
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



The Agency's work with member countries



The Agency Network

- National networks in 30 European countries: 27 countries from the European Union plus Norway, Iceland and Switzerland
- Iceland has been a full member country and participated in all Agency activities since 1996



Agency position

The ultimate vision for inclusive education systems is to ensure that all learners of any age are provided with meaningful, high-quality educational opportunities in their local community, alongside their friends and peers



Services to Countries

- Supporting country work through European level thematic analyses in relation to ET 2020 targets
 - Financing
 - Early school leaving
 - Inclusive early childhood education
 - Raising achievement for all learners
- Data provision for monitoring learners' rights and system effectiveness issues
- Country Policy Review and Analysis activities
- *Country Consultancy*



The External Audit in Iceland



Work on behalf of ...

- The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture
- Signatories to the External Audit Memorandum of Understanding:
 1. The Ministry of Welfare
 2. The Icelandic Association of Local Authorities
 3. The Teachers' Union
 4. The National Home and School Association
 5. The Head Teachers' Union of Upper-Secondary Schools



Standards-based Audit model

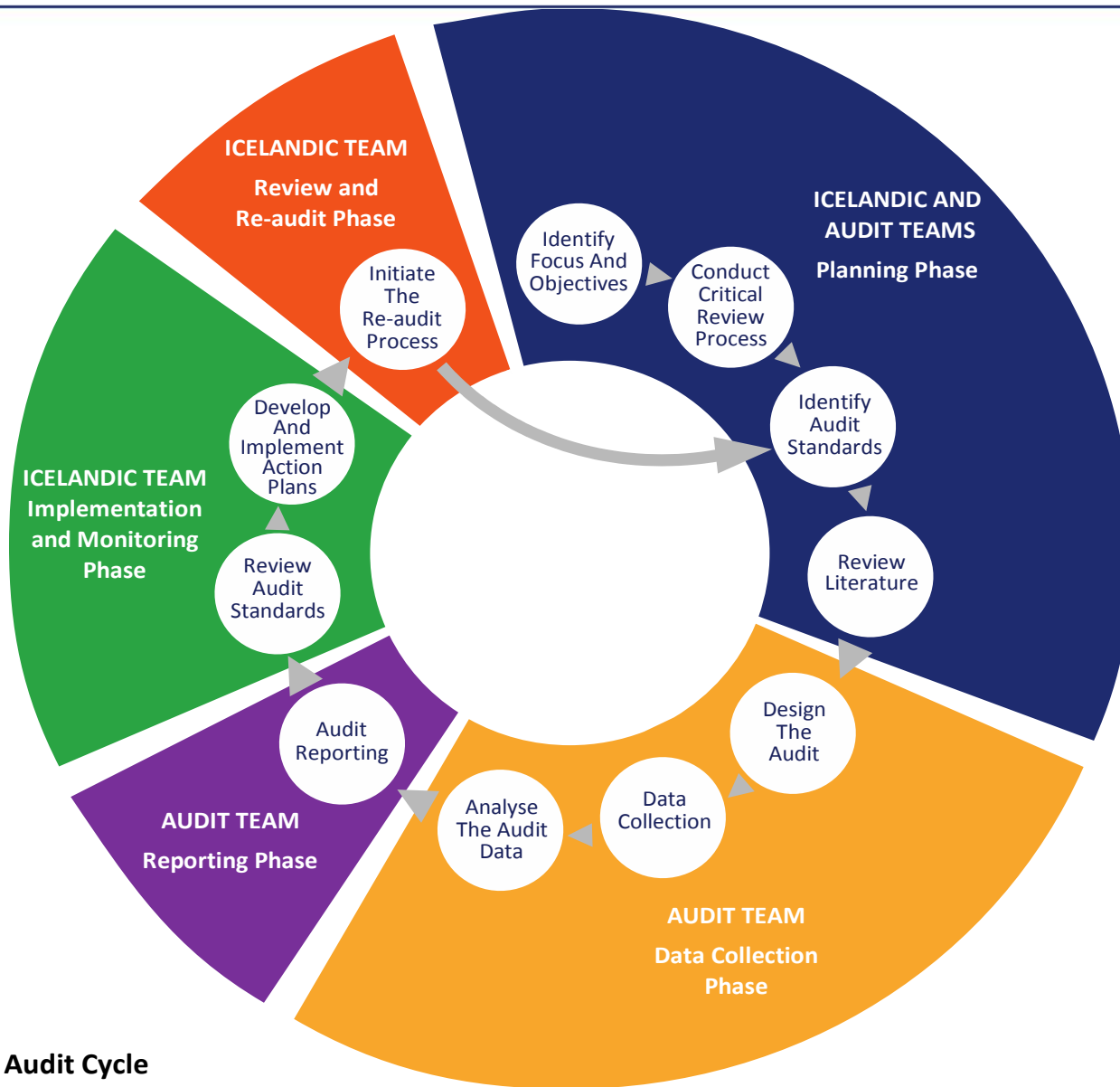
This approach involves two key tasks:

- 1 - The internal identification of desired standards for inclusive education by the country stakeholders
- 2 - External data collection by to evaluate current policy and practice against the agreed standards

The External Audit approach has the possibility to:

- Inform self-review at different levels of the system
- Identify areas for future country system development work





The Audit Cycle



Working with stakeholders from ...

- Pre-school through to the end of upper secondary education
- 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 (Municipalities Equalisation fund)
- Learners and their families; school staff; support services; school funders and operators; national teacher organisations and teacher education institutions; local and national level decision-makers



Fieldwork

- 27 focus groups involving 222 participants (including two held by Skype, one shortly after the main fieldwork period)
- 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



Geographical coverage

- *A key issue for the Icelandic Audit given the decentralised nature of the system*
 - Reykjavik and surrounding municipalities
 - Akureyri and surrounding municipalities
 - Egilsstaðir and surrounding municipalities
 - Árborg and surrounding municipalities
 - Borgarbyggð and surrounding municipalities



On-line Survey

- 4 versions targeting 4 different stakeholder groups: teachers, support staff, parents and school leaders
- Available in Icelandic and English
- 934 responses to the survey in total across all surveys and language versions:
 - 351 teachers
 - 422 parents
 - 57 support staff
 - 104 school leaders



Data Analysis

- 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:
 - issues underpinning key areas of policy and practice requiring attention
 - areas of strength that could be built upon when planning improvement
- The extent to which the Standards are being met



Audit Reporting Package

- The Final Report
- 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
- Executive summary in Icelandic and English



Main Audit Findings



Strengths within the system

- Stakeholders share the view that inclusive education is an important goal for economic and social well-being in Iceland
- There is a strong foundation of legislation and policy that is in line with international conventions relating to learners' rights
- All stakeholder groups – including parents – recognise the benefits of the curriculum framework built upon 'pillars' that encourage cross-curricular approaches to teaching and learning



-
- The degree of system flexibility means that there are opportunities for schools to innovate as well as develop and deliver ‘joined-up’ initiatives
 - Iceland’s general education system is relatively well-resourced - expenditure on education is higher than in other OECD countries
 - There is a comprehensive framework of criteria for quality education for use in internal and external evaluation in compulsory schools
 - There is 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



Do all stakeholders have a common understanding of inclusive education?

- 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



Does legislation and policy support equity 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



Are stakeholders enabled to implement policy for inclusive education?

- 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
- The achievement of this Standard is highly dependent upon the achievement of other standards proposed, in particular the effectiveness of support systems, funding mechanisms and governance and quality assurance procedures



Does the education system enable all stakeholders to be inclusive in their day-to-day work?

- 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 innovative 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



Is the resource allocation system effective, equitable and enabling?

- 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



Are educational governance and quality assurance processes effective?

- 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



Are stakeholders enabled through their professional training and development to implement inclusive education as a rights-based approach for all learners?

- 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



-
- 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

- 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*



Audit Recommendations



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

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 across all initial and continuing education and development pathways and opportunities



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



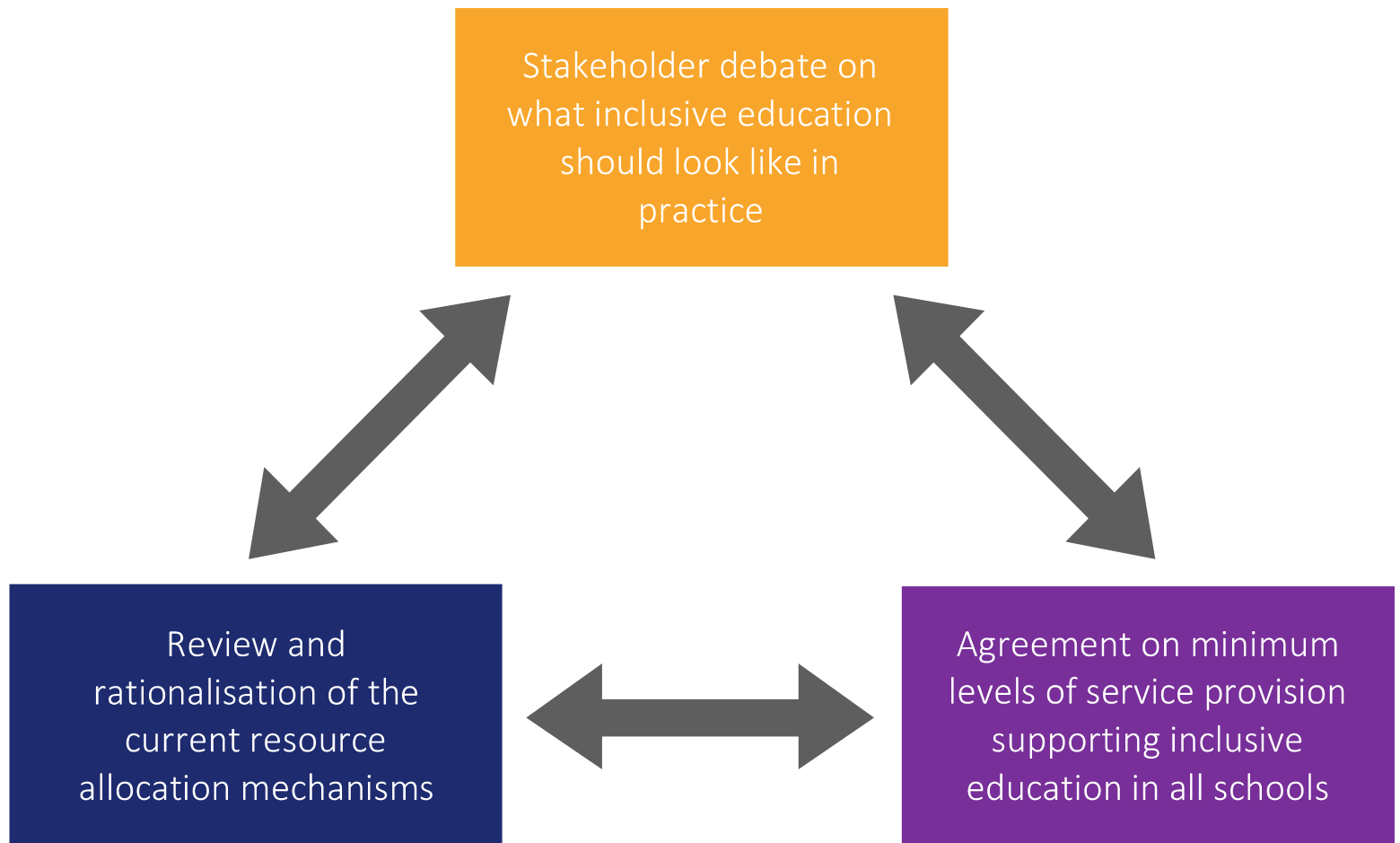
7. Develop the capacity of all pre-, compulsory and upper-secondary school stakeholders to think and act inclusively in their daily practice and build inclusive learning communities

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



Three inter-connected critical levers





Three inter-connected critical levers for system development



Initiate a widespread stakeholder debate on what inclusive education should look like in practice across all municipalities, school phases and schools

With a focus 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



Review and rationalisation of the current resource allocation mechanisms with a view to improving effectiveness and cost-effectiveness

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)



Initiate discussions leading to the agreement of minimum levels of service provision for supporting inclusive education in all schools

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 eye of the guest is keenest’

