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BRIEF REVIEW

OF COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT AND ASSESSMENT POLICIES AND PRACTICES IN GENERAL EDUCATION

Cases of Finland, Lithuania and Romania

Erasmus+ Project COMPASS – In support of students' competence assessment
No. 2023-1-LT01-KA220-SCH-000156521



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Introduction

The purpose of this review is to provide a summary of Finnish, Lithuanian and Romanian approaches to the development and assessment of students' competences. **Generic competences** are those that are not tied to a specific context, but could be applied in different contexts and across different fields and disciplines. **Transversal competences** mean that they can be applied or “transferred” to different academic content areas and interdisciplinary fields, as well as to new and unfamiliar contexts beyond the classroom. The terms “generic” and “transversal” have similar meanings and we use both in this report, as well as the term “**key competences**” when referring to the European Union Recommendations on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning (2006¹, 2018²).

Finland, Lithuania and Romania are in the long-term process of revising their curricula to define the essential skills, knowledge and attitudes that individuals need to acquire in order to participate effectively in today's societies. The European Union emphasises the importance of young people acquiring a wide range of skills in order to become independent, active citizens and to find fulfilling employment. Key competences are important for lifelong learning, for work or simply for everyday life. The focus on competences shows that education is about helping people to be well-rounded and able to deal with different issues, rather than just learning academic knowledge.

Finland, Lithuania and Romania have each taken different approaches to developing and implementing a competence-enriched curriculum. In this paper we will explore the origins and development of the competence-enriched curriculum in each country, as well as the representation of competences in their national curricula. We will also examine the challenges associated with competence development and assessment, and identify successful practices that can be shared and learned from. We hope that this review will contribute to a better understanding of national policy orientations and experiences of their implementation in schools and classrooms.

¹ Council of the European Union. (2006). Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning. 2006-962/EC. *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 394/10. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2006:394:0010:0018:en:PDF>

² Council of the European Union. (2018). Council recommendations of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning. *Official Journal of the European Union*, C189/1. [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H0604\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H0604(01))



What is the background to the competence-enriched curriculum in Finland, Lithuania and Romania?



Finland

In Finland, the National Core Curriculum for Primary and Lower Secondary (Basic) Education (comprehensive school, years 1–9) was renewed in 2014 and have been implemented from 2016. Accordingly, the National Core Curriculum for General Upper Secondary Education was published in 2019 have been introduced in schools in August 2021. The National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care, developed by the Finnish National Board of Education (currently Finnish National Agency for Education) entered into force in March 2022.

Education providers at all levels are responsible for formulating a local curriculum based on the National Core Curriculum. Local actors should discuss what the mission of basic education and the national goals of education, as defined in the government decree, mean locally. They should also consider the requirements that the national goals place on the provision and management of education at local and school level. Local curricula may add details and specify some concepts, goals and guidelines of the National Core Curriculum, but they may not exclude any goals or content prescribed by law, decree or the National Core Curriculum. The topics for local decisions are specified in the National Core Curriculum. One of them is the organisation and implementation of transversal competences. Decisions are expected on the possible local emphases of the transversal competence areas defined in the National Core Curriculum and how these emphases are manifested in practice. Local curricula should also define the arrangements and measures for ensuring and monitoring the achievement of transversal competence objectives in education.

In the Finnish system, the ethos of trust gives teachers wide scope to interpret curriculum standards, decide on teaching methods and plan their lessons individually. Thus, the teacher is the ultimate curriculum maker and his or her interpretations ultimately define the curriculum delivered.

Since 1990, when Lithuania regained its independence, great efforts have been made to create an independent education system. Curriculum development has been one of the main focuses of educational reform. Curriculum guidelines have been revised 6 times in 30 years. In 2007, the Ministry of Education (currently Ministry of Education, Science and Sport) adopted a curriculum development strategy. It emphasises that the curriculum should “serve” the personal development of each student, helping him or her to acquire the competences needed for further education, employment and a meaningful life. The 2008 General Curriculum Guidelines had a clear orientation from a subject-based curriculum to the development of generic competences, combining them with subject-based competences. A distinction was made between generic and subject competences, and schools were invited to find their own way of integrating the development of generic competences into the teaching process and school life. Schools were offered “integrated programmes” such as “learning to learn”, “sustainable development”, “healthy lifestyles and life skills”, etc. as additional content and alternative ideas for implementation. However, teachers did not consider them as compulsory content and in most cases they were not implemented in schools, except for a few schools that created their own curriculum design to include the development of competences.

The new curriculum guidelines were adopted in 2022. It follows the idea that competences such as cognitive, digital, social, emotional and healthy lifestyles, creativity, citizenship, cultural awareness and communication are at the centre of students' learning and that students should not only know but also be able to apply the acquired competences in their lives.

The other major change in the curriculum is to give teachers and schools more freedom to create or select optional content (around 30 %) according to students' abilities and in consultation with other teachers. The size of this proportion may vary according to the level of education, the logic of the subject, the objectives and the teaching tradition.

Curricular reform in Romania started in 1990 and is still ongoing. The evolution of the educational policy reform, as outlined by F. Tacea and A. Crişan in 2007¹, unfolds in four distinct periods: the reparative phase (1990–1993), the preparatory curriculum-wide phase (1993–1997), the independent curriculum reform phase (1997–2000) and the significant changes at the systemic and educational process level, initiated in 2001 and continuing until today. At the curricular level, there was a demand for new philosophies about the place and function of the formal education system and its role in the educational journey of learners. Educational policy experts emphasised the need to move from goal-based learning to competence-based learning. The emergence of the new curriculum paradigm coincided with the need to align existing trends with European education policy. It was recognised that “the objectives of compulsory education are similar for most education and training systems in Europe”, with adherence to principles such as equality of opportunity, ensuring basic education for all, promoting stability and social change at the same time, preparing children for active adulthood, leisure, family and society, and motivating them to continue learning in a rapidly changing world.

The policy guiding Romania's accession to the European Union provided a clear framework for reform, which necessitated changes to Romania's education legislation. The amendments to the National Education Act aimed to adapt to contemporary educational perspectives, including areas such as education for sustainable development, lifelong learning, inclusive education and competence-based education.

The first competence-based curricula for primary and secondary education entered into force in 2003–2006. The primary curriculum was revised in 2010 and 2012–2013. A new competence-based curriculum for lower secondary education was introduced in 2016–2017. The upper secondary curriculum was due to be reformed in 2020–2021, but this has been postponed, so teachers are still using the 2003–2006 curriculum for these students.

In 2021–2030, the allegedly most extensive and comprehensive education reform project in Romania, “Educated Romania”², initiated by the Presidential Administration will be implemented to improve and modernise Romanian education.

¹ Tacea, F., & Crişan, A. (2007). *17 years of curriculum change in Romania: The way forward*.

² Romania. *Ongoing reforms and policy developments*. (2023, April 1). Eurydice.

<https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-education-systems/romania/ongoing-reforms-and-policy-developments>



What conclusions can be drawn?

Finland, Lithuania and Romania are in the process of curriculum reform with a focus on competence development. The curriculum reforms are in line with EU and OECD policy orientations, but each country has chosen its own approach and scope of the competence-enriched curriculum and its implementation. Finland has a much longer history of competence-enriched curriculum development and implementation, where the school and the teacher are seen as the main creators of the curriculum. Recent curriculum reforms in Lithuania and Romania have been strongly influenced by the EU's Lifelong Learning Strategy and OECD recommendations, and schools are not given as much freedom to implement the national curriculum.



How is “competence” defined in national policy documents?



Finland

According to the National Core Curriculum for Primary and Lower Secondary (Basic) Education (2014)¹, transversal competence refers to a set of knowledge, skills, values, attitudes and will. Competence also means the ability to apply knowledge and skills in a given situation. The way students use their knowledge and skills is influenced by the values and attitudes they have adopted and their willingness to act and contribute in different situations they face in the complex world. A competence builds on knowledge and contributes to the ability to process, evaluate and use knowledge in an ethically relevant way.

The increased need for transversal competences arises from changes in the world around us. Competences that transcend and link different areas of knowledge and skills are a prerequisite for personal development, learning, work and citizenship now and in the future.

In all the other core curricula, the definition remains the same, even if the list of transversal competences varies.

In other words, transversal competences aim to create active members of society who think critically through subject-based teaching, so that the content and perspectives of each subject strengthen the learner's capacity for action².

¹ Finnish National Agency for Education. (2014). *National core curriculum for primary and lower secondary (basic) education*. <https://www.oph.fi/en/education-and-qualifications/national-core-curriculum-primary-and-lower-secondary-basic-education>

² Hienonen, N., Nilivaara, P., Saarnio, M. & Vainikainen, M-P. (2022). *Laaja-alainen osaaminen koulussa: Ajattelijana ja oppijana kehittyminen*. Gaudeamus. (p. 6).

In the Lithuanian educational context, the term “competence” is understood as the ability to perform a certain activity on the basis of a set of acquired knowledge, skills and values¹. Generic competences are defined as "a personal ability, the development of which is usually based on personal qualities and includes, for example, creativity, analytical thinking, responsibility, integrity, communication skills, etc."²

The concept of competence development is often contrasted with the teaching and learning of academic knowledge, so there is a broader explanation of the different components of competence, such as knowledge, skills, abilities, values and dispositions:

1. Knowledge includes four different types of knowledge, such as: a) subject knowledge (content and main concepts of a subject (e. g. mathematics, science, social sciences, etc.); b) cross-curricular knowledge (interrelated knowledge that crosses the boundaries of different subjects); c) procedural knowledge (understanding how to carry out different procedures in the learning process, e.g. writing an essay, carrying out an experiment, etc.); d) epistemic knowledge (understanding the methods and ways used by researchers in different subject areas).
2. Cognitive, metacognitive, emotional, social and practical skills.
3. Personal, social and shared human values³.

All elements of competence are equally important and should be developed in the context of general education through the implementation of the general curriculum and the provision of other learning experiences in school life, formal and non-formal education.

¹ Lietuvos Respublikos švietimo įstatymas, 1991 m. birželio 25 d. Nr. I-1489. (1991). <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/TAIS.1480/asr>

² Kvalifikacijų ir profesinio mokymo plėtros centras. (n. d.). *Terminų žodynas*. <https://www.kpmc.lt/kpmc/kvalifikaciju-formavimas/terminu-zodynelis/>

³ Gerulaitis, Š., Jovsejevienė, J., Poderienė, N. ir Raudienė I. (2019). *Bendrujų programų atnaujinimo gairės*. Nacionalinė švietimo agentūra. https://www.nsa.smm.lt/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/bendruju-programu-atnaujinimo-gaires_internetine-versija.pdf

The Law of Preuniversity Education¹ defines "competence" and related terms as "the multifunctional and transferable set of knowledge, skills and abilities" (Art. 85). Also, in the List of definitions of terms and expressions appended to the text of the Law, it is stated:

"Competence is the demonstrated ability to use knowledge, personal, social and/or procedural (methodological) attitudes and skills in work or study contexts for professional and personal development."

"Vocational competences are a coherent and dynamic set of knowledge and skills. Knowledge is expressed by the following descriptors: knowing, understanding and using the specific language, explaining and interpreting. Skills are expressed by the following descriptors: application, transfer and problem solving, critical and constructive reflection, creativity and innovation."

"Transversal competences are acquired values and attitudes that go beyond a specific field/study programme and are expressed by the following descriptors: autonomy and responsibility, social interaction, personal and professional development."



What conclusions can be drawn?

In the Finnish, Lithuanian and Romanian contexts, the term 'competence' is defined in a similar way, emphasising the complexity of different components of competence, such as knowledge, skills, values, attitudes (and will) to be performed or applied in a given situation. In all three countries, the list of generic or transversal competences is being developed as a result of changes in the surrounding world. Transversal competences cut across and link different areas of knowledge and skills and are a prerequisite for personal development, learning, work and citizenship now and in the future.

¹ *Legea învățământului preuniversitar nr. 198/2023*. (2023). Monitorul Oficial, Partea I nr. 613. <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocumentAfis/271896>



What are the lists of competences in each country?



Finland

The transversal competences complete the mission of basic education, which can be viewed from the perspective of its educational, social, cultural or future-oriented mission. The transversal competences reflect the concept of learning that is embedded in the curriculum. The elements that link the transversal competences described to the concept of learning include interactivity, student activity, willingness and emerging ability to cooperate, responsibility for self, others and the environment, curiosity and enjoyment of learning. Thinking and learning skills are also emphasised in the learning approach.

In the National Core Curriculum for Primary and Lower Secondary (Basic) Education (2014)¹ the objectives set for transversal competences include:

1. Thinking and learning to learn.
2. Cultural competence, interaction and self-expression.
3. Taking care of oneself and managing daily life.
4. Multiliteracy skills.
5. ICT literacy.
6. Work-life skills and entrepreneurship.
7. Participation, involvement and building a sustainable future.

The areas of competence are often interrelated. Their common aim, in line with the mission of basic education and taking into account the age of the pupils, is to support their development as human beings and to provide them with the competences necessary for membership of a democratic society and a sustainable way of life. It is particularly important to encourage pupils to recognise their uniqueness, their personal strengths and potential for development, and to value themselves.

The following are brief descriptions of each of the transversal competences, which are defined in more detail in the National Core Curriculum for Years 1–2, 3–6 and 7–9.

¹ Finnish National Agency for Education. (2014). *National core curriculum for primary and lower secondary (basic) education*. <https://www.oph.fi/en/education-and-qualifications/national-core-curriculum-primary-and-lower-secondary-basic-education>

Thinking and learning to learn

- Learning to make observations and to seek, evaluate, process, produce and share information and ideas.
- Practising an exploratory and creative approach to work, to be open to new solutions.
- Learning to look at things from different perspectives, to seek new insights, to look for alternatives, to combine perspectives and to think outside the box.
- Learning to use information independently and with others for problem solving, argumentation, reasoning, drawing conclusions and invention, and to critically analyse issues from different perspectives.
- Develop systemic and ethical thinking skills.

Cultural competence, interaction and self-expression

- Adopting culturally sustainable ways of living and acting in a diverse environment: learning to recognise and appreciate cultural meanings in their environment, building a personal cultural identity and a positive relationship with the environment, and seeing cultural diversity as a positive resource.
- Learning to know, appreciate and develop the environment and its cultural heritage.
- Learning to appreciate the importance of their own background and their place in the chain of generations.
- Learning to respect human rights, especially the rights of the child; recognising what is unacceptable as a violation of human rights.
- Developing skills of respectful interaction and self-expression.

Taking care of themselves and managing their daily lives

- Thinking positively about their future.
- Learning to take care for themselves and others.
- Developing skills needed to manage their daily lives and to work for the well-being of the environment.
- Practising looking after their own safety and that of others in a variety of situations, for example in traffic.
- To be responsible both for their own work and actions and for the work and actions of others.
- Developing emotional and social skills.
- Developing consumer skills and the ability to manage and plan their personal finances.

-
- Practising sustainable choices and actions.
-
- Learning to make sensible technological choices and to use technology responsibly and ethically.

Multi-literacy

- Learning to interpret the world around them and to appreciate its cultural diversity
-
- Developing skills in interpreting, producing and evaluating different types of texts, which will help pupils to understand different forms of cultural communication and to build their personal identity (in this context, text means information expressed through systems of verbal, visual, auditory, numerical and kinaesthetic symbols and their combinations).

ICT literacy

- Understanding the use of ICT and its operating principles and key concepts, developing skills in using ICT for productive purposes.
-
- Learning to use ICT to manage information and for research and creative work.
-
- Learning to use ICT for interaction and networking.
-
- Learning to use ICT responsibly, safely and ergonomically and to assess the impact of ICT in the context of sustainable development; learning to be responsible consumers of ICT.

Work-life skills and entrepreneurship

- Developing an interest in and a positive attitude towards work and working life, understanding the importance of work and entrepreneurship in society and in one's own life.
-
- Learning teamwork, project work and networking; developing skills in self-employment, entrepreneurship, risk assessment and controlled risk-taking.
-
- Learning responsibility, reciprocity and working towards a common goal, seeing one's work as part of a whole, anticipating difficulties and dealing with failure and disappointment.
-
- Encouraging them to be open to new opportunities, to be flexible and creative in the face of change, to take initiative and to explore different options.
-
- Developing perseverance, a systematic way of working, working independently and with others.

Participation, involvement and building a sustainable future

- Having opportunities to learn about participation, decision-making and responsibility in their community and society.
-
- Learning to understand the importance of rules, agreements and trust.
-
- Learning to work together, negotiate, compromise, resolve conflicts and reflect critically on issues.
-
- Learning to see different parties as equals and to consider ideas through the lens of a sustainable way of life.
-
- Learning to understand the importance of protecting the environment through their personal relationship with nature.
-
- To be guided to understand the significance of their choices, lifestyles and actions, not only for themselves, but also for their local environment, society and nature as a whole.
-
- Developing skills to evaluate and change ways of doing things, both their own and those of their communities and society, so that they contribute to a sustainable future.

In the Core Curriculum for General Upper Secondary Education (2019)¹, the list of competences is as follows

1. Well-being competence

- Caring for oneself and others;
- Recognising and using one's own strengths; identity construction;
- Grit and resilience in a world of change and surprises.

2. Interaction skills

- Emotional and empathic skills;
- Social and collaborative skills; collaborative learning skills;
- Language awareness and constructive communication skills (mediation).

3. Multidisciplinary and creative competence

- Curiosity and motivation to learn; to find meaning and combine things in new ways;
- Self-regulated learning, factual criticism, development of learning-to-learn skills;
- Multiliteracy in the digital age.

¹ Opetushallitus Utbildningsstyrelsen. (2019). *Lukion opetussuunnitelman perusteet 2019*. OPH-2263-2019. <https://eperusteet.opintopolku.fi/#/en/lukiokoulutus/6828810/tiedot>

4. Societal competence

- Democratic skills, influencing for a safe, just and sustainable future;
- Using competences for personal and social benefit;
- A capacity for transformation in relation to life in general and the world of work. An entrepreneurial disposition.

5. Ethical and environmental skills

- Value-based and ethical action for the common good;
- Respect for the diversity of nature; research-based climate action;
- Appreciation of circular economy and sustainable consumption.

6. Global and cultural competence

- International competences; global citizenship disposition;
- Knowledge of Finnish, European and global heritage, appreciation of cultural diversity;
- Ethical agency in the globalised spheres of media and technology.

Although the list and labels are different from those in basic education, the content is more or less the same.

The objectives of transversal competences are specified in local curricula. Education providers may further define them according to their individual focus, or they may offer the transversal competences as defined in the national core curriculum. Local curricula may also complement the practical implementation, give local emphasis to specific sets of objectives and describe the arrangements and measures for ensuring and monitoring the achievement of the objectives of the transversal competences in teaching.



The new General Curriculum, approved in 2022¹, emphasises the development of personal qualities, values and competences in students so that they develop a virtuous, sensitive and strong character, as well as a sense of responsibility and commitment to Lithuania and society. Students' learning should focus on the promotion of democracy, empathy, dignity and responsibility. Values are developed in the curricula through the implementation of learning content. The new list of

¹ *Priešmokyklinio, pradinio, pagrindinio ir vidurinio ugdymo bendrosios programos, 2022 m. rugpjūčio 24. Nr. V-1269.* (2022). <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/45f3b02523e311edb36fa1cf41a91fd9?positionInSearchResults=0&searchModelUID=0930658b-09d3-4617-9b69-3e37720373e6>

generic competences is presented in the general curriculum for general education (including pre-primary, primary and secondary levels). The same set of competences is used for all levels of general education, except for early childhood education (years 2–5). This list of competences is slightly different from the list of competences used in the General Curriculum approved in 2008 and 2012, and includes new competences or new components added due to new societal challenges and requests from stakeholders.

The new list contains 7 competences:

1. Social, emotional and health competence (it was called personal competence in the previous list).
2. Cognitive competence (it includes the learning to learn competence from the previous list).
3. Creative competence (it includes Entrepreneurship from the previous list).
4. Civic competence (a new competence).
5. Cultural competence.
6. Communication competence.
7. Digital competence (a new competence).

A more detailed explanation of each competence and its elements is given below:

- Communication competence involves the motivation and ability to create, communicate and understand knowledge (facts, attitudes or personal preferences); to use verbal and non-verbal communication tools and technologies in an ethical way.
-
- Cultural competence includes self-awareness of one's own culture, active expression and awareness of other cultures.
-
- Creativity competence involves exploring, generating, developing and evaluating creative ideas, products and solutions to problems that are meaningful to oneself and others, while maintaining a harmonious relationship with oneself and the environment.
-
- Cognitive competence refers to the motivation and ability to understand oneself and the world through the assimilation of humanity's cultural experience. It includes subject knowledge, critical thinking, problem solving and learning. Achieving cognitive competence in school requires willpower, effort and perseverance.
-
- Civic competence refers to civic identity and power based on values, attitudes, knowledge and practical skills. It enables individuals to build a democratic society together with others in a responsible manner and to strengthen the statehood of Lithuania.
-
- Digital competence refers to the motivation and ability to use digital technologies for various purposes such as performing tasks, learning, problem solving, working, communicating, collaborating, managing information, creating and sharing digital content effectively, appropriately, safely, critically, independently and ethically.
-
- Social, emotional and healthy life skills include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship-building skills, responsible decision-making and personal care for physical and mental health.

Art. 89 of the Law of Preuniversity Education¹ states:

"Art. 89. – (1) The national curriculum for pre-university education focuses on the competences for lifelong learning promoted at European/international level, which form the basis of the graduate's development profile. (2) The graduate's development profile is a regulating component of the national curriculum, a reference for its planning, implementation and evaluation, and is approved by decree of the Minister of Education. It shall indicate the planned levels of mastery of the competences according to the student's stage of development."

Art. 91 of the Law of Preuniversity Education refers to and lists all the key competences identified by the Council Recommendations of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning, although in some cases it expresses them somewhat differently, as follows:

"Art. 91. – The national curriculum for primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education shall focus on the key competences promoted at European level, which define a student's development profile:

1. the ability to read, write and comprehend;
2. multilingual competence;
3. mathematical competence and competence in science, technology and engineering;
4. digital competence, including internet safety and cybersecurity;
5. personal, social and learning competences;
6. civic, legal and environmental competences;
7. entrepreneurship;
8. cultural awareness and expression."

Art. 85 of the Law of pre-university education also states that pre-university education has as its main purpose the development of competences, which are necessary for the following:

- a) personal fulfilment and development;
- b) social integration and active citizen participation in society;
- c) participation in the operation and development of a sustainable economy;
- d) the formation of a conception of life, based on humanistic and scientific values, on national and universal culture and on the stimulation of intercultural dialogue;

¹*Legea învățământului preuniversitar nr. 198/2023. (2023). Monitorul Oficial, Partea I nr. 613.*
<https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocumentAfis/271896>

- e) respect for dignity, tolerance and fundamental human rights and freedoms;
- f) respecting the principles of ethics and integrity in the school activity, regarding the selection, use and correct citation of documentation sources, the development of students' critical spirit in the analysis and retrieval of useful information;
- g) developing sensitivity towards human issues, towards moral-civic values and promoting sustainability, respect for the natural, social and cultural environment;
- h) ensuring the ability to adapt and active participation in social, economic, political and cultural life in the context of digital transformation;
- i) developing the necessary competences for using the Internet safely;
- j) forming a healthy lifestyle based on physical activity, proper nutrition and hygiene rules.

What conclusions can be drawn?

The Finnish and Lithuanian curricula are based on the nationally developed lists of competences, which are linked to the general objective of personal development of pupils. They are interrelated and complementary to the overall educational goals. In the Romanian education system, the key competences defined in the recommendations of the European Commission are referred to in most of the subject curricula. The Finnish and Lithuanian curricula provide a more comprehensive description of each competence. The table below illustrates the similarities and differences in the listing and naming of competences.

Finland	Lithuania	Romania
Thinking and learning to learn.	Cognitive competence.	Personal, social and learning to learn competence. Mathematical competence and competence in science, technology and engineering.
Cultural competence, interaction and self-expression.	Cultural competence.	Cultural awareness and expression competence.
Taking care of oneself and managing daily life.	Social, emotional and health competence.	Personal, social and learning to learn competence.
Multiliteracy.	Communication competence.	The competence to read, write and understand a message. Multilingual competence.
ICT competence.	Digital competence.	Digital competence, including safety on the Internet and cybersecurity.
Working life competence and entrepreneurship.	Creativity competence.	Entrepreneurial competence.
Participation, involvement and building a sustainable future.	Civic competence.	Civic, legal and environmental protection competence.



How are the competences represented in the current national curriculum?



Finland

The new Act on General Upper Secondary Education (2018)¹ set the goal of organising interdisciplinary studies and broader study modules, so that students can develop their transversal competence during general upper secondary education. Transversal competence then became a central reform in the National Core Curriculum for General Upper Secondary Education (2019)², which defines the common objectives of study subjects.

According to the values of the National Core Curriculum for Primary and Lower Secondary (Basic) Education (2014)³, the concept of learning and the school culture form the basis for the development of competence. Each subject develops the student's competence through the content and methods typical of its field of knowledge. The development of competence is influenced not only by the content on which the students work, but also and above all by the way they work and the interaction between the learner and the environment. Feedback to learners, guidance and support for learning influence attitudes, motivation and agency.

Transversal competences are always taught, studied and assessed as part of different subjects. For this reason, the objectives and content of transversal competences are also defined in the criteria in the descriptions of the different subjects. In particular, the curriculum for upper secondary education emphasises the link between transversal competences and subjects by stating: "The common objectives of the subjects are crystallised as transversal competence areas."

The link between transversal competences and subject objectives is made visible in the national core curriculum by means of tables showing the relationship between the competences. However, the link is described at a general level, leaving it to the teacher to consider in more detail which areas of each competence are linked to the educational objective.

¹ Act on General Upper Secondary Education 714/2018. (2018). Finlex.

<https://www.finlex.fi/en/laki/kaannokset/2018/en20180714?search%5Btype%5D=pika&search%5Bkieli%5D%5B0%5D=en&search%5Bpika%5D=upper%20secondary>

² Opetushallitus Utbildningsstyrelsen. (2019). *Lukion opetussuunnitelman perusteet 2019*. OPH-2263-2019.

<https://eperusteet.opintopolku.fi/#/en/lukiokoulutus/6828810/tiedot>

³ Finnish National Agency for Education. (2014). *National core curriculum for primary and lower secondary (basic) education*. <https://www.oph.fi/en/education-and-qualifications/national-core-curriculum-primary-and-lower-secondary-basic-education>

The renewal of the General Curriculum started with the development of the framework of competences. The framework includes a description of each competence, indicating its components, guidelines for the development of each competence in different subject areas and the development of the competence at each grade level, e. g. grade 1–2, grade 3–4, etc.¹

This framework was used by the expert groups that developed curricula for different subject areas. The idea was that subject areas should be used as vehicles for the development of generic competences and that each subject area, e.g. maths, science, arts, languages, should become a "home" for certain generic competences, e.g. the subject area of languages is a "home" for communication and cultural competences, science is a "home" for cognitive, communicative and creative competences, and so on. All competences are equally important, but the intensity of their development varies from subject to subject. Subject experts, taking into account the expected outcomes of certain competence developments, should include them in the description of the curriculum of their subject, e. g. "The student participates willingly in the mathematics learning process and takes responsibility for the results. He/she reflects on and evaluates the learning process and results, sets short-term learning goals and plans his/her own learning with the help of indirect support" (Mathematics curriculum, years 5–6)².

Curriculum experts have used the strategy of "competence development through academic subjects", therefore it is quite difficult for teachers to find and decipher the competence development prompts in the subject curriculum. As a consequence, some teachers do not believe in the meaning and importance of competence development, as it is not sufficiently supported by the curriculum guidelines and the student assessment system.

¹ *Kompetencijos ir jų aprašai*. (n. d.). Švietimo portalas. <https://www.emokykla.lt/bendrosios-programos/kompetencijos>

² *Matematikos bendroji programa*. (2023). Švietimo portalas. <https://emokykla.lt/bendrosios-programos/visos-bendrosios-programos/5?ach-1=3&st=1>

As mentioned above, the national curriculum is based on the key competences for lifelong learning¹. The national curriculum defines general competences for each discipline and specific competences for each grade. The national curriculum for each subject makes reference to the key competence(s) most relevant to the subject. For example, for lower secondary Biology, the following is part of the introduction to the 2017 curriculum² (in force):

“The curriculum for Biology is developed according to the competence-based curriculum design model. The development of this curriculum started from the structuring of the learning outcomes of students in primary education, aiming at the same time to connect with the TIMSS 2011 Science Reference Framework, to respond to the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of the European Union on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning (2006/962/EC)³, as well as to make a specific contribution to the development profile of secondary school students. The curriculum aims primarily to develop the key competences specific to the subject (mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology), but it also contributes to the development of other key competences such as: communication in the mother tongue, learning to learn, ICT competence, social and civic competence, sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, cultural awareness and artistic expression.

Through the proposed general and specific competences, the study of biology contributes to the development of the profile of secondary school students. This profile is characterised by the development of the student's ability to solve everyday problems and situations, to design and carry out an investigation to verify a working hypothesis, to process, graphically represent and interpret experimental data and evidence, to imagine and create some useful products for current activities, and to show interest in a healthy life and in maintaining a clean environment⁴”.

¹ Council of the European Union. (2006). Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning. 2006-962/EC. *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 394/10. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2006:394:0010:0018:en:PDF>

² Anexa nr. 2 la ordinul ministrului educației naționale nr. 3393 / 28.02.2017, Ministerul Educației Naționale. Programa școlară pentru disciplina BIOLOGIE, CLASELE a V-a – a VIII-a.

³ Council of the European Union. (2006). Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning. 2006-962/EC. *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 394/10. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2006:394:0010:0018:en:PDF>

⁴ Anexa nr. 2 la ordinul ministrului educației naționale nr. 3393 / 28.02.2017, Ministerul Educației Naționale. Programa școlară pentru disciplina BIOLOGIE, CLASELE a V-a – a VIII-a.



What conclusions can be drawn?

Finnish and Lithuanian curricula in different subject areas integrate subject-based and generic competence-based descriptions of expected student outcomes. The Finnish National Core Curriculum for General upper Secondary Education (2018)¹ provides recommendations for the organisation of interdisciplinary studies and broader study modules for the development of students' transversal competences, as well as their inclusion in the common objectives of subjects. In the Romanian curriculum, for each subject area, there are references to the most relevant key competences that are targeted in specific disciplines.

¹ Opwtushallitus Utbildningsstyrelsen. (2019). *Lukion opetussuunnitelman perusteet 2019*. OPH-2263-2019. <https://eperusteet.opintopolku.fi/#/en/lukiokoulutus/6828810/tiedot>



How are the competences implemented in schools? What are the main obstacles, challenges and successes?



Finland

The goals of transversal competences are not new in the Finnish school system. For decades, the curriculum has included objectives that cut across subject boundaries. In the past, these objectives were used more to integrate teaching and provide a multidisciplinary approach. In the curricula of the 2010s, the focus is more clearly on developing students' competences.

Transversal competences are always taught, studied and assessed as part of the different subjects. For this reason, the objectives and content of transversal competences are also defined in the criteria in the descriptions of the different subjects. The learning modules support the achievement of the objectives set for basic education and in particular the development of transversal competences. The topics of the modules are planned locally to reflect the principles of the school culture. All pupils should have the opportunity to participate in at least one multidisciplinary learning module per school year. The objectives, contents and methods of implementation of multidisciplinary learning modules are decided in the local curriculum and specified in the school's annual plans.

Most education providers seem to use the objectives of transversal competences as presented in the National Core Curriculum. In the annual plan, schools define which competence or competences will be in focus during the school year. Often schools have projects, theme weeks or theme days that focus on the particular competence areas¹.

One of the challenges is that as transversal competences are the responsibility of everyone and no one in particular, the way in which they are implemented depends very much on the interests and skills of the teachers. For example, teachers may need additional materials or training in the specific skills, such as digital literacy or multi-literacy, before they can successfully implement them as part of their everyday teaching.

¹ Koulutuksen, arvioinnin ja oppimisen tutkimuskeskus. (n. d.). *Laaja-alaisen osaamisen arviointi formaaleissa ja informaaleissa oppimisympäristöissä*. <https://www.researchreal.fi/fi/materiaalipankki>

The evaluation report by the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC)¹ states that teachers in basic education in particular find it difficult to promote and assess transversal competences as part of subject teaching. Only one third of basic education teachers consider that transversal competences are well or very well taken into account in teaching practices or in the development of school culture. The results are similar for the assessment of transversal competences.

Although transversal competences have been included in the objectives of the subjects in the core curriculum document, the link between them remains open to interpretation at the practical level of teaching. According to the evaluation it seems that further clarification of the links and differences between transversal competence, integrative teaching and multidisciplinary learning modules at the conceptual level would be useful.

Transversal competences are a good example of how the adoption of new concepts introduced in the curricula requires a lot of support and discussion during the implementation of the national core curricula. The National Assessment Centre (FINEEC) recommends further meaningful discussions in schools on the concept of transversal competences and in-service training for teachers and school leaders on the topic.



The new competence-based curriculum was introduced in schools in the school year 2022–2023. One of the main novelties of this version of the curriculum is its competence-based orientation. In the previous version of the curriculum, a distinction was made between subject-based competences and generic competences, which resulted in the emphasis of teaching practice on academic achievement and subject-based competences. The conceptual framework of the new curriculum is based on the idea that the main goal of teaching and learning at school is the holistic approach to the personal development of students through the orientation towards the generic competences. This means that the pedagogical approaches used in the classroom should change: from subject-centred to interdisciplinary approach, from teacher-centred pedagogy to student-centred pedagogy, from teaching to learning and active engagement of students. These approaches are well known to schools and teachers, but they are difficult to put into practice. Nevertheless, there are excellent examples of individual schools that have developed and successfully implemented their own strategies to address the development of generic competences over a number of years, e.g. the cases of two Lithuanian schools in the “Study on

¹ Venäläinen, S., Saarinen, J. & Viitala, M. (2021). *Näkökulmia OPS-arviointiin. Esi- ja perusopetuksen opetussuunnitelmien perusteiden 2014 toimeenpanon arviointi*. Kansallinen koulutuksen arviointikeskus Julkaisut 26:2021. https://www.karvi.fi/sites/default/files/sites/default/files/documents/KARVI_2621.pdf

Supporting School Innovation across Europe”¹. There have been a number of national projects to create new practices of competence development in schools (e.g. "Competence development in grades 5–8")². One of the problems of the current curriculum policy is its top-down approach and the lack of dissemination of successful school practices at national level. However, schools and teachers have considerable autonomy in curriculum design by choosing or creating integrated courses or projects, choosing digital solutions or other teaching aids, organising pupils' learning in authentic environments, etc. The study of 30 schools on their readiness to implement a competence-based curriculum showed that teachers understand the inevitability of change but need more practical examples and professional support.



In Romania, there is no impact study of the latest school curriculum, but several good practices developed in schools have been documented. For example, from the publication "Guidelines for assessing students' skills developed through math research"³ we learn about a successful approach to the development and evaluation of two transversal skills and a mathematical skill (collaborative problem solving), described in great detail in a Teacher's Guide. The guide provides methods and tools for both the development and the assessment of transversal skills and mathematical competence. The guide was designed for teachers and teaching experts interested in creating skills assessment tools.

The transversal competences are, according to the teachers with whom we have discussed this issue, regularly implemented. Teachers refer to the generic and specific competences defined in the curriculum when they develop their annual plan and their unit plans. They relate the content of their subject to the specific competences and to the teaching materials and methods, as well as to the assessment.

One teacher reports that she starts by defining what students should do to demonstrate their level of mastery of a disciplinary specific competence in each of the three cognitive domains: knowledge, application and reasoning. In an elective discipline (mathematics research) where the competence to be developed is not covered by the national core curriculum, she operationalises the competence, identifies the sub-competences and the behaviours that indicate that the student has acquired these sub-competences; then she describes three levels of performance (novice, proficient, expert) for each behavioural indicator of each competence, as well as a progression in

¹ Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (European Commission), Public Policy and Management Institute. (2018). *Study on supporting school innovation across Europe. Final report.*

<https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/2e440297-4ce9-11e8-be1d-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

² Ugdymo plėtotės centras. (2012). *Kompetencijų ugdymas*. <http://www.ugdome.lt/kompetencijos5-8/apie-svetaine/>

³ Văcărețu, A. S. & Proal. H. (2016). *Guidelines for assessing students' skills developed through math research*. Ecou Transilvan Publishing House.

http://matlanproject.weebly.com/uploads/4/2/9/1/42916225/evaluarea_competentelor_en-final.pdf

the development of that competence (i.e. a detailed “map” illustrating the increasingly sophisticated behaviours that students will display as they progress from novice to expert in each learning domain). Finally, assessment methods and develops assessment tools are selected using the progression as a reference.



What conclusions can be drawn?

In Finland, Lithuania and Romania, schools should integrate the development of students' generic or transversal competences into the regular learning of different subjects. In addition, in Finland, all students should have the opportunity to participate in at least one multidisciplinary learning module per school year which promotes the achievement of the objectives set for basic education, in particular the development of transversal competences. In Lithuania, teachers engage students in a variety of active learning experiences, such as project- or inquiry-based learning and experiential learning. In Romania, individual teachers include the development of generic competences in their annual or unit plans. However, Lithuanian and Romanian schools are under pressure to achieve high academic standards, often at the expense of providing rich learning experiences for students. One of the common challenges is that, as transversal competences are the responsibility of everyone and no one in particular, the way in which they are implemented depends very much on the interests and skills of teachers and school communities.



What is the national policy on the assessment of competences?



Finland

The legislation on basic education sets out two complementary tasks for assessment: to guide and support students' learning and to assess their performance in relation to the set objectives.

According to the core curriculum, transversal competences are assessed as part of the formative and summative assessment of each subject and study unit, not as separate areas of focus. Transversal competence areas are incorporated in the objectives and assessment criteria of each subject. When the teacher carries out summative assessment in accordance with the criteria, the student's transversal competences are also assessed.

The curriculum for basic education emphasizes the importance of formative assessment in order to support the development of transversal competences. Formative assessment includes for example student self-assessment, learning diaries, peer-feedback, teacher-feedback, etc.

The school culture also contributes significantly to the development of transversal skills. For example, in the Cultural Competence, Interaction and Expression unit, the curriculum says: "They are taught to treat other people with respect and good manners" or in the Self-care and Everyday Skills unit, "The school community teaches them to understand that everyone contributes to their own well-being, health and safety, as well as that of others." Those are skills to be learned in particular through culture, everyday interactions, during the breaks, events and also through the example of adults. Therefore, evaluation should also focus on culture and the forces that drive it. Evaluation of the learning community's activities is the starting point for development and the cornerstone of action¹. In the local curricula they should define what are the arrangements and measures by which the organisation of development of the transversal competences is ensured and monitored in the system level.

¹ Luostarinen, A. & Nilivaara, P. (2019). Laaja-alaisen osaamisen arviointi (The assessment of transversal competences) In A. Luostarinen & J. H. Nieminen (Eds.) *Arvioinnin käsikirja* (The Handbook of Assessment). PS-kustannus.

The new Guidelines for the Assessment of Student Achievement¹ were introduced in 2023. They emphasise the nature of competence development through students' active engagement in rich and complex learning tasks and other educational activities. Meaningful activities and rich tasks are the basis for the development of students' competences. These include problem-based, investigative, analytical, project-based, etc. tasks and activities. These types of tasks and activities promote higher-level thinking and ensure coherence between educational objectives, learning activities and assessment. Effective feedback is the main tool for assessing learners' competences. In giving feedback, teachers support learners, encourage them to be open, to seek and not to be afraid of making mistakes. It is important for learners to know what and how they need to improve in their learning in order to make progress and improve their learning outcomes.

There are two levels of competence development and assessment:

- in subject lessons alongside subject achievement;
- competences acquired through participation in social, civic, cultural and other educational activities are assessed according to the procedures established by the school, e.g. portfolios, digital badges, diaries and journals, etc.

The main form of assessment is formative, promoting individual progress. At the end of the learning phase, the evidence of pupils' competence development should be summarised in the form of a grade, a level of achievement, an oral or written comment.

The competence profile of students at the end of primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education was adopted in December 2023.

In addition to the eight above-mentioned key competences, the following character traits are also emphasised: communicative, creative, reflexive, collaborative, prospective, autonomous, resilient, responsible, ethical. It is not yet clear to what extent this will influence education policy, but the document states that the profile should act as a compass for the entire Romanian education

¹ Mokinių, kurie mokosi pagal bendrojo ugdymo programas, mokymosi pasiekimų vertinimo ir vertinimo rezultatų panaudojimo tvarkos aprašas, 2023 m. rugpjūčio 31 d. Nr. V-1125. (2023). <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/c497e6e0483511ee8185e4f3ad07094a?positionInSearchResults=0&searchModelUUID=cdcc36a3-9c43-443a-88ff-5d96bf17d47a>

system, where the elements of the teaching-learning-assessment-evaluation continuum work together to achieve the educational ideal defined in the law as follows: "The educational ideal of the Romanian school is the free, integral and harmonious development of the human being, The educational ideal of the Romanian school is the free, integral and harmonious development of human individuality, the formation of an autonomous personality and the adoption of a system of values necessary for personal fulfilment and development, for the development of entrepreneurial spirit, for civic participation in society, for social integration and employment in the labour market¹."



What conclusions can be drawn?

In Romania and Lithuania the new policy on the assessment of competences is recently adopted and there is not much evidence about its implementation in practice. However, the need and the idea of assessing generic or transversal competences is not new in any country. The Finnish experience shows that the adoption of the new concepts and practices requires a lot of support, discussion and professional development for teachers and school leaders on the topic.

¹ *Legea învățământului preuniversitar nr. 198/2023*. [Title, 1, Chapter 1, Art.1, para.3]. (2023). Monitorul Oficial, Partea I nr. 613. <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocumentAfis/271896>



What assessment practices are used in schools? What are the main challenges?



Finland

According to an analysis of curriculum implementation by the Finnish National Agency for Education (2019)¹, the most difficult parts to apply at local level are the guidelines for assessment, the objectives of multidisciplinary learning units and transversal competences.

A key challenge that complicates the assessment of transversal competences is related to the definition of a transversal competence: it is a combination of knowledge, skills, values, attitudes and dispositions. According to the curriculum, the assessment does not focus on the student's personality, temperament or other personal characteristics. The interpretation is that the teacher cannot therefore focus the assessment on the values, attitudes and dispositions of the pupil. However, the pupil can monitor and self-assess these characteristics.

Another challenge is that of continuity. The objectives and sets of transversal competences of basic and upper secondary education do not form a continuum that would allow proper monitoring of students' progress². Education providers and individual teachers have developed their own formative assessment methods to assess transversal competences. In-service training for teachers produces a range of materials for self- and peer-assessment.

¹ Saarinen, J., Venäläinen, S., Johnson, P., Cantell H., Jakobsson, G., Koivisto, P., Routti, M., Väänänen, J., Huhtanen, M., Kivistö, A. & Viitala, M. (2019). *OPS-työn askeleita. Esi- ja perusopetuksen opetussuunnitelmien perusteiden 2014 toimeenpanon arviointi*. Finnish Education Evaluation Centre. Julkaisu 1/2029.

https://www.karvi.fi/sites/default/files/sites/default/files/documents/KARVI_0119.pdf

² Ouakrim-Soivio, N. (2022) Laaja-alaisen osaamisen tavoitteet ja niiden arviointi osana oppiaineiden arviontia. In N. Hienonen, P. Nilivaara, M. Saarnio, & M-P. Vainikainen (Eds.), *Laaja-alainen osaaminen koulussa: Ajattelijana ja oppijana kehittyminen* (pp. 218–227). Gaudeamus.

The assessment of generic competences in Lithuanian schools is a rather new trend, which is not yet systematic and widespread. It is often argued that there is no need to assess the development of generic competences as they are developed informally and unconsciously. The external assessment system, such as standardised tests or exams, tends to assess academic achievement and knowledge and does not support the orientation towards competence development. Nevertheless, individual schools develop their own systems of competence assessment. For example, a student journal for self-assessment of competences, as well as a special practice to integrate competence development and assessment into regular teaching, portfolios to assess students' competences. There are also a number of guidelines for teachers on how to assess specific components of competences, e.g. "Guidelines for the Assessment of Learning to Learn Competence"¹, etc. One of the main challenges for schools is the incompatibility of competence development and assessment with the external system of student assessment, as well as the lack of teachers' expertise and experience in formative and performance-based assessment.

Key competences are referred to in the curricula of most disciplines. The curriculum for each discipline identifies 4–6 competences, which are then broken down into specific competences. Teachers report the use of formative assessment and end-of-unit summative assessment of specific subject competences.

Challenges perceived by teachers:

- Assessment is not standardised as there are no national standards (except in national examinations).
- The national assessments do not really assess competences but rather knowledge.
- The number of specific competences targeted by the national curriculum and the insufficient time allocated to their development.
- The absence or very limited availability of real-life, practical situations whereby competences can be demonstrated and assessed (i. e. the classroom context does not allow for concrete demonstration of competence mastery).
- Lack of communication between teachers in the same school about the development and assessment of competences in different school disciplines, combined with fragmentation of competence development and assessment.

¹ Bigelienė, D., Budnikienė, R., Dijokienė, E., Karpavičienė, R., Melnikė, E., Sičiūnienė ir V., Ščit, O. (2012). *Mokėjimo mokytis kompetencijos vertinimas*. Ugdymo plėtotės centras. <http://www.ugdome.lt/kompetencijos5-8/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/MMK%20vertinimas.pdf>



What conclusions can be drawn?

Teachers and schools in all three countries face challenges in assessing students' competences. However, the challenges are quite different. Finnish teachers raise issues related to the complex definition of transversal competences and it's a combination of knowledge, skills, values, attitudes and dispositions. According to the curriculum, assessment does not focus on pupils' personality, temperament or other personal characteristics. In Lithuania, teachers doubt the need to assess other components of competence than knowledge. Teachers also indicate a lack of professional capacity in performance-based and formative assessment, as well as a lack of professional communication with other teachers and schools. The other challenge is the incompatibility of competence development and assessment with the external system of student assessment. Similar challenges are faced by teachers in Romania. Nevertheless, in all three countries there are examples of good practice developed by teachers, schools and teacher educators that could be shared nationally and internationally.



Discussion

Finland, Lithuania and Romania are implementing competence-enriched curriculum reforms. The national curriculum documents of all three countries show a shift from a subject-based curriculum to a competence-enriched curriculum. This reflects a broader understanding of education that focuses on the development of well-rounded individuals capable of adapting to a rapidly changing world. A. Reid¹ describes several ways in which key competences are embedded in the national curriculum.

1

“Name and hope”. Curriculum developers and policy makers simply identify and list competences in the curriculum guidelines. Schools and teachers are left to decide how to put them into practice. At the policy level, Finland, Lithuania and Romania have gone much further than this approach, providing schools and teachers with more detailed guidance on the development of pupils' competences.

2

“Raising awareness”. Curriculum developers and teachers are called upon to "develop an approach to the integration of key competences into learning". A. Reid argues that curriculum developers and teachers are "forced" to think about key competences, but the "fundamental relationships between key competences and traditional disciplines remain unaddressed". This approach has some similarities with curriculum development practice in Lithuania and Romania, where the integration of generic competences into the subject curriculum is quite artificial and the main focus of the curricula remains the logic and structure of the subject or learning area.

3

“Embedded”. Curricula for each learning area or subject illustrate the links to the key competences (e.g. it is specified which competence is addressed in which topic of the learning area). Reid warns that this approach runs the risk of 'atomising' the curriculum if the key competences simply 'serve' the knowledge focus of the learning area. This approach is also used at some point in the curriculum development of all three countries and demonstrates the complexity and problematic nature of efforts to embed key competences in the subject curriculum.

A. Reid argues that the approaches listed above predict the traditional view of the curriculum, which focuses on the acquisition of academic knowledge. He proposes an alternative view of

¹ Reid, A. (2006). Key competences: A new way forward or more of the same? *Curriculum Matters*, 2, 43–62. <https://doi.org/10.18296/cm.0076>

curriculum development that makes academic knowledge merely a vehicle for the delivery of key competences. In this model, key competences are understood and developed holistically, there is a dynamic interaction between key competence and curriculum content, and the types and forms of assessment reflect the broader focus on key competences. Such a holistic approach could be achieved by focusing on the development of key competences rather than on academic subjects, thus placing the school at the centre of competence-based curriculum design. By analysing the Finnish, Lithuanian and Romanian curriculum development policies, we could identify signs and efforts to use the holistic approach, e.g.:

- Development of a conceptual framework of competences and rubrics on the progress of each competence in the Lithuanian curriculum. This framework will be used by subject curriculum developers and school communities to understand the wholeness of each competence and what progress steps of each competence can be observed throughout the general education of each student.
- In Finland, the common objectives of the subjects are crystallised as transversal competence, which puts the emphasis on a broader educational goal than just academic achievement. Schools are seen as the main actors in the development of transversal competences, involving every student in the interdisciplinary project dealing with the development of transversal competences.
- In Romania, the Student Competence Profile is being developed and presented for public debate. It includes eight key competences and character traits such as communicative, creative, reflexive, collaborative, prospective, autonomous, resilient, responsible, ethical. The student competence profile should become a compass for the entire Romanian education system, embracing the continuum of teaching, learning, assessment and evaluation.

The concept of competence points to the learner's ability to apply acquired knowledge, skills, values and dispositions. The complexity of competence as a learning outcome raises many questions about its assessment. International studies show that the assessment of key or transversal competences is challenging in all EU or OECD countries as they "refer to complex constructs that are not easily measurable" and are "the weakest points in EU countries' efforts to integrate 21st century competences in school curricula"¹. Finland, Lithuania and Romania also face challenges and do not yet have simple answers on how to do it, but there are many efforts and successful practices that should be further developed and shared nationally and internationally.

¹ Siarova, H., Sternadel, D., & Mašidlauskaitė, R., (2017). *Assessment practices for 21st century learning: Review of evidence. Analytical report*. Publications Office of the European Union. https://nesetweb.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/AR1_20172.pdf