

LISBON DECLARATION

Young People's Views on Inclusive Education

On the 17th of September 2007, within the framework of the Portuguese Presidency of the European Union, the Portuguese Ministry of Education organised together with the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education a European Hearing: 'Young Voices: Meeting Diversity in Education'.

The proposals agreed upon by young people with special educational needs from 29 countries¹, attending secondary, vocational and higher education have resulted in the 'Lisbon Declaration – Young People's Views on Inclusive Education'. This Declaration covers what the young people presented in Lisbon in the plenary session at the Assembleia da República concerning their rights, needs, challenges and recommendations in order to achieve successful inclusive education.

The Declaration is within the scope of previous official European and International documents in the field of special needs education such as: the 'Council Resolution concerning integration of children and young people with disabilities into ordinary systems of education' (EC, 1990); the 'Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education' (UNESCO, 1994); the 'Charter of Luxembourg' (Helios programme, 1996); the 'Council Resolution on equal opportunities for pupils and students with disabilities in education and training' (EC, 2003); the 'Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities' (United Nations, 2006).

1. The Young People agreed on their RIGHTS:

- We have the right to be respected and not to be discriminated against. We do not want sympathy; we want to be respected as future adults who will have to live and work in a normal environment.
- We have the right to the same opportunities as everyone else, but with the necessary support to meet our needs. No one's needs should be ignored.
- We have the right to make our own decisions and choices. Our voice needs to be heard.
- We have the right to live independently. We also want to have a family and we want to have a house adapted to our needs. Many of us want to have the possibility to study at a university. We also want to work and we do not want to be separated from other people without disabilities.
- Everyone in society needs to be aware of, understand and respect our rights.

2. The Young People expressed clear views on the main IMPROVEMENTS they have experienced in their education:

- Generally we have received satisfactory support in our education, but more progress needs to be made.
- The accessibility of buildings is improving. Mobility issues and the accessibility of the built environment are more and more a topic of discussion and debate.
- Disability is becoming more visible in society.

¹ Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and United Kingdom.

- Computer technology is improving and well-structured digital books are available.

3. The Young People highlighted CHALLENGES and NEEDS:

- Accessibility needs are different for different people. There are different accessibility barriers in education and in society for people with different special needs, for example:
 - During lessons and exams some of us need more time;
 - Sometimes we need personal assistants in our classes;
 - We need to have access to adapted materials at the same time as our classmates.
- Free choice of study topics is sometimes limited by accessibility of buildings, insufficient technology and accessibility of materials (equipment, books).
- We need subjects and skills that are meaningful for us and for our future life.
- We need good counselling throughout our school education regarding what is possible for us to do in the future based upon our individual needs.
- There is still a lack of knowledge about disability. Teachers, other pupils and some parents sometimes have a negative attitude towards us. Non-disabled people should know that they can ask a disabled person her/himself whether help is needed or not.

4. The Young People expressed their views on INCLUSIVE EDUCATION:

- It is very important to give everyone the freedom to choose where they want to be educated.
- Inclusive education is best if the conditions are right for us. This means the necessary support, resources and trained teachers should be available. Teachers need to be motivated, to be well informed about and understand our needs. They need to be well trained, ask us what we need and to be well co-ordinated among themselves during all the school years.
- We see a lot of benefits in inclusive education: we acquire more social skills; we live wider experiences; we learn about how to manage in the real world; we need to have and interact with friends with and without special needs.
- Inclusive education with individualised, specialised support is the best preparation for higher education. Specialised centres would be of help to support us and to inform universities properly about the help we require.
- Inclusive education is mutually beneficial to us and to everyone.

The Young People CONCLUDED:

We are the ones to build our future. We need to remove barriers inside ourselves and inside other people without disabilities. We have to grow beyond our disability – then the world will accept us in a better way.

Lisbon, September 2007

The production of this document has been made possible through support from the Agency member countries as well as the DG Education, Training and Culture of the European Commission
http://europa.eu.int/comm/dgs/education_culture/index_en.htm

