Case Study

Curricular Integration of Key Competences Programme (Combas)

Spain

Health & Consumers
Santé & Consommateurs

European Commission
Key Competence Network on School Education
European Schoolnet
KeyCoNet (2012 – 2014) is a European policy network focused on identifying and analyzing initiatives on the implementation of key competences in primary and secondary school education.

On the basis of the evidence collected through literature reviews, case studies, peer learning visits, country overviews, videos and exchanges between network members, the project’s final objective is to produce recommendations for policy and practice regarding the enablers and obstacles to a holistic implementation of key competence development.

Among KeyCoNet’s current 18 partners in 10 countries (Austria, Belgium, Estonia, Finland, France, Ireland, Norway, Portugal, Spain and Sweden), are Ministries of Education/related agencies, universities/research institutes, European organizations, and practice related partners. KeyCoNet also has a growing number of associate members from other countries and stakeholder groups, steadily increasing our network’s scope and influence.
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ABOUT THIS CASE STUDY

Part of a series
This case study is part of a series of case studies being produced by KeyCoNet, to highlight various initiatives concerning key competence development, taking place across Europe. Each case study analyses the initiative’s implementation strategies in depth, and will feed into the network’s recommendations for policy and practice on how to implement a key competence approach in schools most effectively.

How and why was this case selected?
Each year the KeyCoNet network identifies initiatives concerning key competence development across Europe, and a case note is produced providing basic information about each one. Following this, network partners participate in an online selection according to pre-established criteria, as well as an in-depth face-to-face discussion, in order to select the most interesting initiatives to develop into case studies.

The focus of the Spanish case study is Spain’s national project, ComBas: Proyecto de consolidación de las competencias básicas como elemento esencial del currículo – project for the consolidation of key competences as an essential element of the curriculum. This initiative was considered particularly interesting by the network as it is one of the few national programmes with a holistic approach to developing key competences in Europe. The project targets all members of the education community at all stages of compulsory education (students, teachers, management teams, families, etc.) and its holistic approach includes: supporting competence-based curriculum development so as to increase students’ level of competences, develop their creativity, and prevent and reduce school failure by promoting lifelong learning; improving and updating initial teacher training in primary and secondary education to include the teaching and learning of key competences; financially supporting the development of projects seeking to consolidate a key competence approach in the curriculum; and evaluating the implementation of the programme and its impact.

Which methodology has been used?
Case studies are the main tool used by the network to probe beneath the surface of each selected initiative and provide a rich context for understanding the implementation issues involved. The initiatives selected by the network differ in many ways, according to the nature of the key competences addressed, the implementation process used, the number of students and teachers directly concerned, the type and number of actors involved, and the duration and stage of development etc. A multiple-case study design, whereby each initiative generates its own case study, but uses one single prism for a common analysis, was therefore chosen. This method makes it possible to explore diversity, as well as the enablers and obstacles to the initiative’s implementation, as perceived by the initiators and stakeholders interviewed. Moreover, through a multiple-case study design it is possible to identify choices, strategies, characteristics, situations or contexts leading to success or failure in a recurrent manner. This will particularly contribute to fuelling the set of recommendations for policy and practice at institutional, local, regional, national and European level, for the effective implementation of key competences in school education.

Each case study included interviews with the initiative’s coordinators and stakeholders, as well as desk research. In some cases, where considered feasible and fruitful, focus groups were also organized. For this particular case study, relevant data has been collected and analysed in order to assess the possibilities, problems and alternatives of the COMBAS Programme. Official documents, training materials, the work carried out by schools and the records of the informative and training meetings were all analysed. Direct contact was also made with various sources: school coordinators, teachers and head teachers of participating schools, coordinators and members of technical and pedagogical regional teams, and pedagogical coordinators and organisers of the programme.
### Basic Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country:</th>
<th>Spain</th>
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| Title of initiative: | **[ES]** Programa de Integración Curricular de las Competencias Básicas (COMBAS)  
**[EN]** Curricular Integration of Key Competences (COMBAS) |
| Coordinator/Organization: | Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport |
| Key competences addressed: | **[ES]** comunicación lingüística  
**[EN]** linguistic communication  
**[ES]** matemática  
**[EN]** mathematics  
**[ES]** conocimiento e interacción con el mundo físico  
**[EN]** awareness of and interaction with the physical world  
**[ES]** tratamiento de la información y competencia digital  
**[EN]** information processing and digital competence  
**[ES]** competencia social y ciudadana  
**[EN]** social competence and citizenship  
**[ES]** competencia cultural y artística  
**[EN]** cultural and artistic competence  
**[ES]** aprender a aprender  
**[EN]** learning to learn  
**[ES]** autonomía personal  
**[EN]** personal autonomy |
| Type of initiative and channels used for implementation (e.g., curriculum reform introduced through legislation etc.): | In-service teacher training in schools |
| Partners: | Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports, educational authorities of 15 autonomous communities, 150 schools. |
| Scope: | Teacher and school level  
(student/teacher/school level; local/regional/national) |
| Learning context: | Formal |
| School education levels: | Primary and secondary  
(primary, lower secondary, upper secondary) |
| Target groups: | Schools and teachers |
| Time frame: | 2010/2011 |
**SUMMARY**

The Curricular Integration of Key Competences (COMBAS) Programme was launched in 2010-2011 by the Spanish Ministry of Education as an in-service training initiative that aimed at helping teachers incorporate the development of students’ key competences in their planning, teaching and assessment, and to institutionalize key competence-based pedagogies in schools. The programme was based on previous school-based initiatives organized by the Atlántida Innovation Group – a non-profit educational organization – after the inclusion of key competences in the national curriculum in the 2006 reform. Five thousand teachers from 150 primary and secondary schools participated in its first edition, within a national collaboration frame between the central administration and the educational authorities of 15 autonomous communities. The strategy of the initiative consisted in the training of one coordinator per participating school, who received instruction in a monthly meeting in Madrid and afterwards acted as school coordinator, facilitating his or her colleagues’ learning and organizing their group activities. This cascade approach with horizontal expansion at school level was perceived as very helpful to support teachers in the incorporation of key competences in their teaching.

The programme continued in 2012/13, and similar initiatives are being developed also at a regional level by many autonomous communities, mainly Extremadura, Andalusia (PICBA), La Rioja, Galicia, Valencia and Navarra. Currently, the publication of a COMBAS guide and different digital tools are providing educational material to facilitate the theoretical-practical debate about the COMBAS model and its contextualisation.

**INTRODUCTION**

By including key competences in the compulsory curriculum in Spain through the *Organic Law of Education (LOE)* in 2006, a need was created to make this curricular change a reality in educational practices within compulsory education in a decentralised country with 17 autonomous communities. In view of this challenge, the Atlántida Innovation Group, a non-profit organisation that has been working in the field of educational innovation in Spain since 1998, has searched for possible answers at a regional level, generating a working model1, and creating collaborative spaces between curricular integration proposals put forward by experts and practice in a group of schools. The achievements of this model in various regions led to the Ministry of Education accepting it as the official approach in 2010/11, developing a pilot model in collaboration with autonomous communities. This was how the *Curricular Integration of Key Competences Programme (COMBAS)* came about, focused on teacher training and evaluation in schools.

COMBAS provides a platform including:

- Theoretical-practical evaluation focused on the fulfilment of teaching tasks related to the inclusion of key competences in curriculum development.
- Teacher training through a *top-down* process between national evaluation, in situ monitoring and adaptation at a regional and local level and the *horizontal* coordination of teachers for the fulfilment and delivery of the proposed tasks.
- A document database with bibliographic analysis by teams of experts.

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A digital portal for the exchange of documents, materials, proposals and tasks and to raise the visibility of good practices and useful initiatives.

This case study is focused on the first year of the aforementioned programme, in which 150 primary and secondary schools from 15 autonomous communities have participated.

1. Contextual Influence

Which contextual factors have been perceived as enablers for the implementation of the initiative, and why?

The first year of COMBAS became meaningful in view of the situation that, despite the fact that key competences were included in the *Organic Law of Education* some years earlier, there were still no curriculum guidelines for their development in classrooms. Therefore, it was able to provide solutions to this absence and, to some degree, to a certain culture of complaining and conservative criticism that characterised educational reforms in Spain. Several contextual factors supported its implementation:

- **The legal framework of regional cooperation concerning education between the central government and autonomous communities:** this enabled the implementation of COMBAS in 15 communities (out of a total of 17) and 2 autonomous cities.

- **Coordinated work between teams from different educational organisations** (the Ministry of Education, regional educational authorities and schools): this facilitated shared responsibility in order to achieve COMBAS objectives.

- **Experience related to the inclusion of COMBAS coordinators in the dynamic of each school:** with advice from the Atlántida Innovation Group, they contributed their experience to the implementation of COMBAS: a network of 30 schools based around a permanent teacher training centre in Alzira, in the Autonomous Community of Valencia (2009); various networks coordinated by the regional authorities of the Canary Islands, Zarago-
za, Huelva and Extremadura, reaching a total of 250 schools (from 2007); a network of 23 La Compañía de María schools, a private educational organisation (2008); and a local network in El Hierro (the Canary Islands) with the participation of all the schools on the island, family associations and the civil community as a whole (2009).

• **Spanish schools organizational schemes that provided teachers with time for curriculum coordination:** this facilitated teamwork for the fulfilment of COMBAS tasks.

• **The possibility of organising training in each school with the support of leadership from COMBAS coordinators and the external collaborative networks.** The sources consulted indicated that one of the main achievements of the programme was to make clear the need for educational authorities to understand that, in order to make legislation a reality, teacher training actions were required and that, in order for these to work, it was essential to improve leadership in schools and promote collaborative networks around them.

• **The diversity of figures in regional coordination.** Although the effectiveness of this coordination depended on strong personal commitment, the sources stated that, when coordination was assumed by an executive from local educational authorities or inspectors, there were greater advantages for COMBAS because of the power of these positions, and when it was assumed by directors of in-service teacher training centres, there were advantages in terms of teacher training support.

**Which contextual factors have been perceived as obstacles to the implementation of the initiative, and why?**

One of the COMBAS coordinators reported that the lack of a culture of collaborative innovation within the Spanish education system (both in private and public schools, and universities) could be considered to have hindered, to some degree, the wider implementation of the first year of COMBAS in view of the fact that: the presence of different theoretical-practical approaches hindered the understanding of the COMBAS approach, and the legacy of the various educational reforms that have taken place in the last two decades have struggled to differentiate themselves from each other rather than find shared points of view that would facilitate the educational consensus demanded by Spanish society.

**2. SUBSTANCE RELATED ISSUES**

In view of the distance between the official curriculum and the reality in classrooms regarding the competence model, COMBAS proposed generating alternatives that would make it possible to turn legislation into reality in classrooms. The substance of the model consisted of five levels of curricular integration of key competences:

1. in real classroom situations, such as the completion of tasks,
2. in curriculum elements like curriculum specification,
3. in methodologies,
4. in evaluation,
5. in formal, informal and non-formal education.
Integration requires a change in teachers’ mentality. As this is difficult to achieve because the institutional framework prevents transformations in educational practices, it was understood that it could be achieved through cooperation between schools and experts, jointly reflecting in order to enable teachers to prepare their own innovative procedures.

The following aspects, related to the substance of COMBAS, were effective:

- **An integrated curriculum based on the inclusion of key competences:** although there was general support, the approach put forward the particular aspect of relating five levels of curricular integration.

- **A concept of innovation:** COMBAS did not implement a pre-designed model of educational intervention, but rather generated one based on continuous interactions between schools and experts.

- **A concept of competences:** COMBAS expanded this, going beyond the evaluative perspective through the incorporation of concepts related to methodological practices.

- **Working procedures focused on the interrelation between various teams:** this guaranteed the continuous review and improvement of materials produced.

Which substance related issues have been the most difficult ones to fix when deciding on the content of the initiative, and why?

- Connecting general actions was a very difficult challenge, because despite the fact that there is a legal framework to help reach regional cooperation agreements, educational competences are very decentralised.

- It was difficult to organise, with a degree of harmony, a response to the curricular integration of key competences that could be used by a group of very different schools (because of their respective experiences in the field, internal organisation, approach to educational innovation etc.).

- The theoretical framework regarding the curricular integration of key competences provided by the Atlántida Innovation Group was prepared in close relationship to various educational practices carried out in schools: based on these practices, the theoretical framework was re-designed and, as the practical experience was analysed, this re-design was progressively improved. This methodology for the construction of knowledge, although complex for taking general decisions, continued to be developed during the COMBAS pilot project in order to make the individual adjustments that the high diversity of participating regions and schools required.

- Understanding that the development of student competences does not require one sole methodology, but requires a combination of a set of methodologies was difficult for the participating teachers.

### 3. PARTNERSHIP RELATED ISSUES

Which key aspects should be taken into consideration when defining the partnership?

**Participation in the COMBAS Programme was organised on three levels:**

**The first participation level** included, with the coordination of the Ministry of Education, a management team (management and coordination between the Ministry and autonomous communities and cities), a consultancy team (face-to-face advice and online sup-
port, through the participation of training coordinators and representatives of regional teams), and a team of experts (with training support duties).

The second level of participation was composed of regional technical and educational coordinators and their respective support teams. This included those responsible for political decisions regarding the regional structure of the programme, its monitoring and the institutional support regarding its legal, practical and financial aspects. The regional coordinators connected this network with the central administration and then with the respective school networks. Its role (just like that of school coordinators) could be conceptualised using the metaphor of a knot: the coordinators acted as knots between the different levels of networks and the strength of these knots depended on political, organisational and personal factors.

The third level of participation was focused on the teachers’ network established in each school, led by the management team and, through delegation, by the individual teachers that accepted responsibility for the coordination of the programme in schools. Each region selected a certain number of schools to participate in the first year of COMBAS. Although the selection criteria and procedures were different in each case, from the documentation consulted we can see that 59% of the schools participated through the direct invitation of the respective educational authority, generally because of their high levels of professional involvement demonstrated by their participation in other innovation programmes. In view of the collective commitment that this type of participation entails, the programme demanded that each school have the support of the majority of teachers (although active participation was limited to only some of them). Of the 150 participating schools, 87% were state schools (45% nursery and primary, and 42% secondary) and 13% were subsidised private schools (including nursery, primary and secondary schools). A total of 6,579 teachers participated. Regarding the motivation that led these teachers to agree to participate in the programme, we have the following data: the majority of teachers participated due to intrinsic motivation (belief in the relevance of the key competence work or interest in innovation) and 37% because of extrinsic motivation (because teaching through competences was considered as compulsory in the official curriculum, because the school administration had decided that all teachers from the school should participate, or to obtain a certificate).

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>NETWORK LEVEL</th>
<th>SCOPE OF ACTIVITY</th>
<th>PARTICIPANTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>national</td>
<td>organisers, officers from the Ministry of Education, training coordinators, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>each autonomous community</td>
<td>programme coordinators (managerial and educational), support teams, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>each school</td>
<td>teacher-coordinator of the programme, management teams, participating teachers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. STRATEGY RELATED ISSUES

The core of the programme was collaborative action between various administrations and an innovative educational movement based on the continuous review of training approaches, depending on the results obtained by schools. The following strategies proved to be particularly effective:
• **A model for the integration of the curriculum under constant review based on the vision provided by the work in and with schools.** Priority was given to integration arising from the monitoring, by experts, of processes and products generated in the participating schools to obtain approaches.

• **Training focused on the collective solving of tasks.** Based on training meetings, the interaction between members of the same group and between representatives of different groups led to the production of materials. This process fed back into the programme actions and justified student groups as the object of learning.

• **Top-down training, including the role of a COMBAS coordinator in each school.** This was key in order to drive the programme: coordinators attended the monthly training meetings to receive explanations about the proposed learning tasks and the materials that accompanied them (texts, activities, examples etc.), analysed the information received and shared it with the management team, identifying the best proposal for the training process being followed in their schools. They organized the monthly schedule for the carrying out of the relevant tasks and coordinated and facilitated their execution through face-to-face and on-line meetings and were responsible for sending the products of the tasks executed by all teachers to the general coordination of the programme for them to be evaluated and returned with relevant comments.

• **Website.** This provided an information bank (information about the programme, texts, activities, PowerPoint presentations, examples of good practices, a “press magazine” and technical information) and a communication tool (internal e-mail, forums, chat room), a self-evaluation tool (self-evaluation questionnaires for each activity and for the end of the training action), an evaluation tool (administration of “satisfaction” questionnaires) and an expansion tool (with links to a bibliography on key competences and to blogs by various schools).

Which aspects of the strategy implemented for the initiative have proved to be most problematic, and why?

• **The transfer of knowledge within each school has not proved to be as effective as desired,** in contrast to what was achieved at group level by regional and school coordinators. In addition to resistance to change, the transfer depended on the leadership capabilities of each coordinator, understanding the prior ideas and educational skills of their schools in order to support their learning by establishing relationships between theory and practice, and by promoting methodological changes without hurting professional pride.

• **The analysis of training materials did not reach the desired standards in some schools,** because of their scope and a lack of time for teachers. This problem was reduced through the filtering of information by the majority of coordinators in each school. For its part, the coordination of the programme dealt with this situation by organising, for its use in future years, the publication of a COMBAS guide, including 14 activities that, by being related to the five levels of curricular integration analysed in the provided educational material and in turn, being compared with practice in pioneering schools, facilitated the theoretical-practical debate about the COMBAS model and its contextualisation.

5. **Mainstreaming related issues**

COMBAS has two mainstreaming aims: an internal one in schools, of including the highest possible number of teachers in order to institutionalise educational change and an external one of extending the initiative to the highest possible number of schools.
**Mainstreaming inside schools.** COMBAS approaches are committed not only to supporting a change in the mentality of teachers and in curriculum specification, but also to promoting their institutionalisation in the lesson planning and improvement plans of schools. The changes in lesson planning proved to be easier for teachers with more teaching experience in problem solving and projects, than for those who based their teaching on textbooks. Regarding the improvement plans, there were four representative approaches for curriculum change:

- **Temporary:** lesson planning based on competences would be introduced for a limited time, making the most of occasions such as cultural or similar weeks when teachers are used to taking a break from their normal way of lesson planning.

- **Progressive:** school teachers would plan their lessons based on competences, which would then be used by other teachers in the following years instead of textbooks, becoming more or less a permanent part of the repertoire of the school.

- **Defined by areas:** replacement of textbooks only in certain subjects.

- **Defined by academic years:** as an experiment for certain groups or levels.

One factor that represents an obstacle for this type of mainstreaming is the high turnover of teachers in many schools (because of transfers and interim situations in state schools, and of temporary contracts in private schools), as it hinders the continuity of training and the consistent development of educational innovation.

- **Regarding external mainstreaming:** One of the most important factors in the development of ongoing teacher training programmes is connected to the continuity of innovation experiences and to the profitability of these joint efforts carried out by institutions, schools and teachers. Despite the fact that the continuity of any educational programme in Spain and well as in many other countries is usually threatened by changes to the compulsory curriculum when the government changes, in this case this has not occurred because of the power of the collaboration networks that the programme itself has promoted, between the Ministry of Education and regional educational authorities, between these and schools, among schools themselves and among participating teachers. Therefore, in the midst of parliamentary debate about a new educational reform, it could be said that the commitment of the various political parties to follow European recommendations has not faded regarding the need to promote the integration of key competences into the curriculum. This commitment has been encouraged by the recommendations of the European Commission, by the impact of national and international competence tests, by the importance of internal and external evaluation, by the international profile of COMBAS and by the passionate defence of continuity made by the responsible politicians from the various autonomous communities. Within this scenario, we should mention the extension of the model used in two autonomous communities, Extremadura and Andalusia, through their participation in COMBAS. In the latter case, there is the regional *Programme for the Curricular Integration of Key Competences* (PICBA) which, with 125 schools every academic year and with the cooperation of all the support services of the Andalusian educational system, still continues today.
6. SYSTEMIC ASPECTS

In view of the following aspects, it could be considered that the initiative was designed systemically from the start:

- It was based on the evaluation of teacher training within schools themselves, in order to facilitate the preparation of materials that would offer experience in order to convert the nominal incorporation of key competences into the official curriculum.

- It was founded on the interaction of groups of teachers resolving pedagogical tasks: identifying shared principles in schools and understanding that teaching decisions do not belong to the individual but mean a responsibility that cannot be reduced to personal efforts and that requires collective work in keeping with the principles of an educational project. It was planned that the search for materials and document modules would culminate in the production of educational resources “by the school for the school”.

- It was planned that the products provided by the participating schools as a product of their own training process, related to the activities proposed by the programme, would be characterised by informing, explaining, describing, defining, re-designing and illustrating to other schools about their own experience regarding possible alternative approaches to integrating key competences into the curriculum.

The systemic approach of the initiative enabled the implementation of the following aspects:

- It enabled, based on training meetings, interaction processes, the communication and production of materials between the members of the same group and between representatives of different groups and always providing support from various networks. These, in addition to feeding back into the actions of the programme, also justified using groups as the objects of learning: learning to solve tasks that would enable the exchange of different points of view and approaches to educational work.

- It improved interaction with various support teams in the central administration and autonomous communities to ensure the circulation of information between its members through the various strategies. It therefore promoted the role of schools, through approaches aimed at enabling teachers to assume a central role in the organisation of their own learning based on the use of their organisational capabilities.

In summary, the systemic model of the programme could be conceptualised as a cascade training with horizontal expansion at school level, as it was organized around two interrelated axes: one, focused on the figure of school coordinators, who functioned as a “transmitting chain” about the training they received in training meetings, and another focused on horizontal analysis and production that each school contextualized, with the help of the coordinators. Both fed back into the process and closed a training circle with the support of the various documentary and communicative resources offered by COMBAS, both in hard copies and on-line.
What have been the obstacles and/or challenges encountered during the implementation as a result of the systemic aspect of the initiative?

The large number of participating teachers hindered all the teachers from being able to enter the COMBAS portal where all the working and reference materials were, with only the school coordinators being able to enter. The interviewed respondents agreed by indicating that this situation represented an obstacle for the dissemination work of materials to teachers, as it made it necessary to use different technological resources, including the design of a specific portal for each school.

How have the obstacles and/or challenges encountered been overcome?

It could be considered that the successful strategies of the first year of COMBAS were based on their commitment to cooperation in educational matters in a decentralised country, on confidence in the potential and the reflective nature of teachers in order to carry out the curriculum specification of what has been established in legislation independently and professionally, and on the cascade training model with horizontal participation in each school, which became a work network. It was these formal and informal networks between institutions and people that supported the training action and that, in the final instance, made it possible to achieve its ultimate objective, which was the institutionalisation and the practical realisation of a key competence based teaching in schools. The teachers that carried out the coordination of the programme in their respective schools, with institutional support but taking on a large extra load of work, became references for these networks and also leaders in innovation, an essential aspect given that educational reforms are rarely successful without effective leadership, both at school level and at the educational system level.

Have some parts of the original design of the initiative [from the systemic point of view] been abandoned and why?

• Improving the development of competences in students through work with families: this proved difficult to carry out at the same time as teacher training during the first year of COMBAS.

• Coordinating the COMBAS approach with the innovation initiatives regarding key competences generated by other school and university groups. Aware that COMBAS is just one way of responding to the challenge of helping teachers to develop their students’ key competences, the COMBAS team reports that some contacts were initiated with other programmes in order to exchange and disseminate different ways of dealing with key competences in compulsory education. At the end of the first year, COMBAS had not been able to advance in this regard.

• The evaluation of students from schools that participated in the first year of COMBAS to compare their performance with that of others that had not participated.
7. EVALUATION RELATED ISSUES

The first year of COMBAS had internal and external evaluation. The internal evaluation was in parallel with its development: in each training meeting the school coordinators evaluated the process followed so that the training could be adapted to meet its needs. This made it possible to change the dynamic of training sessions, to simplify some materials by prioritising the resources to be used and making their development more flexible, giving a greater leadership role to school coordinators to contextualise the designed tasks and include group dynamics techniques in order to support the coordination work.

The multi-methodological external evaluation followed the CIPP (context-input-process-product) model of Stufflebeam (2002), and was guided by the respondent approach of Stake (2004), so that the information generated would allow all stakeholders to improve the programme. The anonymity of schools and respondents was strictly maintained throughout the process. 51 schools were selected for the collection of qualitative data through a conceptual sample using geographic representation, and criteria such as location (urban or rural), educational level (primary or secondary) and type of school (subsidised private or state school). 34 were visited and videoconferences were held with the remaining 17. 197 individual interviews were held with: school coordinators, school managers, teachers participating in the programme, non-participating teachers, advisers, coordinators, members of organisational teams of autonomous communities and inspectors. 60 discussion groups (300 teachers) were also organised and there were group interviews with students at 5 schools.

The organisational meetings and the monthly training meetings were observed, as well as the learning and organizational environments of the visited schools. In 10 of these, classes were observed where competence-based lesson plans were developed as part of the training activity. Finally, the official documents of the programme, the work carried out by participating teachers and their contributions in a forum were reviewed.

Based on the issues arising from the interviews and discussion groups, two anonymous open-ended multiple-choice questionnaires were designed and administered: one for coordinators with a response of 98%, and the other for participating teachers with a response of 65%. The data were analysed together, with the interpretations being validated through triangulations of observers, data collection techniques, data sources and theories.

Finally, the evaluation report was jointly supervised by the Ministry of Education, the coordinators from the participating autonomous communities and the organisers of COMBAS, and was distributed to the participants.

8. ACHIEVEMENT OF INITIATIVE’S AIMS

The first year of COMBAS was proposed to generate a pilot project to support teachers when planning lessons, taking into account the development of key competences by their students, to develop materials that could be used later by other teachers and to contribute to the institutionalisation of competence-based teaching in schools. Although any educational change is only verifiable in the long term, the respondents confirmed the presence of various products that demonstrate the achievement of COMBAS objectives,
although they indicated that the distribution of these products was not uniform, there being a noticeable variation between the participating schools. These achievements can be divided into five types:

1. It fostered a curriculum debate, for the first time in Spain after the educational reform in 1990, between the Ministry of Education and the autonomous communities. It provided a meeting point to define a common core in order to understand the new curriculum model including the incorporation of competences.

2. It proved to be a catalyst for educational debate and for the use of a shared curricular language among teachers. It was shown to help to initiate debates and to continue them in schools where for whatever reason they had been suspended.

3. It was clearly committed to promoting a change in mentality, taking great care to negotiate resistance from teachers. Clearly, any change in mentality is very slow and, due to its unpredictable nature, very difficult to measure. The replies of the interviewed teachers made it possible to identify three phases in this change among participants: (1) of resistance to change (defining key competences as bureaucratic aspects that would hinder teaching), (2) of growing awareness of the link between competence-based elements of the curriculum and current teaching, and (3) of appropriation of the theory of key competences to support practice.

4. It provided some teachers with better organisation in their lesson plans and a different perspective of the national curriculum, better coordination with other teachers, and a more objective assessment. For those teachers with more experience in problem-solving or project-based teaching, it provided a structure that made it possible to channel their prior curricular advances and to self-evaluate their methodological advances.

5. It made it possible for teachers with greater understanding of the curricular implications of key competences to implement competence-based lesson plans in their own classrooms.

9. NEXT STEPS

Once the first year of COMBAS has finished, its next steps will be connected to two types of actions with the support and cooperation of the Ministry for Education, Culture and Sport (MECS) and a group of autonomous communities.

1. Its continuity during the 2012/13 academic year, maintaining the national participation dynamic with the participation of 81 schools from 13 of the 15 autonomous communities that participated in the first year, generating the Curricular Integration of Key Competences Programme COMBAS. This programme, which not only consolidates the initial year, also goes into greater depth regarding the areas of the programme that are considered essential to raise schools’ capability to improve the educational success of students:

   - Identification of the integrating role of key competences regarding all types of knowledge (conceptual, procedural and attitudinal).
   - Diversification of competence-based teaching, integrating the various elements of the curriculum.
   - Promotion of the methodology as a decisive force for the development of projects in real contexts, for the design of lesson planning that facilitates the development of competences.
   - Consolidation of the revised assessment approach based on competence levels.

6 Through the National Centre for Educational Innovation and Research (CNIIE).
Development of the programme regionally, including advice and ad hoc teacher training: the Autonomous Community of Andalusia (PICBA) and the Autonomous Community of Extremadura will continue with the programmes that they started in previous years, the autonomous communities of Galicia and La Rioja will begin their programmes in 2013 and plan to continue them, and the autonomous communities of Murcia, Navarra, Castile-La Mancha and Valencia are debating similar processes for the future. The other autonomous communities that are participating or have participated in COMBAS (Asturias, the Canary Islands, Castile and Leon, Catalonia, the Balearic Islands), and the autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla, have decided to contextualise the approaches by combining them with other complementary approaches in order to generate their own plans.

The following actions have been designed to make this challenge possible: designing activities related to national and international external competence tests, analysing the possible relationship between the weaknesses described by these tests and their similarity with the results of internal school evaluation, and identifying indicators of change leading to the development of contextualised improvement plans. In other words, the key role of performance-based evaluation defines the core of this new phase, with a plan to publish a guide that will strengthen curricular debate in schools and a digital resource to facilitate its development. Also, as is usual in COMBAS, there are plans for its internal and external evaluation in order to collect evaluations and contributions from participants regarding the inter-regional cooperative approach of the programme, whose results will be debated by the team that represents the responsible politicians of the MECS/CNIIE and of the various autonomous communities involved.

To find out more:
Website of the MECD/CNIIE including the latest version of the COMBAS guide and digital tools.

http://www.mecd.gob.es/cniie/proyectos/competencias-basicas/Integracion-curricular/proyecto-combas.html

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Annex I:
Photo of the inauguration of the second phase of COMBAS at the MECD/CNIIE.
European Schoolnet is the coordinator of the KeyCoNet Project.

European Schoolnet is the network of 30 European Ministries of Education, based in Brussels. As a not-for-profit organisation, we aim to bring innovation in teaching and learning to our key stakeholders: Ministries of Education, schools, teachers, researchers, and industry partners.

Since its founding in 1997, European Schoolnet has used its links with education ministries to help schools make effective use of educational technologies, equipping both teachers and pupils with the skills to achieve in the knowledge society.

In particular, European Schoolnet pledges to:

• Support schools in achieving effective use of ICT in teaching and learning
• Improve and raise the quality of education in Europe
• Promote the European dimension in education

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