would serve as a starting point for identifying critical issues for examination in the Audit.

Reviewing the literature

From the initial stages of the External Audit, all activities were informed by a review of recent research literature. Among other things, this aimed to place the work in Iceland in a wider research and policy context.

The main areas for this desk research were identified from the Critical Reflection document, prepared by the Icelandic Team (please see **Annex 2** for details). The key areas highlighted in the Critical Reflection were used as search terms to provide an

overview of relevant information from academic articles, books and internet databases, as well as theses, conference papers and other reports from international organisations (e.g. UNESCO, OECD). The desk research also drew on recent Agency work in relevant projects – in particular Organisation of Provision to Support Inclusive Education (www.european-agency.org/agency-projects/organisation-of-provision) and Raising the Achievement of All Learners in Inclusive Education (www.european-agency.org/agency-projects/raising-achievement).

The information covered in the desk research:

- summarises literature relevant to key areas of practice identified in the initial Critical Reflection document;

- highlights practice in other countries, particularly those with similar policy contexts or facing similar challenges;

- identifies key areas of policy and practice, including potential levers for change.

As mentioned in the section on the *Agency Audit approach*, a key purpose of the literature review was to ensure that the standards and Audit recommendations are based on the best possible evidence.

The desk research, which was on-going throughout the Audit, also supported other activities by:

1. verifying and expanding upon the main areas to be considered as standards for the Audit;

2. providing a framework of concepts to be explored in data analysis;

3. highlighting key factors to be considered in final reporting.

The final desk research is a stand-alone document and is presented as **Annex 3: Desk Research Report**.

Setting the Standards for the Audit

A key preparatory activity for the Audit was initiated in early 2016. This was the preparation of a Critical Reflection document by the Icelandic Team members. The document provides the Icelandic Team's perception of strengths and weaknesses of key aspects of the system for inclusive education in Iceland. These include:

- The notion of inclusion

- Policy and guidelines on inclusive education

- Inclusive education in practice

- Support for schools

- The use of resources

- Governance and quality assurance

- Teacher education and continuing professional development.

The Icelandic Team identified these points following a process of self-reflection and open discussion to agree the aspects to be examined in the External Audit. The commitment of the stakeholders who prepared the document reflects their belief that the current system has strengths that can be built upon to address areas that require further development. The comprehensive and balanced discussion of issues in this Critical Reflection (presented in full in **Annex 2**) has provided a sound foundation for the entire Audit process.

The initial standards – stakeholder aspirations – proposed in the Critical Reflection document served as the starting point for detailed discussions regarding the final *Framework of Standards* that would be used as the basis for the Audit.

ISO defines a standard as:

> *… a document that provides requirements, specifications, guidelines or characteristics that can be used consistently to ensure that materials, products, processes and services are fit for their purpose* (2014).

Early discussions between the Icelandic and Audit Teams focused on agreeing an operational definition for a standard as:

- A statement that articulates agreed ways of working and indicates levels of quality or attainment that can be used as a measure, norm or benchmark in comparative evaluations.

Joint work by the Agency Team and the Icelandic Team also considered how the initial standards identified in the Critical Reflection document could be operationalised and used as the basis for data collection. A set of revised standards covering all key issues identified in the Critical Reflection document was agreed in spring 2016. This revision drew on the initial desk research to clarify the focus areas and the relationships between them, as outlined above.

The final framework has seven Standards, each with a number of Standard descriptors that expand upon different aspects and elements within the Standard.

1st Standard – Inclusive education is defined by all stakeholders as an approach for improving the quality of education of all learners

Standard descriptors

- The concept of inclusive education and its implications is well understood by all stakeholders, including parents and pupils.

- Inclusive education is understood by all stakeholders as being an approach for all pupils.

- 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

Standard descriptors

- Legislation clearly articulates rights to appropriate education for all children.

- Policies provide operational definitions of what is understood by access and appropriateness.

- All schools and municipalities have policies and action plans detailing how national-level policies on inclusive education will be implemented and funded.

- 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

Standard descriptors

- Every member of the school community is made to feel welcome and valued.

- There are high expectations for all pupils.

- Schools have formal and objective procedures that assist in the early identification of students' individual needs.

- All schools have well educated staff fit for their purpose.

- The division of labour between different types of teachers within schools is clear and promotes successful implementation of inclusive education policy.

- All pupils have access to good teaching materials that suit their needs.

- There are clear and objective procedures implemented for monitoring the achievements of pupils who are at risk of exclusion.

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

- 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

Standard descriptors

- Support services have the ultimate goal of empowering students, families and teachers.

- Schools are effectively supported by the specialist/school services as appropriate in delivering the provision required by students with individual educational needs.

- The support system is co-ordinated and easy to understand.

- Appropriate training is available for all staff in order to ensure all staff can respond positively to student diversity.

- The staff and resourcing levels of resource services at all levels is adequate to meet the needs of the schools and pupils.

- There is an adequate access to diagnoses in the health and the welfare system.

- School administrators are able to act as leaders in inclusive education settings.

- There is a recognised forum for teachers to meet and share experiences.

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

- Parents understand the philosophy of inclusive education.

- 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

Standard descriptors

- Funding mechanisms support successful implementation of the policy of inclusive education.

- There is a strong inter-ministerial co-operation in the financing of the policy of inclusive education.

- 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

Standard descriptors

- There is a national evaluation and assessment framework that covers the needs of all pupils, including those with the most complex needs.

- External evaluation standards address directly the diversity of pupils' needs and the means to address them in schools.

- Systematic monitoring is conducted to ensure compliance with all quality assurance standards.

- Results of assessment procedures are communicated and explained to parents by teachers and others involved with pupils' learning programmes.

- 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

Standard descriptors

- Teacher education is viewed as a lifelong continuous process.

- 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.

- Inclusive education is an embedded element within all training for school leaders and teachers.

- Appropriate general and specialist training are available for all staff in order to ensure all staff can respond positively to student diversity.

These seven Standards were used as the basis for framing all data collection tools, protocols and procedures with all stakeholders. They were also used as the basis for the data analysis.

As with the Critical Reflection document, the process of refining the Standards for use in the Audit required openness and a willingness to engage in debate and reflection on policy and practice. The Icelandic Team's commitment to developing such a comprehensive framework should be recognised and commended.

DATA COLLECTION PHASE ACTIVITIES

The extensive information generated during the planning phase provided the basis for designing and implementing all data collection activities.

Designing the Audit

The Audit focused primarily on collecting evidence to evaluate policy and practice *against* the Standards. Therefore, it follows that the Standards themselves form the basis for data collection. However, before starting this process, a number of tasks had to be undertaken:

- Agreeing the scope and range of data collection
- Identifying the key stakeholders to be involved
- Identifying the core issues underpinning the Standards that would be re-framed as questions for stakeholders
- Agreeing on the data collection methods to be used.

During the spring planning meetings, the Agency Audit Team members met with a range of stakeholders in the Icelandic education system. These included the Minister for Education, Science and Culture, key Ministry staff, and representatives from the municipalities, the Teachers' Union, different school sectors – pre-school, compulsory, upper-secondary –, parents' organisations, and the university sector/teacher educators.

These meetings explored various stakeholders' expectations regarding the respondents to be involved in data collection activities and the main issues to be examined.

Final discussions with the Icelandic Team led to an agreement that data collection would focus on:

- the provision of background information on the education system in Iceland by the Icelandic Team;
- a programme of fieldwork including focus group discussions, face-to-face interviews and school visits, involving a broad range of stakeholders in the education system;
- an on-line, anonymous survey for key stakeholders at school level.

Discussions with the Icelandic Team also led to an agreement on the core issues and main data collection questions that would underpin all the data collection and analysis work.

Table 1. Standards, core issues and data collection questions

Standards	Core issues	Data collection questions
1st Standard – 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 (is this needed or seen as underpinning all)	What does inclusive education mean for you?
2nd Standard – 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?
3rd Standard – 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?
4th Standard – 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 (i.e. school organisation, curriculum, assessment, pedagogy, support for learners, development opportunities for all stakeholders, effective communication across and between system levels)	In your role, how well supported do you feel to ensure that learners' diverse needs are met?
5th Standard – 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?

Standards	Core issues	Data collection questions
6th Standard – 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?
7th Standard – 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 seven Standards set out above were used as the basis for structuring the data collection tools. They have also been used as the basis for presenting the main findings of the External Audit.

Collecting the Audit data

The three data collection activities were implemented in parallel throughout April and May 2016.

Background information

The Icelandic Team provided background information covering the following areas:

1. The education system in Iceland

A description of the school system in Iceland; relevant policy documents (codes of practice, details of national targets and goals for education, curricula frameworks and guidelines, school admission policies, etc.); a description of school accountability, inspection and quality assurance procedures; school internal review procedures and development planning processes; rationales for and descriptions of current initiatives/pilot work and relevant research.

2. Special needs and inclusive education system

Background information on legislation, regulations and implementation of the UNCRPD (2006); a description of the goals, policies and guidance for inclusive education; a description of SNE decision-making procedures including information

on school governance and dispute mediation procedures; a description of inclusive education and SNE support services including types of provision and support, roles and responsibilities of key service providers (NGOs, health services, psychologists, etc.); contracts and working agreements with service providers; mapping of resources available in each municipality; description of the diagnostic centres – purpose, working methods and role of 'gate-keeper' of resources; description of the 29 municipality resource centres – roles, working procedures, numbers of schools, teachers and pupils supported, evaluation of practice; description of the national/regional special schools and units: roles, working procedures, numbers of mainstream schools, teachers and pupils supported, evaluation of practice.

3. Staffing and resourcing

Staffing and resourcing data from 2009, 2012 and 2015; inclusive education budget expenditure figures from 2009, 2012 and 2015.

4. Pupil information

Pupil numbers in pre-school, compulsory and upper-secondary education during 2009, 2012 and 2015; data on pupils with recognised additional needs from pre-school, compulsory and upper-secondary sectors in 2009, 2012 and 2015.

5. Explanation and regulations regarding the Equalization Fund

These include the support intensity scale and proposals for changes to criteria.

6. Description of systems for initial teacher education and continuing professional development

These include regulations, national standards and competence criteria, resourcing and financing, evaluation frameworks and mechanisms, and a description of professional training and development opportunities for specialist/support staff.

These resources were supplemented with *EU-level information* where relevant and key OECD reports and documents on Iceland's education system.

The Audit Team used the background information to understand the Icelandic context and highlight the main policy issues for exploration in the fieldwork. Key information was integrated into the **Annex 3: Desk Research Report**. Background information was also used in the data analysis work as a further source of evidence for proposed findings and recommendations.

Fieldwork

The fieldwork for the External Audit was carried out during April 2016. Over the course of four days, the six Audit Team members conducted:

- 27 focus groups involving a total of 222 participants (including two held by Skype, one shortly after the main fieldwork period)
- 9 individual face-to-face interviews
- 11 school visits.

The Icelandic Team, working in co-operation with the Audit Team, identified potential interview and focus group respondents. Interview and focus group participants were selected using a purposive sampling approach (as described by Krathwohl, 1998). The respondents came from a defined population – stakeholders in the education system. They conformed to certain pre-determined parameters: geographical location, school sector and phase representation across the participants. Using a purposive (as opposed to a random) sample allowed for the selection of respondents who would better inform the Audit by providing focused information on their experiences of the system for inclusive education.

The Icelandic Team agreed upon criteria for identifying the fieldwork locations. The following factors were used as far as possible for identifying the actual fieldwork locations:

- Type of support service within the municipality (independent service; shared service; buying in service; everything at school level)
- Size of municipality
- Location – urban, fishing, agricultural
- Social deprivation indicators.

The Icelandic Team identified five geographical areas to be covered in the Audit:

- Akureyri and the vicinity
- Reykjavík and the vicinity
- Borgarbyggð
- Egilsstaðir and the East
- Árborg and South Iceland.

A project manager was appointed to oversee the fieldwork logistics. Working partners were identified in each municipality to provide support in finding stakeholders and schools to take part in data collection activities.

The project manager decided, in collaboration with the Ministry and local authorities, how focus groups and school visits would be divided between different areas to ensure a balance of school types across the regions.

Reykjavík was mainly focused on the primary level and the Árborg area on pre-school. The focus in Akureyri and Egilsstaðir was on upper-secondary. The contact partner in each of the selected municipalities was asked to find appropriate group members. The Agency Team also met with a range of other key stakeholders, e.g. representatives from different ministries, the chair of the Association of Local Authorities and the chair of the teacher associations. These mostly took part in one-to-one interviews.

The next step was to contact the partners and ensure that everyone had information about the project. E-mails were sent to those nominated, as well as the heads of their schools/ organisations. The mayors of municipalities were also contacted regarding the names of two representatives to take part in the decision-makers focus group.

A plan was then drawn up detailing specific times and venues for focus groups, interviews and school visits so that practical arrangements could be put in place and supporting documents drafted.

The activities took place in parallel between 25 and 29 April. One focus group was held in early June via Skype.

The Icelandic Team handled the logistics associated with the fieldwork activities. However, no members were involved in any of the focus groups or interviews except where they were specifically identified as a key respondent.

Icelandic interpretation support was provided when required, mainly for the activities involving parents and learners.

For all areas of activity, the Audit Team members provided an introduction based on an agreed script. It was re-phrased as needed to meet the respondents' needs:

> *In 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 about possible input to an examination of the inclusive education system in Iceland.*

> *In November 2015, the Agency formally signed an agreement with the Ministry and other Icelandic key stakeholders to act as consultants and conduct an External Audit of the system for inclusive education in Iceland.*

The Audit is being conducted by a team of Agency staff working with additional consultants. The Agency Team is working in co-operation with, but independently from, any stakeholders within Iceland.

The goal of the External Audit is to evaluate in a transparent way how successful the implementation of the Icelandic policy for inclusive education is, in line with standards for the system identified by Icelandic stakeholders.

Data collection is being conducted with a range of stakeholders within the whole education system in Iceland. The data collection will explore stakeholders' perspectives on issues relating to:

- *What inclusive education means for them*

- *How they feel that current legislation and policy supports an equitable inclusive education system for all learners*

- *How well supported they feel to ensure that learners' diverse needs are met.*

*The **Final Audit Report** will be presented in late 2016. It will aim to inform future development work in Iceland.*

All fieldwork activities were designed to explore the 7 Standards and core issues underpinning the Audit (please refer to Table 1) using the data collection questions. The questions were re-framed as discussion points considered to be most relevant to the respondents. Separate sections below provide further details of each of the three fieldwork activities.

Digital recordings were made of all focus groups and interviews and written notes were taken during school visits. The Team member(s) responsible for conducting the activity analysed this raw data, using agreed templates and procedures. All information used in this report has been anonymised in line with the agreement that all data provided by respondents would remain confidential to the Audit Team members.

1. Focus groups

Focus groups were held in a number of schools (combined with school visits). They aimed to collect information from representative groups of different stakeholders within the education system.

The number of participants and the stakeholder groups represented are outlined in Table 2, along with the priority questions used as discussion points. The number in brackets indicates the Standard that the priority questions inform.

Table 2. Focus group participants and priority questions

Participants	No. of participants	Priority questions
Class teachers from compulsory education	9	In your role, how well supported do you feel to ensure that learners' diverse needs are met? (S4) 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? (S7)
Educational staff trainers: universities, in-service trainers, new council for staff development	8	How do you feel that current legislation and policy supports an equitable, inclusive education system for all learners? (S2) How well do you feel that policy for inclusive education is being implemented in practice? (S3)
Policy-/decision-makers from across municipalities	10	How do you feel that current legislation and policy supports an equitable, inclusive education system for all learners? (S2) What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of the current QA processes for informing improvement in inclusive education? (S6)
Representatives from unions: teachers, head teachers, special teachers, special needs sub-group	10	How do you feel that current legislation and policy supports an equitable inclusive education system for all learners? (S2) How well do you feel that policy for inclusive education is being implemented in practice? (S3)
Managers of upper-secondary provision; curriculum/assessment leaders; inspectors	8	How do you feel that current legislation and policy supports an equitable inclusive education system for all learners? (S2) In what ways do you feel that current systems of resource allocation enable you to support all learners in equitable, efficient and cost-effective ways? (S5)

Participants	No. of participants	Priority questions
School leaders from upper-secondary education	9	In your role, how well supported do you feel to ensure that learners' diverse needs are met? (S4) What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of the current QA processes for informing improvement in inclusive education? (S6)
Learners with and without additional needs from compulsory education	4	What do teachers and other school/specialist staff do that supports you in your learning?
Parents and families from compulsory education	8	How well do you feel that policy for inclusive education is being implemented in practice? (S3)
Educational staff trainers: universities, in-service trainers, new council for staff development	8	How do you feel that current legislation and policy supports an equitable, inclusive education system for all learners? (S2) How well do you feel that policy for inclusive education is being implemented in practice? (S3)
School leaders from compulsory education	10	In your role, how well supported do you feel to ensure that learners' diverse needs are met? (S4) What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of the current QA processes for informing improvement in inclusive education? (S6)
Class teachers from pre-school	9	In your role, how well supported do you feel to ensure that learners' diverse needs are met? (S4) 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? (S7)

Participants	No. of participants	Priority questions
Special teaching support staff that work in schools	8	In your role, how well supported do you feel to ensure that learners' diverse needs are met? (S4) 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? (S7)
School leaders from pre-school	10	In your role, how well supported do you feel to ensure that learners' diverse needs are met? (S4) What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of the current QA processes for informing improvement in inclusive education? (S6)
Special teaching support staff that work in schools	11	In your role, how well supported do you feel to ensure that learners' diverse needs are met? (S4) 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? (S7)
Learners with and without additional needs from upper-secondary education	9	What do teachers and other school/specialist staff do that supports you in your learning?
Parents and families from upper-secondary education	7	How well do you feel that policy for inclusive education is being implemented in practice? (S3)
Special teaching support staff that work in schools	9	In your role, how well supported do you feel to ensure that learners' diverse needs are met? (S4) 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? (S7)

Participants	No. of participants	Priority questions
Learners with and without additional needs from pre-schools	8	What do teachers and other school/specialist staff do that supports you in your learning?
Parents and families from pre-school	6	How well do you feel that policy for inclusive education is being implemented in practice? (S3)
Mental health seminar participants	6	How do you feel that current legislation and policy supports an equitable, inclusive education system for all learners? (S2) How well do you feel that policy for inclusive education is being implemented in practice? (S3)
Class teachers from upper-secondary education	10	In your role, how well supported do you feel to ensure that learners' diverse needs are met? (S4) 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? (S7)
Policy-/decision-makers from across municipalities	10	How do you feel that current legislation and policy supports an equitable, inclusive education system for all learners? (S2) What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of the current QA processes for informing improvement in inclusive education? (S6)
Special staff from local resource centres/services	10	In your role, how well supported do you feel to ensure that learners' diverse needs are met? (S4) In what ways do you feel that current systems of resource allocation enable you to support all learners in equitable, efficient and cost-effective ways? (S5)

Participants	No. of participants	Priority questions
Representatives of special services	10	In your role, how well supported do you feel to ensure that learners' diverse needs are met? (S4) In what ways do you feel that current systems of resource allocation enable you to support all learners in equitable, efficient and cost-effective ways? (S5)
Special school and special unit staff	8	How well do you feel that policy for inclusive education is being implemented in practice? (S3) 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? (S7)
Skype FG with representatives from municipalities and private schools that are not covered by the resource centres	4	In your role, how well supported do you feel to ensure that learners' diverse needs are met? (S4) What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of the current quality assurance processes for informing improvement in inclusive education? (S6)
Skype FG with representatives from the municipalities association	3	In your role, how well supported do you feel to ensure that learners' diverse needs are met? (S4) What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of the current quality assurance processes for informing improvement in inclusive education? (S6)

Protocols

For the majority of the focus groups (24), two Audit Team members conducted the discussion. (For logistical reasons, only one Audit Team member was available to conduct the others.)

Each focus group discussion lasted for approximately one hour and was recorded by two separate machines (so that each Team member had an electronic file).

One Audit Team member asked questions, while the other took notes.

The Team member asking questions used the agreed script at the beginning and end of each FG.

All respondents introduced themselves giving their name and role.

Where appropriate, participants were asked to complete an 'eco-map' at the end of the session. For further details, please refer to the separate section on eco-maps and to **Annex 5**.

During the session, the Team ensured that all respondents had the opportunity to contribute to each question.

Questions

The opening question for all FGs was: *What does inclusive education mean to you?*

A limited number of open (non-leading) follow-up questions explored issues arising from the responses.

Each FG then had a priority question based on one of the seven core issues linked to the Standards. A second question was planned in case discussions 'dried up'. For learners and parents, just one question was asked (with some follow-up).

The priority questions were re-worded to 'fit' with focus groups respondents' needs. The priority questions for each stakeholder groups are set out in Table 2.

Eco-maps

The eco-maps were designed to provide additional information about everyday life in school for teachers and learners, as well as details of parent/carer networks. The eco-maps show, in particular, relationships and personal/professional connections between different stakeholders and the range of teaching approaches used in schools.

The eco-maps ask a question designed to be answered with one word or a short phrase to provide information about contacts made/approaches used in the last year, during the current school term, in the past month, or during the current week.

Four eco-maps were used, each being completed in approximately five minutes at the end of focus group meetings.

1. Teaching approaches eco-map. This asked 'what teaching approaches have you used?'

2. Working with other stakeholders eco-map. This asked 'who have you worked with?'

3. Being helped eco-map for parents. This asked 'who have you talked to about your child's education?'

4. Being helped eco-map for learners. This asked 'who has helped you with your school work?'.

The 'teaching approaches' eco-map was used by 70 participants in six focus groups – by teachers and also by support staff working in schools. The analysis gave an indication of the diversity of approaches used – as well as those not regularly used.

The 'working with other stakeholders' eco-map was used by 131 participants in 18 focus groups – mostly teachers and support staff and representatives from municipalities and NGOs. Here, the analysis provided details of people or services worked with – and the extent to which people draw on their own and/or external resources.

The eco-map for parents was completed by 20 participants in three focus groups. These maps gave an indication of contacts/support networks – both formal and informal – and the frequency of use.

The final eco-map for learners was completed by 13 participants in two focus groups. These eco-maps were expected to highlight the learning activities and support from professionals and peers that were important to them.

The eco-maps analysis aimed to complement the findings from all other data sources and has been specifically used to inform to the 4th, 5th and 7th Audit Standards.

Annex 5 presents a detailed analysis of the eco-maps.

2. Interviews

The goal of the interviews was to collect information from key decision-makers working at municipality or national levels. One-to-one interviews took place in parallel with focus groups. The interviewer met respondents at different locations – mainly their workplaces.

One-to-one interviews were conducted with:

- A high-level representative from the Ministry of Welfare

- The Head of the Municipalities Association

- The Head of the Teachers' Union

- A representative from the Ministry of Education, Quality Assurance Department

- A representative from the Ministry of Education, Teacher Professional Development Department

- A representative from the Ministry of Education, responsible for financing and strategic planning within upper-secondary education

- A representative from the Ministry of Interior, responsible for the Local Authorities' Equalization Fund

- A representative from the Ministry of Interior, responsible for signing and ratifying international conventions

- Mr Illugi Gunnarsson, Minister for Education, (not recorded).

It was not possible to arrange any form of interview with any high-level representatives from the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs.

Protocols

Interviews lasted for 30–45 minutes and were recorded (unless otherwise stated).

The interviewer introduced each session with the agreed script (please refer to the previous section on the script).

At the start of each interview, the interviewee introduced themselves and explained their role.

Questions

All interviewees were asked the same questions:

- What is the greatest challenge to inclusive education from your perspective?

- How does this challenge impact upon your role?

- What needs to be done to overcome this challenge?

- What is the most positive thing about the current system that should be built upon?

At the end of each interview, the interviewee was asked if there was any further information they wanted to share with the Audit Team.

3. School visits

School visits aimed to provide some background context for the Team. They also provided an opportunity to collect further information from school-level stakeholders. There were visits to 11 schools identified by the Icelandic Team. These covered different sectors and age phases in different geographical locations:

- Sæmundarskóli – compulsory school

- Borgarholtsskóli – upper-secondary school

- Rauðhóll – pre-school

- Langholtsskóli – compulsory school
- Hrafnagilsskóli – compulsory school
- Sunnulækjarskóli – compulsory school
- Jötunheimar í Árborg – pre-school
- Klettaskóli – special school
- Menntaskóli Akureyrar – upper-secondary school
- Ugluklettur Borgarnesi – pre-school
- Menntaskólinn á Egilsstöðum – upper-secondary school.

Protocols

Visits included:

- a short school tour and visit to some classes;
- short discussions with some of the following: school head teachers, senior managers, teachers, support staff, other professionals (e.g. counsellors, health staff) and learners.

Within the Teams, one person asked questions, while the other took notes.

The Team members' observations (see Table 3) were completed jointly.

(The Team member asking questions used the agreed introductory script as needed).

All activity aimed to minimise disruption to usual lessons/routines.

If teachers/leaders asked Team members for feedback, then it was made clear that the members were there to listen, but not to give any form of comment/input.

Questions

For school leaders, managers and class teachers:

- What is the greatest challenge for you in making inclusive education a reality in your school/classroom?
- Which activities within your school are most effective in supporting a more inclusive approach?

For other professionals/support staff:

- In what ways do you, in your daily work, enable learners to be included in the school/classroom?

For learners:

- What do you like most about your school? What do teachers/other staff do to support your learning?

Team members' observations

In addition to taking notes of discussions, Audit Team members used an observation schedule for recording notes on key aspects of the school environment. This was used for guidance only, as there was not time to comment on every aspect/bullet point. Team members also noted any (additional) aspects/events that impressed them or that highlighted particular issues for further exploration.

Table 3. Team members' observations

Aspect	The school/classroom …
School/classroom climate	- has a relaxed and welcoming atmosphere (e.g. staff and learners interact freely) - reflects the diversity of the local community - is accessible to all - has an ethos that respects the rights of learners/families (e.g. note language used to describe learners from particular groups, etc.) - has a clear sense of purpose, with teachers and managers who have high expectations for all learners
Social environment	- engages both staff and learners (i.e. emotional, behavioural and social engagement) - supports respectful relationships between staff and learners and learners and their peers (e.g. note how challenging behaviour and learner conflict is addressed; how is success recognised?)
Learning environment – resources	- contains resources that reflect diversity and are interesting and intellectually engaging for all learners - provides opportunities for all learners to use ICT - adapts resources/equipment and uses assistive technology where needed - engages parents as a resource

Aspect	The school/classroom …
Learning environment – organisation and teaching	• uses flexible groupings for learners, as well as individual support where necessary (e.g. approaches for learners with disabilities, learners with Icelandic as a second language, more able learners) • uses activities/approaches matched to needs/interests at an appropriate level of challenge • allows learners to 'lead' on learning – to make choices and respond in a variety of ways • provides feedback to learners and uses assessment information to support learning • supports collaboration and teamwork between staff and learners (e.g. team teaching, effective use of LSAs, peer support) • makes the most of time through careful planning/lesson structure

On-line survey

At the start of the Audit, the Agency Team and key stakeholders agreed that information would be collected from a range of school-level stakeholders via a survey. The Agency and Icelandic Teams were involved in agreeing the framework and protocols for the survey and planning their implementation.

The survey's goal was to collect information from the following school-level stakeholders:

- School leaders
- Class teachers
- Support staff
- Parents.

The intention of the survey was to provide first-hand information from these stakeholder groups about their perceptions of the core issues regarding inclusive education that underpinned the overall Audit data collection.

The survey was on-line, web-based and open to respondents from any of the above groups across the country. It was available in Icelandic and English.

The questions were closed and required respondents to rate their opinion regarding key statements.

The survey covered all school levels (pre-school, compulsory and upper-secondary). Respondents were asked to identify their role and school sector. Their replies then led to the appropriate version of the survey, as some questions were specific to particular roles/sectors.

The survey was distributed in English from 9 May until 24 June and in Icelandic from 21 May until 24 June 2016.

The survey was promoted by the Ministry and Municipality representatives, as well as all their stakeholders. All schools were specifically asked to support parents who requested help in completing the survey.

Survey questions were designed to gather stakeholders' perceptions and attitudes regarding the seven core issues being examined by the Audit.

The survey comprised a series of statements and respondents were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed/disagreed with each one – fully, partially, not really or not at all. Such ordinal scales are commonly used to measure attitudes in particular, so are fit for purpose in this case. The scale was designed with two positive and two negative responses in an attempt to overcome the problem of acquiescence bias.

The survey also included one open question to give respondents the opportunity to provide additional information they considered relevant regarding their understanding of inclusive education.

There were also a limited number of 'other' open options linked to specific questions.

The four versions of the survey were translated into Icelandic by the Agency and then improved and approved by representatives from the Ministry of Education. All eight surveys were then made available from www.european-agency.org/audit-schools-survey

On the webpage, respondents were provided with a general introduction and the option to choose the survey relevant to their role.

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

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

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

The details of the survey responses and results are presented in **Annex 6: On-line Survey Analysis Report.**

ANALYSING THE AUDIT DATA

Data analysis was conducted from July to October 2016. This considered system structure, process and outcome factors and contributed to the overall goal for the Audit – identifying findings and then recommendations that can be used to plan improvements in the Icelandic system for inclusive education in the short, medium and long term.

Prior to the Audit, it was agreed that participants of 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.

To guide the data analysis, a mapping of the Audit Standards, core issues and questions for data collection, shown in Table 1, was conducted to show potential sources of evidence. The sources considered include the survey, focus groups, school visits, interviews, eco-maps and desk research. For each of the Standards/core issues, the mapping noted the relevant 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).

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 the learner voice.

Data analysis by Team members took place on an individual, working pair and then whole Team level.

Individual Team members initially focused on the desk research and fieldwork analysis in order to provide a reflective commentary on emerging issues. These reflections were combined into a single internal working document that:

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

These findings were structured in order to inform the seven core issues for the Audit and highlight specific issues for consideration in the final report.

Teams made up of pairs of Team members analysed the focus group and interview recordings by making notes about the main issues raised, the context of comments and, where relevant, the language/terminology used. Illustrative quotes were also recorded as indicative evidence against the specific Standard descriptors. These

analyses were combined into a single document presented in **Annex 4: Fieldwork Illustrative Evidence Report**.

In October 2016, all information (including initial drafts of the eco-map analysis and on-line survey reports) was circulated to all Team members. Each Team member then undertook an individual evaluation of the complete set of agreed Standards and Standard descriptors. Using a grid of the Standards, each Team member indicated whether, based on all available evidence, they considered each Standard and Standard 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 at early stage/practice yet to be started.

The individual Team members' evaluations were then combined. Using a modal calculation, a final Team-level evaluation for each of the Standards and Standard descriptors was reached. This compilation was circulated to all Team members for checking and agreement. The **Final Audit Report** presents the final evaluation of each of the Standards and Standard descriptors.

The main findings were circulated to all Team members for comment. During a meeting of Audit Team members in late 2016, the final recommendations arising from the Audit were identified and discussed.

The overall Audit approach was based on a combination of three elements:

- Statements of aspiration (Standards)

- Potential principles/evidence to inform developments (information from the desk research)

- Current practice (data gathered via fieldwork and survey).

These three elements were drawn upon in order to develop final recommendations.

The main findings and recommendations are the focus of the **Final Audit Report.** The production of this **Final Audit Report** and all accompanying Annexes aims to support the next phase of the Audit cycle – the feedback of findings.

REFLECTIONS ON THE AUDIT PROCESS

In concluding this description of the Audit Methodology, this section provides some reflections from the Audit Team members on the External Audit process.

The level of support from the Icelandic Team must be recognised and commended. All information requested was provided quickly. Key documents, with some translation, were also made available. The appointment of a dedicated project manager for the fieldwork was an invaluable support. All logistical requests and practical arrangements were organised efficiently. As a result, the Audit Team received the support needed to allow them to conduct the Audit effectively.

In addition, all Team members noted and appreciated the Icelandic stakeholders' positive engagement, interest and high level of commitment to the Audit activities.

All respondents contributed enthusiastically during focus groups. They willingly shared their views and experiences, as well as their knowledge of research and other documentation that might be helpful to the Team. Everyone working with the Audit Team has been welcoming and given their time freely.

All face-to-face interviews were open and frank and respondents were willing to express their personal and professional ideas.

This open exchange of ideas – about concerns and challenges, as well as the positive aspects of the system – has made a significant contribution to the quality of the final Audit findings and recommendations.

During the Audit process, many stakeholders expressed the view that bringing different stakeholders together to discuss common issues and concerns was a positive step that was beneficial for everyone. It is hoped that this key Audit activity has laid the foundations for continuing dialogue that will support future developments.

The Audit process has clearly raised expectations regarding future action and possible change in both the short and longer term. It is hoped that the recommendations presented in the **Final Audit Report** will support the Icelandic Team to further develop the system of inclusive education, continuing with the next stages of audit cycle – Standards review, action planning and implementation.

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