# **Video Talk 4: Competence-based education in Europe today**

Welcome to this session. Earlier in this module we heard about the European competence framework which refers to ‘key competences’. This concept has been adopted by all European education systems, but the specific terms used, and the exact content of the set of competences, varies across countries. Depending on the country and context, legal, policy and curricular documents make reference to core competences for example, key capacities (as in Scotland ), basic skills (as in Spain) or key skills (as in Ireland); and other similar terms are also in use.

Several European countries, including Austria, Bulgaria, the Flemish Community of Belgium, Finland, France, Norway, Spain, Portugal and Poland, have introduced new legislation or amended existing legislation to set out goals and frameworks for integrating key competences into school education. Most European countries have also introduced key competences and related learning outcomes into their national curricula for compulsory education, during the last decade. For example, France introduced competence-based education in 2005 through the ‘socle commun’, a common core curriculum, comprising 7 competences, largely in line with the European key competences. A new education act, which confirms a new common core for knowledge, competences and now also culture, was adopted in July 2013. In 2006 Spain published its Organic Act on Education which specifically mentioned 8 basic competences as the building blocks of the Spanish school curriculum. This has been accompanied by a national programme introduced by the Ministry of Education in collaboration with 12 of Spain’s Autonomous Communities, which aims at consolidating the integration of key competences in the curriculum. In countries, including Finland and Sweden, where a competence-based approach has in fact been in place since the mid-1990s, recent or current education reform is re-emphasizing the centrality of key competences in the new curricula to be introduced in the near future. Therefore key competences have been and still are the focus of educational reform. However, the situation across Europe is rather varied, with only some countries and regions having launched overarching strategies fostering the development of all or most of the key competences, including Spain, Poland, Lithuania and Austria. In the absence of a national strategy, most other European countries have established centrally or regionally coordinated initiatives to promote specific key competences.

While no country has made a complete shift to competence-based education, several countries have made significant progress. In addition to introducing legal and curricular frameworks for key competences, countries have used various strategies to foster a competence-based approach in the classroom. These include innovative partnerships, pilot projects, the monitoring and evaluation of new initiatives, dedicated funding and capacity building. Let’s take a look at some of these strategies by listening to stakeholders who have been involved in key competence initiatives, featured in case study videos produced by KeyCoNet – the European Network on Key Competences in School Education.

Norway’s Cultural Rucksack Programme is a good example of a national initiative which has used an innovative partnership between the educational and cultural sectors as well as dedicated funding to ensure all young people in Norway have the opportunity to engage with high quality, professional arts and culture. The programme has secured funding from the support of surplus national lottery funds. (INSERT VIDEO CLIP).

Another example of a large-scale initiative which engages schools with the broader community, is the Global Enterprize project, which teams up students with professionals from the business sector. (INSERT VIDEO CLIP).

Some countries have invested in intensive professional development when introducing new competence-based initiatives, like Project Maths in Ireland, which we will be hearing about in the next video. Each pilot school involved in Project Maths was allocated a regional officer to provide teachers with in-school training to support them in this new approach to teaching, learning and assessment. Portugal is an example of a country with a specific initiative aimed at developing teachers’ ICT skills so that they can in turn develop their students’ digital competence. The EduScratch initiative promotes the educational use of the programming tool Scratch, which helps develop students’ computational thinking. Teachers were offered in-service training to support their use of the tool. (INSERT VIDEO CLIP).

Some education systems have also provided centrally-developed tools to help teachers implement this new approach to teaching and learning. Last year Spain published a didactic guide for teachers to support their integration of key competences in the classroom. Poland has also recently developed a teaching tools database which includes a bank of complex ready-to-use tasks which teachers can use to develop their students’ critical thinking and reasoning skills. The tools database was created to support teachers in implementing the new competence-based curriculum introduced in 2008, which prioritizes the development of students’ problem-solving skills. (INSERT VIDEO CLIP).

We recently launched an online survey about stakeholders’ experiences of competence-based education across Europe. We got responses from over 3, 000 teachers, around 800 students, 700 parents and 500 head teachers. While the results highlight some important issues, we should be careful in our interpretation of them, as the survey was not based on random sampling and country representation was uneven. The good news is that there is almost universal agreement among teachers, students, parents and head teachers that key competences are indeed important for helping people succeed in learning and life, and progress has been made in defining and integrating key competences in national curricula. However, if competence-based education is to become a reality, improvement is needed in terms of collaboration and communication among stakeholders. Only 18% of teachers indicated that their school had engaged with the broader community to facilitate the integration of competence-based learning. Similarly only 21% of parents stated that they had participated in discussions about competence-based education, while only 65% of students said that their teachers had explained the purpose and goals of key competences to them. A participative approach involving communication with all key stakeholders, is essential to building broad support for new competence-based reforms. School leaders play an important role in communicating the objectives of the new approach to teachers, parents, learners and the wider community.

Remember that you can access further reading and related resources to this session, including the full versions of the videos you saw, from our course library. We also encourage you to visit the course forum where you can discuss any of the issues mentioned in this session, and exchange with your peers about your own country experiences of developing key competences in schools.