EUronews 2 ON SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION

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Message from the Agency Director



Dear Readers,

In this issue we bring you some examples of new initiatives in our member countries, as well as information about the outcomes of some of our projects and other activities. I hope you will find the information interesting and useful!

The findings of an external evaluation of the Agency have just been published. The study demonstrates a dramatic increase in the Agency's impact in member countries as well as at the European level.

Most importantly, the Agency is seen as 'adding value' by member countries, representatives of the EC, and international agencies because it accomplishes tasks that could not be accomplished by member countries alone and are not a part of

other agencies' portfolios. This includes developing European-level metrics, indicators and recommendations; collecting and reporting data on special needs and inclusive education from member countries; and regularly convening professional meetings on inclusive and special needs education at the European level.

In November 2013, we are organising an international conference focusing on inclusive education in Europe – key messages for putting theory into practice. The conference will reflect upon key developments evidenced through Agency work with its member countries in the last decade and will mark the end of our 2007–2013 work programme and also the beginning of our new 2014–2020 multi-annual work programme. More information on the outcomes of the conference and our new multi-annual programme will be available in the next issue of EuroNews.

If you want to know more about the work of the Agency, I hope you will take the time to visit our website: www.european-agency.org. Here you can keep up to date with country data and recent legislation and policy initiatives across Europe and explore the investigations we are conducting for our member countries.

As ever, we are keen to receive your feedback. Please use the information at the back of this issue if you would like to contact us.



Cor J. W. Meijer Director





NEWS FROM THE AGENCY

ICT for Information Accessibility in Learning

The provision of accessible information on and for learning is crucial for enabling equity in learning. Providing inaccessible information creates an additional barrier for learners with disabilities or special needs.

The Accessible Information Provision for Lifelong Learning (i-access) Agency project (2011–2012), aimed to raise awareness on this issue and develop recommendations for policy-makers on accessible information provision for lifelong learning.

In the new ICT for Information Accessibility in Learning (ICT4IAL) follow-up project (2013–2015), the Agency aims to build on these recommendations and develop practical guidelines. This project is a multi-disciplinary network of European and international partners that represent both learning and ICT communities, funded by the European Commission under the Lifelong Learning Transversal Programme, Key Activity 3: Information and Communication Technologies. For this project the Agency has entered into an active partnership together with: European Schoolnet (EUN), the International Association of Universities (IAU), UNESCO, the DAISY Consortium and the Global Initiative for Inclusive ICTs (G3ict).

The ICT4IAL network partners have faced and considered the issue of accessible information in differing ways within their work with their member countries. The ICT4IAL initiative combines their different perspectives in an attempt to address these shared concerns in a way that will benefit information providers for education across Europe.



The project objectives are:

- knowledge exchange and networking;
- development and trialling of practical guidelines;
- reflection and evaluation upon implementation; and
- validation of guidelines.

As a first step, a Guideline Development Workshop took place in Portugal in June 2013, bringing together various stakeholders involved in providing and using accessible information for learning. The outcomes of this workshop will shape the guidelines developed within the project, which will be trialled within the work of the Agency, EUN and IAU.



For more information about the ICT4IAL project contact the Agency at **secretariat@european-agency.org**

The ICT4IAL project partners are:

- European Schoolnet http://www.eun.org
- the International Association of Universities http://www.iau-aiu.net
- UNESCO http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communicationand-information
- the DAISY Consortium http://www.daisy.org
- the Global Initiative for Inclusive ICTs http://www.g3ict.org



Organisation of Provision to Support Inclusive Education



• funding and resourcing – targeting support to meet the needs of learners with disabilities.

Project outputs include a literature review, country reports from participants on how provision is organised and evaluated, and study visit reports on provision in Sweden, Austria, Germany, Slovenia and Malta. Reports will be available on the thematic seminars to be held in autumn 2013 in the five visit sites. These will explore the factors that influence support for learners with disabilities in inclusive settings, taking into account different country contexts. Finally, a project synthesis report will draw together evidence from all project activities and present a series of recommendations for the organisation of provision and implementation of new practices to improve support for learners with disabilities in mainstream schools.

A secondary focus of the project is on change management, and a practical tool will also be produced to support policy-makers in moving towards more inclusive provision.

This project's key question is; how are systems of provision organised to meet the needs of learners identified as having disabilities under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) in inclusive settings within the compulsory school sector?

The Organisation of Provision to Support Inclusive Education project (2011–2014) focuses on the following themes, which were identified as priorities by Agency member countries and also by the initial literature review:

- inclusion as a quality issue the presence and participation of all learners in the school community enhances the quality of the educational experience;
- strengthening the capacity of mainstream schools to respond to diverse needs (including developing the role of specialist provision as resources to support the mainstream sector);
- collaboration and networking effective provision of educational and multi-agency support within the mainstream sector;



For more information about the project contact the Agency at **secretariat@european-agency.org** or visit the project web area.





Raising Achievement for All Learners – Quality in Inclusive Education



DANISH PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION 2012

An Agency survey carried out in 2010 among its member countries identified raising achievement for all learners as a key issue for investigation. In autumn 2011, the Agency was awarded a grant from the European Commission's Lifelong Learning Programme, Comenius, to fund the one-year Raising Achievement for All Learners (RA4AL) project.

The RA4AL project has drawn upon findings from Agency thematic project work and recent research as well as the outcomes of the RA4AL conference, planned in collaboration with the Danish Ministry of Education and the Odense municipal authorities and held in Odense, Denmark on 13–15 June 2012, as an official event under the Danish Presidency of the EU.

The conference was attended by three groups of experts: policy-makers for general compulsory sector education, and policy-makers and researchers in the field of inclusive education, who contributed to discussions on key issues raised in a position paper prepared for the conference.

The RA4AL project identified six themes as being critical in raising achievement:

- collaborative policy and practice;
- support for school and system leaders;
- inclusive accountability;
- personalisation through listening to learners;
- professional development for inclusive education;
- pedagogical approaches for all.

The one-year project ended in December 2012 and has received a very favourable report from the European Commission. The project outcomes will form the basis of a further three-year thematic project by the Agency.



Further information on the RA4AL project and all project outputs can be found on the RA4AL project web area.





Vocational Education and Training: Policy and Practice in the field of Special Needs Education



In the last few years there has been a visible shift at European level towards including people with special educational needs (SEN) and disabilities into the labour market. This can be seen both as a rights-based development and as a sound response by European policy-makers to the globalised competitive economy and the economic crisis of the past few years.

Both in individual member states and in the European institutions there is consensus that vocational education and training (VET) is the key if countries are to succeed in including a higher rate of people with SEN and disabilities into the labour market.

The Agency's three-year project (2010–2012) on Vocational Education and Training: Policy and Practice in the field of Special Needs Education focused on identifying and investigating the key aspects of VET for learners with SEN/disabilities aged between 14 and 25, with a clear link to employment opportunities. In particular, the project analysed 'what works' in VET for learners with SEN/disabilities, 'why it works' and 'how it works'.

Project outputs include a literature review, country reports and outcomes of 28 study visits, a summary report on VET policies and practice for learners with SEN, and European Patterns of Successful Practice in Vocational Education and Training, a synthesis report developed as a result of a coherent and comprehensive analysis of 28 VET practices.

The key outcome highlighted in the course of the project analysis is that what is good and efficient practice for learners with SEN/disabilities in VET and the transition to employment, is good practice for *all* learners. Consequently, recommendations based on the findings of this project will also be useful in VET and the transition to employment for all learners.

Four main areas on which the project outcomes build have been identified at various study visit examples. These areas are called 'patterns'.

Within these patterns, the following issues where VET systems require further improvement, were mentioned:

VET institution management pattern

School leadership needs to develop an inclusive policy,

where differences among learners are considered a 'normal' part of the educational culture, and to create an atmosphere of motivation and commitment. Effective leadership will be 'distributed', with a move away from a top-down approach towards teamwork and collaborative problem solving.

• Multidisciplinary teams with clear roles need to adopt a teamwork approach and co-operate with a high level of internal communication (peer coaching, informal discussions, collaborative problem solving, etc.) and external communication with other services.

Vocational education and training pattern

- Learner-centred approaches with regard to planning, goal setting and curriculum design need to be used in the VET learning process so that the curriculum, pedagogical methods and materials and assessment methods and goals are tailored to individual needs.
- •The learning process needs to use flexible approaches which allow for the development and implementation of individual plans. A good plan is regularly reviewed and it informs and is informed by a multidisciplinary team approach. Learners are involved throughout the individual planning process.
- Schools/VET institutions need to take action to prevent drop-outs in close co-operation with the local social services and to develop the necessary measures so that learners who become disengaged find new alternatives.
- VET programmes/courses need to be reviewed periodically, both internally (e.g. by validating them against recent labour market analyses) and/or externally (e.g. national agencies) in order to adapt to current and future skill needs.

Learners' pattern

- All staff need to put learners' abilities at the centre of their approaches and see opportunities rather than challenges. They should focus on what learners *can* do, not what they *cannot* do, and make all learners feel more confident and assertive.
- Success in VET and in the transition to the open labour market is unlikely if the learners' individual wishes and expectations are neglected. These wishes and





expectations need to be respected and reflected in the transition process.

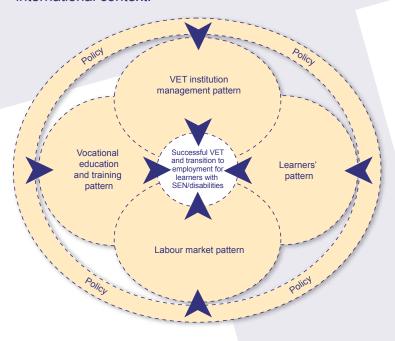
• The VET institution needs to develop partnerships and networks with local employers to ensure close co-operation in providing supervised practical training of learners and in finding employment after graduation.

Labour market pattern

- Schools/VET institutions need to establish and maintain resilient connections with local employers over time. These connections are based upon the companies' growing confidence that they receive adequate support whenever they need it during the process.
- The transition from education to employment needs to be backed up by adequate support during the transition phase. Career counsellors/officers need to inform learners about employment possibilities, offer them support with job applications, inform and support employers and facilitate contact between both parties.
- In order to have a successful transition phase that leads to sustainable jobs in the open labour market, follow-up activities need to be undertaken by competent staff for as long as required, in order to meet the needs of young graduates and employers.

The final VET project conference was held in Cyprus in November 2012, organised within the framework of the

Cypriot Presidency of the EU. Policy-makers and experts from 28 European countries met in Nicosia to discuss the project's main outcomes, draw conclusions and place the outcomes in the wider European and international context.





The main project outputs are available on the project web area.

Data Collection Development Work

Every two years the Agency collects data on special needs education (SNE) in its member countries from its member country representatives. All data refers to pupils officially identified as having special educational needs (SEN), as defined in the country in question. Information collected within the Agency's current work suggests that the data on learners with SEN in segregated settings is currently the most comparable across countries and that this quantitative data can be used in indicating certain trends in provision and movements towards inclusion. However, it is clear that indicators more relevant to policy would not only be comparable — both among countries and within longitudinal data collection work — but would focus on participation in inclusive settings, rather than segregated provision.

In 2012, the European Commission provided additional funding for the Agency to develop its quantitative data collection work by building upon existing Agency data collection work in countries and using the final findings of the Mapping the Implementation of Policy for Inclusive Education project as a starting point.

These developments will inform the Education and Training 2020 strategic objectives and the

implementation of Article 24 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

In relation to the suggested indicator for inclusive education, work has been conducted with all Agency member countries in order to agree on what quantitative data should be collected, what data collection methods should be used and how data should be analysed and presented. A workshop was held in Brussels in December 2012 for national data collection experts to collect the necessary inputs from countries.

Activities in 2013 focus on work with a small number of Agency countries to explore the feasibility of the indicator and trial methods for systematically collecting data linked to the indicator. In late 2013, an additional workshop will be organised to present information and findings from the country visits and agree on plans for actual data collection work from 2014 onwards.



For more information about the data collection development work contact the Agency at secretariat@european-agency.org



NEWS FROM AGENCY MEMBER COUNTRIES

Denmark: Developments in Special Needs Education and Inclusion

The new legislation on special needs education and inclusion passed in Denmark last year entered the implementation phase in schools in 2013.

The publication of a **report about inclusive education** from the Danish Clearinghouse for Educational Research at Aarhus University is highly significant. This report, which was commissioned by the Danish Ministry of Children and Education (MCE) and is to be published in English in 2013, is remarkable because it is based upon systematic evaluation of international scientific effect research. It provides valuable information and pinpoints the most important conditions for successful inclusion of students with special needs in mainstream schools. The report gives practical guidelines for administration and strategies for increasing inclusion in schools.

The MCE has established a **task force** for supporting municipalities in developing values, strategies and tools to increase inclusion in schools and leisure activities. This service is offered free of charge and has been in demand from many municipalities and schools. It will cover about one-fifth of all municipalities this year. Its functions include providing advice and guidance about policy, strategies, methods, professional competences and development.

Another new initiative is the establishment of a Resource Centre for Inclusion and Special Needs Education, which will provide information on reports and results and initiate new research and development concerning inclusion and special needs education. This organisation receives advice from a board comprising researchers, heads of schools, teachers and students with special needs. The board ensures that the issues raised are relevant in order to maintain the focus on the practical implications of research reports.

A major area involves follow-up on the developments arising from the new legislation. Ministries and the Union of Municipal Councils are obliged to carry out follow-up and secure reliable statistics on developments in inclusion and special needs education. The aim is to have at least 96% of students in mainstream schools by 2015. Information about the degree of segregated students in each of the 98 municipalities is now publicly accessible online.



For more information on the developments contact the Agency's National Co-ordinator in Denmark, Finn Christensen: finn.christensen@uvm.dk

Iceland: Seminar on Inclusive Education



The Icelandic Ministry of Education, Science and Culture organised a one-day seminar in Reykjavík on 5 March 2013 on inclusive education and support services, with the participation of around 200 stakeholders, mainly representatives working in compulsory schools. The focus of the seminar was on the education of students with special needs and a debate on the inclusive education policy. This policy has been implemented in pre-primary schools and compulsory schools, as well as in regulations and general national curricula.

During the seminar the implementation of the policy was discussed from various points of view, reflecting on current challenges, trends and opportunities, including

professional services and support systems for schools in Iceland. In recent years some parents have questioned the inclusive education policy and asked for a better opportunity to choose special schools for their children. Some teachers have also complained about the lack of support services.

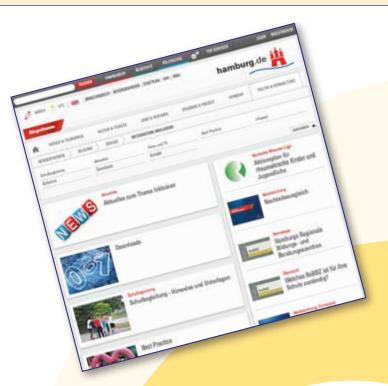
Representatives of the Agency presented at the seminar on the topic of international developments in inclusive education, major challenges, trends and opportunities. They also participated in panel discussions about inclusive education together with the Minister of Education in Iceland, chairs of the Teachers' Union and Parents' Union and a representative from the National Association of the Municipalities. The discussions have been very positive and constructive, which provides a good basis for the continuing efforts of Icelandic authorities to develop the policy and practice of inclusive education in co-operation with all stakeholders.



For more information on the seminar visit the website of the Icelandic Ministry of Education, Science and Culture or contact the Agency's Representative Board member in Iceland, Guðni Olgeirsson: gudni.olgeirsson@mrn.stjr.is



Germany: Inclusive Education in Hamburg's Schools



'Inclusive Education in Hamburg's Schools' is the resolution adopted by the Hamburg Parliament in the spring of 2012 in order to put inclusive learning into practice in all schools.

The most important aspects of the resolution are as follows:

- Article 24 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities serves as the basis of the concept, ensuring access to inclusive, high-quality and free education.
- In line with Section 12 of the Hamburg School Law, the parents of all children and adolescents with special educational needs are free to choose whether they attend a mainstream school or a special school.
- Bringing the traditional means of special education and the new form of inclusive education together in a consistent structure and reshaping the panorama of schools for special education.
- Systemic resource allocation based on the social indices of schools for special education in the fields of learning, language and emotional and social development, as well as child-related allocation for pupils with special educational needs in the fields of visual perception, auditory perception and

communication, mental development, physical and motor development and autism.

- High-quality special education diagnostic assessment and special educational planning as the basis of any special educational intervention.
- Heterogeneity and diversity as an opportunity for enrichment for any learning group and educational offers in terms of internal differentiation on the basis of tried and tested educational conceptions.
- Ensuring extensive further vocational training and consulting, as well as quality-assured special educational support.
- Establishing regional educational and consulting centres with the following four core tasks:
 - consultation and support for schools, teaching staff, pupils and parents;
 - support for all school types as well as for parents in all matters relating to special education and inclusive education;
 - guaranteeing a long-term educational offer for pupils with special educational needs in the fields of learning, language and emotional and social development based on parental wishes;
 - ensuring the provision of temporary learning groups for pupils who due to their particular life issues are not able to learn in their regular classes.

It is intended to take the first and crucial steps on the challenging path to inclusive schooling slowly and surely.

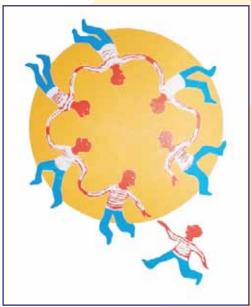


For more information on this article visit the following website: http://www.hamburg.de/integration-inklusion or contact Dr Angela Ehlers: angela.ehlers@bsb.hamburg.de or the Agency's National Co-ordinator in Germany, Ulrike Suntheim: suntheim@em.uni-frankfurt.de



Recent Developments in Norway

New Strategy Proposal for Continuing Education in the Educational and Psychological Counselling Service



Graphic image 'Inn i varmen' © Eli Hovdenak

Increasing the skill set of employees at the Educational and Psychological Counselling Service (PPT) is one of the principal measures outlined in the Report to the Storting no. 18. The government's contribution to improving the quality of this service is to help implement a continuing education strategy for the service's employees. The strategy targets county and municipal employees who work in the service, as well as the service's leadership. The strategy aims to encourage the Educational and Psychological Counselling Service to engage more actively in providing guidance, implementing preventive measures and collaborating more closely with daycare centres and schools.

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Information about the Educational and Psychological Counselling Service is available on the website of the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training.

Queen Sonja's School Award for Equality and Inclusion

Queen Sonja's School Award is awarded each year to a school that has excelled in promoting inclusion and equality. Her Majesty Queen Sonja herself established this award, which was first presented in 2006.

The award criteria state that the winning school must:

- make long-term, systematic and knowledgebased efforts to improve its pupils' learning environment;
- practise equality and inclusion in such a way that each pupil feels appreciated within an



Photography © Tone M. Kornerud

environment that promotes co-participation, well-being and community spirit;

• be characterised by positive relationships both among pupils and between pupils and staff and by close co-operation between staff and parents.

Equality means that each pupil should feel that they are treated in an equal and dignified manner. Inclusion, which encompasses more than the related concept of integration, means that each pupil should feel that they are an appreciated participant in the school community. According to three head teachers at schools that have won the School Award: 'Schools are charged with more than teaching our young to read or do maths. Social skills are just as important in order to do well in life.'



A list of schools which have previously won the award and further background information can be found on the award's website.



Portugal: The DAISY Project and Web Accessibility



The DAISY Project is the result of an agreement among the Education Department (Portuguese Ministry of Education and Science) and telecommunications and assistive technology companies, including a school publisher.

The DAISY format was already used to provide schoolbooks on CD-ROMs to pupils with special educational needs. The current agreement consists of sponsoring DAISY licenses so pupils can install them on their computers, thus allowing them to read any document in this format.

The Ministry of Education and Science is considering using this format in examinations. At local level, the ICT Resources Centres for Special Needs are identifying all the pupils who are potential users of this application, in order to inform and train the respective teachers for its dissemination. A webinar was produced with the collaboration of a DAISY format specialist in order to promote

the use of the product and as a resource for future training sessions.

Another initiative, within the framework of the National Strategy for Disability, involves raising awareness about web accessibility and ensuring that school webpages are accessible.

A working session took place on 15 January with the collaboration of the Access Unit of the Foundation for Science and Technology, which brought together the ICT Resources Centres for Special Needs as well as teachers in charge of maintaining school webpages. The focus was on the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0, site accessibility evaluation and how to change HTML code to overcome barriers. Future training sessions will take place at local level during the year, organised by the Centres and with the support of the Access Unit.



For more information on this project contact the Agency's Representative Board member in Portugal, Filomena Pereira: filomena.pereira@dgidc.min-edu.pt

Sweden: Education Reforms for Young People with Intellectual Disabilities

A reform of upper secondary school education for young people with intellectual disabilities is currently underway in Sweden. The objective of the reform is to better prepare the pupils for working life and to give them a solid foundation for their personal development and active participation in society.

The new upper secondary school for individuals with intellectual disabilities consists of both national and individual programmes. There are nine national programmes, with various professional specialisations. Each has its own goals, decided at national level, describing what the pupils will be able to study. Individual programmes and their planning are based entirely on each pupil's needs and circumstances.

The education consists of theoretical and practical as well as vocational subjects. Each subject's goals, content and knowledge demands are decided at national level. Upon completion, the pupils receive a certificate that explains what the education consisted of and what grades they achieved.

All of the national programmes include a segment where each pupil spends at least 22 weeks at one or more places of work. The idea is for the tasks carried out at these

workplaces to be somehow connected with the programme the pupil is undertaking. Each pupil is assigned a supervisor at the workplace. At the end of this segment of their education, the pupil completes a project that shows that they can perform common work tasks that are encompassed in the programme field. Pupils in individual programmes who meet the prerequisites can also participate in workplace training during parts of their education.

Facts about upper secondary schools for individuals with intellectual disabilities in Sweden

Upper secondary school for people with intellectual disabilities is a four-year educational programme for young people aged 16 to 20 who have intellectual disabilities or an acquired brain injury. The programme's goals and content are adapted to these young people's disabilities. In 2012, about 9,000 pupils in Sweden attended upper secondary school for individuals with intellectual disabilities.



For more information, contact Peter Gröndahl, Director of Education, The Swedish National Agency for Education: peter.grondahl@skolverket.se



United Kingdom (Scotland): Improving Communication in the Field of Additional Support Needs (ASN) – Communication Matters

It is no surprise that there are sometimes disagreements about the best way of meeting children's additional support needs. This is because, by definition, a child with additional support needs requires something that is different from or additional to the type of educational provision which is normally provided.

Although the Scottish Government wants to include as many children as possible in mainstream schools, some children may flourish in a special school which may be independent, grant-aided or run by the local authority. Additional services and different types of education can be expensive, and local authorities obviously have to ensure that resources are allocated fairly. Particularly at a time of reductions in public spending, local authorities and schools may not always be able to afford the type of provision which parents believe best meets their child's needs.

Frequently, responding to children with additional support needs does not involve great expense, but rather thinking in a creative way about doing things slightly differently. It is essential for parents and practitioners to work together to ensure that children with additional support needs get the best possible education. Successful communication between parents practitioners is always based on positive engagement and mutual respect. Creating atmosphere where positive engagement is the norm will benefit all parents and children, producing the type of nurturing environment where learning flourishes. In order to help practitioners and parents think about ways of avoiding and resolving conflict in Scotland, the Centre for Research in Education Inclusion and Diversity at the University of Edinburgh, Resolve Mediation, based at Children in Scotland, and Common Ground Mediation collaborated in the production of a best practice guide, published in 2012.

This publication:

- summarises key aspects of the legislation, including ways of resolving disagreements;
- sets the Additional Support Needs legislation within the wider educational and child welfare framework:
- describes the key principles of parents' and children's rights which are reflected in the policy and legislation;
- explores the underlying principles of good communication between parents and practitioners;
- discusses parents' and practitioners' experiences of different dispute resolution routes (mediation, adjudication, tribunal) and explores how these can be used to resolve difficulties;
- uses case studies to illustrate what happens when children and young people, parents and practitioners communicate effectively, and what happens when things go wrong;
- suggests changes which are needed to ensure that the rights of children and young people with additional support needs and their parents are realised in practice.

The report's authors are Sheila Riddell, Morag Steven, Elisabet Weedon and Sandra Mitchell.



For more information, contact **Prof. Sheila Ridd**ell: **sriddel1@staffmail.ed.ac.uk**

Production information

Extracts from this newsletter are permitted provided a clear reference to the source is given. Electronic versions are available on the Agency's website in the following languages: Czech, Danish, Dutch, English, Estonian, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Hungarian, Icelandic, Italian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Maltese, Norwegian, Polish, Portuguese, Slovak, Slovene, Spanish and Swedish

http://www.european-agency.org/news/euronews

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