



**Enabling the
next generation
to become world
ready, not just exam
ready**

A New Kind

Designed by A New Kind (newkind.studio)
for the Future Perfect Education Commission

Disclaimer

This report reflects the balance of opinion across the commission. Individual commission members may have differing views on individual recommendations. Each Commission member acted in a personal capacity and was not representing the organisation they work for.

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Imagine a future perfect



Schools enable every child to become world ready, not just exam ready

Our education system moves from being good to great globally, and great for all

Schools help each other improve and ensure no area is left behind

Teaching becomes a profession of choice

Future perfect — very different from today

	Today's world	Tomorrow's world
Curriculum	Knowledge rich and narrow	Broad and rich curriculum Knowledge and essential skills
Accountability	Inspect for compliance	Support school improvement Audit compliance
Assessment	Summative assessment to sort children academically	Formative to support learning Certification of academic achievement and skills
Teaching profession	Workforce	Profession of choice
Vocational education	Second class	Parity of esteem Integration of academic and vocational routes.
Schools	Schools are competitive islands	Schools collaborate to address challenges of place and build a self-improving system Schools work with the local community, businesses and agencies
Policy	Top down incremental changes by government of the day	Design top down systemic change with cross party support Develop bottom up systemic innovation

Recommendations for starting the journey

Design the future

Build a national consensus around the future of education in England. Established players and vested interests are comfortable with the status quo and fear change. Both the voices for change and for continuity need to be heard and understood to establish an agreed way forward. Establish an independent commission, or Royal Commission, to build a common vision, practical plan and sustainable coalition for change which has public and political cross-party support.

Discover the future

The future is unknowable, as COVID19 has reminded us. Not everything can be designed in theory. Much has to be discovered in practice. We can make a fast start, right now, by discovering and scaling what works:

- Create an independent body to identify what works systemically, and scale it fast. Adopt a business, not academic, approach to evaluation and scaling.
- Encourage systemic innovation at a local level to discover what works. Introduce VIP areas (Voluntary Improvement Partnerships), aided by government funding and regulatory flexibility. This can represent a step up for Opportunity Areas and address inequality in left behind places.

Foreword: a global perspective

by **Andreas Schleicher**
Director for the Directorate
of Education and Skills
OECD



We live in this world in which the kind of things that are easy to teach and test have also become easy to digitize and automate. The industrial age taught us how to educate second-class robots, people who are good at repeating what we tell them. In this age of accelerations, we need to think harder about what makes us first-class humans, how we complement, not substitute, the artificial intelligence we have created in our computers, and how we build a culture that facilitates learning, unlearning and re-learning throughout life.

Algorithms behind social media are sorting us into groups of like-minded individuals. They create virtual bubbles that amplify our views and leave us insulated from divergent perspectives; they homogenise opinions and polarise our societies. Tomorrow's learning systems will need to help learners to think for themselves and join others, with empathy, in work and citizenship. They need to help learners develop a strong sense of right and wrong, a sensitivity to the claims that others make on us, and a grasp of the limits on individual and collective action. At work, at home and in the community, people will need a deep understanding of how others live, in different cultures and traditions, and how others think, whether as scientists or artists. And whatever tasks machines may be taking over from humans at work, the demands on our knowledge and skills to contribute meaningfully to social and civic life will keep rising.

The growing complexity of modern living, for individuals, communities and societies, suggests that the solutions to our problems will also be complex: in a structurally imbalanced world, the imperative of reconciling diverse perspectives and interests, in local settings with often global implications, will require people to become adept in handling tensions, dilemmas and trade-offs. Striking a balance between competing demands – equity and freedom, autonomy and community, innovation and continuity, efficiency and democratic process – will rarely lead to an either/or choice or even a single solution. Individuals will need to think in a more integrated way that recognises interconnections. Empathy, adaptability and trust are underpinning this.

Creativity in problem solving requires the capacity to consider the future consequences of one's actions, evaluate risk and reward, and assume accountability for the products of one's work. This suggests

a sense of responsibility, and of moral and intellectual maturity, with which we can reflect upon and evaluate our actions in the light of experiences and personal and societal goals.

The conventional approach in education is often to break problems down into manageable bits and pieces and then to teach learners how to solve these bits and pieces. The results from PISA for the United Kingdom suggest that students are comparatively good on precisely those kinds of tasks. But modern societies create value by synthesising different fields of knowledge, making connections between ideas that previously seemed unrelated. That requires being familiar with and receptive to knowledge in other fields. This is where many students in the UK struggle on PISA.

In today's education systems, students typically learn individually and at the end of the school year, we certify their individual achievements. But the more interdependent the world becomes, the more we need great collaborators and orchestrators. Innovation is now rarely the product of individuals working in isolation, but rather an outcome of how we mobilise, share and integrate knowledge. The well-being of societies depends increasingly on people's capacity to take collective action. Learning systems therefore need to become better at helping students learn to develop an awareness of the pluralism of modern life. That means teaching and rewarding collaboration as well as individual academic achievement, enabling students both to think for themselves, and to act for and with others.

The Future Perfect Education Commission has recognised these challenges, and it engages with the question of what students should be learning. This differentiates it from so many other efforts that often limit themselves to discussing the how of education. But the Commission recognises that developing new types of knowledge, skills and attitudes may necessitate new types of learning environments. This is important too. Where teaching is about imparting prefabricated knowledge, education systems can afford low teacher quality. And when teacher quality is low, governments tend to tell their teachers exactly what to do and exactly how they want it done, using an industrial organisation of work to get the results they want. The challenge is to make teaching a profession of advanced knowledge workers who work with a high level of professional autonomy and within a collaborative culture.

But such people will not work as exchangeable widgets in education systems organised as Taylorist workplaces that rely mainly on administrative forms of accountability, and bureaucratic command-and-control systems to direct their work. To attract the people they need, modern learning systems need to transform the type of work organisation to one in which professional norms of control replace bureaucratic and administrative forms of control. The past was about received wisdom; the future is about user-generated wisdom.

Instruction in the past was subject-based; instruction in the future needs to be more project-based, building experiences that help

students think across the boundaries of subject-matter disciplines. The past was hierarchical; the future is collaborative, recognising both teachers and students as resources and co-creators.

In the past, different students were taught in similar ways. Now learning systems need to embrace diversity with differentiated approaches to learning. The goals of the past were standardisation and compliance, with students educated in age cohorts, following the same standard curriculum, all assessed at the same time. The future is about building instruction from students' passions and capacities, helping students personalise their learning and assessments in ways that foster engagement and talent. It's about encouraging students to be ingenious.

Learning systems need to better recognise that individuals learn differently, and in different ways at different stages of their lives. They need to create new ways of providing education that take learning to the learner and that are most conducive to students' progress. Learning is not a place, but an activity.

In the past, schools were technological islands, with technology often limited to supporting existing practices, and students outpacing schools in their adoption and consumption of technology. Future learning systems need to use the potential of technologies to liberate learning from past conventions and connect learners in new and powerful ways, with sources of knowledge, with innovative applications and with one another.

The past was also divided – with teachers and content divided by subjects and students separated by expectations of their future career prospects; with schools designed to keep students inside, and the rest of the world outside; with a lack of engagement with families and a reluctance to partner with other schools. The future needs to be integrated – with an emphasis on the inter-relation of subjects and the integration of students. It also needs to be connected, so that learning is closely related to real-world contexts and contemporary issues, and open to the rich resources in the community. Effective learning environments are constantly creating synergies and finding new ways to enhance professional, social and cultural capital with others. They do that with families and communities, with higher education, with businesses, and especially with other learning environments.

These things are easy to say, but hard to do. The value of the report from the Future Perfect Education Commission lies in not shying away from examining the policy and practical implications of helping the next generation to become world ready, not just exam ready.

Foreword: a UK perspective

by Venki Ramakrishnan,
President, The Royal Society



This report resonates with the Royal Society's own ambition to bring about change in how we educate members of society to lead meaningful, fulfilling, and productive lives. Unceasing technological advance often disrupts the way in which society operates and how our lives are organised. The changing societal landscape it creates has serious implications for how we should educate young people. That is why the Royal Society shares the aspiration of the Future Perfect Education Commission, in its call for a high level commission to examine how we deliver an education system that will equip our young people for the future.

As President of the Royal Society, which is effectively the UK's national academy of science, you might expect that I would wish to see as many students as possible study science, mathematics and computing throughout their school, college and university careers. This is true, but it is not the whole truth. In 2014 we published a Vision for Science, Mathematics and Computing Education, and continue to press for reform in the nature of school and college education that will make it fit for the 21st century. However, whilst the Royal Society continues to promote and support excellence in science, we also recognise that thriving in any modern society will require being educated in a broad range of subjects other than science. Not only is it necessary to be well-informed and cultured citizens, it is also necessary to confront the global challenges and disruptions that we face. To succeed in such a world, we must give young people a broad, balanced and connected experience of education in which their talents can be best nurtured and developed.

The UK, and England in particular, has one of the narrowest educational systems in the world, with the average number of subjects being studied post-16 standing at only 2.7. At a time in their lives when they are not equipped to do so, we are forcing students at the age of 16 to choose whether they want to focus on science or humanities or arts, narrowing their opportunities and restricting their horizons. This early specialisation discriminates against girls who because of cultural gender prejudice may feel inhibited about choosing science at an earlier stage. It also discriminates against children from less advantaged backgrounds, including those from some ethnic minority communities, who may be far less likely to encounter a wide range of

educational and career opportunities through family networks and are consequently more reliant on school experience. The inflexibility of the system also threatens to undermine very welcome national initiatives intended to offer parity to high-quality technical education alongside academic study.

Of course, in any conversation about the future of education, we must carefully consider the critical role that teachers play. A strong supply of excellent teachers is essential for education to thrive, but instead, in recent years we have reached a crisis point in teacher recruitment and retention. Teachers must be trusted as professionals and awarded the same agency that many other professionals take for granted.

We absolutely agree that it is vitally important to ensure that teachers have access to a radically reformed programme of professional development designed around professional growth, as discussed in this report by The Future Perfect Education Commission. However this alone does not go far enough, and I am delighted to see that the report also recommends teachers are afforded greater autonomy, a reduction in the reporting and accountability work that so often takes up countless hours of teachers' time, and a move to developing flexible work patterns in line with other sectors.

The nature of work itself has been changing for many years now. A 'job for life' is no longer something that will exist or even something that young people will relate or aspire to. Young people at school now will need to switch jobs and sectors during their career, possibly several times, all the while blending their occupation with continuous learning and training. We therefore need an education system that provides a solid foundation across multiple disciplines to allow them this flexibility, and to further develop the skills essential to the 21st century. The Future Perfect Education Commission has produced a valuable report, which acknowledges some of the challenges facing the education system as well as looking more deeply into the content of what students should be learning at school. This is an important and timely piece of work.

Introduction

Why now?

During a crisis like COVID-19, re-thinking the nature of education may seem to be an unnecessary indulgence and waste of effort. But history shows that when the country goes through a major crisis, people want to know that their sacrifices have not been in vain. They do not want to return to the past, they want to return to a better future.

In Britain's darkest hour, in 1941, the Board of Education published "Education After the War" which became known as the Green Book and laid the groundwork for the 1944 Education Act which transformed education. The Green Book stated:

The purpose of the education so given may be broadly defined as:

- (a) to provide a school environment and training that will enable every child to develop his capacities to the best advantage as an individual;*
- (b) to prepare him to take his place in the life of the community as a useful citizen. In this connection the importance of equipping him to earn a livelihood must always be kept in mind;*
- (c) generally so to assist the development of body, mind, and spirit as to enable him to lead a healthy and happy life.*

The vision of the Green Book saw that schools should enable children to be more than just exam ready: education has to help children become world ready. Our future perfect vision is back to the future vision which rediscovers the principles of the 1941 Green Book, and adapts them for the 21st century.

Today's desire for a better future was shown by a survey commissioned by the RSA. It found that only 9% of people want to return to the old normal. We need to show that there is a better future.

Building on success

Over the last twenty years, successive governments have overseen a slow and steady improvement in exam results.

English schools are now average or slightly better on OECD rankings on literacy, numeracy and science. Rigorous assessment and accountability, and a knowledge rich curriculum has gone hand in hand with improving PISA rankings. English schools are average in terms of inequality, with islands of excellence. School results do not reflect a system in crisis, although England ranks 75th out of 79 PISA nations for wellbeing of students.

The true impact of an education system can not be measured only by results today, although they matter. The impact of today's education system will be felt for at least another sixty years. Children who start education now will live to see the 22nd century: only then will we know if today's education system prepared them adequately for a future very different from today. An effective system will achieve excellence and reduce inequality. Excellence means enabling all children to take their place as full citizens of the future.

There are compelling reasons to believe that today's system is not fit for the future. It needs to transform itself to meet the challenges of tomorrow. Starting now with a clear strategy will allow for measured, controlled change which builds on the strengths of the existing system. An early start avoids a later and greater crisis, and enables both change and risk to be well managed.



The coming challenge

1. What works today will not work tomorrow.

A radically uncertain future requires that we prepare the next generation in a different way. The next generation, like today's, will need a strong bedrock of knowledge, literacy and numeracy. But that is not enough. Success means more than regurgitating information for a test. Although efforts have been made to improve essential skills and capabilities including resilience, adaptability, problem solving, teamwork and critical thinking, these efforts have not been enough.

2. Our competitors are changing and charging ahead.

Asian school systems which perform well in PISA tests have been criticised for churning out students who are intensively crammed to do well in tests, but lack critical thinking, teamwork and creativity. Those systems are aware of their limitations and are now changing to produce more rounded citizens of the future.

3. Inequality remains entrenched

There are many great schools but there are too many children who are left behind by the system. The personal, economic and social costs of inequality are high and felt particularly acutely by left behind towns and communities.

4. Average is not good enough.

If Global Britain is to compete successfully, it needs to remain well above average relative to its OECD peers.

5. England has a uniquely fragmented school system.

This could be a strength which allows us to foster innovation and enable the system to learn and adapt faster and better than our global competitors. However, our accountability system inhibits innovation, and fragmentation of the system makes it hard to scale the best ideas and entrenches inequality around islands of success. Most MATs lack the scale to add value or improve the system.

6. Change needs to deal with the challenges of today and tomorrow at the same time.

A clear future vision and transition plan is needed. Tomorrow's system can not succeed if we ignore today's challenges of left behind areas, workforce morale and recruitment, funding and accountability.

About the commission

The goal of Education Commission is to change the nature of the debate about the future of education in England.

Historically, Governments have focused on how to improve the existing system. This is pragmatic, effective and low risk in the short term. What is absent from the debate is a clear vision of what the future needs to look like. A clear future focus enables government to make better decisions about how to improve today's system.

This goal has four consequences:

1. Focus on the future perfect, not on today. If we focus on today's debate we simply get variations of today's solutions. But the future will be radically different, not incrementally different. We need to change the debate to identify what a future perfect system will look like. Subsequent phases of work can then identify how we get from here to there.
2. Learn from global best practice and innovative practice, for three reasons:
 - a. Keep discussion about the future perfect rooted in reality, rather than being pure blue sky thinking
 - b. Broaden the range of potential solutions so that debate is no longer anchored around current experience in England.
 - c. Recognise that we will not succeed by copying other systems, but we can adapt their experience for our unique system and situation in England.

3. Be fiercely apolitical and engage stakeholders from all disciplines. During the initial consultation period we heard and received evidence from over 100 groups and experts. Although there was little consensus on the future perfect, there was consensus that the future has to be radically different from the present.
4. Recognise that we do not have all the answers. Since no one can predict the future perfectly, no one can predict what a future perfect system should look like in detail. Instead of designing a blue print for the future, we want to discover the future by harnessing the collective talents of the teaching profession, experts, policy makers, students and parents. Only by being humble can we be truly ambitious.

If the commission can help ignite and inform a vigorous debate about the future of education, it has served its purpose. It is now up to other groups to take the debate forward. Ultimately, the government of the day will need to shape the debate in a structured and purposeful way which gains cross-party support. An independent government commission, or Royal Commission, would ensure that any new direction will have the breadth of support to ensure change is sustained across future governments of all colours.

"Prepare young people for real life, not just for the next test"

Edge Foundation

Commission members

**Nick Brook**

Nick is Deputy General Secretary at the NAHT. He previously held senior management positions at the TDA (Training and Development Agency for Schools), OFSTED, the Home Office and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary. He holds a PGCE from the University of Sussex.

**Neil Carmichael**

Neil was Conservative Member of Parliament for Stroud from 2010 to 2017, during which time he held the role of Chair of the Education Select Committee, with the ability to scrutinise the Department for Education and provide oversight on behalf of Parliament. After leaving Parliament, he has been appointed honorary professor of Politics and Education at Nottingham University, and has chaired the Commission of Sustainable Learning for Work, Life and a Changing Economy.

**Kevin Courtney**

Kevin Courtney was formerly a physics teacher in Camden, where he joined the Camden branch of National Union of Teachers. He has over 25 years' experience as an NUT school representative and association secretary, and became deputy General Secretary of the NUT in 2010. In July 2015 he was voted in as the General Secretary of the NUT with 70% of the vote.

**Dame Judith Hackitt**

Dame Judith currently has a portfolio of non-Executive roles following a long career in industry and 10 years as Chair of the Health and Safety Executive. She is Chair of MakeUK and of Enginuity and is a non-Exec Director of the High Value Manufacturing Catapult and serves on the Board of HS2 Ltd. She is also an independent advisor to Government following on from her review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety, following the Grenfell Tower fire.

**Layla Moran (Patron)**

Layla asked for the commission to be formed to address the challenge of the future of education. In order to maintain the independence of the commission she plays no part in any of the meetings of the Commission. The Commission is deeply grateful to Layla for initiating its work. Layla Moran is the Liberal Democrat Education spokesperson and is MP for Oxford West and Abingdon, and was previously a physics teacher.

**Jo Owen (Chair)**

Jo is co-founder of Teach First, and of Teaching Leaders, Future Leaders, Ambition School Leadership and STIR Education. He is chair of Right to Succeed and STIR Education. Previously he was a partner at Accenture and worked in brand management at P&G. He is the author of 20 books on management and leadership and is the only person to win the Chartered Management Institute gold medal four times for his writing.

**Professor Emma Smith**

Former secondary school Chemistry teacher and currently the Director of the Department of Education Studies at the University of Warwick. She has recently completed a large funded study into inequalities in the educational and employment trajectories of STEM graduates. She is the co-editor of The BERA/SAGE Handbook of Educational Research and her latest book Key issues in Education and Social Justice was published by SAGE in 2018.

Summary

The goal of education should be to enable all children, regardless of background, to develop their cognitive, social and emotional capabilities, so that they can take their place as full citizens of the future. At present our education system already does this for some children and young people. We want this to be an entitlement for all.

Two challenges

Make excellence available to all. The English school system has islands of excellence. It also has too many areas and children that are left behind. The challenge is to level up the system as a whole in terms of both educational outcomes and inputs to the system.

Prepare the next generation for different challenges from past generations. Building knowledge and cognitive skills remains essential, especially literacy and numeracy. The next generation will also need essential social and emotional skills to cope with an uncertain, changing and high skills future. We need to move beyond the knowledge–skills trade off and achieve both.

"We need to acknowledge that our lives are changing and we need education to change too."

Royal Society

Two solutions

Ensure schools build the cognitive, social and emotional skills of the next generation

- Build on the knowledge rich curriculum, literacy and numeracy by developing essential skills such as teamwork, critical thinking, resilience which support employability and citizenship.
- Create an assessment system which recognises development of the whole child, with a continuing focus on literacy, numeracy and knowledge which are the gateways to success.
- Invest heavily in helping teachers, leaders and schools acquire the capabilities to deliver the new approach. Rebuild workforce morale and make teaching a profession of choice.

Make excellence available to all

- Focus on place: improve local systems, not just individual schools. Encourage collaboration across schools to raise standards, to share best practices and to address the challenges of left behind areas. Remove the barriers to collaboration inherent in the accountability system.
- Enhance the accountability system to focus on school improvement while protecting the essentials: safeguarding, literacy and numeracy.
- Give full pre-school support to families in left behind areas to ensure their children are not left behind by the time they start school.



Seven deep dives

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Accountability: what we heard

"It is important that schools are incentivised through accountability measures and the inspection framework to be able to offer a broad and rich curriculum"

Pearson

"Our school lives in fear of OFSTED"

Teacher roundtable

"Accountability needs to go beyond academic success and consider health, wellbeing, future employment but must be done in a supportive, informative way rather than punitive"

Teacher roundtable

"The current accountability system and reformed GCSEs appear to be creating incentives to narrow rather than widen the curriculum"

Teacher roundtable

"It just leads to gaming the system and loss of collaboration between schools"

Expert roundtable

77%

wish to have a say on their child's education at school level.

Parentkind

66%

of parents want schools to be more accountable to them.

Parentkind

Accountability: summary

The challenge

The current accountability system prevents progress to a future perfect because it:

- Limits ambition and innovation by encouraging a compliance culture
- Drives teachers and leaders from the profession
- Deters staff from working in more deprived communities
- Deters collaboration within and across schools, which limits the ability to raise standards and spread innovation
- Fails to support school improvement: it focuses on audit and summative assessment, not on formative assessment.

The future perfect

Future perfect requires a strong accountability system which will help drive up standards. Accountability will have five major strands:

- Inspections which focus on improvement, not compliance. This requires more self-evaluation and peer review. Self-evaluation to follow a national framework to achieve consistency and quality. Inspection to focus not just on the plan (which is an easy cut and paste job, potentially) but on the quality of implementation.
- New School Standards Agency to provide a balanced view of pupil progress in the round, consistent with a broader curriculum.
- Quality assurance of basic standards, such as safeguarding and basic performance metrics such as literacy and numeracy.
- Peer reviews among schools, which will require funding, training and support to be effective.
- In addition to school inspections, areas will be inspected as a whole to assess how schools can better collaborate and support each other to improve learning for all pupils. This will reduce incentives for gaming the system by off-rolling.

Consequences

The future perfect requires a complete re-think of the existing system:

- Inspections need to make a proper diagnostic and to provide a formative (not just summative) assessment of the school. Light touch for high performing schools, intense support where needed. This will require more resource to be allocated to an inspection system
- Head teachers must be given both the incentives and the capability (training, support) to make continuous improvement.
- Teachers, management and teachers should be treated as professionals and act as professionals. Need for constant learning and development of teachers.
- Identify appropriate school groupings for peer reviews: similar types to share best practice, different types to shift thinking and introduce new ideas.
- Identify right local groupings of schools for area wide inspections
- The new inspections agency will also have to be subject to external inspection and review.



Accountability: global best practices

Commission Recommendations

- Inspections which focus on improvement, not compliance. This requires more self-evaluation and peer review.

The Commission recommends a strong accountability system which will help drive up standards. Embedded within this the Commission proposes a focus on self-evaluation, collaboration and quality assurance around basic standards.

Over the last few decades, most high performing systems have decentralised control of their education systems giving greater autonomy to schools and local school authorities. This has led to greater scrutiny of what goes on in schools and the increased availability of data on student and school performance has led to parents and other stakeholders becoming more involved in decision making about schooling.

There is however no single approach to holding schools accountable and many high performing systems adopt a hybrid model of accountability which typically include elements of external inspection, school self-evaluation, as well as school leader and teacher appraisal and monitoring. The relative importance of these elements does vary between systems and depends on the relationship between school self-evaluation, external inspection and accountability policies. In addition, the effectiveness of systems which combine accountability with autonomy depends on the quality and motivation of the school staff, the nature of the accountability system used and the support that schools are given to undertake evaluation and improvement activities.

International practice indicates that school self-evaluation is a key component of accountability and monitoring in a number of systems. A range of areas are evaluated ranging from school finance, safeguarding and curriculum alignment to pupil performance outcomes. Some systems also make effective use of thematic and sample based inspections and evaluations. Self-evaluations are often designed in connection with an external activity such as school inspections or school accreditation visits.

In systems which adopt hybrid models of school accountability, school inspections tend to have a much larger influence on schools than self-evaluation and teacher and school leader appraisal. The majority of countries that use self-evaluations share the outcomes with external audiences such as high-level education authorities, school inspectors and parents or the public. In many high performing systems, schools have limited influence on the design and implementation of school inspections which tend to be devised by higher-level authorities and conducted by external inspectors.

Case study New Zealand

New Zealand has a collaborative model of school evaluation in which school self-review and external review are integrated and complementary with all schools expected to be involved in an ongoing, cyclical process of evaluation. The evaluation system is underpinned by two sets of indicators: outcome indicators (including student achievement and progress; their sense of well-being and confidence in their identity) and a set of process indicators that describe the practices and processes that contribute to school effectiveness and improvement (including curriculum, leadership and assessment).

Schools set in place their own evaluation processes and, as part of an annual reporting cycle, provide regular accounts of student achievement in relation to goals and targets, along with planned improvement actions. Internal evaluations can vary in scope, depth and focus depending on the purpose and the context. The focus of the evaluation is flexible: it may be strategic, linked to vision, values, goals and targets; it may be a regular business-as-usual review of the curriculum or a learning area; or it may be a review undertaken in response to an unforeseen event or issue.

Schools are reviewed on average once every three years. Reviews are more frequent where performance is perceived to be poor and there are risks to the education and safety of the students. Following external review, schools are classified into four categories. If the school is able to demonstrate good self-reviewing processes, effective use of its assessment information and a stable reporting history, then external reviews are less frequent.

Assessment: what we heard

1/3

Only one third of classroom teachers feel 'very confident' conducting assessment as part of their day-to-day teaching.

Pearson

"I don't see the point in exams. They're not for me."

Student roundtable

"Assessment needs to reflect the wider range of skills, not purely written exams"

Teacher roundtable

90%

of parents agree or strongly agree that "a good education for my child goes beyond exam results"

Parentkind

"Attitudes and aptitudes are often seen as more important than formal qualifications"

UCAS

"Right now qualifications drive assessment which in turn determines the curriculum. Curriculum must always come first"

CST

45%

of businesses ranked aptitude and readiness for work as the single most important factor (for recruiting school and college leavers)

CBI

Assessment: summary

The challenge

The assessment system needs to be made more rigorous and fit for the future:

1. Employers value aptitude and attitude as much as academic qualifications
2. Assessment has been driven by the need of Universities for an academic sorting system, not by the needs of the student
3. Norm referencing of exams assures that 30% of children start adult life having been assessed as failures
4. The assessment system means many students acquire a dislike of learning: learning to regurgitate information for a test, rather than learning for life.
5. Schools game the system to meet the needs of the accountability regime, with adverse effects on children: off-rolling, teaching to test, focus resources on a few children at key stages.

The future perfect

The future perfect will make a clear distinction between certification and qualification. Certification shows when students have achieved sufficient proficiency in core capabilities, including literacy and numeracy and has to be externally validated. Internal certification (with external moderation) can be used to certify the wider achievements of each student. Assessment for sorting is required at the end of a student's career to inform university selection.

Assessment must be relevant to student needs and the method of assessment must achieve three outcomes: credibility, validity and engagement. The future perfect will:

1. Focus on sustained student progress through strong, effective and continuous formative assessment. The best or most fortunate schools already do this.

2. Certify when children have achieved proficiency in core skills, especially literacy and numeracy. Certification can happen when the student is ready, and should focus on functional skills and should be externally assessed.
3. Make qualifications more engaging for all pupils: relevant to their needs and achievable, eg through clear progression (grades, badges etc)
4. Reflect the talents of the whole child, including their employability and life skills. To be certified by teachers with external moderation to assure credibility and validity
5. Reflect human ingenuity and creativity – including authentic problem solving, modelling of real situations and practical learning
6. Provide a sorting mechanism at the end of their school career through examination and/or project work: trade off rigour/credibility versus engagement/validity.

Consequences

1. Teachers to be trained and supported better, from ITT onwards, to deliver effective formative assessment.
2. Curriculum to be reviewed to ensure children acquire functional skills in literacy and numeracy, and appropriate employability and life skills
3. External moderation requires extra resources and support; in the long term technology/may provide a solution.

Assessment: global best practices

Commission Recommendations

- Focus on sustained student progress through strong, effective and continuous formative assessment. The best or most fortunate schools already do this.

Evidence from around the world suggests that formative assessment (or feedback) is an effective strategy for improving children's learning. However, the term 'formative assessment' covers a wide range of different methods and approaches for providing and receiving feedback; these tend to be implemented in different ways, with varying levels of effectiveness. Similarly, teachers often find it challenging to embed and utilize formative assessment consistently and in a way that encourages students to respond as needed.

Many OECD education systems have developed policy frameworks to promote and support this practice in the classroom. Where these frameworks exist, they tend to be developed at the central (national or state) level and apply to all schools. In Australia and South Korea, for example, formative assessment is a required part of teacher education programmes at some levels. In South Korea and Spain, there is also a requirement for teachers to undertake professional development in using this formative assessment approaches. And in both Estonia and Spain, schools are required to report on the strategies that are being used to promote and implement effective feedback.

Evidence suggests that formative assessment is not a panacea for improving learning but needs to be carefully woven into curriculum delivery throughout the subjects and age phases of a child's school career. To support with this, some jurisdictions (e.g. Sweden, Japan, South Korea) use centralised assessments for formative purposes. These do not have stakes for students but instead provide diagnostic information to schools and/or are used to provide regional or national overviews of pupil performance.

Case study Sweden

Students are assessed continuously by their teachers. Assessment in the early years is mostly formative. In the early years of education, student assessment is mostly formative. From Sixth Grade (age 12-13), students receive grades to indicate their academic attainment. Teachers and pupils are engaged in ongoing dialogue and evaluation of progress; goal-setting is a regular and embedded pedagogical element across all phases of schooling.

Teachers can opt to use a national 'test bank' to provide standardised assessments and monitor progress. Furthermore, national assessments must be undertaken at key stages across the compulsory stages and upper secondary phase. Assessments in the earlier years (Grades 3 and 5) are used for formative/ diagnostic purposes while those in Grades 9 and upper secondary school are summative and are used by teachers when determining students' final end-of-phase grade. All national tests are administered and marked by pupils' teachers; this has been a key source of debate in recent years.

While Sweden is a highly decentralised system overall, in recent years there have been some substantial efforts to work on local and regional levels to support and deliver high-quality professional development relating to formative assessment.

Curriculum: what we heard

25%

Just 25% felt they were good at communicating, only 15% believed they were good at presenting, and just 14% good at getting people to work together in a team.

Skills Builder Partnership

"Ensure children are 'world-ready' rather than 'exam-ready'"

NAHT

"How can we prepare young people throughout their education for jobs that are changing, or haven't yet been created?"

Pearson

88%

of young people, 94% of employers and 97% of teachers say life skills are as or more important than academic qualifications.."

Sutton Trust

"If we want future generations to be adaptable and resilient to the large disruptive changes that will be brought about by technology, we need them to have as broad a foundation as possible."

Royal Society

"The decision between knowledge and skills is not an either/or"

Teacher round table

"How can we prepare young people throughout their education for jobs that are changing, or haven't yet been created?"

Pearson

"Children developing character and resilience will also help to prepare them for their future in the workplace"

Parentkind

70%

of the 2,000 respondents argued that ...English and maths should be easily applicable to everyday life. This....be applied to the education system more broadly.

NCFE/CACHE

Curriculum: summary

The challenge

There has long been a debate about skills versus knowledge. It is possible to deliver both. The challenge is to ensure the system as a whole delivers both. The current curriculum does not adequately prepare the next generation for a radically uncertain future because it:

- Feels irrelevant to many students who then disengage from education for life
- Rewards recalling facts, which is a low value skill for the future
- Fails to equip students with essential skills and character: resilience, teamwork, persuasive communication, leadership, mental health.
- Does not prepare students for the world of work
- Requires students to specialise to early

Excessive focus on the knowledge rich curriculum is a recent development. Returning to the goal of a broader, more balanced education is not a radical leap into the unknown. It is an update of a traditional success system for the 21st century.

The future perfect

The future perfect curriculum may be a back to the future curriculum. In June 1941 the Government outlined the purpose of education, which was then captured in the Education Act of 1944 (the Butler Act¹). The Green Book defined the purpose of education as:

- (a) to provide a school environment and training that will enable every child to develop his capacities to the best advantage as an individual;
- (b) to prepare him to take his place in the life of the community as a useful citizen. In this connection the importance of equipping him to earn a livelihood must always be kept in mind;
- (c) generally so to assist the development of body, mind, and spirit as to enable him to lead a healthy and happy life.

A future perfect curriculum goals should always be subject to democratic approval. The design to meet those goals should be based on an independent body to assure quality, cohesion and practicality. The future perfect curriculum should enable children to achieve their full human potential. This depends on achieving four goals:

- Build core functional skills: literacy and numeracy
- Address the economic imperative of building skills for the future including essential skills like problem solving, teamwork and oracy – but avoid the trap of building specific technical skills which may have a short shelf life. Note that creativity needs content knowledge.
- Build citizens of the future (history, geography etc)
- Help grow the whole child to enable the next generation to deal with whatever the future may throw at them (mental health, resilience, motivation for life long learning)

Consequences

The consequences of these choices are:

- The curriculum needs to be redesigned not only in terms of content (what it achieves) but also in style (how it is achieved). This is the role of the independent commission to design, and may call for more thematic teaching so that both skills and knowledge can be developed at the same time.
- The teaching profession needs to be supported and upskilled to take on an increasingly challenging curriculum.
- The accountability system needs to create a safe space in which schools and teachers have discretion to innovate ways of delivering the curriculum.
- The curriculum redesign has to be consistent with stretching the brightest and addressing social inclusion and equity: it should achieve the fullest development of each child's potential.

Curriculum: global best practices

Commission Recommendations

- Build core functional skills: literacy and numeracy
- Address the economic imperative of building skills for the future including essential skills like problem solving, teamwork and oracy – but avoid the trap of building specific technical skills which may have a short shelf life. Note that creativity needs content knowledge.
- Build citizens of the future (history, geography etc)
- Help grow the whole child to enable the next generation to deal with whatever the future may throw at them (mental health, resilience, motivation for lifelong learning).

In line with the Commission's four Curriculum goals, practice and policy from some of the higher-performing OECD nations indicates a close relationship between high-quality knowledge-rich subject content along with broader individual and social skills, designed to support young people through their schooling career and beyond.

Many high-performing OECD countries also have a core 'national curriculum'. Implementation of this is often supported with a clear framework of the subjects, skills and content to be covered. High-quality textbooks are frequently used to encourage a standardized, equitable approach, and to support with teacher workload and pedagogic content knowledge.

Within their curricula, a number of these countries integrate the development of skills or competencies beyond traditional subject disciplines. There is often a focus on complementing examined, subject areas with the opportunity for students to learn about the wider world within which they live, and to develop skills which may help them later in life. In Hong Kong, for example, these include moral and civic education, career-related experiences and community service; in Finland, they include ICT competence and working life competence and entrepreneurship; the Ministry of Education in Singapore have recently sought to take a more holistic approach to curriculum development, integrating a range of skills designed to encourage lifelong learning and prepare students for life after school.

Case study New Zealand

The National Curriculum in New Zealand begins with a statement of vision that all ‘young people will be confident, connected, actively involved lifelong learners.’ In addition to nine Key Learning Areas (subjects such as English, Maths, the Arts, Social Sciences) the curriculum also promotes the development of five skill areas: thinking; using language, symbols and texts; managing self; relating to others; and, participating and contributing. These are described as essential for young people “to live, learn, work, and contribute as active members of their communities...they are not separate or stand-alone. They are the key to learning in every learning area (NZ MOE, 2007).”

The five competencies incorporate a range of knowledge, skills and values. The competency of ‘using language, symbols and texts’, for example, includes the development of key literacy and numeracy skills, as well as engagement with written and oral texts from a range of sources, including those accessed via technology. The emphasis is on developing strong communication competencies in order to access, process, and provide information to others.

While these key competencies should be integrated within subject areas, schools have the freedom to determine how this happens in practice. The Ministry of Education states that a ‘future-focused’ approach to supporting the development of competencies and skills can be beneficial. Issues relating to sustainability, citizenship, enterprise and globalisation are presented as potential areas for supporting students’ engagement with the competencies and the future world that they will inhabit.

Vocational education: what we heard

"Skills like creativity, originality, problem-solving and the ability to learn give humans an advantage over machines and learners say they need help mastering them and should be recognised in the school curriculum."

Pearson

"Young people should not be faced with a blunt choice between an academic and a VT route post 16.; there needs to be a coherent and integrated system"

NAHT

"Impartial careers advice is needed to prepare young people for all options post-16"

CBI

"We need an education system that allows for a range of pathways through education and training. Whatever path they take it should lead to real qualifications for young people and support them in progressing through to employment"

Pearson

"We need to create better linkages between business and education (which happens to some extent on STEM). Further Education does this well, although it is the Cinderella service: ignored and under funded. It plays a vital role: it works with the community to match supply and demand: people learn knowledge and skills they can apply locally. But universities have no such community base: people go to Newcastle University because it is good and then disappear to London for a job."

Teacher Round table

Vocational education: summary

The case for change

Employers have concerns that current traditional secondary and tertiary education does not generate “work ready” candidates and are stating an increasing preference for the Apprentice route.

Parents, students and educators continue to hold on to the view that vocational training is “second rate” compared to University education.

Schools are incentivised to keep students in sixth form rather than moving those who would benefit or show an interest into vocational FE education. Poorer performers are encouraged to go off and do vocational training elsewhere and brighter students are encouraged to follow academic route irrespective of personal preference/aptitude.

Funding for FE is inadequate in comparison to HE funding further reinforcing the “second rate” belief and fails to recognise the need for significant investment especially in technology.

Process for developing and approving vocational qualifications/ standards is slow and bureaucratic and cannot keep pace with current skills gap and emerging skills needs (especially in engineering and technology).

Employers are now tasked with defining new standards leading to fragmentation/lack of coherent narrative on needs, detailed and specific job specs, duplication and erosion of transferrable skills.

Vocational skills gaps (in many sectors but especially in engineering and manufacturing) are well recognised and there are too many well meaning but poorly targeted initiatives trying to address the issue Government’s introduction of the Apprenticeship levy (designed to encourage Apprenticeship take up) has led to a significant drop off in the number of people taking up apprenticeships.

Focus is almost exclusively on training for young people and not addressing the increasing challenge of upskilling the existing workforce (60% of 2030 workforce have already left full time education).

Consensus/Emerging Narrative

The re-emergence of Apprenticeships and introduction of T-levels as part of the suite of education routes is very much welcome but there is much to do to integrate this into a coherent framework without stigma of preferred and second rate routes.

Much of the current and future vocational skills needs agenda is common despite businesses emphasising specific needs/job roles. Digital skills are at the heart of everyone's needs.

Vocational training as with all education needs to recognise how the world of work will change over the working life of today's students – jobs and technologies not yet thought of – and provide a skills set that can adapt, adjust, move sectors and acquire new skills and competence throughout working life.

Government sees its primary role in vocational education as ensuring that young people have skills for jobs now with no real consideration of planning for future needs.

A large proportion of today's workforce in every sector have vocational qualifications and/or on the job training. There is a need to include upskilling of the existing workforce into the vocational training and education model to ensure fulfilling work and increase productivity. UTCs have been a mixed blessing. Some have been successful but many are struggling to survive. The model is flawed in that there is a reluctance (among parents and teachers) to move students at the age of 14 and many schools see nearby UTCs as an opportunity to pass off their "problem children".

Applying for apprenticeships is challenging for many – applicants often go only to large employers in their area and then "give up" when rejected a localised (regional) system for applications and clearing like exists for University application is needed.

There is a real need for better coordination and collaboration within sectors to achieve a coherent plan. This requires leadership and for many to give up on their own "pet projects".

There is a lack of joined up thinking in Government with DfE lacking real understanding of employers needs and BEIS seeking to respond to employers needs though initiatives such as Industrial strategy and driving further sectoral fragmented activity as a result.

Choices to be made

All major party manifestos talked of some form of lifelong learning account/portfolio, this needs to become a reality with realistic amounts of money made available and a culture of lifelong learning must become an integral part of the narrative.

Schools need to be incentivised to make decisions on what is best for each student and perverse incentives removed. Apprenticeships offer a real “win-win” especially to bright students from disadvantaged backgrounds especially with the opportunity to “earn while you learn”. Careers advice/guidance needs a major overhaul to offer real informed choices to students and their parents.

Government to focus on development of future needs rather than current short term focus.

Institutes of Technology have great potential but meaningful liaison with business and R&D organisations needs to be established to ensure that foresighting and curriculum development become an integral part of the process. Are UTCs to be nurtured or abandoned?

Skills and aptitudes need to be prioritised over detailed knowledge acquisition throughout the education system and this needs to be presented in the context of a lifelong learning journey. How should this be reflected in terms of qualifications/assessments?

Vocational education and development needs to be recognised as having parity with the academic route and also remove the binary approach to one or the other – a blended route is what many people can and should follow.

Future Vision

A single standards body for vocational qualifications which has eye on future needs as well as current.

Lifelong learning accounts for all employees.

Assessment and qualifications based on skills and aptitudes rather than knowledge.

A coordinated application and clearing system for vocational education to facilitate entry to apprenticeships and FE.

Invest more in UTCs or scrap altogether.

Careers guidance focused on making the best of everyone’s knowledge and interests and advising on all routes without prejudice

The teaching profession: what we heard

"The workload associated with assessment is enormous, with the burden often placed on classroom teachers. As a consequence inefficient assessment practices can lead to a focus on distorting effects – e.g. heavy marking, and mock tests and exams."

Pearson

"Create a positive proposition for a career in teaching, comparable with other graduate profession such as law, medicine and accountancy so that we can attract and retain the teachers the future system will inevitably need."

NAHT

"Unmanageable workload is consistently the most cited reason teachers give for why they leave the profession"

NFER

"Make teaching more appealing through reasonable pay, acceptable workload and renewed purpose, not just preparing students for exams but preparing them to be successful in life."

Teacher roundtable

"Schools in challenging circumstances, such as remote or disadvantaged areas, have particular issues in retaining staff."

Teacher roundtable

The teaching profession: summary

The challenge

How to turn teaching workforce into a trusted profession at all levels which can lead change in a radically uncertain future. Technology may change the role of the teacher dramatically, and the workforce has to be supported to manage such change.

Teachers not currently equipped to transition to a future perfect education system because they:

- Are not treated or trusted as professionals: lack of autonomy
- Lack agency as a result of an accountability system which delivers compliance, not commitment
- Lose, over time, the intrinsic motivation which initially attracted them to teaching: too much pointless reporting; teaching to test; lack of support and lack of flexible working patterns

The future perfect

The key elements of a future perfect profession are:

1. Embed learning and development as an intrinsic part of teachers' day-to-day role. This includes a radical reframing of continuous professional development as a well-resourced professionally delivered and evidence based feature of a teacher's career. In negotiation with school leaders teachers will take responsibility for their professional growth matching both their individual and institutional needs. This goes beyond training days, and will involve high levels of peer learning, mentoring and management which supports as well as controls.
2. Recognise that successful professionals rely on intrinsic motivation, not just the extrinsic motivation of carrots and sticks. Restoring professional intrinsic motivation will involve:
 - a. Allowing more autonomy within the curriculum and within the accountability system
 - b. Encouraging more supportive relationships: more peer group learning and supportive management

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- c. Enable greater mastery to adapt to new methods and new challenges through more intense CPD and different career routes which recognise expertise.
 - d. Reducing redundant work, especially in terms of reporting and accountability
 - e. Developing flexible work patterns and working hours fit for a 21st century profession
3. Strengthen school leadership and management: avoid the need to rely on super hero heads. This will mean:
- a. More and better CPD to help teachers become effective managers and leaders
 - b. More peer to peer learning and support among heads, with strong support for new heads
 - c. Potentially, central contracts for key heads who can take on the most challenging schools without fear for their career prospects
 - d. Reform the accountability system so that it becomes less focused on compliance and more focused progress and continuous improvement. Accountability system should allow autonomy to school leaders and teachers to innovate and adapt.

Consequences

1. Identify where best practice management and leadership exists currently.
 - a. Focus on sustained success which does not rely on gaming the system, for instance off-rolling and pre-excluding certain children.
 - b. Identify which schools, by type of school, have the lowest rates of attrition among staff
2. Reform the accountability system and incentives to enable:
 - a. greater innovation within schools
 - b. greater peer group learning across schools
 - c. identification and spread of best practice
 - d. reduction of pointless reporting and paper work
3. Improve CPD at all levels
 - a. Bring all (newcomers to the profession and more experienced colleagues) up to speed on what evidence says is best practice – innovation from a solid starting position.
 - b. Teachers to be given paid opportunities to adapt to new methods and update their professional skills
 - c. Enable managers and leaders to manage change and manage people, not just manage learning.
 - d. Introduce new career options so that teachers can be recognised for their expertise: management should not be the only way of progressing a career.
 - e. Review ITT to ensure new teachers are equipped with the teaching skills of the future.

The teaching profession: global best practice

Commission Recommendations

- Embed learning and development as an intrinsic part of teachers' day-to-day role. This includes a radical reframing of continuous professional development as a well-resourced professionally delivered and evidence-based feature of a teacher's career. In negotiation with school leaders, teachers will take responsibility for their professional growth, matching both their individual and institutional needs. This goes beyond training days, and will involve high levels of peer learning, mentoring and management which supports as well as controls.

The Commission recommend that teachers' time is used effectively on activities which will enhance their practice and the outcomes of the young people they work with, and that their workload is manageable. Examples from high performing OECD nations from around the globe, suggests that having and maintaining a high-quality and valued teaching workforce is essential for ensuring a functioning education system where children can thrive.

A number of different policies and practices have been highlighted which would support these goals. Countries such as Singapore, Estonia and Finland have developed strategies to attract high-calibre graduates into the profession. These include innovative selection approaches as well as the offer of scholarships and regular adjustments to teacher pay to ensure that it is in line with other graduate salaries. Some East Asian countries, such as Japan and Singapore, provide teachers with substantial time during their working day for planning and preparation in collaboration with colleagues. Across a range of nations, professional development is also emphasized for in-service teachers. Teachers in Singapore, for example, are entitled to 100 hours per year of professional development. In Sweden and Canada (Alberta) the education ministries have also embedded development opportunities which support teachers to work inclusively and to support students from diverse backgrounds.

Case study

Japan

Teaching is a popular and high-status profession in Japan. Collaboration and peer support is an important feature of the Japanese system. There is an expectation that teachers will collaborate and that younger teachers will have ongoing opportunities to learn from those more experienced.

While, according to recent OECD data, Japanese teachers work long hours, they spend substantially fewer hours than many of their international counterparts teaching in the classroom. Instead, their timetables include significant proportions of time for planning, subject knowledge development and collaboration with colleagues. In addition, a clearly structured and focused national curriculum, means that there is more time to be spent teaching each topic in order to ensure that all children have a thorough understanding of the content before moving on. Teachers have time to cover key concepts and subject knowledge in depth, using high-quality textbooks to support with this. While not the only resource, these assist with teachers' workload and ensure that children are receiving an equal 'diet' within their lessons.

A local board of education determines the amount of time that teachers in their area should spend on professional development activities per year. Also at a local level, specific PD courses are run for those at different stages of their careers. A key component of teacher licence renewal (which occurs every 10 years in Japan) consists of teachers demonstrating that they have participated in a certain amount of professional development. More informally, the Japanese traditional of 'lesson study' is used in schools to enable teachers to collaboratively plan, observe and reflect upon, and improve their teaching.

Schools & society: what we heard

"Schools perhaps put too much responsibility on teachers. Maybe they need to have teams — social workers, behaviour support, healthcare and so on working together in schools — then they could start addressing these problems as a team"

Expert roundtable

"Most experienced teachers should be in the most disadvantaged schools, not vice versa. Pay experienced teachers more in difficult schools."

Teacher roundtable

"Collaboration is essential to improvement. The basis for this must be schools working together in strong and sustainable groups."

NAHT

"Schools can't solve all the ills of society by themselves."

Teacher roundtable

"The vast majority of parents want to be active participants in their child's education"

ParentKind

"Schools need to be able to make their own choices but are stronger when working together. Schools should be given the freedom to develop and implement approaches to curricula (which should lead to both knowledge and skills acquisition) that reflect their local context, their culture and the needs of their learners — providing they can demonstrate the positive impact of those choices"

Pearson

Schools & society: summary

The challenge

Future perfect schools will move from being islands of competition to networks of collaboration, with other schools, with the community and employers.

The current system will struggle to deliver a future perfect because:

- System fragmentation makes it hard to scale best practices, although fragmentation should enable high rates of innovation and variation across the system
- Schools lack the resources and capability to engage appropriately with the community beyond the school gates: parents, local businesses, early years, social services.
- Competition has unintended consequences: reduced collaboration between schools; game playing to improve perceived results and segregation of children by ability, faith and social background.
- Under performing schools struggle to improve: lack of local support; adverse selection of pupils; difficulty in attracting best teaching talent.
- Marginalised children forced out of the mainstream with the result that they become more vulnerable to gangs, drugs, crime and less likely to become employable.

The future perfect

A future perfect school system will:

- Encourage greater collaboration between schools, to raise standards and to spread best practices.
- Encourage schools to work with the community in so far as such work will improve educational outcomes. This is particularly important in early years and for engaging parents who have low engagement with their children's education. Schools are highly trusted in the community.
- Expect schools to share responsibility for the success of all young people in the locality. Ensure marginalised children are not made more vulnerable outside the mainstream.

Consequences

- Change accountability and incentives to encourage greater collaboration between schools.
- Assess the impact of school selection on system effectiveness: does school selection improve overall system results, or simply shift problems and opportunities within the system?
- Identify and spread schools best practices in early years provision and engaging with the community.
- Identify best practice for how and where schools and other agencies should engage and review resource requirements accordingly.
- Identify and spread best practice in engaging local employers in schools.

Schools & society: global best practice

Commission Recommendations:

- Expect schools to share responsibility for the success of all young people in the locality.
- Encourage greater collaboration between schools, to raise standards and to spread best practices
- Ensure marginalised children are not made more vulnerable outside the mainstream.

England has a highly fragmented school system and the Commission recommends enhanced localized collaboration, in order to ensure more equitable provision for all children and young people; especially the most vulnerable.

The degree of social and academic diversity in schools depends on how students are allocated across schools. The social composition of a school at least partially reflects that of the area in which the school is located. In countries where families of different socio-economic status live in different neighbourhoods, students are likely to attend school with peers of similar socio-economic status. Parental choice policies can also exacerbate between school inequalities if, for example, middle class families in mixed neighbourhoods choose to send their children to schools outside the local area (for example choose to enrol their children in fee paying schools). This means that local schools risk having higher concentrations of socioeconomically disadvantaged students. In comprehensive systems, sorting by ability may occur when parents apply to several schools and oversubscribed schools are able to select the brightest students

The governance of a nation's school network is characterised by complex relationships between multiple stakeholders across different levels. In most high performing nations, decisions about school planning and structure (e.g. laws and regulations, resource allocation, qualifications framework, accreditation requirements, and the use of national examinations or assessments) are taken at the national level. Schools tend to be responsible for taking decisions about the organisation and delivery of instruction (e.g. choice of textbooks,

teaching methods, assessment of students' progress). While decisions about the hiring of staff, salary schedules, and work conditions are commonly shared between schools and local authorities.

According to the OECD, highly centralised systems are less able to respond to changing demand or student needs. Since the 1980s, an emphasis on giving local stakeholders more influence and control over the education system has led to an increased push for greater school autonomy and greater parental choice. One challenge faced by systems with multi-level and multi-stakeholder involvement has been weak coordination between the different levels – this has particular implications for monitoring demand and supply for school places. The OECD recommends models of horizontal collaboration at the local level facilitated by robust local networks of providers.

One approach to enhancing quality and equity in high performing nations is by sustaining close collaborative links between schools and their local community, including families as well as private and social stakeholders. This approach promotes the use of community wide networks to support all students, especially the most disadvantaged, through schemes such as mentoring, volunteering and enrichment activities. The extent to which these local networks work to support disadvantaged students varies between high performing nations. In Singapore for example, local community councils are responsible for identifying families in need and for providing multi-layered support.

In Estonia, all students are able to access personalised support to prevent school drop-out. The type of support available ranges from psychological support, special education programmes and social pedagogic counselling. These services are provided through study counselling centres (see Denmark case study).

Case study Denmark

The provision of educational and vocational guidance for young people is afforded high priority in Denmark. Guidance is a continuous process that supports young people to be aware of their abilities, interests and opportunities and so enable them to make informed decisions about education and employment. There is a network of local, regional and online provision to support young people up to the age of 25.

Denmark also has a well-developed system of highly qualified school counsellors who work closely with school and local authorities to support all young people, particularly the most vulnerable and including those at risk of dropping out. At the end of lower secondary school, the school counsellor has a key role in supporting students' transition to the next phase. Taking into account individual skills (e.g. motivation, responsibility), social skills (e.g. cooperation with classmates, behaviour in the community) and academic results, the counsellor determines the preparedness of the student for transition to upper secondary school. If a student is deemed 'not ready' for upper secondary education at age 15, or if they have dropped out of education, they are able to attend alternative provision offered by Youth Schools.

A network of youth guidance centres provides guidance services for young people up to the age of 25, focusing on the transition from compulsory to youth education, or, alternatively, to the labour market. The youth guidance centres cooperate closely with primary and lower secondary schools and youth education institutions, as well as with local businesses and public employment services. Guidance counsellors use a national database to ensure that they are in touch with those who have dropped out of education or training and, if this happens, they are required to support them quickly into alternative provision. Counsellors are available not only in educational institutions, but also in less formal settings in libraries and youth clubs. The youth guidance programme links the different systems together (e.g. job centres, police, workplace, psychologists) and facilitates cooperation between schools, social services, employers and other authorities.

Policy: what we heard

67%

of parents wished to have a say at government level, but only 6% had done so"

ParentKind

"What forms of system governance will support an intelligent and self-improving system?"

CST

"An apolitical body would provide the consistency required to bring about and bed in the required cultural change and ensure public confidence in the outcomes of the education system."

NFCE/CACHE

"We tinker with the system non-stop. This means we cause confusion, we disengage both pupils and teachers"

Expert roundtable

We currently have no united national vision for who we want our young people to become"

Expert roundtable

"Collaboration is essential to improvement. The basis for this must be schools working together in strong and sustainable groups."

NAHT

Education has had 40 Secretaries of State and 3,500 Statutory Instruments in the last 40 years

Policy: summary

The challenge

Moving to a future perfect involves at least four major challenges:

- **Complexity:** change to one part of the system has implications for the rest of the system. Assessment, accountability, curriculum and teacher skills are all linked. Piecemeal change will not achieve systemic change unless it is part of a coherent and integrated plan.
- **Scale and risk:** deep change is risky, especially at a system level. While some changes can be tested and developed bottom up, other changes (such as the accountability system) have to be driven top down and are harder to test. The challenge is to change while mitigating the risks of unintended consequences.
- **Fragmentation:** the current system is highly fragmented. This allows, in theory, for rapid innovation and learning. But it also means:
 - Diagnosis of the problem is harder
 - Scaling of the solution is harder;
 - Entrenches inequality (magnet schools locally and regionally the best resources and MATs stay in the best areas)
 - Is a market failure: originally, it was envisioned that just 17 super MATs would arise; instead we have far too many sub-scale MATs which lack economies of scale or scope
 - Fragmentation means we have lost a sense of place: poor collaboration across schools and across the community.
 - Competition is encouraged, which can spur performance and also lead to gaming of the system and lack of local collaboration
- **Electoral resistance to changing a familiar system:** change must be consensual and requires extensive public debate and consultation

The future perfect

Future perfect policy will encourage change, not churn.

- Be under democratic control, and ideally should reach cross-party consensus so that reforms can be sustained over time. High level policy such as the accountability and assessment systems, the overall curriculum and funding decisions are government responsibility.
- Devolve detail of implementation to an independent body. For instance, detailed curriculum design and workforce development require expert oversight.
- Discover best practices locally and scale them. This requires central capability to enable scaling to happen across a fragmented system.
- Actively test systemic changes at a local level where possible: drive innovation bottom up, not just top down
- Focus clearly on challenges of place by creating a place based middle tier to replace or consolidate the fragmented system of MATs.

Consequences

- Create a new body (similar to the OBR or MPC) with a mandate to implement government direction and the move to the future perfect system.
- Create a system for identifying, testing and scaling best innovations rapidly through an independent body with funding and relevant schools and business expertise: avoid RCT obsession.
- Establish VIP areas (Voluntary Improvement Partnerships) in place of OAs. VIPs are properly funded and voluntary local initiatives which can drive place based improvement and are empowered to test systemic innovations
- Establish an independent commission or Royal Commission to build a sustainable, cross-party consensus on the future of Education in England

Policy implementation

Commission recommendations

- Devolve detail of implementation to an independent body. For instance, detailed curriculum design and workforce development require expert oversight.

The Commission recommends the de-politicisation of education reform moving to a system of rigorous evaluation of ‘what works’, where promising interventions can be scaled up and tested.

Even though OECD countries adopted no fewer than 450 education reforms between 2008 and 2014, there is little evidence about whether education reforms actually have an effect and little systemised knowledge about the best ways that reform can be implemented.

In order to be able to support reforms in evaluation and assessment, policy needs to be implemented within a coherent framework which has sufficient capacity for conducting and interpreting evaluations at all levels of the education system. There also needs to be a clear link between innovations in the learning environment and the specific teaching and learning issues that they are seeking to address. Similarly in order to improve the quality of the education that schools provide, policies need to focus on changing classroom practices, balancing external pressure and support, and developing and pursuing long term objectives.

Policy implementation and evaluation processes vary between high performing nations. In centralised systems, it is the State, often through the Ministry of Education, that takes a major role in defining and delivering the policy for most educational issues. For example in Singapore, policy-making and implementation is relatively well-centralised, with the Ministry of Education being responsible for all aspects of policy at all levels. However, the MOE works closely with a number of independent or semi-autonomous agencies. These include the National Institute of Education which provides teacher education, CPD, higher degrees as well as undertaking research. Other systems work around hybrid models combining a central with local dynamic – usually a central ministry guides the policy which authorities at the municipal level have responsibility to deliver. For example, Finland and Japan have more locally devolved systems where autonomy over innovation rests with local and school level authorities under the direction of the Ministry.

Case study Finland

The Ministry of Education and Culture oversees all publicly funded education and is responsible for preparing educational legislation. The Finnish National Board of Education works closely with the Ministry to develop educational objectives, curriculum content and methods for early childhood education through to upper secondary as well as for adult education and training (although not higher education). The NBE also has a role in assisting the Ministry in policy decision making. In addition, a National Education and Research Development Plan outlines education policy priorities every four years and guides the government in their planning and implementation.

At the regional level, Regional State Administrative Agencies implement policies on behalf of the Ministry. Local municipalities and schools draw up their own local curricula within the framework of the national core curriculum. They are also responsible for practical teaching arrangements, the effectiveness, and quality of their education. Schools have a great deal of flexibility to provide educational services according to their own administrative arrangements and visions, provided they lie within legal parameters.

Dare to think the unthinkable

Creative ideas for a radically different future

The constraints on the education system are constraints we create for ourselves. If we want a future perfect education, we should be prepared to re-imagine it and test all our assumptions about how things are done. A radically different future requires radical thinking. In the course of our consultations, we came across many creative ideas which should give us pause for thought. These ideas are not part of the formal recommendations of the commission, but deserve to be aired because they challenge our assumptions about what is possible:

- 1. Start formal schooling at age 7, not age 5**
Starting school young was primarily designed to ensure mothers could get back to work: it was not for the benefit of the child. Other systems let children start school later, with good educational and emotional outcomes.
- 2. Move the transition from primary to secondary from age 11 to age 13**
The transition to secondary school is always challenging educationally and emotionally for children. An older transition age would help ease the transition and has been shown to work in the fee paying sector.
- 3. Use technology to reinvent the role of the teacher**
Technology should allow for more personalised teaching with consistent checking for understanding and adapting material to the speed of learning of each student, even in much larger classrooms. The role of the teacher then becomes more of a coach and mentor to individual students when they need specific interventions.
- 4. Integrate provision of schools, sixth form colleges, UTCs, FE colleges into one group (MAT) within an area**
This means that the MAT (or equivalent body) is responsible for every child regardless of destination; decisions can be made in the interests of the child, not the provider; vocational is no longer automatically second class; enables far greater focus on performance of place and not just of individual institutions. Potentially, pilot this as part of the levelling up programme in “red wall” areas.

5. **Force consolidation of MATs to create scale at local areas**
Most MATs are subscale and ineffective. The market for corporate control is broken: there are few incentives for good MATs to scale up, or for weak MATs to cede control. Have the good force out the bad, focus on place and achieve the scale required to support schools properly and encourage collaboration locally. MATs can then be held accountable for performance of an area, stopping them gaming the system.
6. **Vocational and educational paths should be merged, not be treated as separate pathways**
This implies curriculum changes at all levels. At school level, literacy and numeracy should focus on applied skills. At university level all courses should have an element of vocational training and/or employer engagement: employers find that university graduates are not work ready currently. Note that some degrees already do this (medicine).
7. **Recertify teachers as fit to practice once every five years**
This would be part of a grand bargain where teachers are treated as professionals, and the system is changed accordingly. A system which knows it can trust its professionals to perform could eliminate, or drastically reduce, the whole accountability regime of OFSTED and league tables because all parents would be confident that their local school is a good school, which is the experience of parents in many other parts of the world.

A grand bargain for the profession, schools & education?

"The highest form of accountability is the individual's professional accountability for the quality of his or her own work and to the people who the profession serves"

CST

The more you check, test and micro-manage anyone, the less trust you show in them. Teachers do not feel trusted or empowered in the current accountability regime. So what would happen if you changed the terms of debate and showed that teachers could be trusted as professionals? What if teachers were re-certified every five years as being fit to practice? Clearly, if this was in addition to the existing accountability regime, it would be the burden that breaks the camel's back for many teachers. But what if it replaced the existing accountability regime?

Potentially, require teachers to have their certification re-confirmed every 5 years to ensure that they sustain current best practices over a forty year career. This would have to be part of a "grand bargain" which would see the end of OFSTED, league tables, PRP and SATs. It would let teachers be treated as professionals, with far more autonomy over how they teach. By explicitly recognising teachers as professionals, it would enhance their status in the community and aid both recruitment and retention.

Re-certification would be part of a new deal, new contract for teachers and leaders including:

- a. More support for teachers and leaders development. Intensive CPD, with significant funding and timetabling support, would be required to enable teachers to keep up to date with latest best practice, changes in technology and curriculum developments.
- b. Light touch inspections: if the teachers and leaders are all certified, what more needs to be inspected? We use our local GP and hospital because we trust that they are good. The same should be true of every school: we should not have to shop around. If we know that every teacher is professionally up to date, we can trust our local school, which removes the need for league table. It also means that there is a drastically reduced need for OFSTED: some audit functions remain, such as safeguarding, but there is no need to inspect the quality of teaching because all teachers have recently been certified.
- c. Treating teachers as professionals, like doctors. Within schools this could be transformative. Instead of PRP, pay could be related to personal development and capability, to incentivise enhancing skills and keeping them up to date for re-certification. This should encourage much greater team work and peer learning, as seen in medicine.
- d. Re-certification to be externally managed through a professionally controlled body such as the College. To assure the credibility and integrity of certification, the teacher 'MoT' test would have to be externally and independently managed. The assessment process has to be fit for purpose from the perspective of both the profession and government, which means that they would have to agree it and review it every five years.
- e. Much less political interference, such as dictating how literacy should be taught: give professionals autonomy to exercise their skill and judgement.
- f. Support for teachers who fail re-certification, so that they are given every reasonable chance to show that they can achieve the required standard.

Clearly, this is not a magic wand solution. If no teachers ever fail re-certification, then it is not a credible or valuable exercise. If too many fail, it becomes a good way to demotivate a profession which is already suffering.

Glossary

ASCL	Association of School and College Leaders
BEIS	Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy
CBI	Confederation of British Industry
CACHE	Council for Awards in Care, Health and Education (trade mark of NFCE)
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CST	Confederation of School Trusts
DfE	Department for Education
EEF	Education Endowment Fund
FE	Further Education
HE	Higher Education
ITT	Initial Teacher Training
MAT	Multi Academy Trust
MPC	Monetary Policy Committee
NAHT	National Association of Head Teachers
NEU	National Education Union
NFCE	NFCE is an educational services provider
NFER	National Foundation for Educational Research
OBR	Office for Budget Responsibility
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OFSTED	Office for Standards in Education
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment (part of OECD)
RCTs	Randomised control trials
RSA	Royal Society of Arts
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths
T-levels	A technical based qualification being introduced between 2020 & 2022
UCAS	Universities and Colleges Admissions Service
UTCs	University Technical Colleges
VT	Vocational and technical



Part two

Summary of evidence

University of Warwick,
Department of Education Studies

Introduction to Part Two: Summary of evidence

The objective of this review was to help inform and guide the commission.

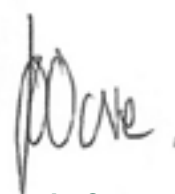
The Commission believes that a global Britain should learn from the rest of the world. We should not try to copy other systems slavishly, because we start in a different place from other countries. If we start from a different place, then our journey to the future must be different, even if the destination looks similar to other countries.

We did not expect to discover a magic bullet on how to build a future perfect education system, and we did not discover it. Instead, we found a wide range of practices and policies which extend the range of potential solutions for the English system to explore. We found many systems are actively exploring how to future proof their systems and are managing change in a way which brings all key stakeholders with them. Other systems are steadily changing and improving, and so must we. The evidence in this section is organised around the main themes of the commission: accountability, assessment, curriculum, teaching profession, and schools and society.

We are hugely grateful to the ESRC and Research England who provided some funding for this work, and to Dr Jacqueline Dynes and Dr Rebecca Morris who undertook the daunting task of getting to grips with the key features of so many different education systems around the world.



Professor Emma Smith
University of Warwick



Jo Owen
Commission chair

Accountability

Summary of evidence

1. Methodology

The evidence presented here has been compiled using data from, but not limited to, international reports, national level policy documents, international league tables and wider academic literature. It does not constitute a systematic review. The specific focus is on a survey of international evidence and indications of trends and practices from countries other than the UK.

2. Accountability practices in high performing nations

High performing systems adopt a number of quality assurance processes. These range from external inspection to school self-evaluation; with some systems adopting hybrid models containing both external and internal assessment. School self-evaluation is a key component of accountability and monitoring in a number of systems where it can be separate from the school inspection system. An extensive range of areas are evaluated, ranging from school finance to pupil performance.

Approaches to accountability span the range from defining broad education goals to having precisely defined performance indicators and may include systems which reward or sanction teacher performance. While it is important to note that the use, frequency and scope of accountability measure vary considerably between nations, most adopt some combination of the following elements of school accountability:

- External performance indicators, including the use of achievement data beyond the school
- Quality assurance and school self-evaluations
- School leader and teacher appraisals
- Monitoring teacher practices

3. Influences on accountability practices

Schools tend to have limited influence on the design and implementation of school inspections which tend to be devised by higher-level authorities and conducted by external inspectors. Across the OECD, for example, school inspections are likely to have a much larger influence on schools than self-evaluation and teacher and school leader appraisal. The extent of this influence does vary from country to country however. Where school inspections take place, they are a key influence in the evaluation of school performance and school administration; their influence on the remuneration of teaching staff is less important as is their influence on the school budget. However, the outcomes of school inspections are a key factor in whether a school may close in a small number of countries, including England, Scotland and the Netherlands.

4. Collection and dissemination of accountability data

According to PISA 2015, the extent to which achievement data are shared publicly varies considerably across OECD countries (OECD 2015). Just under half of students attended schools where performance data are released to the public; countries that tend to post data publicly include the UK, the Netherlands, the US and New Zealand. Such practice is less frequent in Finland, Austria, Belgium and Japan. It is also socially advantaged and urban schools that tend to post their data publicly rather than schools in more socially disadvantaged and rural areas, suggesting some autonomy of the process in some contexts. The practice is also more common at upper secondary level. Interestingly none of our comparator nations report rankings of schools based on pupil performance outcomes and many nations take active steps to prohibit the ranking of schools. Even so, in many nations, including England and the Netherlands, the media or other external organisations prepare and publish school rankings based on academic outcomes. Providing data directly to parents was much more common than publishing data publicly and the vast majority of students in OECD countries attend schools where performance data are shared with parents.

5. Case Studies

New Zealand

New Zealand has a collaborative model of school evaluation in which school self-review and external review are integrated and complementary (OECD 2013). Under the Education Act 1989 all schools are expected to be involved in an ongoing, cyclical process of evaluation. The evaluation system is run by the Education Review Office (ERO), an agency of the Ministry of Education. It is underpinned by two sets of indicators: outcome indicators (including student achievement and progress; their sense of well-being and confidence in their identity) and a set of process indicators that describe the practices and processes that contribute to school effectiveness and improvement (including curriculum, leadership and assessment).

External review

Schools are reviewed on average once every three years. Reviews are more frequent where performance is poor and there are risks to the education and safety of the students. If the school is able to demonstrate good self-reviewing processes, effective use of its assessment information and a stable reporting history, then ERO reviews are less frequent. The ERO reports for individual institutions are freely available on its website. The ERO reviews include an examination of data collected by the Ministry, schools' self-assessments, and an on-site review that includes meetings with the board of trustees, leadership, teachers and students. Following external review, schools are classified as needs development, developing, well-placed and strong.

Internal review

School self-evaluation is a statutory requirement and National Administration Guideline 2 (MoE 2016) requires every school to:

- 'develop a strategic plan which documents how it is giving effect to the National Education Guidelines through its policies, plans and programmes, including those for curriculum, National Standards, assessment, and staff professional development
- maintain an ongoing programme of self-review in relation to the above policies, plans and programmes, including evaluation of information on student achievement'

The emphasis is on schools and their communities engaging in an ongoing process of continuous evaluation and self-reflection in order to achieve equity and excellence in outcomes for all. Schools set in place their own evaluation processes and, as part of an annual reporting cycle, provide regular accounts of student achievement in relation to goals and targets, along with planned improvement actions. Internal evaluations can vary in scope, depth and focus depending on the purpose and the context. An evaluation may be strategic, linked to vision, values, goals and targets; or it may be a regular business-as-usual review of the curriculum or a learning area; or it may be a review undertaken in response to an unforeseen event or issue.

Estonia

The Estonian education system is decentralised with a clearly defined division of responsibility between state, local government and schools. Education provision is supervised by the state with the Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020 guiding long-term developments. Evaluation of student performance is monitored through state-wide examinations of which there are three main types: upper secondary school state examinations, basic school harmonised final examinations and national standard-determining tests. All of which are regulated by the Ministry of Education and Research.

School accountability in Estonia is determined through a combination of external and internal evaluations:

External evaluations

In Estonia, there is no separate Inspectorate and therefore no full-scale inspections. School inspections do exist and take the following forms:

A thematic inspection undertaken by county governors. This is undertaken in a roughly 10% sample of schools and based upon a specific priority or theme, such as SEND, that is determined by the Ministry of Education and Research. A thematic inspection takes up to 8 working days and is usually carried out by 1 or 2 officials or experts. The Ministry is in charge of the design of the inspection and in the analyses of its results. Data examined includes 1) statistical and financial reports; 2) other documentation; 3) interviews e.g. with employees, parents and

students; 4) a review of the learning and growing environment. It is unusual for lessons to be observed.

An inspection undertaken by the Ministry of Education and Research. These tend to happen only when an issue or problem has arisen in a specific institution or if an institution requires a new licence. The comprehensive Estonia Educational Information System (EEIS) is an online portal that contains school, student, teacher, and system-level data on all levels of the education system. Much of this data is available to the public and can be used to inform school inspections as well as to compare progress of different institutions.

Internal evaluations

The internal evaluation of educational institutions has been mandatory since 2006. Schools are required to conduct self-evaluations at least once over a three-year period and this takes the form of an action plan which is then implemented. The purpose of self-evaluations are to summarize strengths and areas for improvement in terms of the effectiveness of teaching and education activities and the management of the institution. Particular areas of focus include leadership and administration, personnel management, cooperation with interest groups, resource management, the education and schooling process; results related to a child/student, personnel and interest groups and statistics of the educational institution). This list is advisory only and the methods and focus of the internal evaluation are determined by the institution. While the Ministry has developed tools for self-evaluation, they are voluntary. This limits the ability to compare schools' experiences and the consistency of practices across schools. Institutions are able to seek external advice and support during the internal evaluation process but this is also optional. Internal evaluations are led by the school principal and involve the entire school staff. All educational institutions submit data about the internal evaluation to the EEIS. The results of internal evaluations are public but their publication on the website of the educational institution is not mandatory.

For further information, please see the series of full review reports on the Commission's website.

Ministry of Education (2016), Effective school evaluation: how to do and use internal evaluation for improvement, accessed <https://www.ero.govt.nz/publications/effective-school-evaluation/engaging-in-effective-internal-evaluation>

OECD (2013), What makes schools successful? Resources, policies and practices, Paris: OECD.

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Assessment

Summary of Evidence

1. Methodology

The evidence presented here has been compiled using data from, but not limited to, international reports, national level policy documents, international league tables and wider academic literature. It does not constitute a systematic review. The specific focus is on a survey of international evidence and indications of trends and practices from countries other than the UK.

2. International Assessment Practices

Countries use a range of approaches for the evaluation and assessment of students. The purpose of assessment varies considerably from understanding how well students are learning, to using data for accountability purposes. The extent to which student assessment data is used to hold schools accountable varies from countries like England who use this data extensively, to Finland where its use is less widespread. While the national curricula of many high performing systems emphasis the development of complex competencies rather isolated knowledge and skills – assessment techniques tend to be less innovative focusing on knowledge acquisition and limited application of skills.

Formative forms of assessment are embedded in the strategies of many systems but tend to be part of teacher-led assessment rather than part of national assessment systems. The extent to which formative assessment is used effectively is questionable. The extent to which national assessments (usually teacher led) and national examinations (usually centrally led) are used varies between systems. Most systems use some combination of national assessments and/or national examinations at the lower secondary and upper secondary level. England is unusual in only using national examinations as part of its formal assessment process.

Systems that do not use national examinations often use national sample based assessments to monitor country wide standards and inform targeted teaching and learning support initiatives. Most systems use age based assessment with little evidence that they emphasise mastery ahead of progression. The exceptions are systems that practice grade retention (see School and Society report).

3. Case Studies

Canada

Despite having a highly decentralised and federal education system (there is no national curriculum) the different Canadian provinces share a number of similarities when it comes to their education systems. All have comprehensive systems, use similar textbooks, have strong teacher unions, similar approaches to assessment and common models of teacher training.

At age 15 students move on to upper secondary school. Most upper secondary schools are comprehensive and offer both academic and vocational programs. Education is compulsory up to 16 in all provinces except for three provinces, including Ontario, where it is compulsory until age 18. In most provinces teachers use formative assessment in their classrooms but all provinces have some form of assessment in numeracy and literacy for selected age groups, as well as core-subject tests for high school graduation. The primary national assessment is the Pan-Canadian Assessment Program (PCAP), which assesses the reading, mathematics, and science skills of a sample of 13- and 16-year-old students. The PCAP is modelled on PISA and one of the three core test subjects is the primary focus of the examination in each year.

Finland

Finnish schools are comprehensive and untracked until upper secondary school, when students attend either an academic or vocational school. This has provided a great deal of educational equity for students from all socioeconomic backgrounds, aided by a strong teaching workforce force. Teachers are encouraged to assess their students regularly, and guidelines for assessment are provided in the national curriculum. There is also a focus on student self-assessment and co-learning. External testing is used for monitoring, rather than for accountability purposes, and is carried out on a sample of year 7 and year 10 students.

Finnish classrooms emphasize the importance of learning through doing, and place particular emphasis on group work, creativity and problem-solving skills. Students are expected to work collaboratively on interdisciplinary projects and are often expected to contribute to the design of their programmes. Selection based on test scores is illegal and most students are taught in mixed ability classes with less able students provided with additional support.

At the end of compulsory education (lower secondary school, age 16), students must decide whether they want to continue in an academic track possibly leading to university, or to pursue vocational education. However, there is no formal test to determine their path. At the end of upper secondary school (age 19) all students take the National Matriculation Exam; this is the only formal, national test that Finnish students take. It measures competency in their native language and in three other subjects. The examination assesses problem-solving skills

rather than subject mastery. The outcomes affect University placement (although some universities admit students using other measures) and students who follow vocational routes in upper secondary education are not required to take this assessment.

Hong Kong

There are no national assessments in Hong Kong until the end of upper secondary school (age 18). In 2009, Hong Kong combined lower and upper secondary school into six years of schooling (so similar to England). Hong Kong also removed national assessments at the end of lower secondary school and put in place a single assessment, the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE), taken at the end of secondary school by students who wish to progress to post-secondary education.

The HKDSE assesses students in four core subjects (Chinese, English, mathematics, and Liberal Studies) as well as two to three elective subjects (take from a list of about 30 subjects including foreign languages). There is also an assessment in primary and lower secondary school – the Territory-wide System Assessment. The TSA assesses basic competencies and student progress in Chinese, English and mathematics in grades three, six and nine. National results are reported publicly, while school-level data is reported only to individual schools and are not used for purposes of school comparison. Student-level results are not reported. In response to concerns about excessive focus on TSA preparation in primary school, from 2018 testing in the 3rd grade has been sample based and no school-level data are reported. Primary schools can still choose to administer the test to all grade three students in order to receive school-level data. All students in grades six and nine take the TSA, but since 2012 grade six students have only taken it every other year.

Singapore

Students are continually assessed by their teachers at all levels of education – this assessment tends to take place informally on a day-to-day basis and focuses on student work in and out of the classroom. Students sit for national examinations at the end of primary, secondary and post-secondary school. These exams serve as gateways to lower secondary, higher secondary and tertiary education.

At the end of primary school (age 12), all students take the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE). This is a high stakes norm-referenced assessment. PSLE scores determine which band students will join in lower secondary education, as well as which school they will attend. Singapore adopts a system of tracking at age 12 which has implications for educational equity. For example, some students enter primary school having received three years of high-quality and expensive pre-school. Other students may not have received any pre-school education at all, due to the lack of affordable high-quality provision. Secondly, research evidence is clear that tracking at such an early age reinforces social inequalities in terms of the types of student who are tracked into vocational and academic routes.

Curriculum

Summary of Evidence

1. Methodology

The evidence presented here was compiled using literature from, but not limited to, international reports, national level policy documents, international league tables and wider academic work. It does not constitute a systematic review. The specific focus is on a survey of international policy and indications of trends and practices from countries other than the UK.

2. Curriculum development and implementation

For the countries and regions focused on here, curriculum reform is predominantly instigated and carried out by high-level government agencies (i.e. Departments or Ministries of Education). For most, this is national level or federal government; in Hong Kong (China) and Ontario (Canada), however, it is the regional/provincial government who have responsibility for education and thus curriculum reform. Some of the countries draw upon expertise from beyond the government during the process of curriculum development. Many undertake reviews and development of curricula regularly. Examples suggest that this occurs once a decade on average. For most of the countries here, curriculum review appears to be an ongoing and cyclical process, and often part of wider education reforms and/or a response to wider economic/societal changes. For some, it is also the case that changes to curriculum content, structure or implementation have come as a response to outcomes from international tests and comparisons such as PISA or TIMSS.

3. Inclusivity in the Curriculum

In Finland, the national core curriculum provides a uniform foundation for local curricula, thus enhancing equality in education throughout the country. The curricula of each municipality and school steer instruction and schoolwork in more detail, taking local needs and perspectives into consideration. The Japanese curriculum is founded on the aim to provide “general curriculum standards for children at educational levels ranging from kindergartens to senior high schools, to make sure that they can receive a uniform level of education no matter where they might live in Japan” (MEXT, 2013). The principle of equality in relation to access to education and opportunity while studying and beyond, has been a core aim of the Japanese education system since the end of World War II.

4. Key aspects of curriculum content.

Many countries have a set of core, or compulsory subjects, overlaid with what could be termed competencies or skills which are designed to be taught or developed in pupils alongside subject specific knowledge. Most curricula indicate a desire to prepare young people for their lives beyond school both during their childhood years and into adulthood. Skills and subjects relating to civic education, careers and employment, IT and technology, financial literacy, self-management, and health and

wellbeing feature frequently in the curricula of high performing nations. Like England, some jurisdictions also include current ‘world issues’ as core/compulsory parts of their curriculum e.g. climate change.

5. Case Studies

Singapore

Summative testing has played an integral part in the Singaporean education system for decades, with exams closely aligned with the national curriculum and pedagogical approaches (e.g. use of textbooks, a mastery focus). Since the late 1990s, the government have also introduced a number of policy initiatives relating to preparing young people for globalisation, significant technological advances, and life more generally in the 21st century (Tan et al., 2017). In more recent years, the Singapore Ministry of Education has made a number of further changes to the curriculum. First, with Curriculum 2015, the aim was to develop a more active learning experience, following the concept of ‘teach less, learn more’, in which the curriculum content was reduced by 10 to 20% in order to allow for a wider range of teaching approaches whilst reducing content-overload. In addition, the MoE have attempted to develop a more student-centric, holistic approach to schooling, promoting lifelong learning and embedding a more ‘creative and critical curriculum’ (Fletcher-Wood, 2018). The MoE have taken an integrated approach, seeking to incorporate a range of core values and skills plus what they define as ‘21st century competencies’ both across and within subject disciplines (MoE, 2019). Despite these developments, Singapore has also maintained a strong focus on distinct subject areas and high-level academic content.



Figure 1: Framework for values and 21st century competencies in Singapore curriculum

Children in Singapore start school at age 7. They follow a six-year course, giving them a firm academic base (particularly in relation to language and numeracy) and developing values and skills. At the end of the six years at primary school, children take an exam and are then streamed in to either the Express, Normal (Academic) or Normal (Technical) streams. In 2019, the Singapore government announced that they would be abolishing this streaming from 2024. Instead schools will use a process of 'subject-based banding' where at the end of primary school pupils will be able to choose subjects at three different levels of difficulty, depending on their ability.

Currently, for the first two years of lower secondary school, pupils experience a broad curriculum including: languages, the humanities and the arts, mathematics and sciences, design and technology, physical education as well as character and citizenship education. At grades 9 and 10, all students learn two languages, social studies and mathematics, and select from a wide range of elective subjects and programmes.



Figure 2: The Secondary Curriculum Framework in Singapore

The Ministry of Education provides detailed syllabi for each curriculum subject at primary and secondary phases. These provide details of how the subject aligns with the nation's 'Desired Outcomes for Education' and with the 21st century competencies framework seen above. Key learning outcomes, skills and values are outlined as well as outlines of content, themes and concepts to be taught. There are also details of the pedagogical approaches that teachers should take. In secondary geography, for example, an inquiry-learning approach is promoted.

The Mastery Approach

Closely associated with the Singaporean curriculum is the notion of a 'mastery' approach to teaching and learning. Singapore Maths or Maths Mastery have both become well-known brands in relation to mathematics curriculum and pedagogy in the UK. Influenced by maths teaching in jurisdictions such as Singapore, Shanghai and other East Asian nations, the Maths Mastery programme claims to draw from teaching in these countries by adopting the following principles:

- Ambitious expectations for all pupils
- Gaps in learning immediately addressed
- All pupils access rich mathematical content
- Avoidance of grouping and labelling children
- Conceptual and procedural maths taught together
- Investment in professional development for teachers

Recent high-quality evaluations of Mastery Mathematics programmes in England have found small positive effects, indicating a potentially promising and cost-effective approach to improving maths attainment for young people (Jerrim and Vignoles, 2015).

Finland

The Finnish National Agency for Education introduced the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education in 2014. It was introduced for grades 1–6 in all schools beginning on 1 August 2016 and then phased in for higher grades in 2017–2019.

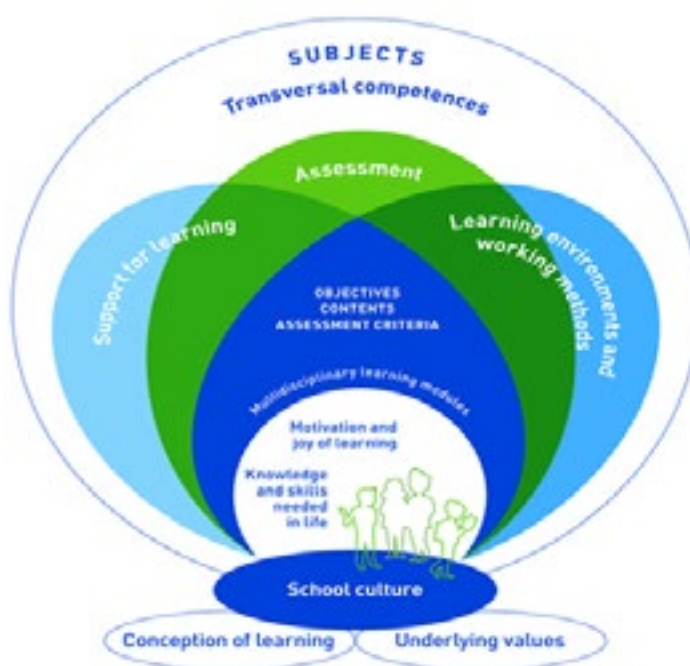


Figure 3: The National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (FNAE, 2014)

The diagram above provides an overview of the current Finnish National Curriculum. The FNAE state that the curriculum reforms were designed “to ensure that the knowledge and skills of Finnish children and youths will remain strong in the future, both nationally and internationally” as well as encouraging learning and participation amongst all pupils. The curriculum remains based around 20 subject areas and the number of hours to be spent on each subject are specified.

The national core curriculum provides a uniform foundation for local curricula, thus enhancing equality in education throughout the country. The curricula of each municipality and school steer instruction and schoolwork in more detail, taking local needs and perspectives into consideration.

The new curriculum is also underpinned by seven ‘transversal competences’ which are expected to be taught through each subject. These, the Finnish government argue, will support pupils’ skills development, learning outcomes and prepare them for the needs of a changing society. In addition, the reformed curriculum states that every year, students must participate in a ‘multidisciplinary learning module’ which focuses on a clearly-defined theme and allows for content to be drawn from a range of subject areas.



Figure 4: The Seven Transversal Competences within the Finnish National Core Curriculum

Historically, some have attributed Finland's success in international rankings to the 'freedoms' that were introduced to the education system during the mid-1980s (Sahlberg, 2014). These freedoms included less checking of curriculum content coverage, a less detailed and prescriptive national curriculum document, and reduced teacher training in relation to subject/curriculum knowledge (Vittikka et al., 2011). However, others have questioned the causal links between these systemic characteristics and the outcomes, arguing that the country was rising in performance well before these reforms were introduced (Altinok et al., 2018) and that its plateauing and recent decrease in attainment could actually be associated with the shift towards a more constructivist, skills-based approach to curriculum (Sahlgren, 2015).

For further information, please see the series of full review reports on the Commission's website.

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The Teaching Profession

Summary of Evidence

1. Methodology

The evidence presented here was compiled using data from, but not limited to, international reports, national level policy documents, international league tables and wider academic literature. It does not constitute a systematic review. The specific focus is on a survey of international evidence and indications of trends and practices from countries other than the UK.

2. Teacher Time

Japanese teachers and teachers from Shanghai and Singapore have ample time to plan lessons thoroughly with their colleagues (3,5 hrs a day), which is made possible by their larger class sizes. Japanese teachers also have more time on each topic to ensure the children have a thorough understanding of it before they move on, because of the way the curriculum is set out. The curriculum is demanding, but covers few concepts per year, and the textbooks are skinny containing about 10 topics a year for maths and science. Therefore, Japanese teachers have the time to cover concepts in depth, and do not move onto the next topic until students have mastered the first.

3. Teacher Education and Training and Continuous Professional Development

On average across OECD countries and economies, 50% of teachers report a bachelor's degree or equivalent as their highest educational attainment. Another smaller share of teachers (44%) report a master's degree or equivalent, incl. stronger specialisation and more complex content than a bachelor's degree, as their highest educational attainment. In some systems, a significant share of teachers did not complete any formal teacher education or only completed fast-track or specialised education or training programmes.

A crucial component of professionalism among teachers and school leaders is their participation in ongoing in service professional development. Under this approach, teachers and school leaders are considered lifelong learners, with different needs for training throughout their career path. education systems and training institutions need to accurately identify these needs and secure access to relevant training for teachers and school leaders. TALIS findings support the idea that receiving pre-service training and/or in-service training in a given area is associated with a higher perceived level of self-efficacy in this area by teachers, and/or a higher propensity to use related practices.

4. Group Learning

In Japan the practice of lesson study is common in elementary schools. The lesson is observed by 10 teachers through a video camera in order to watch how students are responding to the lesson, so that the teachers can communally feed back on the effectiveness of the lesson plan. The lesson plan is designed by 4–5 teachers with the teacher in the first place, so the teacher is not even being judged on their planning. Expert teachers feed into all lesson plans, allowing younger teachers to learn from them and avoid the lesson disasters. The carefully designed and evaluated lesson plans are stored centrally so that teachers rarely have to plan from scratch, just edit to suit their particular class. And the regular conversations about the best way to teach a lesson ensure that teachers at all levels are thinking about their practice, rather than growing stale after many years of teaching the same thing.

5. Case Study

Finland

In Finland, teachers go into the profession because they think educating the next generation is important. Teaching is a hugely popular profession overall, with applications for places on teacher training courses far outweighing places available (by a ratio of 10:1 in the capital, Helsinki), allowing those who run the courses to be very selective about those they let in. Finns run teacher training programmes (TTP) in only a handful of highly prestigious universities, allowing for quality control of these courses and the skills of those who graduate from them. TTPs are nationally coordinated. Primary teaching is particularly popular. To get a place on a teacher training course, applicants have to go to two sets of tests both written and practical. They first have to read a series of articles related to education, and then write an essay based on them. They then have a practical demonstration of their teaching ability, and an interview that checks their commitment to teaching. It is a respected job that requires both moral commitment and professional expertise. Therefore, Finns rank teachers highly. The teacher training programme in Finland is a five-year masters degree in education, which is funded by the Finnish government. Primary-school teachers spend this time studying education at one of the eight universities in Finland that offer teacher training, in addition to a school placement, and they cover all the subjects that they will have to teach in school (incl. ice-skating-in PE). Secondary-school teachers, on the other hand, complete a one-year education masters after their subject-based undergraduate degree; they still study for five years, but only one of those years is focused on education specifically.

These masters level degree courses include research training, and all teachers produce a masters level thesis in an educational topic of their choice. In addition, students are taught the latest educational science based on up-to-date research on teaching practice, and complete a placement in a special teacher training school—an essential part of their training. All in all, the masters level qualification itself has helped raise Finland's scores and teachers in Finland have been better educated

than the rest of the population since the beginning of compulsory education. This is recognition that it is a job that requires expertise. Universities select someone who has a sense of purpose, and they train him or her to be able to understand and apply their understanding of pedagogical research.

For further information, please see the series of full review reports on the Commission's website.

Schools and Society

Summary of Evidence

1. Methodology

The evidence presented here has been compiled using data from, but not limited to, international reports, national level policy documents, international league tables and wider academic literature. It does not constitute a systematic review. The specific focus is on a survey of international evidence and indications of trends and practices from countries other than the UK.

2. Educational Equity

One way to consider equity issues is to look at the relationship between students' socio-economic background and their performance in international comparative tests such as PISA. While more advantaged pupils perform better on average than their less advantaged peers, the extent of this association varies from country to country. For example, in China and Singapore, there is a strong relationship between family background and performance (i.e. there is greater inequality) yet in Hong Kong and Estonia the relationship is weaker (i.e. there is less inequality). In England, Scotland and Northern Ireland the relationship between socio-economic background and PISA attainment is similar to the OECD average and in the case of England, not that dissimilar to Finland (Jerrim and Shure 2016).

There is a vast amount of research evidence about the relationship between schooling and educational equity, in general the evidence points to the following policy recommendations:

- Guarantee high-quality, early childhood education and care for all children
- Ensure that all children achieve a good minimum level of core skills by introducing a baseline requirement for an equitable school system
- Provide additional support to disadvantaged schools
- Reduce the impact of socio-economic inequalities through a combination of family allowances and public services
- Reduce the segregation of children with different family backgrounds into different schools: Sorting students into schools by ability or social status adversely affects the efficiency and equity of the national school system
- Have excellent schools in every neighbourhood and make them accessible to all students
- Produce better data: not enough is known about how inequalities develop and persist in different contexts

3. Key Features of School Organisation and Governance

England has a highly fragmented school system and the Commission recommends enhanced localized collaboration, in order to ensure more equitable provision for all children and young people; especially the most vulnerable. Across high performing nations, decisions about policy and governance are made at a number of levels: central/national, regional, sub-regional, local/municipal, and school level. The distribution of responsibilities (and therefore autonomy) among these different levels varies across countries with some nations emphasising local collaboration above national level reform. For example:

Singapore

The system is highly centralised with the Ministry of Education assuming responsibility at all levels. The Ministry has oversight of all school funding, curriculum, assessment, teacher credentialing, evaluation and recruitment. Schools are grouped into geographic clusters offering some local coordination of the Ministry's policies.

Denmark

Education is largely the responsibility of the Ministry and implemented through regional and local levels of governance. Decentralised structures in Denmark have facilitated efficiency-enhancing reforms and municipalities have developed school networks that generate economies of scale and reduce expenditure.

Sweden

Has a decentralized education system, steered by goals and learning outcomes defined at central level. The government has the overall responsibility and sets the framework for education at all levels. Organisation of schooling is the responsibility of the municipalities.

In most high performing nations, decisions about school planning and structure (e.g. laws and regulations, resource allocation, qualifications framework, accreditation requirements, and the use of national examinations or assessments) are taken at the national level. Schools tend to be responsible for taking decisions about the organisation and delivery of instruction (e.g. choice of textbooks, teaching methods, assessment of students' progress). While decisions about the hiring of staff, salary schedules, and work conditions are commonly shared between schools and local authorities.

According to the OECD, highly centralised systems are less able to respond to changing demand or student needs. Since the 1980s, an emphasis on giving local stakeholders more influence and control over the education system has led to an increased push for greater school autonomy and greater parental choice. One challenge faced by systems with multi-level and multi-stakeholder involvement has been weak coordination between the different levels – this has particular implications for monitoring demand and supply for school places. The OECD recommends models of horizontal collaboration at the local level facilitated by robust local networks of providers.

4. School Admission and Selection

The degree of social and academic diversity in schools depends on how students are allocated across schools. The social composition of a school at least partially reflects that of the area in which the school is located. In countries where families of different socio-economic status live in different neighbourhoods, students are likely to attend school with peers of similar socio-economic status. Parental choice policies can also exacerbate between school inequalities if, for example, middle class families in mixed neighbourhoods choose to send their children to schools outside the local area (for example choose to enrol their children in fee paying schools). This means that local schools risk having higher concentrations of socioeconomically disadvantaged students. In comprehensive systems, sorting by ability may occur when parents apply to several schools and oversubscribed schools are able to select the brightest students (OECD 2018).

On average across OECD countries, 41% of students are in schools where place of residence is always considered as part of the criteria for admission (OECD 2013). For example, in Poland, the United States, Canada and Finland, more than two thirds of students are enrolled in such schools. By contrast, fewer than 10% of students in Belgium, Macao-China, Singapore and Japan are enrolled in schools that always consider residence in a particular area for admission. The next usual criteria for admission is students' academic performance: over 40% of students in OECD countries are in academically selective schools where "students' records of academic performance" or "recommendations of feeder schools" was used to decide admission. For example, in the Netherlands, Hong Kong-China and Japan, over 90% of students are in academically selective schools, while in Finland, Norway and Sweden fewer than 10% of students are enrolled in such schools. In the UK 28% of pupils are in schools where some form of academic selection takes place, but the majority of students in UK schools are selected based on residence.

Sorting students into schools by ability or social status may adversely affect equity in education. Disadvantaged students often struggle at school; and social and academic segregation of schools may create additional barriers to success, and reduce equity in education. For instance, disadvantaged schools may have less financial resources or may attract less qualified teachers. Evidence has shown the detrimental impact on student performance of attending schools with many low achievers – and the benefits of having high-achieving schoolmates.

5: Collaboration

According to the OECD, one approach to enhancing quality and equity in high performing nations is by sustaining close collaborative links between schools and their local community, including families as well as private and social stakeholders. This approach promotes the use of community wide networks to support all students, especially the most disadvantaged, through schemes such as mentoring, volunteering and enrichment activities. The extent to which these local networks work to support disadvantaged students varies between high performing nations. In Singapore for example, local community

councils are responsible for identifying families in need and for providing multi-layered support. In Estonia, all students are able to access personalised support to prevent school drop-out. The type of support available ranges from psychological support, special education programmes and social pedagogic counselling. These services are provided through study counselling centres (see Denmark case study also).

In Denmark counsellors are available in schools as well as libraries, youth clubs, sports clubs and employment centres. They cooperate with other supporting professionals to encourage development and support in a holistic way for students. In Norway there is a national database where every student is traceable and these records are visible and can be added to by police, tax authorities and schools. Finland provides programmes for whole families organized through schools.

6. Case Studies

Poland

Educational reform in Poland has been implemented since the beginning of 2017. Its main goal is to offer students a solid background of general education required for further personal development and the needs of contemporary labour market. The country has adopted a 9 year long (3-3-3) model of comprehensive schooling, a decentralised education system, a new National Core Curriculum and new exams to evaluate students' performance. Early selection was abolished in 1999 in order to make the Polish education system more equitable, which has had positive impact on the country's PISA results. There are no marks/exams in the first three years of elementary school – just formative assessment. The same teacher teaches each class focusing on themes rather than on subjects in order to improve students' skills and competences (similar to the Finish model). Students start learning a foreign language (mainly English) from Year 1 which is taught by a teacher of foreign language. In the next three years of elementary school different subjects are taught by different teachers and students now receive marks. The end of this second phase students are evaluated by a competence based test. The aim of this measurement is to inform the students' parents and the school about the students' competence level. In the third phase (lower secondary) students learn new subjects including a second foreign language. In the third phase students are supported to decide their pathway in upper-secondary education.

Denmark

The provision of educational and vocational guidance for young people is afforded high priority in Denmark. Guidance is viewed as a continuous process that supports young people to be aware of their abilities, interests and opportunities and so enable them to make informed decisions about education and employment. There is a network of local, regional and online provision to support young people up to the age of 25.

Denmark also has a well-developed system of highly qualified school counsellors who work closely with school and local authorities to support all young people, particularly the most vulnerable and including those at risk of dropping out. At the end of lower secondary school, the school counsellor has a key role in supporting students' transition to the next phase. Taking into account individual skills (e.g. motivation, responsibility), social skills (e.g. cooperation with classmates, behaviour in the community) and academic results, the counsellor determines the preparedness of the student for transition to upper secondary school. If a student is deemed 'not ready' for upper secondary education at age 15, or if they have dropped out of education, they are able to attend alternative provision offered by Youth Schools.

A network of youth guidance centres provides guidance services for young people up to the age of 25, focusing on the transition from compulsory to youth education, or, alternatively, to the labour market. The youth guidance centres cooperate closely with primary and lower secondary schools and youth education institutions, as well as with local businesses and public employment services. Guidance counsellors use a national database to ensure that they are in touch with those who have dropped out of education or training and, if this happens, they are required to support them quickly into alternative provision. Counsellors are available not only in educational institutions, but also in less formal settings in libraries and youth clubs. The youth guidance programme links the different systems together (e.g. job centres, police, workplace, psychologists) and facilitates cooperation between schools, social services, employers and other authorities.

For further information, please see the series of full review reports on the Commission's website.

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OECD (2018), *Responsive School Systems: Connecting Facilities, Sectors and Programmes for Student Success*, OECD: Paris, https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/responsive-school-systems_9789264306707-en

Policy Implementation Summary of Evidence

1. Methodology

The evidence presented here has been compiled using data from, but not limited to, international reports, national level policy documents, international league tables and wider academic literature. It does not constitute a systematic review. The specific focus is on a survey of international evidence and indications of trends and practices from countries other than the UK.

2. Effectiveness of Educational Reforms

Across OECD nations there is little evidence about whether education reforms actually have an effect (Viennet and Pont 2017) and little systemised knowledge about the best ways that policy makers can implement policies to promote improvement. The OECD (2015:156) identifies the following common challenges at classroom, school and system level:

- a) There is a tendency for education improvement reform initiatives to bypass the classroom level
- b) Developing capacity at the school level may not be sufficiently well enhanced or may be too superficial
- c) The external environment may not be conducive to implementing policies at school level
- d) The context of the system and surrounding policy processes may not be sufficiently taken into account for effective implementation of reform

A further challenge arises because educational impacts are challenging to assess and are seldom evaluated. While education reform can only be effective if policies are well implemented. Such implementation is a complex process involving many stakeholders and this complexity is a key reason why policies are not always implemented successfully.

In order to be able to support reforms in evaluation and assessment, policy needs to be implemented within a coherent framework which has sufficient capacity for conducting and interpreting evaluations at all levels of the education system. There also needs to be a clear link between innovations in the learning environment and specific teaching and learning issues that they are seeking to address. Similarly, in order to improve the quality of the education that schools provide, policies must focus on changing classroom practices, balancing external pressure and support, and developing and pursuing long term objectives (OECD 2015).

3. Governance Structures and Policy Implementation

Of course different policy frameworks operate within different national governance structures and this makes policy implementation, regardless of the context, more challenging to undertake and evaluate. The OECD (2015) has identified four main governance structures among the school systems of its member states:

- Centralised: France, Austria
- Central with local: Finland, Japan
- Central with schools: New Zealand, The Netherlands
- Decentralised United States, Canada

In centralised systems, it is the state and/or the Ministry of Education that takes a major role in defining and delivering the policy for most educational issues. Other systems work around hybrid models combining a central with local dynamic – usually a central ministry guides the policy which authorities at the municipal level have responsibility to deliver.

4. Case Study: New Zealand


The Ministry of Education is the main public body in charge of education in New Zealand. It maintains control over policy development, sets educational standards and through the inspectorate system monitors school performance. The Ministry operates through a network of regional, district and local offices.

At the local level, schools are run by individual school boards of trustees, made up of the school principal, a staff representative, and elected parent and community volunteers. There is no middle level of school administration in New Zealand. Each school board is required to set its own student performance targets as measured by teacher-designed tests, and conduct annual reviews and self-assessment. Schools are given considerable autonomy when it comes to the implementation of evaluation and assessment, although they are held accountable to the Ministry of Education, as well as the school inspectorate. An important challenge for policy development in New Zealand is the capacity of local school boards to lead on implementation. In 2018 a review of the education system recommended a reduction in the role of local school boards in favour of creating regional Education Hubs, independent of the Ministry that would provide services and support to schools. Under the proposals, each Hub would serve around 125 schools and would assume many of the legal responsibilities previously held by the school board, including principal and teacher employment, financial management, and budgeting.

For further information, please see the series of full review reports on the Commission's website.

OECD (2015), Education Policy Outlook: Making Reforms Happen, Paris: OECD.

Viennet R., Pont, B., (2017), Education Policy Implementation: A literature Review and Propose framework, OECD Education Working Paper No. 162, Paris: OECD



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