Learning during Crisis

Insights for Ukraine from across the Globe

Foreword

Russia's war against Ukraine is, first and foremost, a human tragedy. As so often, children and youths are the centre of this tragedy. They are wearing the brunt of the consequences, witnessing the destruction of their homes, the loss of loved ones and the disruption of their education.

These children and youth are a modest percentage of Ukraine's population, but they are 100 percent of Ukraine's future. That is why educational continuity even amidst the destruction, and educational recovery as soon as conditions allow, is such a high priority.

Educators and the government of Ukraine are making every effort to maintain educational services during these times, but they are also beginning to reimagine education for a different future. One way in which the global community can help with this is by sharing experience with the rebuilding of education after major crises and disruptions.

That is the purpose of this publication. In this publication, countries participating in the OECD programme on the Future of Education and Skills (Education 2030) are offering a range of case studies for how they have tackled major challenges to education and transformed learning and schooling following significant disruptions.

Together, they present a range of policy ideas and examples of implementation that could be beneficial to Ukrainian educators and policymakers as they plan to not just sustain but transform learning, teaching and schooling in Ukraine.

The publication is part of broader efforts of the OECD to deepen and strengthen our co-operation with Ukraine, mobilising our expertise, analysis, data and membership to support Ukraine's agenda for reform, recovery and reconstruction.

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Educational environments provide a sense of security for children, where the provision of multi-dimensional support can play a crucial role in helping students with anxiety disorders and post-traumatic stress (Creed and Morpeth, 2014[13]). Drawing on the international examples, MoNE has developed a model that ensures that students are physically and psychologically protected, their access to education is ensured, and the quality of education is improved (see Figure 13.1). 262
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Executive summary

The horrendous impact of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine continues to unfold, with the repercussions of the conflict reverberating across the world. One of the consequences has been the systematic destruction of Ukraine's education system. Every day, civilians must overcome the challenges of war: shelling, air raid warnings, power blackouts and much more. Hundreds of schools have been destroyed, with teachers, students and parents killed due to Russia's military aggression. The education of millions of children has been interrupted and the continuity of teaching and learning continues to be a struggle.

This publication aims to support Ukrainian policymakers in the twin challenge of ensuring high-quality education can continue and to aid the remodelling of an education system that is fit for the future. As part of the OECD's Global Forum on the Future of Education and Skills 2030 project, it offers a collection of case studies from across the world that outline how policymakers have tackled major challenges to schooling and reimagined education systems. Combined, they present a range of policy ideas and examples of implementation that could be beneficial to Ukrainian policymakers as they plan strategies and reforms to revitalise their schools, teaching practices and re-think student well-being.

Chapter 2, written by the former Ukrainian Education and Science Minister Liliia Hrynevych, outlines the current state of the education system in Ukraine, the extensive challenges it faces because of the war, and current and planned reforms to improve teaching and learning across the country. Taking onboard the examples of the case studies in this publication, the chapter considers the ideas and policies that could be beneficial to Ukraine's context. Ukraine is already engaged in revitalising its education system via the New Ukrainian School reform programme and is drawing on the experiences of other countries to identify key policies that can be customised to help reverse the negative impacts of the war and benefit a post-war Ukraine.

Chapter 3 explores a series of ambitious reforms launched in 2015 in the city state of Delhi (India) to address the low levels of educational achievement amongst young people. It discusses the introduction of three innovative new curricula focused on fostering well-being, innovation and national pride in students, as well as accompanying infrastructural changes. Moreover, the case study describes the importance of decentralising education management, empowering frontline staff and encouraging collaboration with external partners.

Chapter 4 focuses on Estonia and outlines the country's significant strides in transforming its education system since gaining independence in 1991, with an emphasis on using digital technology to enhance learning outcomes and improve educational access. Estonia's education system, which promotes creativity, innovation and flexibility, focuses on giving autonomy to schools and teachers, allowing them to develop their curricula within a set framework and tailor their teaching methods to meet the needs of individual students. The insights into how Estonia has used digital innovation and teacher training can benefit Ukraine's own push to further develop its education system.

Chapter 5 provides an example from Finland. The case study describes how it has extended the compulsory education age from 16- to 18-years-old in a bid to combat school drop-outs and interruptions

in education, and to promote social cohesion, social responsibility and citizenship. Prior to the reform, a significant proportion of young people opted not to continue with formal education. One government study estimated that some 15% of Finns in all age groups lack upper secondary education qualifications. Ukraine is taking similar measures to improve educational participation and attainment by transitioning to 12-years of compulsory education.

Chapter 6 is a case study from Ireland, exploring how the country developed a Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice. This ambition framework describes how schools can best promote well-being through the provision of a whole-school, multi-component and preventative approach. By drawing on pre-existing networks and resources, developing a detailed implementation plan and fostering a collaborative approach to planning and execution, this chapter shows how Ireland has developed a holistic, evidence-based and comprehensive well-being framework for children and young people.

Chapter 7, the second case study from Ireland, describes how the country's curriculum was significantly shifted to reflect a focus on student-centred approaches to education. This aimed to create a more engaging and interactive learning experience by moving away from heavily content-oriented syllabuses. The Irish goverDenment has redesigned a part of its secondary curriculum, the "Junior Cycle", to focus on a modern, skills-based and student-centred approach. Ukraine can potentially use information from this chapter to aid the development of its educational content and assessments.

Chapter 8 from Japan discusses the Tohoku School Project, an innovative approach to educational reconstruction taken by the Japanese government in the aftermath of the 2011 triple tragedy. In the wake of this devastation, an innovative education framework was proposed, placing students at the centre and equipping them with the skills to become the leaders of the future. This case study follows the project from conception through to completion, detailing the successes, challenges and potential lessons to be learnt for similar projects in the future.

Chapter 9 covers a case study outlining the Green-Smart Schools initiative in Korea. This project aims to transform outdated school facilities into an eco-friendly learning environment to adapt both to the challenges of climate change, and the era of digital transformations. Despite being in its early phase, the project demonstrates a coherent trajectory established at its core, complemented by adaptable strategies at the grassroots level. This study offers a valuable illustration of a sustainable environment planning model that balances societal and ecological considerations with educational objectives.

Chapter 10 is a case study shared by the Canadian province of Manitoba which focuses on the importance of creating a more inclusive education system, with policymakers aiming to incorporate Indigenous perspectives, histories and cultures into the curriculum. An action plan aims to promote understanding, respect, and reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. This reflects a commitment to acknowledge the truths of the past, promote inclusivity, and foster a more harmonious relationship between communities through education. A similar initiative could potentially be helpful in Ukraine, particularly for children who have studied in occupied territories.

Chapter 11 is a case study from Portugal. To overcome challenges such as grade repetition, school drop-out and deficiencies in social cohesion, Portuguese policymakers describe how they set out a vision of what young people are expected to achieve at the end of compulsory schooling. Named the *Students' Profile*, it aims to align policies, such as curriculum autonomy and the use of a variety of assessments, across different sectors, to address complex societal challenges effectively. Recognising the importance of a co-ordinated approach, the profile has become the touchstone document around which other related policies are re-framed or constructed. This initiative could aid Ukrainian policymakers as they aim to put students firmly at the centre of curriculum change policy and other initiatives in a bid to bring about tangible and lasting change.

Chapter 12 focuses on Sweden. The Swedish education system acknowledges that every student is unique and has diverse learning needs. Its case study describes an assessment programme that was

designed to ensure that Syrian refugee children, and others new to the Swedish school system, were placed in appropriate class groups. To achieve this, Sweden developed a toolkit for schools to ‘map’ students’ learning needs. This process identifies their language and experiences, specific subject knowledge and knowledge in core areas such as numeracy. A similar system could be beneficial to Ukraine to help identify the strengths and needs of children who have had many different experiences during the war.

Taken together, these case studies present clear insights into countries’ educational decision-making processes and how they communicate, execute, measure and adjust policy implementation to ensure successful outcomes. They provide examples of how to ensure that decisions about education systems translate into impactful, organisational change. Policy makers in Ukraine can analyse and potentially build on the lessons learnt from these examples to support educators as they operate under war conditions. This will hopefully create more positive teaching and learning environments in the future for children who, for too long, have been robbed of the stability and safety of a classroom due to Russia’s aggression.

1 Overview

This chapter provides an overview of the background for this report, including a brief exploration of the impact of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine on the state of education in the country. The role of the OECD's Future of Education and Skills 2030 project is explained in the context of the Learning Compass, which places the learner at the centre of curriculum development. The chapter then goes on to briefly describe the issues tackled by each of the countries and regions who have contributed to this report.

In February 2022, Russian forces launched an unprovoked full-scale invasion of Ukraine that shocked the world. The devastating effects of Russia's aggression has caused extreme civilian harm and left millions of people in Ukraine without access to water, food and other essential supplies. At the time of writing, at least 10 000 civilians have been killed and more than 18 000 injured (UN, 2023[1]). Millions of people have been internally displaced, some 6.3 million refugees have fled abroad and there has been catastrophic damage to civilian infrastructure, including hospitals and schools (UNHCR, 2023[2]) The resilience of the Ukrainian people in the face of daily attacks has been both impressive and inspiring.

Like many others around the world, country representatives participating in the OECD's Global Forum on the Future of Education and Skills 2030 wanted to offer help in their areas of expertise. This collection of case studies is the result: A set of stories that outline how countries have redesigned and rebuilt education systems in different parts of the world. Its aim is to support the work already taking place in Ukraine to plan for a re-vitalised education system once the war is over.

There is much work to do. The education of more than 5 million boys and girls has been disrupted due to the war, with many suffering from mental health problems such as depression and anxiety. More than 3 000 education institutions have been damaged from bombing and shelling, with 261 of them destroyed completely. Many parents and caregivers remain reluctant to send children to school out of fear for their safety. And while online learning opportunities have been used to enrol students into virtual classes, attacks against electricity and other energy infrastructure have caused widespread blackouts making even these a challenge to attend.

The New Ukrainian School reform programme, originally launched in 2017 to modernise Ukraine's education system, has been severely impacted. It is vital that this programme is re-energised to ensure that secondary education is further developed to a new high-quality level that provides students with the ability to learn and apply knowledge in real life. In whatever post-war period emerges, the Ukrainian government will need to address a host of priority issues concerning the national education system. These include:

- rebuilding schools and ensuring their effective management;
- implementing offline studies;
- reintegrating students into the national education system, especially migrants and those who lived in temporarily occupied territories;
- building equal access to education and psychological support.

In solving these and other critical issues, the Ukrainian government and local communities will face a host of challenges, including the huge costs of rebuilding destroyed and damaged infrastructure. Significant resources will also be required to help schools and teachers working with traumatised individuals. Adults and children will need qualified psychological support, and policies and learning techniques will need to be developed to provide the right advice and support. Budgets are likely to be tight. The Ukrainian education system will need international assistance and support if it is to fulfil its reform objectives.

The list of educational issues that Ukrainian policymakers need to address is extensive but can be summed up into two main challenges: to ensure schooling continuity at a time of conflict and diminished funding, and to rebuild education for a different future.

The case studies in this publication offer a window into how other countries have reimagined their education systems and offer detailed insight into their reform processes, successes and challenges - many of which are relevant to Ukraine's situation. They highlight a range of issues, dilemmas, and opportunities that policymakers have faced, and all share a commitment to building and sustaining education systems that prepare learners to shape the future, to thrive in the face of uncertainty and to contribute to a sustainable and equitable world.

The case studies include ideas for designing and implementing system-level changes and also underline several themes that may be useful for Ukraine to consider, such as:

- the importance of a unifying vision to ensure that all stakeholders understand the objectives of a policy and sustain coherence across initiatives;
- the recognition that policy implementation is not fixed and linear, and may require revision and adaptation as it is rolled out;
- the need to allow the necessary time for every stage of the change process, to facilitate stakeholder understanding and adoption as well as supporting monitoring and adaptation as needed.

This publication is the result of the OECD's Global Forum on the Future of Education and Skills 2030[1], which provides a shared space for countries to explore education issues and identifies the competencies – the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values – that today's students need to thrive. In this volume, Delhi India), Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Japan, Korea, Manitoba (Canada), Portugal, Sweden and Türkiye provide case studies.

These case studies are intended to help Ukrainian policymakers anticipate, think through and plan strategies and solutions for changes to education systems. They also provide real life examples and ideas to mitigate the worst effects of challenges that may arise.

There are many lessons to be drawn upon, including several countries highlighting the importance of placing students at the heart of educational policy changes.

Korea has provided a case study on a new initiative, the Green-Smart Schools project. This focusses on creating safe, future-oriented and healthy educational environments through the refurbishment and/or rebuilding of old school buildings. The engagement of school users in the design phase is intended to ensure that the physical space will facilitate future-oriented teaching and learning experiences, through space for collaborative learning and optimum use of technology.

The case study from Ireland on education which enhances well-being describes how provision for well-being education has been made, drawing together in a synergistic coalition the work of multiple agencies. Students need support to make responsible and positive decisions in relation to their health and well-being and the well-being of others. The study describes how policymakers introduced a new framework for well-being in schools, setting out how they can best promote well-being through the provision of a whole-school, multi-component and preventative approach.

The centrality of students' needs has also been a focus for policymakers in other countries. Estonia has created a flexible system to respond to the learning needs of students by granting schools a significant amount of autonomy. This approach was based on trust in the professional judgement of teachers, who are viewed as best placed to know their students and their learning needs.

Finland provided an example of how a relatively simple change can sometimes facilitate a real improvement in potential outcomes for young people. Finish policymakers decided to extend the period of compulsory education from 16 to 18 in a bid to improve equity of access and opportunity. The policy means that all students, regardless of socio-economic factors, have access to upper secondary and vocational education. A range of supports to enable them to transition successfully from lower secondary education has been put in place. The goal is that this will reduce learning gaps, improve the well-being of young people, and provide young people with greater career and economic opportunities while raising national employment.

In Sweden, in large part due to the war in Syria, a sudden and sustained influx of migrant children into the education system, led to the creation of an assessment tool that aimed to provide individualised study plans and follow-up assessments. It was implemented at school level to ensure that the language, learning and psycho-social needs of the students were acknowledged and addressed.

The second case study from Ireland on curriculum change describes how policy makers significantly shifted the emphasis of the country's curriculum, from heavily content-oriented syllabuses to one which placed student interests and needs at the centre. This led to a focus on more skills-based curriculum, where both ongoing assessment and a final exam are carefully balanced to ensure all the learning achieved by students is acknowledged.

To meet the challenges of the 21st century, students need to be empowered and feel that they can aspire to help shape a world where well-being and sustainability – for themselves, for others, and for the planet – is achievable. As the world becomes increasingly complex and unpredictable, many of the countries participating in the Global Forum have sought to include in their develop school curriculums a range of socio-emotional skills to protect and sustain the well-being of their students. In some instances, historical discrimination and abuses must also be acknowledged and tackled head-on if education is to make a meaningful contribution to the positive mental health of individuals and to a peaceful, equitable, society.

The study shared by Manitoba (Canada) underlines the importance of respectfully honouring difference in an increasingly diverse world. It describes how policymakers have promoted more harmonious community relations by emphasising understanding and reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. This includes addressing painful truths about past and existing wrongs. Building relationships is an integral function of education so it is a primary vehicle for the construction of more just, equitable and peaceful societies. Few countries have experienced catastrophe at the level experienced by Ukraine. Nevertheless, the experiences of Japan and Türkiye describe how the education system can be pivotal in re-establishing a sense of normalcy, as well as being a catalyst for fresh thinking. The case study from Japan describes a project which set out to challenge the established experienced curriculum. It illustrates how disaster can provide unique opportunities for change and renewal and the value of strategic partnerships between government, universities and international partners.

Following the devastating earthquakes in February 2023, Türkiye developed and implemented a post-disaster education management strategy. The case study describes the actions taken under that strategy to ensure the welfare of earthquake victims, furnish them with necessary humanitarian support, and promptly transition to educational provision. The ultimate goal is to achieve normalization by consistently enhancing the quality of education provided.

The case study from Delhi describes a significant programme of reform which leveraged the curriculum to transform government schools. The curriculum, understood as dynamic and multi-dimensional, acted as a lever to promote parental engagement and activate local initiatives aimed at improving the educational outcomes for students.

Taken together, the studies set out a range of innovations and changes to education systems that have been implemented in different contexts. They are not intended to prescribe particular actions or goals – those are context-dependent. Instead, they are offered as accounts of change management, to aid Ukrainian policymakers contemplating change from the earliest stages of conception through to implementation and resolution.

Many of the practical issues presented could emerge across a range of cultural, geographical, political, and socio-economic settings. For example, the value of extensive stakeholder engagement at an early stage, the importance of ongoing communication, and the usefulness of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms and so on. Ukraine can draw upon the inspiration of other policymakers and the lessons learnt in these case studies. They are offered in a spirit of collegiality and solidarity as Ukraine continues to provide education to its population under horrific war conditions; a war which has unjustly deprived many children in the country of the education they deserve.

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Notes

[1] For more information on the work of the Global Forum, see https://www.oecd.org/education/2030-project/.

2 The state of education in Ukraine and steps for future progress

This chapter, written by the former Ukrainian Education and Science Minister Liliia Hrynevych, outlines the current state of the education system in Ukraine, the extensive challenges it faces, and the current and planned reforms to improve teaching and learning across the country. Ukraine is already engaged in revitalising its education system via the "New Ukrainian School" reform programme and is drawing on the experiences of other countries to identify key policies that can be customised to help reverse the negative impacts of the war and benefit a post-war Ukraine.

The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has had a devastating impact on civilians with many families struggling to meet their most basic needs, including education for their children. As Russian forces continue to bomb and shell schools, injuring and killing civilians, a significant number of students do not have the opportunity to study properly. Many are suffering from stress and trauma, which makes learning even more difficult. Teachers too are struggling to cope, and the rebuilding of educational facilities will require significant resources.

In this context, the Ukrainian government has been engaged in ensuring the continuity of schooling for as many children as possible. It also plans to restart a reform process to further modernise and improve its education system despite Russia's war of aggression. The case studies in this book are a timely and helpful collection of innovations to schooling from across the world that can benefit Ukrainian policymakers contemplating educational changes.

In this chapter, Ukraine outlines its current situation, its plans for the future, and areas of related significance from the country case studies.

Impact of the war on school education in Ukraine

August 2023, Russia's bombardment of Ukraine has damaged 3582 educational facilities, of which 341 have been completely destroyed (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, 2023[1]). Almost half of them are secondary schools. In total, 10% of the country's educational infrastructure has been damaged by Russian shelling (Centre for Economic Strategy, 2023[2]).

At the same time, millions of people have been forcibly displaced both inside the country and to neighbouring countries. Almost 8 million Ukrainians have travelled abroad (Telegraf, 2023[3]); another 7 million are internally displaced (Slovo i Dilo, 2023[4]). As of December 2022, 516 243 students (13% of the total) and almost 11 000 teaching staff (3%) were living abroad (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, 2022[5]).

Since the beginning of the conflict, 502 children have been killed and another 1100 children have been injured, according to confirmed data as of August 2023. Almost 20 000 children have been forcibly deported from temporarily occupied territories. A further 393 are considered missing (Children of war, 2023[6]). Unfortunately, due to active hostilities and the temporary occupation of part of Ukraine's territory, it is impossible to accurately state the full extent of the suffering.

Most parents (61%) note symptoms of trauma in their children. These include increased anxiety, sleep disturbances, memory deterioration, difficulties concentrating and less desire to communicate (CEDOS, SavED, 2023[7]). At the same time, more than half of teachers (54%) are experiencing professional burnout and need psychological support (GoGlobal, 2023[8]).

Even for students studying in relatively safe regions, conditions have deteriorated significantly. Due to frequent air raid alerts, lessons are often interrupted and shortened to enable students to take shelter. In the autumn and winter of 2022 and early 2023, there were frequent power outages due to missile attacks. A significant number of teachers and students had no internet connection to teach and study remotely. Children in regions close to the front line and in the occupied territories, where internet is available, only have access to remote learning. Those without a connection, cannot study with their teachers at all.

The Office of the Education Ombudsperson of Ukraine has analysed the impact of the war and identified seven distinct categories of student, each of whom faces specific educational challenges:

- students who found refuge abroad;
- students who permanently live far from the combat zone;
- students who found refuge in Ukraine (IDPs);

- students who live in de-occupied territories;
- students who have been forcibly deported to the territory of Russia or Belarus;
- students who permanently live close to or in the combat zone;
- students who are in the temporarily occupied territories (The Education Ombudsman of Ukraine, 2022[9]).

A priority of the Ukrainian government is to ensure that disruptions to students' learning are minimised as much as possible. A number of strategies have been used to ensure continuity of education to the greatest extent possible. One such strategy has been to leverage the expertise gained by teachers and students during the COVID-19 pandemic, when schools in Ukraine, as elsewhere, switched to working online. As a result, almost all teachers have mastered the necessary digital skills to conduct remote lessons.

This has helped the Ukrainian education system to adapt to the realities of war. As of 1 September 2022, 12 996 schools were operating in some form across Ukraine (CEDOS, SavED, 2023[7]) by dynamically applying three education models simultaneously. A third of schools were operating on a permanent remote basis (36%), another third mix remote and in-person learning (36%), and the remainder are solely face-to-face (28%), as of December 2022 (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, 2022[5]).

As one would expect, educational facilities near the frontline are operating remotely while schools in relatively safe areas provide face-to-face instruction - if they have a bomb shelter that can accommodate all the school children. According to official statistics, by the 2022-23 academic year, shelters were equipped in 74.7% of educational facilities, giving them the opportunity to go back to face-to-face instruction (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, 2020[10]). However, in large cities, particularly in Kyiv, many schools have more students than a shelter can accommodate. In such cases, institutions introduced hybrid learning and hot seating. For example, different classes took turns studying in-person at school each week. Primary schools, where possible, were prioritised as evidence shows that remote learning can most negatively impact the development of young children.

Education changes in pre-war Ukraine

After gaining independence in 1991, Ukraine developed its own national education system. The country has shifted from a centralised post-Soviet education system to one based on the principles of child-centredness, democratisation and decentralisation. The Revolution of Dignity in 2014 was a powerful impetus for significant change in Ukraine. Civil society, the government and parliament made education policy a top priority. Following a three-year civic and political dialogue involving many stakeholders, a new foundational education law was adopted in 2017 that defined the ideological changes (The Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2017[11]).

The "New Ukrainian School" (NUS) reform, which began the same year, was a response to demands for quality European education system with equal access for all. "The modern world is complex. It is not enough to only give knowledge to a child. It is also important to teach them how to use it. Knowledge and skills interconnected with a student's values form the competences required for success in life, studies and work," the reform concept paper stated (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, 2016[12]).

The reform was gradually implemented in primary schools between 2017-21, which included targeted funding for teacher training and funds for classroom equipment (Re:Osvita, International Renaissance Foundation, 2022[13]). However, the impact of the Russian invasion left the education system facing enormous challenges and the reform programme in a critical state.

Ukraine is now ready to restart the reform process, taking into account the circumstances that have arisen during the war and the country's overall development strategy. The main goal is to ensure that all children in Ukraine have access to quality education, so that they can achieve success in their lives and become

active, united, resilient and responsible citizens able to contribute to the development of a European Ukraine. Drawing on the experiences of other countries, Ukraine has tried to identify key policies that could improve the quality of education, help reverse the negative impacts of the crisis, and be customised to Ukraine's unique set of circumstances, both during and after the war. This will ensure that Ukraine can implement best practices from across the world to overcome the extraordinary challenges its education system faces, as well as add new ideas or confirm current policy reforms.

Areas of change to improve school education

Ukraine has identified a number of actions to revitalise the reform programme and ensure the ambition to continue to provide a high-quality education to all its students can be realised. This covers a wide range of areas, including policies to reduce education gaps, improve professional development opportunities for the teaching profession and the use of innovative digital technologies to support educational goals. Below is a summary of some of the main areas of reform that will be necessary to improve the education system.

Overcoming losses and gaps in the education system

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has negatively impacted education in many ways and led to the formation of new educational gaps between students who have had different experiences during the war. According to research, learning is an effective way to return to a sense of normality in the most abnormal situations, such as natural calamities, disasters, wars and other traumatic events for children (Le Brocque, 2016[14]). As a result of military operations in territories that are under the control of Ukraine, threatened with occupation, or have been recently de-occupied, it was necessary to apply a strategy to restore education. This followed the following three phases:

1. ensuring the protection of children's lives by evacuating them, urging them to stay in bomb shelters and safe places, and providing medical and psychosocial assistance;

2. restoring the education system through distance and hybrid learning, and, in cases where a school was destroyed, conducting classes in other premises, and arranging digital educational centres (Digital Learning Centres, DLC);

3. ensuring access to quality education, implementing the reform of the New Ukrainian School.

Such an approach is very similar to the management model implemented by Türkiye's Ministry of National Education after the catastrophic earthquake of February 06, 2023, which caused significant destruction and casualties in ten provinces, home to more than 13.5 million citizens. This is a three-stage model:

1. supporting search and rescue operations as well as providing humanitarian aid – providing premises to be used as shelters, producing food for victims, and allocating specialists for psychosocial support;

2. prioritising the return to education, during which temporary classrooms were constructed and classes were held in communal and public premises;

3. ensuring equality – access to education for all students, including children with special educational needs.

The Ministry has also created hospital classrooms to ensure access to education for students with illnesses or disabilities. And in Ukraine, the "School of Superheroes" in particular has developed as a non-governmental and later state initiative to hold school classes at hospitals.

During the initial stages of restoring education in Türkiye, the psychosocial support of students was a priority, and the transition to psychological and pedagogical support took place as schools reopened. Similar processes have been taking place in Ukrainian education since the beginning of the full-scale war.

The different ways OECD countries have compensated for educational losses and learning gaps linked to remote learning can be useful in this regard. Case studies in this publication, as well as the OECD paper, “Recovering lost learning opportunities in Ukraine: Key education policy strategies” (OECD, 2023[14]), identify key strategies for overcoming educational losses, for example by adapting teaching practices to students’ individual needs, adapting and extending learning time and other techniques.

In this regard, Ukraine can consider the allocation of additional teaching and learning hours for individuals and groups of students. The focus of the additional time should be stipulated in the curriculum and paid from budget funds. Summer schools, for example, may be a promising approach for children from combat zones and from de-occupied territories. Türkiye has a similar experience of free summer school programmes as part of overcoming educational losses after the earthquake. Assigning additional time allows for students to catch up on missed learning opportunities. Another useful approach is to develop an online tutoring platform, which could match students with a teacher, university student or even facilitate peer-to-peer learning.

The experience of Türkiye regarding mobile scientific centers established at disaster zones to study natural sciences and conduct practical experiments is interesting in terms of overcoming educational losses and gaps. Tents were set up to provide games and activities. Such centers can be useful in rural areas and territories of Ukraine which are sparsely populated as a result of hostilities. A network of DLCs is also developing in Ukraine, created by the SavEd charitable foundation with the support of foreign organisations, such as AWO International, Aktion Deutschland Hilft, Plan International, Crown Agents, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), etc. (CEDOS, SavED, 2023[7]). Digital education centers that have shelters or are established within shelters are also properly set up with furniture and equipment to give lessons, and have everything necessary for children to relax and play.

The effectiveness of additional time is dependent on ensuring that the learning experiences offered are appropriately targeted. In effect, they need to address the specific learning needs of the students. Developing a diagnostic process which will identify those needs is a particularly urgent objective in Ukraine. The experiences of other countries can help provide guidance. The Swedish case study gives some useful insights into the development of diagnostic tools to identify the strengths and needs of students. It also points to the value of engaging local expertise in their development. The Ukrainian Center for Educational Quality Assessment, (UCEQA), has experience of conducting national monitoring and the external final assessment. As a result, UCEQA’s involvement in developing additional diagnostic materials is worth considering. A similar assessment test is already being developed, with primary diagnostic tests for the Ukrainian language and mathematics posted on the "Ukrainian School Online" resource.

Sweden also developed the concept of a “mapping” process which looks at students’ language and experiences, literacy and numeracy proficiency, and knowledge in specific subject discipline areas. The principal uses the findings to determine which class group a student should join, by also taking into consideration the student’s social maturity, previous school experience and health.

When developing similar procedures in Ukraine, it will be important to create appropriate tests and tasks that can assess core knowledge and competencies in the Ukrainian context. Conducting an interview with the student, as is done in Sweden, rather than relying solely on a written test, provides an additional source of information. Adopting this approach would enable educators to take into account educational gaps and students’ strengths and areas to improve. Sweden's experience of "immersion" and "preparatory" classes is also helpful. This can be especially relevant for the support of children who have been studying in occupied territories under the Russian education system since 2014.

Updating the content of the curriculum

Competency-based learning

The "New Ukrainian School" (NUS) reform signalled a transition from a knowledge content focused curriculum to one which was competency-based. The outcomes achieved by Ukrainian students in PISA 2018, the first time Ukraine had participated, illustrated clearly the need for reform as 25.9% of Ukrainian teenagers failed to attain basic levels of literacy in reading, 36% in mathematics, and 26.4% in sciences – Ukraine's average scores were lower than the OECD average scores in all three domains (OECD, 2018[15]). The NUS reform set out to ensure that students would not only gain knowledge but also the range of competencies necessary to apply that knowledge in real-life situations. Knowledge and skills are linked to the student's value system, to form ten key competencies prescribed in the NUS. The reform built on the existing pedagogical practices in Ukraine and on best practice from the world's leading education systems. The list of competencies included in the curriculum is based on recommendations from the European Parliament and the Council of Europe (European Parliament, 2006[16]). In addition to competencies, NUS develops cross-cutting skills, in particular critical thinking, responsibility and other socio-emotional skills. The government adopted new State standards that define the expected learning outcomes for primary (2018) and basic (2020) schools, which have reflected mentioned NUS approaches.

Russia's war of aggression has impacted the progress of educational reforms. However, it is vital that the Ukrainian education system continues to implement a competence-based approach and to update educational content. In the context of the war, learning takes place under stressful conditions. Children need resilience, the capacity to regulate emotions, as well as other socio-emotional skills. The NUS reforms have been developed in line with state-of-the-art education trends, however the case studies shared in this book also highlight valuable insights into how education systems can be developed.

Since 2015, the Irish secondary education system has been implementing a new Junior Cycle Framework – the most significant school reform in that country in decades. In the curriculum, the emphasis shifted from subjects to focus on students' interests and needs. It identified the expected outcomes of lower secondary education in a set of 24 learning statements and eight key skills. The framework document details each skill, their elements and outcomes, and this enables teachers to integrate them into subject planning and classwork.

Meanwhile, in Portugal, policymakers have also focused education reform on competencies important for students' future lives. The Education Ministry introduced the "Students' Profile", which outlines both the principles and vision underpinning education provision, and the values and competency areas education should develop in students. It has become the touchstone for all relevant policies and decision-making, bringing coherence to multiple elements in the education reform programme in Portugal.

Thus, the experiences of countries that put the interests and needs of students at the forefront of educational changes resonate with reforms in Ukraine, which are based on child-centredness and the formation of core competencies and cross-cutting skills. Similarly, public standards for elementary and basic schooling are described in terms of learning outcomes rather than curriculum content components. Ukraine also has its student profile tool, developed in 2016, which can be improved drawing on international experience.

Ukraine can also use the experience of OECD countries to support its education sector reform agenda. In particular, it can draw on their experiences to support its own efforts to integrate a competency-based approach in various subjects and to identify teaching methods that avoid overloading students. The experience of Ireland is extremely interesting and relevant for Ukraine. As Ukraine further rolls-out reforms to cover high school and continues implementation of the new State Standard of Basic Education and the State Standard of High Specialised Academic and Vocational Education envisaged by the NUS reform,

Portugal's experience of designing differentiated pathways for students requiring additional support will also be of use.

Updating the content of subjects

A challenge for education in post-war Ukraine will be integrating children from temporarily occupied territories. It will be necessary to develop an adapted curriculum in the Ukrainian language that can immerse them in various subjects. It will be important too to build flexibility into the curriculum so that it can be adapted to meet the needs of students who have had diverse experiences of disruption. For example, this will be important for children from temporarily occupied territories who did not study within the Ukrainian education system for a considerable period of time.

In post-war education, nation-building subjects will play an important role for all children. Subjects that are key to the development of Ukrainian identity and social cohesion, such as the Ukrainian language and literature, history and civic education, will need to be revised. Examples of the curriculum approaches taken in some of the case studies illustrate the possibilities.

Education in the state language - as well as deep knowledge of the native literature, history, and geography – are of particular importance in national school systems. In Sweden, the “Intensive Swedish” initiative was aimed at supporting high school students who had recently arrived in the country, with little to no Swedish language ability. Estonia, when transitioning to the national education system, introduced teaching in the Estonian language with an emphasis on the local history, geography, works by Estonian authors, and much more. \ Meanwhile, in Portugal, an essential element of the curriculum has been citizenship education, which is taught both in primary and secondary schools. The subject of "Citizenship and Development" includes studying topics such as gender equality, consumption culture, and intercultural relations. A new programme resulting from the reform in Delhi was Deshbhakti, or National Pride, which was introduced in 2021, from Kindergarten to Grade 12, to inculcate the values enshrined in the Indian constitution, including tolerance, brotherhood, collective belonging and participatory democracy.

Approaches to updating the content of education in Ukraine - in accordance with current needs and international experience - include enhancing science and mathematics education (STEM), and students’ command of foreign languages. School subjects in the areas of natural sciences and mathematics should not only provide knowledge and skills, but also develop the innovative competency required for Ukrainian youth to be competitive in local and global labour markets. Since Ukraine has set its course towards European and Euro-Atlantic integration, more attention should be paid to learning foreign languages by using communicative teaching methods and modern digital resources.

Developing socio-emotional skills and resilience

The traumatic impact of the war on Ukrainian students means curriculum reform should include a focus on developing the life skills of resilience, emotional self-regulation, and empathy in order to ensure students’ well-being. One of the noted outcomes of the introduction of the NUS was the improvement of socio-emotional skills among primary school children (Linnik, Hrynevych and Staragina, 2022[17]). Ukraine is also already piloting a socio-emotional and ethical learning program (EdCamp Ukraine, 2019[18]). As this work continues, the case studies from Manitoba and Ireland underline the importance of attention to this area, as well as provide ideas for exploration in the Ukrainian context.

In Manitoba (Canada) the student-centred educational strategy aims to holistically support their mental health and well-being. *Mino-Pimatisiwin* or “the Good Life” is a concept shared by many First Nation peoples. It refers to living a well-balanced life and education that must address the development of the whole person, their emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual state. In Manitoba, a model of positive youth development was also formed - the "Circle of Courage", which defines the four basic needs of children -

belonging, mastery, independence and generosity. This model emphasizes the importance of meeting the socio-emotional needs of children in implementing an inclusive, equal and quality education system.

As part of the education reform in Delhi, the quality of education was improved through the introduction of new curricula. Among them is the Happiness Curriculum, which is implemented from grades 1 through 8 and consists of daily 45-minute lessons. This curriculum aims to develop social and emotional skills, critical thinking, attention and reflection. It consists of three parts: exploring happiness through learning and awareness, experiencing happiness in relationships through feelings, and active participation. The key factor in the success of the Happiness Curriculum was its implementation with the help and support of partners and public organizations.

A report published by the Boston Consulting Group highlights that 87% of teachers believe that the school's Happiness curriculum has had a tangible impact on students (Boston Consultancy Group, 2021[20]). For some of the children who participated in this curriculum, the school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic were not as stressful because of the mindfulness and resilience-building practices acquired while learning. The pandemic has drawn attention to the feasibility of including happiness practices and mindfulness in the curriculum and the consideration of well-being of students as a critical component of education.

Subsequently, in grades 9 through 12, the Happiness Curriculum is followed by the Entrepreneurship Mindset Curriculum. Its goal is to develop mindsets enabling students to be innovators, solve conflicts and create jobs. An important element of the curriculum was building bridges with local business, focusing on providing students with real-world experience to understand economic processes. Entrepreneurial thinking is also very relevant for Ukraine at the time of post-war reconstruction, and it corresponds to the learning outcomes for entrepreneurial and innovative key competencies defined in the State Education Standards. Using the example of the Delhi experience, we can see that the purposeful development of social and emotional skills and entrepreneurial competence is successfully taking place at the policy level through introducing targeted curricula.

Since 2015, the study of well-being has been defined as a separate educational area and subject in Ireland. For this, 300 hours were allocated in the basic school cycle. Various dimensions of well-being are considered, which relate to the ability to realise one's potential, resist life's stresses, care for one's health, both physical and mental, and find a sense of purpose, connectedness and belonging to a wider community. In addition, schools can add those aspects of well-being that they consider appropriate to the curriculum. The psychological and emotional needs of students have also become a priority in Türkiye in the course of creating post-disaster education models.

In Ukraine, it is necessary to implement a system for developing socio-emotional skills for all age groups of students, in particular, taking into account the traumatic impact of the war. On this point, the experience of other countries can be helpful in the design of curricula and models aimed at developing emotional intelligence, fostering a culture of diversity and respect for others. Thus, the experience of Delhi led to the conclusion that in the conditions of war and post-war reconstruction, taking into account the level of traumatization of Ukrainian society, especially to children and students, it will be appropriate to consider social-emotional education as a mandatory part of the educational process. Currently, it is only selectively implemented in Ukraine.

Developing educational and methodological support for new content and assessing students' educational achievements

Successful reform of education systems internationally has been accompanied by dedicated attention to supporting teachers and students to adapt to new approaches and content. In many instances, this has taken the form of additional professional development for teachers, the development of digital resources and methodological guides for teachers, as well as textbooks for students. Particular attention is paid to

the evaluation of learning, both in the classroom and exams that determine the progress of students to further and higher education. The success of reforms in various countries had one thing in common: teachers and students were provided with well-developed educational and methodological materials before the introduction of new educational programs and curricula. In practically all the considered cases, manuals were developed for each curriculum, at the level of each class, in parallel with the introduction of educational reforms.

In many systems, a renewed focus on formative assessment has reflected the shift to a more student-centred curriculum approach. For example, reforms in Ireland involved rethinking the evaluation system so that all the learning achievements of students, not just their knowledge of subject content, could be recognised and celebrated. Thus, two components of evaluation emerged – ongoing, in-class evaluation of work completed in school time and a final exam at the end of a three-year learning cycle. The classroom-based assessments allow students to explore themes, conduct research and present their learning through a variety of formats, including for example dramatic presentation, speech, fieldwork reporting, portfolio development and, where the student chooses to, a traditional written paper.

In Portugal, implementing the *Students' Profile* requires teachers to adapt their pedagogical practice and, in 2018, a diverse use of assessment and evaluation instruments was encouraged in the guidance documents and legislation. Maintaining a focus on the student at the centre of assessment practice, Portugal requires teachers to carefully consider the purpose of any assessment and the particular curriculum component or objectives being measured. They should choose an assessment methodology which directly addresses that purpose. A teachers' guide to formative assessment is an important tool provided to teachers to support their assessment practice.

Formative assessment has also been introduced in Ukraine as part of its reform process. It aims to focus on where students succeed and where they need to improve. However, at present, an insufficient number of standardised assessment cards have been developed to fully reflect the expected wide range of students' knowledge and skills. While in primary school this problem has been largely resolved, it remains an issue in lower secondary school. There is also scope to use technology to support learning and evaluation. Specifically, digital gamified educational resources, especially in mathematics, can help motivate students to learn. Similarly, it is necessary to develop evaluation algorithms for competency-building in basic secondary education (grades 5-9) and specialised secondary education (grades 10-11 (12).

Transition to 12-year general secondary education

According to the Ukrainian Constitution, there are 11 years of compulsory school attendance for children and teenagers from age 6 to 17. The New Ukrainian School (NUS) reform envisages the gradual transition to 12 years of compulsory education (the first graduation would take place in 2030). However, there are still concerns about whether there will be enough resources to pay for the extra year of schooling. Ensuring adequate financing to support new educational policies is a challenge in any context. Without sufficient funding, the intention of reform is often compromised.

An important factor in the success of Estonia's educational reforms was financial support and the timely transition from a post-Soviet system to 12 years of national education. The experience in Finland is also worth noting, which in 2021 extended the period of compulsory education from 16 to 18. In both cases significant resources were needed, both human and financial. When developing the project to increase the duration of compulsory education, Finnish experts carefully analysed all financial costs. Given the evidence that keeping young people in school is strongly correlated with improved employment and income development opportunities, which in turn results in higher tax revenues and lower social security expenditure, financing the additional year can be considered a prudent investment. Having analysed other alternatives, such as provision of social assistance to youth, the government was convinced that extending the period of compulsory education would be the most beneficial and cost-effective.

As Ukraine implements an additional school year as part of the introduction of a new three-year high (senior) school of academic or professional direction, an emphasis on student guidance is needed to support young people to choose an appropriate educational pathway. This should include orientation on a broad range of professions, delivered by career consultants.

Professional development of teachers and school principals

Under the NUS reform plan, teachers play a key role as they directly implement the changes in schools. The case studies in this publication outline the importance of providing teachers with training so that they understand the purpose of a policy change and acquire the skills needed to support its implementation in the classroom. This meant changes to pre-service training, for example, in Estonia. During the transition from the Soviet education system to the national one, universities revised their curricula for future teachers to put an emphasis on students and their learning outcomes. In-service professional development opportunities were also provided for teachers, who decide how and what they need to learn. Similarly in Ireland, prior to approval of each new subject specification, in-service professional development courses and subject-based courses were organised for teachers. In Manitoba, educators were also supported to better understand and implement the new Indigenous education policy. In particular, teachers were provided with a wide range of external resources on the history, culture, and languages of Indigenous peoples.

Support for teachers is of paramount importance in post-disaster education recovery, as they are often the first point of contact for students, welcoming children and young people into a safe learning environment and helping them to meet their psychological and physiological needs (Özer, Şensoy and Suna, 2023[21]). Therefore, in Türkiye mass training was implemented for 1.2 million teachers, in particular through the Informatics Teachers Network (ÖBA), on various topics such as disaster management and post-disaster mental health, to strengthen their professional capacity and emotional resilience in supporting affected students. The Ministry has also provided teachers with temporary housing and transportation assistance to ensure quality education in a situation of significant challenges.

In some cases, countries have granted additional autonomy to teachers to enable them to design curricula tailored to the needs of their students. In Estonia and Portugal, teachers have the autonomy to independently choose teaching methods and techniques, and to adapt the curricula to achieve learning outcomes, after taking into account the specific learning needs within their classrooms. Estonian teachers select curriculum content according to students' needs and can flexibly integrate subjects. In Portugal, teachers are provided with guidance on how to select and combine methods and techniques for the development of children's competencies.

These experiences resonate with Ukraine. One of the important innovations of the new State Education Standards is the extensive pedagogical autonomy given to schools and teachers, who can independently develop and use various curricula to meet the standards. A new teacher professional standard has also been approved, which sets five general and 15 professional competencies necessary for the reform's implementation (Ministry of Economic Development, 2020[19]).

When considering the international experiences described in these case studies, it is clear that all successful educational changes have been accompanied by steps that support teachers and their professional development. Ireland, for example, promoted co-operation among teachers by allocating 22 hours in the school calendar each year for subject-oriented meetings, so teachers can develop a common understanding of standards, expectations, evaluation, and reflect on their experience. It helped to move from an "isolated school culture" towards a culture of communication and co-operation. Ireland also used experienced teachers, to develop programmes to support their colleagues across the country. In Sweden, the National Agency for Education worked with principals to help showcase the opportunities that reforms offered to teachers, as well as introducing them to materials about projects and initiatives.

During the implementation of the reform in Delhi, the leadership role of heads of school was further reinforced, and their transition from administrative tasks to leadership in the educational process was supported. For this purpose, they used the Cluster Leadership Development Program (CLDP), which helped school leaders understand the specifics of implementing new curricula. Under this model, groups of principals and managers from neighbouring schools meet monthly for peer-facilitated learning. Training educational leaders is particularly important in the Ukrainian reform of the National Academy of Sciences, while a targeted course for school principals specifically, peer learning, and the development of leadership skills is very important.

Also in Delhi, leading teachers and mentors, as well as teacher development coordinators and mentors, were involved in the implementation of the new Happiness Curriculum. They have been providing feedback for developers to act upon, increasing the level of trust in the new curricula. There was a four-stage model of support, which started with training the teachers implementing the Happiness Curriculum, followed by training coordinators and finally resulting in intensive training using the cascade model. This demonstrates the importance of teacher training, especially in the implementation of new curricula, which is now necessary for Ukrainian subject teachers of grades 5 through 9.

In Ukraine, professional growth is important for teachers and managers of educational facilities, who have to understand and implement reforms, and master teaching methods for competency development. In order to provide teachers with more opportunities for professional growth, Ukraine's government de-monopolised the professional development market in 2020. Previously, it was only offered by Institutes of Postgraduate Pedagogical Education. As a result of the de-monopolisation, lots of providers have appeared and competition has increased. In 2021, the EdWay National Platform for Professional Development of Pedagogical Workers was launched, where all interested providers can publish their offers (EdWay, n.d.[20]). For teachers, this is a convenient resource to find learning opportunities in various areas. Teachers can also now plan their own professional growth and combine courses from different providers. For this purpose, the government of Ukraine introduced a subvention that was paid to schools and then - based on the "money follows the teacher's preference" principle - transferred to professional development entities chosen by teachers.

As a result of the Russian invasion, progress in teacher professional development slowed significantly. This happened, in particular, due to curtailment of the targeted subventions. In order to move the reform forward, Ukrainian teachers and school principals are encouraged to make efforts to continue supporting learning opportunities and allow for professional development accordingly.

The experiences described in the case studies can be used to guide further expansion of reforms in Ukraine to cover basic and specialised secondary schools. The development of dedicated materials for principals and teachers to explain policy changes will also be necessary, as will the establishment of teams of subject consultants. Targeted professional development of teachers and school principals which encourages professional communication about new policy approaches, and which restores the approach of the "money follows the teacher's preference" principle, is necessary. A comprehensive support program should include educational and methodical support, high-quality modern textbooks, materials with the rationale for changes and reforms, as well as a single electronic platform where a teacher or school principal can access everything they need. It will also be necessary to take steps to improve the status of teaching and teachers. The remuneration paid to teachers in Ukraine is low and this has been exacerbated by the war, with certain teacher bonuses eliminated or reduced. On top of this, inflation-linked pay rises have not been paid. It is strategically important to attract and financially support both teachers already employed, as well as to develop a financial structure that appeals to young professionals.

Creation of a safe and developmental educational environment

In order for Ukraine's reforms to have a positive impact on the quality of education at primary schools, the government allocated targeted subventions. These aimed to improve teachers' qualifications and to update

the educational space. In particular, local communities received funds from the state budget for new primary school equipment. Founders of educational facilities bought classroom furniture which could be used flexibly to create learning spaces for students to collaborate in groups, as well as dynamic teaching aids, and multimedia equipment. Problem-solving and research-based learning equipment was also provided to primary schools, in particular, the integrated "I Explore the World" course. To create a developmental environment, the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine also collaborated with the international organisation "The LEGO Foundation", which provided sets of learning LEGO bricks to every Ukrainian school (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, 2019[21]).

Ukraine has also focused on creating a barrier-free environment in schools attended by children with disabilities. As a result, barrier-free accessibility was a mandatory standard for all new school builds. School constructions and reconstruction designs were also developed to make educational spaces more effective and motivating.

However, after the full-scale invasion by Russia, equipment subsidies for educational spaces were withdrawn and schools did not receive additional support for the organisation of 5th grade learning based on the new State Basic Education Standard. On top of this, previously procured equipment for primary schools has been significantly damaged in regions under occupation. Other regions have seen equipment destroyed in missile attacks. For example, during the occupation of the Kharkiv region, 10,815 pieces of school equipment were damaged, destroyed or stolen in only two of the communities, including 1,514 pieces of electronic equipment procured as part of the reform process (CEDOS, SavED, 2023[7]). The war has significantly increased security requirements for schools. As noted earlier, educational facilities must equip shelters. Currently, around three-quarters of Ukrainian schools have shelters. However, they vary massively in quality and are often basements that are not sufficiently reinforced or equipped.

Educational spaces should provide both physical and psychological safety and promote the development of students' potential. Resuming the targeted subvention from the state budget for equipment, educational and methodological support for schools is a major goal. In particular, ensuring the availability of resources, including up-to-date equipment, is extremely important. This will help support the use of an active problem-solving approach and project work in STEAM subjects to motivate students to achieve better learning outcomes.

Ukraine also inspires to enhance the significance of social, emotional, and behavioural components of the school experience on a par with the academic side. The learning outcomes of the new State Basic Education Standard (2020) mention "well-being" 97 times (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, 2020[10]). Under the standard, well-being is one of the promoted personal competences, which includes pursuit of life satisfaction, care for one's physical, mental, and social health, and adoption of a sustainable lifestyle.

In Ireland, education that enhances and supports well-being was implemented in lower secondary curriculum due to slumping levels of mental well-being and life satisfaction in children. Ukrainian students are suffering from the horrors of war, which negatively impacts their psycho-emotional state. Therefore, for the Ukrainian education system, the issue of children's well-being is more relevant than ever. It is highly important for schools to be able to improve and restore students' life resilience, increase their internal motivation to study and improve academic results so they can fulfil their full potential. Implementing policies to ensure the well-being of students at the individual, group, and school-wide levels is necessary. The needs of students require complex solutions, including inter-institutional co-operation and investments, and personnel, educational and methodological support. These are all extremely relevant to improving children's education conditions in a post-war Ukraine. Teachers will also need to be supported so they can work effectively with children who require psychological support.

The educational well-being policy in Ireland has been comprehensive and accompanied by adequate institutional, personnel, educational and methodological support. A similar policy focused on children's well-being could be an extremely important element to creating a progressive and safe environment at Ukrainian schools.

Digitalisation of education

Due to the switch to online formats because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ukrainian education system has significantly increased its levels of digitalisation. Teachers have actively acquired digital skills in line with professional standards. A significant number of educational facilities have switched to electronic document management, and digital databases in the domain of education are also being developed, with digital educational resources for children and adults created during the pandemic. Ukrainian School Online has provided lessons for students from grades 5-11 (Ukrainian School Online). Meanwhile, in 2020, the Ministry of Digital Transformations of Ukraine launched the online platform "Diia. Digital Education”, which hosted 40 educational series on various aspects of digital literacy. In 2023, it expanded the platform with more web courses.

Schools have actively procured computer equipment; however technical support has been insufficient. On the eve of the Russian invasion, roughly 56% of school computer equipment needed updating, while some 72% of educational facilities were connected to the internet. Ukraine has received a significant amount of international aid to provide technical support for teachers and students during the war. However, as of the beginning of 2023, 25% of teachers still did not have a work computer, 20% have no access to the internet, and only 50% of basic and high school students have their own computers, laptops or tablets, with 74% using smartphones for learning (State Service of Education Quality of Ukraine, 2023[22]). Despite these challenges, the digitalisation process has contributed enormously to providing remote learning during the war.

Ukraine can take advantage of some international best practices in this area as it considers its next steps. For example, Estonia’s government, working together with IT companies and private individuals, began implementing The Tiger Leap programme in the late 1990s, which aimed to heavily invest in developing and expanding computer and network infrastructure, with an emphasis on education. As a result, Estonia became the first country in Europe where all schools had access to the internet, with the vast majority having advanced teaching and learning equipment. Ukraine will also require collaboration between public institutions and private companies, both domestically and abroad, to provide the education system with sufficient technical equipment. Ensuring adequate internet connections, a sufficient number of digital devices for teachers and students, and implementing effective Learning Management Systems to improve feedback to students and parents is one of the goals of Ukraine’s approach to digitalisation.

Estonian schools integrated digital literacy across the curriculum and taught it as a separate subject. Because students and teachers had already developed digital literacy skills, Estonia was able to organise remote learning more effectively during the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, digitalisation fuelled the new phenomenon of cyber-bullying, which must be addressed. Other challenges included some educators failing to understand the opportunities offered by digital tools as they did not keep up with the digitalisation process. Ukraine also has its experience of teachers’ insufficiently developing digital skills, which urgently need to be updated. Ukraine needs to develop digital literacy, for example, by modernising information technology curricula, providing students with the relevant knowledge and skills, and also by introducing a system to combat cyber-bullying. It also needs to implement systems for the development and monitoring of information on the digital competence of teachers and students. Unlike some countries, Ukraine has no exams that can show the extent of digital skills achieved by students. It would be advisable to introduce assessment of this competency for both students and teachers.

In Korea the Green-Smart Schools project is being implemented, which aims to develop students' competencies to prepare them for life in the future world of rapid social and environmental changes. To ensure the education of the future, "smart classrooms" are planned to be equipped with digital technologies including virtual and mixed reality equipment, mirror devices, 3D simulators, intelligent closed-circuit televisions (Intelligent CCTV) and an integrated learning platform. For all these technologies to be effectively used for personalised learning, in February 2023, Korea announced an education reform plan for all, focusing on digital transformation and personalised learning. This is planned to be achieved through

"Teacher's Assistants" in the form of artificial intelligence (AI)-based textbooks in mathematics, English and computer science, which will be gradually introduced from 2025. Furthermore, math tutoring is planned to be made available using AI. Support for teachers who teach using AI-based textbooks will be provided through a group of teachers with experience in digital technologies and an understanding of the reform.

Development of curricula that would correspond to the vision of the Green-Smart School was yet another task. All teachers participated in professional development programmes focused on pedagogy that aims to support student development through individualised learning. In the case of Ukraine this would be a very important experience of involving digital technologies for individualised education, because after the war, children might have different levels of gaps in their learning and so would inevitably need such approaches.

One of the advantages of digitalisation is cost optimisation. The Finnish National Agency for Education also wants to reduce costs and has proposed that all teaching materials and content produced with public funds should be accessible in a public library. The development of educational materials in digital formats enables countries to reduce the costs of printing and distribution, as the experience in Sweden also proves. Ukraine also needs to use digital formats more widely, given the possible lack of budget funds for printing educational materials in war and post-war times. Materials accompanying innovations in the educational process, changes in the educational environment, pedagogical methods and practices should be developed in an electronic format and made available to teachers.

Other benefits of digitalisation are evident in the country case studies. To support teachers in Ireland**,** an online platform was developed to provide access to a range of teaching resources, including recommendations for practice, methodological materials, samples of students' work, and evaluation guides (Junior Cycle for Teachers). During the COVID-19 pandemic, Türkiye, with the support of the World Bank, invested significantly in the development of the interactive online digital education portal EBA, which has been operating since 2011. In Finland, they intend to establish a compulsory education register with data on the duration of a student's studies and identifying the professionals responsible for supervising students. The Swedish National Agency for Education created a digital version of materials for assessing the knowledge of refugee children. Given the high workloads of teachers, Ukraine needs a single resource offering free access to all educational materials. This is especially relevant for subject teachers, who need support and guidelines on how to implement changes to curricula. This requires the creation of a single digital platform that contains educational resources for teachers and students, and that is accessible and understandable for everyone. Ukraine also needs a register similar to the Finnish one, which can track the individual educational pathway of every student, especially in the case of large war-related knowledge gaps.

Ensuring equity and inclusion

The OECD PISA study in 2018 revealed a gap of more than two years of learning between Ukrainian students who live and study in cities and those who live and study in villages. There is also a strong association between the socio-economic status of children and their academic achievements (OECD, 2018[15]). As a result of the war, educational gaps will widen - not only between urban and rural students, but also between the seven categories of children noted earlier. Achieving inclusion is one of the priorities of the NUS reform program. In addition to the legal framework, the government has:

- allocated a targeted subvention to create suitable conditions for children with special educational needs;
- introduced the position of assistant teacher;
- established a network of inclusive resource centres that help teachers develop individual curricula for each such child.

However, only 35% of Ukrainian schools are currently fully barrier-free. Inclusion in the post-war education system of Ukraine will imply a wide spectrum. This includes (re)integration of various groups of children into the education system, inclusion into the education process of children with disabilities – of which there will be a significantly greater number because of the war – and ongoing access to quality education.

Optimising school networks and autonomy to address equity issues

Establishing local autonomy and decentralising decision-making is one way of addressing equity issues. It has the potential to allow for local differentiation of the programmes offered in schools to meet the needs of all students in their communities. In effect, it removes a “one size fits all” approach to education provision and replaces it with a more tailored, locally responsive, approach.

The first step in the education transformation process in Estonia was decentralisation. Local governments received more powers and responsibilities to organise the education process in accordance with the needs and interests of their residents. School managers became responsible for the education process, as well as other areas such as the organisational and financial aspects of school life. To support them, financial management training was organised by the state. In order to overcome structural barriers to access to education in Estonia, social and educational policies were brought together. This included some payments to parents and free school lunches for all students. The Culture Ministry also provides targeted support to schools, so that all students have the opportunity to visit cultural facilities at least once a year.

To restore education in the earthquake-affected regions, Türkiye set up academic assistance tents where teachers helped students prepare for central exams to transition to middle and high school and provided additional study materials free of charge. In Ukraine, for the same purpose, free graduate training courses for passing NMT (National Multi-Subject Test) were created, which are posted on various educational online portals, in particular, Prometheus, EdEra, and iLearn. In 2022, the government also provided the opportunity to Ukrainian graduates to take assessments to allow them to continue their education in 39 cities across 23 different countries where Ukrainian refugees were living (Ukrainian Center for Educational Quality Assessment, 2022[26]).

The Finnish education system is based on the principle that all people are entitled to equal access to high-quality education and training. When proposing to extend the duration of compulsory education, the government undertook to cover all costs, including the remuneration of teachers, the creation and distribution of educational and methodological support materials, and the transportation of students to school if they live more than 7 km away from an educational facility. The extension of education until the age of 18 was accompanied with improved student orientation and support services to minimise dropout rates.

In Ukraine, policymakers have implemented decentralisation reforms that have granted local government more powers in the field of education. At the same time, Ukrainian schools do not have true financial autonomy. This will only happen if management system changes are implemented, and training provided to managers of educational facilities. In the post-war reconstruction in Ukraine, it will also be necessary to optimise the school network in view of demographic processes and to create opportunities for equal access to education. It is worth taking advantage of the experience of Finland, which carefully thought-out budget allocations for additional supervision and support for students, especially those at risk of dropping out. The network of lyceums (high schools) envisaged under the reform in Ukraine will probably require children to travel to them. Finland offers an example of budgetary support for this option.

A useful approach for Ukraine would be the development of an effective network of schools that reflect demographic trends resulting from the war. Students will have to travel to these schools, so it is important to enhance the capacity of them to accommodate their needs.

In their effort to restore the education system, Türkiye groups the earthquake-affected regions into at least three groups based on the extent of the damage, and creates a separate education management roadmap

for each group. Turkish professionals faced the challenge of collecting reliable data due to the displacement of students and their families. Ukraine also needs separate strategies for restoring the education system for each type of relatively safe territory; those that are under fire; those de-occupied after a short or long occupation; and those that are temporarily occupied. At the same time, the unpredictability of migration processes creates a great challenge for Ukraine in collecting reliable data and forecasting the number of students in different territories.

More than 20 000 teachers and 5 000 psychological counsellors came to the affected communities in Türkiye to provide assistance. This experience of involving specialists in affected communities is useful for Ukraine, in particular, for de-occupied communities where it is necessary to restore the education system.

It will also be important to train teachers to work in an inclusive environment with children with special educational needs, as well as children from different groups affected by the war. To achieve this, it is necessary to revise the curricula offered in higher pedagogical education institutions and include inclusive competencies in initial teacher education and training. It is also advisable to establish a basic inclusive education course to support and improve the practice of teachers already in service. In addition, the network of inclusive resource centres needs to be expanded, co-ordinated, and supported to increase its institutional capacity. Teaching and methodological materials should be developed according to the principles of universal design to meet the needs of students, including those with special educational needs.

Transformation of the network of schools for a qualitatively new educational process

Since Ukraine will need to reconstruct its educational institutions, it is extremely important to determine how to qualitatively improve the education system; to not simply construct a building, but rather create an educational space that is safe and developmental.

In this regard, the experience of Korea with the implementation of the Green-Smart Schools project is very interesting. Launched in 2020, the project aims to reconstruct and rebuild old school buildings, specifically those over 40 years old. The initiative envisages a new future-oriented school model that supports the adaptation of educational programmes to the needs of children and the introduction of innovations in teaching and learning.

The schools were selected according to transparent criteria and on a competitive basis. The following factors were taken into account: demographic indicators (trends in the number of students), the age of the buildings, safety arrangements and the desire of the team to participate in the project. School selection committees ensured that selection conditions were adequate and effective.

A unique aspect of the project is that it not only improves premises not fit for purpose, but also generates innovations that have become key to school redesign in Korea. The curriculum update was aimed at promoting digital and environmental education. It is extremely important for Ukraine to decide on the priority areas of educational redesign in schools that will be built or reconstructed. Useful elements of the Korean experience are the "Zero Energy" initiative aimed at increasing energy efficiency and switching to solar energy, as well as increasing Wi-Fi coverage of classrooms to 100% and developing a digital educational platform that uses big data and provides personalized educational content. Structural components of the project - new use of space, smart classrooms, green schools, and the construction of school complexes - will also be useful for Ukraine.

The government of the city-state of Delhi has started building 500 new schools with an emphasis on secondary and senior schools as part of the education reform. Almost 10 000 new classrooms, sports halls, libraries, and specialist schools focused particularly on natural and scientific disciplines and the performing arts were built. The goal was to create a safe and appealing environment conducive to learning for public school students who were previously disadvantaged. The reconstruction was accompanied by changes in educational materials and the introduction of the Happiness Curriculum, the Entrepreneurial

Thinking and the civic education Deshbhakti curriculum, which became mandatory at schools that participated in the reform and aimed at developing competencies relevant to the modern world. Infrastructure reconstruction was accompanied by significant investments, which strengthened confidence in reform success.

Ukraine will also benefit from Japan's experience restoring its education system after the triple disaster, namely the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear accident at the Fukushima power plant in the Tohoku region in 2011. The restoration of this region was seen as a unique opportunity for change and the revitalization of the education system. This concerned not only the physical reconstruction of the region and schools, but also the process of their "creative restoration". A very important rule was established, which Ukraine also affirms: instead of restoring schools to their previous state, it is necessary to develop an innovative education system that puts students at the center, providing them with vital skills so that they become leaders of the future. This contributed to the creation of the OECD's Tohoku School initiative, the main idea of which was to create a workforce to lead the region's recovery, with necessary skills in the industries and innovations needed for the country's development. These skills were used to define the OECD key competences, which are the basis of PISA and reflected in the Learning Compass, as well as the concept of student agency, which involves the leadership of children and youth (OECD, 2019[27]).

The project conducted "intensive workshops" involving all stakeholders - students, teachers, experts, community leaders, politicians, and business representatives - and this contributed to its successful implementation. In the process, charity and fundraising events were held. It became important to define KPIs and indicators to manage the implementation of the Tohoku School and measure its success. Responsibilities at different levels of management were clearly defined, and a management structure was created to ensure coordinated implementation. Participants held a 4-day series of activities where students collaborated with adults. The project used a grass-root model of innovation, which involves a "bottom-up" approach. Pupils took on leadership positions and developed initiative. Such responsibility for the development and implementation of the Tohoku School increased the motivation of students, allowing them to develop leadership, teamwork and critical thinking skills, alongside practical experience.

The project included goals that went beyond the education system. The main focus was on connecting education with the bigger world, in particular, learning from the business community and international and public organisations, in order to give a broader and more appropriate response to the need for recovery. The results of the project were reflected in the national educational policy. This is, in particular, the application of an approach focused on the needs of the student and the development of quality human resources that are able to respond to modern challenges. Such a successful experience can be applied in Ukraine in communities that will rebuild or reconstruct school buildings. They need to rethink the educational process and raise it to a qualitatively new level. For this purpose, OECD expertise will be extremely valuable, which puts the development of key competencies necessary for success in the complex and multifaceted 21st century, particularly in the post-war period in Ukraine, at the center of the educational process.

We consider an idea of a similar project implemented in partnership with the OECD a very promising one. Its task would be to create pilot educational institutions in the network of high schools. Their experience will be very valuable for the development of effective models of the functioning of upper secondary schools, or lyceums during the implementation of the New Ukrainian School reform.

Integration and reintegration of children

In the 1980s, many Russian schools in Estonia were teaching in Russian and did not recognise Estonian language or culture. During the formation of the national education system, the Estonian language became the official language of instruction, and over time all students were phased into studying in the state language. Estonian schools also prioritise the study of foreign languages, which are selected depending on students' needs. This enabled them to actively participate in international projects and better understand

the world and EU processes. Learning from this experience, Ukraine may introduce practices for adapting the curricula to children who lived in occupied territories and studied according to Russian curricula. For such children, it is necessary to develop programs for rapid integration into the Ukrainian-language education system.

The case study from Manitoba (Canada) may have relevant ideas to Ukraine's context. The exposure of historical and contemporary violence against Indigenous peoples of Canada led to changes in the educational policy of Manitoba. One of the objectives of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada was to promote understanding and reconciliation among former students, their families, and communities of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. In its final report, the Commission called for the transformation of education to embody truth and reconciliation. In 2022, Manitoba published a framework policy for Indigenous education with activities that are based, in particular, on the principles of promoting truth and reconciliation, achieving justice, ensuring inclusion, striving for improvement, and prioritising well-being. A part of the framework included targeted training courses for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students to help them gain knowledge and understanding of the history, traditions, cultures, and contemporary issues of Indigenous peoples in Canada and globally.

In post-war Ukraine, it is likely that children living in de-occupied territories could be placed in classes where they will meet children who hold opposing views and have had a variety of experiences during the war, including experience of combat. Some of the main tasks of the school is to teach children to understand each other, to develop their national identity as Ukrainian citizens, and to debunk historical and ideological myths imposed on them by the aggressor state's education system. Reconciliation begins with the truth of historical events, which must be recognised by all, and children need to see this truth. As in Manitoba, it is worth developing targeted courses on the history, culture, and traditions of Ukraine for children who studied within the ideologically oriented Russian education system, which offered little information or distorted information about Ukraine.

Inclusion

Introducing inclusive practices was yet another important step to ensure access to education for children affected by the earthquake in Türkiye. Special educational tents were set up for students with special educational needs, where the environment, equipment and educational materials met the needs of such children. Support classes were also available in the disaster zone, allowing students to study the courses they have chosen and overcome educational losses and gaps. Children who lost their families received scholarships for studies.

Portugal has also taken a number of steps to improve inclusion, which is a key aspect of the country's system. In 2016, it set up the National Programme to Promote Educational Success to tackle grade repetition, early school leaving and school failure. It was followed by the *Students' Profile* a year later and the foundations for the commitment to inclusion in schools were laid in new legislation in 2018. In developing new curricula, Portugal adopted a universal learning design and a multi-level teaching approach which aimed to ensure equal access to the curriculum for all students, regardless of their challenges. Inclusion is also supported through the use of interdisciplinary teams, which comprise teachers – including special education teachers – members of the pedagogical council, a psychologist, parents and guardians.

The Portuguese government also approved a regulation in 2018 that authorises school clusters and teachers to have autonomy and flexibility to manage more than 25% of the curriculum to address their specific context. For example, teachers can combine study sections, topics, subjects, and vary the duration of studies. In line with these best practices, Ukraine can develop inclusive curricula and practices for children with various educational needs, which will be extremely relevant in the conditions of post-war Ukraine.

Monitoring and evaluation of the quality of education

Ukraine has experience of participating in international comparative studies, including TIMSS, PIRLS and PISA. An important tool for evaluating the quality of secondary education at the national level is the External Independent Assessment (EIA), introduced in 2007. This tool gives Ukrainian students the opportunity to undergo an impartial assessment of their educational achievements upon completion of secondary education. While Ukraine is now moving towards competency-based content for education purposes, the EIA needs to be reconfigured to assess competencies as well as knowledge. The Ukrainian Center for Educational Quality Assessment is working on this task. This reform envisages external final assessments after the primary and basic school levels. Assessment after the 9th grade needs to be supplemented with a test on professional determination; a career orientation section to help children choose their professional profile at high school. To assess competencies, it is necessary to develop a new toolkit, using for example student portfolios and other methods that can adequately assess learning outcomes including competencies and socio-emotional skills.

In recent years, the Ministry of Education and Science has changed approaches to evaluating the quality of schoolwork. Since 2019, the State Service of Education Quality has conducted institutional audits of schools, which have replaced the traditional certification process. The audits focus on establishing a school self-evaluation system to help schools identify problem areas and create plans to improve the quality of education. To assess the quality of the reform, the Ministry has implemented a triannual monitoring study to assess reading and mathematical competencies of students at the end of primary school. In 2016-2019, the first cycle of the survey was conducted despite being interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic and war in the east of Ukraine. Therefore, Ukraine needs to restart national monitoring surveys, which will assess the progress of the reform and war-related educational losses in order to make adjustments in accordance with curricula.

Schools’ self-assessment and response to the findings

There are examples of international best practice in monitoring and evaluating the quality of education which may be useful to consider. The main tool for assessing the quality of education in Estonian schools is self-assessment, which has supported educational facilities in achieving their declared development goals. The duty to monitor the school`s development was taken over by school owners, while public authorities were involved in addressing problematic issues only if they could not be dealt with at the local level. Since 2012, school self-evaluation aimed at improving teaching, learning and well-being is an important part of the school evaluation process. Schools are supported by a quality framework, which provides a set of criteria or descriptors of quality for them to use.

Self-assessment tools are embedded in the procedures for institutional audits of Ukrainian schools. However, they need to be implemented at a broader level, as well as the procedures for determining the strategic vision and goals of educational facilities. These methods can be applied to improve institutional audits of Ukrainian schools.

External monitoring of educational facilities

In Estonia, the state periodically monitors the entire scope of activities at schools, but only in certain aspects. For example, it monitors how legislation regulating the work of teachers is implemented. In Ireland, monitoring of reforms to the junior cycle also take place, such as intra-school reflective analysis and reviews of subject specifications, as well as state inspection of teaching and learning in schools. Portugal also monitors how schools implement teaching autonomy and flexibility by using teams to visit schools, collect and analyse data, and share information and best practices on a Moodle platform.

Finland monitors the impact of its reform under six themes, including the well-being of students and the economic consequences of the reform. Monitoring is also important in Sweden where external monitoring of school activities is carried out by the Swedish National Schools Inspectorate, which visits schools to checks on the implementation of tools for assessing the knowledge of newly arrived children.

In Delhi, the implementation of the Entrepreneurial Mindset curriculum began with 24 pilot schools whose experience helped scale up the change. During the pilot, the impact of the curriculum was closely monitored by both teachers and the independent research group IDInsight. This contributed to the preparation and revision of materials for a second version, which was then implemented at a wider level. This is consistent with the approach in piloting the reform in Ukraine, where one of the problems was the lack of feedback. This aspect must be taken into account in the further piloting of the reform to improve the quality of curricula and materials.

In Ukraine, monitoring and summative assessment of schools and students' academic achievements are handled by the State Service of Education Quality and the Ukrainian Center for Education Quality Assessment. The assessments are mainly based on quantitative indicators. Following the examples of other countries, these institutions should start monitoring quality performance indicators and encourage schools to change as part of their activities. Monitoring of the New Ukrainian School reform should follow the Irish model of combining different stages and research organisations.

Graduation exams as a source of transparent and accurate information

In Estonia, they introduced two new types of exams – national standard-determining tests and final examinations, which provide information regarding students' academic achievements. National standard-determining tests are conducted at each school level and reveal the level of knowledge and skills development. There are no grades attributed within these tests, and the state uses them to promote the culture of assessment as a learning and developmental tool. The final examinations are held after the completion of basic and high school, and they are a source of information for the state, schools, and teachers.

Ukraine needs to accelerate changes in approaches to data analytics based on external independent assessments and other school tests, pay more attention to how they reflect the competency-based approach, and use data to improve the quality of education.

Engagement and communication

Education reform in Ukraine has been successfully implemented in primary schools mainly due to the active engagement of all impacted stakeholders. Parental and civil society organisations, teachers and schools, national and local government have participated in developing the philosophy and spirit of the reform, which led to the development of the New Ukrainian School concept (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, 2016[12]). This concept explained the essence of the entire reform process to a wide audience in an engaging way. An ecosystem was formed – including specialised facilities, civil society organisations and active parents and teachers – who worked together to develop and implement the reforms.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the war disrupted links within the ecosystem. As a result, the roll-out of the reform to cover the 5th grade of basic school has not been a success story. This is also due to a lack of effective communication to explain the reform process to target groups. The capacity of civil society organisations, for example, was not sufficiently used to advance the reform. Therefore, a greater focus on involving different stakeholders and the use of more effective communication will be needed in future.

Analysis of international best practices highlights the crucial role of effective communication activities during the implementation of education changes.

Engaging stakeholders in making conceptual and political decisions

In Estonia, teachers, parents, and students are involved in the development of policies and educational solutions. At the initial stages, they are invited to discussions to consider the need for change, possible alternatives and implementation challenges. Education associations are also involved in developing curricula. Since 2010, the Irish government has engaged teachers' trade unions and school leaders in redesigning the junior cycle curriculum and communicated via surveys, focus group discussions and regional workshops. Various consultations were also held with parents and children. The focus on engaging all stakeholders was key to improving the proposals and their wider understanding in society.

The involvement of internal and external expertise, in particular the work of the OECD, on international models of education, has become the strength of the Tohoku School in Japan. The school project is a joint initiative of the OECD, the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) and Fukushima University.

The implementation of the Green-Smart Schools project in Korea is marked by collaboration at ministry level, as well as with communities and participating schools. In general, the project is a national political initiative, overseen by the Ministry of Education, and implemented at the local level by education departments. It is important that the administrative units responsible for this project were housed in the education departments, while the auxiliary structures, headed by directors responsible for all tasks related to the project, were housed in the participating schools. Multi-level project support systems were developed, in the form of both central advisory bodies and regional ones, consisting of government representatives, schools, and groups of experts and the public.

The project management was also structured to incorporate external expertise, in particular an advisory body, which included experts from various fields. The sources of funding for the project were clearly defined: 30% came from the state budget, and 70% from local budgets. All stakeholders were involved throughout the development of the project plan.

The project was implemented with a partial public-private partnership according to the Build Transfer Operate (BTL) model, characterised by revision and adaptation of regulatory documents to take the needs of consumers into account. The creation of an adequate legal basis for the implementation of public-private partnership in education is extremely important for Ukraine.

The Portuguese government, when developing a new concept of learning outcomes, invited subject teachers to discuss which competencies are most needed for modern students. This contributed to teachers adopting a competency-based approach to education. The Ministry also held meetings with school leaders, trade unions, parents, students and other groups which helped create a sense of shared responsibility and ownership of school innovations. In Finland, they held a series of webinars for all stakeholder groups involved in the reform program, including schools, municipalities, education organisers and vocational training providers. Children and their parents or guardians were informed about the changes, consequences, and impacts of compulsory education in an easy-to-understand graphic format.

The experiences above explain why the progress of education reform in Ukraine has slowed down. At the stage of its expansion to cover basic school, there was no proper counselling for teachers. In the future, teachers and the public should have more involvement in the initiation and progress of reforms and in other changes. It is important to resume engagement with different groups of stakeholders. This will facilitate recovery of the ecosystem around the secondary education reform programme in Ukraine – for example, by including the participation of active parents, civil society organisations, specialised institutions and trade unions, as well as the involvement of new groups, such as representatives of students who studied within other education systems. It is also necessary to bring together educational organisations to update the content of education and support the professional development of teachers.

Ensuring the influence of various stakeholders on development of new projects and initiatives

In Portugal, the Ministry of Education worked to build commitment to the *Students' Profile* across all government departments – not just to support change, but also to co-ordinate the reforms over the long term, regardless of electoral cycles. For education, a long-term perspective and a policy vision that are passed from one government to another are extremely important. This is also vital for Ukraine, which must effectively implement the reform of basic schools and high schools.

Similarly, the Swedish Education Agency held consultations with teachers' and students' unions, the association of school principals, and municipal and district councils when developing assessment tools. The agency took into account comments and additions from these stakeholders for further development of the materials, in particular, by abridging the texts to make them shorter and more convenient for teachers already overloaded with work.

Stakeholder engagement was also at the heart of the Green-Smart Schools initiative in Korea. Teachers filled out questionnaires and met with parents to discuss how to create a physical space fit for educational activities, as well as create a new school culture.

At the pre-planning stage, students and teachers were involved in the process and expressed their wishes and discussed examples of what a Green-Smart School should look like. Prioritising user participation and welcoming opinions and suggestions improved engagement, and also ensured that the building would be adapted to the needs of users who were in the school every day and knew the challenges, limitations and opportunities of the environment.

How children would study during the renovation of the premises was a significant challenge. Therefore, there was a proposal to create portable classrooms, which could be an interesting experience for Ukraine. There have been questions from parents about how safe such classrooms are, and concerns about the growing use of digital devices - how children would be protected from dangerous content and whether it would affect reading and book-using skills. The formulation of these complex issues contributed to their discussion and resolution.

Seeing education as a joint venture between parents and schools, the Delhi government has sought to strengthen the role of parents by building partnerships, holding regular parent-teacher conferences and even encouraging employers to give parents half-day leave to attend. The role of the School Management Committees, which ensured the parent voice was heard in the programming decisions made by the head of the educational institution, was strengthened. Steps were taken to have these committees be operational rather than only exist "on paper", practically involving the community in the school's activities. For Ukraine, this is an important experience, because local communities maintain schools, so the participation of parents and the community in planning the school's strategy is necessary, as it increases attention to education and strengthens the motivation of all participants in the educational process.

In Ukraine, the development of regional centres and communities to implement relevant educational changes can support reform. They can provide a locus for schools, parents and communities to join regional educational events, where they can share success stories of learning, education, and improvement of the education infrastructure.

Diversified communication with different groups

To promote knowledge tests for newly arrived children in Sweden, the Swedish Education Agency developed various communication methods such as video, illustrations, and targeted booklets for parents and student. Other countries sharing their experiences in this publication have made available explanatory materials in a range of languages for parents and students.

The Turkish Ministry of National Education communicated with the country's population in detail through various channels, including official social media accounts, press conferences, newspapers and television, as well as through teachers and psychologists.

While preparing for the implementation of the Green-Smart Schools project in Korea, there were cases when some schools did not involve the public and parents adequately. Insufficient public information about the project and failure to stick to the consensus procedure led to resistance and misunderstanding of its purpose.

Delhi has taken a strategic approach to making the education reform public, including through a large number of official government press releases, announcements of parents' meeting dates on television, radio, and billboards with accessible infographic and visual communication.

Ukraine can be guided by this experience when developing information and advertising campaigns that cover different population groups. The development and implementation of sustainable communication protocols adapted to the needs of different groups is a first step. The content and formats of such protocols should adjust to different user groups to consider their needs. The protocols should also include crisis response scenarios for possible situations of misunderstanding concerning educational policies and reforms. In particular, a communication protocol for post-traumatic situations is essential. Adults and children suffering from trauma and an aggravated psychological state require communication based on understanding. It is important to involve psychologists, specialists in the fields of crisis and trauma psychology to develop such a protocol.

Reflections

Education systems from around the world are developing and implementing systemic reforms in a bid to adapt to rapid global changes that require the next generation to learn new competencies and values. The case studies in this publication are valuable to Ukrainian policymakers and will help Ukraine update and rebuild a quality school education system following the traumatic experiences of war.

The studies give many insights, including making the point that the involvement of all stakeholders is critical to the development and initiation of successful changes to education systems. While this requires considerable effort and long-term commitment, it is the price of the democratisation of education. That price is worth paying, as it ensures that all elements of society buy-in to the reform agenda and greatly enhances the chance of effective policy implementation.

We are grateful to the OECD and the Future of Education and Skills 2030 project team for their support. Based on Ukraine’s needs and international practices, it is possible to suggest the following model of education transformations in Ukraine during and after the war (Table 2.1).

Table 2.1. A model of education transformations in Ukraine during and after the war, based on current challenges and international educational best practices

Areas of implementation	Education transformations	Relevant experience of other countries
Overcoming losses and gaps in the education system	Diagnosis of educational losses at the individual level Customisation of curricula Additional individual and group teaching hours for teachers, summer schools Online tutorship platform Digital learning resources to overcome educational losses	Estonia, Manitoba (Canada), Korea, Türkiye, Sweden
Increasing the duration of compulsory education	Transition to the 12-year compulsory education in the framework of continuation of the New Ukrainian School reform	Finland
Updating the content of education	Implementation of core competency-based content of education	Delhi (India), Estonia, Ireland, Portugal, Japan
	Updating programmes for learning the national (Ukrainian) language, literature and history, geography for the sake of developing the national identity Enhancing command of foreign languages Enhancing science and mathematics education (STEM)	Delhi (India), Estonia
	Development of socio-emotional skills, well-being learning	Delhi (India), Ireland, Manitoba (Canada), Portugal, Türkiye
Development of educational and methodological support for the new content of education and assessment of students' educational achievements	The updated content of education should be accompanied by expanded educational and methodological materials for students and teachers, in particular in the digital format Development of materials for formative assessment and assessment of competencies	Delhi (India), Ireland, Korea, Portugal
Professional development of teachers and school principals	Targeted professional development of teachers and school leaders in accordance with needs of the reform, in particular, regarding use of new standards of the content of education, the competency-based approach, development of social and emotional skills, formation of life resilience and ensuring well-being, active learning methods, inclusion and overcoming educational losses. Supporting teachers and school principals with respective educational resources prepared for implementation of changes	Delhi (India), Estonia, Ireland, Manitoba (Canada), Korea, Portugal, Türkiye, Finland, Sweden, Japan
	Increasing teachers' social status and salaries	Finland
Creation of a safe and developmental educational environment	Equipping safe shelters in every school. Rebuilding destroyed and damaged educational facilities with up-to-date designs for equipping educational spaces Resuming the targeted subvention from the state budget for equipment and educational and methodological support of schools in accordance with requirements of the New Ukrainian School reform	Delhi (India), Korea, Türkiye
	Providing systemic psychological support to students and teachers Implementation of the policy of ensuring the well-being of students at the individual, group, and school-wide levels	Delhi (India), Ireland, Türkiye
Digitalisation of education	Development of the digital infrastructure of education This includes ensuring adequate internet	Delhi (India), Estonia, Korea, Portugal, Türkiye, Sweden

Areas of implementation	Education transformations	Relevant experience of other countries
	connection, a sufficient number of digital devices for teachers and students, implementation of effective LMS systems to improve feedback from students and parents. Development of electronic educational resources to implement educational changes. Creation of a single electronic educational platform to search for educational resources. Implementation of systems for development and monitoring of information and digital competence of teachers and students	
Ensuring equal access to quality education, inclusion	Development of an effective network of schools in view of demographic processes and increasing their capacity to improve the quality of education. Transformation and reconstruction of the network of schools with the simultaneous renewal of the quality of the educational process. Building an inclusive educational environment at all educational facilities (barrier-free, establishing mutual understanding, resolving conflicts). Training teachers to work in an inclusive environment with children with special educational needs, as well as with children from different groups affected by consequences of the war. Training of a sufficient number of professional to ensure inclusion at schools and the network of inclusive resource centres.	Delhi (India), Estonia, Ireland, Korea, Türkiye, Sweden, Japan
Monitoring and evaluation of the quality of education	Development of indicators for education reforms and changes and ensuring internal self-assessment of schools based on them for the sake of monitoring and respective adjustment of change management. Implementation of final external assessments after completion of primary and basic secondary education to receive feedback on students' academic achievements. Application of the student portfolio and other methods to assess competencies and socio-emotional skills	Delhi (India), Ireland, Portugal
Engagement and communication	Resuming engagement of different groups of stakeholders in education changes. Development of regional centres and communities to implement relevant educational changes. Development and implementation of sustainable communication protocols adapted to different groups to discuss education changes. Development and implementation of the communication protocol in a post-traumatic situation.	Delhi (India), Ireland, Manitoba (Canada), Korea, Portugal, Türkiye, Finland, Sweden

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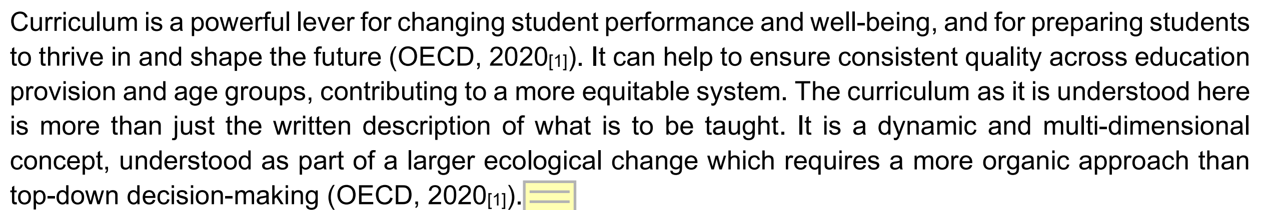
3 Delhi: leveraging curriculum to achieve better outcomes for students

This chapter explores a series of ambitious reforms launched in 2015 in the city state of Delhi to address the low levels of educational achievement amongst young people. It discusses the introduction of three innovative new curricula focused on fostering well-being, innovation and national pride in students, as well as accompanying infrastructural changes. Moreover, the case study describes the importance of decentralising education management, empowering frontline staff and encouraging collaboration with external partners. Taken together, these advances aim to equip learners with the problem-solving and critical thinking skills to become change makers of the future.

Introduction

This case study describes a series of major reforms launched in 2015 in the city state of Delhi. These changes aimed to bridge the gap between the low levels of achievement and the ambition of the state government, who funded the work, to provide a high quality, relevant and effective education system for all children.

Curriculum is a powerful lever for changing student performance and well-being, and for preparing students to thrive in and shape the future (OECD, 2020[1]). It can help to ensure consistent quality across education provision and age groups, contributing to a more equitable system. The curriculum as it is understood here is more than just the written description of what is to be taught. It is a dynamic and multi-dimensional concept, understood as part of a larger ecological change which requires a more organic approach than top-down decision-making (OECD, 2020[1]).



India's National Education Policy (Govt. of India, 2020[2]) recognises that, "education is fundamental for achieving full human potential, developing an equitable and just society, and promoting national development". Acknowledging the many challenges facing India, the Policy calls for major reforms to the education system, to achieve the vision that all learners, regardless of background, have access to the highest-quality education by 2040.

Implementing what is undoubtedly a significant programme of reform is challenging. This challenge is shared by many other countries who want to ensure that their children and young people are prepared to take their places in a rapidly changing world. India has the third-largest school-going population and education is a priority to ensure the future prosperity of the country.

In India, school education policies and programmes, including curriculum, are set at the national level. Two agencies in particular – the Central Advisory Board of Education and the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) – have a lead role in policy development. The former advises the government and shapes the direction of educational policies and programmes. The latter is responsible for the development of national curriculum frameworks for early childhood care and education, school education and adult education. It also provides advice on quality improvement measures to the central and state governments.

Each of the 28 state governments has a lot of freedom to adopt and adapt national directives in relation to education. Each state has its own State Council for Educational Research and Training (SCERT), which proposes educational strategies, curricula, pedagogical schemes and evaluation methodologies to the state departments of education. The SCERTs generally follow guidelines established by the NCERT; however, decision-making rests at the state level. Budget and funding decisions are also made at state level, reinforcing the state's authority. This is designed to facilitate cultural, social, language, economic and other differences across states. The policies and programmes implemented in a state typically reflect the priorities for education of the state government.

What is starting point?

When the Delhi state government came to power in 2015, it inherited a number of challenges related to education. In fact, the winning party had made public education reform a key element in its election manifesto and it prioritised reform once elected.

Preparing students for the future

One of the key motivations behind the development of a new curriculum was the concern that the existing curriculum in government schools was not adequately preparing young people to take their place in a

rapidly evolving world. The demand for routine low-skilled labour is quickly dropping as automation increases. Instead, what is needed is a workforce that is adaptable, highly skilled, and capable of productive collaboration and imaginative problem-solving.

The National Education Policy highlights that with the changing employment landscape and global ecosystem it is becoming increasingly critical that children not only learn, but learn how to learn. "Education thus, must move towards less content, and more towards learning about how to think critically and solve problems, how to be creative and multidisciplinary, and how to innovate, adapt, and absorb new material in novel and changing fields" (Govt. of India, 2020[2]).

It was felt that the Indian education system was built to produce clerks and workers (SCERT, 2019[3]), rather than individuals and leaders who create change in society. There was a recognition in Delhi that children and young people were overburdened by the pressure to pass exams, engage in extra-curricular activities and apply for university.

Thus, despite possessing good intelligence and skills, they had few opportunities for self-discovery and nurturing of their individual spirit, and they were discouraged, or did not have time, to try new things and take risks. There was great concern that children and young people in India were not being properly prepared for the future. With rapidly evolving technology and an ever-changing world, most of the jobs they were being prepared for wouldn't exist in 20 years' time.

Delhi recognised that a significant change in the education system was required, in order to prepare students better for the future, enable them to fulfil their potential and lead change and progress in a rapidly evolving world.

An exam-centred education system which left students behind

A second motivation for change was the failure of the existing, strongly examination focussed system for a sizeable proportion of Delhi children. The school system in India has four levels: lower primary (Standards 1-5), upper primary (Standards 6-8), secondary school (Standards 9-10) and higher secondary (Standards 11-12). Low achievement at all levels, as well as high drop-out rates at the points of transfer from upper primary to secondary and from secondary to upper secondary levels, were a real concern.

A National Assessment Survey was conducted in 2017 for Standards 3, 5 and 8 in government and government-aided schools. It was designed to assess student-learning competencies in the subjects of math, sciences, language, and social sciences. Delhi's performance was below average in all subjects across the three Standards. In 2014-2015, 48.26% of students failed to clear Standard 9 exams. This rose to nearly 50% in 2015-2016 (Aiyar et al., 2021[4]).

There are many factors influencing dropout rates, including household income, as children seek work to support their families, and the level of parental education, as dropout rates are higher in illiterate families, among other factors. Dropout rates are high across India, with 12.6% of children dropping out of school overall and 19.8% discontinuing at secondary level (NSO, 2019[5]). In 2018, the Gross Enrolment Ratio for Standards 6-8 was 90.9%, while for Standards 9-10 and 11-12 it was only 79.3% and 56.5% respectively. This indicates that a significant proportion of enrolled students drop out after Standard 5 and especially after Standard 8. As per the household survey by NSSO in 2017-18, the number of out of school children between the ages of 6 and 17 is 3.22 million (Govt. of India, 2020[2]).

It was evident that the existing system, one which has often been described as a "sorting system in which the best students are identified and made exam-ready" (Aiyar et al., 2021[4]), was no longer fit for purpose. However, changing this would be challenging – Aiyar et al described a broad-based social consensus, which they dubbed the "classroom consensus". This consensus was formed both by parents who judged the success of a classroom by examination results, and by teachers, who were usually focused on

completing the syllabus, as this is the one metric for which teachers were held accountable (ibid). The impact of that consensus on students' learning experiences was, not surprisingly, almost wholly negative.

In order to meet the required metric of examination pass rates, classroom practice tended to narrow towards a focus on rote learning and "chalk and talk" teaching methods. This consequently encouraged students to focus on memorising information to pass the examination, rather than ensuring their understanding of key concepts or encouraging skills such as critical thinking and reflection. Furthermore, the classroom consensus incentivised teachers to maximise student pass rates by focusing predominantly on those students closer to curriculum-level expectations, whilst neglecting other students.

For example, Aiyar et al report that, in their observations in schools, it was common to find that higher-achieving students were placed at the front of the classroom and teachers often focused on teaching these rows, paying less attention to weaker performers. This trait of "teaching to the top" was often so ingrained in teachers that they were unconscious of it. Thus, those students who were behind curriculum-level expectations fell even further behind, progressing and learning little as they moved through the Standards (ibid).

The focus on passing examinations rather than enriching learning had an impact on student retention, particularly in Standard 9, just before the high-stakes exam. The Unified District Information System for Education (UDISE) 2021-22 data (Govt. of India, 2022[6]) shows that, nationally, the dropout rate is highest at the secondary level (9-10) at 12.6%, followed by upper primary (6-8) at 3% and primary (1-5) at 1.5%. The data further reveals that the dropout rate is higher nationally for girls than boys at all levels of education.

The data shows a more positive picture for Delhi. The transition rate there is at 96.9% from class 8 to 9 and 98.5% for class 10 to 11 (Ibid). The dropout rate in Delhi, while relatively low at 4.8%, remains a matter of concern for the state government.

Low levels of teacher motivation and morale

In the face of an increasing number of school dropouts and declining achievement rates, it was clear that the government education system in India was in dire need of reform. Alongside the challenge of a predominantly exam-focused system was the low motivation of teachers. For example, Aiyar et al reported how the vast majority of teachers they interviewed in their study on educational reforms had experienced feelings of powerlessness and low motivation. They referred to themselves as no more than clerks in the system and felt that they were being made to perform lowly administrative tasks which were not central to their role as teachers.

This, in turn, led to a decline in teaching quality, with the average class monitored lasting between 30-50 minutes, of which 19-25% of time was spent on classroom management. Teaching and learning activity accounted for only half the class time available. This compression of time fuelled the environment in which teachers prioritised "rote learning", rarely used interactive teaching or demonstration methods and were inclined to "teach to the top" (Aiyar et al., 2021[4]).

Whilst they recognised that children were falling behind curriculum-level expectations and that this resulted in a stronger focus on those students more likely to succeed, teachers complained about the pressures of syllabus and exams but rarely considered its impact on student learning. The feedback from teachers, where it focused on their students, often cited factors such as their socio-economic background and lack of discipline as problematic. Teachers rarely initiated conversations about teacher-learning practices and how to best frame these for student diversity (ibid).

Teacher morale is an important factor in student success. An enthusiastic teacher has the potential to engage students more readily, is more likely to collaborate with and learn from other teachers and contributes to a positive learning environment in school. Teachers with low morale feel stressed, are not

satisfied with their job, develop burnout, and are at risk of leaving the profession (Vandenberghe, 1999[7]). In Delhi, there was concern that, given few alternative employment opportunities, teachers rarely leave Delhi recognised that strong teacher motivation was imperative to improve student outcomes and set out to understand and address the causes of low teacher morale. It was necessary to initiate a change in how teachers approach teaching and give greater autonomy to schools in order to transform the education system.

Student unhappiness

According to the World Happiness Report 2018, India was among the least happy nations, ranking 133 out of 152, a drop from 122 in 2017. Stressors came from a range of sources, including conflict with peers, family issues, social-cultural factors and vulnerabilities to physical and mental health risk factors (SCERT & DoE, 2019[8]). Research has indicated that not only can education play a key role in improving the mental well-being of students, but that happiness can improve student outcomes. When students have a sense of purpose in learning, achieve well and are confident that they can apply what they learn to solve problems, their well-being is enhanced.

A variety of studies demonstrate that when students are happy, they are more likely to be engaged in their learning and motivated to succeed. For example, a study of 8 000 students across 18 schools by Professor Alejandro Adler of the University of Pennsylvania found that those on a “happiness curriculum” experienced significantly improved performance on standardised tests (Adler, 2016[9]).

Low levels of happiness among the students of Delhi may well have contributed to poor attendance and retention figures. Happy students are more likely to continue their education, pursue their goals, and experience success in their personal and professional lives (Pekrun et al., 2002[10]). A positive outlook and sense of well-being can help students build resilience and cope with challenges throughout their lives. Delhi recognised that low happiness levels among students in India was of great concern and that happiness was key to developing confident, fulfilled and skilled students. Promoting happiness at school is, therefore, an important goal and can lead to positive outcomes for individuals and the school community.

Strong, positive, social relationships are more likely to be formed by students who have a sense of belonging and of being supported and connected to their school community. This can create a positive and inclusive school culture that benefits all students. Mindfulness is recognised as a key factor in happiness and has been proven to have numerous important benefits, including enhancing attention and self-regulation, improving decision making, contributing to greater emotional stability, abstract planning and less reactivity (SCERT & DoE, 2019[8]).

In order to meet these challenges and enable students to be more confident, happier and better-equipped for the future, a significant shift in learning in the education system was needed.

Box 3.1. The context for change

- An ambitious state government vision for better state education provision;
- narrowly focussed, examination-dominated, school experiences were not addressing students' needs.
- high dropout rates at key transition points, particularly from upper primary to lower secondary;
- low teacher morale and engagement;
- low levels of happiness and wellbeing among students.

What was the vision for education?

When the new government came to power in 2015, improving the educational experience in government schools was a priority. Speaking in 2015, Arvind Kejriwal, the newly elected Chief Minister, emphasised the entitlement of all children to a high-quality education, regardless of their socio-economic circumstances (PHI, 2015[11]). At the time government schools were impoverished, both physically and in terms of the social capital at their disposal. As described above, morale was poor and there was a high dropout rate at secondary level. This was very different to the situation in privately-owned and managed schools – learning outcomes were better and these schools were perceived by many as performing better. As a result, despite expensive fees, parents, where they could afford it, preferred to enrol their children in a private school. This exacerbated economic and social inequality and the new government was concerned that poverty and unemployment was the likely future for tens of thousands of children attending government schools. They were committed to ensuring that this would not happen. The "dream", as Chief Minister Kejriwal put it, was "to make government schools in Delhi better than private schools within five years" (Ibid). Thus, the state government chose to tackle the challenge of improving learning quality in government schools head-on and made it part of their political agenda (Aiyar et al., 2021[4]).

The Entrepreneurship Mindset Curriculum, for example, published in Delhi in 2019, provides a succinct summary of this vision. The key objectives set out in the curriculum are:

1. To develop entrepreneurial mindsets in the students which include:
    a. key building blocks such as critical thinking, confidence and creativity
    b. foundational abilities like problem solving, communication & collaboration
    c. entrepreneurial abilities like recognizing opportunities, taking risk, and bouncing back from failure.
2. To enable the students to:
    a. dream and pursue their dreams with zeal
    b. be happy & joyful
    c. be lifelong learners.

This marks a significant paradigm shift, away from teaching students to follow instructions to encouraging them to lead, from memorising the syllabus to exploring new opportunities, from memorising facts to solving problems and from eventual job seekers to job creators. This, in turn, was understood as vital to addressing growing economic inequality in India, shifting away from a system where wealth is concentrated within a small group - the job creators - who get richer, whilst earnings for others - the job seekers – do not grow at the same rate (SCERT, 2019[3]).

Having adopted this vision and committed to education as a priority development area in 2015, the state government of Delhi took several significant decisions in quick succession to transform the system, investing heavily over the following years in three core areas: school infrastructure, teacher training and curriculum.

Box 3.2. Vision

Universal, free, compulsory and accessible education for all children, regardless of socio-economic circumstance, in government schools which develop self-confident, self-aware and socially responsible students equipped with the vital skills needed for the future.

What opportunities existed?

Learning from past experience and engaging frontline staff in change design

Delhi's approach towards educational reform was unique within the Indian context. It was informed by the lessons learned from previous failures to initiate successful educational change within the Indian education system.

Typically, two models of reform had been deployed by government in India. The first was heavily top-down in approach, with responsibility for the design and implementation of initiatives firmly held by leadership. Rigorous mentoring, training and implementation by directive was intended to ensure adoption of the initiative at ground level, coupled with tracking these initiatives. The second "let many partners in" model relied heavily on the involvement of numerous external organisations, who were invited, again from the top, to design, support or implement reforms (BCG, 2021[12]). It would be unfair to say that both approaches were unsuccessful; however, they worked best for localised, short-term, initiatives and their use may well have contributed to the idea that India had become the place where pilot programmes came to die. What both these approaches have in common is the failure to capitalise on the expertise and experience of frontline staff.

The approach to educational reform taken by the Delhi government differed. In the first instance, the government recognised that change, however valuable, was unlikely to be sustained at school level unless teachers understood and accepted the rationale for it and committed to implementation in their own classrooms. Delhi recognised the unique position, experience and knowledge of the people already working in the system and believed that the path to implementing real, long-lasting change relied on the involvement of frontline staff in identifying reform needs and proposing solutions. What Delhi got right was embarking on understanding the challenges before developing a piecemeal programme of reform. They set out to understand not just whether teachers lacked morale, but why. This meant that significant time was invested in talking and listening to the key actors in the system.

Rather than bringing in external experts to attempt to lead full-scale change, the Delhi government placed its faith in the hands of those in the frontline - for example, heads of school, teachers, students and parents - and gave greater power and autonomy to them to identify the strengths and challenges faced in their schools. Their responsibility was to identify approaches to tackling those challenges in a context-specific way. In turn, this increased motivation and engagement of those directly involved and ensured stakeholder commitment and buy-in (BCG, 2021[12]).

The success of this approach is evident in the commitment in the National Education Policy to re-establishing teachers, at all levels, as respected and empowered professionals. It recognises that the best

and brightest will enter the teaching profession only if respect, dignity, and autonomy are evident (Govt. of India, 2020[2])

A practical example of the empowerment of teachers and school leaders is the design of the Entrepreneurship Mindset Curriculum (EMC), which is presented as a framework document. The framework provides a guiding syllabus which schools should utilise when teaching Entrepreneurial Mindset through a recommended daily class. Teachers can decide the pedagogical approach and resources used, bearing in mind the EMC objectives and the unique context of their own classrooms. By describing a framework, rather than providing detailed direction on content and teaching approaches, the curriculum designers provide significant autonomy to schools and teachers.

As the framework outlines, the intention is that there are no written examinations for the EMC, nor is there an official marking system. Rather, the EMC is designed to encourage teachers and students to focus on the process over the outcome. The teacher is the evaluator of his or her students' progress and, whilst the curriculum does cover some measurable skills, the larger focus of evaluation is on creating a change in the mindset of the learners. Thus, the curriculum framework reminds teachers and students that any monitoring of the success of the curriculum in schools should be focused on an overall holistic understanding of a student's journey (ibid).

A strong background in educational research and training

Since it was established in 1988, the State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT) in Delhi has developed significant expertise in research, teacher education and resource development. It has a specific role in promoting and supporting the professional growth of teachers and other educational functionaries, leading to improvement in their effectiveness and efficiency.

As a body, it was therefore well-placed to take the lead in the design and implementation of the reforms discussed in this study. The expertise gleaned from its experience of designing pre- and in-service training for teachers, of developing teacher training materials, and of undertaking research projects to support system improvement was an invaluable resource, particularly in the implementation phase.

Collaboration with relevant NGOs

There is a well-developed non-governmental organisation (NGO) sector in Delhi contributing to education in a variety of ways, including direct provision, specialist remedial provision, textbooks, teacher education and, particularly relevant here, curriculum design and implementation. NGOs provided a wellspring of experience and expertise which the Delhi government could call on when considering large-scale systemic improvement.

A clear example of this is the Chunauti 2018 programme, which targets children in Standards 6 to 9 who are not meeting standard-level expectations. Introduced in 2016, the programme aims to improve their literacy and numeracy so that they can enrol in Standard 10 with realistic expectations of success. The programme drew on the expertise which an NGO, Pratham Education Foundation, had acquired through collaboration with Nobel laureates Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo, who evaluated and disseminated a teaching and learning model called Teaching at the Right Level, developed by Pratham. This approach relied on accurately identifying the learning needs of children so that teaching focussed not on what the curriculum specified for each standard level, but on what children actually needed to learn.

Learning goals are simple and clear, and ongoing measurement is used to assess progress (Banerjee et al., 2017[13]). Pratham had significant experience both in data collection and evaluation; its annual Status of Education Report is the largest non-governmental household survey undertaken in rural India.

The word *Chunauti* means challenge, and the objective of the government's programme is to provide appropriate and attainable challenges to improve the learning outcomes of children at risk of failure and

drop-out. Using baseline assessment data, teachers divide students into ability-level, rather than standard level, groups, and work intensively with them to build their skills, using appropriate learning activities and materials. The programme has been successful. In the two years preceding the introduction of Chunauti 2018, the government estimated that about 50% of those in Standard 9 could not make the transition to Standard 10 because of poor literacy levels. By the end of the first year of the programme, an additional 62 000 students, who would otherwise have dropped out of school, transferred successfully into Standard 10 (MoEI, 2018[14]).

Box 3.3. Existing opportunities

- A strong political will for change;
- insights gained from the implementation of earlier reforms;
- engagement of school leaders and teachers at an early stage of development;
- existing expertise within SCERT;
- collaborative engagement of NGOs.

What actions were taken?

In order to tackle the challenge of improving learning quality in government schools, the state government actioned a set of reforms designed to address weaknesses in the existing system. As Aiyar et al highlight, the Delhi educational reforms were built around three central pillars:

- improving school infrastructure
- improving learning quality
- improving accountability through enhanced parental participation in school activities (Aiyar et al., 2021[4]).

Addressing infrastructural deficits

The government recognised that achieving the first pillar was vital to make the others possible: improvement programmes could not be rolled out successfully whilst schools had poor working conditions and broken infrastructure. Such an environment was recognised as severely damaging to the dignity and morale of teachers and students.

Therefore, within their first year, the government instigated a state-wide cleaning and construction initiative in schools. The ambition was to build 500 new schools with a special focus on secondary and senior secondary schools to ensure that every Delhi child had easy access to a quality school. New schools and classrooms were constructed, cleaning staff were recruited through external agencies and estate managers were appointed to manage infrastructure-related issues (ibid). This necessitated significant state funding, which has been sustained (Sahoo, 2020[15]).

The programme of building and refurbishment was ambitious. It includes almost 10 000 new classrooms, additional facilities such as sports halls and libraries, and specialist schools focused on STEM and the performing arts. The aim was to provide an attractive, safe and supportive environment for students in Delhi government schools so that they would enjoy coming to school, feel respected and valued and, ultimately, commit to their studies there. The effect of improving infrastructure was immediate; in response to an independent review conducted by the Boston Consulting Group 91% of teachers reported “renewed enthusiasm and motivation” (BCG, 2021[12]).

The work done to improve the physical infrastructure was instrumental in fostering trust in government's reform package among teachers and parents. It created a positive and encouraging atmosphere into which curriculum and organisational reforms could be introduced, and it acted as a clear signal of the intention of government to improve the quality of education in government schools. Most importantly, it changed the mindset among teachers, making them more open to engage with the reform agenda.

Improving learning quality through the intended curriculum

While efforts to improve school infrastructure were underway, a number of significant curriculum initiatives were also introduced. Reflecting the commitment to achieve a more child-centric education focussed on the holistic development of the child, new curricula were implemented. These include the Happiness Curriculum for Standards K-8, introduced in 2018, the Entrepreneurship Mindset Curriculum for Standards 9-12 and the DeshBhakti Curriculum for Standards K-12.

The Happiness Curriculum is a mandatory programme designed to promote social-emotional learning. Responding to the very low levels of student happiness noted above, the Delhi government committed to shifting away from the existing emphasis on rote learning and memorisation in preparation for examinations towards a more holistic, balanced approach. The intention is to include learning outcomes which are more learner-centred and which promote "development in areas such as cognition, language, literacy [and also] address wellbeing and happiness of students" (SCERT & DoE, 2019[8]).

There are three units in the Happiness Curriculum: "Exploring happiness through learning and awareness", "Experiencing happiness in relationships through feelings", and "Happiness through active participation". These are explored during compulsory 45-minute daily lessons for children in Standards 1-8 inclusive. Children in Montessori and kindergarten have two mindfulness education periods a week. The intended learning outcomes are summarised under four headings:

1. The learner becomes mindful and attentive.
2. The learner develops critical thinking and reflection.
3. The learner develops social-emotional skills.
4. The learner develops a confident and pleasant personality.

Students spend one period each day in happiness classes in addition to traditional subjects. They engage in a variety of games, reflective conversations, storytelling, guided practice for mindfulness, role-playing, and presentations. These activities are designed to target essential skills, as well as the more holistic competencies believed to contribute to satisfaction, happiness and well-being.

Five "knowledge partners", or NGOs, brought expertise in socio-emotional learning, life skills and child psychology to their engagement with SCERT in developing the Happiness Curriculum. The collaborative partnership was a key enabler of the success of the curriculum design process and of the teacher education programme needed to support its implementation.

The Entrepreneurship Mindset Curriculum (EMC) was introduced in 2019. It is intended to extend the learning achieved through the Happiness Curriculum and build on the self-confidence and resilience it will hopefully foster. The EMC's aim is to nurture the mindset which will allow students to be innovators, problem solvers and job creators (SCERT, 2019[3])Entrepreneurial mindsets are defined in the EMC as those which enable people to bring about change and increase value in the field of their choice. The rationale is that students need to develop "mindsets" which would encourage them to learn new things, take risks, see opportunities in adversity, adapt to change, bounce back from failure and persevere in order to thrive in the rapidly changing world they face.

Entrepreneurial mindsets are relevant in all types of work, and all spheres of life and can enable students to realise their full potential in whichever professional journey they wish to undertake (SCERT, 2019[3]).

The curriculum framework includes more than 30 units of work, to be explored across the four senior years in high school. An important element in the programme is the link with local business. The Entrepreneurial Mindset curriculum focuses on delivering real-life, engaging experiences that prepare the students for work. Work-related experiences are provided to foster an understanding of socio-economic processes and encourage a mindset that encourages collaboration (SCERT, 2019[3]).

The third curriculum innovation is the Deshbhakti (National Pride) Curriculum, for all standards from kindergarten through to Standard 12. This was introduced in 2021 and it seeks to embed the spirit of empathy, tolerance and brotherhood which is enshrined in the Constitution of India and a sense of collective belonging in students. The Deshbhakti Curriculum moves from themes of love and respect for the country, to identifying its strengths and challenges, to reflecting on what each student can do for the country and how each individual contributes to its progress. The curriculum finds its rationale in the National Education Framework's challenge to education to strengthen participatory democracy, as well as in international frameworks which emphasise the inclusion of civic literacy, environmental literacy and global awareness in the curriculum (SCERT, n.d.[16]).

Improving learning quality through the implemented curriculum

Delhi understood that realising the goal of improving learning quality requires a paradigm shift in how the curriculum is taught. Teachers interpret the curriculum intentions and content, often drawing upon textbooks and other curricular resources, to shape the learning experience, including learning and well-being, for and with students (Ibid). With this in mind, each of the new curriculums pushed for a changed pedagogy and included direction and support for teachers. The Frameworks are intended to make education more experiential and holistic, and they require teachers to move from the established rote learning and memorisation to facilitating reflective discussion, active participation, and the practice of new skills. To enable this, a wide range of programmes aimed at changing the in-service training model were instigated. Of particular note is the creation of a new mentorship and support structure for teachers, and an active public campaign to motivate teachers.

Training was provided for everyone involved in implementing the new curriculums. Taking the EMC as an example, experiential training sessions were held for officers of the Directorate of Education to ensure that they understood the new curriculum and their role in its implementation, as well as heads of schools to ensure their understanding of the motivations behind the EMC and what it would entail. Orientation was also carried for all teachers involved in the EMC, where they were shown the relevant teacher manual and could consider how they would use it to support their work in classrooms.

Initially established to support the introduction of Chunauti 2018, a new cohort of teacher educators, mentor teachers and teacher development coordinators was in place to support the implementation of the three new curriculums. These experienced teachers, drawn from the existing pool in schools, received specialist training and became the key interpreters of curriculum change for the schools they worked with. They also fed back to the Directorate of Education on how implementation was going and any challenges they were encountering.

This feedback loop facilitated agile responses from the curriculum designers and helped to both strengthen the position of the mentor or coordinator and build teacher confidence in the curriculum. The training delivered by mentor teachers complemented the mass training provided, because it created a space for teachers to discuss and ask questions concerning the curriculum and share learnings with their peers.

The commitment of the Delhi Directorate of Education to supporting teachers is evident in the training plans outlined to accompany the implementation of the Happiness Curriculum. It describes a four-stage model of support, beginning with an initial orientation of all Happiness Curriculum teachers, moving through the appointment and subsequent training of "Happiness Coordinators" who worked with teachers to coordinate and facilitate school and classroom activities designed to support the curriculum, as well as large-scale

intensive recurrent training using a cascade model. The training focussed on pedagogy and content, and was informed by continuous feedback from teachers so that it could be responsive to their needs across the full school year.

Manuals were developed to guide teachers through the pedagogical processes recommended in each curriculum. For example, a full set of teachers' manuals was developed to support teachers implementing the Entrepreneurial Mindset Curriculum, one for each of the four standard levels (SCERT, 2021[17]; SCERT, 2021[18]; SCERT, 2021[19]; SCERT, 2021[20]). The manuals provide a comprehensive background to the concept of entrepreneurship mindset through answering key questions such as "what is the difference between developing Entrepreneurship Mindset and Entrepreneurship Skills?", "how can we say whether a person has an Entrepreneurship Mindset?", and "in which situations can a person doing a job be categorised as having an Entrepreneurship Mindset?". This lays the foundations for teachers approaching the Entrepreneurial Mindset Curriculum for the first time and ensures that they understand the underlying basis of the curriculum.

Further information is then provided on the underlying components of entrepreneurship, and the manual offers guidance on how the curriculum will be taught through experiential learning. For example, it outlines two different aspects of experiential learning:

1. Experience: Learning by Doing. Doing the activities individually or with friends, asking questions, finding answers by doing and improving one's understanding.
2. Reflection: Thinking about Experience. After doing the activity, reflecting on the experience, one's observations and questions and preparing for new experiences (SCERT, 2021[17]; SCERT, 2021[18]; SCERT, 2021[19]; SCERT, 2021[20]).

Detailed information is then provided on how to teach each of the components, including its objective, when it should be taught, and the role of the teacher and the student. In addition, guidance is provided on the structure of each unit and each accompanying activity or story. Examples of activities are then provided in detail, including the learning objectives of each activity and the estimated time that they should take (ibid).

Improving learning quality by enhancing the role of the Head of School as leader of learning

Principals in Delhi's government schools were, prior to the reforms discussed in this paper, fully occupied by administrative tasks and rarely had time to function as leaders of learning. As the reform programme got underway, the Minister for Education visited schools on a daily basis, engaging with heads of school and listening to their frustrations. An important early action of the programme designed to rehabilitate the infrastructure of schools was to immediately lessen the burden on principals to manage the maintenance of the physical school space. New estate managers were appointed who took on this responsibility. Heads of school were given further freedom by having the authority to allocate budgets to improve the learning outcomes of students. Together with a state-level focus on recruiting to close the gap in teacher numbers, this allowed heads of school to make recruitment decisions based on their own school's needs.

There was a renewed emphasis on teaching and learning in the school planning process. The existing Cluster Leadership Development Programme (CLDP) was utilised to support heads of school to understand the rationale for the new curriculum programmes and to implement them. Under this model, small groups of heads of school meet monthly to engage in facilitated peer learning. The aim is to support the development of leadership competencies through a continuous process of learning and improvement. As the new education reform programme was rolled out, heads of school were required to develop a vision for their school, and the discussions in the cluster sessions supported this.

The Cord Report notes that improving results was the heads' most important goal for students, and providing them with a safe and secure learning environment was also a high priority. Their goals for

teachers primarily related to encouraging teachers to be aware of their roles and responsibilities, including understanding students better and using activity-based teaching methods and the latest technology to make classes more interesting. 87% of the principals cited the cluster meetings as a source of support in enabling them to better understand and implement the new curriculums (CORD, 2021[21]).

Additional professional learning opportunities were also provided, designed to broaden the perspectives of heads of school and to familiarise them with international school leadership practice. heads of school were sent on leadership development programmes offered by the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad. They also participated in international field trips to attend training sessions and workshops and observe practice in schools in countries like the UK, Finland and Singapore. This experience exposed them to some of the best higher education institutions both nationally and globally, as well as some pioneering learning and teaching methods for their students back home (Talreja and Bhat, 2020[22]).

Improving learning quality by enhancing the role of parents

Parents and the local community are integral parts of the school ecosystem – how relationships between them are nurtured and sustained matters. Conceptualising education as a joint endeavour between parents and the school, the Delhi government sought to strengthen the parental role. The first action was to lessen a perceived distance between parents and teachers. This was important: research indicates that parental involvement is a critical factor for children's learning. At a minimum, parental engagement with a school signals to the child that learning matters (OECD, 2012[23]). However, due to socio-economic constraints, many parents whose children were enrolled in government schools had never been inside the school, creating a huge disconnect between the teachers and parents, stifling student progress in the process (Talreja and Bhat, 2020[22]).

To build partnership with parents and develop mutual responsibility for children's success, the Delhi government required schools to hold regular parent-teacher meetings throughout the school year, designed to engage parents in their children's learning. All meetings were held on the same day, advertised widely at district level, and employers were encouraged to facilitate parents' attendance by providing them with a half-day's leave to attend (Ibid). The enhanced communication between parents and teachers has had a remarkable effect on parental engagement, contributing to greater commitment to supporting their children's schooling. 73% of parents noted this as one of the fundamental shifts in the system (BCG, 2021[12])).

A second strategic element was intended to strengthen community partnership and ownership in the management of government schools (Directorate of Education, n.d.[24]). Every government school has long been required to have a 16-member school management committee (SMC), of whom 12 are parents or guardians of students enrolled in the school. The role of SMCs is to support the management of the school and particularly to contribute to the development of the school plan. The intention is to ensure that parents have a say in how their children's school is managed and in the programme decisions made by the principal or head of school.

However, in 2015, the Minister for Education believed that, while there were SMCs in 70% of schools, most existed in name only (Ibid). In the majority of government schools, a significant proportion of the parent body is less economically and socially advantaged than the head of school and their engagement in SMCs had been peripheral. The Delhi government set out to address this by building the profile of the parents on SMCs, providing active support to facilitate their active engagement on SMCs and by enhancing the powers of SMC.

Public recognition of the role of SMC members was stepped up. Small but important measures such as posting photographs of SMC members in the local area, mandating that they sat with the head of school at school meetings and other functions, and encouraging public recognition of their contribution at local

and district level, for example, all worked to ensure the dignity of parents within the school and to raise the profile and the confidence of parent SMC members.

The establishment of a network of volunteer SMC support workers, strategically organised to ensure their reach to all government schools in Delhi, also contributed to building the confidence of parents on SMCs. The support network offered sustained mentorship to every SMC, acting to resolve any difficulties experienced on the ground and explaining to parents their role and their authority.

Following a devolution of financial and administrative powers, SMCs became equal stakeholders in the development and management of the school. The SMC have authority to use funding for purposes such as the promotion of extracurricular activities, or any other purpose which will improve the functioning of the school. Members can visit their school at any time and engage the heads of school in discussion about the school programme and finances. In many ways, this has had the effect of strengthening the ties between the school and its community and it serves as a valuable accountability mechanism.

Reflecting on the impact of these measures in 2019, the Directorate of Education noted that the SMC had become a platform for the parents to communicate with heads of school and with the Directorate, contributing to both mutual understanding and improved co-operation between all three (Directorate of Education, n.d.[24]).

Box 3.4. Actions

- Address infrastructural deficits;
- design and implement curriculum to achieve vision for learners;
- devolve authority and autonomy to local level to empower heads of school, teachers and parents;
- develop the leadership competencies of principals;
- support teachers to implement pedagogical changes;
- support greater parental involvement.

What supported success?

Taking an ecosystem view

The key factor to the success of educational reforms in Delhi is the understanding of the Delhi government that successful change does not happen as a consequence of piecemeal interventions. Rather, taking an ecosystemic approach to change is required, recognising that any one dimension of a system influences and is influenced by other dimensions within that system, as well as the other systems within which it is nested.

Thus in Delhi, at the macro level, for example, significant effort was invested in reestablishing a new vision for education and in setting out new educational aims, which was accompanied by an increase in budgetary funding. At the exosystemic level, including the broader community within which children live, a number of changes were made to encourage and support parental and community engagement with schools. Introducing reforms designed to improve educational quality and standards of achievement brought change at the meso level, such that Delhi decentralised decision-making to an extent to heads of school, for example, and enhanced the training and in-service support available to teachers in a bid to develop their professional practice. Finally, at the micro-level of the classroom, new curriculums and the pedagogies they required helped to initiate a paradigm shift in learning, teaching, and assessment.

The commitment of the state government to see through the reform agenda was steadfast. The Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal holds to the belief that, "[e]ducation is the single most important factor which can bring families out of vicious cycles of poverty, which can change the way a generation demands its rights, which can lead to progress in the true sense of the word." (Directorate of Education, n.d.[24]). The appointment of the Deputy Chief Minister as Minister for Education underlines the priority ranking of education. His visits on an almost daily basis directly to schools and the communities they serve acted as a signal that the government was open to listening directly to the voices of heads of school, teachers and parents and helped to build trust.

That trust was further enhanced as the promises to improve education were backed up by investment. Delhi's investment in education as a ratio to aggregate expenditure has grown to exceed all other Indian states (Dialogue & Development Commission of Delhi, 2022[25]).

Engaging strategic partnerships

Having set out the ambition, a strategic approach was taken to implementing the change programme. This involved engaging with key stakeholders early in the process and utilising the expertise already on the ground. The role played by NGOs in helping to develop the curriculums, design and implement teacher support programmes and develop teacher manuals was important. SCERT in Delhi made good use of their knowledge and experience, particularly in working with disadvantaged and educationally deprived populations who were a key target of the reform programme. While building collaborative partnerships with NGOs, SCERT ensured the focus remained on the Government vision for education (Aiyar et al., 2021[4]).

In addition to establishing strategic partnerships at the level of the Directorate and SCERT, the reforms also pushed for similar partnerships at the level of the school and its local community. The goal of these local partnerships is to have a direct and positive impact on the learning experiences of students. One example is the Live Entrepreneur Interaction requirement of the Entrepreneurial Mindset Curriculum. This provides students with the opportunity to interact with established entrepreneurs and to learn directly from them the kinds of skills and attributes they will need to succeed in their own careers. Schools are encouraged to connect with local businesses to engage them in direct interaction with students. By hearing the entrepreneurs' stories of their journeys into business, the goal is that students will be motivated to consider careers in business themselves. More than 900 Live Entrepreneur Interactions were facilitated in classrooms in 2019-2020 (DDC, 2022[26]).

School management Committees are a second strategic school-community partnership. What Aiyar et al called, the "classroom consensus" constituted a significant obstacle for change. Challenging this deeply held understanding of education would have been much less successful if not for the work done to engage parents and communities at the local level. Achieving change in educational practices at classroom level required teachers and parents to understand and accept the new, broader conceptualisation of learning. That acceptance, in turn, required a new relationship and mutual trust and respect. The work done to promote the dignity of both teachers and parents was a critical enabler of that trust.

Implementing adaptive leadership of the change programme

The Delhi reform programme set out a clear agenda including infrastructure development, new curriculum programmes, a re-designed teacher education model, targeted interventions for children that need extra help and increased parental involvement. Work quickly began on each of these. By paying careful attention throughout, Delhi identified and addressed potential roadblocks through collaboration and strategic re-orientation. An example of this was the decision to attend to infrastructure deficits first. As noted earlier, this helped to both address a critical problem in the system as well as build trust that the government were sincere in their ambitions for their schools.

A curriculum-level example is the use of pilot schemes to road test new pedagogic approaches and curriculums. Even while the first infrastructural projects got underway, a number of interventions were piloted in 54 schools, ranging from extra-curricular activities, testing supplementary teaching materials and creating “learning managers” who were responsible for providing pedagogic support to teachers. These pilots provided further detail on two key issues of reform: levels of morale and motivation among teachers, and the prioritisation of syllabus completion over student mastery (Aiyar et al., 2021[4]). They laid the foundations for the development of consequent initiatives, including teacher support mechanisms and the mindset curriculums.

The Entrepreneurship Mindset curriculum was piloted in 300 classrooms across 24 schools from April-May 2019 and its impact was carefully monitored. A network of district and local coordinators, together with the Mentor Teachers, gathered feedback from teachers and heads of school, which was passed on to the curriculum designers. In addition, a systematic process evaluation study was carried out by IDInsight, an independent third-party research team. The study was conducted across 60 randomly selected schools and involved interviewing students, teachers and heads of school. A subsequent report and recommendations were sent to the Directorate of Education (SCERT & DoE, 2019[8]).

This facilitated a re-working of the curriculum materials and a second version of the EMC was developed, which simplified the messaging about its purpose and objectives and reduced the number of units to a more manageable level. The second version was extensively reviewed by over 80 teachers and launched in July 2020. To support the rollout of the revised EMC, a programme of teacher training was carried out again, this time online. The aim of the training, reflecting the findings of the earlier evaluation and feedback, was to ensure that teachers and EMC coordinators understood the why, what and how of EMC. Thus, an online capacity building programme was developed, consisting of several short, animated videos with voice narration and a set of relevant questions. 20 781 teachers enrolled and 89% of them completed the training (ibid).

The flexibility and agility which this shows was an important factor in the successful implementation of the new curriculum. Being open to feedback, ready for inevitable change, and agile enough to make those changes quickly resulted in an environment that fostered trust and supported engagement.

Clear, ongoing, communication

The Delhi government adopted a very strategic approach to communicating not just the reforms, but the underlying rationale. Every effort was made to inform the public through multiple channels and establish education as a legitimate focus. Accessible language and targeting specific points of contact ensured mass awareness of the reforms.

The gap between school and home was bridged through direct contact, as with, for example the engagement with SMCs described earlier, and the publication of the dates of parent teacher meetings on television, radio and billboards. The government made use of formal communications such as press releases, as well as the more informal, like the minister’s social media accounts. In fact, Delhi released over 50 official press releases between 2016-2017, approximately three times the average number released by other states (BCG, 2021[12]). Care was taken to ensure that the messaging was accessible for all, with widespread use of infographics and other visual communications. The network of support workers in the community, including SMC members, teacher mentors and teacher development coordinators, was exploited to ensure awareness of reforms was maintained.

Box 3.5. Success Factors

- Understanding the interdependence of change initiatives at different levels of the education ecosystem and developing the reform programme with that in mind;
- firm commitment from government to the vision and the details of the programme;
- leveraging the expertise and the engagement of strategic partners in the community;
- adopting an agile, responsive leadership approach to the implementation of the change agenda;
- designing an effective, multi-channel communication strategy.

Reflections

This paper describes an ambitious and extensive reform programme which has been largely successful. The attained (or achieved) curriculum refers to what students are able to demonstrate that they have learned. It can be thought of as the end product of the intended and implemented curriculum. Indicators show that the reform measures are having the desired effects. The pass percentage of the 2016 batch of Standard 12 CBSE students under the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government was 85.9%. In 2017, it improved to 88.2% (DDC, 2022[26]). It then leaped from 90.6% in 2018, to 94.24% in 2019, to 97.8% in July 2020 (Iftikhar, 2020[27]).

The evidence is that the reforms are having an impact. For example, the Dream A Dream Foundation and Brookings Institute developed measurement tools and rubrics for students and teachers to conduct an impact analysis of the Happiness Curriculum. Findings show a significant positive change: students have become more self-confident, comfortable and secure, and teachers have become better at adopting new pedagogies. Happiness classes do not require assignments and exams to reduce pressure on students. Based on classroom observation, empathy has improved for both students and teachers, which also improved the relationship between students and teachers. These findings are echoed in the Boston Consultancy report, which found that 87% of teachers reported that the Happiness Curriculum has had a tangible impact on students. Most teachers and parents cited students' increased confidence and awareness of career choices as direct consequences of the Entrepreneurial Mindset Curriculum (BCG, 2021[12]).

During the implementation period, however, Delhi experienced one of the most disruptive challenges to education globally, the COVID-19 pandemic. As in many other countries, schooling was disrupted and required adapting the education system to maintain continuity of education. In Delhi, this did not interrupt the reform agenda.

As school communities moved to online learning, the new curriculums were adapted for digital implementation. For some children who had been participating in the Happiness Curriculum since 2018, the disruption and uncertainty caused by the pandemic and the consequent school closures may have been less stressful. This because of the practice of mindfulness and the development of resilience that the curriculum is intended to promote. In 2020, the Happiness Curriculum moved online and resources were developed to help parents to engage in the programme with their children. While COVID-19 brought about a mental health crisis in India (UNICEF, 2021[28]), the continuation of the Happiness Curriculum provided a space for children and their families to reflect on how they were feeling and to share coping strategies. The pandemic brought into sharp focus the validity of including socio-emotional learning on the curriculum and attending to the well-being of students as a critical component of education.

The Entrepreneurship Mindset Curriculum was also adapted so that it could be implemented digitally. Activities based on EMC themes were sent to students in the form of posters and short two-minute videos. Students completed the activities at home, either independently or with family members, and sent the

responses to their teachers via WhatsApp. The EMC videos received more than 470 000 views and teachers reported successful results. An online summer bootcamp focused on developing an entrepreneurship mindset was designed in collaboration with eight organisations. 250 students in 14 groups took part in the bootcamp, participating in project group presentations and a broadcast event where they shared their experiences. Student participation demonstrated evidence of the impact of the curriculum on confident communication and their ability to take risks and try new, challenging, things. The Live Entrepreneur Interactions (LEIs) were also moved online. 16 events were organised with students nationwide, and interviews with inspiring entrepreneurs were broadcast to several thousand students and teachers on YouTube. Shorter videos of these interviews were also posted on YouTube, receiving over 400 000 views (ibid).

Delhi's reform programme is still relatively new. Many of the elements have been recently implemented or amended and the impact of COVID-19 on children's learning is still being addressed. However, the core policy principles which guide it - decentralizing education management, restoring the agency of school leaders, collaborating across departments and stakeholders, and making quick decisions only after listening to what stakeholders actually need (Talreja and Bhat, 2020[22]) – remain valid and provide a useful touchstone for those who might wish to emulate its approach.

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4 Estonia: From “control and command” to flexibility and autonomy

This chapter outlines Estonia’s significant strides in transforming its education system since gaining independence in 1991, with an emphasis on using digital technology to enhance learning outcomes and improve educational access. Estonia's education system, which promotes creativity, innovation and flexibility, focuses on giving autonomy to schools and teachers, allowing them to develop their curricula within a set framework and tailor their teaching methods to meet the individual needs of students. The insights into how Estonia has used digital innovation and teacher training can benefit Ukraine’s efforts to further improve its education system.

Introduction

Estonia's history has shaped the country's attitudes and beliefs about education. Estonian culture had prioritised education and emphasised its importance throughout its history. The belief that happiness and success can only be achieved through hard work, studying and public effort is intrinsic to Estonian popular culture (Hauga and Magi, 2017[1]).

Following five decades under Russian rule within the Russian empire, Estonia experienced a short period of independence from 1918-40 (Krull and Trasberg, 2006[2]). During this time, Estonia established a modern and efficient model of general education programme. In 1940, Estonia was occupied by the Soviet Union, and enforced changes were made to the education system in order to reflect Soviet totalitarian and centralised principles of education.

While Estonia, along with other Baltic states, was permitted some limited autonomy, specifically to allow teaching in the Estonian language and the inclusion of some elements of Estonian culture in the centralised subject syllabi, all curriculum content and teaching was heavily reviewed and dictated. For example, although the curriculum of general education was adapted to a minor extent by the Estonian Ministry of Education, and many textbooks were written by Estonian authors, these were strictly vetted by the central authorities in Moscow to ensure that they followed the central ideology of Soviet education.

Two parallel systems of education began to emerge simultaneously in Estonian society. A growing number of "Russian schools" were established in response to mass immigration into Estonia, mainly from people from Russian backgrounds. These schools often taught solely in Russian, using a curriculum designed specifically for Russian schools, and which failed to acknowledge the native culture and language of Estonia. Estonian schools, on the other hand, while adhering to the prescriptions of the Russian central authority, offered a curriculum which included tuition in the Estonian language and culture (ibid).

What motivated change?

While many Estonian educators were unhappy with the Soviet influence on the Estonian education system, the conditions needed for change emerged under Gorbachev's perestroika in the mid-1980s. Educators began to more openly criticise Soviet influence on Estonian general education, resulting in the organisation of a Teachers' Congress in 1987 which aimed to analyse the current state of Estonian education. Attendees considered what an alternative system might look like and how that could be achieved. The congress called for the decentralisation of the compulsory curricula and suggested that content should be divided between central and local decision makers, roughly a two-thirds/one-third split. Teachers also demanded a more learner-centred teaching approach, in contrast to the subject-centred instruction dictated by the Soviet education system (Krull and Trasberg, 2006[2]).

While the demands were rejected by Moscow, the congress is identified by many as kickstarting a renaissance of innovation in Estonian schooling (Ibid). Educators began to re-study the innovative ideas of earlier Estonian educators and philosophers, such as Johannes Käis, Peeter Põld and Hilda Taba, as well as the ideas of dissident Russian thinkers. In addition, relations with Estonian educators in exile were sought out and improved, and international contact and co-operation was developed, with the aim of benefiting from global ideas of best practice.

As opposition to the Soviet regime grew, so did the willingness and desire of Estonian educators to challenge the education system. In 1988, the superiority of Estonian legislation over federal legislation was officially declared by the Estonian State (Krull and Trasberg, 2006[2]). Schools and teachers began to realise that central control over schooling and curricula was collapsing and that they could take a greater role in decision-making.

Following a period of increasing debate over educational philosophies, the manifesto “Main principles for the reorganization of the public education in Estonia” was published. This called for a re-organisation of learning to focus on the intellectual skills students needed to put theoretical learning into practice, rather than “cramming ready-made facts”. There should be a wider variety of teaching methods utilised to enable this approach, such as role-playing with video feedback and micro-teaching (ibid). These central ideas, which began to emerge in the late 1980s, ultimately formed the basis for the significant educational change which followed.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union was officially declared on 26th December 1991 and Estonia gained full independence. In the early 1990s, it became clear that a new education system was needed that would promote Estonian values and not Soviet principles.

Box 4.1. Push Factors

1. Growing dissatisfaction with the Soviet influence on the Estonian education system;
2. Gorbachev’s perestroika and the influence of Western education philosophies;
3. 1987 Estonian Teachers’ Congress and its challenge to Soviet ideas of education;
4. increased international contact and influence.

What opportunities could be exploited?

The strong Estonian belief in the importance of teaching and learning helped fuel opposition to Soviet influence and also influenced public opinion to accept a whole scale transformation of the education system that aligned with Estonian values.

Decisions by the Estonian State to re-organise the education system were influenced by a number of factors, including its past experience in developing and implementing policy. Estonia had operated high-quality national education policies during its previous period of independence (1918-1940). The experience of already managing a well-organised and explicitly Estonian education system had an influence on the decision to radically re-organise schooling following de-Sovietisation. Some of the main principles from the past, which would be considered to be maintained, included a focus on long-term strategic education policies, outreach and negotiation with various stakeholders, and ensuring little political influence.

Despite the dissatisfaction with Soviet influences on education, there were a number of successful elements to be acknowledged. These included high-quality textbooks compiled by Estonian authors, high-level preparation of subject teachers, a focus on local history and natural science, high-level educational research and good academic knowledge in the field of information technology. A key consideration during the reform process was deciding which elements of the different systems to keep or transform.

Educational beliefs and theories were not only drawn from the Estonian educational system. International contact and co-operation also allowed global educational philosophies to form an important part of the consideration process. In particular, Estonia had established a good relationship with Finland in the mid-1980s, which helped Estonian educators to initiate extensive contacts with their Finnish counterparts and to harness their expertise and best practice. This was particularly important for science education (Elvista and Siska, 2022[3]). One key consideration was how to use the relationship with Finland to help restructure the Estonian education system. There was also a push to build further international contacts throughout the world to benefit the reform process.

As a result of these factors, and the context in which Estonia found itself at the beginning of the 1990s, it was decided that it was necessary for a dramatic transformation of the Estonian education system.

Box 4.2. Considerations

1. Building on the strengths of earlier experiences from the first period of independence such as willingness to embark on a whole scale transformation, focus on long-term strategic education policies, various stakeholders' engagement, and ensuring little political influence;
2. philosophical educational ideas, highlighted in a wide range of policy domains e.g. production of textbooks, preparation of subject teachers, as well as a focus on local history, natural science, educational research, and academic foundation in information technology;
3. existing international relationships and new international contacts.

What was the vision for education?

Influenced by philosophical ideas of educational scientists and the strengths of the previous Estonian education system, the new education system was to focus on a human-centred approach. At its heart was the belief that every person was valuable and that the circumstances of a person's education should be decided according to their educational development needs. In order to properly support this approach, the State created a new framework for re-organisation of the Estonian education system.

The main aims of the educational reforms in the early 1990s can now be described through the Universal Design for Learning model[1]. The central aim of the initiative was to create an education system without Soviet ideology, in which all relevant stakeholders had decision-making rights, responsibilities and obligations due to their role, and which were not centrally prescribed. This laid the foundations for a national education system focused on the learner as an individual, the competencies that an individual should acquire, and how to provide those. This would be enabled by the development of new legislation, curricula and curricular materials, in addition to the retraining and development of teachers.

Box 4.3. Vision

1. A person-centred, competency-based approach, i.e. valuing every learner as an individual and providing him/her with the types of competencies he/she will need;
2. educational provision in accordance with the needs of the individual student, based on the Universal Design for Learning model, with the alignment from new legislation, curricula and curricular materials, in addition to the retraining and development of teachers.

What actions were taken?

Changes were made in a number of areas in order to achieve this vision.

Division of responsibilities between State and local government

During the Soviet era, all schools in Estonia were public and under central control. Local governments had a very minimal role and influence in general education. In the 1990s, legislation was passed that dismantled centralisation of responsibilities and control in the education system (Krull and Trasberg, 2006[2]).

The 1992 adoption of the Estonian Law on Education was the first substantial act to start transforming the education system. The legislation laid out the general principles of organisation, governance and financing, as well as the legal basis, of the education system (ibid). This was followed by the implementation of the Local Government Organisation Act in 1993, which restored the local self-government system at a single level (Laane, Mäeltsemees and Olle, 2021[4]). This gave local governments the right to independently organise and manage local issues according to the needs and interests of residents (Noorkõiv, 2021[5]). In effect, local governments now had the responsibility to decide on educational structure and delivery at a local level, rather than being directed from central government.

Thus, all local governments were given greater responsibility and decision-making power for the organisation of education in their local area. Responsibility and authority for schools, predominantly basic schools[2] and upper secondary schools, was transferred from the state to local government. There were some exceptions, including schools for students with special needs, as well as most vocational schools and upper secondary schools, which remained under state control. This was to ensure that responsibility for education was perceived as being appropriately distributed and shared.

In addition, the State opened up opportunities for legal entities to establish private schools in order to utilise alternative teaching methods to support a learner's individual development. However, it should be noted that this opportunity was seldom taken up, with only 2% of schools operating under the private domain by 2004 (Krull and Trasberg, 2006[2]).

The new responsibilities designated to local governments and private school owners included ensuring that schools had adequate financial and non-financial support. This meant schools were responsible for supporting students with the values of creativity and versatility, and to choose help students choose a study path according to their interests and abilities.

Autonomy to schools and teachers

Under Soviet rule, educators were required to follow strict guidelines and rules for teaching. Reflecting the new principle that education should not be centrally prescribed, but that all stakeholders should have decision-making rights, early moves were initiated to provide more autonomy to schools within the re-organisation of the education system.

The head of the school became primarily responsible for all of the school's activities, including the organisation and performance of studies. She or he led on the recruitment and professional development of school staff, collaborated with the school administrator and made financial decisions. School heads were now responsible for the overall development of the school and were required to work closely with the school owner to secure and allocate funding for implementing development plans. While they had to take into consideration the national educational strategy and local development trends, they were otherwise free to guide the school's development according to the needs of the students. As such, they needed to learn new approaches to their roles, such as financial management and how to use resources autonomously. The State provided a number of support and development opportunities for heads of schools to guide them in their new role, such as the provision of coaches and mentors and the development of training centred around the profile of the heads of schools.

Teachers were also given a significant amount of autonomy within their roles, which was in stark contrast to during the Soviet era. They were given the ability to plan their teaching according to the needs of students, including the content of the teaching and the ways in which they chose to teach that information.

Rather than being centrally prescribed, the curriculum was prepared on an output basis: expectations around learning outcomes and objectives were prescribed to ensure that all students had equal opportunities. This led to a focus on understanding and deep learning, offering choices and integrating subjects. This was to ensure that students were able and supported to choose their own study path, according to their interests and abilities. Teachers were encouraged to consider that learning takes place both inside and outside the classroom, to support student learning in their own personal time, and to reflect this within their teaching strategies. This new approach empowered teachers, giving them the freedom to design student learning. It was guided by trust, supported by legal framework, and took place during a confusing transition period for educators and the education system.

The responsibility given to teachers, alongside changes in the curriculum and values of education, also required a new approach to initial and continuing teacher education. Universities were required to re-design teacher education curricula to reflect the transition to output-based learning and the student-centred focus of the new policies.

In-service training for teachers already in post was decided at school level, rather than prescribed at State level. The head of the school was given responsibility for establishing the school's training policy, in collaboration with the school team. This had to be based on the school's development plans and reflect teachers' competencies in supporting the development of students.

Equal opportunities

Central to the design of the new education system was the notion of inclusive education: that every child is entitled to education which meets their needs and abilities. The new education system was shaped by the presupposition of equal acceptance of all students and social integration of students into school, as well as the community.

In order to create one unified education system and one common cultural and values space, the Estonian language was established as the official language of instruction. This meant that all students were given the right to study in Estonian, particularly students with a home language other than Estonian.

The learning of foreign languages in schools was also promoted. Schools were given the freedom to decide which languages would be studied, according to the needs of their students. This focus has enabled the active participation of Estonian young people in international projects and facilitated a better understanding of the world, as well as the functioning of the European Union.

Re-designing the curriculum

In order to meet the aim of de-sovietising Estonian education and restructuring the education system to reflect new student-centred values, it was evident that the curriculum must be adapted. A period of curriculum renewal followed during which new national bodies were established to support advancing curricular changes and to explore alternative pedagogical approaches.

There were strict guidelines in place under Soviet rule on the content which teachers were required to teach, in order to reflect Soviet values and history. In the final few years of Soviet rule, when Soviet influence on Estonian education was waning, many educators began to ignore the official curriculum and recognised their growing ability to decide content themselves. However, the lack of any replacement content or guidance led to disorganisation in students' learning and a sharp decline in learning achievements, particular in maths and sciences (Krull and Trasberg, 2006[2]).

It was evident that some curriculum guidance would be required. In 1992, the Estonian Centre for Educational Development (established in 1989), in collaboration with the Institute for Pedagogical Research and the Ministry's General Education Department, compiled a renewed curriculum for basic school (Sarv and Rõuk, 2020[6]). One year later, in 1993, a revised curriculum for Estonian secondary

schools was also published, with compulsory core curriculum and subject syllabi (Krull and Trasberg, 2006[2]). This revised curriculum was used in the short-term to 'de-sovietise' education.

In 1993, responsibility for curriculum development was moved from the Institute for Research in Pedagogy to the Estonian Board of Education and the Laboratory of Curriculum Studies was established, with the aim of establishing the first national curricula (Oja, 2020[7]). The laboratory worked closely with the Finnish School Agency to learn more about Finland's experience in developing a national curriculum, in order to help construct the Estonian curricula (Krull and Trasberg, 2006[2]).

The first Estonian national curriculum was published three years later in 1996. This demonstrated a significant shift from the immediate period after independence, during which teachers had complete autonomy in deciding lesson content. The new curriculum emphasised the view of Estonia as a democratic and market-based society; competencies for defining learning outcomes were introduced, cross-curricular themes were promoted, and there was an emphasis on permanent change and the development of personality and society (Sarv and Rõuk, 2020[6]). A number of new subjects were introduced, such as health education, philosophy and psychology. However, educators still retained the autonomy to specify learning content and decide the number of lessons that would be taught within the national curriculum. The curriculum was introduced gradually according to school levels in 1997. (Krull and Trasberg, 2006[2]). However, shortly after the introduction of the curriculum, it became clear that schools were not thoroughly prepared to implement it. There was also a significant gap between the general parts of the curriculum, which had been updated, and those subject syllabi which had not been. The two elements did not follow the same style and values and were somewhat contradictory (Ibid).

The Ministry announced an open competition for developing a new curriculum centre. This was won by the University of Tartu, who opened a centre in 2000 (Ibid). The centre published an updated curriculum in 2002, with a focus on reducing mandatory content in order to enhance capacity for the development of competencies (NCEE, 2020[8]). Responsibility for the renewal of the curriculum was ultimately given to the School Agency, which had been established at the Ministry of Education and Research. It published the current curriculum in 2011.

Control mechanism

While the restructuring of the education system placed significant trust in schools and educators, quality assurance mechanisms were also developed to monitor the work of schools. This was to ensure the central aims of the new education system were met and that education was delivered to a high standard.

The most important tool for monitoring the quality of education was the internal assessment conducted by the school, which analysed the progress made towards achieving development goals. The head of the school became responsible for monitoring quality assurance and responding to the results of internal assessment. As they took on more responsibility following independence, school owners assumed a duty to monitor the school's development through a control mechanism, whereby they would closely monitor the progress of the school and maintain consistent dialogue with the school concerning potential risks and success factors. The main approach of the State was to only intervene if a problem at a school was not solved adequately at the local level.

There were, however, two new national level examinations, the national standard-determining tests and final examinations. These effectively serve as quality assurance mechanisms, providing data on the achievements of students. The national standard-determining tests are conducted at each school level to provide the State with an understanding of the extent to which students' knowledge and competencies are in line with objectives set by the national educational standard. The results of the tests provide information to the State to help inform evidenced-based educational policy making. They also inform the school and school owner on management decisions, such as personnel decisions and the design of learning and educational activities. The tests provide valuable information to teachers on their own strengths and areas

of improvement, as well as a guide for the development of their teaching strategies. These tests are not graded and they have no impact on the direction of a student's studies. Instead, they are used to promote a culture in schools in which assessment is used to support learning and development and to support an evidence-based approach to teaching and learning.

The final examinations are carried out at the end of basic and upper secondary school and are also a key tool for providing knowledge to the State, schools and teachers. These examinations are compulsory and schools are responsible for certifying the completion of general education by issuing a final certificate to the student, alongside a results card.

In addition to the national standard-determining tests and national examinations, the State also carries out periodic monitoring of all school activities. Such monitoring was useful to understand the effectiveness of the implementation of certain topics in schools in particular, as well as for understanding any problems which arose in implementing legislation governing teaching and education. The State is also responsible for ensuring that schools are properly informed about corruption prevention; all school employees are considered to be public officials performing public duties and, as such, must be externally monitored to ensure competence to make decisions or actions relating to a student.

The control mechanisms described here were deemed essential in order to fulfil a number of key functions, which were instrumental to delivering a successful, restructured education system focused on delivering high-quality, student-centred education. For example, the aims of these tools were to provide transparent and evidence-based information for decision-making by all stakeholders; to support the decision-making power of heads of schools and teachers; to ensure the consideration of the key elements of the national curriculum and the general competencies of the school; and to facilitate the efficient collection of information and feedback during the external evaluation. Schools were to be provided with the necessary support to help students to meet their curricular objectives, while still maintaining an emphasis on autonomy and student-centred learning.

Box 4.4. Key action

1. Legislate for a division of responsibilities between State and local government so that local government is given greater responsibility and decision-making power for the organisation of education in their local area;

2. increase the autonomy of schools and teachers so that they are free to guide the school's development according to the needs of the students;

3. focus on inclusion and equity by creating one unified education system and one common cultural and values space;

4. re-design the curriculum to include defined learning outcomes, cross-curricular themes and an emphasis on permanent change and the development of personality and society;

5. implement appropriate controls and quality assurance mechanisms to ensure the central aims of the new education system are being met and that education is being delivered to a high standard.

What supported success?

Inclusive stakeholder engagement

The involvement of stakeholders at all levels - State, local authority, school, parents - was central not only to the restructuring of the education system, but to the continued success of the system as it developed. Early on it was decided that a culture of inclusion and engagement would be a central tenet of the new education system.

In the initial years following the restoration of independence, a number of representative organisations were formed or restored. Representation units of international organisations, such as the Estonian Montessori Society, were established. Groups such as youth groups were restored, and teachers began to join professional teacher associations. These teacher associations were instrumental in their contributions to the development of national curricula, the professional development of their members and conducting the international co-operation which would inform many parts of the restructuring process (Krull and Trasberg, 2006[2]).

In accordance with the learner-centric approach, students were invited to play a pivotal role in the decision-making process of schools. Schools established the right of students to assemble into student bodies, which were to be consulted on the organisation of school life. All students in a school had the right to elect such a student body, and student bodies nationally assembled into a singular national body (Ibid).

Parents were also given the right to form representative organisations. Schools were obliged to consult as many parents as possible when making important decisions. In order to aid this, the State developed a satisfaction questionnaire, with the aim of collecting more diverse feedback on the quality of teaching and education. This could then be used to monitor how different target groups perceived wellbeing within a particular school. Each school established a board of trustees, which included teachers, students, the school owner, parents, alumni and organisations that support the school. The head of the school was subject to reporting requirements to the board of trustees and was responsible for creating opportunities to consult stakeholders.

In recent years, to further improve the modern culture of inclusion, the Ministry of Education and Research launched an initiative in 2014 to encourage schools, parents and the wider community to work closer together. The initiative focused on disseminating best practice, community involvement, optimising curricula and providing supportive external evaluation processes in general education (Huvitakool, 2020[9]). This aimed to increase transparency over the activities and organisation of a school and to highlight best practice and the contributions of various stakeholders.

A new financing model

One area in which significant change was enacted under the restructuring of the education system was that of financial provision for education. During the centralised education system during the Soviet period, all schools were public and received public funding (Lees, 2016[10]). After the restoration of independence, the State initially provided the funding for a school's administrative costs and teachers' salaries. However, in line with the increased autonomy of the school, changes were made to the funding system to deliver responsibility for all school costs to the school owner. In 1992, the Law on Basic Schools and Gymnasiums was established, which outlined the principles of funding and running of schools for general education (Krull and Trasberg, 2006[2]). The owner was responsible for deciding the budget for the school and the head of the school was, in turn, responsible for its implementation.

The State provided grants to all schools, regardless of their form of ownership, to be used to provide training for school staff; cover the labour costs of heads of schools, teachers and support specialists. The grants were also used to obtain study literature and provide free study materials for students. Increased

support was given to schools with students receiving enhanced or special support. If additional funding was required by the school to meet its development plans, or any other expenses, this cost had to be met by the school owner (local government or private enterprise).

The number of general schools grew during the initial years following restructuring, with more schools being opened. For example, there were 541 comprehensive schools providing general education in 1981, but this number increased to 666 by 1991. The Ministry of Education additionally funded the reopening of small rural schools, which were closed by the Soviet Union for economic reasons. However, many of these failed to stay open in the longer-term, also due to the costs involved (Krull and Trasberg, 2006[2]). By 2022 the number of schools providing general education has dropped to 517.

After the initial restoration of independence, one common feature of the school financing system was financial contributions from parents. However, this culture is changing. Schools can accept donations, but parents are no longer expected to co-finance. There are also additional routes of funding open to schools, on a project-basis and particularly from other sectors. For example, the Ministry of Culture allocates targeted support to school owners to enable all children equal opportunities to visit a cultural institution at least once per year. Funding is also provided to ensure children receive basic swimming lessons by the end of the first stage of school (3rd grade; ages 10-11).

Digitalisation

The first school Information and Communication Technology (ICT) program was launched in Estonia in 1987. However, in the early 1990s, the ICT infrastructure in Estonia was ineffective and students and school staff lacked experience. Only a few progressively managed general education schools had computers and relatively high academic computer knowledge, even though the mastering of the new technology was recognised as an important future skill.

From 1992 onwards, computers were distributed to schools. Each received a minimum of one-two computer stations and ensured they could be accessed in a classroom. However, these computers were often of poor quality and technical issues were common. As it was new to the curriculum, it was also difficult to find teachers competent or qualified to teach students how to use ICT. Despite these challenges, there was a willingness and enthusiasm amongst students to learn (Lees, 2016[10]).

The implementation of a permanent internet connection in Estonia in 1992 further sparked interest in computer science, particularly among young people. In response to growing demand, the following years witnessed increased investment in building ICT infrastructure within the education system. The State invested approximately 0.2 million USD annually into the provision of IT equipment in schools between 1992 and 1996 (Lees, 2016[10]). The aim was to ensure that all students had equal access to ICT on a daily basis and were able to develop critical digital skills.

With the aim of further improving digital access for young people, integrating ICT into the curriculum and building an innovative and modern education system, the first non-profit organisation in Estonia was established in 1996. The initiative, named “The Tiger Leap National Programmes”, was created by the president Lennart Meri and later evolved into “The Tiger Leap Foundation” in 1997, which was established in collaboration between the Ministry of Education, computer companies and private persons (Lees, 2016[10]).

The project had six key objectives:

1. providing young people with ICT literacy;

1. connecting the education system with international databases and developing a generation of young people connected with global information;

2. creating a modern school environment with modernised tools;

3. developing an effective infrastructure to support distance and continuing education;
4. providing equal opportunities;
5. optimising educational expenditures by embedding ICT into education administration (Krull and Trasberg, 2006[2]).

As well as providing hardware and network connections, training for teachers and student assistants was supported. Regional competence centres were also created, alongside multimedia teaching tools, and programmes for the international dissemination of Estonian language, culture and history.

Thanks to the help of Open Estonia Foundation and Nordic Council of Ministers, the initiative is considered to have been successful (Krull and Trasberg, 2006[2]). Estonia became the first country in Europe where all schools had internet access in 1999. The increase in the provision of hardware during 1996-98 further cemented the importance of computer science within schools, with the number of students per computer decreasing from 50 in 1996 to 20 in 1998 (Lees, 2016[10]). The ICT literacy of both students and teachers improved significantly and ICT was officially integrated as a subject within the national curriculum. This in turn proved a useful tool in aiding the overall restructuring of the education system during these years, by contributing to the development of a modern, efficient and innovative education system which enabled students to pursue their interests, equipped them with the critical tools of the future and modernised teaching and learning. In addition, it contributed to the goal of improved co-operation between the State, schools and service providers (Lees, 2016[10]). The continuous development of digital competencies throughout the years also enabled Estonian schools to quickly and efficiently organise distance learning during later health crises and wartime assistance.

International support and co-operation

A key aspect of the restructuring of the education system following independence, both an enabling force in the restructure and a key change factor in the process itself, was a high level of international support and co-operation.

During the last few years of Soviet rule, the infiltration of international ideas concerning education, together with growing international contact and discussion, played an important role in facilitating criticism and debate of Soviet influence on education.

Following the restoration of independence, as the State looked to the re-organisation of the education system, discussion with international counterparts was increased with the view of incorporating international ideas and philosophies into the design process of the restructured education system. For example, conversations between Estonian educators and their Finnish counterparts had a significant influence on the re-design of the national curriculum during the 1990s. Many international books on education were translated into Estonian for the first time (Krull and Trasberg, 2006[2]). In addition, many heads of schools and teachers visited other countries to meet international educators, visit schools and learn about the educational experiences abroad.

International support for Estonia following the restoration of independence has been instrumental to the success of the re-organisation of the Estonian education system in many ways. In 1991, the Open Estonia Foundation organised a series of seminars entitled “Independent School”, which explored innovative ideas and best practice for key elements of education. These were considered in the re-organisation of Estonian education and included: school development, management, policies, testing and legislation, curriculum development, school renewal and quality assurance system modules. These seminars were of great value in supporting the Estonian State and Estonian educators as they looked to rebuild and modernise the education system.

With the view that international co-operation was key to rebuilding Estonia following independence, Estonia applied to join the PHARE programme in 1991: an initiative by the European Union which provides pre-

application support for countries seeking to join the EU. Since 2000, students in Estonia have been entitled to participate in the education and youth programmes of the European Union, which have been valuable in supporting their academic and personal growth, as well as international understanding and awareness. Estonia was able to reference the steps taken in the re-organisation of the Estonian education system within its application in the European Union, and it ultimately succeeded in its application to join the EU in 2004.

The opportunities provided by international co-operation, particularly around accessing international grants and funds, has also provided valuable skills and experience to educators in Estonia concerning project-writing. Schools learned to formulate the objectives and expected results of their activities in a clear and comprehensive manner, to justify their risks and possible mitigation methods.

Box 4.5. Building success

1. A strong commitment to a culture of engagement and inclusion and the establishment of the mechanisms through which stakeholders can engage;
2. increased financial autonomy for school owners, supported by State grants;
3. use of ICT to innovate and modernise, through integration into the curriculum and administration;
4. international support and co-operation.

The modern Estonian education system today is widely recognised as one of the highest performing in the world. The skills of Estonian students rank 1st in Europe according to the OECD's PISA international survey[3]. Many elements of the restructuring of the education system contributed to the success of student learning in Estonia today. However, there are many lessons to learn from the initiative, as well as notable areas of improvement that should be recognised.

Division of responsibilities between State and local government

The division of responsibilities between State and local government in Estonian education policy still exists today and there are elements which can be considered highly positive, while some aspects are less successful.

The legislation put in place to provide a clear division and distinct responsibilities between State and local governments in the provision of education has improved collaboration between stakeholders to create an equitable system. It not only ensures that the expertise and knowledge of different stakeholders is properly utilised but also that control over education delivery is equally distributed to ensure a fair system. However, there were many challenges and issues which arose during the process of dividing responsibilities between the State and local government. In particular, in the initial years, there was a lack of knowledge about the change management required to most efficiently enact the sharing of responsibilities. While policymakers were better informed about societal developments and thus able to expand their expertise in this area more quickly, it proved to be more challenging for policy implementers (such as school leaders and teachers) to understand why and how best to implement their changing responsibilities.

It was not always the case that school owners had the understanding and ability necessary to operate autonomy effectively. In the earlier years, many educators struggled to understand the nature of their new responsibilities and how to utilise this autonomy effectively. Autonomy is, on the one hand, the freedom and the right to decide and, on the other, the duty to fulfil tasks and be responsible for the purposefulness of actions and the legitimacy of decisions. Schools struggled to take on the significant increase in autonomy so quickly and ensure that they were meeting their new responsibilities.

This coincided with a lack of communication and co-operation between relevant bodies. Teachers in particular were not properly informed about the main objectives of changes, such as the reasons for changes in funding, the implications of new legislation and the possibilities to contribute towards educational decisions through representative organisations. Thus, teachers were limited in their ability to utilise their new autonomy and unprepared for their new role. As a result, there was a risk that they were not fulfilling their new responsibilities, which would subsequently impact the quality of education that students received.

Furthermore, with the number of changes to the education system, particularly regarding numerous updates to the curriculum, teacher education and training struggled to keep up with new changes and requirements. As a result, new teachers coming into the profession were not properly prepared for their roles and responsibilities. In hindsight, greater support for local governments and school owners to understand their new responsibilities, and how to carry them out efficiently, could have been valuable.

Today, schools in Estonia exercise a significant amount of autonomy and this is a unique aspect of the Estonian education system. As attention now turns towards improving the system, the goal remains to foster autonomy and co-agency. The State still takes the approach that its role is to support, rather than to impose, and to share responsibilities and opportunities.

The autonomy of headteachers to organise a school and shape the curriculum, alongside the freedom of teachers to decide their style of teaching and the content of learning is often applauded for being a critical factor in the success of Estonia's education in the OECD's PISA tests (Elvista and Siska, 2022[3]). Teachers also tend to have studied teacher education at high quality universities and professional development of teachers is strongly encouraged, with 98% of Estonia's teachers and 100% of Estonia's principals in 2018 having attended professional development activities. Routine in-service training for teachers is carried out in schools, which creates opportunities for teachers to analyse their own competencies and identify areas of improvement, as well as promoting a sense of community.

Aligning educational and social policy

There is a central belief in the Estonian education system that eliminating structural barriers to learning starts with aligning social and education policy. By doing so, education in Estonia has become more accessible, more equal and of a higher quality. For example, a number of supporting initiatives have been implemented to support an equal education, such as the provision of parental pay for 1.5 years; free school lunches for all students; early childhood education; the provision of leisure activities and child support.

The Estonian education system prides itself, and is often praised for, its promotion of equitable education and opportunities for all students (OECD, 2020[11]). Changes in legislation and teaching methods have cemented the obligation to provide equal opportunities to all students to complete basic education and to continue their studies in accordance with their individual abilities and preferences. The effect is clear. Estonia has the lowest number of students without basic education in the world. The difference between rural and urban students' education levels is also the lowest in the world, and the socio-economic background of students' parents has been demonstrated to have little influence on the progress of a student (Lees, 2016[10]).

Grade repetition is amongst the lowest in the world because the Estonian education system promotes the value that students who are struggling should be identified at the time of need, rather than at the end of the year when they are far behind their peers.

The principle of providing an equitable education has not only been maintained throughout the years since it was first implemented after independence, but further developed. Students of different abilities now study together in the same classes in Estonia. Such a model has been shown to be more effective and can support better student performance (ibid). Furthermore, there is an equal distribution of resources in

Estonia, although it does rank slightly higher than the OECD average in terms of insufficient material resources, a notable area of improvement (ibid).

However, there are some notable weaknesses in the implementation of equal opportunities in the education system. Autonomy of schools and school owners to decide the organisation of the school has provided some challenges and is considered to have hindered the progress of reaching completely equitable education in some regards.

As a legacy of the Soviet era, Estonia still has general education schools where the language of instruction is either Russian or Estonian/Russian. Both PISA tests and basic school final exams and upper secondary state exams indicate that students of Russian-medium schools achieve lower scores compared to their Estonian peers. The level of proficiency in Estonian as a second language among graduates is closely linked to the proportion of teachers meeting the state language requirements.

In 2022 Estonian government has approved a detailed action plan prepared by the Ministry of Education and Research to transition to Estonian-language education in Russian-language kindergartens and schools. The transition to Estonian as a language of instruction will start in preschools and in the first and fourth grades in 2024. The transition will be completed by the beginning of the 2029/30 academic year.

A further indicator of the commitment to inclusion in Estonian education policy is the involvement of diverse stakeholders in policy making and implementation. The culture of co-operation and engagement between all stakeholders, which was a cornerstone of the rebuilding of the Estonian education system following independence, has been maintained into the present day. The belief that teachers, parents and students are experts in the education of the modern day is intrinsic to the educational policy decisions and directions of the State. Consultation and debate between the relevant stakeholders are central to educational decision-making.

A focus on and commitment to full stakeholder engagement does, however, pose some challenges. When any decision is made, all stakeholders must be involved in the discussions from the outset, including discussions around the necessity of changes, possible alternative solutions and agreements for implementation. While this is undoubtedly valuable in ensuring that expertise is harnessed from all areas and the perspectives and concerns of relevant bodies are listened to and acted on, it is ultimately a complex, time-consuming and diplomatic process.

Building appropriate supports

Visions can only be realised where a range of supporting mechanisms are put in place. In Estonia, ensuring adequate investment in transformation was an important factor in its success, as was the digitalisation programme and the inclusion of quality oversight mechanisms.

As initiated under the 1992 Law on Basic Schools and Gymnasiums, today all financial support for the functioning of schools is provided by the school owner, who has an overview of school needs. Funding is based on the number of students, but there are exceptions to ensure that education is equally accessible in all regions. School owners are guaranteed State support of an agreed amount and according to agreed principles.

However, implementation of the new financial model was not immediately successful. School owners and heads of schools did not fully understand the new model from the outset, particularly the notion that not all schools received the same amount of funding. Today, many aspects of the new financial model implemented during the re-organisation of the education system proved durable and efficient and are currently still maintained in the Estonian education system.

Digitalisation in Estonia was implemented rapidly, and priority was given to ensure equal access to ICT for all students, particularly from 1992 onwards. Collaboration between the State, education providers and the

social sector improved during this time, with all bodies working together effectively in order to implement digitisation initiatives and meet the needs and interests of students in this area.

Such initiatives have since been commended for initiating the formation of a wider e-State, which has brought nationwide benefits culturally, economically and socially. Since digitisation initiatives were first developed in the 1990s, beliefs around the provision of digitalisation have since evolved into a culture of utilising digitalisation as a tool for organising modern learning, rather than a goal. Creating such a culture, which prioritises equal digital access for all children, has proven instrumental in ensuring that Estonia was prepared for providing remote learning in health crises, wartime assistance and, most recently, during the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, the digitisation initiatives met some challenges. When ICT was first integrated into the education system in 1996, teachers did not always fully understand the opportunities digitalisation brought to improving and aiding teaching and learning. While increased enthusiasm over time from teachers has resulted in improved digital skills, this perspective took some time to develop, and teachers did not seize the opportunities early on to harness digitisation effectively. For example, critical thinking has not been sufficiently developed in light of digital developments. In hindsight, further training and guidance to help teachers to understand the possibilities of digitisation and how to utilise it effectively within teaching, would have been beneficial.

As many schools have experienced during the rapid move to a digital world, digitisation itself also brings some problems, such as the emergence of cyberbullying. Such prominent issues, which began with the emergence of digitisation in the 1990s, are still evident in the digital education world of the COVID-19 era.

The system of internal self-assessment of development goals by schools supplemented by external control mechanisms in the form of tests could be considered to have been highly successful, considering the performance of students in test results, such as the PISA tests.

Self-assessment has supported schools to make effective and efficient school management decisions in identified areas of weakness and strength. In addition, results of external evaluation carried out by the State is taken into consideration in the development of curriculum and has been utilised in recent updates to curriculum guidance; most notably, the separation of curricula for basic schools and upper secondary schools in 2011 (Tire, 2020[12]).

However, in the initial years, schools did not always possess an adequate ability to analyse themselves. There was a tendency amongst some schools to assimilate new directions without critical consideration, which in turn negatively affected students' fulfilment of their responsibilities

Furthermore, the rapid change from the totalitarian principles of school administration under Soviet rule and the rigorous school attendance regulations they applied, as well as a rapid social stratification of people, has been criticised as resulting in a high student dropout rate and an increase in incidents of school violence (Krull and Trasberg, 2006[2]).

Efforts to create a modern-day curriculum which embodied Estonian values was at the heart of the educational reform. After revising Soviet-era curriculum in the early 1990s, the first completely new curriculum entered into force in 1996, the following in 2002 and 2011. More important changes were introduced to the curriculum in 2005 after joining the European Union. In 2014, other changes were introduced to enforce key competences, school autonomy and to update the content of education; and in 2018 to establish inclusive education.

The speed at which the curriculum was developed during these years is often commended, alongside the willingness to maximise access to existing systems and materials. Adaptations of national curriculum were based of philosophical ideas and reasoned thought, rather than hastily developed on the spot and based on little evidence. Educational associations also grew in importance during this time and played a critical role in the development of curriculum, which helped to ensure that stakeholders were well informed, and

that the expertise of all stakeholders was utilised. In addition, this period is also credited as combatting the lack of professional expertise in the field of curriculum that existed during the Soviet period, through the production of new Estonian textbooks, syllabi and teaching materials (Sarv and Rõuk, 2020[6]).

As evidenced by Estonian's exemplary performance in the most recent PISA tests, the design and delivery of the national curriculum have been a success. The curriculum has put in place the building blocks to support students' mental, physical, moral, social and emotional development. This serves as a basis for students to go on to live happy lives and make a full contribution to society.

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Notes

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[2] Basic education serves as the mandatory minimum of general education requirement, which can be acquired either partially in primary schools (grades 1 to 6), basic schools (grades 1 to 9) or upper secondary schools that also teach basic school curricula. For further information see: Pre-school, basic and secondary education (Haridus- ja Teadusministeerium (hm.ee).

[3] PISA | Haridus- ja Teadusministeerium (hm.ee).

5 Extending the compulsory school period and enhancing personal and societal well-being in Finland

This chapter describes how Finland has extended the compulsory education age from 16 to 18 years-old in a bid to combat school dropouts and interruptions in education, and to promote social cohesion, social responsibility and citizenship. Prior to this reform, a significant proportion of young people opted not to continue with formal education. One government study estimated that some 15% of Finns in all age groups lack upper secondary education qualifications. Ukraine is taking similar measures to improve educational participation and attainment by transitioning to 12 years of compulsory education.

Introduction

Finland is renowned internationally for its successful education provision, particularly in the latter half of the twentieth century, when strong expansion of the education sector and a growth of investments produced high levels of participation in education and strong learning outcomes among the Finnish population. In the 1990s, for example, Finland reached the international top in learning outcomes assessments and the level of education of Finnish young adults was the highest among industrialised countries. In recent decades, however, learning outcomes and the educational level of young people has witnessed a sharp decrease, while differences in learning outcomes according to a person's background and region have increased. This has resulted in the level of education going backwards overall. Finnish people born in 1978 are the most highly educated group in the country. In contrast, those born just fifteen years later, in 1993, are unlikely to reach a similar level of attainment (Kalenius, 2023[1]).

The period of compulsory education in Finland has, until recently, coincided with the completion of basic education at the age of 16. Young people then had the option to apply for further studies through upper secondary education or vocational education and training (VET). However, a significant proportion of young people opted not to continue with formal education[1] and, of those who did continue, 3.2% of young people dropped out of upper secondary education and 8.7% dropped out of vocational education and training (Ministry of Education and Culture (OKM), 2020[2]). This case study looks at one measure, recently introduced, to address this apparent drop in educational participation and attainment.

In 2021, Finland extended the period of compulsory education for all to include completion of either upper secondary education or a VET qualification. The extension aims to ensure that all young people are in education until the age of 18, minimising dropouts and interruptions in education for young people and providing comprehensive guidance and support for them to achieve an upper secondary education qualification. Thus, from 1 August 2021 onwards, the leaving age for compulsory education was extended and all young people who have completed primary and lower secondary school (basic education) are legally obliged to apply for further studies, either to an upper secondary school, vocational education and training, preparatory education or any other programme which belongs to compulsory education (ibid).

The context, rationale and practical considerations involved are described in this case study.

What motivated change?

Finland, like many other countries, faces a rapidly changing and unpredictable future. Old certainties have been replaced in what some call the "volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous" world, where transformations in the nature and organisation of work and business; challenges posed by environmental and climate crises; rapid technological developments and demographic changes have made the future increasingly challenging to navigate. Ensuring that young people have the competences and dispositions needed to manage this world is vital for individual and societal prosperity. In Finland, an ageing population, reduction of the working-age population, and a rapidly declining birth rate means that the population will start decreasing from 2031 onwards and that the sizes of young cohorts, in particular, will dwindle (Statistics Finland, 2018[3]). There will be fewer people entering into the labour market and, while there is a growing migrant population, the long-term outlook indicates a growing need for a skilled workforce, having specialised training, knowledge and experience, in order to attract and retain high value employment opportunities and investment.

In its *Education Policy Report* (Government of Finland, 2021[4]) the Finnish Government set out an ambition that, by 2040, Finland will be a nation where educational equity and accessibility will have improved, and the level of education and competence achieved by its citizens will rank among the world's best. Achieving this ambition will require a cultural and educational foundation that draws on effective education and high-quality research, contributing to the achievement of sustainable development goals in society as a whole.

The *Policy Report* also notes that a strong and responsive educational system is required to ensure Finland's international competitiveness and the well-being of its citizens (Government of Finland, 2021[4]).

Finland is facing a growing shortage of skilled labour. Efforts are already underway to improve the education level of young people in response to this deficit. The availability of skilled labour has been highlighted as a barrier to companies hiring more staff in recent years, in addition to having a negative impact on companies' growth. More than half of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Finland reported that the unavailability of skilled labour that meets the company's needs is, at least to some extent, limiting the company's growth, according to the 2020 SME Barometer. In addition, it is clear that the skill requirements of working life are increasing and are expected to increase to a greater extent in the future (Ministry of Education and Culture (OKM), 2020[2]). The number of jobs where only an elementary-level education is required is decreasing and, according to the skills foresight platform's anticipation of training needs up to 2035, the expected skills requirements for the future workforce will be significantly higher than the current workforce. If education is used as a measure of competence in this assessment, the future workforce will be required to have at least the level of upper secondary vocational qualifications (Seuri, 2018[5]). This suggests that improving the level of education of young people will be a key factor in future economic development. It will be vital to ensure a skilled workforce able to meet future needs and drive national improvement.

Upper secondary education allows students to build a strong foundation of knowledge and skills and develop into active citizens and full members of society. It secures the abilities and vocational competence needed for further studies and the transition to working life for the entire cohort of young people, as well as contributes to the competence development of the working-age population (Government of Finland, 2021[4]). Extending the period of compulsory education will mean that every young person living in Finland will complete upper secondary education and graduate with a qualification.

The increasing numbers of young people dropping out of formal education after lower secondary has been a concern for Finland for some time. The consequences for the individual are evident – lower earning potential and greater risk of long-term (in excess of twelve months) unemployment. This can also impact on an individual's well-being (Ministry of Education and Culture (OKM), 2020[2]). Finnish data indicates that 63% of people aged 25-34 who possessed only basic-level education had an annual income of less than EUR 20 000. 31% of this group were considered at-risk-of-poverty, compared to 14% of the same age group with upper secondary education qualifications (Statistics Finland, 2018[3]).

Research suggests that levels of education are also associated with a person's physical well-being. In Finland, 40% of people with low levels of education believed that their own health was average or bad, in comparison to 29.5% of middle-level educated people and 26.5% of highly educated people, according to the Finnish Institute for Health and Well-being (Ministry of Education and Culture (OKM), 2020[2]). Between 2012-14, the lowest-earning men in society were three times more likely to die, relative to the population, than the highest-earning.

Youth unemployment in Finland is an area of concern as it is higher than the OECD average. In 2017, 14.7% of 15-29-year-olds in Finland were unemployed, compared to the OECD average of 9.8% (OECD, 2019[6]). According to the 2017 Youth Barometer (Pekkarinen and Myllyneimi, 2017[7]) - a yearly research project wherein the values, well-being and everyday life of young people aged 15-29 in Finland is assessed through phone interviews - one significant reason young people gave for interrupting their studies was the desire to go to work immediately. However, nearly a third of those who interrupted their studies were unemployed at the time of the interview (Pekkarinen and Myllyneimi, 2017[7]). Data reported by the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare in 2018 indicated a concern among people with low levels of education (33%) that they would be unlikely to work until the pension age of 65, in comparison to 20% of middle-level educated people and 14% of highly educated people (Ministry of Education and Culture (OKM), 2020[2]).

There is a strong correlation between youth unemployment and education. Drawing on 2013 data, young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs) status was significantly higher among young

people aged 20 to 24 with only basic level education at 36%, in comparison to 15% of young people with upper secondary level qualifications (Ministry of Education and Culture (OKM), 2020[2]). NEET youth were also more likely to be consistently unemployed (Ibid). The picture remains consistent over time, with Statistics Finland's 2018 data indicating an 18% difference in employment rate between those with only basic level education and those with upper secondary level education (Statistics Finland, 2018[3]). Long-term unemployment is more common among those with only basic-level education. 7% of persons over the age of 18 with basic-level education were long-term unemployed in 2018 (unemployed for a period of 12 months or longer) (Ministry of Education and Culture (OKM), 2020[2]).

Low earning potential and unemployment have evident negative impacts on a person's financial and personal well-being. Life satisfaction levels of NEET youth in Finland are demonstrated to be low, as is their sense of belonging to Finnish society (Ministry of Education and Culture (OKM), 2020[2]). Evidence suggests that improving the level of a person's education can have a positive impact on their employment prospects and, in turn, their future financial security, well-being and life satisfaction. Raising the compulsory school leaving age could have a direct impact on a person's present and future well-being and thus significantly improve the lives of young people in Finland.

One of the basic principles of Finnish education is that all people must have equal access to high-quality education and training. All citizens should have the same educational opportunities irrespective of their background, such as ethnic origin, age, wealth or where they live. However, despite significant investment in ensuring equity of access, differences in learning outcomes according to a person's socio-economic background have significantly increased in Finland in recent decades. Children with parents who have not completed upper secondary education are less likely to complete it themselves. According to research published by the Finnish government, the level of education of guardians, changes in working life and the unemployment linked to this are common factors associated with poverty in families with children. It notes of concern in Finland that the low level of education of guardians is one of the key mechanisms behind the maintenance of poverty among families with children. Half of parents with only primary or secondary education believe their financial situation to be moderate at best, and one in seven have feared that they would run out of food (Ministry of Education and Culture (OKM), 2020[2]). This, in turn, negatively impacts a child's well-being, particularly a child's health. In addition, school burnout, loneliness, bullying and anxiety is more common among these children than the average.

Differences in learning outcomes according to gender has seen a particular increase and the gender literacy gap in Finland is amongst the largest in countries participating in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). The difference between literacy learning outcomes in Finland is 52 score points in favour of girls, compared to the OECD average of 30 score points in 2018 (OECD, 2018[8]). According to Statistics Finland, 20.2% of comprehensive students received intensified or special support in autumn 2019; 71% of these were boys, in comparison to 29% of girls (Ministry of Education and Culture (OKM), 2020[2]); (Statistics Finland, 2018[3]). There is also a notable gap in interruption of studies, with 6.4% of men discontinuing education leading to a qualification or degree in 2018-2019, in comparison to 4.4% of women.

Concern has also been raised about the exclusion of people with disabilities from further education; according to several studies, people with disabilities have a lower level of education than their peers and are much less likely to be in the workplace, which in turn has a significant impact on their financial situation and their well-being (Ministry of Education and Culture (OKM), 2020[2]).

Because completion of upper secondary enables the student to participate in further and higher education, it cements their access to lifelong learning and the advantages which can accrue from it, for example, personal development, improved employment prospects, economic advantage and civic engagement. There have been many efforts to tackle dropouts, decrease the number of NEETs and improve inequalities but they have not had the desired effect. Thus, the decision to extend the compulsory period of education

was motivated by a concern that all students in Finland have access to, participate in and benefit from an upper secondary education.

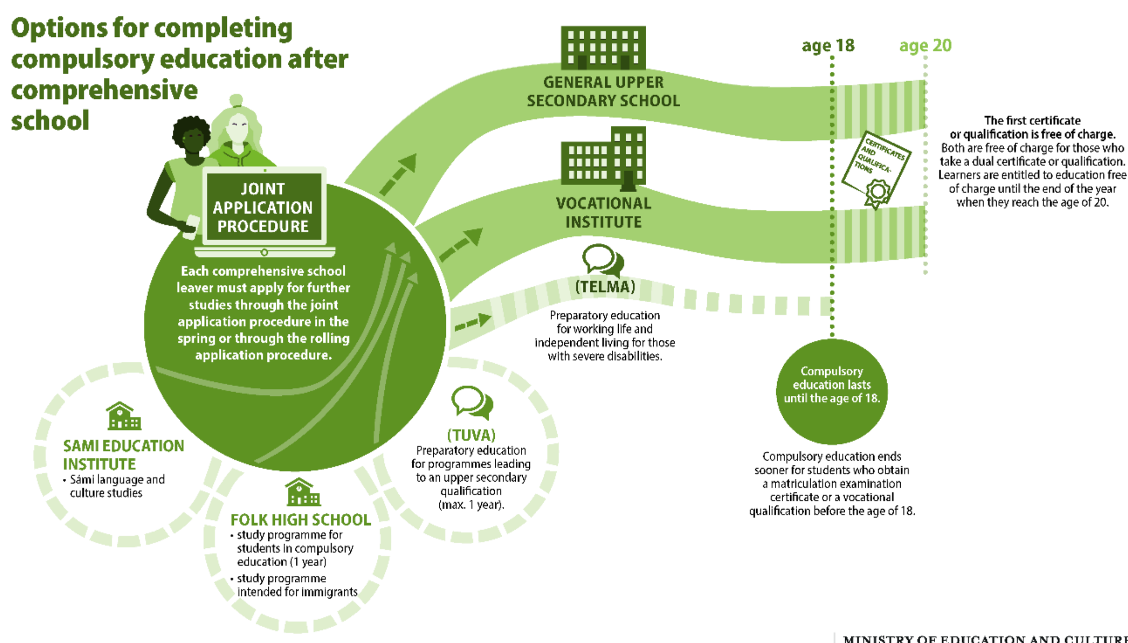
Box 5.1. Push factors

- Governmental commitment to ensuring that education fits Finnish students with the skills and competences needed to thrive in the future and secures Finland's competitiveness;
- growing rates of non-participation in, and dropout from, upper secondary and VET, and the negative consequences for individuals and society.
- the growing gap in learning outcomes according to a person's socio-economic background and circumstances is a concern.

What is the vision?

Equity in education is an important principle of the Finnish education system; all people must have equal access to high-quality education and training. The goal is to maximise the potential of every individual. The extension of compulsory school education in Finland seeks to achieve this vision and the principle of equity is embedded throughout the variety of proposals, legislation and guidance documents which were part of the changes. The aim is for all students to have equal access to upper secondary education, regardless of socio-economic factors, and that they receive holistic support to transition into upper secondary education. This, in turn, will reduce learning gaps, improve the well-being of young people, raise national employment and provide young people with greater career and economic opportunities.

Figure 5.1. Options for completing compulsory education after comprehensive school



Source: Source: Ministry of Education and Culture (OKM), Options for completing compulsory education after comprehensive school, https://okm.fi/documents/1410845/122468998/Compulsory+education-EN.pdf/e573a61f-88ca-5fc7-234d-c2ecbc4f47e7/Compulsory+education-EN.pdf?t=1654074940321 (accessed on 25 May 2023).

Box 5.2. Vision

By extending compulsory education, we aim to:

- raise the level of education and competence in Finland;
- reduce learning gaps;
- boost equality and non-discrimination in education;
- improve the well-being of young people;
- raise the employment rate.

What opportunities existed?

During the process of designing and implementing this initiative, the Ministry was able to consider relevant information from a variety of sources, nationally and internationally.

The extension of compulsory education from the age of 16 to 18 had been planned for a long time. The first drafts were prepared in 2014 and finalised and brought into force in 2021. The main reasons for this were to reduce school dropout rates and to improve the chances of students to find work in the future (Witting, 2021[9]).

International examples

The Ministry looked to international examples to inform their decision. Extending compulsory education was not an entirely new concept; in recent years, several European countries have raised the compulsory schooling age, including in Belgium, Portugal, Austria, Holland, England, Germany, Israel, Russia, and in some states of Canada, Australia and the United States (Seuri, 2018[5]). In most countries, the extension of the compulsory education age was raised to its current level only within the last 10 years. For example, Austria implemented a law in 2016 which requires all 15–18-year-olds to participate in training or preparatory training. Every young person in this age group who is not in secondary education or has completed secondary education is equipped with a personal plan to fulfil their obligation. Education can also include apprenticeships and work training or coaching organised by employment agencies (ibid).

The implementation of extended compulsory education age varies across different countries. Some countries have a uniform system of compulsory education, others have separate systems for 16–17-year-olds and younger people. Systems always include obligations, at least for local authorities, and training for organisers. Young people and their guardians are always sanctioned if they do not meet the obligations, but the severity and extent of sanctions varies. In addition, most systems emphasise that a young person subject to compulsory education may not be legally hired for work, unless such a job is supportive of their studies. Across different countries, several key issues seem to arise: flow of information between educational institutions and authorities, the possibility of sanctioning young people and their guardians and sufficient resources. The examples of these countries who have implemented their own programmes of extending compulsory education was instrumental in informing both the decision to extend compulsory education in Finland and the form such an initiative should take (ibid).

An agile and experienced teaching cohort

The role of the teacher is highly respected in Finland, with most preparatory courses for entry into the profession over-subscribed. In considering the implementation of this proposal, the Finnish government could be confident in the capacity of the teaching force to meet the needs of all students. With strong

theoretical and practical content, teacher education is research-based, with emphasis on developing pedagogical knowledge. Teachers are trained to adapt their teaching to different learning needs and styles of students, and they have long-established experience of accommodating students with a range of learning needs.

Teachers enjoy a high level of public trust – they have autonomy to choose teaching materials, pedagogical approaches and assessment practices, but they are very strongly supported by both the nature of their pre-service training and ongoing professional development opportunities. They are encouraged to work in close collaboration with their peers, constantly mentoring and tutoring each other. Thus, teachers are supported to ensure that the best pedagogical practices are implemented in every classroom.

In deciding to extend the period of compulsory education, the Government could be confident that, with the additional training and support measures, education providers and schools were well placed to support all students.

An established and capable planning and governance structure

Governance in Finland is based on the principle of decentralisation. Although the Ministry of Education and Culture defines education policy and the Finnish National Agency for Education is responsible for its implementation, local authorities have a significant amount of autonomy and responsibility. They are responsible for organising education provision for all children of compulsory school age, including those with special education needs, so that all have an opportunity to learn according to their abilities. The local authorities make decisions on allocation of funding and recruitment of personnel. They can also delegate the decision-making power to the schools. The education providers, usually municipalities and the schools themselves, 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.

The Government could proceed with this initiative building on the administrative capacity and funding experience already available nationally.

Box 5.3. Existing opportunities

- Building on existing Finnish research in relation to compulsory education;
- using international research and best practice to inform development of policy;
- confidence in the capacity of the teaching force;
- capitalising on the established governance and funding networks.

What actions were taken?

Development of government proposals

The first steps taken by the Ministry of Education and Culture in this initiative was to appoint a project group tasked with the aim of developing a government proposal to extend compulsory education. The responsibility of the project group was to organise the preparation of the reform, primarily through organising and, as necessary, acquiring the research and evaluation expertise required to support the preparation of the reform, including consultation and public engagement efforts. A wide-ranging follow-up group was also established to support the work of the project group. The group met ten times during the preparation of the proposals to discuss their details and provide feedback. Both groups operated over two years, between 2019 and 2021, with the aim that the reform would be enacted in 2021. In addition, expert

opinions from constitutional experts were also requested and the preparation work was monitored by the Ministerial Working Group on Knowledge, Education and Innovation (Ministry of Education and Culture (OKM), 2020[2]).

In autumn 2019, shortly after their establishment, the project group produced a draft of proposals concerning the extension of compulsory education. The document outlined the key proposals of reform:

- the extension of compulsory education until the age of 18;
- the improvement of student guidance and support services to enable this;
- the proposal of accompanied supervision responsibilities;
- the exemption from payment of such extended compulsory education.

In addition, it provided key information regarding the legal obligations of extending free education which guided the decision to make extended compulsory education free of charge. Equally important, it considered international obligations which affected the extension of compulsory education, primarily obligations to international human rights treaties, such as the UN Convention of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education, all of which placed obligations on Finland in regards to factors such as provisions on compulsory education, accessibility of upper secondary education, guidance in applying for education and reducing school leaving.

The proposals also outlined in detail the educational context in which they were developed, including detailed information on the motivations guiding the decision to extend compulsory education, as discussed in a previous chapter. Information regarding this references extensive research and studies which support the motivating factors guiding the reform (Ministry of Education and Culture (OKM), 2020[2]).

Clarifying new stakeholder responsibilities

Extension of the compulsory education period would increase the number of students in upper secondary education by 5%, both from the inclusion of young people otherwise excluded from upper secondary education and those who drop out of their studies. This equated to 8 000 more students per year. This, of course, will have a noticeable impact on upper secondary education providers (Ministry of Education and Culture (OKM), 2020[2]). The proposals considered by the government clearly outlined the new responsibilities placed on various stakeholders as a result of the changes. For example, the obligation to monitor a student's application for further studies after basic education ends and the responsibility to notify the municipality of residence if a student interrupts their studies. Basic education providers would be expected to provide students with intensified personal guidance and to develop an individual plan for future studies where required. This provides a new strengthened opportunity for providers to develop and differentiate student guidance according to their needs, providing more tailored, holistic and effective education. In addition, this intensified guidance is expected to contribute significantly to the prevention and reduction of interruption of studies, in turn strengthening the national availability of personal student guidance and thus equal guidance practices. It is likely, however, to require the hiring of additional study councillors, given that a maximum of 250 students per study councillor is recommended in basic education.

The reforms also provide a number of other key benefits for basic education providers, including improving their capacity and ability to strengthen the systematic and continuous guidance required by the core curriculum, improving their ability and use of multi professional cooperation to support student guidance, and clarifying and strengthening the role of student guidance within larger continuous learning and lifelong guidance (Ministry of Education and Culture (OKM), 2020[2]).

For municipalities, the new requirement to map the overall situation of students, refer them for future studies and clarify the need for further services, is not deemed to have a significant impact on their activities. Many already have such arrangements in place for similar services, such as multi professional

cooperation between youth services and teaching activities and they can utilise these within their new supervisory responsibilities. In addition, the proposals outline the intention to develop a new Compulsory Education Register, which would provide information on the beginning and termination of a student's studies, alongside clearly outlining the actor with responsibility for supervision. This register would be made available to the actor with responsibility for supervision at the time. The intention is to develop a service wherein education providers can easily send notifications to municipalities about students who do not have a place in further studies or about the termination of a student's studies (ibid).

No significant impact on upper secondary school and vocational education and training providers was predicted, given that they were already obliged to support students at risk of dropping out of their studies. Study councillors and group supervisors were expected to carry out the bulk of supervision, although according to the notion that "all teachers are supervisors" already in existence in the education system, all teaching staff were expected to play some role in the supervision. Strengthened resources, including study documents and guidance, was developed to support these new supervisory responsibilities (ibid).

An important aspect of the reform is the TUVA (in Finnish: *tutkintokoulutukseen valmistava koulutus)* programme, which was introduced last year. This is a preparatory education programme (TUVA education) to support students to make a successful transition from lower secondary to upper secondary education. It is intended for students of compulsory education age, for students with immigrant background as well as for those adult learners, who are lacking the upper secondary qualification. The training lasts for a maximum of one year. TUVA is not compulsory; it is designed to provide an extra support for learners who require further preparation for the next phase of their studies. During the preparatory year students have time to think about their further studies and career choices. They will acquire the necessary knowledge, skills and abilities to apply for an upper secondary qualification. At the time the proposals were being developed, education provision targeted at preparing students for upper secondary general education was already in place, but it was provided to students with an immigrant background. As a result, municipalities with an immigrant population already had preparatory programme design and implementation experience. As a result of the reforms, all upper secondary education providers can choose to organise training to guide degree education for all students for whom it would be beneficial.

Considering the consequences of reform

Extended compulsory education was made free of charge. This was to ensure that all students had equal access to it and could participate. Since the right to free basic education and compulsory education is already provided for in the Constitution of Finland, the assessment was made that when compulsory education was extended, the obligation to provide free education must also be extended. Thus, upper secondary education or vocational education and training, in addition to the matriculation examinations required to complete upper secondary education (and the retake of these examinations should a student fail), was made free of charge until the student receives an upper secondary qualification or until the end of the calendar year in which the student reaches the age of 20. Teaching materials required to complete extended compulsory education were additionally made free of charge, in addition to any tools or work materials required. School trips taking place farther than 7km from the education provider, in addition to travel costs incurred by a student to arrive at the place of education, were also made free of charge, where previously students were required to cover such costs themselves. During the preparation of the proposals, a thorough assessment of the likely impacts of this policy decision was carried out (Ministry of Education and Culture (OKM), 2020[2]).

Economic impact on students and their families

A thorough assessment was made of the economic and cost implications of the proposed reform, both in terms of initial costs and resulting longer-term savings. The extension of the compulsory education period places an obligation on individual students and their families to participate at least until age 18 and thus it

was likely that this would impose a financial burden on them. To address this, the Government decided that upper secondary education would be made free of charge for students in extended compulsory education. This benefits the significant proportion of young persons under the age of 20 who would have applied for and participated in upper secondary or VET before the it was compulsory to do so. For example, upper secondary education costs prior to the extension of the compulsory education period included those costs associated with textbooks, study materials, computer, calculator licence and matriculation examination fees. The costs for students of vocational education and training vary according to the field of study, so the financial impact for these students varies between different fields of studies and degrees. These costs are be covered by the education provider, rather than the student. It also benefits students who might otherwise have opted out of upper secondary education on economic grounds, removing those barriers to their participation. This ensures that all students have equal access to upper secondary education, regardless of their socio-economic background (Ministry of Education and Culture (OKM), 2020[2]).

Extending the free scheme to include school travel further improved the financial position of students and their families. Analysis estimated that 50 000 new students who previously shouldered the costs of school travel themselves would begin to be covered by the scheme. In addition, approximately 38 000 students under the age of 21 who previously received support for school travel would no longer have to provide for extra uncovered costs for this, which will improve their financial position by EUR 43 per month (Ministry of Education and Culture (OKM), 2020[2]).

Cost implications for central and local government and education providers

The cost of implementing the new policy was expected to be expensive in the short-term. The transfer of responsibilities and costs from students and their families to municipalities and the providers of basic education meant that several additional roles and responsibilities were assigned to those bodies. For example, responsibility for school accommodation, student guidance, supervision and monitoring of student progress was extended to include the period of compulsory education and its attendant costs had to be borne by the local authority and/or education provider. The overall estimated cost for teaching materials transferred from the student to the education provider is EUR 1 834 per student across three years of study (Ministry of Education and Culture (OKM), 2020[2]). The costs associated with the new task of providing additional special support for students and for additional supervision and guidance of students, particularly those at risk of dropping out, were carefully considered and budgeted for.

Costs related to factors such as the acquisition of teaching materials and computers, additional guidance regarding transitional education, the task of supervising training concerning special support and the travel and accommodation allowance related to compulsory education were also considered. Education providers are encouraged to be innovative in how to secure teaching materials, for example through utilising libraries and lending stations, considering alternative ways of creating and using open teaching materials, borrowing e-books and to open up and jointly procure commercial material to competition. Pilot projects by the Finnish National Agency for Education have proposed that all teaching materials and content produced with public funds should be made accessible through an open library with an CC-BY licence, meaning that they can be further processed. This would reduce the overlapping work of preparing teaching materials and thus reduce the associated costs (ibid).

The work done in advance of implementation indicated that the additional appropriation requirement would be around of EUR 301 million during the implementation years 2021-24 for upper secondary education. For vocational education and training, the additional appropriation requirement was estimated at EUR 29.4 million. As the policy is being implemented one age group at a time, the amount to be transferred from central to local government would increase gradually over that period. While new procedures, supervision responsibilities and notification obligations will be placed on education providers these were not considered to have significant resulting costs but can be covered within the existing framework of

current resources. Likewise, the hiring of new staff, such as study counsellors, was not predicted to entail significant costs which cannot be already covered within the existing hiring and training frameworks (ibid).

While previous studies were deemed sufficient to effectively assess the costs of the extension of compulsory education in regard to upper secondary school studies, it was felt that additional information was necessary to provide the required information on vocational education and training. In November-December 2019, the Finnish National Agency for Education conducted a detailed study on the costs associated with vocational education and training, particularly concerning the costs incurred by students in different fields and degrees. This included carrying out a survey of providers of vocational education and training, of which 75 responses were received (ibid). This study, in addition to existing studies on cost calculations for upper secondary education, informed the initiative.

It is important to note that the fiscal analysis which was done to inform the policy decision considered not only direct costs in detail but also indirect costs, through loss of existing revenue streams, for example. Local government and /or education providers no longer have an income stream from tuition fees charged for upper secondary or vocational education. The resulting cost of abolishing the latter, for example, is approximately EUR 300 000 (ibid). Equally, the analysis acknowledged other relevant areas where costs would diminish. For example, the extension of the compulsory education age meant that young people under the age of 18 were no longer legally entitled to apply for unemployment benefits. In 2019, approximately 1 400 young people under the age of 18 were receiving unemployment benefits. Another example was the removal of the need for a financial supplement to support students to pay course/tuition fees. Students who received this allowance were able to receive up to EUR 1 400 across three years of study in financial aid to supplement teaching material costs (ibid).

While changes to unemployment benefit entitlements could be seen to financially disadvantage a cohort of young people, or to temporarily reduce the income opportunities of the small number of sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds who entered work immediately, under the new policy, they will be supported throughout further education, and their longer-term financial position is likely to be enhanced, improving their chances of success in the labour market. Many studies evidence a strong correlation between educational attainment and success in the labour market, and finding work, particularly higher-paid work, has proven to be more difficult for young people with only basic education, as opposed to upper secondary or tertiary education (Ministry of Education and Culture (OKM), 2020[2]).

While it was recognised that extending the compulsory school leaving age would entail short-term significant public costs, research suggests that there would be long-term fiscal benefits to such an initiative. In fact, the EPC (Education Policy Report) report ascertains that raising the compulsory school age to 18 years would provide a long-term fiscal benefit of EUR 140 million in Finland – a figure which outweighed estimated costs of the initiative as detailed in the government proposal at the time (Seuri, 2018[5]).

Consideration of alternative actions

Before finalising the details on how to extend compulsory education, a thorough assessment was conducted of alternative initiatives.

One option explored was that longer participation in education could be improved by making study guidance more effective, specifically in basic education and particularly in the application and transition stage to upper secondary education. Various alternative guidance and support measures were tested by the Ministry for years prior to this initiative with the aim of preventing the interruption of upper secondary education studies. For example, from 2011-15, EUR 16 million was allocated to VET providers for measures to reduce dropouts and increase the number of students completing qualifications on time. While at the beginning of the initiative, interruptions decreased slightly, they soon increased again and no clear downward trend was noted during the initiative (Ministry of Education and Culture (OKM), 2020[2]).

The cost of improving study guidance and support alone was calculated during the cost assessment stage of the proposal to extend the compulsory education age. At approximately EUR 20 million, it is significantly lower than the cost of extending compulsory education. However, this method was deemed insufficient, as such targeted measures seem to reduce the dropout rate or increase upper secondary education only to a small extent. This can be partially attributed to the fact that many young people who drop out of upper secondary education have sufficient knowledge to progress and no clear health or other significant reasons to not complete their studies. According to the EPC report, about one-third of young people not participating in upper secondary education have completed comprehensive school with an average grade of 7 (on a scale from 4 to 10), which would enable them to participate in upper secondary education (Seuri, 2018[5]).

A second approach to addressing the participation, retention and achievement challenges is to place legal requirements on entitlements to social security which would disincentivise school dropout. Such a measure had been attempted in Finland. For example, a young person under the age of 25 who does not have upper secondary education does not have a legal right to unemployment security and their social assistance may be cut if they do not apply for a study place, refuse to accept a study place or interrupt their studies without a good reason. Unemployed young people who do not have vocational training must wait five months before they can enter the labour market. While it is difficult to assess whether these measures have had an impact, it is evident that there are negative consequences, as some young people end up as customers of social security before receiving the benefits that come first by virtue of the regulation, in addition to the young people who end up outside the service system altogether (Ministry of Education and Culture (OKM), 2020[2]).

Another alternative considered was that, if a student does not achieve the objectives of basic education at the lowest level, then basic education could be extended by one or two years. This would ensure that all students completing the basic education syllabus would have sufficient skills and knowledge to progress onto upper secondary education. However, this does not guarantee that more young people would move into upper secondary education and can incur a negative label for students who are in basic education for longer than their peers. This, in turn, could increase their risk of exclusion and harm their motivation to continue their studies (ibid).

A further option could be to require young people who have completed basic education, but not continued their studies, to complete an activity, such as work, workshop activities or other community activities. However, according to international examples of such an approach, work without learning objectives attached is not recommended. It is likely to also produce difficulty concerning drawing a line between short and part-time employment (ibid).

Conducting a thorough assessment of alternative options to achieve the objective of improving participation in upper secondary education helped to ensure that the most appropriate and cost-effective method to meet the objective was being proposed. It also ensured that stakeholders could understand the proposal to extend the compulsory education age by explaining the alternatives and decision-making process.

Legislation

Once the proposal had been edited to reflect issues raised during the consultation phase, the next step was the ratification and publication of relevant legislation. The Act on Compulsory Education officially came into force on 1 August 2021, which legally extended compulsory education, implemented in a staggered means through one age group at a time.

Communication of the reforms

In addition to the extensive communication efforts during the consultation phase of the initiative, an effort was placed on ensuring effective communication of the reforms both before and after implementation.

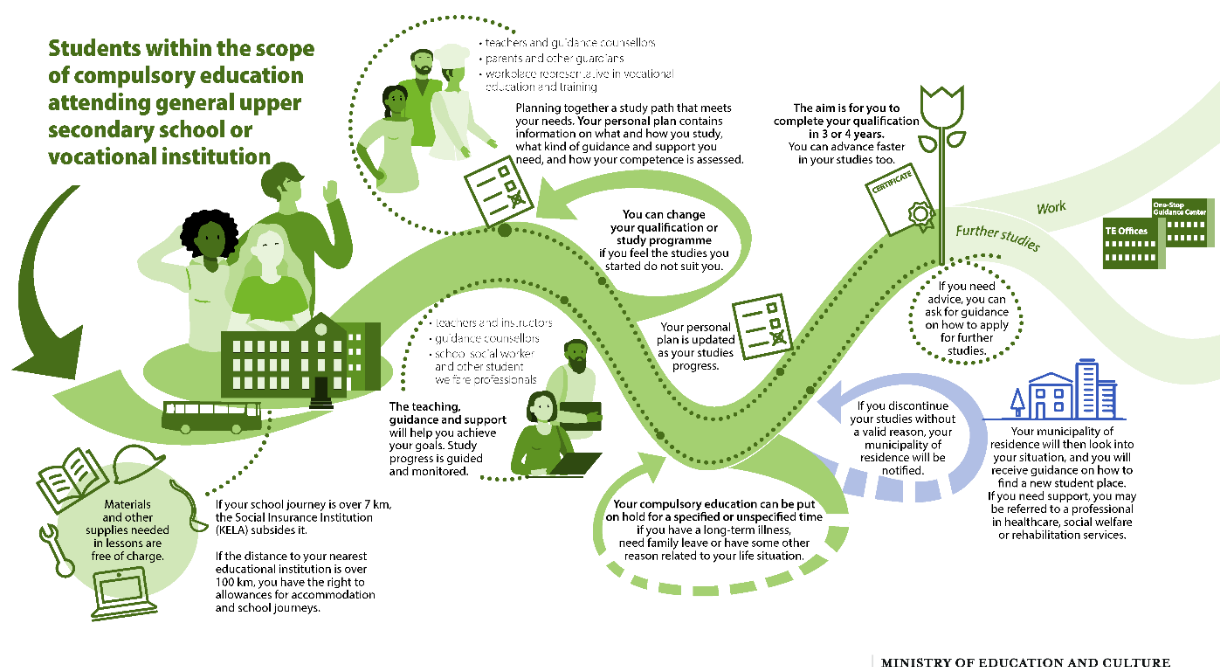
Several seminars were held for educational staff to ensure that they were properly briefed on the incoming changes and understand their new responsibilities. These included webinars designed for the different stakeholders involved in the reforms on:

- "Expanding compulsory education – where are we going?", delivered by the Ministry of Education and Culture (OKM) & the Finnish National Agency for Education (FNAE).
- "The expansion of compulsory education for special vocational schools and other education providers tasked with demanding special support" – delivered by the OKM.
- Webinar for municipalities on the guidance and control responsibilities related to the expansion of compulsory education – delivered by the OKM.
- "Questions and answers about compulsory education webinar: the training organiser's responsibility for guidance and supervision" – delivered by the OKM.
- Webinar for the organisers of basic education about the expansion of compulsory education' – delivered by the OKM.
- Webinars on the former topic, designed in turn for secondary education organisers, vocational educational providers and training organisers (Ministry of Education and Culture, n.d.[10]).

These webinars provided an opportunity for education providers to engage with the implementation of the new reforms, ask questions and ensure they were properly briefed on the reforms and their corresponding responsibilities.

Efforts were similarly made to ensure students, parents and guardians were properly briefed on the changes. A letter was sent to all students and parents which provided relevant detail on the reforms, what they would entail and how it would affect students. Information was presented in an easily understood graphic format.

Figure 5.2. Pathways and supports for students through upper secondary or VET



Source: Ministry of Education and Culture (OKM), Students within the scope of compulsory education attending gender upper secondary school or vocational institution, https://okm.fi/documents/1410845/122468998/Students-compulsory-education-EN.pdf/c50b7e39-d657-a95e-c616-3a584a8bbc94/Students-compulsory-education-EN.pdf?t=1654074938778 (accessed on 25 May 2023).

Box 5.4. Actions

- Establishment of expert group(s) to develop proposals for Government;
- establishing clarity of expectations re roles, responsibilities and possible impacts on practice, including cost analysis;
- enacting required legislation to underpin the initiative and its implementation;
- clear communication of the change and its implications to all stakeholders.

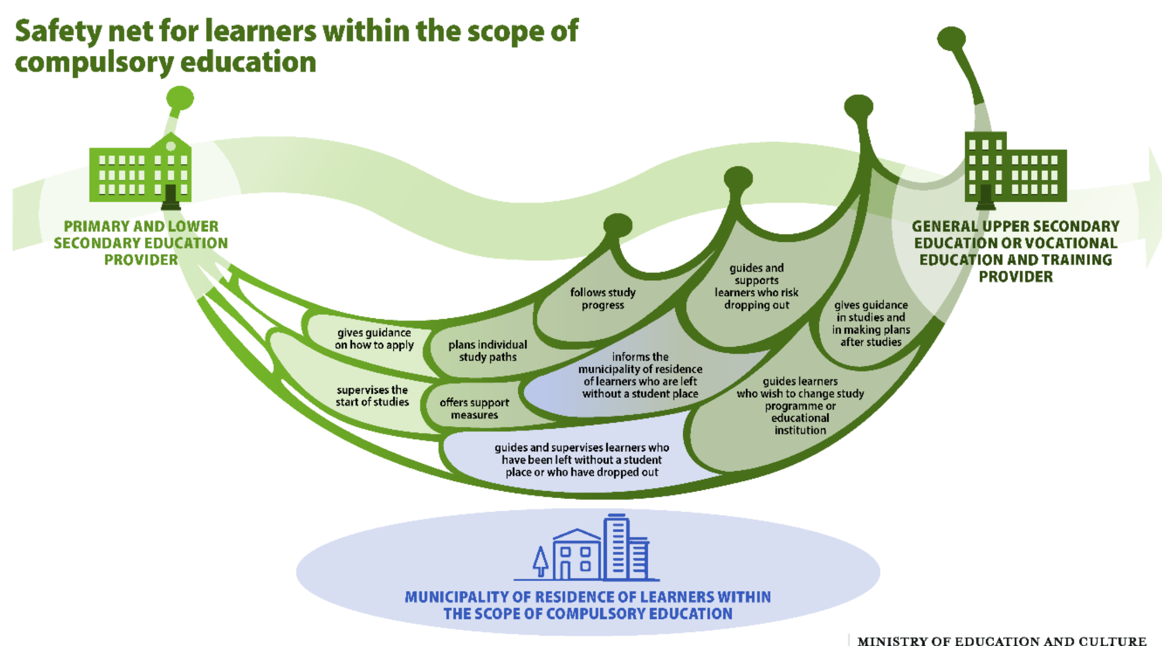
What supported successful implementation?

The extension of the compulsory education period was introduced in 2021 and it is too early to evaluate whether it will achieve the intentions which underpin the policy. However, it is possible to identify a number of aspects of the reform which are likely to support its successful implementation.

Development of a “safety net”

Given that the number of students at risk of not transferring following basic education or of dropping out from upper secondary or VET courses was a target group for this reform, the development of what the Department calls a ‘safety net’ is very positive. It sets out the support and guidance available to students and clarifies responsibilities at each stage of the student’s education journey. The aim is to provide wraparound, comprehensive support and ensure that the student is not outside of the support network at any stage. Underpinning it is an enhanced guidance and support service for young people under 18, particularly at the stage wherein they are most likely to be considering either applying for further studies or interrupting their studies. Responsibility for providing this level of supervision is built according to the principle of "*saatettu vaihto*", where the supervision responsibilities of one actor only ends when the supervision responsibilities of another actor begins. Basic education providers are obliged to ensure that a student applies for post-basic education, especially in the last year of basic education. Students must apply for post-basic education via the joint application process, where they can opt to apply for either upper secondary education, vocational education and training or transitional education, although they also can apply for courses outside of the joint application, such as apprenticeship training of foreign language training. If a student is unsuccessful in the joint application and does not secure a place in extended compulsory education, the basic education provider is obliged to continue to provide support to the student in the continuous application stage, even during the summer months after basic education ends. This responsibility ends only when the student has begun studying with another provider (Ministry of Education and Culture (OKM), 2020[2]).

Figure 5.3. Safety net for learners within the scope of compulsory education



Note: The safety net outlines specific responsibilities for student guidance and supervision distributed across primary and lower secondary education providers, general upper secondary education or vocational education and training providers and the municipality of residence of learners within the scope of compulsory education.
Source: Ministry of Education and Culture (OKM), Safety net for learners within the scope of compulsory education, https://okm.fi/documents/1410845/122468998/Safety+net-1-2-EN.pdf/5ed60305-1c94-ed34-17f0-01d69144b61b/Safety+net-1-2-EN.pdf?t=1654074935509 (accessed on 25 May 2023).

The aim is to ensure that all students access and successfully complete upper secondary education. If the student has not secured a place in extended compulsory education by a definitive date in August determined annually by the Ministry of Education and Culture, then the basic education provider must notify the municipality of residence of the student. The municipality then acquires the responsibility to supervise the student. This is initially through the investigation of the student's needs in collaboration with the student and their parents, guardian or another legal representative. The municipality is obliged to direct the student towards further education or other services as required. If a student does not voluntarily apply for upper secondary education, they will be assigned a place to study in VET (ibid).

Once a young person who has completed basic education officially begins studying with an upper secondary education provider, the responsibility for supervision is then transferred onto the education provider in question. The provider is then obliged to monitor the progress of the student and, if necessary, notify the student's parents or guardian if they do not carry out their studies in accordance with the study plan. Should a young person wish to leave extended compulsory education, the education provider must then investigate the possibilities for the student to study in a different learning environment or to apply for a different education, in addition to analysing the adequacy of the support services available to the student and whether further support is required. Should a young person leave extended compulsory education altogether, the education provider is then obliged to notify the municipality of residence (ibid).

The provision of additional guidance supports

As part of the extension of compulsory education, the Ministry of Education and Culture launched an extensive programme to support guidance counselling in primary education, lower secondary education, general upper secondary education and vocational education and training. Approximately EUR 19 million per year was allocated from 2021 onwards to support guidance counselling. In addition, EUR 6.3 million will be allocated for developing guidance counselling over the course of the programme. The project will continue until the end of 2022 (Ministry of Education and Culture (OKM), 2020[2]).

The programme for guidance counselling included three main objectives:

- improving and reinforcing the implementation and practices of guidance counselling and ensuring a continuation from the lower secondary to the upper secondary level;
- ensuring personal guidance that is tailored to the learners' needs;
- increasing educational equality by making opportunities in working life and in further studies visible to all.

The programme introduced a completely new, more intensive and personal approach to guidance counselling. Each year, it enabled tailored guidance counselling for 10 000 students who needed more intensive guidance counselling in the 8th and 9th grade of lower secondary education. It was provided on the grounds of an observed need, such as to motivate students to study, to provide additional support for career planning and planning for further studies, or to meet other needs (ibid).

The programme improved the quality and increased the amount of counselling available to students. The aim was to provide all students in general upper secondary education and in vocational education and training with the guidance and support they need at the right time and in all learning environments, so that there were fewer school dropouts and learning outcomes improve. Above all, the programme reinforced support and guidance for those who need it the most, such as students with learning difficulties or other learning challenges, students with mental health issues and students who are from an immigrant background and whose mother tongue is a foreign language.

Providers of comprehensive school education have a duty to intensify student guidance in years 8 and 9 of compulsory school with a focus on preparing students for the next phase of studies. This is the point at which students need to apply for upper secondary education, transition phase education or another kind of education within the scope of compulsory education. After completing basic education, if a student does not have the necessary skills to transfer directly onto upper secondary education or vocational education, they are able to fulfil their compulsory education requirements within transitional education, such as training which supervises degree education or Adult Education Centres aimed at those subjects to compulsory education (ibid).

Public consultation and stakeholder engagement

Achieving stakeholder acceptance of a reform is an essential prerequisite for successful implementation. In this case, an extensive programme of consultation and stakeholder engagement was carried out following the publication of the proposals and crucially, the Department responded to feedback and amended the proposals in light of it.

In December 2019, an online survey was conducted, and a variety of stakeholders were invited to provide feedback on the draft proposals; it received 1 159 responses from different stakeholders. In addition, various meetings and events were held with stakeholders to discuss the proposals and provide an opportunity for feedback. Four workshops were held across the country: three Finnish-language workshops in Helsinki, *Jyväskylä* and *Oulu* and one Swedish-language workshop in Helsinki. In February 2020, a research meeting was held on the themes of social exclusion among young people and how this could be prevented, general development of the labour market and future skill needs, young people's well-being

and the possible effects of extending compulsory education from the perspective of public finances. The following month, a roundtable was held under the leadership of the Minister of Education, wherein eleven providers of basic education, upper secondary general education, and vocational education of different sizes, were invited to discuss the proposals. The roundtable was also attended by representatives of eight different training providers (Ministry of Education and Culture (OKM), 2020[2]).

To ensure that the views of young people were listened to and reflected in the reforms, an online survey was conducted in April 2020. The survey was open for just over a month and received more than 5 000 responses from young people. A central issue raised was the need for more guidance and support at the transition stage to upper secondary education (ibid).

A further opportunity was also provided for a wide range of stakeholders to provide feedback on the draft proposals. The proposals were submitted for comments between May and mid-June 2020. A total of 262 responses were received. The majority of respondents supported the objectives of the proposed reform, but opinions diverged in regard to the best way in which these objectives could be achieved. For example, some respondents felt that broad continuation of young people in further studies could be better achieved by investing in guidance and services for young people. Others argued that appropriations should be directed towards enabling students to acquire adequate skills for further studies in basic education instead, or by extending study guidance, student welfare and other social and health care services for young people instead. In response, the Ministry assured the stakeholders that additional appropriations will also be allocated to these other measures (ibid).

Some consultation responses were critical of the cost estimates of the reforms. They believed that the additional appropriations required for teaching materials were under-estimated. The Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities suggested that the cost of teaching materials would be EUR 15 million and the cost of supervision EUR 4.4 million higher than the estimates outlined in the proposals; this was referred to by several municipalities in their responses. Responses also criticised that no cost estimates for alternative options were included in the initial draft of the proposals. While the cost estimates for teaching materials in the proposal were justified in principle, the Ministry assessed the concerns and made changes. As a result, the cost calculations of upper secondary school materials were slightly adjusted and appropriation for upper secondary general education rose by approximately EUR 2 million. Several municipalities also emphasised their concern that they must be fully reimbursed for associated costs, highlighting the financial impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. They also voiced concern that education providers could be forced to make savings, including increasing class sizes, if insufficient resources were allocated to them. In response, the Ministry assured that municipalities would be fully reimbursed for the costs from 100% state funding. In addition, the actual costs of upper secondary education and vocational education and training would be continued to be monitored annually and that any change in these costs would result in a reassessment of available funding (ibid).

Another concern raised in the consultation responses was the potential number of new tasks for education providers. For example, tasks resulting from procurement, storage, maintenance, reuse and distribution of teaching materials and the costs of new registration and supervision tasks. As a result of these concerns, cost estimates were increased by EUR 2 million for the procurement and storage of materials.

The extension of the free of charge obligation for extended compulsory education was also highlighted as a point of concern among consultation respondents. The length of time during which a student is eligible for free education was considered too long by some and others proposed that education should be free of charge dependent on family circumstances. Consultation responses also asked for further clarification on free provisions; for example, what constitutes free teaching materials in upper secondary education with a specific education task? In response, the Ministry emphasised the importance of a free right to apply for upper secondary education and regional access to education must be assured through authorisation to organise training, reflecting concerns over regional disparities in access to upper secondary education. The Ministry provided reassurance that, when considering the granting of a permit to organise education,

the regional and national availability of different forms of education would be properly considered (Ministry of Education and Culture (OKM), 2020[2]).

Regarding the new supervision responsibilities proposed, the notion of "*saatettu vaihto*" was widely supported, but the need for a national information system to support this was stressed. Thus, the development of a Compulsory Education Register was included in the revised proposal. Opinions on the legislation also diverged among providers of vocational education and training on the inclusion of provisions for specified weekly teaching hours for supervising training. It was argued that the training should take into account the student's needs at the time. On the other hand, other referral bodies argued that too much flexibility could mean a student does not receive sufficient teaching. Following assessment, the Ministry decided that the inclusion of provision hours was justified, as students on VET courses usually need teaching and guidance and self-study was not considered an appropriate way for the student to complete the training. However, it was acknowledged that providers should be able to deviate from the statutory number of teaching hours where necessary in accordance with the student's individual needs. One further criticism was raised that there were no proposed regulations on the eligibility requirements of teachers for VET so an amendment (Finlex Data Bank, 2021[11]) to the decree on eligibility conditions entered into force in August 2022 (ibid). This decree lays down provisions on the qualification requirements for principals and teachers and it recognises the eligibility of a person with sufficient work experience in both teaching and other teaching tasks referred to in the Act on Vocational Education.

The proposal to extend the period of compulsory education was also evaluated by the Council for the Evaluation of Legislation. The corresponding assessment provided by the Council praised the proposals for being well-written and of a high-quality. They were complimentary of the proposals for providing a clear and thorough idea of the aims of the proposed legislation and the most important proposals; in addition, the background of the current situation in which the proposals are created was also praised for being exceptionally well-done. The Council acknowledged that research, investigations and statistics were utilised with great skill in the proposals. However, they proposed that there should be information included on alternative options to the proposed extension of compulsory education and that the benefits and costs of these should be compared, to ensure that the line of action proposed is the most efficient and effective. As a result of this feedback, the decision was made to extend the assessment of alternative courses of action and include information on the cost-benefit analysis of such options (ibid).

Considering the societal benefits of extending compulsory education

The proposals circulated for consultation, and which eventually were considered by Government, paid careful attention to a cost-benefit analysis, thus ensuring that speculation on cost was carefully managed and grounded in realism. While inevitably causing costs in the short-term, research suggests that investing in improving the levels of education of young people can have significant long-term fiscal benefits. In 2018, the EPC report estimated that raising the compulsory school age to 18 years would provide a long-term fiscal benefit of EUR 140 million, although they emphasise that this is a long-term investment, as even after 15 years following the extension of compulsory education, the fiscal benefit would be less than EUR 60 million (Seuri, 2018[5]). Thus, investing in extending the compulsory school leaving age is presented as a strategic fiscal investment for the Finnish economy in the long-term.

It must be noted that direct assertions of the impact of education on economic growth in research is heavily dependent on the model used. For example, in traditional growth models, the impact of human capital has very little impact on economic growth; in empirical regression models, education has a significant direct impact on economic growth and in endogenous growth models, education has had an impact on growth both directly and indirectly (Ministry of Education and Culture (OKM), 2020[2]). Growth models traditionally measure human capital by the formal level of education but, more recently, it has become more common to use comparisons of learning outcomes as direct indicators of human capital (ibid).

According to an assessment by Hanushek and Wössmann in 2015, an improvement in learning outcomes in mathematics and science by 25 PISA points will increase long-term growth in Finland by 0.49% each year (Seuri, 2018[5]). If the extension of compulsory education is assumed to achieve an actual extension of education experience of 1.5 years, approximately 10% of the age group would improve their skills by about 45 PISA points (when a year of learning is about 30 points). Thus, the impact across the entire age group would be approximately 4.5 PISA points, which would increase economic growth by about 0.09% per year (Ministry of Education and Culture (OKM), 2020[2]).

Improving the education levels of young people can have further fiscal benefits. Young people with higher education levels have lower juvenile delinquency levels, which would mean a reduction in corrective services costs. Cost reductions are also likely to be seen in areas such as outreach youth work, labour market training and training initiatives such as the skills programme for young adults. In turn, improving young people's well-being is likely to reduce expenditure on social and health care services (Huttunen, 2018[12]).

As discussed in an earlier section, evidence suggests that keeping young people in education longer has a strong correlation with reducing youth unemployment. This, in turn, is likely to have a corresponding positive impact on public finances. Prior to this initiative, unemployed persons from the age of 16 were eligible for unemployment benefits. In 2019, more than EUR 4.5 million in unemployment benefits was paid to persons under the age of 18. The extension of compulsory education eliminates most of this cost as it will be rare that a young person under the age of 18 will have already completed an upper secondary qualification. In addition, the proposals will result in the increase of the age at which a person is entitled to unemployment insurance premiums, from 17 to 18 years of age. In 2019, 62 144 persons under the age of 19 received wages and salaries which were subject to unemployment insurance premiums, totalling a cost of approximately EUR 2.3 million in unemployment insurance premiums. Thus, by 2022, there will be a reduction of EUR 1 million in these costs, moving to full costs from 2023 onwards (Ministry of Education and Culture (OKM), 2020[2]).

Regarding the socio-economic consequences of these proposals, it is acknowledged that these are difficult to estimate, given the fact that they are dependent on so many external factors. However, there is a natural assumption that employment and income development will improve in the future as a result, which in turn results in higher tax revenues and lower social security expenditure, all of which are beneficial to public finances (ibid).

Successful implementation is a result of the interaction of several different factors that work together to create a coherent approach to system-wide change. Taken together, the actions discussed here go some way to ensuring consistency of understanding of the vision and objectives underpinning this significant change in educational provision in Finland, and that in turn, is a positive force for implementation.

Box 5.5. Success factors

- Recognition of the particular needs of vulnerable students and the provision of a safety net;
- extending the scope and range of guidance and supervision supports for students;
- engaging in, and responding to, a wide-ranging and open public consultation and evaluation of the proposal to extend the compulsory education period;
- clarifying the societal benefits of the proposal so that its contribution to achieving the aims of the Government's Education Policy Report (Government of Finland, 2021[4]).

Next steps

Effective and continuous monitoring of the reform to ensure its effectiveness was highlighted early on by the Ministry as an important objective. In August 2019, at the same time as the establishment of the project group and follow-up group, a monitoring group was established to ensure the effective implementation of the policy for extended education.

Shortly after the Act on Compulsory Education was passed, the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Finnish National Agency for Education (FNAE) jointly published a plan for monitoring the implementation of extended compulsory education from 2021 to 2024. This plan was produced in collaboration with the OKM and FNAE and had also been discussed in the project group and monitoring group. It outlines the responsibility of both the OKM and FNAE for the planning and implementation of the monitoring, which was supported by the monitoring group, the term of which ended on 21 December 2021. After this time, the OKM and FNAE committed to organising a regular webinar every six months, which would report on the progress of the implementation and monitoring to the group (Ministry of Education and Culture (OKM), 2020[2]).

The plan acknowledges the importance of drawing on external evaluation of the implementation, as well as the evaluation of the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre. In addition to the expected follow-ups, reports, studies and evaluations encouraged by the monitoring plan, information-based guidance and possible allocation of resources was provided to support research groups and researchers to investigate the success of the implementation. The Government's joint analysis, assessment and research body (VN TEAS) will conduct a study of the whole reform in 2024. Further external evaluation on the overall impacts of the reform, including the resulting impact on national employment, will be carried out once comprehensive information is available on the overall impacts of reform.

The plan sets out how monitoring will be carried out, according to themes which correspond to part of the proposal document:

1. application and admissions for those within the scope of compulsory education;
2. study guidance and engagement in studies;
3. teaching and guidance;
4. special needs support and other forms of support;
5. student well-being;
6. cost effects of the reform.

Evaluation will be carried out annually on applications and admissions for those within the scope of compulsory education, primarily considering the number of young people applying, receiving and accepting a study place. Special attention will be paid to persons entitled to special needs support, immigrants and students without a basic education certificate. If all students within the scope of compulsory education do not get a study place in all of the regions, the reasons for deviation will be analysed and subsequent solutions proposed.

Particular attention will be paid to new or already confirmed forms of study guidance introduced in response to the reform, concerning their quality, amount and resourcing, in addition to the allocation, relevance and adequacy of study guidance from the perspective of students. Attention will also be paid to the impact of the reform on the education of guidance counsellors, including the number of study places and competence needs. Quantitative monitoring will assess: intensified personal guidance counselling in basic education; applying and admissions to education; participation in education in transition phases and beginning studies in compulsory education after basic education. In addition, the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC) is expected to launch a qualitative evaluation of study guidance (Finnish Education Evaluation Centre, n.d.[13]). The first phase of this will assess the implementation of the reform as a whole and how it

has supported young people to pursue upper secondary education, alongside supporting their well-being. A corresponding interim report is expected to be published in 2023. The second phase of the research will assess the rate of completing an upper secondary qualification, the prevention of interruption of studies and the role of enhancing study guidance and well-being of students. A final report is expected in 2024 (ibid).

When monitoring teaching and guidance, an emphasis will be placed on ensuring there are professionals who can use both national languages, Finnish and Swedish. When assessing teaching and guidance in vocational education and training, the quality, amount and adequacy in different learning environments will be analysed. FINEEC have also carried out an evaluation of the realisation of individual learning pathways between 2021 and 2022, focusing on the individualisation, identification and recognition of prior learning and guidance and the realisation of choice for students.

As part of this evaluation, FINEEC will also assess the organisation of special needs support in upper secondary education and vocational education and training. Based on these results, an assessment will be made on whether further measures are required to ensure efficient special needs support. In addition, the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health collaborated to launch three reports between 2021 - 2022 which focus on three elements regarding special needs support: the current state of special needs support, the availability of services and support measures and proposals for the required measures.

There is also annual monitoring of the cost of the reform. This is in addition to a separate report investigating how education providers can ensure students have access to learning materials and tools free of charge for the duration of their education. The report was launched in autumn 2022 and is expected to be published in 2023 (ibid).

Developing such detailed and comprehensive monitoring plans, both internally and through the commission and encouragement of external monitoring, will ensure that the implementation of the reform is regularly reflected on. This will help ensure that measures are developed, if necessary, to drive successful implementation of the reforms so that all young people achieve an upper secondary education, as well as monitoring the impact of the policy.

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Notes

[1] An analysis in 2020 found that approximately 15% of Finns in all age groups did not possess an upper secondary education qualification, for example (Ministry of Education and Culture (OKM), 2020[2]).

6 Ireland: Enhancing and sustaining well-being through education

This case study explores how Ireland developed a *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice,* which describes how schools can best promote well-being through the provision of a whole-school, multi-component and preventative approach. By drawing on pre-existing networks and resources, developing a detailed implementation plan and fostering a collaborative approach to planning and execution, Ireland has developed a holistic, evidence-based and comprehensive well-being framework for children and young people, placing them as a leader in well-being promotion within schools and centres for education.

Introduction

This case study describes how Ireland developed a *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice* (Government of Ireland, 2018[1]) for schools and centres for education. The policy acknowledges the important socialising role of schools and that children are exposed to a range of influences and require support to make positive, responsible decisions relating to their health and well-being and the well-being of others. It describes how schools can best promote well-being through the provision of a whole-school, multi-component and preventative approach.

It is widely recognised that economic prosperity accounts for only one part of an individual's or a society's well-being (European Commission, 2019[2]). There is growing recognition that a wider range of factors impact quality of life. These include, for example, work-life balance, social connectedness, health and sense of purpose – what might be described as perceptions of well-being. From the perspective of education policy, research demonstrates that the social, emotional and behavioural components of school experience are as important contributors as the academic component to general well-being (O' Brien, 2009[3]). The promotion of well-being is central to Ireland's Department of Education (DES) mission to enable children and young people to achieve their full potential and contribute to Ireland's social, cultural and economic development. Schools are important settings for preparing children and young people to develop well-being and positive mental health, where emotional well-being may be understood as an educational end in and of itself.

Well-being enhances intrinsic motivation, decreases disciplinary problems, increases academic achievement, improves school satisfaction and leads to the flourishing of individuals, communities, and nations (Buecker et al., 2018[4]). Systems which wish to equip learners with the knowledge and skills that they need to achieve their potential and to participate fully in society and the economy must concern themselves with ensuring delivery of high-quality educational experiences that enhance the well-being of students. In Ireland, the DES conducted a review of existing practices in schools to support students' social and emotional development. It initiated a process to achieve alignment across those policies and actions and to address any gaps in provision. The *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice* that resulted recognises that the context of each school and classroom is different and that the needs of students will differ across those contexts. Therefore, it provides for flexibility at the level of the individual school within the guidance set out in an overarching framework encompassing existing, ongoing and developing work in this area.

What motivated change?

Government policy

Schools in Ireland play an important role in the promotion of well-being through a range of activities and approaches to support the academic, physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual development of students. Well-being promotion was and remains a government priority (Department of the Taoiseach, 2017[5]). The first *National Children's Strategy* was published in Ireland in 2000 (Department of Education & Department of Health, 2000[6]), followed by the country's first national policy framework for children and young people. *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* adopted a whole-child perspective, setting out that, "[c]hildren will be supported to enjoy the optimum physical, mental and emotional well-being" (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2014[7]).

The framework coordinates policy across government and establishes a set of commitments to achieve better outcomes for children and young people. It recognises that schools, youth and sports organisations play a vital role in the promotion of positive mental health and well-being, and that they can provide a safe and supportive environment for building life skills, emotional resilience and a strong sense of

connectedness to school and community. In response, it commits to the implementation of a whole-school approach to health and well-being to bring about a cultural focus on well-being as a basis for effective learning (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2014, p. 69[7]).

Concerns about the well-being of children and young people

Concerns over the well-being of children and young people in Ireland were a key motivation for the initiative. Whilst various international studies indicated a mixed picture, there were evident areas of improvement identified. For example, in a report comparing the international well-being of children and young people in different countries in the years 2013–14, children and young people in Ireland reported below average rates for life satisfaction (World Health Organisation, 2016[8]). The report found that, although they ranked below average for bullying others, they also ranked below average for liking school. In addition, school students reported high levels of feeling pressure from their schoolwork, ranking 3rd out of 42 countries for this factor - a distinct jump from a ranking of 10th in 2010 (World Health Organisation, 2016[8]).

The results of the OECD PISA 2015 findings highlighted a similarly high level of students reporting themselves as feeling schoolwork-related anxiety (OECD, 2017[9]). Across OECD countries, many students reported feeling anxiety about schoolwork and tests, at 64% of girls and 47% of boys. Such anxiety was reported as linked to the level of support provided by teachers, rather than the number of school hours or frequency of tests. In Ireland in particular, a significant number of students reported themselves as agreeing with a number of statements about schoolwork related anxiety; for example, 63% of students agreed with the statement that “even if I am well prepared for a test, I feel very anxious” and 46% agreed with the statement that “I get very tense when I study” (OECD, 2017[9]). Whilst the PISA findings demonstrated that most 15-year-olds in Ireland reported feeling satisfied with their lives - largely in line with the OECD average of 7.3 out of 10 students - girls and disadvantaged students were more likely to be dissatisfied (OECD, 2017[9]).

Circumstances such as family background and gender are significant influences on the well-being of children and young people in Ireland. In 2017-18, boys and girls from more affluent backgrounds reported significantly higher levels of self-rated health than their less affluent peers (World Health Organisation, 2020[10]). In addition, the longitudinal study *Growing up in Ireland*[1], which examines the lives and experiences of children in Ireland, found that gender and family circumstances had a significant impact on a child’s well-being (McNamara et al., 2021[11]).

Thus, at a time when the global community was raising concerns about the well-being of children and young people and the high anxiety levels experienced by students, concerns were also growing in Ireland. Although there was some variation across studies on how well-being issues in Ireland compared to the international situation, it was recognised that Ireland had distinct needs with respect to measuring, monitoring and improving the well-being of children and young people.

Misaligned views of well-being

Several studies flagged the prevalence of misaligned or competing interpretations of well-being across schools. One, *Growing Up in Ireland* by Nohill and Tynan, which explored the gap between the language of policy and the culture of schools concerning well-being, found three distinct definitions: one related to health, one related to the development of skills in students and one related to the development of empathy (Nohill and Tynan, 2019[12]).

Furthermore, teachers reported that while many elements of well-being - such as fostering a sense of belonging with the school, physical well-being or supporting students to cope with life stressors - were present, there was no formal structure to support well-being within the school. Instead, it was addressed on an ad-hoc basis. It was evident that there was a need for the whole school community to develop an

agreed on understanding of well-being, as well as a need for the development of nationwide Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for teachers on the topic of well-being (ibid).

The Nohill and Tynan study proposed that the development of a conceptual framework encompassing the multidimensional elements of well-being could be instrumental in supporting teachers to create a structured approach to the topic, responsive to the needs of students (ibid). Such an approach is also recommended in the *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice* (Government of Ireland, 2018[1]).

Box 6.1. Push factors

- Recognition that a child or young person's sense of well-being is fundamental to their ability to function in society and meet the demands of everyday life;
- government commitment to achieve better outcomes for children and young people;
- concerns about the well-being and mental health of children and young people;
- lack of a shared understanding of well-being and the contribution that can be made at school level.

What is the vision for well-being?

The Government of Ireland's *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice* is guided by five key principles:

- Child/young person-centred: the well-being needs and interests of children and young people are at the heart of the policy. This requires respecting and valuing the voice of children and young people and fostering their sense of belonging and connectedness to the school community.
- Equitable, fair and inclusive: children and young people are enabled to access equitable, fair and inclusive opportunities to develop their well-being according to their needs and individual contexts. This requires responsive and relevant well-being practices, tailored to the strengths of children and young people, school staff, families and communities.
- Evidence-informed: a focus on evidence-informed practice, bringing together local practice and expertise with national and international research, while acknowledging that best practice in one context may not be appropriate or feasible in another.
- Outcomes focused: promotion of continuous improvement practices and utilising outcomes data to guide practice.
- Partnership and collaboration: cross-departmental and cross-agency working (Government of Ireland, 2018[1]).

Through these principles, the *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice* aims to provide all children with the best foundation for their learning and development, support their social and emotional well-being, and promote engagement in their education.

Box 6.2. Vision

Within this context, the document sets out the vision of the Department of Education concerning well-being, that by 2025:

- the promotion of well-being will be at the core of the ethos of every school;
- all schools will provide evidence-informed approaches and support, appropriate to need, to enhance the well-being of all; and
- Ireland will be recognised as a leader in the promotion of well-being in schools and centres for education.

What opportunities existed?

The Department of Education was able to draw on the expertise of a number of established agencies during the policy development process in addition to learning from international best practice in the area of well-being.

Existing expertise

National Educational Psychological Service

To develop the *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice,* the Department of Education drew on the expertise of National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), a constituent section of DES. NEPS provides a school-based, educational psychological service to all primary and post primary schools. NEPS' primary role is to promote and support the well-being, and the academic, social and emotional competence of all learners, having particular regard for children with special educational needs (SEN) and those at risk of marginalisation due to disadvantage (Department of Education, 2023[13]).

NEPS achieves its objectives through working at multiple levels within the education system, from individual pupil level, through to school, community, departmental and inter-departmental levels. NEPS' approaches across these systems range from individual casework, to developmental, preventative and targeted early interventions, to multi-level collaboration.

NEPS works on behalf of individual children experiencing learning and/or social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. It provides a casework service with a collaborative problem-solving approach which includes assessment, case formulation, intervention planning, monitoring and review. Students, parents or guardians and teachers are centrally involved in the process. Casework may be direct – when the psychologist works directly with the child and their teachers/parents – or indirect – when the psychologist works consultatively with the parent/teacher who are the key agents of change in a child's life.

NEPS engage with support and development work, which refers to a range of activities delivered to teachers/staff on site in individual schools and to teachers/staff from multiple schools in a local/regional area off site in education centres or external venues. NEPS also provides assistance to all schools that experience critical incidents.

NEPS psychologists' skills base includes psychological theory and practice as applied to child and adolescent development, learning and cognition, behaviour, motivation, mental health, and the needs of SEN pupils, including those at risk of marginalisation. All of NEPS' work is underpinned by psychological theory and practice and relevant legislation, and is guided by governmental and DES policy and international best practice in the delivery of psychological services in education.

The Inspectorate

Schools were also supported by the involvement of the Inspectorate, a special division within the DES, that carries out school inspections to ensure that educational standards are maintained. All state primary and post-primary schools in Ireland must be inspected by the DES on a regular basis, as established by the Education Act (1998). In addition to carrying out inspections, the Inspectorate gives advice to those working in the education system and contributes to education policy development.

Whole School Evaluations (WSE) complements school inspections. The WSE has been developed using a partnership approach. It includes pre-evaluation meetings with staff and management, meeting with parents' associations, school and classroom visits, the preparation of a draft report, post-inspection meetings with staff and management, the finalisation of the WSE report and issuing the report to the school. Inspection reports for individual schools and Whole School Evaluations can be found on the Department of Education's website.

Professional Development Service for Teachers

The Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) is the country's largest single support service offering professional learning opportunities to teachers and school leaders in a range of pedagogical, curricular and educational areas.

The PDST was established in September 2010 as a generic, integrated and cross-sectoral support service for schools. The establishment of the organisation was synonymous with the amalgamation and restructuring of a number of stand-alone services which now operate under the PDST providing their services to schools in the context of PDST's overall vision and mission. The PDST provides continuing professional development and support through its team of teachers, primary and post-primary, seconded from their schools to work with the PDST. The PDST Technology in Education team brings technical and pedagogical knowledge and skills to the organisation to provide a wide array of supports for schools - see www. pdsttechnologyineducation.ie.

The PDST support teachers as reflective practitioners by providing a range of professional development opportunities and supports that enable teacher learning, collaboration and evidence-based practice with an emphasis on:

- curriculum and pedagogy;
- learning and teaching methodologies;
- school improvement and school self-evaluation;
- school leadership, culture and leading learning;
- student and teacher welfare;
- information and communications technology.

The overall goal for the PDST is to be widely acknowledged as an innovative, responsive and trusted provider of CPD for teachers and schools.

Guidance Counselling Service

The guidance counselling service in post-primary schools was established in 1966. Guidance is a whole school activity where each school forms a team in which the Guidance Counsellor has a pivotal role: to collaboratively design and develop a whole-school Guidance plan as a means of supporting the needs of all students.

Guidance in schools refers to a range of learning experiences provided in a developmental sequence that help students to develop self-management skills that lead to effective life choices and decisions. It

encompasses the three separate but interlinked areas of personal and social development, educational guidance and career guidance.

The role of the Guidance Counsellor (a qualified post-primary teacher with an additional professional postgraduate qualification in guidance counselling) is complex and integrated. It involves a variety of activities including teaching, curriculum design, and guidance counselling. The Guidance Counsellor is a pivotal person in the establishment and operation of student support systems within a school. In addition, the Guidance Counsellor brings expertise to support the school's well-being planning.

International research and best practice

International research and best practice provided key guidance during the design phase of the Framework. The research demonstrates that the most beneficial and evidence-informed approach to the promotion of well-being is a multi-component, preventative, whole-school approach, which includes both universal and targeted interventions. Such an approach has been proven internationally to produce a variety of important benefits for children and young people, such as improved behaviour and learning, increased social inclusion and improvements to mental health (Department of Education & Department of Health, 2000[6]; Weare and Gray, 2003[14]).

In determining the specific components of a whole-school approach, research also informed the Framework. Viner's work on the nature of a school environment and connectedness as a key factor in the success of well-being promotion, for example, was relevant (Viner et al., 2011[15]). This can be facilitated through factors such as fostering warm relationships, developing pupil and teacher autonomy, encouraging participation and ensuring clarity concerning boundaries, rules and positive expectations.

International evidence that both universal and targeted support in schools can be key in preventing and addressing anxiety and low mood for many children and young people was considered when developing advice on which well-being interventions should be promoted at school (Government of Ireland, 2018[1]; Werner-Seidler et al., 2017[16]; Das et al., 2016[17]; Ahlen, Lenhard and Ghaderi, 2015[18]).

Research findings from international organisations such as the OECD also provided key insights. For example, research by the OECD on the relationship between the role of the teacher and children and young people's well-being is referenced in the document (OECD, 2017[9]). It outlines how the relationship that a teacher develops with a student is paramount to well-being development, particularly considering that access to "one good adult" who can guide and support a young person during times of vulnerability is identified as a protective factor.

Furthermore, the well-being of staff is also crucial so that staff are motivated and able to support the well-being of their students, model resilience, and provide support to cope with challenges and adapt to change (ibid). This notion is highlighted throughout the *Framework* as a key indicator of well-being (Government of Ireland, 2018[1]).

Building on existing practice in relation to well-being in schools

A curriculum for Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) (NCCA, n.d.[19]) was introduced to the primary school curriculum in 1999 and to post-primary schools in 2003. SPHE provides opportunities to develop key life skills which can have far-reaching effects on the ability of children and young people to cope with and contribute positively to everyday situations in school, at home and in their communities.

By helping students to develop the skills to care for themselves and others and to make informed decisions about their health, personal lives and social development, SPHE is an important contributor to well-being. It enables students to create and maintain supportive relationships and become active and responsible citizens in society. It is a core subject on the Irish curriculum, meaning that all students attend SPHE lessons.

The implementation of SPHE as a curricular subject combined with the development of a whole-school positive ethos play a key role in the development of emotional health and well-being in post-primary schools (Department of Education, 2021c[20]) and established a supportive context for the introduction of the *Framework* in 2018.

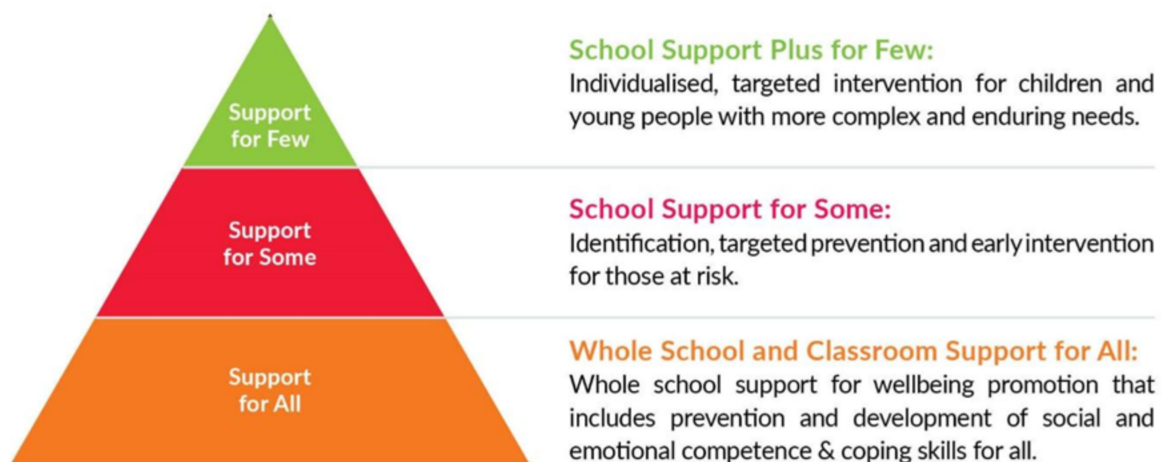
At lower secondary level, all students who started from September 2017 onwards undertake an area of learning called Wellbeing (NCCA, 2021[21]). Wellbeing crosses the three years of the Junior Cycle programme (the first stage of the education programme for post-primary schools (Government of Ireland, 2018, p. 14[1])) and builds on substantial work already taking place in schools in support of students' well-being. Well-being in Junior Cycle is about young people feeling confident, happy, healthy and connected. Updated NCCA *Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines* (2021[21]) aim to support schools in planning and developing a coherent well-being programme that builds on the understandings, practices and curricula for well-being already existing in schools.

Any approach to developing and sustaining the well-being of children and young people must acknowledge their vulnerability at different stages of their development. Thus, their well-being may vary depending on time and context (Government of Ireland, 2018[1]). Weare and Nind, (2011[22]) found that adopting a balance between a universal approach to well-being and more targeted interventions aimed at higher risk students was more effective than either approach alone.

The *Framework* was able to draw upon the concept of a continuum of support, already established in schools. This continuum is designed to support schools to address all educational needs, including well-being, within three levels: *Whole-school and Classroom Support for All*, *School Support for Some* and *School Support Plus for Few*, as detailed in the below image.

It recognises that individual children and young people can have different needs at different times and that children and young people at greater risk and with greater needs may require more targeted support in addition to the wider support provided for all (Government of Ireland, 2018[1]). The continuum of support has been consistently utilised and modelled by the DES across different educational initiatives (Department of Education & National Educational Psychological Service, 2007[23]; Department of Education & National Educational Psychological Service, 2010a[24]; Department of Education & National Educational Psychological Service, 2007[23]). This continuum of support is highlighted as an overarching principle within the *Framework* and a key source of guidance for school staff in well-being provision (Government of Ireland, 2018[1]).

Figure 6.1. The Continuum of Support



Source: Government of Ireland (2018), *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018–2023*, https://assets.gov.ie/24725/07cc07626f6a426eb6eab4c523fb2ee2.pdf (accessed on 20 July 2023), p14.

It is recognised that, while a school can provide significant support, some children and young people will still need additional help from specialist support services outside the school.

Drawing on established programme practice

Well-being has been an area of focus within Irish education for some time. As such, existing initiatives, structures and knowledge within this area could be drawn upon when developing the *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice*. For example, *Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* was published by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment in 2017 and provided a key source of reference in the development of the *Framework* (NCCA, 2017[25])[2]. Aistear outlines four interconnected themes of physical and psychological learning and development: well-being, identity and belonging, communicating and exploring and thinking (Nohill and Tynan, 2019[12]). Aistear outlines the ways in which adults can support children's learning and development across these themes and many of these ideas are reflected in the *Framework*.

The 2013 *Wellbeing in Post Primary Schools* and the 2016 *Wellbeing in Primary Schools*, which were developed in partnership with the DES, Department of Health and the Health Service Executive (HSE) outlined key actions that schools can undertake to promote well-being within schools. Many of these can be identified within the vision set out by the *Framework*; for example, adopting a whole-school approach to health promotion, building positive relationships between teachers and students and facilitating access to CPD for school staff on the promotion of well-being.

The existence of a robust and established school self-evaluation (SSE) process (Department of Education, 2021e[26]), introduced in 2012, was also a supportive factor. SSE is a collaborative, reflective process of internal school review, which requires schools to gather evidence about their teaching and learning practices, assess the findings, understand their strengths and weaknesses and then create a self-evaluation report and improvement plan (Department of Education, 2021e[26]). Schools were familiar with a six-step self-evaluation process and so could easily adapt to the focus of the *Framework* on self-reflection, monitoring and assessment concerning well-being initiatives.

Approaches which engage all school staff collaboratively have been shown to enhance professional development by sharing expertise and learning and building shared ownership. Thus, the *Framework* speaks to how collaborative structures in schools, such as student support teams, supportive consultation models and reflective practices, can be applied to the improvement of their own systems (Government of Ireland, 2018[1]).

A range of support is in place to help schools with the SSE process, including assistance from the Inspectorate and the PDST, online resources including a catalogue of well-being resources, a directory of relevant continuous professional development opportunities, presentations, short video clips and materials created by best practice schools (Department of Education, 2021a[27]). The *Framework* integrates the well-being planning process at school level with the existing SSE process so that existing materials, such as the website for primary and post-primary schools and the update newsletter, that had been designed to support schools with the original SSE initiative also support the implementation of the *Framework* in schools.

In addition, the quality framework used for school self-evaluation, *Looking at our School,* provides a holistic view of learning in schools and recognises well-being as both an enabler and an outcome of learning (Department of Education & Inspectorate, 2016a[28]; Department of Education & Inspectorate, 2016b[29]). It highlights the importance of children and young people developing a broad range of skills, competencies and values which support active citizenship, lifelong learning and personal well-being. It also emphasises

the importance of developing a positive, secure and healthy culture which supports the holistic development of children and young people (ibid).

Box 6.3. Existing Opportunities

- Significant in-house experience of supporting the well-being of children and young people;
- using international research and best practice to inform development of policy;
- building on existing practice in relation to well-being in schools;
- capitalising on the experience of implementing established programmes.

What actions were taken?

Assigning responsibility; establishing a collaborative network

The Minister of Education allocated responsibility for the development of the *Framework* to the NEPS, who convened an interdepartmental group, including representatives from other relevant divisions, to support the identification of already available resources and programmes and to identify policy priorities.

Given the government's commitment to developing and sustaining the well-being of its citizens, there were a number of other government departments which provided guidance and direction. These included the Department of Health, the Health Promotion Unit in the Health Service Executive (HSE) and the Department for Children and Youth Affairs, which had overall responsibility for developing a unified framework of policy, legislation and service provision across government for children and young people. Connecting these departments and their agencies facilitated collaborative networking, increasing the likelihood of efficient and coherent policy development.

Extensive review of existing resources

As noted above, the *Framework* was built on a strong pre-existing foundation for policy development. A wide range of official DES guidance on well-being was available and curriculum programmes such as the SPHE programme were well-established. Resources on matters ranging from mental health, internet safety, bullying, and healthy eating to student voice and inclusion was provided by DES, its agencies, support services, other government departments and their agencies and by the HSE to assist the promotion of well-being across school communities.

An important first step in the development of the *Framework* was to conduct an audit of all existing materials and programmes. This work began in Q3 2018 and was completed by Q2 2019. A consequent gap analysis followed, which aimed to provide recommendations and provisions for the implementation of the priority actions to embed clear pathways to support schools and ensure that resources were made available to all schools and centres for education to support well-being. Consequently, best practices guidance and resources were gathered and, where gaps were found, work was undertaken to establish new resources in these areas to support schools. These were catalogued for primary and post-primary schools and are updated as appropriate (Department of Education, 2021a[27]).

In addition, schools could, and did, draw on an extensive range of speakers, facilitators and external programmes to supplement the work being done in schools. Mindful of the responsibility at school level to protect students at all times from any potentially harmful, inappropriate or misguided resources,

interventions or programmes, the DES provided guidance on how schools should engage with external resources. Guidance emphasised that the qualified classroom teacher is the best placed professional to work sensitively and consistently with students and they can have a powerful impact on influencing student attitudes, values, and behaviour in all aspects of well-being education. Nevertheless, programmes and/or external facilitators can play a role in supplementing, complementing and supporting a comprehensive approach to well-being promotion, so the DES also issued advice to schools on how to engage a facilitator or choose a particular programme.

Framework development

The next step by the NEPS team was to design the various stages of the framework development, starting with success indicators for a school-based well-being programme (Government of Ireland, 2018[1]). These comprise a set of indicators which schools and centres for education are expected to pursue and which can guide the development and promotion of their own wellbeing initiatives, and they focus on four areas:

- culture and environment;
- curriculum (teaching and learning);
- policy and planning;
- relationships and partnerships.

For example, in the first area, one indicator is that "[c]hildren, young people and staff experience a sense of belonging and feel safe, connected and supported." In the fourth area, on relationships and partnerships, one indicator is that "[c]hildren and young people, their parents and other external partners are actively involved in well-being promotion within the school community".

The indicators of success are very general and are further expanded into a set of Statements of Effective Practice, presented as a series of descriptor statements. These are designed to support schools to identify their own strengths and areas for improvement within well-being promotion, as well as supporting them to continuously monitor and assess their progress and outcomes in this area.

The statements provide a set of standards for well-being promotion across the Continuum of Support at the whole-school preventative level and at the targeted and individualised levels (Government of Ireland, 2018[1]). These statements act as key reference tools, which help to ensure a standardised approach to implementing and reviewing well-being promotion in schools.

Using the SSE process, schools are required to initiate a well-being promotion review and development cycle. This six-step process is intended to support schools to identify the specific well-being support needs of their students, consulting with children and young people as well as their parents. Schools can use the statements to support them in identifying strengths and areas of improvement and to inform their well-being promotion initiatives and improvement plans (Government of Ireland, 2018[1]). They are encouraged to engage with the Statements of Effective Practice, but also to adapt and design statements according to their own needs and context. They should be utilised in addition to the range of supports and programmes offered by the Department and other agencies to support wellbeing promotion in schools (Government of Ireland, 2018[1]).

The intention is that the school's review and development process using the *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice* provides context-specific guidance to assist in planning for the further enhancement of whole-school approaches to well-being promotion.

Figure 6.2. The Framework for Practice

Source: Government of Ireland (2018), *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018–2023*, https://assets.gov.ie/24725/07cc07626f6a426eb6eab4c523fb2ee2.pdf (accessed on 20 July 2023), p37.

The *Statements of Effective Practice* also provide a mechanism for measuring progress at school level. The *Framework* acknowledges that measuring progress in well-being is difficult. Unlike subjects such as maths and literacy, personal well-being cannot be definitively tested. It fluctuates over time and according to different contexts. However, measuring well-being within a system can give an indication of the effectiveness of initiatives, highlight the areas for improvement and demonstrate the ability of schools to reflect on its systems. Therefore, the statements provide measures of success which can support schools in their evaluation of their well-being promotion work. Schools are encouraged to consider which measures are most appropriate for their individual context and to harness the opinions and views of a variety of stakeholders during the process (Government of Ireland, 2018[1]). Additionally, the DES is committed to identifying and establishing clearer ways of measuring well-being into the future.

Development of an implementation plan

Recognising the need for a multi-faceted and comprehensive approach to well-being alongside more interdepartmental collaboration across government, a detailed implementation plan of high-level actions within relevant departments was developed (ibid).

This plan is intended to fulfil the initial programme of work and to identify areas where further work should be carried out to enhance well-being promotion in schools and centres for education. The initial programme of work includes enhancing existing structures that support well-being implementation, coordinating the work of support services, clarifying roles and responsibilities, building capacity in schools for well-being promotion and promoting communities of practice and a collaborative culture.

The plan outlines seven high-level actions to fulfil this initial programme of work, including enhancing the alignment of structures and practices within the DES and between other relevant departments to improve collaborative working and to ensure a coordinated implementation of the *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice.* For each of these high-level actions, the *Framework* includes a set of sub-actions detailing further steps which contribute to the achievement of the larger goal. To ensure clarity regarding roles and the expected timeline, each sub-action also has expected start date and delivery dates, and specifies which government department or agency is responsible (Government of Ireland, 2018[1]).

Building capacity in schools and centres for education

An important part of the implementation plan is the provision of professional support for schools and individual teachers. Careful consultation with existing professional development services resulted in the development of programmes to build capacity in schools to promote well-being. This involved planning for and implementing a national rollout of a professional development mechanism to support staff to engage with and embed a self-evaluation well-being promotion process that builds professional capacity and collaborative cultures. Simultaneously, an aligned, comprehensive and easily accessible programme of support for all schools to address school-identified well-being promotion needs was developed.

In addition, there was a commitment in the implementation plan to develop a research-based framework for the evaluation of CPD, which was completed and recently published in May 2023.

Box 6.4. Actions

- Establishing a working group and assigning responsibility for development
- auditing existing resources and supports to achieve alignment and ensure efficiencies
- developing a clear Framework, with key areas, indicators of success and Statements of Effective Practice
- designing a comprehensive implementation plan
- establishing relevant supports to build capacity in schools.

What supported success?

Taking an inter and cross-departmental collaborative approach

One of the key actions outlined by the DES was focused on strengthening and aligning current structures within and outside the department to ensure coordinated implementation of the *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice*.

Developing a linked approach to implementation, which fosters greater inter and cross-departmental collaboration, in addition to wider stakeholder engagement, contributed to the successful implementation of the initiative. This allowed the DES to harness expertise, create stakeholder buy-in and ensure a consistent and coordinated approach to both the implementation of the *Framework* and to wider departmental initiatives in the area of well-being. This in turn was supported by the early development and publication of an implementation plan which clearly outlined the roles and responsibilities of different actors involved, including the expected timeline by which actions were expected to be initiated and completed.

The establishment of an inter-agency group also facilitated the alignment of a comprehensive body of well-being supports to school communities. This group included the department support service and agencies as well as the HSE services. The group ensured:

- the sharing of information on well-being support for school communities;
- clear and consistent messages from the DES to schools to support well-being;
- a channel through which challenges in supporting well-being in schools can be addressed;
- that the work of the Department's *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice* would progress; and

- monitoring of progress on cross-agency actions in the area of well-being to inform recommendations.

Building necessary administrative structures

A new Wellbeing Office (Tithe an Oireachtais: Houses of the Orireachtas, 2020[30]) was established by NEPS to support the implementation of the *Framework*. A steering committee within the DES was given responsibility for oversight for the implementation, coordination and review of the initiative. This committee was composed of representatives from the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Unit, the Teacher Education Section, the Inspectorate, Parents Learners Unit, Social Inclusion Unit and Special Education and was coordinated by NEPS (ibid).

In addition, a Wellbeing Implementation Group was created. The implementation group is responsible for leading the implementation and monitoring the work of the initiative, and provides regular progress reports to the steering committee.

Assigning responsibility and building the necessary administrative structures is a key step in ensuring proper coordination across and within departments, and it can also streamline operations by avoiding duplication of work.

Providing professional development to build capacity

The implementation plan included a number of actions to build capacity within schools to achieve the vision of the *Framework*. Key among these were those which targeted the professional development of school leaders and teachers.

To develop the required professional development resources for schools, the DES worked with 30 schools (10 post primary and 20 primary) in an action-research project to support the implementation of the *Framework*. The work was led by the PDST in collaboration with the Junior Cycle for Teachers support service and NEPS (Tithe an Oireachtais: Houses of the Orireachtas, 2020[30]). The PDST also collaborated with the National Council for Special Education to assess how CPD should be offered to special schools. The findings of these two projects informed the design and implementation of national CPD programmes.

A directory of well-being CPD tailored to primary schools and post-primary schools was published on the government website and circulated to schools (Department of Education, 2021c[20]; Department of Education, 2021d[31]). It provides an overview of CPD opportunities provided by the DES, its agencies and support services, set out under each of the four key areas of well-being promotion noted in Section 5 above. The directory also provides information on which department, agency or support service provides the CPD and how schools and staff can access the programmes (Department of Education, 2021c[20]).

Examples of the CPD opportunities provided include programmes which address classroom relationships, anti-bullying, SPHE, suicide prevention, and school leadership. For example, the Incredible Years Teacher Classroom Management Training is an evidence-based programme for teachers focused on strengthening management strategies, improving classroom climate and fostering home-school relationships to support children’s social, emotional and academic competence and reduce classroom aggression and disruptive behaviour.

The CPD opportunities available are extensive and provided through a variety of media, to ensure that opportunities are easily accessible, cater to a variety of learning preferences and time commitments, and cover a broad range of topics. For example, opportunities range from one-hour online programmes to multi-day in-person programmes and cover a range of target groups, from all school staff to those with specialised roles.

Additional support for schools

Student support teams – overarching teams focused on progressing actions for the welfare and well-being of all students – are central to the whole-school, multi-component, preventative approach to well-being outlined by the *Framework*. Consequently, all schools were encouraged to introduce, develop or review student support team structures as part of the well-being promotion process (European Commission, 2019[2]; Government of Ireland, 2018[1]).

Focused support was extended to 20 disadvantaged post-primary schools participating in the DEIS scheme[3] to support the development of student support teams within the schools. Following this work guidelines were reviewed and published in 2021, offering extensive guidance to all schools on establishing, developing or reviewing student support teams within post-primary schools (Department of Education, 2021f). Teacher professional learning has now expanded to all post primary schools in the country which includes in school visits by NEPS to support the development or review of teams. Work has commenced to pilot a similar initiative in large primary schools.

Numerous studies have shown that, above all other factors, it's the teacher in the classroom who inspires, cultivates and enthuses learning. Teacher well-being is also linked to student well-being, and so attending to the well-being needs of teachers is important. Stressed or burnt-out teachers have poorer relationships with students and the quality of their teaching decreases. Throughout the *Framework*, the well-being of school staff is highlighted as a protective factor and key to the well-being of children and young people in, for example, the Statements of Effective Practice. The DES has committed to facilitating a review of the current range of well-being support available to staff to ensure best practice in early intervention and prevention for supporting positive occupational health and well-being.

Through establishing a clear system of support for schools on well-being promotion, including resources and best practice guidance, schools are supported in the implementation process and can build capacity to develop and monitor well-being promotion initiatives independently. The integration of the well-being planning process with the SSE process provides schools with a mechanism to tailor their well-being initiatives and programmes according to their own needs and contexts and those of their students and staff.

Schools are free to identify those CPD inputs which are most relevant to their individual circumstances and to devise their own well-being programme, within parameters (Government of Ireland, 2018[1]). This autonomy promotes communities of practice and collaborative cultures within and across schools and encourages innovation and creativity in improving outcomes and experiences for children and young people.

Alignment with other well-being initiatives

One factor which was significant in the successful implementation of the initiative was its alignment with other initiatives and policies in the area of well-being in education, particularly curricular reform.

In the same year that the *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice* document was being finalised, another significant education reform around well-being was announced. In 2017, as previously mentioned, well-being was introduced as a mandatory, standalone area of learning in Junior Cycle (Department of Education, 2015[32]). The Framework for Junior Cycle was introduced in 2015 and reflected an increased focus on well-being, outlining the aim that well-being would be introduced as a standalone area of learning from 2017. This new area of learning is intended to provide learning opportunities to support the physical, social and emotional well-being of students, enabling them to develop life-skills and a sense of belonging and connectedness with their communities and schools. A school's well-being programme incorporates learning that was traditionally included in subjects such as Physical Education, Social, Personal and Health Education and Civic, Social and Political Education as well as any additional inputs the school chooses (ibid).

Other curricular changes currently underway also acknowledge the importance of well-being. For example, work is currently ongoing to update the SPHE curriculum in the Senior Cycle. Following the publication of the *Senior Cycle Review: Advisory Report* by the NCCA in March 2022, which considers the views of teachers, students, parents and stakeholders on reform of the Senior Cycle, the need for scoping new curriculum components was highlighted as a key action (NCCA, 2022b[33]). Supported by NCCA's *Review of RSE in primary and post-primary schools* in 2019, which provides recommendations for redeveloping SPHE, a number of proposals were outlined, considering status of the subject and its time allocation, content, and continuity between systems (NCCA, 2019[34]). A redeveloped Senior Cycle specification is expected to be available for public consultation later in 2023, following the publication of a background paper in October 2022.

The evident alignment between the *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice* and curriculum developments in the area of well-being ensures a comprehensive, full-system approach to improving well-being promotion across schools, with corresponding initiatives supporting each other and providing consistency and clarity for those involved.

A detailed implementation plan

Developing and publishing a detailed implementation plan played a significant role in its success. Clarity regarding roles and expectations were established in a detailed implementation plan, which outlined the sub-actions to be taken, who was responsible for carrying them out and the expected timeline to which they should be completed ensured that clear roles and expectations were established (Government of Ireland, 2018[1]).

The DES is committed to monitoring and evaluating the *Framework*. At school level, there is a commitment to develop a framework for evaluation of well-being promotion in schools (ibid). At national level, the implementation plan notes the intention to work with international partners to develop an efficient framework for evaluating the initiative, for example with the OECD, who will be collecting data and publishing an evaluation (ibid).

Effective monitoring and evaluation are key to the success of the initiative. By highlighting strengths and areas of improvement, the DES will be able to identify any necessary amendments to ensure long-term success.

Box 6.5. Success factors

- Shared ambitions across government departments and their agencies for the contribution that education can make to individual and societal well-being;
- an efficient and effective administrative structure to lead implementation;
- comprehensive professional development programmes to build capacity at school level;
- flexibility and autonomy at school level to identify and plan for local well-being promotion needs;
- coherence between the *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice* and curriculum development;
- a robust and detailed implementation plan.

Reflections

The development and implementation of a holistic, evidence-based and comprehensive well-being framework for children and young people places Ireland as a leader in well-being promotion within schools and centres for education. While this initiative is still relatively new and, thus, comprehensive monitoring and evaluation of the success of its implementation is still underway, early feedback from schools is positive. Many school leaders and teachers are happy with the training on well-being promotion offered by PDST for school staff, in addition to the range of well-being resources developed to support schools.

As with all transformative education initiatives, there were a number of challenges which arose. It is useful to reflect on these. For example, although the initiative's cross-departmental collaborative approach aided successful implementation, achieving the full alignment of structures within the DES took longer than expected. The development of a comprehensive structure which utilised expertise and experience from different agencies also led to the unintentional duplication of provision of resources from departmental services.

Wider contextual factors also provided some challenge. For example, during the development process of the initiative, there was cyclical change of government ministers, which in turn resulted in change in policy focus. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on education systems worldwide and Ireland was no exception: rollout of policies and training was interrupted by the pandemic and significant changes had to be made to the teaching and learning environment as a result.

In addition, many schools struggled with initiative overload due to the fact that they were already making active efforts to improve the school environment and student experience on a variety of issues. Thus, many schools found it difficult to prioritise well-being as an initiative whilst juggling many other priorities and projects. On the other hand, the pandemic highlighted concerns around children and young people's well-being, leading to the issue moving further up the priority list for more schools in recent years.

Providing space for and facilitating consultation in advance of publication proved to be an important determinant of success. Stakeholder buy-in is crucial to the success of such an initiative and it is important that specific attention is paid to ensuring that the student voice in particular is heard, and that it is emphasised as being at the centre of the process. Another key lesson is the need to have strong processes in place to ensure alignment with other departmental policies, in order to ensure a holistic, coherent approach across policies.

The well-being initiative is still early in its implementation and a number of areas for further work have already been highlighted. For example, a new pilot initiative focused on counselling in primary schools was

recently announced. While many goals of the implementation plan have already been achieved, the context under which it was originally developed has changed and, thus, a new revised plan which is adapted to the context and needs of today is required. It is imperative that well-being is kept as a high priority on the government agenda and understood as critical both internally and across departments, and that it is not deemed to be something that has now been 'achieved' through this initiative. Well-being must be prioritised and invested in over the long term and further adaptations of this initiative and any future education policies must sufficiently reflect this.

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Notes

[1] Growing Up in Ireland (GUI) is a national, longitudinal study of the lives of children and young people. The study is carried out jointly by Trinity College Dublin and the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) and is managed by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) and the Central Statistics Office (CSO). The study comprises a nationally representative sample of over 20,000 cohort members from across Ireland. GUI follows two main cohorts: Cohort '98 (the 'Child Cohort') who were 9 years old when they were first interviewed in 2007, and Cohort '08 (the 'Infant Cohort') who were 9 months old during the first wave of data collection in 2008. GUI gathers data on a wide range of topics across the domains of health, cognitive/educational development, and socio-emotional development and uses a mix of questionnaires, direct measurement, and interviews. Data are gathered from the child/ young person themselves, as well as key stakeholders such as caregiver(s), teacher(s), and the school principal. The main objective of GUI is to inform Government policy about the lives of children and young people in Ireland. Growing Up in Ireland – National Longitudinal Study of Children

[2] The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) was established in 1987 and reconstituted fourteen years later, in July 2001 as a statutory body, under the Education Act 1998. It has responsibility for advising the Minister for Education on curriculum and assessment for early childhood education and for primary and post-primary schools. It also advises the Minister on assessment procedures used in schools and examinations as part of the curriculum.

[3] Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools – DEIS – is the national action plan focused on addressing the educational needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities. Its primary aim is to ensure that their educational needs are prioritised and effectively addressed. More information is available at Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) - An Action Plan for Educational Inclusion (File Format PDF 600KB) - ae52a117b0d24eb8a136cfaf0036c7fb.pdf (www.gov.ie)

7 Ireland: Putting the student at the centre and focusing on learning experiences

This chapter describes how Ireland's curriculum has significantly shifted to reflect a focus on student-centred approaches to education. This shift aimed to produce a more engaging and interactive learning experience by moving away from heavily content-oriented syllabi. The Irish government has redesigned a part of its secondary curriculum, the "Junior Cycle", to focus on a modern, skills-based and student-centred approach. Ukraine could benefit from this chapter to aid in the improvement of educational content and assessments.

Introduction

Like many countries, the curriculum offered in Irish schools is centrally defined. Secondary education is divided into two cycles – the first typically starts when a child is 12 and lasts for three years. The second, senior cycle, lasts for two or three years[1]. Each cycle ends in a formal, externally administered state examination, which is prepared, administered and marked by the State Examinations Commission. Until recently, the curriculum prescribed for the Junior Cycle was structured around a set of subject disciplines with few opportunities for cross-disciplinary learning. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), in line with international trends, undertook a redesign of this curriculum, shifting the emphasis to include a set of key skills, across subject disciplines. The changes also included a re-imagining of assessment practice so that learning achieved by students, not just within subject disciplines, could be recognised and celebrated.

The journey through implementation was challenging but in 2023, the new Junior Cycle Framework is now firmly established.

This case study considers how Ireland significantly shifted the emphasis of its curriculum, from heavily content-oriented syllabuses to one which placed student interests and needs at the centre.

What motivated change?

The “Junior Certificate” curriculum, in place in lower secondary since 1989, was intended to provide a student-centred, broad and balanced curriculum in the first three years of secondary education. Placing the child at the centre of teaching and learning had long been an established principle in Irish primary education. The 1971 primary curriculum, for example, portrayed children as active co-constructors of their learning rather than passive participants (Department of Education, 1999[1]). In reality, experiences at the secondary level varied greatly. The subject discipline focus resulted in a fragmentary experience. While the syllabuses for each subject included comprehensive objectives which spoke to the development of the whole person (aesthetic, creative, cultural, critical, emotional, intellectual, physical, moral), in practice, the focus was on the acquisition of knowledge and subject skills, and on preparation for exams. In many schools, students were placed in class groups according to their ability and based on their teachers’ assessment of their likely grades. For some students, this resulted in a slower pace of teaching and learning, with lower expectations among both teachers and students (Smyth et al., 2007[2]).

Among the aims of the Junior Certificate programme was the inclusion of a wide range of modes of assessment, including oral and aural examinations, project and practical work. However, following strong teacher union opposition, there instead became an emphasis on a single, national, written examination at the end of the third year of the Junior Cycle. Despite intentions, the lower secondary system settled itself back to how it operated before. The assessment reforms promised were not delivered and the new curriculum was confined by the old examination system; consequently, it was not able to achieve its desired outcomes (NCCA, 2011a[3]).

Assessment at Junior Cycle was associated almost totally with the State examination. There was a general dissatisfaction with this situation. It was believed that the formality of the examinations and the status applied to them reinforced the subject-centred nature of teaching and learning to the detriment of cross-curricular work and efforts to develop thinking or problem-solving skills (Coolahan, 1994[4]). The examination, which often determined students’ access to particular courses in senior cycle, threw a long “shadow” back into the classroom during third year, evidence indicated. Students and their teachers were focused on preparing for the examinations: revising, examining marking schemes, looking at previous papers, rote-learning, rehearsing possible questions and answers, for example (NCCA, 2004b[5]; NCCA, 2006[6]; NCCA, 2007[7]; NCCA, 2010[8]). The resulting pressure had a detrimental effect on well-being. A 2007 study found that “Students find schoolwork more difficult, spend more time on homework and study,

and have less access to the kind of 'fun' lessons which help engage them in learning. Students also become more negative about school and their teachers as they move into third year." (Smyth et al., 2007[2]).

In a more recent study, principals believed that the formal assessment modes of the Junior Certificate had little benefit for students' learning and development. There was also general agreement that the stress placed on students, parents and teachers due to the reliance on a single examination had a negative effect on teaching and learning (Mc Garr et al., 2022[9]). Writing in 2006, the then Chief Executive of the NCCA noted that teachers' assessment practice had been neglected by policy makers (Looney, 2006[10]) Consequently, teachers' capacity to develop competence in assessment for learning (rather than the summative assessment typified by examinations) relied heavily on their own initiative. She also noted a need to professionally develop classroom assessment practice (ibid). It was evident that fundamental changes to curriculum and assessment, including school-based assessment, was necessary.

In 2002, the NCCA undertook a review of Junior Cycle provision. An earlier progress report published in 1999 expressed concern that the curriculum at Junior Cycle was overloaded, and that there was a repetition of topics in some subjects. In response to this, the NCCA decided to instigate a review of all Junior Cycle subject syllabi in a bid to rebalance the curriculum and to allow more time for the quality of engagement with students, which was a key objective during the initial introduction of the Junior Cycle (NCCA, 2004a[11]).

As part of the review, the NCCA commissioned research into good practice in facilitating a smooth transition for students from primary to post-primary school and the type of curricular provision which could best support this. This research was structured in several parts. The first part looked at experiences of students making the transition from primary to post-primary and utilised the perspectives of teachers, principals, parents and students themselves (NCCA, 2004b[5]). The second part focused on capturing the experiences of second-year students of teaching, learning and the curriculum, with the aim of tracing changes in the attitudes of students towards school over the second year (NCCA, 2006[6]). The third and final part of the research focused on the experiences of third-year students and their transition into senior cycle (NCCA, 2007[7]).

The research findings demonstrated a need for significant reform within the Junior Cycle system and it pointed to a number of areas of improvement which needed urgent focus, including:

1. An information gap between post-primary and primary schools, with only a minority of post-primary schools receiving information on incoming students.
2. Curriculum discontinuity between primary and post-primary, which can have a negative effect on student's academic progress over the first year of the Junior Cycle.
3. A significant decline in "liking" school among students, particularly where there was a weak emphasis on integration. The informal culture of a school, particularly the relationship between teachers and students, can have a significant influence on this.
4. Taking an approach wherein students are able to experience a range of subjects before final selection of the subjects which would make up the Junior Certificate can have tangible benefits for student engagement, learning and achievement.
5. The importance of offering a broad and balanced curriculum that includes a range of more practical subjects. This can improve student engagement and facilitate success for students who are not necessarily academic-oriented.
6. There was relative low interest among students in subjects such as Irish, English, Mathematics and Modern European Languages.
7. Over 40% of teachers were concerned that the first-year curriculum was not suitable for lower-ability students, alongside a concern of their ability to cover the curriculum in the available time (NCCA, 2011b[12]; NCCA, 2010[8]).

The research also indicated that, within the three years of lower secondary education, there was insufficient coherence in the student experience noting poor connections across the curriculum. Each of the three years was dominated by factors which affected the quality of learning. The first year, for example, was spent by the student on “settling in” and adjusting to the new curriculum and learning experience, which meant that often little progress was made by the student. The second year tended to witness a difference in attachment by the student to the school – often, students would begin to “like” learning and school less. The third year was then dominated by the terminal examination. This meant the main focus of both teachers and students was on examination results and teaching centred on the student rehearsing the questions and answers needed to pass, rather than on their broader development and learning (NCCA, 2011b[12]).

In 2009, the poor performance in reading of Ireland’s 15-year-olds, measured in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), generated significant concern. Ireland’s mean score in 2009 was 31 points lower than it had been in 2000. The drop was the largest across all 39 countries that participated in both PISA 2000 and PISA 2009, resulting in Ireland’s rank falling from 5th to 17th among those countries (Perkins et al., 2010[13]; OECD, n.d.[14]). At the time, over one in six students in Ireland was estimated to have poor reading skills. The response of the Irish educational authorities was swift and comprehensive. In 2011, Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People, 2011 – 2020 was launched. The Strategy identified a set of clearly defined outcomes, both quantitative and qualitative, which were to be achieved through implementation of a wide-ranging programme of reforms in different areas. These included initial teacher education courses, professional development for teachers and school principals, and the content of the curriculum at primary and post-primary levels (Government of Ireland, 2011[15]).

The Strategy included a number of recommendations in relation to building the capacity of school leaders, enhancing teaching skills and promoting a greater awareness among parents and the community of the importance of literacy and numeracy and their role in relation to both. In particular, it included recommendations which informed curriculum redesign. The understanding of literacy was extended by the Strategy to include the ability to use and understand spoken language, print, writing and digital media and numeracy was defined as the ability to use mathematics to solve problems and meet the demands of day-to-day living (ibid). All teachers were considered teachers of both literacy and numeracy and revisions to all subject syllabuses reflected this understanding. It is noteworthy that a 2017 review of the Strategy found that Ireland’s progress in promoting a high level of literacy for all has been especially impressive. Irish students ranked 3rd out of 35 OECD countries in reading in PISA 2015 with just Singapore having a statistically significant mean score (Government of Ireland, 2017[16]). Being literate and numerate are two of the eight key skills prioritised within the new framework for Junior Cycle (NCCA, 2015a[17]).

The NCCA published a commentary in 2010 reflecting on the findings set out in the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) reports published on the three different phases of their review of Junior Cycle provision. This was distributed to schools and parents in the form of a booklet (NCCA, 2010[8]). It included the key points arising from the research and suggested areas where changes should be made, including, for example, facilitating access to a broad range of subject choice, particularly more practically oriented subjects. It also accepted the importance of ensuring continuity of learning experiences for students, so that they are supported not only in their transition from primary to post-primary, but also throughout the entirety of their Junior Cycle experience and in their later transition to Senior Cycle (ibid).

The proposals made by the NCCA for a reformed programme for lower secondary, the Junior Cycle, included the curriculum response to the recommendations made in the National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People, 2011 – 2020. Recognising that the current assessment practice at the end of lower secondary had a detrimental effect on the quality of many students’ learning experiences, one of the key aims in reforming the programme was to achieve a better balance between Assessment *for* Learning and Assessment *of* Learning.

Box 7.1. Push factors

- Weaknesses in the implementation of the existing Junior Certificate programme;
- recommendations in the National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People, 2011 – 2020;
- recognised need for assessment reform;
- policy commitment to a student-focused approach.

What opportunities existed?

Given the situation described above, there was an appetite for change among stakeholders, reflecting shifts towards a skills-based curriculum (Dempsey, 2016[18]). Curriculum changes which emphasised the acquisition of so-called "21st century skills" reflected a widely held belief that the existing curricula did not adequately prepare young people to flourish in their personal, work and civic lives. In Ireland, stakeholders such as the Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC) called for an overhaul of the existing subject-based curriculum on the grounds that it did not encourage the types of creativity, flexibility, independent thinking and appetite for learning that are so critical in later stages of education and work. Teacher unions recognised that an emphasis on learner autonomy for students, an increased focus on developing skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, and communicating with others, and a move from content learning to student-centred learning was good. Public policy in Ireland recognised that fostering independent thinking, creativity and innovation was vital (Government of Ireland, 2010[19]). The widespread understanding that education should help students to acquire the key skills necessary to cope with the demands and pressures they face within and outside of school formed a good foundation for curriculum redesign efforts.

Ireland's reform efforts benefitted from the pre-existence of a strong curriculum research and development infrastructure. The Curriculum and Examination Board (CEB) was set up in 1984. Prior to this, the Department of Education had sole charge of curriculum and examinations. The CEB brought together education experts who considered issues relating to curriculum and issued a series of influential discussion papers[2]. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) was established in 1987 as a successor to the CEB and was reconstituted fourteen years later, in July 2001 as a statutory body, under the Education Act 1998. It has responsibility for advising the Minister for Education on curriculum and assessment for early childhood education and for primary and post-primary schools. It also advises the Minister on assessment procedures used in schools and examinations as part of the curriculum (NCCA, 2021[20])

Ireland could also draw on the resources of the Educational Research Centre, an internationally recognised centre of excellence in research, assessment and evaluation in education. Established in 1966, the Centre carries out research at all levels of the education system on behalf of the Department of Education, at the request of other agencies and on the initiative of the ERC itself and its staff.[3]

The NCCA's approach to re-designing curriculum brings together representatives of key stakeholders, including teacher union and school management nominees, to contribute to curriculum policy making and design. Drawing on school-based and empirical research, the NCCA drafts the curriculum used in each of these settings, following a highly consultative and deliberative approach across research, policy and practice, using discussion papers, surveys, focus groups and regional seminars (Gleeson, 2022[21]). Being able to draw on existing expertise, particularly where it was coupled with a strong partnership approach which engaged stakeholders from the earliest opportunity, was a significant advantage for Ireland.

A second resource which guided the approach to Junior Cycle reform was the lessons learnt from past reforms within this area. When the Junior Certificate programme was first introduced in 1989, there were concerns that there was a misalignment between the re-designed curriculum and the end-of-cycle State examination. In the early 2000s, resulting from the review reports mentioned earlier which revealed that the curriculum was overcrowded and failed to allow enough space for active learning and student engagement, efforts were made by the NCCA to rebalance the subject syllabuses in Junior Cycle (NCCA, 2004a[11]; NCCA, 2004b[5]). However, despite the fact that this process of rebalancing was almost complete, there was overwhelming feedback from the Committee responsible for undertaking the work that, unless assessment changed, changes made to the curriculum would be futile (NCCA, 2011b[12]). This underlined the need for the new curriculum programme to address assessment practice in schools comprehensively and influenced the curriculum redesign process.

When designing the new framework, including the format of reforms, the key aims and objectives and how this could be achieved, national and international research and practice provided another source of information which helped shape the design and development process. The core elements and design of the framework was grounded in national and international research and practice at every step. For example, the starting point for the framework was the OECD DeSeCo framework[4], which outlines key definitions and selections of key competencies and defines three broad categories for key skills: interacting with heterogeneous groups, acting autonomously and using tools interactively ((NCCA, 2011b[12]; OECD, 2001[22]). This framework was instrumental during the design stage in deciding how the Irish Junior Cycle framework should look and its main areas of focus.

Inspiration was taken from international best practice in the field, particularly from countries such as Australia, Canada and Scotland. For example, these countries already have a successful externally moderated school-based element, wherein moderation provides assurance to all that there is a consistency of standard across schools where school-based assessment is used (NCCA, 2011b[12]). Such examples provided a foundation on which the reformed Irish Junior Cycle was to be based.

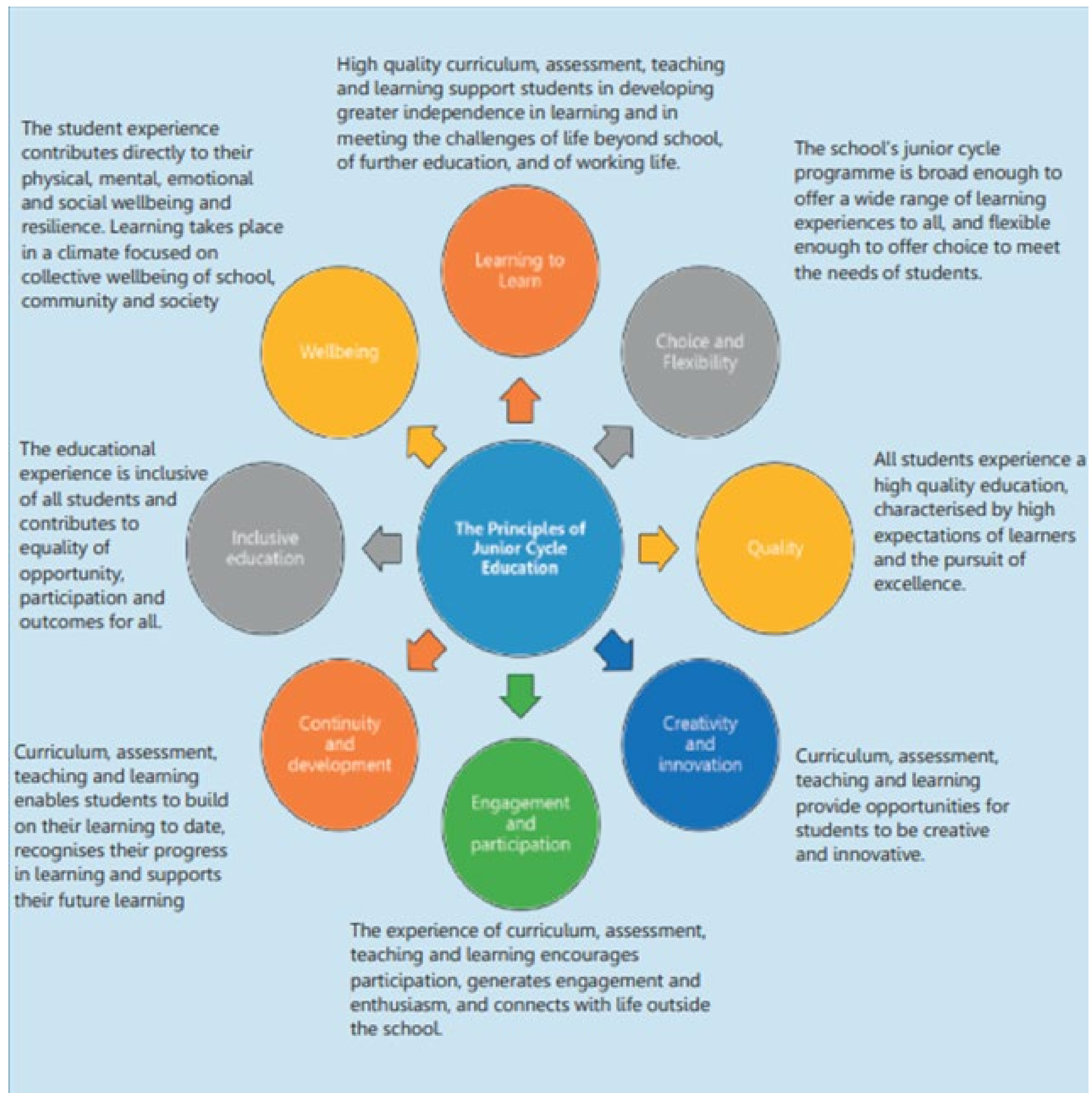
Box 7.2. Existing opportunities

- Dissatisfaction among stakeholders with the status quo;
- a strong, curriculum research and development infrastructure;
- insights gained from analysis of past reforms;
- national and international research and practice.

What is the vision for education?

The Framework for Junior Cycle was first published in October 2012. It set out a vision of school-designed curriculum programmes which were responsive to the particular needs of all their students, including those with special educational needs (NCCA, 2011b[12]). Although it was necessary to issue a revised Framework in 2015, the vision, and the principles which underpin it, remained unchanged (NCCA, 2015a[17]). They are illustrated in Figure 1 below. The principles, taken together, provide an explication of a vision which places students at the centre, enabling them to participate in their communities and in society, to be resourceful and confident in all aspects and stages of their lives.

Figure 7.1. The principles of Junior Cycle Education



The Framework goes on to set out twenty-four statements of learning, which identify the expected outcomes of Junior Cycle education and provide the basis for schools to plan for, design and evaluate their Junior Cycle programmes (NCCA, 2015a[17]). Eight key skills required for successful learning by students across the curriculum and for learning beyond school are also outlined. These key skills, which are grounded in national and international research and practice, are connected to skills outlined at early childhood, primary and senior level, to better facilitate a flow of learning throughout the different stages of education (ibid). This is intended to be particularly valuable for first-year students: whereas previously, the first year of Junior Cycle had been seen merely as a 'settling in' period for students where little actual progress is made, ensuring a continued focus on key skills would enable first-year students to consolidate learnings from primary education and build a strong foundation for second and third years, alongside facilitating for students to begin developing responsibility for their own learning.

Figure 7.2. Key skills

The key skills were designed in collaboration with schools who had previous experiences of working at a senior level in this area. In line with their recommendations to keep language age-appropriate, the Framework document provides details of each skill with elements and outcomes that enable teachers to integrate them into subject planning and classwork.

Box 7.3. Vision

Quality, inclusive and relevant education programmes with improved learning experiences for all students, including those with special educational needs.

What actions were taken?

Extensive initial consultation

The NCCA embarked on a period of extensive consultation with a variety of stakeholders, beginning in 2010. The timescale dedicated to the consultation period was longer than usual, totalling nine months, which reflected the belief that schools and educators needed more time to engage with the ideas of the consultation paper, given the scale of reform proposed (NCCA, 2011a[3]; NCCA, 2011b[12]).

The consultation also marked a change in the way that such consultations were carried out by the NCCA. Responding to evidence that there was an increase in use of the NCCA website and a general overall increase in engagement by teachers in online environments, the decision was made to focus the consultation on a dedicated website. A variety of different formats were developed to enable this, including blogs and school videos (NCCA, 2011a[3]). Stakeholders were invited to participate in an online questionnaire hosted on the website, which was focused on the key themes of the consultation paper. There were 445 responses to the questionnaire, over 40% of which were from post-primary teachers, 19% from parents and guardians, 15% from third level students and 12% from second level students (ibid).

In addition, a varied range of consultation methods were employed to encourage engagement and facilitate access. Meetings were held with the National Parents Council Post-Primary and the Irish Vocational Education Association[5], alongside a series of focus groups held in five schools with teachers and students. A further day-long consultation was held in collaboration with the Office of Minister of Children and Youth Affairs, in which 86 students participated. Additionally, 40 written submissions were received from groups and individuals and NCCA representatives were encouraged to speak at events which touched on the subject of the Junior Cycle (ibid).

It must be noted that the period of consultation coincided with what is considered by many to be amongst the most challenging times for the education sector in Ireland to date. As such, it is admirable to see so much engagement with the consultation across the different groups of stakeholders. Despite the challenging context, the consultation showed broad support for the need for Junior Cycle reform, with only one group contesting, but it also evidenced significant concern from stakeholders regarding the way in which the Junior Cycle should or would change (ibid).

Amongst the consultation submissions and discussions, there were three overarching questions reflected throughout:

1. How can we ensure that reform leads to greater equity and inclusion?
2. What is the best balance between locally and centrally devised curricula?
3. How can reforms at Junior Cycle be connected to reforms in senior cycle and in primary education?

The findings overall reflected a concern for the well-being of young people at a critical stage in their education, in their lives and for the complex challenging environment these students must navigate (ibid).

According to the NCCA, consultation findings can be split into two groups - those who argued for ‘more of the same’ and those who argued for the opposite. The debates on the side of “more of the same” tended to focus on the need to establish the number and nature of compulsory subjects, concern for the readiness

of students entering post-primary education to engage with the curriculum and the allocation of time to some subjects. Feedback emphasised the need to add more components to the Junior Cycle Certificate in a broader range of subjects, to ensure that the examination better matched the aims of subject syllabuses. Those on the opposite side of the argument tended to focus on the need to describe common central learning, the quality of learning, the need to make greater use of technologies at home and school, the balance between control from the centre and school autonomy and the future of an examination that they felt was just becoming a dress-rehearsal for the Leaving Certificate examination, the final exam in the Irish secondary school system, rather than supporting learning of students throughout Junior Cycle (NCCA, 2011b[12]).

In addition, as noted earlier, the consultation findings confirmed the findings of earlier ESRI research (NCCA, 2004b[5]; NCCA, 2006[6]; NCCA, 2007[7]), which demonstrated that the Junior Cycle was divided into three distinct phases, where the first year was merely about "settling in", the second year tended to evidence a disenchantment of students with the school and the third year which was dominated by the final examination.

Overall, there was a strong belief reflected in the consultation findings that unless schools lead change themselves, any change would not be meaningful. There was a desire to move away from the traditional model of change, where schools and classrooms are the object of the change, rather than agents of change. There was also strong support for placing schools, teachers and students at the heart of reform, but a wider concern that the proposed flexibility could result in further polarisation across the school system. For example, concerns were voiced that some schools, serving specific communities, would choose to enact the new Junior Cycle recommendations, whereas others serving other kinds of communities would choose to continue with the traditional route, thus creating polarisation and differentiation between different schools and communities. Overall, consultation respondents believed that flexibility must be balanced with leadership from the centre, to ensure that schools are moving in the same direction and towards the same endpoint, albeit with flexibility in movement (NCCA, 2011b[12]).

Development of the proposals in a consultation paper

Curriculum content and delivery

Following the initial consultation, the next step taken by the NCCA was the development and publication of the Junior Cycle reform proposals in a consultation paper, Towards a Junior Cycle Framework.

One of the key reforms proposed concerned the design and delivery of curriculum content. Schools were to take on a more active role, signalling a shift from central prescription and increasing school autonomy. The principles, statements of learning and key skills set out in the consultation paper would act as supports for schools as they designed their own Junior Cycle programmes. The intention was that schools, based on the outcomes of their school self-evaluation work, would devise a quality, inclusive and relevant education programme for all their students, including those students with special educational needs (NCCA, 2011b[12]).

A second proposed reform related to the breadth of the curriculum to be followed by students. Intended to address the issue of curriculum overload, the document proposed a move away from the old system wherein students were able to study any number of subjects, towards a more focused system wherein students could study a maximum of ten subjects. The curriculum was to be composed of three components: subjects, short courses and Priority Learning Units (PLUs) for students working towards Level 2 qualification (see below). The NCCA would develop and publish specifications for all components, which would guide their design, planning and delivery. Learning outcomes in subjects would be less extensive than before and designed to provide a focus and resource for learning, rather than a list that must be covered in its entirety, allowing schools and teachers flexibility to deliver curriculum as best fits the needs of their students (ibid)

The biggest change concerning curriculum content proposed by the document is the introduction of short courses. The decision to introduce this new curriculum component was in response to school requests during the consultation process to provide opportunities that facilitate community connections, the use of ICT and the ability to include new and different learning experiences. Short courses are intended to allow schools to broaden the learning experiences for students, address their interests and encompass areas of learning not covered by the combination of curricular subjects available in the school. They are not intended to replace existing subjects. School innovation was encouraged in the design and delivery of short courses; although the NCCA undertook to produce specifications for six different courses, these would act as guidelines to support the development of new short courses by schools, in line with student needs and interests. As with subjects, the specifications for short courses should outline the key aims and learning outcomes of the course, how evidence of learning will be generated, gathered, judged and reported on and how that evidence can contribute towards Junior Cycle qualifications. In order to ensure quality, these courses must be delivered by teachers, albeit with community engagement encouraged (ibid).

A new component to be introduced in the reformed Junior Cycle was the introduction of learning programmes designed for students with particular special educational needs, where they are prevented from accessing all or some of the subjects and short courses. Level 2 Learning programmes build on prior learning but are designed around Priority Learning Units (PLUs), focusing on the social, personal and pre-vocational skills needed to prepare students for future study, work and life. For example, some PLUs developed by the NCCA are: communication and literacy, personal care and preparing for work. These programmes are up to 250 hours in length, and are composed of a number of different elements, which make up a range of knowledge, skills and competencies. Schools can select the elements they believe most relevant to the needs of the student in question, in consultation with the student and parent/guardian (NCCA, 2015a[17]). Level 1 Learning Programmes (L1LPs) were introduced in 2019 for those students who have low moderate to severe and profound learning disabilities.

Changes in assessment

The most controversial change proposed by the discussion document concerned assessment. Previous research by the ESRI, commissioned by the NCCA, alongside the findings from the consultation, had demonstrated that the third year of the Junior Cycle had become dominated by the final examination. As a result, teaching and learning focused on remembering the facts needed to pass the exam, but not on actual learning itself. This, in turn, placed a high level of stress on both students and teachers.

Thus, a new approach to assessment was proposed. The document proposed a move away from terminal examinations as the primary means of assessment, towards a more varied approach which would include assessing the work of students. This move towards classroom-based assessment would mean that there would be two assessment components for each subject: a portfolio based on schoolwork completed during the Junior Cycle which would equate to 40% of the overall marks and a final examination at the end of Year 3, which would count for 60% of the overall marks. For short courses and PLUs, classroom-based assessment would be the only means of assessment and a single portfolio of schoolwork would be compiled. The NCCA proposed to issue specifications for how a portfolio should be developed, to include a variety of different methods, including assignments, projects, case studies, performances, practical activities and different kinds of tasks. Supported by guidance issued by the NCCA on how to ensure a consistent approach across subjects, the portfolio assessment process was to be reviewed and verified by schools. Any results issued would then be provisional and subject to an external moderation process of the subject portfolio, which would be conducted by the SEC on a sample basis annually. Students would be awarded a Junior Cycle Student Award on completion of the three-year course (NCCA, 2011b[12]; NCCA, 2015a[17]).

Continued stakeholder dialogue

One of the greatest challenges faced by the NCCA when leading reform, yet which would ultimately become a strength leading to success, was the necessary extensive negotiation with stakeholders during the consultation process. However, ultimately, this was extremely beneficial to creating successful policy. In the initial stages, there was significant opposition to certain aspects of the reform as set out in the consultation paper. Whilst the reforms were recognised as following progressive, international practice, they were criticised for not taking enough account of the distinctive Irish educational and cultural context (Travers, 2015[23]). Furthermore, teacher unions had a number of concerns, including that school-based assessment for certification would expose teachers to intense and undue pressure. Relationships between the Department and the two teacher unions were strained significantly because of disagreement about the proposed assessment arrangements. In April 2014, the unions held a ballot for industrial action, which passed with 84% in favour. A directive was issued to union members, instructing all members to withdraw co-operation with the introduction or implementation of the Junior Cycle proposals, including not attending any CPD initiatives or meetings relating to the proposals, refusing to engage in school-based assessment for the purpose of the Junior Cycle Student Award, or engaging in the development or delivery of short courses (National Working Group on Junior Cycle Reform, 2014[24]).

Thus, a period of extended stakeholder dialogue was entered by the NCCA and teaching unions to reach an agreement on the Junior Cycle reforms. Following a period of continued discussions, changes were made to the planned implementation of the reforms, including:

- Phasing in: a slowing down of the phasing in of the new Junior Cycle subjects, and a delay in the beginning of standardised testing.
- CPD (continuous professional development): an additional CPD day to be provided for all teachers and a new full day of whole-school CPD for each year of implementation in addition to a wider range of supplementary elective CPD offerings.
- Workload and assessment: A commitment to consider duties and posts in schools to support assessment and moderation and an agreement to discuss external supports for teacher assessment and moderation (ibid).

In addition to the establishment of a National Working Group in January 2014 to formalise continuing dialogue between stakeholders, the NCCA also created three additional sub-groups to address three key themes: Workload and Implementation Issues for Schools and Teachers; Quality Assurance and Support for Teacher Assessment and CPD. A key priority for these groups, and pivotal to the success of their discussions, was ensuring that all relevant stakeholders were represented at these meetings, including teacher unions, education organisations, education and training boards, alongside the State Examinations Commission and the Department of Education and Skills (ibid).

The subgroups were briefed and provided with information on the topic at hand, including presentations from the NCCA executive and Education Scotland. For example, the sub-group focused on quality assurance received a presentation on assessment and qualifications in Scotland. This was to understand issues faced by the Scottish system that was ahead of the Irish system in implementing reform. In addition, the groups received submissions from relevant bodies; for example, the sub-group on workload received a joint submission from management bodies and the National Association for Principals and Deputy Principals.

Whilst the sub-group on CPD faced significant delays due to industrial action by the unions, the Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT) service, which provided training for teachers, allowed any members who had missed meetings the opportunity to attend on another date. The existence of the CPD sub-group proved beneficial in developing CPD opportunities and provided a useful platform for briefing partners on progress and plans regarding CPD, as well as allowing a space for questions and feedback(ibid).

Concurrently, Department of Education and Teacher Union representatives continued to engage on the assessment issues. Consultation meetings, chaired by an independent chairperson, were difficult and in 2014, the Chair proposed a middle ground between the two groups. The proposal, called the Travers Plan, suggested that a balance be achieved in the assessment arrangements such that a terminal examination, marked by SEC through the traditional format would be retained, while assessments in second and third year, marked by the students' own teachers, would make up the second part (Travers, 2015[23]). Whilst the Travers Plan was initially rejected by the teacher unions, an agreement was reached in 2015 on an amended plan: teachers would assess students in practical exercises, in addition to the state examinations, and the results would then be recorded separately on a new Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (Teachers Union of Ireland, Association of Secondary Teachers Ireland, Department of Education and Skills, 2015[25]).

Parents were also heavily involved in the dialogue from the initial stages, and it was a priority to ensure that space was given to discuss the needs of parents regarding the reforms. The NCCA and the National Parent Councils for Primary and Post-Primary partnered to deliver a series of meetings nationwide to explain the new approach to learning and assessment and to allow the opportunity for parents to share their thoughts (NCCA, 2011b[12]).

Efforts were also made to engage students in the development and implementation of the new Junior Cycle proposals. For example, the Irish Secondary Students' Union (ISSU) was invited to suggest a name for the final qualification which would represent the views and perspectives of students. The ISSU was tasked with engaging as many students as possible and utilised innovative methods to achieve this, including using a variety of communication methods, such as text messaging, Facebook, twitter, email and consultation sessions. Posters were also circulated to schools via post and email and some schools were contacted by phone and invited for consultation sessions. These sessions focused on discussion of the new framework and offered an opportunity to share thoughts and feedback, in addition to ideas on what the new name of the qualification should reflect (ISSU, 2014[26]).

The focus on engagement of different education stakeholders proved to be vital to the success of the reforms. Offering continued opportunity for discussion and feedback not only ensured that the proposals were continuously improved to ensure that they would be effective, efficient and minimised undue pressure on stakeholders involved, but it also created buy-in from stakeholders and ensured various opportunities for the proposals to be interacted with and fully understood.

Publication of the final Junior Cycle Framework

Following an extended period of dialogue and discussion, in 2015 the final Junior Cycle Framework was published. As a result of this dialogue and feedback from stakeholders, whilst much of the proposals outlined in the initial 2011 document remain, there were several significant changes.

The 2015 Framework reflected an increased focus on well-being within the curriculum. It outlined the decision to introduce well-being as a new independent area of learning from 2017. Reflected in a number of the overarching statements of learning, as well as in the key skills that guide curriculum planning, well-being was introduced as a standalone learning area across the three years of the Junior Cycle. Up to 400 hours were made available in the area of Well-being, beginning with a minimum of 300 time-tabled areas in 2017 and progressing to the full allocation of 400 hours as the new Junior Cycle is fully implemented. It will incorporate learning that has traditionally been included in subjects such as Physical Education (PE), Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE). Schools are given the flexibility to include, in addition to these subject areas, other aspects of well-being as they see relevant, for example, they can include existing programmes that relate to well-being, or to develop their own units of learning. Whilst the NCCA will provide specifications and guidance on the format of well-being assessment, it is recognised that schools will require a significant degree of flexibility in assessing and reporting on the course, due to the sensitive nature of the topic. In addition, acknowledging that it is an entirely new learning area, it is accepted that a certain degree of flexibility is required concerning the

number of hours given to Well-being during the initial years of the new Junior Cycle Framework programme (NCCA, 2015a[17]).

Following extensive dialogue in the years following the publication of the 2011 proposals, where classroom-based assessment and the pressure it could place on teachers was the main subject of opposition against the Junior Cycle proposals, the 2015 Framework provided further details on the agreed methods of assessment during the Junior Cycle. Reflecting the agreement reached on assessment by the Department and teacher unions, the 2015 Framework outlined a dual approach to assessment, with the aim of supporting the learning of students throughout the three years of the Junior Cycle and culminating in measuring achievement at the end of the three years. The new form of assessment reflects the belief outlined in the consultation process and throughout the research and design process that students learn best when teachers provide feedback which helps them to understand how their learning can be improved (ibid).

The approach to assessment outlined in the 2015 Framework acknowledged the concerns highlighted during the consultation. These included a heavy reliance on classroom-based assessment that could place high pressure and stress on teachers. In response, a more equal balancing of weight between classroom-based assessment was proposed (CBA)[6] and externally marked assessment. The Framework provides for 2 CBAs, one in 2nd year and one in 3rd year. In addition to this, some subjects have a formal written assessment task which is assessed by the SEC. Reflecting the belief that ongoing feedback can benefit students greatly, regular reporting was mandated to support students to understand and chart their progress and actively involve them, alongside their parents and guardians. In addition to regular annual reporting, which is based on a national approach and supported by the development of standard-reporting templates by the NCCA, schools are enabled to provide further oral or written reporting opportunities that they may wish to put in place, such as parent-teacher meetings and teacher-student dialogue. Finally, following completion of the Junior Cycle, each student will receive a Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement, which will document the full range of their learning achievements, including short courses, classroom-based assessments and State examination results (NCCA, 2015a[17]).

Provision of support

Facilitating collaboration among subject teachers

To further lessen pressure on teachers and build further supports for teachers to facilitate CBA and ongoing assessment, the 2015 Framework provided additional opportunities for teachers to work collaboratively and to learn from each other. Subject Learning and Assessment Review meetings were prescribed for all teachers in schools. These meetings are subject-specific and provide the opportunity for subject teachers to share and discuss assessments of students' work and build a common understanding of standards and expectations, by facilitating them to reflect and share learning and teaching strategies. The aims of these meetings are to promote greater consistency of teachers' judgements, better feedback for students and a greater alignment of judgements with expected standards (NCCA, 2015d[27]). Full-time teachers were allocated 22 hours of professional time within the school calendar each year to participate in these meetings and to support their planning for their subjects. Meetings last approximately two hours and take place as close as possible to the relevant CBA discussed (ibid). These meetings are key to promoting a collaborative professional culture across schools, building confidence about the judgements of teachers and helping to ensure consistency and fairness within and across schools in the assessment process (National Working Group on Junior Cycle Reform, 2014[24]).

Development of resources

To support teachers and school leaders in the development and implementation of their Junior Cycle programmes, a number of resources were developed continuously across different stages of

implementation. As each new subject specification was published, it was accompanied by ongoing guidance documents, as well as CPD opportunities. The website www.jct.ie was also regularly updated with exemplar materials and updated resources (NCCA, 2015a[17]).

Alongside the development of subject and short course specifications, assessment guidance was published for each subject to guide teachers to understand which assessment formats would be best tailored for their students' needs and how they could effectively carry out assessment. In addition, online assessment resources include sample assessment items and annotated exemplars of students' work to support teacher judgement of the CBAs. The aim is to provide a range of assessment supports, advice, guidelines and exemplification to support teachers and schools to engage with the new assessment system in an informed and confident way, alongside providing them with a bank of resources and assessment materials to enable this (NCCA, n.d.[28]).

Materials are also available for teachers navigating the Subject Learning and Assessment Review (SLAR) process. The SLARs toolkit provides a facilitator's guide to the process, including information on the role of teachers as the facilitator before, during and after the meetings, including advice on how to navigate different aspects of the meetings (NCCA, 2015d[27]).

CPD opportunities

The need for supporting ongoing continuous professional development opportunities was recognised as vital to the success of reforms early on and was referenced in both the 2011 proposals and the 2015 Framework. The Director of the JCT pointed out that the shift to a learning-outcomes-based specification is perhaps one of the most significant changes at classroom level (Kirk, 2019[29]). Ensuring that teachers and school leaders had access to high-quality professional learning opportunities was a department priority. The Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT) is a dedicated continuous professional development (CPD) support service designed to support schools in their implementation of the 2015 Framework for Junior Cycle through the provision of appropriate high-quality CPD and the provision of effective teaching and learning resources (JCT, 2023[30]).

CPD opportunities are organised and encouraged on an ongoing basis throughout the development and implementation of new Junior Cycle programmes. With the introduction of each new subject specification, CPD opportunities were made available to help teachers to understand the new specifications and how to implement them effectively. Subject-specific CPD was also provided in advance of the introduction of new subject specifications, alongside whole-school CPD. The JCT also facilitated CPD opportunities for all school leaders, focusing on a range of recognised issues, such as timetabling, subject and whole-school planning, issues relating to curricular provision and engagement in teacher collaboration (NCCA, 2015a[17]).

As teachers and school leaders navigated the new process, support was provided in several different ways, including various methods of online support. For example, online support was made available at www.jct.ie, which was designed with feedback from teachers in mind and launched in 2017. All CPD materials and resources for the Framework are available on the website. Teacher feedback and requests for clarification were also recorded on the website, as well as at meetings and through social media. High engagement with the JCT website, the NCCA website and online support materials was reported among teachers (Mc Garr et al., 2022[9]). The DES and NCCA also engaged regularly with online providers to ensure that schools had access to online reporting to facilitate the new reporting arrangements.

Timetabling support

Ensuring that school leaders and teachers have time to understand and implement change is a particular challenge. Attention was paid early in the implementation process to how this could be facilitated to ensure successful implementation of the reforms. School management were given the ability to allocate an

additional two hours to one teacher of each subject to prepare for and co-ordinate each Subject Learning and Assessment Review meeting, a role which is rotated among teachers. This was in addition to the 22 hours of professional time allocated within the timetable for each full-time teacher each year. Additional professional time was also made available on a pro-rota basis for all teachers of the Junior Cycle. The class contact time of each full-time teacher was reduced from 33 teaching periods in the timetable down to 32 in order to provide a Junior Cycle professional period of 40 minutes for each of the 33 weeks of the year, equating to 22 additional hours a year. The understanding was that these additional hours would be used flexibly, to include SLAR meetings, and suggestions on how teachers may wish to use this time included bundling time periods and carrying time forward for professional collaboration. This time could also be used for individual planning, feedback and reporting activities. In the interim period, as subjects were slowly introduced, additional time was distributed in a phased manner and priority was given to teachers of the first new subjects introduced (NCCA, 2011b[12]).

Box 7.4. Actions

- Extensive initial consultation, engaging all stakeholders;
- development of proposals in a consultation document;
- ongoing stakeholder dialogue through the development phase;
- publication of the final Junior Cycle Framework in 2015;
- provision of support to school leaders and teachers.

What supported success?

The 2015 Framework is now firmly established in Ireland's post-primary schools. Despite the difficulties experienced over the past seven years, all lower secondary students benefit from the changed practices which were introduced under the Framework. Recent research indicates that the reform was successful in achieving a more student-centred experience (Mulcahy, 2022[31]; Mc Garr et al., 2022[9]). Mulcahy's research indicates that teachers have taken on board the learning from the CPD provided and were implementing new methodologies in their classrooms (Mulcahy, 2022). Similarly, the McGarr study found that teachers reported several impacts on their practice, including how they planned for learning and the way they taught, with a significant percentage of teachers believing that the changes provided them with scope to innovate in relation to their teaching (Mc Garr et al., 2022[9]). The vast majority of principals believe the Junior Cycle has had a positive impact on all dimensions presented. This includes student learning, assessment of learning, reporting of learning, the inclusion of learners, students' well-being, student voice and students' interests (ibid).

A number of elements supported the successful implementation of the curriculum reforms:

An established school planning culture

School Self-Evaluation (SSE) was introduced formally in Irish secondary schools in 2012 (Department of Education, 2022a[32]). The six-step process is designed to support schools to work collaboratively to improve aspects of teaching, learning and well-being. SSE is supported by a quality framework, Looking at Our School which provides a set of criteria or descriptors of quality in schools (Department of Education, 2022b[33]). Schools have used this process to support their planning for the implementation of the 2015 Framework. By linking SSE with school curriculum planning from the earliest stage of implementation of the Framework, the system ensured that schools were supported by a familiar planning tool. The SSE process reinforced the emphasis on teachers working collaboratively which is embedded in the 2015

Framework. This helped schools to examine and improve teaching and learning in the classroom, by analysing their strengths and areas for improvement within the context of the new Junior Cycle *Framework* (Department of Education, 2023[34]).

Phased introduction of subject specifications

Once the 2015 *Framework* was published, the process of implementation was underway. However, considering the complexity and breadth of the reforms, and in order to allow teachers and schools time to understand the new reforms, their new roles and how best to implement them within their own schools, it was decided that the new Junior Cycle would be implemented in a phased approach. As a result, new subject specifications were gradually introduced over a number of years, beginning in 2014 (NCCA, 2011b[12]).

Figure 7.3. Phases of the new Junior Cycle

Schools were advised in 2012 to start preparing for the introduction of the framework in 2014 (later revised to 2015). In the meantime, guidance to schools suggested that to begin preparation and develop a lead-in to the introduction of the new qualification, they might reduce the number of subjects a student takes in

the existing Junior Certificate examination. Leading up to the introduction of the new qualifications, student learning would still be recorded and reported on, including subjects that may not be taken for examinations. At the end of the three years, alongside the certificate from SEC outlining grades in examinations, students could receive a report of achievement across all areas and subjects, including reporting on numeracy and literacy for the first time (NCCA, 2011b[12]).

Due to the extended period of discussions, the phased introduction started later than initially expected, with the introduction of the Junior Cycle specifications for Science and Business Studies in 2015 (NCCA, 2015b[35]; NCCA, 2015c[36]). More subject specifications were introduced on a yearly basis. Specifications for example short courses also followed shortly behind, with the first specifications being introduced in 2016, including for Coding, Digital Media Literacy, Social, Personal and Health Specification, Chinese Language and Culture and Forensic Science, amongst others (NCCA, 2016a[37]; NCCA, 2016b[38]; NCCA, 2016c[39]; NCCA, 2016d[40]). Guidance on classroom-based assessment for subjects and short courses followed within a few years of the introduction of subject and short course specifications (NCCA, 2017a[41]; NCCA, 2017b[42]; NCCA, 2018b[43]; NCCA, 2019a[44]; NCCA, 2019b[45]; NCCA, 2019c[46]).

The phased introduction of the 2015 *Framework* allowed for minimal disruption in the early days of implementation, at a time when negotiations between the Teacher Unions and the Department of Education were difficult. In particular, principals noted the value in spreading out the implementation burden. Teachers of subject areas who had already gone through the process were also valuable in supporting other teachers new to the process. However, some principals did note that some teachers whose subject areas would be amongst the last to be implemented, had little motivation to engage at the beginning of the phased implementation (Mc Garr et al., 2022[9]).

Taking a staged approach to implementation provided time for the NCCA to learn about their impact, develop new subject specifications and devise new short courses. It also allowed for more efficient CPD planning. Given that all teachers in second-level schools required targeted CPD, the phased approach minimised the potential disruption in schools. Another advantage was that it accommodated the need for comprehensive curriculum planning at school level. The phased introduction of the framework has also been acknowledged as a key factor in successful implementation (Mc Garr et al., 2022[9]).

Sharing of best practice and professional collaboration

Another success factor was the support for teachers participating in the new Junior Cycle. In the early stages of implementation, the NCCA worked closely with a group of schools as they developed their Junior Cycle programme. This allowed the NCCA to record and share sample programmes from these schools, which could be accessed by other schools as a resource when looking to develop their own programmes. This was in addition to the sharing of best practice from the NCCA at the outset, such as the publication of example short courses which were developed in collaboration with schools who already had similar experience at senior level (NCCA, 2015a[17])

Other schools were encouraged to form small networks and collaborate in the design and delivery of a range of programmes at Junior Cycle level. The NCCA worked closely with these schools to understand and monitor the scale of time needed for collaboration. The NCCA also looked at how schools can deploy current allocations and make best use of additional ones, which informed the development of guidance and resources for schools (ibid).

The JCT also drew on the experience of teachers in implementing the CPD programme for all teachers. Full-time advisors were recruited from the pool of second-level teachers. Each was an experienced teacher in a particular subject discipline(s) and they were instrumental in devising the programme of support for their subject colleagues around the country. The team of advisors was expanded as each new subject was introduced across the phases of implementation. In addition, the support service recruited experienced teachers to act as associate trainers for their peers. This team included practising school principals and

deputy school principals who developed and delivered CPD for school leaders, as well as subject teachers who helped deliver the extensive programme of subject-specific CPD. The strategy of using practising teachers to provide professional development had two particular advantages. First, it enabled the JCT to devise and present CPD inputs that were informed directly by classroom experience, and which addressed the real-time concerns of teachers. Second, it enhanced the credibility of the CPD programme in the eyes of teachers.

Limerick University report evaluated the implementation and introduction of the *Framework* in schools. The study outlined how CPD was reported as the main enabler of change, particularly through its innovative model of delivery, which utilised practising teachers in the programmes and focused on both subject-specific and whole-school issues and supports (Mc Garr et al., 2022[9]). For example, principals were very complimentary of the JCT CPD provision and 78% agreed or strongly agreed that these opportunities had supported their teachers' understanding of the curriculum.

Collaboration and the sharing of expertise and best practice amongst educators was highly valuable in supporting the successful implementation of the Framework. Teacher collaboration and professional conversations, alongside the language teachers have acquired to discuss learning, have developed significantly since the introduction of the Framework (ibid). When asked how often they consulted with other teachers on issues relating to teaching, 94% of teachers surveyed reported that they did so "to some extent" or to "a great extent". A high number also reported that such discussions with colleagues helped them to develop their understanding of the curriculum changes.

Ensuring stakeholder support and engagement

Although the proposed reforms faced some challenges in the early stages, an extended period of dialogue and discussion between relevant stakeholders, including those opposed to certain parts of the reforms, proved crucial to their success. The 2015 publication of the *Joint Statement on Principles and Implementation* by the Teachers' Union of Ireland, the Association of Secondary Teachers Ireland and the Department of Education and Skills helped to provide a clear picture of the agreed vision and principles of the reforms, supported by the relevant bodies (Teachers Union of Ireland, Association of Secondary Teachers Ireland, Department of Education and Skills, 2015[25]).

Amendments to the Framework ensured that it adequately reflected and responded to stakeholder concerns, including from teachers, school leaders, parents and students. This improved the quality and impact of the reforms and, crucially, created stakeholder support and engagement. This helped to ensure that stakeholders were motivated in implementing the new Junior Cycle.

Ongoing monitoring of implementation

Four separate but related mechanisms exist for monitoring implementation. The first is school-based. SSE, the collaborative, reflective process of internal school review discussed above, remains an important tool for internal monitoring by schools of their progress in achieving the vision of the Framework. From the earliest days of implementation there was an expectation that school self-evaluation would be focused on supporting the roll-out of the Junior Cycle Framework (Hislop, 2017[47]). Current guidance from the Department of Education provides schools with the autonomy to choose the focus of their review of education provision, but this is subject to having a school plan which enables them to address, among other things, national curriculum goals, including the Framework (Department of Education, 2022c[48]). Although not part of a formal review process, the subject learning and assessment review meetings also provide a key opportunity for teachers to share experiences and expertise, learn from each other and seek guidance from peers on planning their own work and assessing the work of their students.

The second review process is built into each of the phases of implementation. The NCCA has committed to conducting an interim review once each subject specification has been fully experienced across the

three years of the Junior Cycle by the relevant group of students. These aim to analyse and evaluate several elements, including how effectively the specification reflects the learning aspired to within the subject and within the framework more broadly; the assessment elements within each subject and the ways in which teachers are utilising their professional judgement to mediate the new specification in their classrooms. Areas of discussion which aid this analysis are: student experiences of the subject, including transition from primary to post-primary; planning and task design for teaching; learning and ongoing assessment; teacher collaboration; reporting on student achievement and inclusion in teaching, learning and assessment. The results of the review may suggest amendments which, if minor, will be implemented in the specifications and the updated material then be re-published. If significant amendments are proposed, the development group which designed the original subject specification would be called to reconvene and lead the changes, which must then be approved by the NCCA before publishing (NCCA, 2021a[49]).

The Department's Inspectorate also has a monitoring role. Inspectors complete Inspectorate reports exploring how each of the subject specifications are enacted in classes. These reports are, and will continue to be, publicly available. Initial feedback from inspections indicates that the Junior Cycle Framework has led to positive developments in classroom practices (Inspectorate, 2020[50]; Department of Education, 2022d[51]).Inspectors noted that teachers had made significant advances in the use of student self-assessment and peer-assessment in Junior Cycle lessons. These practices enable students to review their progress and are important in helping them in the next steps of their learning (ibid).

Finally, an external longitudinal review of implementation was commissioned by the NCCA. The University of Limerick is conducting an external research study to evaluate the implementation and impact of the introduction of the framework in post-primary schools in Ireland (Mc Garr et al., 2022[9]). Beginning in 2020 and with an expected finish date of 2024, this longitudinal study is exploring the impact and implementation of the framework through the experiences of schools across four years, including analysing complexities, challenges and successes of implementation. The research will be conducted using several different methods, including interviews with representatives of stakeholder bodies, a survey of 965 teachers across 74 schools, one-on-one interviews with 28 school principals and case studies of 12 schools.

The first interim report of the research study was published in October 2022. Some of its insights into the challenges and enablers of implementation as experienced by teachers, principals and other stakeholders, as well as the wider impacts of the reform have been referenced in this case study (ibid). A second interim report was published in April 2023.

Establishing a robust monitoring system using both internal and external monitoring procedures enables and promotes a culture of continuous learning from the implementation of the Framework. It also provides opportunities for feedback and reflection. As a result, improvements can be made to ensure that the aims of the framework are met, and high-quality learning is delivered.

Box 7.5. Success factors

- The pre-existence of an established process to support curriculum planning at school level;
- introducing the change incrementally allowed time for adjustment, engagement and professional development;
- acknowledging and drawing on the experiences of practising teachers to provide professional development for their colleagues;
- ensuring a mechanism for ongoing dialogue with education stakeholders and partners facilitated programme implementation and amendments where needed;
- designing in monitoring processes which provide timely, evidence-based, information to schools and policy makers.

Reflections

The 2015 *Junior Cycle Framework* is the most significant reform of the formal curriculum in Irish education for decades. It shifts the focus from a content-oriented approach with a dominant, single, end of cycle exam to one which is modern, skills-based and student-focused, where both ongoing assessment and a final exam are carefully balanced to ensure that all the learning achieved by students is acknowledged. It is remarkable that this shift is being achieved following significant early opposition and the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The previous section in this case study identified some factors contributing to its success. However, it must be acknowledged that implementation is still, at whole-of-curriculum level, relatively new. For instance, the last phase of implementation only began in 2019. The first group of students to complete their journey through the *Junior Cycle Framework* in all subject areas did so in June 2022. This explains why monitoring, while reporting many positive findings, noted some challenges that still need to be addressed.

While there is evidence that teachers have developed greater professional language and new ways of collaborating as professionals because of the changes under the Framework, it is clear too that much remains to be done. Moving from what has been termed the “historic isolationist and insular culture” of schools, which saw teachers established as individual masters of their subject disciplines, to a culture of connectedness and collaboration requires teachers to redefine themselves. That may be emotionally and professionally stressful for many (Moynihan and O’Donovan, 2021[52]). Principals believe that “amplifying the level of collaborative practice in their schools needed to happen at a slow and steady pace predominantly based on the idea that what is actually being enacted amounts to a culture shift, an immense task that requires considerable time, care and persistence.” (ibid).

The structural support within the Junior Cycle Framework for SLAR meetings which brings teachers together into a subject department is an important contributor to establishing a collaborative culture and it is recognised that support for the SLAR process will need to continue until they become part of the educational landscape, and a natural part of the three-year learning journey for teachers (Kirk, 2018[53]). In addition, the whole-staff CPD provided by JCT is a significant catalyst to fostering collaboration, providing opportunities for the full school to work together on curriculum. Together with the provision of professional time, and the ongoing policy rhetoric which recognises and celebrates collaboration where it is evidenced, these measures are likely to enhance progress in this regard. This will have a positive impact and to impact positively on learning, teaching and other aspects of school life.

Any account of the story of the Junior Cycle Framework must also acknowledge that communication of the reform was a challenge in the earlier stages of implementation, and that teacher opposition had a

significant impact on the initial intentions for reform set out in 2012. Nevertheless, the remarkable commitment of the Department and its agencies to ongoing dialogue and the pragmatism which facilitated agreement on the changes made is also notable. Maintaining such commitment across electoral cycles is dependent on a shared, cross-party, vision for what is needed in education. The shift to a skills-based curriculum aligns with other Government policies[7] and it may well be this alignment that ensured a consistency of approach to the reforms as they were implemented.

Other challenges are noted in the University of Limerick study. These include an emerging perspective among stakeholders of a misalignment between Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle and subsequent calls for the types of learning experience at Junior Cycle to be followed through to Senior Cycle. Furthermore, whilst students are deemed to learn from CBAs, there is a concern that their experience of CBAs hasn't been as intended, and that it is still perceived as a significant assessment instrument and a stressor resulting in anxiety among students and teachers. On the other hand, findings from the report also demonstrates a belief among teachers and school leaders that students now have a greater voice in, and a greater awareness of, their own learning, that student-teacher relationships have improved and that the classroom practices of teachers have become more student-centred (Mc Garr et al., 2022[9]).

Research and evaluation of this major reform is crucial for understanding the progress of implementation, the impact of the reform and what is needed on an ongoing basis to support the reform over time and ensure it is firmly embedded. An Early Enactment Review of each newly introduced subject specification takes place as standard after the first cohort of students have completed the course (usually three years after introduction) and this provided a subject-specific understanding of the experience. Separately, while the Framework for Junior Cycle is still in the relatively early stages of its introduction the reception and impact of the new courses being studied, and their assessment, is currently the subject of review and evaluation. The University of Limerick longitudinal research commissioned by the NCCA and referenced in this case study aims to capture the opportunities and challenges presented by the Framework for Junior Cycle, and enable schools and teachers to tell their stories of engagement with this curriculum change. The longitudinal research remains ongoing until 2024. Two interim reports have been published to date, the first in October 2022 and the second in April 2023, as outlined elsewhere in this case study. As has been noted in the report, there are valuable findings beginning to emerge from this study. Data collection is continuing and the full research project when complete will inform consideration of policy responses to best support the ongoing implementation of the Junior Cycle Framework. This research will also provide an opportunity to more comprehensively consider the learnings from the experience of implementation and understand how these can be applied to future reforms.

In terms of advice to others embarking on reform, a core element would be to ensure early and sustained communication with all stakeholders including with parents as well as students and teachers. It is also clear that curricular reform on this scale takes considerable time and effort to embed, and so a sustained focus on the implementation over time is necessary including, as noted above, evaluation.

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Notes

[1] Students in senior cycle may opt for an additional Transition Year (TY) immediately after junior cycle. TY is intended to provide participants with an opportunity to develop maturity in terms of their personal and social awareness and competence as well as continuing to develop their academic, technical and general educational skills. It is available to all second level schools and the vast majority of second-level schools offer a TY programme to their students. Each school designs its own Transition Year programme, within set guidelines, to suit the needs and interests of its students. Transition Year | NCCA.

[2] For example, CEB, (1986) *In Our Schools, A Framework for Curriculum and Assessment. Report of the Interim Curriculum and Examinations Board to the Minister for Education*. Dublin: CEB.

[3] See Educational Research Centre, https://www.erc.ie/.

[4] See DeSeCo, https://www.deseco.ch/.

[5] Now known as Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI).

[6] Two new structured classroom-based assessments (CBAs) are conducted by teachers in each subject - one in second year and one in third year. These assessments may take a range of different formats, including oral language tasks, investigations, project tasks, practical or designing tasks, field studies and artistic performances. The intention is to allow students to demonstrate their skills and knowledge in a way that is not possible in the traditional written examination format. The NCCA, in collaboration with the SEC, annually designates the CBA tasks in each subject. Schools select which CBA to use, according to their curriculum and student needs. CBAs are conducted within class contact time and according to a national timetable. In order to guide teachers and to ensure a national standard is adhered to, the NCCA develops standards or reference points that are used to describe performance on the CBA at different levels. These are accompanied by examples of students' work at different levels to support teachers to evaluate the level of work from their own students. In the third year, the CBA has two different elements: A CBA as conducted in second year, and a formal written assignment task, completed in class under the supervision of a teacher, and based on what the student has learnt during the assessment, and skills and competencies developed during the assessment. This written assessment will be submitted to the SEC for external marking, alongside the State-certified examination in the subject which will be carried out at the end of third year. More information can be found in the 2015 Framework, in addition to the subject-specific assessment guidance listed in the bibliography and on the NCCA website.

[7] In 2016, Ireland launched its comprehensive ten-year National Skills Strategy (NSS) to 2025. The 2021 Economic Recovery Plan highlighted that skills, talent and workforce development are the most robust, transformative and enduring means to prepare and reorient the economy in terms of ongoing and accelerated technological transformation, digitisation and decarbonisation. A comprehensive review of Ireland's National Skills Strategy to help reinvigorate Ireland's skills system, and initiation of an OECD Review, was announced in November 2021, to focus on a number of priority areas. Separately, within the framework of the whole-of-government Creative Ireland programme, the Department of Education has placed a focus on creativity and creative skills in education as part of the cross-Departmental Creative Youth Plan 2017-2022. Most recently, the Department worked closely with other Departments in the development of a second Creative Youth Plan to span the period 2023-2027 which was approved by Government in March 2023 and published. This includes a strong focus on opportunities for creative engagement and development of creative skills in education, through school, student and teacher

participation in a range of programmes and opportunities. This second Plan aims to ensure a broad scope of creativity and ensure a focus on seldom-heard children and young people.

8 Japan: The Tohoku School Project

This chapter discusses the Tohoku School Project, an innovative approach to educational reconstruction taken by the Japanese government in the aftermath of the 2011 triple tragedy. In the wake of this devastation, an innovative education framework was proposed, placing students at the centre and equipping them with the skills to become the leaders of the future. A strong emphasis was placed on student autonomy and self-evaluation, as well as collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders both within and outside of the education system. This case study follows the project from conception through to completion, detailing the successes, challenges and potential lessons to be learnt for similar projects in the future.

Introduction

Many education systems introduce curriculum innovation through pilot schemes or singular projects. The thinking is that this approach creates the space to innovate "safely", without disrupting the established operations of schools. Pilot projects allow systems to explore new approaches to curriculum content and to organising teaching and learning. They can be a good way to test the viability of those approaches, identifying any potential deficiencies before committing to investing resources in system-wide change. It makes sense to implement a pilot project given the risks associated with system change - curriculum reform is one of the most politically sensitive and high-stakes reforms undertaken in education systems, and resistance to change is often much stronger than the desire to change (OECD, 2020a[1]).

The risks are perhaps greatest where the established system is entrenched and there is little momentum for change, despite clear evidence that change is needed. In this study, Japan seized the opportunity provided by the catastrophic events of 2011 to launch a project which challenged the established intended and experienced curriculum. Despite the devastation wrought by the triple disaster of an earthquake, tsunami and a nuclear accident, there was an appetite to try something new in the Tohoku region. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) determines the National Curriculum Standards, and the Central Council for Education (CCE) is responsible for responding to the inquiries by the Minister. The CCE organises several sub-committees; the implications from the Tohoku School Project, such as competency-based curriculum, were introduced at one of the sub-committees.

This study describes the Tohoku School Project, a significant innovation which placed students at the centre as leaders and curriculum makers. It provides a faithful description of how the project played out, including some of the challenges it faced.

What motivated change?

The defining trigger for this initiative was the triple tragedy which struck north-eastern Japan - specifically, the Tohoku region. On 11 March 2011, a magnitude 9.0 earthquake struck close to the region. The force of the earthquake created a tsunami towards the Tohoku coastline, destroying entire towns and villages in its path. The Tohoku region is situated in northeast Japan and is made up of the north-eastern section of the island Honshu. It consists of six prefectures: the Aomori, Akita and Iwate prefectures in the north and the Yamagata, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures in the south. Three of these prefectures, Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima, have long coastlines and were consequently severely damaged by the tsunami.

The earthquake and tsunami also caused an accident at Fukushima, Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, which required mass evacuations in the region (Economic Times, 2020[2]). The impact of this disaster was catastrophic. 20 000 people lost their lives; 2500 people are still reported as missing and 6000 people suffered injuries. Over 470 000 people were evacuated from their homes (Reconstruction Agency, n.d.[3]).

There was extensive damage to communities, including severe damage to roads, railways and airports and many homes were left without electricity, gas and water. Approximately 122 000 buildings were completely destroyed, 283 000 suffered severe damage and a further 748 000 were partially damaged (Reconstruction Agency, n.d.[3]). The financial implications of the disaster were significant, with the Cabinet Office estimating that direct financial damage was approximately US$154 billion, whilst the World Bank estimated that the economic cost could reach up to US$235 billion, which would make it the costliest natural disaster in world history (Reconstruction Agency, n.d.[3]).

In addition to the natural disaster, Japan is facing wider societal challenges in the country. Japan has one of the most rapidly ageing societies in the world, whilst simultaneously having one of the lowest birth rates. According to estimates by the Government of Japan, the population is expected to decline to 90 million by 2060, a 30% drop in comparison to 2010. 40% of the remaining population is expected to be over the age

of 65 years. The expected result is that "society as a whole will lose vigour", which in turn is having an impact on the national economy (Halász, 2014[4]).

There are also concerns about the national economy, which had been stagnating since the 1990s, when the country's debt first breached the 100% of GDP mark at the end of the decade and reached 200% by the end of 2010, making it the country holding the world's highest debt balance (Halász, 2014[4]; Economic Times, 2020[2]).

The Tohoku region was also one of the relatively less economically developed regions in Japan and the speed of population decline in the Tohoku region was more rapid than in other areas. The region had a mean yearly GDP per capita of 2545 thousand yen between 2001 and 2010, compared to the national average of 3046 thousand yen (Halász, 2014[4])).

Japan performs very well in educational tests, consistently achieving excellent performance in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) since 2000 and the level of tertiary attainment among 25–34-year-olds is one of the highest among OECD and partner countries, ranking third of 43 in 2021 (OECD, 2022[5]). Nevertheless, there was rising discontent about how education was delivered in practice, particularly concern that teachers focused exclusively on the transfer of knowledge, rather than the actual acquisition of skills by students. In addition, the workload was perceived as too heavy for both teachers and students, and education was perceived as doing little to develop in students the 21st century competencies needed to thrive in a vibrant and innovative economy (Hostens, 2013[6]).

Following the natural disaster, the OECD met with educational representatives, teachers and boards of education in the areas affected. They expressed a desire to implement a new educational system, rather than just rebuilding the same educational system which had existed prior to the disaster; a system capable of creating a problem-solving workforce of the future (Miura, Nanashima and Murashige, 2015[7]).

Thus, when planning efforts to rebuild the Tohoku region following the disaster, a unique prospect of using the situation as an opportunity for change and renewal for the whole country was identified (Halász, 2014[4]). This process of "creative recovery", whereby the recovery process could lead to a new type of economic growth and a new social model, would have the potential to tackle some of the wider and significant challenges at the heart of Japanese society and economy.

Thus, rather than rebuilding schools to their previous state, a new innovative education framework could be developed, which placed students at the centre, equipping them with the skills to become the leaders of the future, to help solve societal challenges and boost a strong national economy in the 21st century. Therefore, the concept of the OECD Tohoku School Project was born. This initiative would bring together selected students and stakeholders from across the education sector, including teachers, representatives from local education boards and representatives from the private sector, in an innovative new school which placed students at the centre. The unique feature of this project was the involvement of these various stakeholders.

The school was designed to equip students with the vital skills needed to drive innovation in the future and lead reconstruction initiatives in Tohoku and wider Japan. Selected students from across the Tohoku region would attend a total of five four-day intensive workshops, within which they were tasked with preparing all elements of a final event to be held in Paris, which would showcase the attractiveness and strengths of Tohoku as a region. The model would place students at the heart of learning and they would take the full lead in designing and delivering the project. They would be supported by adult participants acting as local leaders with the task of providing guidance to students, whilst allowing students to take the lead in the event preparation and project delivery.

Box 8.1. Push Factors

- The destructive impact of a triple disaster on schools and social infrastructure;
- growing societal concerns about the capacity to sustain an ageing population in the context of a stagnant economy and a new loss of confidence in public institutions;
- dissatisfaction with current educational practices;
- concern that students were not being appropriately prepared to create and sustain a thriving economy.

What is the vision?

The central vision behind the initiative was to build a future workforce equipped to lead the recovery of the Tohoku region and national recovery more widely, with the necessary skills to create industries and innovations required for the economic revitalisation of Japan (Fukushima University, 2014[8]). The skills necessary for driving innovation include leadership skills, creativity, planning, critical and constructive thinking, getting things done, negotiation, co-operation and thinking globally - skills reflective of the OECD key competencies which inform the PISA framework and are reflected in the Learning Compass (OECD, 2019[9]).

The objectives of the initiative are to develop students who:

1. Demonstrate independence: students involved in reconstruction will be able to demonstrate their independence and plan and deliver an international event which promotes the appeal of the Tohoku region independently (with adult support). The participation of children and young people in the reconstructive process will be ensured by providing opportunities for them to share their perspectives. The notion of "collaboration" between adults and students will be redefined to enable this.

2. Learn from the process: through the process of planning and implementing an event, students are able to develop the key competencies needed in a global, diverse and knowledge-based 21st century society.

3. Consider the future, regional interests and national interests: contributing to the promotion of regional reconstruction overseas will support the strengthening of "regional power", such as regional policy planning and implementation capabilities. The aim is to create citizens capable of thinking about the future of Tohoku and Japan and of creating the industries and innovations necessary for economic revitalisation (OECD, 2014[10]).

To achieve these aims, the Tohoku School and selected students were tasked with planning and delivering an international event in Paris in 2014 - two and a half years after the project began – to promote the attractiveness of the Tohoku region and initiate conversations on recovery. This would be the founding project for the school but the vision guiding the project extended further than the Tohoku School Project, centred in wider policy aims of national curriculum reform amidst discussions on how to revive the curriculum for the future. For example, the Tohoku School Project was introduced in the discussion of curriculum reform in the subcommittee of Central Council for Education as an example of implementing project-based learning which tried to connect education with society.

Box 8.2. Vision

An educated cadre of independent, resourceful and civic-minded people who can and will contribute to the social and economic development of Tohoku and Japan, through the creation of new economic opportunities.

What opportunities existed?

Existing educational staff personnel

Rather than hiring new staff, local governments in the affected region were approached and asked to invite selected educational staff, including teachers, members of the local education board and administrators, to act as the adult participants and local leaders in the project. This not only avoided a lengthy and costly recruitment process, it also ensured that adult participants were recruited with a knowledge of the local area and existing relationships with the local community, and were people with whom many students were already familiar.

Internal expertise

Existing internal expertise was enlisted from various educational organisations. MEXT acted as a key partner in the initiative and expertise was drawn from across various departments within MEXT in its design and implementation. Expertise was also recruited from Fukushima University, which was enlisted as a key partner and later became the lead of the project.

Community involvement

Local community actors played a key role and were an invaluable source of support in the project. They provided a key range of support mechanisms; for example, NGOs provided fundraising training and assistance to students, local businesses worked with students on their projects, providing expertise and sometimes funding, and companies provided support in the form of transport, consultancy support or event planning support. Local community actors were also enlisted as Empowerment Partners, to provide guidance and mentoring to students and share their expertise and experience.

International models of education provision

When determining the purpose of the project, most notably the skills which students should acquire to lead reconstruction and economic revitalisation initiatives in the future, international models of education provision provided key guidance and examples on which the objectives could be based. In particular, the OECD key competencies, which are determined as vital to leading a successful life in the complex 21st century, provided a key base (OECD, 2005[11]). The OECD key competencies, upon which the PISA Survey is based, provide insight into the critical skills that students should be equipped with in order to face the complex challenges of modern global living and are divided into three core categories:

1. Use tools interactively: individuals need to be able to use a wide range of tools interactively with the environment, such as language and information technology.
2. Interact with heterogeneous groups: in an increasingly interdependent global world, individuals need to be able to interact and engage with people from a range of backgrounds.

3. Act autonomously: individuals should be able to take responsibility for managing their own lives within the broader societal context (ibid).

When determining the key performance indicators of the project, the OECD Key Competencies provided a vital point of guidance for measuring the progress of students, whilst being tailored to the individual context and objectives of the project.

Box 8.3. Existing opportunities

- Existing expertise among local education personnel;
- the support of community-based groups, including NGOs;
- international best practice in education;
- locally based educational leadership.

What actions were taken?

In the month following the disaster, the Secretary General of the OECD visited the Tohoku Region and met with local education boards and schools to discuss efforts to rebuild the education system in Tohoku. After hearing from stakeholders about their desire to build a new educational framework which would support the development of a workforce equipped with the skills to tackle the present and future societal issues facing Japan, the idea of Tohoku School was born.

Development of the project plan

The first step in the initiative was the development of the project plan suggested by the OECD. It was decided that the project would be implemented over a period of 30 months and would consist primarily of four five-day intensive workshops carried out through this period. As detailed further in this section, all students and adult participants would participate in these workshops, wherein students would be tasked with the preparation of a final event to take place in Paris. In addition, a number of smaller local events would be organised simultaneously in the larger schools, wherein students would work in their local groups to organise local projects and plans in relation to the final event.

Recruitment of participants

One of the immediate actions following the decision to begin Tohoku School Project was to recruit participants. Given the urgency created by the time constraints of the founding project and the looming event deadline, this needed to be done quickly and participants were recruited within a four-month period, before the start of the first intensive workshop in March 2012.

Immediately following a seminar which announced the initiative, requests were sent to local educational authorities, schools and community leaders in the three prefectures of the affected region and they were invited to select students and adult leaders to participate in the project. Each of the prefectures affected by the disaster were visited by a MEXT minister to discuss the initiative with the local boards of education and identify those who were committed to the project. 100 students from junior and senior high schools were selected to participate and a priority focus was placed on students who could not participate in "cram" schools or other activities during school holidays, particularly due to financial reasons (Halász, 2014[4]). In addition, 10-15 local team leaders (LLs) were recruited from nine local sites across three prefectures, Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima, including volunteers, who had experience in "implementing project learning", "holding children-led events" and "holding events that bring together the school,

community, and city government as a monolith", and were able to lead children and young people (Fukushima University, 2014[8]).

Adult participants were enlisted from a range of backgrounds, including teachers, members of boards of education, local education administrators, community leaders, politicians and industry representatives to guide the students in their activities, facilitate conversation and carry updates and messaging from the project back to their schools and communities (Fukushima University, 2014[8]; Halász, 2014[4]). The intention, however, was for students to take the lead in the project, with adult leaders acting more as a source of support, rather than leading activities as customary in schools.

An advisory board was also established which included stakeholders from a range of backgrounds and experiences and which reflected the voices of the local community (Miura, Nanashima and Murashige, 2015[7]). This board met during each intensive workshop and was crucial in providing advice to the programme on areas such as project governance issues, cooperation systems for funding and review of the Tohoku School curriculum (ibid).

In addition, empowerment partners (EPs) were enlisted, with the role of providing professional advice and expertise to students. They were drawn from a variety of backgrounds, including NGOs, a TV crew, schools and companies like Yahoo, Microsoft, SoftBank and a telecom operator. Companies' motivation to join the project as EPs was often, as part of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and/or Creating Shared Value (CSV), to support schools to change for a better future, for which the education system would need the students to be equipped students with vital skills, such as identifying and solving problems and creative and communicative skills. Others, such as NGO Kidsdoor, volunteered to coordinate fundraising activities and train students in their fundraising skills (Hostens, 2013[6]).

Development of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

The programme is intended to equip students with the OECD key competencies, which are crucial in a global, diverse and knowledge-based 21st century. However, it was recognised that these competencies are general in purpose and abstract, and there was a need to tailor these competencies to focus specifically on developing a workforce for reconstruction. Thus, it was decided that a specific set of KPIs should be developed which could be used to measure the learning of students participating in the initiative (Miura, Nanashima and Murashige, 2015[7]).

During the second intensive workshop, a representative from MEXT was invited to join a teacher discussion focused on the outcomes of students participating in the Tohoku School Project. Participants of the workshop were asked to identify what they want the students to grow up to be; their responses were then collected and categorised. The five categories of aims which emerged were: "power to create"; "to play and enjoy"; "to work together"'; "hometown power"' and "creativity and imagination". In addition, Fukushima University, local leaders and EPs gathered several times to develop a clear image of the workforce they were aiming to build, which was defined as "innovators who can contribute to the reconstruction of Tohoku and the development of Japan by creating new businesses and initiatives for industry and society in Tohoku twenty years from now" (Miura, Nanashima and Murashige, 2015[7]) and to further clarify educational outcome measures. Thus, the following KPIs and indicators which would guide the implementation of the initiative and monitor its success were defined:

1. ability to actively learn new thinking and think freely;
    a. curiosity: to understand knowledge, investigate, organise and comparatively analyse things from multiple perspectives and address social issues beyond one's own perspective;
    b. imagination: to create plans and proposals based on the information provided.

2. ability to promote business in an autonomous and cooperative manner;
    a. teamwork: not only among members in the same position but also among students and teachers;
    b. management ability: able to see one's own activities objectively; prioritise tasks; manage risks and carry out team activities.
3. ability to solve problems;
    a. problem-solving ability: critically consider direction of oneself and the team; identify essential issues; consider contributions to the region and the country.
4. ability to involve others; ability to communicate;
    a. ability to communicate: make presentations on achievements; gain empathy from others; encourage external stakeholders to act and participate;
    b. involvement: able to express needs and obtain co-operation where needed; involve external parties in the project and expand into large scale initiatives.
5. deep understanding of the region; ability to connect to the world;
    a. regional power: explain appeal of the region to outsiders; understand the issues the region faces and create a vision for the future;
    b. global strength: interest in and interaction with international trends; understand the universal common world values; communicate messages and promote cooperation and collaboration (Miura, Nanashima and Murashige, 2015[7]).

Structural development

The Tohoku School Project was launched as a joint initiative between the OECD, MEXT and Fukushima University, but it operated under a multi-layered structure which included local governments, educational administration, schools and regional cooperation organisations across the regions. In doing so, it is important to establish early on the chain of authority and administrative implementation, and to define roles, to ensure effective collaboration. Due to this multi-layered organisation and the nature of responding to a natural disaster in an urgent and immediate fashion, there was some confusion from the outset concerning who would take the lead in the organisation and administration of the initiative. The first intensive workshop was organised mainly by the OECD, with support from MEXT and Fukushima University, because of the lack of capacity by the local leaders being affected by the disasters themselves. There were challenges presented by the time difference between Paris and Tohoku, particularly concerning speedy contact with regional teams and arranging accommodation and transportation. However, after the first intensive workshop, local leaders started to take more initiative in organising workshops. It became clear that close contact between the region and the management body was essential for the smooth and successful delivery of the project. Thus, the OECD Tohoku School Management Office was established in Fukushima University and, following a high-level roundtable in November 2012, it was confirmed that Fukushima University would act as the lead on the project, with the OECD and MEXT acting as supporters (Miura, Nanashima and Murashige, 2015[7]).

The OECD Tohoku School Management Office initially consisted of one full-time staff member and three Fukushima University graduate students providing support, but over time it progressed to four full time staff members and 12 graduate students, in addition to the recruitment of remote or external roles, including

translators. At the beginning, the main tasks of the office were: organising intensive workshops; organising regional schools; preparations for various conferences; gathering participants; travel expense procedures and securing means of transportation and venues. As the activities of schools increased, the Office began to organise visits to each region to check in on activities and provide support.

In addition, the Office took on more coordination responsibilities, including handling dispatch requests to the boards of education and schools of participating students, and providing explanations and information to parents of participating students to ensure that they were able to work more easily and within a network of support. Whilst staff numbers were increased in line with the evolution of responsibilities, the workload was high and deadlines tight, due to the unprecedented and developing nature of the project (Miura, Nanashima and Murashige, 2015[7]). Simultaneously, a second Administration Office was established in Paris, with the aim of ensuring close contact between the project and the OECD, the Permanent Mission of Japan to the OECD, the Paris City Authorities and other companies involved in the project and based in Paris.

Tohoku School Workshops

Once the participants had been recruited, efforts quickly turned towards delivering a series of intensive workshops for them which would provide a space for participants to carry out their design and implementation of the 2014 event. Participants from each region attended the workshops as a team, led by their local leader. Lecturers from a wide range of backgrounds were enlisted to deliver workshops, discussions and lectures to guide participants in developing the project (Fukushima University, 2014[8]).

The first five-day workshop was held in the Iwaki City, Fukushima prefecture on 25–30 March 2012, with the focus on laying the grounds for the project and developing an action plan. Lectures were held on topics like recovery, critical thinking and strategy (Fukushima University, 2014[8]). Students decided together that the name of their team would be “WA”, chosen to reflect their focus on the notion of collaboration: collaboration between damaged areas and other regions in Japan, collaboration with overseas partners, and collaboration between students and teachers. Students were asked to design a “Tohoku 2014 future forecast”, which outlined their hopes for development in Tohoku and how they would broadcast the appeal of Tohoku at the 2014 event.

Students gave presentations on what they identified as the attractiveness of the Tohoku region which they intended to demonstrate in Paris. Together, they then designed an action plan for the themes of the 2014 Paris event and the working methods to achieve this (Fukushima University, 2014[8]). Students were then divided into teams according to their interests and region. This included four thematic teams tasked with event preparation, external and internal communications, documenting the process, and fundraising and relations with business and community actors (Halász, 2014[4]).

Following this first workshop, and in between future workshops, local activities were held in each region to support participants in developing and enacting projects according to their local situation and needs (Fukushima University, 2014[8]). These were delivered under the leadership of a local team leader and with the support of local collaborators. These activities were held twice a month, usually on weekends or after school. Activities varied by region, including, for example, fishing experiences with local fishery cooperatives, reviving traditional performing arts, product development for agricultural revitalisation and research on renewable energies (Miura, 2016[12]; Fukushima University, 2014[8]). In addition, inter-regional activities and teams were organised regularly on thematic activities (Miura, 2016[12]).

The second five-day intensive workshop was held from 31 July–4 August 2012. Many activities took place during this event, including the development of large-scale art to express the future, thematic workshops, and interviews with people working in Paris. A discussion session was held for adult participants, focused on the objectives for student development and outcomes during the project and the competencies which the project should aim to equip students with (Fukushima University, 2014[8]). A further discussion was

then held with both students and adult leaders, wherein they worked together to explore and agree on the competencies which students should develop through the project. A progress report was provided and there was a discussion on how the action plan agreed in the first workshop should be implemented. The main objective of the workshop was to make a ground plan for the event. Though students worked hard to achieve this, they acknowledged their lack of real knowledge and awareness about Tohoku as a challenge (Fukushima University, 2014[8]; Miura, Nanashima and Murashige, 2015[7]).

Following the second workshop, a number of funding activities were organised by participants. Given that the programme was intended to promote self-sufficiency, participants had been tasked with the responsibility of acquiring the funding to deliver the event themselves, thus one central task of the allocated fundraising group was to identify and raise funding to deliver the event. Students participated in several activities to raise funding, including a charity event called “Cheer! NIPPON!”. At this event, they discussed the programme with famous athletes and successfully secured an offer of funding. Students also delivered a presentation at UNIQLO, a Japanese clothing company, which was well-received and laid the foundation for future fundraising (Fukushima University, 2014[8]).

The third intensive workshop was held in the Miyagi Prefecture from 26–29 March 2013. A number of new students joined and a meeting with a MEXT minister was held to provide updates. The concept of the event and the event logo were agreed by participants, in addition to the main attraction which each regional team would provide. Furthermore, 100 iPad terminals were contributed by one partner company to support communication between widely separated areas, which had been a persistent challenge in the project since the outset (Fukushima University, 2014[8]).

Shortly after the third workshop, a feasibility study visit to Paris was conducted in early May 2013, involving a selected group of 15 adult participants and 16 students who visited the city to further confirm and clarify event aims. A conference was held at the OECD headquarters at which students presented on the project and its progress. A reception was held with Japanese affiliated companies and the students’ pitch for cooperation and collaboration was well received, establishing good relationships with organisations such as the Japanese school in Paris, the Library Association, the Permanent Delegation of Japan to the OECD and the Embassy of Japan (Fukushima University, 2014[8]).

In the fourth intensive workshop, held from August 4–7 2013, in Tokyo, the focus of the discussions was on giving a clearer shape to the event and thematic activities. Students delivered a presentation to the Crown Prince and Princess of Japan and a reception party was held with more than 60 enterprises, at which the students pitched for more support. In addition, a discussion was held for adult participants. Following the school, some students visited companies in Tokyo and delivered more presentations seeking support (Fukushima University, 2014[8]).

An open rehearsal of the event was held in late December 2013 in a local elementary school and resort facility. Participants received support from an event company and rehearsed their exhibits. In the evening, a meeting was held to discuss the funding balance and the scale of the event, issues which had been a constant challenge throughout the project, given that the extent of funding was unknown from the beginning, and thus it was difficult to determine the size of the event (Fukushima University, 2014[8]).

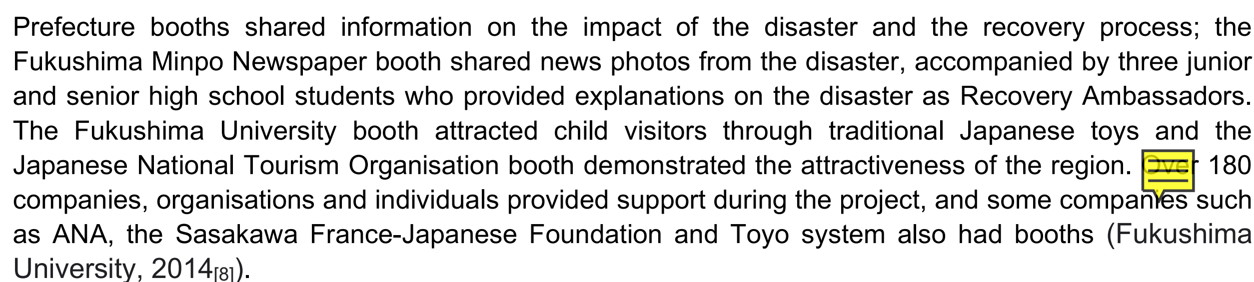
The fifth and final intensive workshop was held from March 22–25 2014 in the Iwate Prefecture. Participants reflected on the previous workshops and engaged in workshops on topics such as the core event messaging and the future branding of Tohoku.

Finally, in the last major event before the final Paris event, two students from the project were invited to the OECD and La Folle Journee au Japan event on May 5, 2014. This marked the first time that high school students had participated in such an event and their presentation on resilience was met with applause. The school was mentioned by Prime Minister Abe in his keynote speech and, at a music festival of French artists in Tokyo in the days before the event, participants held a school booth where they sold products from the Tohoku region, which proved very popular and sold out (Fukushima University, 2014[8]).

A number of smaller events were held in the run-up to the final 2014 event in Paris, including a pre-event at Tokyo International Forum two weeks before. The event was visited by a number of high-profile stakeholders, including the Reconstruction Agency Parliament Secretary, but the number of students and local leaders attending was unfortunately limited due to funding pressures. On the 14 August, a roundtable was held with private companies which, despite being in the middle of a national holiday week in Japan, was attended by representatives of 20 partner companies (Fukushima University, 2014[8]).

The Tohoku School event

The final large-scale Tohoku School event, and the culminating objective of the project, was held in Paris in September 2014. The event started with opening ceremonies, including a traditional deer dance and a story of survival from a participating student. Each team introduced their own unique attractions to demonstrate the appeal of the Tohoku region, including local products, dances and customs. In addition, a number of booths were put up in the park surrounding the conference centre, including from students, prefectures, partner companies and other groups. They received a number of high-profile visitors, including the Mayor of Paris and representatives from the Ministry of Youth and Sports in Romania and the International Division of the Paris City Government.

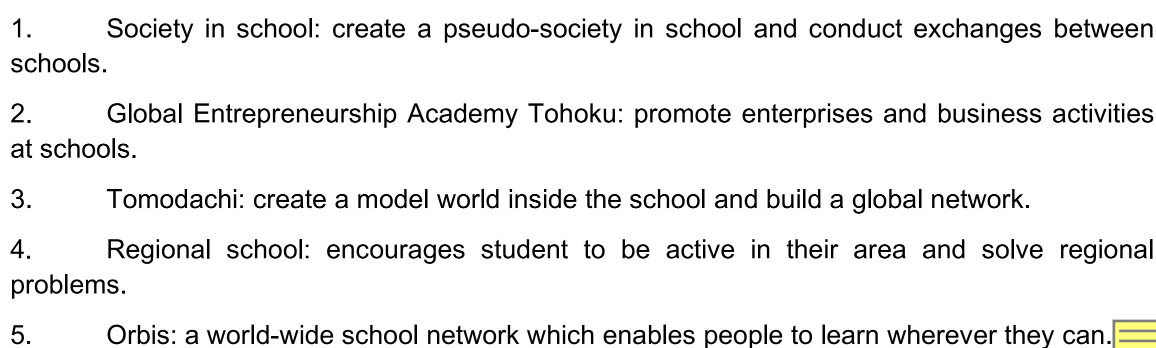


Prefecture booths shared information on the impact of the disaster and the recovery process; the Fukushima Minpo Newspaper booth shared news photos from the disaster, accompanied by three junior and senior high school students who provided explanations on the disaster as Recovery Ambassadors. The Fukushima University booth attracted child visitors through traditional Japanese toys and the Japanese National Tourism Organisation booth demonstrated the attractiveness of the region. Over 180 companies, organisations and individuals provided support during the project, and some companies such as ANA, the Sasakawa France-Japanese Foundation and Toyo system also had booths (Fukushima University, 2014[8]).

The event attracted 149 664 visitors, almost meeting the ambitious target of 150 000 visitors outlined by participants at the start of the project. The day after the event, students joined a symbolic cherry tree planting ceremony and were presented with their certificates of completion and praised for their efforts (Miura, Nanashima and Murashige, 2015[7]; Fukushima University, 2014[8]).

Student conference

The final stage of the programme was a conference attended by students and the adults who had supported them throughout the project. The conference was held on the theme of “My school, our future and schooling for 2030”. Students were divided into five teams and tasked with discussing five key areas of societal problems predicted in 2030 (according to OECD statistics). They were challenged to design ideas for the kinds of schools needed for the future. These five key themes were:



1. Society in school: create a pseudo-society in school and conduct exchanges between schools.
2. Global Entrepreneurship Academy Tohoku: promote enterprises and business activities at schools.
3. Tomodachi: create a model world inside the school and build a global network.
4. Regional school: encourages student to be active in their area and solve regional problems.
5. Orbis: a world-wide school network which enables people to learn wherever they can.

The student groups presented their ideas in a competition to the adults in attendance and a prize was awarded for the best idea. Participants commented on the meaningfulness of having students participate in the design of public education, citing it as a reference for future endeavours (Miura, Nanashima and Murashige, 2015[7]).

Integrating learnings into education reform

The Tohoku School Project was carried out in the midst of a further package of policy reform, which included a significant focus on curriculum reform. Prior to the project, discussions were underway regarding how to revive the curriculum to make it fit for the future and the Tohoku School Project provided a key source of learning and inspiration for these continued efforts.

In 2012, a year after the Tohoku School Project was established, ministers involved in organising the initiative in Japan were inspired by the key principles guiding the Tohoku School Project and how early learnings could be replicated more widely in the Japanese education system. One of the regions which was heavily affected by the nuclear disaster, the Futaba region, was participating in the Tohoku School Project with the view that there needed to be wider changes to the education system following the disaster beyond just participation in the project. Influenced by their participation in Tohoku School Project, students in the region became increasingly convinced that a new vision of education was possible and the idea of creating a new longer-term school which replicated the vision of Tohoku School Project was developed. Superintendent officials of the Futaba region met with Andreas Schleicher, the Director for Education and Skills at the OECD, and discussed the possibility of establishing such a school.

As such, the Futaba Future School was established in 2014, guided by the lessons and principles of the Tohoku School Project, and corresponding to policy demand for national curriculum reform. Replicating discussions held at Tohoku School, officials, teachers and students in the Futaba Future School met to discuss the objectives of the school and the specifics of the student profile which students would need to succeed in the future, in addition to developing together the vision for the school and the rubric for assessment. Students and teachers considered data for 2030 and assessed what kind of competencies students would need to meet present and future challenges.

The key principles of the Tohoku School Project were replicated in the Futaba Future School. For example, there was a significant focus on vision-making across the school with the participation of both teachers and students. Guidance was also taken from discussions with the OECD, including, for example, the importance of formative assessment. As such, assessment rubric focused not just on summative assessment, but also regularly tasking students with self-assessing their own competencies, discussing their findings with a mentor or teacher and receiving feedback for improvement. In turn, the student competencies established within the school replicated those which had guided the Tohoku School, such as that a student “can think patiently about unknown matters, can break away from conventional ideas and his/her own way of thinking to generate new ideas” and “has a will to improve society and the future, can seriously express his/her own opinion to others” (Fukushima Prefecture Futaba Future High School, 2015[13]).

The curriculum in Futaba Future School was also inspired by the Tohoku School Project and shared common notions. For example, “inquiry-based learning to create a future” was a core principle of the Futaba curriculum. In the first grade, three hours a week were dedicated to supporting students to “understand complexity of challenges for community rebuild and development”; in second grade equivalent time was allocated to enable students to “identify challenges and start the inquiry study project”, and in third grade students were tasked with presenting project outcomes and exploring their own carrier vision.

Key learnings and lessons from the experience of the Tohoku School Project were embedded at all levels in the Futaba Future School and successful factors trialled and experimented in the Tohoku School Project were replicated. Graduates from the Tohoku School Project were invited to attend the first meeting of the

Futaba Future School and discuss their experience with teachers so that they could understand first-hand the impact of a student-centred programme on students and the impact that teachers could have.

The comprehensive stakeholder engagement model which guided the Tohoku School Project also proved instrumental in the development of Futaba Future School and is considered by ministers as critical to its success. It was understood that, in order for this school-level project to have the intended wider policy impact, there needed to be involvement from stakeholders at all levels. Within the Ministry itself, there was not a singular individual that was tasked with the delivery of the project; rather, the initiative received full support from political leadership at the top. Officials were engaged with the project across all sections of the Ministry - including curriculum and assessment - and worked together to deliver it successfully. The approach taken was not just top-down or bottom-up but an all-engaging model wherein officials, teachers and students worked together to deliver the shared vision.

This shared commitment to the vision of the school was also a key factor in its success. Although there were many challenges faced in the process of establishing the school, the lived experience of officials in the Tohoku School Project demonstrated that, as long as stakeholders remained committed to a shared vision, the initiative would be successful. As such, despite conflicts of views between staff in the school, regular time was allocated to discuss and agree the vision, particularly during the first month, when it was discussed in detail among teachers. In addition, stakeholders, including top leaders of the Ministry, students and teachers, were able to experience first-hand the impact of a student-centred programme and this proved instrumental both in the decision to create the Futaba Future School but also in decisions concerning wider curriculum reform. The impacts of the Tohoku School Project were very visible and provided the evidence needed to confirm the approach of the government towards curriculum reform. It confirmed the shift of education policy from traditional knowledge-based notions of education to a competency-based focus and this approach was encouraged more widely in schools in Japan.

The Futaba School was conveyed as best practice and schools across the country began to adopt a similar student-centred approach which placed enquiry-based learning at its core. New schools were established within affected regions which looked to replicate the approach of Futaba Future School, such as Okuma School, wherein students and teachers worked together to decide the competencies which students should develop in order to support regional development and reconstruction.

A key message carried across the Tohoku School Project, the establishment of the Futaba Future School and further curriculum reforms, was that the aftermath of a crisis presents a unique opportunity to take bold action for the future. Once Fukushima returned to “normal” life, it became easier to forget about the crisis and making reform happen became much more difficult. As such, crisis response provides an opportunity for bold action which can create full-scale and long-lasting change.

Box 8.4. Actions

- Recruiting interested participants across the community, including students, teachers, community leaders, politicians and industry representatives;
- developing success indicators for the project;
- clarifying responsibilities across the multiple layers of governance and establishing a management structure with defined responsibilities;
- implementation of a series of 4-day events, designed to enable students create and manage the achievement of the foundation project.

What supported successful implementation?

Strong stakeholder involvement

From the outset, stakeholder involvement was a central feature of the Tohoku School Project, enabled by aspects such as the multi-layered organisational structure of the project, dispersed leadership and shared responsibility.

The project was based on a model of regional cooperation. A regional network of local teams of student leaders led by local adult leaders, each with a high level of autonomy united by one common goal (Halász, 2014[4]). The presence of an advisory board made up of actors from a diverse range of backgrounds ensured strong community involvement and support for the project. It brought together expertise and knowledge, connecting the region, industry, government, academic and international actors (OECD, 2014[10]). Similarly, the recruitment of Empowerment Partners provided crucial support and knowledge-sharing whilst connecting different aspects of society with the project. The wider involvement of companies and enterprises in key aspects such as providing funding or support through transport, fundraising, consultancy or mentoring was key to success, but also provided unique opportunities for students to interact and learn from experienced stakeholders.

Crucial support was also provided by NGOs in supporting students to develop key competencies, and including students from other regions, most notably from Paris and Tokyo. They also facilitated collaboration and teamwork from students from different backgrounds and encouraged students to consider alternative, global perspectives. The involvement of local industries in designing revitalisation initiatives, such as the fishing and agricultural industries, encouraged students to consider real-life scenarios, helping them to develop of creativity and innovative thinking skills.

A bottom-up model of innovation

One of the most unique aspects of the Tohoku School Project is that the traditional method of teaching from the top was replaced by a bottom-up model in which students were given leadership and agency over the project. The development of a system which gave students leadership and responsibility over the design of the initiative not only encouraged greater motivation and participation in the project, but also provided an opportunity for them to develop critical competencies such as leadership, teamwork and critical thinking, giving them direct hands-on experience.

It also reversed traditional notions of relationships by promoting students and teachers as equal partners and providing greater opportunities for student-teacher dialogue, a factor which was routinely noted and praised during the student self-evaluation questionnaires and had a significant impact on student confidence and capabilities (Halász, 2014[4]). For example, students who were unable to form effective

relationships with adults in the first workshop were openly discussing their opinions with adult leaders in the second workshop and developing collaborative skills (Miura, Nanashima and Murashige, 2015[7]).

Almost all students and teachers interviewed in one evaluation report praised the two-way communication between teachers and students and mentioned the development of a symmetrical pedagogical relationship, wherein teachers were also able to learn from students. For example, one student told the OECD ambassador to Japan that, “what impressed me the most in this project has been that here adults also learn and they learn also from students. This is important because 'if adults are not capable to learn from us, they will not be capable to teach us'”. In turn, one teacher reported that, prior to the project, he could not imagine that teachers and students, “can be on the same level and can solve problems together”, but that after the project he understood that he can be “a partner to students” and that his way of teaching was “completely transformed”. He reported that, before the initiative, he “did not encourage students to ask questions” but now he sees “their activity as necessary” and that “students have to think in different perspectives” (Halász, 2014[4]).

Thus, instigating a bottom-up model of innovation was key not only to promoting greater participation and enthusiasm from students but also meeting the objectives of developing key competencies, as well as improving student-teacher dialogue and encouraging greater student participation in teaching and learning.

Dominance of non-school related goals

With the key aim of the project focused on developing citizens able to lead reconstruction of the Tohoku region following the natural disaster, rather than improving the quality of teaching and learning, there was a focus on connecting learning with the world outside of schools. Schools themselves had very little role in and experienced little immediate impact from the initiative. This in turn meant little pressure placed on already stretched schools, many of whom were having to deal with the immediate effects of the disaster, the impact of recovery efforts, including school sites under reconstruction, and the challenges of continuing education within a disaster zone.

A focus was placed on learning from external stakeholders, such as the business community, the international community and NGOs, with the aim of building a wider, cross-sectoral response to reconstruction. This was particularly important in the Japanese context, where learning tended to be focused heavily on passing examinations and a centralised system often proves inflexible to attempts at educational reform. The outside world tends to be more supportive of pedagogical innovations than schools which traditionally play a stronger role in shaping pedagogy and where teachers often carry the bulk of responsibility for their students’ learning (Halász, 2014[4]).

Not all schools, principals and teachers approved of the initiative and there were criticisms that the project took students way from the main focus of examinations, or objections to the idea of students participating in fundraising activities. In these circumstances, the fact that the initiative took place outside of school and emphasised non-traditional learning ensured that the project could be implemented in a smoother manner and with less resistance or obstacles than if schools themselves were expected to play a leading role.

Cross-government support

The initiative was supported by various government departments, which added a degree of urgency and importance to the project, as well as ensuring that expertise and knowledge was gathered from various sectors and that the aims of the project could be cross-sectoral. For example, whilst education was the main pillar of the initiative, the OECD former Ambassador Yoshikawa and Kodama from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs also played a key role in the project, by connecting Japan and other countries to foster good diplomatic relations in the area of education (Halász, 2014[4]). There were examples of collaboration between different ministries, agencies and local governments. For example, at an OECD Ministerial

Council meeting, a representative student introduced efforts to collaborate on fishing and agriculture with the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Fisheries (OECD, 2014[10]).

There was also involvement across different teams within MEXT itself. In fact, the division in MEXT which had overall responsibility for the initiative was not the team responsible for primary and secondary education, but the team responsible for lifelong learning and overall policy strategy. This disconnected the project from the daily routine operations of school education, reducing any resulting pressures, and ensuring that the initiative connected with real world issues (Halász, 2014[4]).

Reflecting commitments in wider education policy

The Tohoku School Project prioritised establishing a culture of lifelong learning, developing a workforce that is equipped with vital skills and ensuring that education meets the needs of students. This reflected long-established education policy on access to educational opportunities for all in Japan. For example, the Evening Classes at Junior High Schools project aims to ensure that all individuals can achieve general education at the compulsory education stage (MEXT, n.d.[14]).

This initiative was established during the chaotic post-war period of the 1940s to provide opportunities to complete compulsory education for individuals who otherwise faced barriers in doing so, for example, those who were unable to enrol in schools in the daytime due to the need to work as a result of increased poverty. In addition, the evening classes were put on for those who graduated from junior high school without a sufficient education due to a range of factors, such as non-attendance (Tanaka, Y., 2020[15]).

These evening classes replicate the conditions of regular junior high schools, including the provision of free tuition, the delivery of classes by qualified teachers and a resulting graduation from junior high school for students that successfully completed all courses. The programme is designed to ensure that all enrolled students will study the entire junior high school curriculum. A growing number of schools are additionally conducting Japanese language classes for the increasing number of foreign students who need further language skills. The syllabus for study often varies according to the student's need. For example, younger students tend to study a curriculum similar to daytime junior high school, whereas older learners will often study a curriculum more focused on language development.

By 1955, there were 89 “Evening Classes at Junior High Schools” established across the country. However, the number has since decreased, as the number of school-aged children not attending schools and long-term absentees decreased. In the 1960s, growing demand for the evening classes resurfaced due to an increase in the number of foreign students who had not received a compulsory education in their home countries or in Japan. Efforts by MEXT to increase the number of Evening Classes at Junior High Schools are ongoing, including, for example, the 2017 establishment of *Basic guidelines for ensuring opportunities for education equivalent to general education at the compulsory education stage*, which aims to promote the establishment of Evening Classes at Junior High Schools, enhance the educational activities of existing evening classes and increase the enrolment of diverse groups of students in compulsory education. Measures to support this include improving teaching methods, developing a system to organise the special curriculum to meet the specific needs of students and raising awareness of the need for this initiative (ibid).

Evening Classes at Junior High Schools were and continue to be fundamental to ensuring that all students, regardless of circumstances, are able to achieve general education at the compulsory education stage. They provide a unique opportunity for students from diverse backgrounds, including older students and students of different nationalities, to come together in one learning environment.

Box 8.5. Success factors

- Building the project on a model of regional cooperation;
- giving students leadership and agency;
- maintaining a focus on connecting learning with the external world outside of schools;
- having the support of multiple government.

Next steps

The Tohoku School Project was a unique educational initiative which advocated a new approach to educational systematic change. It is regarded by many as a model of public sector innovation which is able to generate change processes in educational systems often "characterised as immobile, overregulated and resisting to change" (Halász, 2014[4]).

Research conducted following the initiative demonstrates that the project had a significant impact on participants, particularly students. The results of a repeated self-assessment which students completed in the first and second year of the project demonstrated a significant improvement in their general knowledge, communications skills, and ability to using tools interactively. Competencies which saw a significant improvement were teamwork; relating well to others; using knowledge and information interactively; using technology interactively; forming and conducting life plans and personal projects; acting within the big picture; managing and resolving conflicts; using language, symbols and texts interactively; and defending and asserting rights, interests, limits and needs (ibid).

Students and adult leaders reported a range of impacts on students, the most frequently mentioned of which was the significant "development of the capacity of students to cope with situations in a manner characterised by openness and uncertainty and to find solutions creatively in such situations". Increased self-confidence and self-esteem in students was also commonly reported, with one teacher stating, "there has been an improvement in their capacity to succeed in open situations, to find new, autonomous solutions, to express firmly their opinion and their wishes and to make presentations in front of a larger audience" (Halász, 2014[4]).

When asked about the difference between students participating and those not participating in the project, they reported significant differences on several factors, including understanding the difficulties faced in the post-catastrophe reconstruction period; maturity in thinking; creativity; activity in lessons; motivation; involvement in the local community; entrepreneurship and openness to business life (Halász, 2014[4]). One student interviewed during the course of this case study noted that the project had many profound impacts on their development, particularly on their self-esteem and confidence as well as more practical skills, such as how to lead professional conversations, how to attract stakeholders and how to think critically.

Whilst the aim of the project was not intended to have a direct impact on teaching and teaching practices, there were some identifiable effects reported by teachers. The most notable of these is the opening up of two-way communication between teachers and students and a recasting of the traditional relationship to make teachers and students equal partners, in which both are able to learn from each other. Teachers reported a consequent impact on the way that they viewed their teaching, with one reporting that he was "learning gradually the most difficult thing: keeping a balance between directivity and passivity" and to "find out when students can be left in uncertainty" (Halász, 2014[4]).

Given the model of the project and its aim to support self-sufficiency and creative thinking, teachers were pushed outside the boundaries of traditional school practices. Rather than following an organised set of guidelines, from the outset, teachers had to invent practically everything for students. Thus, they were also simultaneously learning new pedagogical skills and how to manage an unknown pedagogical environment, characterised by uncertainty and openness. Whilst the direct impact on teachers and teaching practices observed in studies was modest, where impact was identified, it was typically a significant change in thinking about learning and teaching (Halász, 2014[4]).

Despite the opposition of some to the project, the context of the triple disaster must be acknowledged, as thousands of people lost their homes within minutes and hundreds of people lost their lives, whole cities were evacuated and increased radiation levels will be a daily occurrence for communities for decades to come. In this context, maintaining the traditional separation between different aspects of society, such as the traditional isolation of learning in schools from the outside world, is no longer feasible, nor is it efficient given that a multi-sectoral response across the entire community is necessary to support a comprehensive, multi-level approach to reconstruction (Halász, 2014[4]).

However, the project faced many challenges and there are key lessons that can be learnt. For example, communication was a common challenge and misunderstandings, criticisms and delays were often caused by a lack of information and communication. Providing clarity and addressing difficulties increased the workload of the administration office, who struggled to keep up with evolving responsibilities. Eventually, work was gradually outsourced to external partners for support; for example, Winds International provided event planning assistance, the NGO Kid's Door provided fundraising assistance and Accenture Japan Co. Ltd took over project management, overseeing the entire project and managing progress. This helped to make the process smoother and more efficient (Miura, Nanashima and Murashige, 2015[7]).

The initiative also resulted in conflicting perspectives between teachers. The student-centred nature of the project was misunderstood by some: whilst teachers were ready and willing to give autonomy to students, some gave complete autonomy to students without understanding their role was to provide guidance and leadership. Others who were unfamiliar with such a concept of student agency struggled with the contradiction to traditional notions of the student-teacher relationship. As such, for Ukraine and others looking to replicate a similar student-centred initiative, the Student Agency for 2030 Conceptual Learning Framework may provide useful guidance to facilitate a comprehensive and effective student-centred approach (OECD, 2019[9]). In particular, references to models such as the Sun Model of Co-Agency demonstrate the different levels of student agency.

Whilst any new and innovative education initiative is unlikely to progress without facing challenges, there are important lessons for anyone looking to apply learnings from the project. While the project is often praised for its innovation and creativity as noted by many researchers, there is much to be learned and applied in other contexts. Halász, for example, praises the project as an "open innovation framework", which encourages an internal diversity of approaches and creates an "open space where those facing common challenges and interested in finding solutions can bring in their ideas about possible solutions, they can confront their views, they can combine the partial solutions they have already found and they can try to apply them together" (Halász, 2014[4]) . Many participants have expressed a desire to continue follow-up to the project and to share their learnings with their schools and communities, in the hope of contributing to reconstruction efforts in the future.

Praised by Halász as "a major pedagogical experiment in Japan", the project undeniably had a notable impact on participants and provides many learnings to be considered in future reconstructions of the educational system.

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9 The Great Korean Education Transition: Green-Smart Schools of the Future

This chapter covers a case study outlining the Green-Smart Schools initiative in Korea. This project aims to transform outdated school facilities into an eco-friendly learning environment to adapt both to the challenges of climate change, and the era of digital transformations. Despite being in its early phase, the project demonstrates a coherent trajectory established at its core, complemented by adaptable strategies at the grassroots level. This study offers a valuable illustration of a sustainable environment planning model that balances societal and ecological considerations with educational objectives.

Introduction

Across the globe, governments are acting to address climate, biodiversity and other environmental challenges. Education programmes on environmental sustainability are a common feature on school curriculums and more and more countries are considering how built environment can contribute to a more sustainable future.

In Korea, the recognition that sustainable school buildings are an important part of the solution informed the development of the Green-Smart Schools Project. The Korean Government's ambition, set out in 2020, is to transform the economy to make it greener, reducing CO^2 emissions and promoting low-carbon, eco-friendly policies. The government plans to transform public urban areas into green, zero-energy spaces. Elementary, middle and high schools, as well as other public buildings and cultural facilities, are to be remodelled or reconstructed as energy-efficient, eco-friendly, smart buildings. Announcing the Green-Smart Schools Project, the Ministry of Education noted that almost 20% of school facilities were 40 years old or older and could be expected to deteriorate (Ministry of Education, 2020). The Project, which is being rolled out over two phases, focusses on creating a safe, future-oriented and healthy educational environment through the refurbishment and/or the rebuilding of old school buildings.

The Green-Smart Schools Project is a programme for the renovation and refurbishment of existing school stock. 2 835 school buildings will be included in the first phase of the project, which runs from 2021 to 2026, (Ministry of Education, 2020). It involves innovating the physical space available for teaching and learning, based on feedback from school users, with the aim of developing diverse classroom designs and layouts. The project will also expand the digital infrastructure in schools to create 'smart' classrooms.

While improvements in the built environment and classroom layout can play a significant role in delivering the kinds of changes needed to limit resource use, promote sustainability, and respond to climate change challenges, they also help create the physical conditions for increased collaborative learning, improved student motivation and engagement; and positive student/teacher relations. The Green-Smart Schools Project includes the ambition to make optimum use of digital technologies to create spaces where students can develop the skills and competences needed to respond to the rapid social and environmental changes which the future may bring.

This case study describes the rationale and implementation process of the project. Whilst it is still at an early stage, the project's clear direction, coupled with flexibility at local level, provides a useful example of planning for sustainable environments in a way which considers social and environmental factors as well as educational goals.

What motivated change?

Schools can be seen as communities where members can respond to global crises of climate change, environmental pollution, and demographic changes together. Korea's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, a period of intense and rapid change and uncertainty, led to a recognition of the urgent need to prepare children and young people for the future and equip them with skills to proactively lead and respond to future national and global challenges.

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, there is an increasingly rapid demand for change in traditional schooling, which has centred on offline, or face-to-face, instruction. Simultaneously, the current school system is expected to be equipped with functions and roles that would adapt to the digital age, which has prompted the transformation of physical spaces which would facilitate, apply and practice digitally compatible teaching-learning methods. This new spatial conversion of schools has attracted national attention and has been actively promoted. In response to this challenge the Ministry of Education announced the 'Ten Policy for Future Education Transformation Post COVID-19(draft)' including a physical

infrastructure development plan to build a digital environment that enables online/offline hybrid/blended-classes using digital devices anywhere in the school. Its representative model for this initiative is the Green Smart School.

The successful planning and delivery of remote classes during the pandemic highlighted several key lessons, including the importance of a student-directed learning model of education, and innovative teaching and learning methods which utilised modern, cutting-edge digital technology. The role played by the learning environment was also brought into focus. Korea understood that schools play an important role in supporting the well-being of individuals and society and so realised that the space that schools provide for students should be seen as a safe and comfortable space in which students live, learn and grow.

Whilst an emphasis on school facility improvement and curriculum reform in responding to social, educational and environmental challenges was not an entirely new notion, previous policy implementations had been fragmented or discontinued due to insufficient communication and collaboration between the relevant government departments. Earlier projects which aimed to renew school facilities had focused on improving outdated facilities, rather than on innovation. The commitment to ensuring that the school's physical structure supports the development of a new education approach, utilising EdTech and remote learning and facilitating educational activities based on student choice, signalled a change in emphasis in school (re-)design in Korea.

The Ministry of Education announced the *Five-Year Plan to Improve School Facilities* in 2018, focusing on improving aged school facilities. Priorities included eliminating risk factors caused by old and deteriorating school facilities, replacing heating and cooling systems, and renovating restrooms. Safety inspections of school buildings are regularly conducted and the degree of deterioration is graded, from Grade A, which is in the best condition without problems, to Grade E, where use of facilities is prohibited and urgent attention is required. Buildings graded below C can be restored. The percentage of buildings achieving these low grades is steadily decreasing, from 13.5%-19.3% in 2000, depending on regional location, to 5.0-5.6% in 2021 (KMOE & KEDI, 2022).The *Five-Year Plan* also included opportunities to innovate the way space within the school was used for specific activities, for example, recreation. Those who use the space (students, teachers, etc.) were actively involved in the design stage of refurbishment. The intention was that this would allow for the creation of classroom spaces which would foster students' imagination and nurture creativity. The Plan envisaged learning spaces that differed significantly from the previously existing supplier-centred standardised school spaces.

Following the extensive 2018 physical school renovation plan, the Ministry decided that a more future-oriented and comprehensive project was required; thus, the Green-Smart School Project was created in 2020. The project aims to adapt existing school infrastructure to enable the use of new technology and the development of innovative new teaching and learning practices. This included specific plans to renovate school buildings which were over 40 years old, in order to better promote digital-based and eco-friendly education.

This will be achieved through remodelling old school buildings, making them more energy-efficient and run by solar power under the zero-energy initiative. The commitment to increase classroom WiFi coverage for primary and secondary schools to 100% by 2022 has been achieved (National Education Commission, 2023) and progress has been made in developing a new digital education platform which utilises big data and provides custom-made educational content **Invalid source specified.**.

Box 9.1. Motivation for change

- Desire to prepare students to respond to unforeseen challenges in the future, including those related to the climate change and the environment;
- the need to update and refurbish existing school facilities.

What was the vision?

The Green-Smart School Project has four key components; space innovation, smart classrooms, green school, and building school complexes. These four components are intended to provide an advanced learning environment in which students learn the skills demanded by rapid social changes of the future. The vision which underpins the project is of an ecologically sustainable education environment which enables optimum use of technology to develop the full potential of students.

It envisages a new school model adept for the future, which enables curricula customised to student needs and innovative teaching and learning approaches. It involves a new approach to school facilities management, which organically connects facilities with school curriculum and supports innovative new teaching and learning with technology at its core. For example, in the era of digital transformation, project-based instruction requires a school space facilitating group activities that utilize digital devices. A typical classroom created for this purpose is the PBL (Project Based Learning) classroom. This learning environment supports new teaching and learning and has a positive impact on the design of class models for selective curriculum in the high school credit system.

Box 9.2. Vision

The Green-Smart School of the future is a smart and green learning environment based on digital technology, eco-friendly practices and school complexes which are well connected with the local community.

What opportunities existed?

Internal expertise

As the project was focused on a holistic view of students' life and thus worked across multiple disciplines, various different government ministries worked collaboratively on the project. The Ministry of Science and ICT and the Intellectual Property Office are involved in supporting the establishment and management of schools' smart learning environments. They also help the Ministry of Education to operate software and AI in pilot schools and advanced STEM classrooms, focusing on inquiry and experience. They host IT and invention competitions.

The Ministry of Environment and the Korea Forest Service support the creation of eco-friendly schools and environmental education programmes. The Ministry of the Interior and Safety, the Ministry of Health and Welfare, the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism, and the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, and Transport are involved in supporting the design of school complexes that could be used for the community. This could take the form of providing various services from educational programmes such as urban

renovation and physical and cultural education programmes, as well as childcare or elderly care. Cross-departmental collaboration ensured that student and school needs were considered in the design of the initiative, as well as harnessing internal expertise and creating cross-government support.

In addition, students and teachers, the end users of the new schools, played a key role. A variety of different channels were used engage them at all stages of the project, ensuring that their opinions and needs were listened to. For example, in the pre-planning stages, students and teachers took part in activities to plan how they wanted their Green-Smart School to look. Putting their perspectives at the heart of the initiative was a key opportunity to ensure that the project met their needs and reflected the experiences of those who participated in school life daily and are most affected by the challenges the initiative is aiming to address.

External expertise

External experts were also consulted, particularly in the design stage of the initiative. An external advisory body was created with experts from a range of fields, including education, technology, architecture and the environment. The body was tasked with creating development plans and a mid- to long-term roadmap. In addition, a pool of experts in curriculum, architecture and interior design was recruited to support user participation and be matched to participating schools where useful.

Financial support

Given the nature of the Green-Smart School Project as a large-scale school renovation project, considerable financial resources were required. The total estimated budget for the project is 18.5 trillion Korean won. 30% of the budget comes from national revenue and 70% from local government funds. A total of 94.3 billion won was secured (7.45 billion won more than originally envisaged) for the Fiscal Year of 2021 (Ministry of Education, 2020).

Box 9.3. Existing opportunities

- Existing internal expertise and the experience of the 2018 Five-Year Plan to Improve School Facilities;
- cross-departmental engagement;
- engagement with relevant expertise external to the Department of Education;
- building in clear, strong, financial support.

What actions were taken?

Development of the project plan and management structure

Following the announcement of the project in July 2020, an implementation taskforce was created in September 2020. In order to ensure that the Green-Smart School Project would be responsive to the unique local context of each school, relevant personnel from the Metropolitan and Provincial Offices of Education met five times to discuss implementation details, and experts in related fields such as education technology, architecture and environment met separately a further seven times. The resulting vision of the school promoted by the project was more specific and refined, going beyond mere space renovation to deliver true innovation.

Given the nature of the initiative as a large-scale school renovation project, it was important to ensure that there was a supportive and comprehensive structure in place to ensure continuous, sustainable and stable implementation. Firstly, a management structure was developed to provide clarity on which body would lead the project and on the responsibilities of everyone involved.

The Green-Smart School Project is a national policy initiative, so the Ministry of Education oversees the overall process of implementation and provides guidelines at each phase, such as those which govern the selection of target schools and the decision on whether partial reconstruction of specific school buildings or large-scale re-modelling is required. The Ministry is also responsible for the provision of funds.

Implementation at the local level is managed by the Metropolitan and Provincial Offices of Education, which are responsible for ensuring that the project is relevant to local contexts and for making decisions about the type of project (reconstruction or remodelling), taking their own strategies, education policy, and finances into consideration. They are also responsible for informing the public and educational stakeholders of the purpose and expected outcomes of the project, and for securing the necessary budget in collaboration with the Education Committee of the Metropolitan and Provincial Council.

In order to provide crucial administrative support, an internal consultative body was established to facilitate effective cooperation between relevant bureaus and the Ministry of Education in the areas of curriculum, school facilities, and digital infrastructure. In addition, an external expert advisory body consisting of three Governors of Education and ten experts in the areas of education, technology, architecture and environment was formed. This group is headed by the Deputy Minister of Education and is tasked with creating development plans and designing a mid-to-long term roadmap of the project.

An administrative unit in charge of the Green-Smart School Project was also created within the Metropolitan and Provincial Offices of Education, tasked with planning and implementing the project. An internal coordinating body was also formed to facilitate the cooperation between relevant departments and manage the process of selecting target schools. In addition to the expert advisory group mentioned above, a pool of experts in the areas of curriculum, architecture and interior design was formed. These advisors can support user participation in the process of space design and can be matched with participatory schools if required.

A new supportive structure was also developed within participating schools, with the creation of an administrative unit within the school, which is responsible for any tasks related to the project and which is organised and led by the principal. The unit is tasked with collecting the opinions of school community members, which is considered highly important as user participation was central to the process of space design. Metropolitan and Provincial Offices of Education have provided contact people for each school who can provide support in the pre-planning and design phases.

Clarification of the process for schools' participation

The plan outlined how a total of 2 835 school buildings, which are more than 40 years old and considered "old" and "deteriorating", would be targeted for reconstruction to transform them into schools of the future. In addition, the plan outlined specific guidelines on how target schools would be selected. For example, some factors to be considered were: the trend in the number of students; the age of the buildings in need of remodelling or reconstruction; the status of building safety; the history of recent repairs and the school administration's willingness to participate in the project. Considering all these conditions comprehensively, appropriate schools are given priority to participate in the project. School buildings which have had a significant investment for large-scale repair recently and those in need of preservation due to their cultural and educational value are not eligible.

The procedures of selecting target schools were clarified: each Metropolitan or Provincial Office of Education must conduct a demand survey to identify schools, in line with the selection guidelines described above and make recommendations for participation. It is important that schools willing to participate in the

project should have the approval of all school members, including school leaders, teachers, students and parents. In addition, a Review Committee for Future schools was established, with the role of reviewing the selection standards of each Office of Education to ensure that they are appropriate and effective.

Once the selection process is finalised, a process of pre-planning should be conducted, leading to the development of a design plan which reflects users' demands and needs. Finally, the form of the project (reconstruction or remodelling) and how the project is financed should be agreed by the School and the Metropolitan/Provincial Offices of Education.

Developing channels for user participation

Reflecting the notion that stakeholder engagement should be at the core of the initiative, there were a number of pathways created to collect stakeholders' opinions.

Surveys were distributed to teachers to examine what values should be embodied by the school space. Many agreed that the project should not stay merely at the level of renovating or recreating the physical space for educational activities but should be focused on creating a new school culture.

Students, teachers and parents were all given opportunities to feed back their preferences and expectations for school space innovations. For example, some students wanted space for small group activities, such as small conference rooms for discussion and debate, and open and spacious areas for relaxation and hanging out with friends. Others wanted informal space for studying such as study cafes and eco-friendly spaces such as a lawn and vegetable gardens. Some teachers wanted the school space to be one in which they can expand the concept of learning; utilising information and technology equipment, incorporating a variety of resources, and bringing the school community together.

Other educational experts consulted argued that the concepts of "green" or "smart" should be implicitly embedded in educational content and that space innovation should be concerned with educational content, alongside basic energy-saving renovation and IT infrastructure. Both experts and parents agreed that schools need to involve the community to encourage openness and integration.

By providing opportunities to consult public opinion, not only was the development of the project informed by expertise and tailored to the needs of students and teachers, but it also created stakeholder buy-in for the initiative. The attention paid to promoting user participation within the implementation process makes it possible for users to cooperate more actively and make decisions democratically.

Establishing training programmes

One key step taken was the development of training programmes for relevant education personnel to ensure that they are well informed and prepared for the changes and can take a key role in leading innovation in curriculum and teaching and learning. The Ministry of Education developed a series of joint workshop programmes, wherein those who oversee the project can learn about those aspects of the school environment which enable the improvement of curriculum and the innovation of teaching and learning. Moreover, teachers recommended by the Offices of Education are trained as leading ambassadors of the project and they work as visiting lecturers for the on-site workshops or participate in the pre-planning phase.

Furthermore, a Green-Smart School professional support group of teachers was created by the Metropolitan and Provincial Offices of Education. This group is provided with training opportunities to increase their knowledge about the project and to strengthen their capacity for future education in the newly renovated smart and green school environment. To ensure that teaching and learning adapts to the vision of the Green-Smart Future School, teachers are able to participate in professional development programmes in digital-based teaching and learning tailored to individual students' needs. In the Green-Smart School, teachers take on a role as a coach or facilitator of learning. The Metropolitan and Provincial

Offices of Education can steer the direction of teacher professional development programmes to prepare teachers for a future-oriented pedagogy which aims to support students' own growth through customised education.

Given the challenge of meeting the costs involved, some schools or school districts can choose to remodel or reconstruct their schools using private funds provided by construction companies participating in the project. Companies can apply for the project within their own budgetary plans, which the Metropolitan/Provincial Offices would pay back in instalments after the completion of the project. A professional support organisation which supports private investment projects was established and there are plans to create one tailored for the joint participation of all 17 Metropolitan and Provincial Offices of Education.

Box 9.4. Actions

- Development of project plan and relevant administrative and support structures;
- clear procedures for school involvement;
- extensive initial and ongoing consultation, engaging all school users and other educational experts;
- provision of support to school leaders and teachers.

What supports successful implementation?

Building a multi-layered support system

Multi-layered support systems are available to facilitate the successful implementation of the project at the level of the central and local governments. Central support consultative bodies serve to facilitate the cooperation between relevant ministries. They are also involved in developing supporting educational activities, facilities, equipment and the promotion of the policy. In addition, experts and stakeholders are consulted throughout the design and implementation stages to harness expertise to supports the successful delivery of the project.

Furthermore, regional support consultative bodies consisting of the local government, schools and civic groups work to encourage the local community's participation and support, led by the Metropolitan and Provincial Offices of Education. They develop the methods by which physical and personnel resources and infrastructure are provided to participating schools. They offer an expansive operational model through the participation of the local community.

Developing a comprehensive multi-level support system ensures that personnel and expertise is effectively utilised to ensure the design and implementation of an evidence-based, effective project, supported by stakeholders at every level.

Prioritising stakeholder engagement

User participation was actively sought and a number of structures and bodies were created in order to enable it.

There are several exemplary cases of the pre-planning phase of the Green-Smart School Project. For example, one elementary school of which 98.6% of the student population were from multicultural families, located in Ansan, was selected as a participant. In the pre-planning phase, under the vision of "a joyful

school where students grow with togetherness beyond individual differences", the school planned a dedicated language space designated maintain students' proficiency in their native languages.

This was designed to support students from a range of cultures who may have a difficult time adjusting to school in Korea due to language differences. It also enabled them to maintain the connection with their own cultures. Some examples of the language-related spaces created by the school are language learning classrooms; a bilingual zone; a language learning zone; an English learning zone, and a global community zone.

In the pre-planning phase of one middle school, students and teachers created scenarios which described their specific vision of the future school and they connected their scenarios with school curriculum and space organisation. They visualised their daily routines in the school and described necessary spaces and equipment at each part of their routines. For example, a typical example of a user participation design process can be found in the Nongso Middle School. Here, students, parents, and teachers convened to deliberate upon their future educational visions and goals. They analysed the types and forms of teaching and learning activities in each subject area and identified what was needed in each classroom.

In a vocational high school, there were more complicated demands from students because they must consider both their studies and employment. In the pre-planning phase, students envisioned their school space by first focusing on creating a clear vision of what their education experience could be, including the requirement for extensive practical training. This led to the identification of the kind of space needed to accommodate students' foot traffic through the space, various sizes of equipment, production desks and specialized facilities. These examples demonstrate how students and teachers actively participate in the pre-planning process to create their school space according to their educational vision and needs.

Prioritising user participation, promoting different channels to collect stakeholder opinions and designing opportunities for their involvement in the pre-planning stage of the initiative is a significant factor in successful implementation. It not only improves stakeholder buy-in and support, it also ensures that the building of Green-Smart Schools is tailored according to the needs of those at the centre of schools, who experience the environment on a daily basis and know its challenges, limitations and opportunities well.

Responding to challenges

One factor which is significant in ensuring successful implementation of the project is the willingness and ability to adapt the project according to challenges that arise throughout its implementation.

For example, even though user participation was a key element of this project, in one case, school administration decided to participate without consulting with parents, resulting in strong objections. In addition, the lack of sufficient public information about the project generated misunderstanding about its purpose. In this case, a set of guidelines regarding how participation was to be agreed were not specific enough, resulting in some parents complaining that they were not aware that their children's school would be participating and that the procedure of obtaining a consensus had been omitted.

Following this incident, the Ministry of Education and the Metropolitan and Provincial Offices of Education emphasised that participation should be decided on school members' consensus, including parents and students, and made this consensus-achieving process mandatory. This issue demonstrates that informing the public of the purpose and the details of the project is very important for its successful implementation, but also that being willing and able to make changes to combat emerging challenges is critical to its success.

Other concerns raised by parents throughout the project related to the safety of portable modular classrooms where students continue their learning while old school buildings are being remodelled or reconstructed. Other parents are worried that the increased use of personal digital devices in classrooms may deprive students of the opportunity to read books. Some are worried that participation in this project

may cause disruption in their children’s education or a decline in the quality of education. To respond to these concerns, the Ministry of Education announced that it would collaborate with relevant governmental agencies such as National Fire Agency and the Public Procurement Service to ensure the supply and safety of portable modular classrooms. Parental concerns about the increased use of digital devices are addressed in the Digital-driven Education Reform Plan which was published in February 2023.

A willingness and flexibility to adapt the project ensured not only that users’ concerns were listened to and acted upon, thus building stakeholder engagement and support for the project, but also allowed emerging challenges to be met in an effective and quick manner, in turn ensuring the successful implementation of the initiative.

Establishing a legal foundation

One of the other steps for the successful implementation of the Green-Smart School Project is the establishment of the legal and institutional foundation for the continuous and stable transition to future schools. Some relevant laws will have to be amended, such as the School Facilities Law, to mitigate principals’ responsibilities for maintaining school facilities, for example. Aspects of the School Complexes Law regarding the use of school facilities by community residents will also need to be amended. Consideration is also being given to whether some regulations and standards on the investment review might be alleviated, considering that this project pertains to reconstructing and remodelling schools. The aim is to ensure alignment of school policies and laws, to enable clear understanding of legal responsibilities and to allow a smoother transition to any future laws that may follow.

As the Green-Smart School Project is partly implemented through the mode of Build Transfer Operate (BTL) (a model of public-private partnerships, most commonly used to finance large infrastructure projects), pertinent regulations about private investment are examined and partly revised to reflect the needs of users in the construction process. Upgraded BTL is being promoted to avoid potential disputes that could arise in the process of school reconstruction or remodelling. Managing defects and disputes that arose in the process of maintenance and management following space rearrangement are addressed, improved, and applied to the field.

Development of supporting policy aligned to the Green-Smart Schools project

Recognising that change on such a scale cannot be achieved through one initiative alone, there was a commitment to developing and implementing further policy initiatives to achieve the objective of greener, smarter schools.

As noted earlier, the Green-Smart School Project has four key components: space innovation, smart classroom, green school, and building school complexes. These four components are intended to provide an advanced learning environment in which students learn the skills and competencies demanded by the rapid social changes of the future. However, as it stands currently, the project may not sufficiently address how classroom instruction and teaching and learning will be transformed to respond to the rapidly changing educational landscape.

Similarly, the smart classroom component in the project focuses on equipping the classroom with digital technology such as virtual reality and mixed reality equipment, mirroring devices, 3D simulators, intelligent closed-circuit televisions, etc., and includes the establishment of an Integrated Learning Platform. However, this project does not specifically and sufficiently go into how personalised learning will be delivered using this digital technology in the smart classroom.

To address these weaknesses , an updated education reform plan focusing on digital transformation and personalised learning was announced in February 2023 with an aim to offer “education for all”. The Digital-driven Education Reform Plan complements the Green-Smart Schools Project. One of its key components is the provision of personalised learning using “AI assistant teachers” in the form of AI-driven digital

textbooks, which will be phased in for maths, English and ICT starting from 2025. In addition, AI-based tutoring will be also available in maths so that students' learning can be personalised. Textbook publishing companies can develop AI-driven digital textbooks independently or in collaboration with EdTech companies.

In order to support teachers to provide personalised learning for students using AI-driven digital textbooks, a teacher group called "Teacher who Upgrade Class with High-tech" (TOUCH) will be formed. This group will be composed of teachers who have a solid understanding of the reform with digital technology expertise. They will lead instructional innovation using AI and digital technology and enhanced and meaningful student-teacher connection. After the Metropolitan and Provincial Offices of Education recommend qualified teachers for the group, an intensive professional development program will be offered to them to advance their skills and knowledge.

The teachers who belong to TOUCH will be acting as agents to take on an active role in designing and implementing professional learning opportunities in their respective schools. AI and AI-driven digital textbooks will support personalised learning by helping to identify the status of students' prior knowledge so that teachers can adjust their teaching accordingly by, for example, reviewing classroom materials taught in regular school hours and adjusting materials for after-school and remedial learning.

To respond to parental concerns about students' potential increased use of digital devices in classrooms noted earlier, corresponding measures will be taken: harmful websites and apps will be blocked while practical strategies and tools will be provided so that students learn the proper use of digital devices. Pilot schools and exemplary classrooms will be designated and AI-driven digital education will be gradually expanded to more schools and classrooms.

Embedding the Green-Smart School Project within a programme of further policy reform focused on the common objectives of smarter schools - utilising new technology to drive personalised curriculum delivery and innovation in teaching and learning - ensures that a holistic whole-scale programme of reform is developed which is more effective in achieving these common objectives.

Box 9.5. Success factors

- Providing a multi-level support and administrative system;
- prioritising stakeholder engagement at every stage;
- responding to emerging concerns and challenges through agile adaptation;
- ensuring a strong foundation for the project in legislation;
- aligning new policy and educational innovations with the Green-Smart School Project aims.

Reflections

The Green-Smart School Project is still at an early stage of implementation, with the Metropolitan and Provincial Offices of Education still in the process of accepting and reviewing schools to participate in the project. Therefore, full reflections on its success cannot yet be made, but some early thoughts on the challenges faced and preliminary effects of the project can be discussed.

Whilst many schools are still undergoing modelling or reconstruction efforts, it is useful to reflect on the experience of one of the first participating schools which opened a new building named the "Creative Talent Hall" in May 2023, after a six-month long construction phase. The building was remodelled and its space reorganised as multi-disciplinary classrooms for action learning, conference rooms for debates and seminars, a café-like space for studying and a kitchen space. The Creative Talent Hall has 20 rooms of

different sizes which can be flexibly used for multiple purposes and are digitally equipped to facilitate personalised learning. It is a little early to assess whether the policy had the intended impact, but the principal has an optimistic outlook about the newly renovated building, hoping that students would enjoy the opportunity to learn and grow (Jung-Hwan, 2023).

As with any reform initiative, there were challenges faced throughout the programme and consequent lessons learnt which it is useful to reflect on. One such challenge was how to select schools. Since there are many old school buildings that need to be remodelled or reconstructed across the country, it is challenging to establish the standards for the prioritised selection of schools and multiple factors must be considered to optimise the outcome of the project.

The Green-Smart School Project was announced in 2020 and 2022 was the first year when actual construction began. Several issues have been raised over the past two years while the project was being implemented. The first is the need for more communication. As many experts invested in this project pointed out, one of the most important factors to its success is how much effort was made to communicate about the purpose, need, procedures, and detailed aspects of the project. Effective communication is necessary at the local level to support the decision making of school communities. They need to understand what is involved before deciding to apply for participation in the project.

Another important issue is student safety. Once construction begins, students are moved to other classrooms or portable modular classrooms if alternative space is not available. Parents are questioning the safety of modular classrooms. In response to this, other relevant agencies such as local fire departments and law enforcement, along with school administration, will ensure that students are thoroughly and safely cared for on site. The Ministry of Education acknowledges the need to listen carefully to the voices of the school and the school community members.

Whilst further analysis is necessary once the project is more advanced, the initiative provides an example of how school renovation can also provide a unique opportunity to build more sustainable, modernised school infrastructure. In turn, this can promote the use of new technology, more innovative learning and teaching practices and a more user-centred curriculum, thus creating a school environment fit for the 21st century and capable of preparing students to face the challenges of the modern world.

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10 Manitoba (Canada): From integration to inclusion: Truth, reconciliation and education

This chapter focuses on the importance of creating a more inclusive education system in Manitoba (Canada), with policymakers aiming to incorporate Indigenous perspectives, histories and cultures into the curriculum. Manitoba's *K to 12 Action Plan*, published in April 2022, aims to promote understanding, respect and reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. This reflects a commitment to acknowledge the truths of the past, promote inclusivity, and foster a more harmonious relationship between communities through education.

Introduction

Like most societies today, the country of Canada has a diverse population, with more than 2.2 million people in Canada identifying as having Indigenous ancestries in the 2021 Census, making up 6.1% of the Canadian population (Statistics Canada, 2023[1])[1]. Indigenous peoples are the fastest-growing population in Canada, increasing by 42.5% between 2006 and 2016 (ibid). The Canadian province of Manitoba is particularly diverse, as it is situated on the traditional territories of First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples.

In the 2021 Census, 18% of the population living in Manitoba identified as Indigenous, not itself a homogenous group, but one in which diversity of languages, cultures, traditions, community structures and political histories must be recognised[2] (Statistics Canada, 2023[1]). Developing educational policy can be challenging in such a context, particularly given the risk posed should the cultural traditions and values of the majority population dominate public and social discourse and policy decision-making. This case study looks at a recent significant initiative in Manitoba, designed to respond to the specific educational needs of diverse Indigenous students and to response the Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (Manitoba Education and Childhood Learning, 2022d[2]).

In April 2022, the province of Manitoba published *Mamàhtawisiwin: The Wonder We Are Born With,*[3] an Indigenous Education Policy Framework (Manitoba Education and Childhood Learning, 2022d[2]).The policy is intended to create a more inclusive education system and to help teachers "embed Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing into their teaching practices and deepen their understanding and progress along a path of Truth and Reconciliation in their school communities" (Government of Manitoba, 2022[3]). It is foundational to Manitoba's *K to 12 Action Plan* (Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, 2022b[4]), also published in April, that focuses on four pillars: high-quality learning; student engagement and well-being; excellence in teaching and leadership; and responsive systems. The five-year action plan is guided by a set of principles which include advancing Truth and Reconciliation[4], achieving equity, ensuring inclusion, striving for excellence, prioritising well-being, and enhancing accountability.

In an increasingly diverse world, the imperative to acknowledge, recognise and address difference is strong, even where this may expose unpalatable truths about the past, or indeed, the social, legal and cultural structures of today. The contribution that education can make to a more just, equitable and peaceful community is widely acknowledged. In this case study, that contribution is built on an unwavering commitment to Truth and Reconciliation.

What motivated change?

History of colonisation and violence towards Indigenous peoples

The history of colonisation in Canada is key to understanding the context and motivations which supported the development of the Indigenous Education Policy Framework in Manitoba. Prior to colonisation, the land of what is now Canada had belonged to all Indigenous communities that lived on it. First Nations Peoples and Inuit had well-established traditions and beliefs. They believed that the spiritual, human and natural systems should be viewed as one, that the focus should be on the community rather than the individual and that relationality should be central to the worldview (Manitoba Education and Childhood Learning, 2022d, p. 16[2]). These views were contradictory to the traditional European worldviews of the colonisers however, which were focused on individualistic and non-relational aspects. As a result, a series of legislative measures were taken by settler governments with the aim of assimilation of Indigenous peoples into Euro-Western values (Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, 2022a[5]).

These early measures included the 1857 Gradual Civilisation Act. This encouraged "Indian people" to give up their Indian status/cultural heritage in return for full Canadian citizenship (ibid)[5]. In 1870, the federal

government (herein referred to as the Crown[6]) created a new system which provided a convenient and inexpensive method for federal government and settlers to steal Métis lands (ibid). The Crown signed a series of seven treaties in Manitoba with First Nations, which articulated shared responsibilities, including how to share the lands. However, the Crown never fulfilled many of the treaties' promises, nor followed their spirit and intent (ibid). First Nations oral histories of the treaties and the Crown's documentation of the treaties were contradictory. The Crown claims that First Nations ceded their lands in exchange for promises, whereas First Nations account that "there was no mention in the general terms of the surrender of land, nor had there been any recorded explanation of what would be given up surrendered, nor the concept of surrender itself" (Craft, 2013, pp. 53-54[6]). Much of the land in Canada is unceded (never given up by First Nations). Some of the unceded land remains occupied by First Nations and some stolen by settler governments. In 1876, the federal government passed the "Indian Act"[7]. This Act significantly impacts the lives of First Nations Peoples to the present day, giving the government the power to intervene and make decisions over the lives of "Indian" people, such as managing their lands, resources and promoting "civilisation" (Government of Canada, 2011[7]).

Patrick Wolfe in "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native" argues that the desire to maintain and control territory within settler colonial contexts requires the ongoing and violent elimination of Indigenous populations as "settler colonialism is a specific social formation" predicated upon a "logic of elimination."

> "When invasion is recognized as a structure rather than an event, its history does not stop ... narrating that history involves charting the continuities, discontinuities, adjustments, and departures whereby a logic that initially informed frontier killing transmutes into different modalities, discourses and institutional formations as it undergirds the historical development and complexification of settler society" (Wolfe, 2006, pp. 401-402[8])

Such eliminatory logic can be observed in the growing Crown and government control over the lives and education of Indigenous children in Canada. In 1882, the first residential school was opened in Manitoba. In 1920, it became mandatory for every "Indian" child to attend a residential school and illegal for them to attend any other educational institution (ibid). The Truth and Reconciliation Commission found the schools to be an act of cultural genocide.

"I think as commissioners we have concluded that cultural genocide is probably the best description of what went on here. But more importantly, if anybody tried to do this today, they would easily be subject to prosecution under the genocide convention," Truth and Reconciliation Commission Chair Justice Murray Sinclair said in 2015 (CBC News, 2015[9]).The government created these schools to forcibly remove and separate Indigenous children from their families with the aim of indoctrinating these children into Euro-Western culture and weakening family ties and cultural connections (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015[10]).

By 1930, there were 80 residential schools across Canada. In total, 139 residential schools operated across the country with federal support. However, religious orders and provincial governments also operated residential schools that are not identified by the Indian Residential Schools Settlement[8] Agreement. At least 150 000 students attended residential schools. The last residential school closed in 1997 in Rankin Inlet. In the 1960s-1980s, an event later termed as the "Sixties Scoop" occurred where Indigenous children were stolen or forcibly removed from their families and placed with non-Indigenous parents by child welfare authorities.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada

As a result of the revelations of the historic and ongoing violence towards Indigenous peoples in Canada, a number of measures were taken by the Canadian government in efforts to move towards Truth and Reconciliation. In 2006, the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement was passed, which implemented a series of measures designed to address the legacy of Residential Schools and provide support for Survivors[9], including the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Government of Canada, 2006[11]). The Commission was created with the aim of facilitating reconciliation among former students, their families and communities and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada. Members of the Commission spent six years travelling across Canada and heard accounts from more than 6 500 witnesses (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015[10]). Their investigation resulted in five volumes of reports sharing the findings and experiences of former students in residential schools, culminating in one final report in 2015 (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015[10]), which included 94 "Calls to Action" to move towards Truth and Reconciliation (ibid).

The extent of what has since been addressed by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as a cultural genocide was not fully brought to light until former students and survivors of the schools began to speak out and were finally heard. Their stories revealed the true horrors of the schools: child neglect was institutionalised, physical and sexual abuse was commonplace and many children died in huge numbers, often buried in unmarked graves (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015[10]). Indigenous languages were banned and the educational goals of schools reflected the false belief that European civilisations and Christian religions were superior to Indigenous cultures and Indigenous ways of life (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015[10]). Prior to colonisation, Indigenous peoples had strong communities and thrived. Survival of early settlers was dependent on relationships and support from Indigenous peoples. The intent of the Indian Act, Residential School System, Sixties Scoop and other systems for colonisation was genocide and resulted in control and theft of land and resources.

While the term 'reconciliation' can have many different interpretations, the understanding of the Commission was that reconciliation means 'establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in this country'. For this to happen, the Commission stated that there must be 'an awareness of the past, an acknowledgement of the harm inflicted, atonement for the causes and action to change behaviour' (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015[10]). This speaks to the importance of focussing on both Truth and Reconciliation simultaneously.

Education and mental health and wellness gaps

Amongst other factors, the Commission's report identified the importance of education for reconciliation. It emphasised the need to address the significant gaps in historical knowledge; many non-Indigenous people had some knowledge about the problems faced by Indigenous peoples but limited or no understanding of how these problems arose or the role of governments in causing them. There was little public knowledge about residential schools. The report emphasised that education needed to be transformed to ensure that it taught the history of Indigenous people - why they signed treaties, how these treaties were ignored by European settlers and the Crown, and the inherent rights of Indigenous people. Furthermore, as survivors pointed out to the Commission, simply knowing this would not be sufficient; education needed to work to influence behaviour and change hearts as well as minds. "Education is what got us into this mess — the use of education at least in terms of residential schools — but education is the key to reconciliation," said Justice Murray Sinclair, chair for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (CBC News, 2015b[12]).

The publication of the final report of the Commission was a call to educators everywhere to transform their education system to embody Truth and Reconciliation. For Manitoba, one of the most diverse provinces in Canada, this report – its revelations and recommendations - demonstrated a clear need to take significant actions to ensure the education system actively supports Indigenous peoples to heal from the destruction of colonisation. It was also important to advance Truth and Reconciliation and to inspire Indigenous

peoples and non-Indigenous people to live together in peace and harmony (Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, 2022a[5]).

Another motivation for the development of *Mamàhtawisiwin: The Wonder We Are Born With – An Indigenous Education Policy Framework* was to improve and support the academic performance of Indigenous students, in addition to their well-being. There was and remains a significant achievement gap between Indigenous students and non-Indigenous students in Canada. This is evidenced by an audit from the previous department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada on elementary and secondary education programs in 2000, demonstrating a 28% gap between high-school completion by Indigenous students, in comparison to non-Indigenous students (Giroux, 2012[13]). Between 2001 and 2006, this gap had widened significantly to 36% (ibid). In Manitoba, this gap was significantly higher, with only 50.9% of Indigenous students graduating high school in four years in 2022, in comparison to 91.1% of non-Indigenous students (Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, 2023b[14])

Due to historical and ongoing systemic racism, colonisation, trauma and intergenerational trauma from genocidal policies such as the Sixties Scoop and the Residential School System, Indigenous peoples, particularly youth, face significant mental health inequalities and inequities. Indigenous peoples continue to experience settler colonial violence, as discussed by Wolfe above, through barriers to access basic needs such as housing, clean drinking water, food security and mental health and well-being supports and services. Indigenous peoples are more likely than non-Indigenous peoples in Canada to experience symptoms of psychological stress and depression. *Kahnawà:ke* scholar, Audra Simpson, further explores forms of violence by the settler colonial state that Indigenous women and girls disproportionately experience.

> "Force qualified as violence moves through us, trying to empty us out, transiting through moving to the flesh that is the subsurface of "identity" as peoples possessing bodies with living histories of relatedness to territory that is constantly being violated, harmed, ignored – allowing some of us to be devalued to the point where we are denied bodily integrity, denied philosophical integrity, flattened, sometimes killed. The force of this is ongoing, and multileveled" (Simpson, 2016, pp. 25-26[15]).

The disproportional violence experienced by Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA[10] people is further reported on in Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (2019).

Additionally, Indigenous youth in particular are more likely to suffer from poor mental health due to systemic barriers and racism. For some Indigenous communities in Manitoba the lack of equitable access to mental health services has resulted in states of emergency. Lack of equitable access to services has been compounded by the systemic and personal impacts of Covid-19.

Whilst there are common global trends in Indigenous health, there are significant differences within locally specific contexts, which must be recognised. While some communities are facing a state of emergency due to lack of mental health services and increased suicide, this is not the experience of all Indigenous communities. Evidence suggests that factors such as community control over health services, and community connection to language and culture, identity, values, traditions, and contemporary lifestyles increases community mental health.

Manitoba Commission on Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education

In January 2019, the Manitoba government established the Manitoba Commission on Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education to undertake a comprehensive independent review of the education system. Responding to the findings and recommendations of the Commission, in April 2022, a Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education Action Plan was published (Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, 2022b[4]). It outlines a vision and key actions for student success, alongside a formal approach to system-wide planning and continuous improvement (ibid).

As noted within the published document itself, the *Action Plan* and all future work by Manitoba Education is grounded by the *Mamàhtawisiwin* Policy Framework, which is the "indispensable foundation for the education system". Implementation of the *Mamàhtawisiwin* Policy Framework is identified as a key priority focus.

Box 10.1. Push Factors

- Led by survivors coming forward with their stories, there was an increased public awareness of the historic mistreatment of Indigenous peoples in Canada. This led to recognition of the need for change and culminated in the publication of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's *Final Report* and Calls to Action for educators;
- recognition that "an awareness of the past, an acknowledgement of the harm inflicted, atonement for the causes and action to change behaviour" are needed to create an equitable, just and peaceful society;
- academic performance and well-being gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students;
- publication of Manitoba's Kindergarten to Grade 12 Action Plan and *Mamàhtawisiwin: The Wonder We Are Born With,* Manitoba's Indigenous Education Policy Framework.

What opportunities existed?

Indigenous knowledge, experience, and expertise

The knowledge and experiences of Indigenous peoples provided a valuable resource for Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning at the early stages and throughout the design of the framework. A number of traditional concepts and beliefs which directly addressed the aims of the *Mamàhtawisiwin* Framework are core to its development. These include, for example, the concept of *Mino-Pimatisiwin* (The Good Life in Ininimowin), which is shared by many First Nations Peoples. Central to this concept is the belief that all of life is a ceremony and that the sacred and secular are parts of the whole (Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, 2020[16]).

> The Good Life refers to living a well-balanced life where all four components of a human are being addressed—emotional, physical, mental and spiritual. "It is through the taking of responsibility for their own personal healing and growth that individuals will be able to attain mino-pimatasiwin (Cree)—the good life." (Hart, 2002, p. 44[17])

> Pimadaziwin is to have "life in the fullest sense, life in the sense of longevity and health." (Overholt and Callicott 151) "This growth and attempt to reach the good life is not just an individual focus. It also involves the family and community." (Hart, 2002, p. 44[17])

This gives rise to an understanding that education, to be effective, must address humans as whole beings: mind, body, spirit and emotions. *Mino-Pimatisiwin* (The Good Life) can only be achieved through taking care of all of these aspects of oneself (Manitoba Education, 2019[18]). When designing the *Mamàhtawisiwin* Policy Framework, Manitoba Education prioritised ensuring that the framework both adequately reflected the concept of *Mino-Pimatisiwin* (The Good Life) and aimed to support students in achieving (Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, 2020[16]).

Indigenous cultures value the notion of treating children with deep respect and, as reflected in the concept of *Mino-Pimatisiwin* (The Good Life), they believe that children find wellness through a balance of physical, mental, emotional and spiritual elements (ibid). In Indigenous cultures, communities nurtured a core sense of belonging. Children find purpose, hope, belonging and meaning through their educational and lived experiences. This greater well-being can be fostered through a sense of connectedness with families, communities and culture, an understanding of their own role and their community's role within history and an understanding of their purpose in life (ibid). Independence was practised in the teaching of children, and children were encouraged in decision-making and problem-solving from a young age, in contrast to obedience models of discipline. Children were also taught to strive for mastery but for personal growth rather than competition; and a further central goal was to teach children to be generous and unselfish (Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, n.d.[19]).

These philosophies, alongside other early and contemporary research, form the basis of the *Circle of Courage* (Blue Beard, 2007[20]), a framework for empowerment and education which identifies four universal needs of all children: Belonging, Mastery, Independence, and Generosity. When these needs are met, children grow and thrive (Brendtro, Brokenleg and Bockern, 2006[21]). The *Circle of Courage* incorporates and reflects traditional Indigenous beliefs about education and modern-day educational research. This model informed the development of Manitoba's *Mamàhtawisiwin* Framework, which explicitly references Starr Commonwealth's *Circle of Courage* when describing the conceptual foundation for an Indigenous-inclusive education system (Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, 2022a[5]).[11]

Harnessing the expertise and insights of Indigenous peoples in designing the framework helped the development teams to both understand their values and traditions and to ensure that a richer and more authentic framework for education was developed, one through which educators and students are able to learn about Indigenous histories, languages and cultures and traditions in a meaningful way.

The expertise of Indigenous peoples is also very useful during the practical delivery phase. For example, when considering how to provide the opportunity for students to learn about the cultural teachings, experiences and languages of Indigenous peoples, Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning was able to utilise the expertise of Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers to provide such an opportunity. In the 2021-2022 school year, the Elders and Knowledge Keepers in Schools initiative was piloted in 33 schools with a province-wide expansion in 2022-23. Through this initiative, Elders and Knowledge Keepers share traditional knowledge, teaching practices and protocols to enhance the connection between families and schools through respectful and relational school division partnerships (Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, 2022a[5]).

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Calls to Action

The work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was a second, equally valuable, resource. It included eleven Calls to Action for education. These included, for example, the protection of Indigenous languages, providing equitable funding arrangements across the system and enabling greater participation by Indigenous families and communities in the education of their children. The Commission called for the development of a culturally appropriate curriculum and action to reduce the educational, employment and income attainment gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015[10]). The *Mamàhtawisiwin* Policy Framework is a response to the Calls to Action, specifically in support of Calls to Action 62 and 63 to develop and implement resources on Indigenous Peoples in Canadian history.[12]

The educational philosophy of the Chair of the Commission, the Honourable Murray Sinclair, was particularly influential (Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, 2022a[5]). He asked: ‘What would it take to create a world where we all feel we truly belong?’ His answer, informed by his discussions and experiences during the Commission, was that ‘true belonging means there are people around you who will help you when you need it—and you, in turn, will help them’ (ibid). He further continued that students were able to connect to themselves, their family, community, place and land by consideration of four key questions of Anishinaabe traditional teachings:

1. Who am I?
2. Where do I come from?
3. Why am I here? / What is my purpose?
4. Where am I going?

Recognising that forming a clear sense of personal identity requires an understanding of one’s ancestry, especially one’s cultural and ethnic heritage and associated values, beliefs, and traditions, the Manitoba Department of Education prioritised these four questions as key to the design of the framework, which supports students to explore and answer these questions (ibid).

Internal expertise, experience and resources

In addition to harnessing expertise external to the Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning the development of the framework also drew on internal expertise from the department, which learning outcomes across education initiatives and will align curriculum development and learning outcomes to the policy directions of the framework. Development teams were created which were made up of educators from the field and Indigenous organisations. The experiences, perspectives and insights of these teams were instrumental to the design and development of the framework.

Another important resource was the experience and insight gained through the implementation of earlier initiatives. Manitoba Education had identified the importance of and the need to integrate learning about Indigenous languages and cultures into the curriculum many years before the development of the *Mamàhtawisiwin* Policy Framework. In 2000, in response to the signing of *The Western Canadian Protocol for Collaboration in Basic Education, Kindergarten to Grade 12* by the Canadian government, Manitoba Education began work on the development of the corresponding *Kindergarten to Grade 12 Aboriginal Languages and Cultures: Manitoba Curriculum Framework of Outcomes* (Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, 2007[22]). Initiatives to incorporate Indigenous histories and cultures into the education system had been in place prior to the development of the *Mamàhtawisiwin* Policy Framework.

One such example was the development of a course for Grade 12 students entitled *Current Topics in First Nations, Metis and Inuit Studies* (Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, 2011[23]). The course was designed to equip Indigenous and non-Indigenous students with knowledge and understanding of histories, traditions, cultures, worldviews, and contemporary issues of Indigenous peoples in Canada and

worldwide and to topics such as self-determination, self-government, and language and cultural reclamation (ibid). Providing non-Indigenous students with this information was perceived as enabling them to engage in an informed and empathetic manner in debates concerning Indigenous issues, and become knowledgeable of the worldviews, histories, cultures, and accomplishments of Indigenous peoples. Simultaneously, the course aimed to support Indigenous students to take pride in the accomplishments of Indigenous peoples and to build upon and enhance positive self-identity (ibid). As well as to increase meaningful participation as members of their cultural and linguistic community and as global citizens.

Box 10.2. Existing Opportunities

- The wealth of knowledge and expertise in Indigenous communities, including Elders, Knowledge Keepers, leaders, educators, and families;
- insights from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Calls to Action for Education, at local, provincial, territorial, and federal levels;
- the expertise of the department leaders and staff and the development teams which were made up of educators from the field and Indigenous organisations;
- insights gained from the implementation of earlier initiatives.

What is the vision for education?

The Indigenous Education Policy Framework, *Mamàhtawisiwin: The Wonder We Are Born With* was launched in April 2022 and reflected a commitment by Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning to embed equity, collaboration, shared responsibility, and accountability into an Indigenous-inclusive education system. Equity in education is variously defined but, in this case, it references an inclusive and diverse education system which fosters a sense of belonging in all learners so that they feel they can succeed, take responsibility, find their purpose in life, and achieve *Mino-Pimatisiwin* (The Good Life) (Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, 2022a[5]).

> "This growth and attempt to reach the good life is not just an individual focus. It also involves the family and community." (Hart, 2002, p. 44[17])

The following seven guiding principles are the foundation for the framework:

- shared understandings of the rights of Indigenous Peoples developed;
- knowledge of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit world views held and valued by all educators and learners;
- respect for diversity;
- student-focused systems;
- shared responsibility across systems;
- shared accountability;
- equity within systems.

The needs of students are at the centre of the vision. By employing a holistic approach to supporting students on their living and learning journeys through school, the goal is to provide them all with an engaging and high-quality education that prepares them for lifelong learning and for contributing to a socially just, democratic, and sustainable society. This framework also specifically has as a core goal:

enhancing the educational achievement and well-being of Indigenous students so that they are successful in school and beyond.

Box 10.3. Vision of *Mamàhtawisiwin: The Wonder We Are Born With*

"A path to an Indigenous-inclusive education system is grounded in Indigenous histories, cultures, languages, traditional values and knowledge, and contemporary lifestyles. An equitable, inclusive, and diverse education system fosters a sense of belonging in all learners so that they feel they can succeed, take responsibility, find their purpose in life, and achieve The Good Life/ *Mino-pimatisiwin* (Ininew)/ *Mino Bimaadiziwin* (Anishinabemowin)/ *honso aynai* (Dene)/ *tokatakiya wichoni washte* (Dakota)/ *minopimatitheewin* (Anisininimowin)/ ᐃᓐᓅᓯᖃᓯᐊᕐᓂᖅ (Inuktitut)/ *Miyo-pimatishiwin* (Michif)." (Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, 2022a[5]).

What actions were taken?

The Indigenous Education Policy Framework, *Mamàhtawisiwin: The Wonder We Are Born With* was the culmination of many years of work, reflecting the experience of previous Truth and Reconciliation initiatives and programmes.

Establishment of working group

Once the department decided to develop a new initiative to respond to the Calls to Action in the *Final Report* of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the first step was the establishment of an internal working group. This was launched in 2015 and led by the Aboriginal Education Directorate (now the Indigenous Inclusion Directorate) (Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, 2022a[5]). The Indigenous Inclusion Directorate is a division within Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, which provides leadership and co-ordination for initiatives relating to Indigenous education and training. The directorate works closely with relevant stakeholders and rights holders, including school administrators, educators, students, parents and Indigenous governments and organisations, as well as close co-operation with other government departments, in order to provide research, policy development and strategic initiatives within Indigenous education (Government of Manitoba, 2023[24]).

The path to an Indigenous-inclusive education system is grounded in Indigenous histories, cultures, languages, traditional values and knowledge, and contemporary lifestyles. The working group convened professional learning sessions focused on Indigenous learning around the themes of identity, numeracy and land-based education. This initiative was named *Mamàhtawisiwin* (Manitoba Education and Childhood Learning, 2022d[2]) The name was gifted by a northern Cree Elder through Ceremony and therefore follows the Cree definition of the word.

> "When we are born into this world, we come with a gift to help people live a good life. A person becomes an okihcite (great heart) when they begin to share the gift. A person who goes above and beyond in sharing their gift and connecting people to the root of their existence is referred to as "e-mamahtawisit." - Mamàhtawisiwin (mah ma tah wee see win) is the noun form." (ibid).

Building on this earlier work, the internal working group started developing the *Mamàhtawisiwin* Indigenous-inclusive toolkit to support educators to build Indigenous identities, cultures and languages into their teaching practices (ibid).

Consultations and collaboration

In order to ensure that Indigenous cultures, languages and histories were sufficiently reflected in the *Mamàhtawisiwin* Framework, it was imperative that Indigenous peoples were consulted throughout the process of development. Prior to the design of the initiative, Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning established regular opportunities to consult Indigenous peoples and, in turn, gave them the opportunity to provide feedback. For example, the department held consultations with over 100 people prior to the design phase of the framework, including Indigenous community members, post-secondary institutions, school divisions and districts, Elders and Knowledge Keepers and Indigenous organisations (ibid).

Elders and Knowledge Keepers were given several opportunities to discuss the development of the *Mamàhtawisiwin* Framework the concept of an Indigenous-inclusive education system with students at the centre, and how this should look. Feedback was then reflected on and incorporated into the design of the framework, to ensure that Indigenous beliefs and values were embedded and that the policy framework could meet the needs of Indigenous children (ibid). The final document received validation by Elders and Knowledge Keepers.

Collaboration with representatives from Indigenous communities continued throughout the entire process, with bodies such as the Indigenous Inclusion Directorate Advisory Council playing a key role in drafting, reviewing, and implementation of the framework, proving to be instrumental to its success (ibid). This council includes representation of Indigenous leaders, educators, parents and students to ensure that the department reflects these perspectives and lived experiences in all that it does.

Consultations which informed the development and implementation of the framework involved not only Indigenous peoples, but a wide variety of stakeholders. For example, during the design of the framework, the department harnessed the expertise and insights of students, teachers, parents, principals, superintendents, senior post-secondary administrators, educational organisations and community partners (ibid).

Development of the guiding principles of the framework

The foundation of the framework was positioned around the seven guiding principles outlined above that emerged during a two-day co-creation session in 2019. Based on these principles, four strategies for action follow: Authentic Involvement; Putting Students at the Centre; Understanding of Worldviews, Values, Identities, Traditions, and Contemporary Lifestyles; and Inclusive and Culturally Safe Learning Environments. These core strategies, also described as policy directions, were derived from Indigenous teachings and seen as mutually supportive. They are represented in a painting by an Indigenous artist and former staff person at Niji Mahkwa School, Fred Beardy, in the form of a circle, which represents care and love for the children, families and staff who constitute the school community. It acknowledges the responsibility of community to preserve and protect the rights and privileges of all the children and members of the school community.

The spirit and intent of the circle is for all nations of the world to love one another and get along in peace. The bear represents peace and justice for all people of the earth and protection for the children at Niji Mahkwa School in the Winnipeg School Division. Teachings and colours of the circle were provided by Fred Beardy and Elder Myra Laramee (ibid).

There are roles and responsibilities for students, teachers, school-based support teams, school leaders, school division/district leaders and Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning articulated within

the policy framework under each strategy to encourage action toward Truth and Reconciliation. Each of these policy directions have two corresponding actions which would enable the strategy to be carried out, and all are viewed as interrelated and mutually reinforcing. These, in turn, are designed to meet and embody the guiding principles of *Mamàhtawisiwin* (ibid).

Process development of the Framework

Once the guiding principles and corresponding actions were identified, work began to construct the framework document itself. In order to facilitate a full understanding of the *Mamàhtawisiwin* Framework, the published document provides information on the context within which the framework was developed, information around terminology used in the framework and an historical overview of colonisation in Canada. Explanation is also provided on the conceptual foundations of the framework, including guidance on the Circle of Courage and the Four Guiding Questions (ibid).

The *Mamàhtawisiwin* Framework is not designed to be a curriculum or to produce standardisation. It aims to encourage educators to adapt and enhance guidance according to their own local context. At the heart of the framework is the provision of guidance for educators through a table which describes in depth how an Indigenous-inclusive education system could look like within Manitoba educational settings. This guidance maps out how the different strategies and their corresponding actions can be met. This is mapped out according to the role of different stakeholders: students, teachers, school-based support teams, school leaders, school division/district leaders and Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning (ibid).

The framework encourages students to participate in different cultural and ceremonial experiences, and to interact with Elders and Knowledge Keepers and learn from them on a regular basis. This helps support the strategy of authentic involvement. To facilitate a student-centred approach, students could be encouraged to be more confident by expressing their opinions and asking for help. They are also encouraged to be more active by identifying their own areas of interest and controlling the pace of their own learning. Meanwhile, participating in efforts to create content for learning activities stemming from their own experiences and knowledge and identifying themselves within learning materials could contribute towards the goal of building an inclusive and culturally safe environment (ibid).

The *Mamàhtawisiwin* Framework is a provincial policy directive and a conceptual framework that schools province-wide are to adopt into their school management and teaching practices. The framework details ways in which teachers can support an Indigenous-inclusive education system. For example, teachers can create opportunities in the classroom for family members to share experiences, teaching alongside Elders and Knowledge Keepers, and learn about Indigenous community protocols to support the aim of authentic involvement. Teachers can also facilitate an understanding of world views, values, identities, traditions and contemporary lifestyles by learning about histories and their impact on Indigenous peoples and connecting this to learning in the curriculum. They can also understand how intergenerational trauma can have an impact on students and use Indigenous languages in the classroom and with families. Teachers can support an inclusive and culturally safe learning environment by using examples in teaching of how the local community is connected to, yet different, from the world. This includes celebrations from different cultures in the classroom and learning that enables students to share their experiences and knowledge. The framework identifies that embedding Indigenous values and traditions in daily teaching, rather than as a separate specific theme or unit is beneficial (ibid).

Direction is provided for school-based support teams, school leaders and district/division leaders on the ways in which they can contribute to advancing the key principles of the framework. For example:

- providing opportunities for students to access local and culturally appropriate support;
- ensuring that the physical environment of the collaborative working space reflects the diversity of students;

- connecting with parents and families and inviting them to participate in school events and celebrations;
- budgeting for honoraria for Elders and Knowledge Keepers;
- encouraging Indigenous participation on the school board;
- allocating funding for supports for students and families at critical transition points, such as entry into school, transition between levels and schools.

The framework also outlines a clear role for Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning (ibid).

Providing resources and adapting funding initiatives

The Government of Manitoba provided dedicated funding to support the careful development of the framework to the highest standard, ensuring that sufficient time and resources were provided, hence the development time spanning across seven years. Having a dedicated division focused on Indigenous education and inclusion has also been critical to the progress made in improving the education system within Manitoba and advancing Truth and Reconciliation.

In addition, efforts have been made to adapt existing funding initiatives to support the implementation and goals of the framework. For example, the Indigenous Academic Achievement Grant exists to support school divisions in implementing current and new initiatives with the aim of improving academic success for Indigenous students (Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, n.d.[25]). The grant is administered by the Indigenous Inclusion Directorate to the sum of $9.7 million CAD. Allocation of the grant is upon agreement of the terms that a minimum of 50% of the grant allocation must be utilised to develop or support strategies to achieve measurable improvements in literacy and numeracy for Indigenous students. Any remaining grant funding must then be allocated to supporting educationally and culturally relevant programming. School divisions are able to access support material from the Indigenous Inclusion Directorate and other resources, which offers guidance for schools on developing plans and measuring outcomes of programming focused on the academic achievement of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students. Work is currently in progress to adapt the grant in alignment with the four policy directions of the *Mamàhtawisiwin* Framework which will not only encourage adoption of the guiding principles and general implementation of its direction but also ensure that schools are able to access financial support to enable this (ibid).

Box 10.4. Actions

- Establishment of internal working group;
- external consultations and collaboration;
- development of the guiding principles of the framework;
- process development of the framework;
- providing and adapting funding initiatives.

What supported success?

As this is a new framework supporting the implementation of an inclusive curriculum, it is too early to be definitive here. The department has developed and published *Mamàhtawisiwin: The Wonder We Are Born With - Tools for Reflection, Planning and Reporting* for both schools and school division/districts. The tools will also provide educators, support staff, and administrators with opportunities for reflection in relation to

the four policy directions of *Mamàhtawisiwin* (Manitoba Education and Childhood Learning, 2022d, p. 29[2]). The tools were published in early 2023 alongside professional learning and development sessions.

Incorporating learning from previous initiatives

The development of the *Mamàhtawisiwin* Framework was not the first initiative by Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning to support the achievement and well-being of Indigenous students and incorporate learning about Indigenous histories, cultures and languages into teaching. Prior to the publication of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's final report in 2015, the department had already implemented a number of initiatives in this area. Therefore, they were able to incorporate learning and knowledge gained through the design and implementation of these initiatives into the development process of the framework. They also utilised reflections and feedback on these initiatives to inform the focus and scope of the framework, including actions on the development process and how to address earlier challenges from previous initiatives.

Consultation and engagement

Prior to the development of the framework, Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning facilitated a two-stage consultation process, in which stakeholders were consulted on the current programming and future needs. The first stage of consultation included “visionaries” and the second stage of consultation included front line educators from early childhood to post-secondary. To inform the development the framework, the project team also consulted and collaborated with Elders and Knowledge Keepers to utilise their expertise and knowledge. Consultation, both with Indigenous peoples and with Elders and Knowledge Keepers in particular, and wider consultation with relevant stakeholders, also proved instrumental in the later development of the *Mamàhtawisiwin* Framework (Manitoba Education and Childhood Learning, 2022d[2]).

Guidance and support for school leaders, teachers and districts

The clear guidance and direction on implementation of an inclusive and equitable curriculum, which is provided in the *Mamàhtawisiwin* Policy Framework, is important. Providing additional guidance for educators on topics such as safe discussions of difficult issues in the classroom, developing positive teacher-student relationships built on trust and respect, community involvement and holistic teaching and assessment, as is currently done, is likely to lessen anxiety and support successful implementation (ibid).

To support understanding, adoption and implementation of the framework by educators, the *Mamàhtawisiwin* Framework also provides an extensive list of external resources that educators can use (ibid). This includes general information to support the development and understanding of the true histories, cultures and languages of Indigenous peoples, including reports by the Government of Canada, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, alongside international documents by the United Nations, such as the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UN, 2007[26]). An extensive list is also provided to equip educators with strategies for implementation, such as articles focused on measuring success in Indigenous learning and creating racism-free schools (ibid). Guidance also directs towards toolkits which can be utilised to support embedding core concepts, such as guides for acknowledging *First Peoples and Traditional Territories* (CAUT, n.d.[27]) and *Understanding and Implementing the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (Indigenous Bar Association, 2011[28]). In order to improve access and support a range of learning methods and needs, links to films and videos which can facilitate and support both understanding and teaching are also provided, alongside suggestions on further reading (ibid).

Development of simultaneous supporting initiatives

The *Mamàhtawisiwin* Policy Framework was not developed in isolation. As part of the commitment to advancing Truth and Reconciliation within education in Manitoba, a number of initiatives were developed simultaneously. This enabled and supported the development of the framework and ensured that its guiding principles were reflected across the entire education system. Inner and cross-departmental learning and insights from the development and implementation of initiatives were shared between relevant groups, and in turn were incorporated into the design and implementation processes of alternating initiatives.

Two examples of supporting initiatives are the *It's our Time: the AFN Education Toolkit* in 2017 and the publication of *Creating Racism-Free Schools through Critical/Courageous Conversations on Race* the same year.

The Assembly of First Nations collaborated with a variety of partners to create the *It's Our Time: The AFN Education Toolkit.* This toolkit was based on a comprehensive strategy to bring together First Nation students, teachers, schools, communities and the general public to facilitate co-operation and shared understanding. The toolkit provides a variety of resources for educators to guide teaching First Nations history and culture. It is designed to be utilised in one of two ways: either by incorporating into existing unit planning or teaching as standalone clusters (Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, 2020[16]).

Following the publication of the toolkit, Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning worked with Assembly of First Nations, alongside a number of other partners, to design the It's Our Time: First Nations Education Tool Kit Teacher's Guide. This guide enhanced the tool kit through providing specialised sources from Manitoba to facilitate pride and courage among Manitoba students (ibid). The Assembly of First Nations developed the It's Our Time: First Nations Education Tool Kit Teacher's Guide to promote and enhance First Nations student success by preparing and collecting relevant resources for schools, teachers, facilitators, and other community stakeholders. This will also help to increase understanding of First Nations history and culture among Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples by providing relevant tools and resources. The school-based aspects of the resource complement both First Nations and provincial curricula, and offer a teacher-friendly resource that can be used in creative and flexible ways (Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, 2020[16]).

The guide uses a variety of different resources, teaching practices and activities to facilitate teaching and learning. For example, national components include resources to aid and inform teaching, such as information on cultural protocols, talking circles, myths and stereotypes, alongside cultural objects, the Maps of First Nations and Healthy Aboriginal Network graphic novels. Different activities that teachers can utilise within the classroom are also included, such as Wise Words and Reflection Cards, customisable 'Honouring Role Models' posters, and documents to guide conversations entitled 'Plain Talks'. Supplementary resources are also provided alongside the tool kit, including fact sheets, information on national and regional organisations and an extended bibliography. The regional edition of the toolkit published by the department also includes region-specific content, such as a Manitoba Map of First Nations, a pocket-sized language booklet and values posters (ibid).

Responding to the calls of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission for education to address the impacts of systemic and systematic racism on Indigenous peoples, and to engage and advance Truth and Reconciliation efforts, the department recognised that it would be crucial to ensure that educators had a clear understanding of how and in which ways racism affected their students and how they could support change and tackle racism within a school context.

Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning worked in collaboration with the education sector, anti-racism experts and Elders and Knowledge Keepers within an interdepartmental team to develop resources for educators to enable this. In 2017, the document Creating Racism-Free Schools through Critical/Courageous Conversations on Race was published (Manitoba Education and Early Childhood

Learning, 2017[29]) This guide for educators was designed to support educators to understand where and when racism can occur and the effects it has on school divisions, schools, staff, students and communities. It aims to encourage educators to recognise the importance of conversations about the impacts of racism on Canadian society and implement such conversations within their teaching, alongside developing further strategies to overcome racism within the classroom (ibid).

Conversations, as outlined in the document, are based on critical race theory and require teachers to adopt a critical stance. In order to facilitate such conversations, teachers must work to become critically aware of racism and other issues related to power and equity, as well as an understanding of critical literacy. They must be able to reflect on their own privilege and understand their own racial bias and stereotypes. In turn, this can enable them to employ culturally relevant and culturally responsive pedagogies within the classroom (ibid).

When incorporating such conversations into their teaching, there are some prior considerations which the document recommends for educators. For example, it would be beneficial for teachers to have a clear understanding of how their own background and experience may affect their approach, their own thoughts and feelings on the topic and what generalisations or stereotypes they may have harboured. In addition, teachers are advised to consider what race-related power-dynamics may exist in their classrooms, and in turn, how they can build a safe learning environment within which racism can be discussed in a constructive way. Other considerations which the document advises educators to take include being aware of the comfort levels of students who might have experienced racism and a clear sense of boundaries for self-expression in the school environment. The importance of the involvement of school leadership in such initiatives and conversations is also emphasised (ibid).

A third example of supporting initiatives includes the development of a set of resources designed to help teachers and support students to understand and come to terms with the discovery of unmarked graves of Indigenous children at residential schools' sites (Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, 2021[30]).

This guidance document pointed educators to resources which they could utilise when learning and teaching about residential schools. This included age-appropriate books about residential schools, which were categorised according to student teaching age. Accessible video recordings of all books on YouTube are also provided, along with videos by a Cree, Lakota and Scottish expert offering tips on talking to children about residential schools. A child's view of the 94 calls to action in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Final Report is also provided, to support educators to understand how children might understand these calls and also to enable them to teach children about the calls to action in a manner that they can understand (ibid).

Engaging Elders and Knowledge Keepers in Schools

At the same time as the launch of the *Mamàhtawisiwin* Framework, the Manitoba government also announced an investment of CAD 1.6 million to expand the Elders and Knowledge Keepers in Schools initiative (Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, 2022c[31]). With expansion of the initiative, all school divisions received funds to work with Elders and Knowledge Keepers directly within their schools, with the aim of supporting students, educators and families to learn about Indigenous histories, cultures, traditional values, contemporary lifestyles and traditional knowledge systems. Elders and Knowledge Keepers will work with schools to share knowledge, teaching practices and protocols, alongside providing supports to foster a culture of understanding and respect within schools (ibid).

Alignment of Mamàhtawisiwin Framework with Manitoba's K to 12 Education Action Plan

The close alignment of the *Mamàhtawisiwin* Framework and Manitoba'*s K to 12 Education Action Plan* is positive and supportive. For example, whilst not identical, the *Action Plan* shares similar and supporting guiding principles as the *Mamàhtawisiwin* Framework, which include advancing Truth and Reconciliation; achieving equity; ensuring inclusion; striving for excellence; prioritising well-being and enhancing accountability (Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, 2022b[4]).

The guiding principles within the *K to 12 Action Plan* can be directly linked to similar guiding principles within the *Mamàhtawisiwin* Framework. The key focuses, objectives and themes explored within the *Action Plan* are grounded deeply in the principles, beliefs and objectives of the *Mamàhtawisiwin* Framework (ibid; (Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, 2022a[5]). The vision for student success outlined by the *Action Plan*, which is that all Manitoba students succeed, regardless of geographical location, background or individual circumstances, reflects the Indigenous principle of *Mino-Pimatisiwin* (The Good Life), which is outlined in the framework as guiding the design and objectives of its vision. For example, when explaining what student success looks like, the action plan notes that it will look different for every child, but always means that every child is supported to reach their full potential and to live *Mino-Pimatisiwin* (The Good Life) (ibid).

Ensuring that all education initiatives incorporate and reflect the *Mamàhtawisiwin* Policy Framework encourages the adoption of this direction at all levels, and supports long-lasting change throughout the entire education system.

Box 10.5. Success Factors

- Incorporating learning from previous initiatives in the development of the *Mamàhtawisiwin* Framework;
- wide consultation and engagement, including a pilot which involves schools working directly with Elders and Knowledge Keepers;
- developing supporting resources for educators, including guidance on practice and an extensive list of external resources;
- alignment of purpose across a number of supporting initiatives which developed simultaneously.

Reflections

As this is a very new initiative, and implementation is at a very early stage, this case study has focused primarily on the development of the *Mamàhtawisiwin* Framework. The Canadian contributors to the case study have indicated that, following a full year of implementation in 2023, it is likely that insights into implementation will emerge. What follows are the reflections of the writers, drawing on their experience researching and writing this case study.

Acknowledging past and current injustices is not sufficient for Truth and Reconciliation

Truth and Reconciliation requires a whole of government approach, in-depth community stakeholders and Indigenous rights holders' participation and relationship building. As noted in the previous section and elsewhere in this case study, the extent and breadth of the discrimination and injustice which was experienced by the Indigenous peoples of Manitoba and Canada more widely, cannot be overstated. While much has been done to acknowledge this, Truth and Reconciliation require more than admission of guilt.

Action which is properly conceived and financed and which is built on coherent government policy is essential.

Initiatives designed to address and redress injustices should not work in isolation but should work in parallel with corresponding initiatives within the same aim and across different sectors and government departments. No single initiative is enough to reach Truth and Reconciliation.

The engagement process throughout the development and implementation of the *Mamàhtawisiwin* Framework is grounded in relationship building. Strong relationships with Indigenous rights holders and stakeholders has supported timely and thoughtful recommendations and community support. This evidences the importance of whole-scale engagement of all stakeholders at different stages of the process of policy development and implementation. Through harnessing expertise from various stakeholders (political groups, organisations, parents/caregivers, students and youth, Elders and Knowledge Keepers, community members, teachers, principals, superintendents, Indigenous education leaders etc.), policy and the initiatives it gives rise too are more likely to achieve their stated aim.

Building public buy-in is essential

Public opinion proved, and still proves today, to be both a challenge and an opportunity. Whilst there are still great challenges faced concerning a deeply rooted racism and discrimination of Indigenous peoples in Manitoban society, there was also a growing recognition of Indigenous rights, of the discrimination Indigenous peoples faced and the need for significant change and a move towards Truth and Reconciliation (Macdonald, 2015[32]).

There is growing discussion among the wider public concerning the discrimination and violence faced by Indigenous peoples, alongside an increase in activism, particularly among young people. On a wider level, structural and national changes have supported this change in public opinion, such as the adoption of the Canadian Citizenship Guide to include information on the history of Indigenous peoples in Canada and the abuses they faced under colonisation. However, limited space is given to this history (Jhappen and Samur, 2009[33]). Furthermore, the Oath of Citizenship was also amended to include recognition and affirmation of Aboriginal and treaty rights as entrenched in the Canadian Constitution: a direct response to the Truth and Reconciliation's calls to action (New Canadians, 2021[34]). So, although discrimination and racism still persevere as a distinct challenge to Truth and Reconciliation, both through education and more widely, there was growing support and recognition of the need for Truth and Reconciliation among the public at the time that the framework was being developed and implemented.

Harnessing the expertise and experiences of various groups and providing opportunities for the public to understand and engage with the Truth and Reconciliation process was enabled by an extensive and inclusive consultation process during the development of the framework. The framework was developed in collaboration with over one hundred individuals from across the province, including Elders and Knowledge Keepers, students, teachers, superintendents, senior post-secondary administrators, government working groups, early childhood education and community partners.

Student-centred approaches and authentic development

Supporting the mental health and well-being of young people requires student-centred approaches within the education system. Students are the experts in their own lives. Bringing student voices to the forefront in both decision making and in policy design and implementation is critical. Values of respecting and listening to students and employing holistic approaches are both strategies towards putting students at the centre identified in *Mamàhtawisiwin*.

We need to work with students, parents, their families and communities. This can be achieved through many means such as participating in cultural and ceremonial experiences, inviting parents and extended family to engage in school events, teaching alongside Elders and Knowledge Keepers, creating opportunities for families to share knowledge and contribute to the classroom, and involving families and communities in the design and development of policy. Promoting Elder, Knowledge Keeper and community involvement; and promoting parent, grandparent and extended family involvement are both strategies towards Authentic Involvement identified in the *Mamàhtawisiwin* Framework.

We thank our partners across the education system and the educators, Elders and Knowledge Keepers across Manitoba for their commitment and joint efforts towards teaching the true histories and advancing Truth and Reconciliation.

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Notes

[1] Canadian citizenship has often been used as a tool of assimilation. Some Indigenous nations do not consider themselves to be Canadian citizens "... at issue is a matter of contested citizenship wherein many Aboriginal peoples (individuals and nations) dispute their citizenship on the grounds that they are citizens of Indigenous [N]ations." Ladner, 2003. Available at Electoral Insight – Aboriginal Participation in Elections – Elections Canada (accessed on 20 June 2023)

[2] Languages, cultures, traditions, histories and other aspects of Indigenous identity and/or Nationhood are pluralized throughout this document to recognize the diversity of Indigenous peoples.

[3] “E-mamahtawisit is an Ininimowin (Cree) word referring to a person who goes above and beyond in sharing their gift and connecting people to the root of their existence. ‘Mamàhtawisiwin’ is the noun form. Government of Manitoba, 2022a. Available at https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/iid/index.html) (accessed on 7 June 2023).

[4] While it is not common practice to capitalize Truth and Reconciliation, Jo Chrona has noted the following: “While it is not conventional to capitalize Reconciliation, I do so to emphasize the specific process addressing the harms of colonization on Indigenous peoples in Canada.” (2022: 7) Given that, as Arthur Manuel has noted, “Reconciliation has to pass first through truth” (2017: 56), Truth and Reconciliation is capitalized to draw attention to the significant and necessary linkage that exists between both processes.

Chrona, Jo. Wayi Wah! Indigenous Pedagogies: An Act for Reconciliation and Anti-Racist Education. Portage & Main Press, 2022.

Manuel, Arthur, and Grand Chief Ronald Derrickson. The Reconciliation Manifesto: Recovering the Land, Rebuilding the Economy. James Lorimer & Company, 2017

[5] "In the Americas, the term 'Indian' is a government, racialized, conceptual tradition. It is a universal ideal ... that does not exist in any living Indigenous community. It is a false limit that impedes Indigenous peoples' freer movements, as they cycle over the vast territories of time. As such, it blocks their journeys over difficult conceptual terrain. It is a tool that facilitates domination. It should be removed." Borrows, (2016), p. 236, note 139.

[6] “To First Nations, the Crown is the Treaty partner, the embodiment of the British monarchy, the Canadian government, and the citizens of Canada. Thus, the Crown is a tangible entity represented by the Canadian federal government and a symbolic Treaty partner representing the enduring promises made 150 years ago. First Nations in Canada were here when European newcomers arrived. They were not conquered, and they did not give up their lands. In Manitoba, First Nations did not surrender who they are as a people and define their relationship with the Crown through negotiated Treaties. The Government of Canada is obligated to uphold ‘the honour of the Crown,’ which requires the federal government to act with honour, integrity, good faith, and fairness in all dealings with First Nations.” Treaties With The Crown - Treaty Relations Commission of Manitoba (trcm.ca)

[7] The Indian Act defines Indian as a person who pursuant to this Act is registered as an Indian or is entitled to be registered as an Indian; (*Indien*). Indian Act R.S.C., 1985, c. I-5. The use of the term ‘Indian’ or ‘Indian people’ should only be used in reference to the Indian Act and is considered a derogatory term.

[8] Further details on the agreement are available in *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*.

[9] There is recent shift in use of the language of “survivor” to “warrior” in the community when describing survivors of colonial violence. This can be identified by Lina Suneri in Sky Woman Lives On Contemporary Examples of Mothering the Nation “Indigenous women’s lives are rich with strength and determined spirit, gifts that the Creator has given them so that as warriors they can face the battles they encounter as they work toward pulling down barriers that impede them as women, as First Nations, as well as those that impede our communities.” (p. 56) Monture, P. A., & McGuire, P. D. (2009). *First Voices: An Aboriginal Women's Reader*. Inanna Publications and Education.

Dale Turner has called for a community of 'word warriors' "to assert and defend the integrity of Indigenous rights and nationhood *and* protect Indigenous ways of knowing within the existing legal and political practices of the dominant culture." (p. 74) "What I am calling for is a kind of Indigenous dialogue that protects the integrity of Indigenous ways of knowing the world even while engaging the dominant intellectual culture in more empowering ways." (p. 74) Turner, D. A. (2006). *This Is Not a Peace Pipe: Towards a Critical Indigenous Philosophy*. University of Toronto Press.

[10] 2SLGBTQQIA stands for Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex and asexual p. 40 untitled (mmiwg-ffada.ca)

[11] The Circle of Courage® is a trademarked title registered to Starr Commonwealth and is a positive youth development model that is based on the universal principle that to be emotionally healthy all youth need a sense of belonging, mastery, independence and generosity.

[12] **62.** We call upon the federal, provincial, and territorial governments, in consultation and collaboration with Survivors, Aboriginal peoples, and educators, to:

i. Make age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal peoples’ historical and contemporary contributions to Canada a mandatory education requirement for Kindergarten to Grade Twelve students;
ii. Provide the necessary funding to post-secondary institutions to educate teachers on how to integrate Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into classrooms;
iii. Provide the necessary funding to Aboriginal schools to utilize Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods in classrooms;
iv. Establish senior-level positions in government at the assistant deputy minister level or higher dedicated to Aboriginal content in education.

63. We call upon the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada to maintain an annual commitment to Aboriginal education issues, including:

i. Developing and implementing Kindergarten to Grade Twelve curriculum and learning resources on Aboriginal peoples in Canadian history, and the history and legacy of residential schools;
ii. Sharing information and best practices on teaching curriculum related to residential schools and Aboriginal history;
iii. Building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect;
iv. Identifying teacher-training needs relating to the above.

11 Portugal: Ensuring policy alignment and coherence to achieve real change

To overcome challenges such as grade repetition, school drop-out and deficiencies in social cohesion, Portuguese policymakers describe how they set out a vision of what young people are expected to achieve at the end of compulsory schooling. Named the *Students' Profile*, it aims to align policies, such as curriculum autonomy and the use of a variety of assessments, across different sectors, to address complex societal challenges effectively. Recognising the importance of a co-ordinated approach, the profile has become the touchstone document around which other related policies are re-framed or constructed. This initiative could aid Ukrainian policymakers as they aim to put students firmly at the centre of curriculum change and other initiatives in a bid to bring about tangible and lasting change.

Introduction

Portugal has invested in education reform in response to national and international issues such as grade repetition, school drop-out, early leaver rates, lack of equity of opportunity and deficiencies in social cohesion. The country recognises the importance of relevant, positive educational experiences to ensure all students thrive, live peacefully together, and contribute to societal and global well-being in creative ways. To achieve this goal, Portugal has identified the principles, competences, and values which students need to acquire, and has set out a clear vision statement called *Students' Profile by the End of Compulsory Schooling,* which was published in 2017.

The *Students' Profile* has become the touchstone document around which other related policies have been either re-framed or constructed, ensuring coherence of message and a shared understanding of purpose. This is important as policymakers are acutely aware that implementing change is potentially costly, both economically and in terms of trust in social institutions. If implementation of reforms fails to bring about intended benefits, those costs can continue to accrue. According to change management research, the risk of public policy failures increases if changes are not adequately aligned with other policies in the same area, as this can lead to incoherence and unintended barriers to effective implementation (Hudson, Hunter and Peckham, 2019[1]). In Portugal, this risk is lessened due to the *Students' Profile* (DGE, 2017b[2]).

Policy Coherence is defined by the OECD as the systematic promotion of mutually reinforcing policy actions across government departments and agencies creating synergies towards achieving the agreed objectives (OECD, 2021[3]). This case study looks at how the *Students' Profile* was developed and considers other related policies. In particular, it looks at how this approach in Portugal has supported a connection between policy design and implementation, which enhances consistency in the choices made by different stakeholders.

What motivated change?

In 2015, Portugal published the *National Skills Strategy.* The development of this strategy identified several challenges faced by the skills system in Portugal, including a need to improve quality and equity in education. At the time, Portugal was emerging from a period of severe economic challenges and the percentage of the working-age population that had attained at least secondary education was below the OECD average. It was evident that improving skills among young people would be critical to future development in Portugal (OECD, 2018b[4]). The *Strategy* outlined three 'pillar' areas for development: developing relevant skills from childhood to adulthood, activating the supply of skills in the labour market, and using skills effectively in the economy and society. The goals set out in the *Strategy* acted as an impetus for vision-making by the Ministry of Education and were a strong motivating force for policy change from preschool education until 12th grade, the end of compulsory education. (DGE, 2017b[2])

As a response to the first Pillar, Portugal considers preschool education as the first stage of elementary education in the process of lifelong education. It is complementary to the educational action of the family, with which it should cooperate closely, fostering the balanced education and development of the child, with a view to his or her full integration into society as an autonomous, free, and solidary being.

Preschool education is aimed at children from the age of three until entry into compulsory schooling and is provided in preschool education establishments. Attendance at preschool education is optional, acknowledging the family's primary role in the education of children; however, it is universal for children over four years of age.

The *Orientações Curriculares para a Educação Pré-Escolar* (Curriculum Guidelines for Preschool Education) is the guiding legal document for curriculum design and development. It emphasises the right

to include all children in the education process, regardless of their nationality, mother tongue, culture, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation of family members, their cognitive, motor, or sensory differences.

The content areas are as follows:

- personal and social development;
- knowledge of the world;
- self-Expression and communication, which includes physical education, creative arts, and emergent literacy.

In order to ensure the continuity of lifelong learning policies, encourage greater participation in adult learning and increase the educational attainment and basic skills of adults, the Portuguese Government launched the *Qualifica* Programme in 2017. This large scale re-and up-skilling programme for low-skilled adults has the potential to bring them back to education and training and assumes a central role in mobilising and referring adults towards education and training pathways that are the most adequate to their profiles, thus enhancing their qualification and employability.

A comprehensive network of *Qualifica* Centres (centres specialised in the provision of adult-learning services), covering the whole territory (currently 316), provides information, guidance and referral of adults (18 or plus), and exceptionally of NEET, to qualification pathways (school and/or professional, levels 1 to 5 of the NQF/EQF), as well as ensures their follow-up. These centres work as a “gateway” to adult education and training and play a key role in motivating adults for lifelong learning and in the development of local networks for qualification (employers, education and training providers, municipalities).

In 2016, the *National Programme to Promote Educational Success* (PNPSE) (PNPSE, 2016[5]) aimed to tackle challenges linked to grade repetition, early school leaving and school failure. It targeted intervention at primary school level, working on the premise that educational communities know their own context best and are well-placed to devise strategic plans to address difficulties and challenges. Its approach was preventative. Through provision of enhanced classroom interactions and teacher collaboration, the aim was to intervene early to address disadvantage and challenges. The PNPSE supported schools to develop their own contextualised improvement plans and municipalities to develop local projects (OECD, 2020b[6]).These improvement plans, devised locally for local contexts, and often supported by municipal projects aligned with local school plans, were intended to improve educational practice and learning experiences. The initiative has inspired the development of more than 3,000 different approaches to the problem of school drop-out and grade repetition, with the 50 most effective ones published in a national portfolio of best practices. The early drop-out rate more than halved in six years, decreasing from 13.7% in 2015 to 5.9% in 2021 (OECD, 2020b[6])

This evidence, as well as outcomes of these and other strategic initiatives, served as the context to developing a vision for all students at the end of compulsory education. Teacher subject associations were invited to participate in identifying the competencies that young people need. They were asked how their subjects contributed to the development of those competencies and to consider the inter-relatedness of their subject disciplines with other areas. The outcomes of the discussion indicated a strong teacher loyalty to disciplinary knowledge, with a corresponding awareness that new areas of knowledge – new emerging disciplines – were also important (OECD, 2020b[6]).

The time resource available to schooling is limited. As a result, the strategy of adding new disciplines, such as digital literacy, to already over-crowded curricula is not sustainable. Curriculum expansion is the tendency to include new content items in response to societal demands without appropriate adjustment of other parts of the curriculum. This can result in curriculum overload (OECD, 2020b[6]). and is a challenge not unique to Portugal. Internationally, many countries face similar issues of wanting to be responsive to changing needs while minimising curriculum expansion and overload. Curriculum overload runs the risk of shallow learning experiences for students. The additional stress and negative impact this can have on both student and teacher well-being can undermine reform efforts (OECD, 2020b[6]).

In the background, there was also strong recognition in Portugal that the world that students enter upon leaving education is constantly changing and it is considerably more complex to navigate. Cultural diversity is on the rise among all OECD countries, with the percentage of foreign-born students increasing. In Portugal, the number of foreign-born students increased from 3.5% in 2006 to 4.1% in 2015. The student population in Portugal is becoming more ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse (OECD, 2018a[7]). In an increasingly globalised society, technological advances, and issues such as climate change and migration patterns present significant challenges for future generations (DGE, 2018a[8]; OECD, 2018a[7]). As the world becomes increasingly connected, there are significant implications for education. Students in OECD countries are spending more time online when not in school. This in turn can have a detrimental impact on young people's well-being. Nearly 80% of boys and girls in Portugal reported that they 'feel bad' when not connected to the internet (OECD, 2018a[7]).

Reflecting trends globally, young people are seeking meaning and purpose in complex and confusing circumstances, navigating challenges such as fake news, social media, and cultural diversity (Ibid). In addition, as new technologies change working environments, students need to be prepared for the jobs of the future. Many of these jobs are yet to exist, will utilise technologies not yet invented, and solve future problems still unknown. Schools have a responsibility to prepare students for these challenges. That is why the Ministry identified the need for new competencies to be developed that would enable and encourage students to question established knowledge, integrate emerging knowledge, communicate effectively, and solve complex problems (DGE, 2018b[9]).

Identifying and providing for these competences (Knowledge, Skills, Attitudes and Values) became a priority for the Ministry. The challenge was to formulate a vision of educational change along four dimensions:

- a flexible competency-based curriculum, identifying target skills and a set of 10 key domains competencies for students;
- developing a citizenship education strategy;
- elaborating a law on inclusive education;
- creating a flexible core curriculum (ibid).

The aim was to develop a strategic plan to achieve these goals in schools and guide the development of strategies, methodologies and pedagogical-didactic procedures which could be utilised in teaching practices to achieve this (OECD, 2018a[7]).

The first step was to articulate a clear vision for educational outcomes, built on commitment to the holistic development of the individual. In 2017, this was published as the *Students' Profile*. This initial policy - which identified the actions needed to overcome these challenges and the corresponding educational vision of change - established a clear guide to future educational reform, to advance inclusive and student-centred education, meet diversity challenges and prepare all students for the modern world.

Box 11.1. Portugal education reform priorities

- The requirement to improve skills for national development and to prepare young people for the world of work;
- concern about drop-out and grade repetition rates and a commitment to improving educational outcomes for all students;
- recognition of the importance of emerging disciplines;
- commitment to inclusive and student-centred education.

What is the vision for education?

To provide inclusive, student-centred education, it is important to have a clear vision to guide transformation across the education system. The *Students' Profile at the End of Compulsory Schooling*, published in 2017, provides the foundations for the organisation of the entire education system and future documents, including legislation.

The *Students' Profile* contains two parts: the principles and visions underpinning education provision, and the values and competency areas education should develop. It sets forth broad student outcomes in 10 competency areas such as body awareness, interpersonal relations, aesthetic sensitivity, health well-being and environment, critical and creative thinking, as well as student values including freedom, citizenship and participation, and curiosity (DGE, 2017b[2]).

The *Students' Profile* outlines what students should achieve at the end of compulsory schooling: the common set of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that students are expected to develop (DGE, 2018b[9]). This is positioned as a desirable outcome rather than a minimal or ideal profile, which provides some room for flexibility. This reference document is intended to be a decision-making guide for educational stakeholders, providing guidelines for considering what is relevant, appropriate, and feasible within decision-making at different levels and within different contexts (DGE, 2018b[9]).

The *Students' Profile* was developed with three core concepts in mind: broadness, transversality and recursivity. It is deliberately broad, in order to represent the inclusivity and diversity of schools and to ensure that, regardless of the school pathways, all knowledge is guided by consensus, clear principles, values and vision. Transversality is also adopted, based on the assumption that each curriculum area contributes to the development of all competence areas in the profile. In addition, the document is intentionally designed in a recursive manner, emphasising the possibility that in each year of schooling, its content and purposes are continually invoked (DGE, 2017b[2]).

The first part of the document establishes the *Students' Profile* as the touchstone for all decision-making, at every level of authority, when considering and substantiating what is relevant, appropriate, and feasible at different decision levels. It sets out a clear statement of the principles that should be widely promoted across the entire education system and be considered as a guide for all present and future decisions within the education system (DGE, 2017b[2]). The eight principles are:

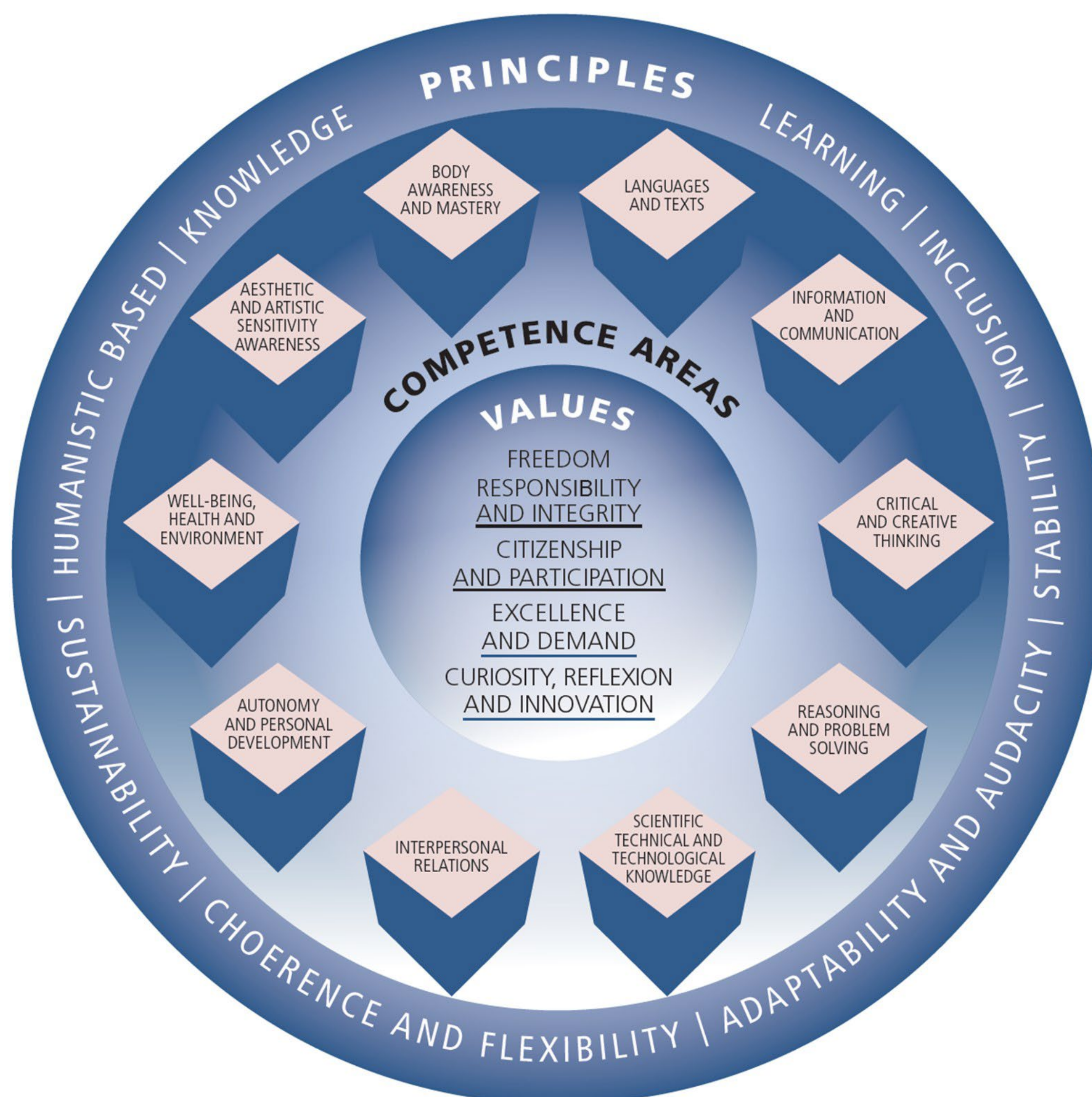
1. Humanistic-based profile: Schools empower young people with the knowledge and values to build a more just society, centred on the individual, human dignity and common good.
2. Knowledge as the centre of the education system: It is the responsibility of the school to facilitate a culture which enables students to understand and make decisions on the world's natural and scientific realities.

3. Learning: Educational action should deliberately promote the development of learning skills.
4. Inclusion: All students are entitled to participate in all educational settings fully and effectively.
5. Coherence and flexibility: Flexible management of the curriculum and collaborative work of educators, in order to explore diverse themes within learning.
6. Adaptability and audacity: Educating in the 21st century requires the ability to adapt to new contexts and structures.
7. Sustainability: Schools must support the development of student’s awareness and understanding of sustainability.
8. Stability: Educating for a broad competence profile requires time, persistence and stability.

The second part of the *Students’ Profile* sets out the values and competences to be acquired by students by the end of their schooling experience. Furthermore, the values which all students should be encouraged to adopt are clearly signposted, to inform and guide teaching and educational decisions (DGE, 2017b[2]).

The term ‘competences’ in the *Students’ Profile* describes a complex combination of knowledge, skills, and attitudes, which facilitate effective human action in diverse contexts. The competence areas outlined are deliberately diverse, including cognitive and metacognitive, social, and emotional, physical, and practical. These are not associated with a specific curriculum area; rather, in each area, there are multiple desirable competencies and each of the subject disciplines can and should contribute to their development.

Figure 11.1. Student's Profile Conceptual Framework



Source: DGE (2017c), Student's Profile by the End of Compulsory Schooling, https://cidadania.dge.mec.pt/sites/default/files/pdfs/students-profile.pdf (accessed on 9 June 2023).

Educators receive guidance to help them support students to develop competencies, which requires changes in pedagogical and didactic practices. For example, several teaching strategies are advised to support competency development. This includes associating contents with daily situations within a student's life experience of the sociocultural and geographical environment they belong to; using experimental techniques related to observation, questioning reality, and the situated nature of knowledge, and planning collaborative activities which allow the exchange of knowledge, awareness of self and others and of the environment (ibid). The *Students' Profile* requires educators, within and across subject disciplines, to provide students with opportunities to make choices, to compare different points of view, to solve problems and to make decisions based on values.

By the end of compulsory education, the vision set out in the *Students' Profile* is for every student to have these qualities:

1. To develop multiple literacies so that they can critically analyse and question reality, evaluate and select information, formulate hypotheses, and make informed decisions in their daily life.
2. To be free, autonomous, and responsible, self-aware, and aware of the world around them.
3. To cope with the transformation and uncertainty of a fast-changing world.
4. To acknowledge the importance and the challenges offered by Arts, Humanities, Science and Technology for the social, cultural, economic, and environmental sustainability of Portugal and the world.
5. To be autonomous and able to make use of several developed skills: critical thinking, creativity, collaborative working skills and communication skills.
6. To continue lifelong learning as a decisive factor in their personal development and social intervention.
7. To know and respect the fundamental principles of democratic society and the rights, guarantees and freedoms on which it is based.
8. To value and respect human dignity, the exercise of full citizenship, solidarity with others, cultural diversity, and democratic debate.
9. To reject all forms of discrimination and social exclusion (ibid).

The *Students' Profile* makes it clear that this is a vision that is to be achieved by all students, regardless of socioeconomic, cultural, or physical background. The profile is applicable to all schools and is deliberately inclusive and respectful of the diversity of Portuguese schools. With transversality at the heart of the profile, there is no strict separation of competence areas into specific components of curriculum domains. The aim of the document is that the content and purposes of the *Students' Profile* can be continually invoked in all schools (OECD, 2018a[7]).

Box 11.2. Vision

The commitment to build an inclusive school where all students have the opportunity to participate and carry out meaningful learning.

What opportunities existed?

Existing expertise

Since the Carnation Revolution and the restoration of democracy in 1974, Portugal has garnered extensive experience of designing and implementing system change. Between 1974 and 1986, a series of changes to the educational system were implemented, moving it ever closer to the model embodied in the *Lei de Bases do Sistema Educativo* (DGE, 1986[10]). The Act defined educational objectives, structures and modes of organisation and set out a comprehensive model of schooling (DGE, 1986[10])The model defined was comprehensive, equal for all, geared towards integrated training and offering contact with different knowledge areas, encouraging different skills to promote informed vocational choices (Eurydice, 2022[11]). In the years which followed, cycles of education reform continued. These extended the period of compulsory schooling, expansion of the school population and much improved outcomes for learners. There has been a considerable improvement in participation among diverse student groups (OECD, 2022[12]) and Portuguese students' performance in PISA has continuously improved in the past two

decades. Portugal is the only OECD member to show consistent score growth in reading, mathematics, and science (OECD, 2019[13]) up to PISA 2018.

The Ministry of Education is the governmental department responsible for defining, coordinating, implementing, and evaluating national policy regarding the education system (preschool, basic, upper secondary and out-of-school education), as well as for articulating education policy with qualification and vocational training policies. Experts in curriculum reform within the Ministry supported the development of the *Students' Profile*. While curriculum is defined centrally and approved by the Minister, the process is a consultative one, building decisions on robust, evidence-based foundations and comprehensive consultation with relevant experts. These can include university-level professional researchers as well as stakeholder groups, such as experienced teachers.

National networks

The education system in Portugal was historically very centralised but educational policy has shifted to encourage and facilitate local level decision-making. Several reforms have resulted in the development of greater levels of autonomy in some aspects of education provision. In 2005, work got underway to consolidate the school network to improve efficiencies and resourcing. The school network is organised into school clusters, which have with their own administration and management bodies. They are made up of preschool establishments, plus two or more levels of education (until lower secondary or upper secondary) that share a common pedagogical project. School clusters enjoy some autonomy in terms of pedagogy, managing teaching schedules and non-teaching staff. Several recently implemented reforms have extended cluster autonomy to curriculum management, promoting decentralisation, assigning responsibilities to municipalities regarding investment, equipment and the maintenance of school buildings, provision of meals in establishments and management of non-teaching staff (Eurydice, 2022[11]; DGE, 2018a[8]; DGE, 2018b[9]). 98% of schools are now aggregated into clusters under an executive principal, supported by a number of deputies and school co-ordinators. Between 2006 and 2018, the Ministry developed autonomy contracts with schools. In July 2018, as a result of Decree-Law 55, all schools and clusters have autonomy and flexibility to manage up to 25% of the curriculum to address their specific context. In some cases, more than 25% of curriculum management can be granted to schools according to the Implementing Order 181/2019, in its current wording. In this scope, schools draft innovation plans to be approved by the Ministry.

The local autonomy which is fostered in the school network has contributed to the gradual development of greater decision-making expertise at a local level and the generation of locally informed, school-level, insights into what is needed and what works. This resource is available to the Ministry when considering new developments and ensures that policy considerations are informed by practitioner experience.

International networks and research

The Ministry drew heavily on the excellent web of international networks which had been developed since the 1970s. During the design stage of the development of the *Students' Profile by the End of Compulsory Schooling*, international reference documents on teaching and learning were consulted to inform its design and development, particularly from the *European Union (EU)*, the *Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)* and the *United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)*. In addition, the Ministry carried out a review of existing literature in the field of education research, with a particular focus on which indispensable skills children and young people must develop in order to be able to exercise active, creative and full citizenship in the increasingly connected and information-based society of today. To further ensure that existing knowledge and expertise was utilised in the development of the profile, various international documents were also considered, alongside national educational texts and guidelines from European and international entities.

A similar approach was also taken in the development of the National Strategy for Citizenship, wherein international research and expertise was harnessed to inform the development of the strategy. For example, documents such as the *Competencies for Democratic Culture: Living together as equals in culturally diverse democratic societies* document by the Council of Europe (Council of Europe, 2016[14]), the UN Sustainable Goals (UN, n.d.[15]) and the UNESCO *Global Citizenship Education, Preparing Learners for the Challenges of the Twenty-First Century* (UNESCO, 2014[16]).

Through conducting a review of existing educational research and literature, the Ministry was able to harness expertise and knowledge to inform the development of the *Students' Profile* and ensure that it was evidence-based and high-quality. Likewise, utilising international networks and research ensured the grounding of the profile in international guidance and best practice of what works internationally.

Box 11.3. Existing opportunities

- Significant in-house experience in curriculum reform;
- strong established networks both nationally and internationally;
- increased levels of autonomy and flexibility at school level.

What actions were taken?

Building political commitment and strong leadership is key to the success of policy implementation. The clarity of the vision set out in the *Students' Profile*, which clearly outlined its relevance and national development goals, was a firm factor in ensuring it was implemented effectively. These included establishing the elements of the curriculum needed to achieve the vision in the *Students' Profile* as well as the introduction of a set of complementary policies. The result is a suite of policies, underpinned by relevant legislation, which work synergistically to enhance the educational experience of students and to meet the intentions of government for schooling.

The clarification of essential learning

Immediately following the publication of the *Students' Profile*, work began on clarifying the essential components of the curriculum. In part, this was motivated by a desire to avoid an overloaded curriculum which would be burdensome for teachers and students. Following extensive consultation, which included consultation with students and professional teacher bodies, the Ministry used this opportunity to create space in the curriculum for inclusion, interdisciplinary learning, citizenship and environmental awareness. This approach was designed to minimise any perceived tensions between traditional, subject discipline-based learning and an emphasis on competence development. Thus, *Essential Learnings* are intended to ensure a mastery of essential disciplinary subjects, while also creating opportunities for interdisciplinary learning[1]. The framework is designed to contribute to the development of the competencies set out in the *Students' Profile* (OECD, 2020a[17]).

A set of curriculum reference documents were developed, which outline the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to be developed by students, particularly in the form of the syllabi, curriculum outcomes, guidelines, professional profiles, and references for the National Qualifications Catalogue, as well as the curriculum competencies set out in the *Students' Profile*. The competencies outlined in the *Students' Profile* act as the main curriculum reference for the planning and delivery of learning, teaching, and assessment (DGE, 2018b[9]).

The new Essential Learning framework places an emphasis on inclusion for all students, interdisciplinary and cross-curricular working, and active learning pedagogy. It instigated the provision of tailored education

pathways in secondary education, providing the possibility for students to switch and substitute subjects in line with their needs and context (Ibid). This flexibility is enhanced by the facility for schools to redirect students along different pathways of education (Ibid).

Citizenship Education is included as an essential aspect of the curriculum, covering topics such as gender equality, interculturalism and consumer education. This is taught by the main classroom teacher in primary education and by a specialist teacher in secondary level through an ongoing course ‘Citizenship and Development’. This was supported by the development of a *National Citizenship Strategy* (DGE, 2017a[18]).

The *Students’ Profile* requires teachers to adapt their pedagogical practice and in 2018, a diverse use of assessment and evaluation instruments was encouraged in the guidance documents and legislation which accompanied the Essential Learnings. The advice focused on ensuring that assessment is fit for purpose. In particular, guidance advised that procedures, techniques and tools should be adapted to assessment purposes, object, recipients and type of information to be collected, which varies according to the diversity and specificity of the curriculum work. For example, across the whole curriculum, students are encouraged to answer hybrid questions which mobilise knowledge from different subjects. The advice is that the primary purpose is formative, so that assessments should provide detailed information about the effectiveness of teaching and learning. The ongoing feedback and reflection that formative assessment provides allows learning difficulties to be identified and equips teachers to offer tailored support to students at the first signs of difficulty (DGE, 2018a[8]).

Arrangements to improve autonomous decision-making in schools

New guidelines and legislation regarding the educational reforms were supported by the extension of structural changes within the education system. As noted, school clusters - a grouping of schools which share management, educational resources, and instructional materials – had been formed in the period from 2005. These clusters have their own jointed administration and management bodies and are entitled to some autonomy regarding pedagogy, managing teaching schedules and non-teaching staff. The formation of these clusters encouraged multidisciplinary working and the sharing of expertise and knowledge, whilst promoting innovation. In 2018, the *Decree-Law No 55/2018* extended cluster autonomy to curriculum management, which enabled school leaders and teachers to design tailored learning experiences according to the needs and profile of their students (DGE, 2018b[9]).

Additional regulations promoted decentralisation of decision-making. For example, municipalities were assigned responsibilities regarding investment, equipment, the maintenance of school buildings, the provision of meals and the management of non-teaching staff (DGE, 2019[19]). This supported the key notions guiding educational reform, particularly in distributing more autonomy and flexibility to schools and encouraging greater collaborative working. Decree-Law No.55/2018 provided schools with greater autonomy and flexibility in curriculum planning, granting schools the ability to manage up to 25% of the curriculum. Schools were given the power to identify effective curriculum options, which were aligned to the school context and the specific needs of their students. These include partial or total combination of curriculum components, subject areas, subjects or share term training units, through interdisciplinary work or sharing teaching time across subjects. Schools are also able to alternate periods focusing on one single subject with periods focusing on several subjects, through utilising collaborative work. In addition, teachers can utilise practical or experimental work splitting classes or using different organisations (DGE, 2018b[9]).

Under *Ordinance no.181*, published in 2019, additional management of over 25% of the curriculum structure is also possible for schools who wish to address specific needs. For example, to develop alternative education pathways or dual certification courses. Schools granted this facility must draft innovation plans outlining the intended educational measures that are approved by the Ministry for Education. These plans can be in areas such as curriculum management, new subjects, pedagogical differentiation, different class arrangements and alternative curricular pathways (Eurydice, 2022[11]).

A three-year Pedagogical Innovation Pilot Project (*Projeto-Piloto de Inovação Pedagógica*, PPIP, 2017-2020) was put in motion to improve learning through school-led innovation, specifically to reduce early school-leaving rates. This project was completely voluntary and participation by schools exceeded initial expectations. Six school clusters from across Portugal were granted full autonomy to break with legislation in pursuit of innovative solutions to student drop-out and grade repetition. The clusters identified problems, set priorities, mobilised teachers, defined strategies and shared ideas and reflections at regular PPIP network meetings. Strategies could relate to curricula, pedagogy, organisation, or community relationships. In 2018, a seventh school cluster joined. Participating schools are supported and overseen by a dedicated monitoring group. Evaluations of the pilot in 2019[2] found that the quality of learning had improved in participating schools, leading to a positive impact on student retention (OECD, 2018a[7]; Cosme, 2017[20]). Specific pedagogies being strengthened included formative assessment, differentiation, and active learning. For example, the OECD noted during visits to participating schools that they were finding innovative ways to combine subjects or promote more interdisciplinary learning. Some schools took their students to nearby nature parks to study the environment, so that teachers were able to combine science and maths lessons with communication skills practice. Other schools provided the opportunity for students to find mentors in other fields, who coached students and were able to provide valuable life skills that would not usually be learned within a traditional subject area. Students reported that they found these opportunities highly engaging and invaluable, as the OECD noted, and that such experiences caused them to think differently about learning and learning styles, including an understanding that their peers might need to learn in different ways from them (OECD, 2018a[7]).

Underpinning equity in the new approach

The *Inclusive Education Act*, Decree-Law No. 54/2018, was published in July 2018. Whilst special education teachers and other specialised staff are critical to achieving inclusive education, it also requires the mobilisation of interdisciplinary teams and of the wider school community (Alves, Campos Pinto and Janela Pinto, 2020[21]). The responsibility of the school in achieving inclusion is emphasised, particularly the need for each school to recognise the diversity of their students and to put in place practices to promote diversity and ensure the diverse needs of students are met. Methods include adjusting curricular design, learning methodologies and teaching processes, to make curricula content accessible to the individual circumstances of each student. Where difficulties in accessing the curriculum are identified, the school needs to establish and conduct a process to assess the barriers the student is facing, taking an approach to overcome those barriers and support the student to have equal access to the curriculum (DGE, 2018a[8]).

The Universal Design for Learning and multi-level approach to teaching and learning for students with educational needs, with the aim of ensuring equal access to the curriculum, was adopted, Decree-Law No. 54/2018. It established a set of three different measures, which schools should utilise to adapt to the needs and potential of each student and promote equal opportunities within the curriculum, attendance, and progression. These measures are universal, selective, and additional. Universal measures must be mobilised for all students, including those in need of selective and additional measures, with the aim of promoting personal, interpersonal, and social intervention development. These include differentiated instruction, curricular accommodations, curriculum enrichment, the promotion of pro-social behaviour and intervention, with academic and behavioural focus, in small groups (Ibid).

Selective measures, on the other hand, aim to facilitate learning supports where required and when universal measures prove not to be sufficient. These measures are differentiated curriculum pathways, non-significant curricular adaptations, psycho-pedagogical support, anticipation and reinforcement of learning and tutorial support. Such measures were to be monitored and evaluated by those responsible for their implementation and must be implemented with the material and human resources available in the school (ibid).

The third and final tier of measures are additional measures, which aim to respond to intense and persistent difficulties, for example in communication, interaction, cognitive or learning. Additional measures must only be provided when universal and selective measures have been proven to be insufficient. These measures include the completion of the school year by subject, significant curricular adaptations, individual transition plan, the development of structures, teaching methodologies and strategies, and the development of personal and social autonomy competencies (ibid).

In addition, schools are required to include "Lines of Action" for Inclusion in their guidance documents, which ensures every student has equal opportunities and have their needs met through valuing diversity, non-discrimination, and progression. The lines of action are based on a whole school approach within a multi-level intervention, in which there is a school commitment to ensure equal access to the curriculum for all the students. (ibid).

The legislation also enacted further measures to support inclusion, such as the replacement of former specialised units with learning support centres, which work with teachers and students to support inclusion through measures such as assisting the creation of learning resources and assessment tools and developing interdisciplinary intervention methodologies that facilitate autonomy and adaptation to the school context. Further emphasising the focus on multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary working, the law stipulates that each school must have a multidisciplinary team to support inclusive education, which should include one of the teachers who assist the school director, a special education teacher, three members of the pedagogical council and a psychologist (ibid). In September 2019, the law was amended to provide greater powers to parents and caregivers. They should be recognised as variable and important members of multidisciplinary teams. The amendments also stipulated the requirement for schools to provide indicators to assess the efficacy of measures (Alves, Campos Pinto and Janela Pinto, 2020[21]).

A new support and monitoring mechanism

Whilst schools were granted autonomy and flexibility to manage the curriculum, the Ministry understood it would need to provide support. This was to help guide schools with their newly acquired curriculum management abilities and to monitor practice to guarantee that the quality of education remained high. A new structure was established to support and monitor schools in their efforts. This consisted of three tiers of support: a national coordination team, technical support teams and regional teams.

The national coordination team comprises the President of the National Agency for Qualification and Professional Education, DG for the General Directorate for Schools, the General Directorate for Education (DGE), the General Directorate for Scholar Administration, and the General Inspectorate for Education and Science. It aims to ensure alignment between the management of national-level monitoring and evaluation of policy measures, directorates, and agencies.

The national coordination team is supported by a technical team and five regional teams. The technical team supports the alignment between regional teams, and the implementation of the measures defined by the national team. The technical team is also responsible for collecting and analysing school data, for managing the project website and the Moodle platform – which provides webinar, documentation, and forums to support educators in curriculum management through sharing information, best practices and facilitating communication.

Finally, five regional teams were created to support and monitor implementation of curriculum autonomy and flexibility in Portugal's five geographical areas, within which the number of schools ranges from 38 to more than 200. These teams provide support to schools in several ways, such as promoting peer learning between teachers, responding to queries or concerns, visiting schools and encouraging schools and teachers to participate in regional meetings. In turn, the regional teams meet regularly to share experiences and learning (OECD, 2018a[7]).

Box 11.4. Actions accomplished

- Specification of the new Essential Learning Curriculum Orientation requirements and supporting formative assessment practice;
- building inclusion into the curriculum experience;
- enacting required legislation to underpin the initiative and its implementation;
- enhancing school-level curriculum autonomy and implementing a focused Pedagogical Innovation Pilot Project;
- establishing a comprehensive support and monitoring mechanism, which aligns policies, Directorates and agencies at the national level.

What supported success?

Policy coherence

Successful implementation of curriculum reform – that meets the original agreed goals - depends heavily on the extent to which the vision and intention are clearly articulated, according to research and experience. The goals also need to be communicated and supported by coherence across all relevant policies. “No single initiative, pilot or programme can achieve full reform of the Portuguese education system” (OECD, 2018a[7]). One key strength of the approach taken by Portugal to educational reforms is the prioritisation of policy coherence across a suite of four programmes – the *Students’ Profile*; a flexible Core Curriculum, the law on Inclusive Education, and a strategy for citizenship education. Portugal’s approach to curriculum reform reflects the value of attention to alignment of actions. Having the advantage of being supported by other complementary initiatives has meant that the intentions of the *Students’ Profile* are being achieved. The reviews of the Pedagogical Innovation Pilot Project, for example, found a shift in pedagogical practices, noting that teachers are facilitating engaging ways of learning, such as project-based learning, interdisciplinary and student-centred approaches, and self-directed learning, encouraging enhanced student engagement and improved behaviour. Increased collaboration among teachers was also found, perhaps reflecting the more collaborative leadership and collegial working in schools that is required by local-level curriculum making (OECD, 2018a[7]; Cosme, 2017[20]).

The *Students’ Profile* provides coherence across different initiatives and reforms and supports key outcomes for success in related areas including the *National Strategy for Citizenship*; the development of the Essential Learnings; *School Autonomy and Curriculum Flexibility*; Inclusive Education; and reformed assessment practice.

Consensus on approach

A further clear strength has been consensus-building because of the *Students’ Profile*. At every stage of the design and implementation of reform plans, there was extensive consultation and communication with stakeholders. Expert consultation, meetings with teachers, administrators and parents have all provided crucial information and created stakeholder buy-in. Critically, this process has also involved students, including from an early age.

For example, prior to launching the Pilot School Year for Curriculum Autonomy and Flexibility (PACF) (2017-18), which was the basis for the issuing of Decree Law No. 55/2018, the project team and senior members of the Ministry facilitated an extensive 18-month programme of engagement and consultation.

This included meetings with headteachers, teachers' societies, unions, the National Council for Education, NGOs, parent representatives and students (OECD, 2018a[7])

When drafting DL No. 55/2018, extensive consultation was carried out with public and private education institutions, higher education institutions, teacher professional associations, national professional bodies, the Episcopal Commission, the Olympic Committee, the National Confederation of Parents' Associations, parents' and guardians' associations, union federations and individuals in general. Institutions such as the National Education Council, the Council of Schools, the National Association of Vocational Schools, the Association of Private Education Institutions, the National Association of Portuguese Municipalities, and the self-governing bodies of the Portuguese Autonomous Regions were also involved in the process (DGE, 2018b[9]).

A similar approach of consultation was taken with the development of the *National Strategy for Citizenship Education.* This strategy was designed through close collaboration between stakeholders and inter-agency co-operation. For example, the Citizenship Education Working Group (GTEC), which guided the development of the strategy was formed by members from different government departments – including Citizenship and Equality, Citizenship and Gender Equality, Education and Health - in addition to universities, the National Coordination of the Network of School Libraries, and the National Association of Portuguese Municipalities. Extensive consultation was also carried out with stakeholders. The GTEC held three focus groups with teachers, students, and representatives of NGO platforms. Each of these groups were asked to submit proposals to inform the strategy, including areas of citizen education and ways to address them through the curriculum of compulsory schooling; how to achieve these in the school context and teaching participation and training (DGE, 2017a[18]).

Of note is the work done within Government to build commitment and sustain the changes. This has entailed alignment across education reforms and ongoing policy measures/actions through the years - regardless of electoral cycles. Curriculum change and adjustment takes time, so a long-term vision and commitment are necessary in addition to collaborative work across all relevant education departments and stakeholders.

Commitment to inclusion in policy

At an early stage, the Ministry of Education made a commitment to inclusion in education through policy. In July 2018, the Decree-Law no 54/2018, otherwise known as the *Inclusion Act*, was published. The Decree established a pedagogical model centred on the belief that all students have learning potential, provided that they receive adequate support (Alves, Pinto, Pinto, 2020). Its central aim is to foster inclusive schools that enable and support all students, regardless of personal or socioeconomic background, to be able to achieve an equal level of education and training and enable them to integrate into society fully socially. It outlines in law the rights of every student to receive an inclusive education that meets their needs, within the framework of a common and plural educational endeavour which provides all students with a sense of participation and belonging (DGE, 2018a[8]).

The passing of Decree-Law no 54/2018 enshrined in law the commitment of the government to inclusion in policy and further laid the legal foundations for the commitment of inclusion to schools. This legislation marked a distinct move away from the previous rationale that it was necessary to categorise and potentially exclude certain students, such as those with special needs (OECD, 2018a[7]). Thus, the *Students' Profile* should be reached by all students, albeit with differentiated learning paths for students where required. This policy approach aligned directly with the Government's strategic view on implementing curriculum change and expected outcomes of education.

A strategic communication strategy

A strategic approach was taken to communicating the educational reforms, which ultimately contributed to their success. Parent, teacher, and student voices played a large role in the curricular reforms. Hundreds of seminars were held across schools nationwide, targeting parent representatives and sharing information about the proposed reforms in order to encourage debate and discussion (OECD, 2020a[17]). The Ministry of Education and the Secretary of State for Inclusion made visits to schools nationwide for public meetings. Seminars, training events and public discussions were centred in the schools so that the voices of school leaders, teachers and the community were heard and consulted. This communication approach helped to motivate teachers and school leaders, who saw the reforms as an opportunity to make needed curricular and pedagogical changes. This communication ran in parallel to the formal consultation process, which invited submissions from all interested stakeholders (ibid).

Communication and engagement with students were also a key priority. It was stated in the Decree Law 55/2018 that schools should create regular opportunities to consult student voices concerning the curriculum. Student assemblies were formed in response, which were invited to elect representatives to participate in the consultation process. Numerous efforts were made to engage students at different stages of the reforms. For example, a *Students' Profile Day* was held in January 2018 and livestreamed to every school. A media partner was secured for the event, who ensured that it was broadcasted at a national level to the wider public. The event enlisted a broad and popular based panel, which consisted of a prominent Portuguese TV presenter, the national football team's coach, a well-known judge, a scientist, a journalist, and a young pop star, which gave the event a freshness and relevance which could resonate and attract young people. Event organisers interviewed students watching the programme to share their voices and perspectives, most of which expressed genuine engagement and enthusiasm. Pilot schools participating in the PACF programme reported during several OECD visits that there was high levels of engagement and enthusiasm of students concerning the initiative and that students of all ages were involved in contributing to the development of the student profile in their own contexts. Students referred with pride to the profile and demonstrated a true sense of shared ownership (ibid).

This extensive communication created a broad platform of support and stakeholder buy-in for the reforms and awarded them strong legitimacy. It also ensured that educator, parent, student, and community voices were centralised in the design and implementation of reforms and enabled the gathering of public input and feedback. In addition, it helped to develop public understanding of the reforms and invested in the continuance of the reform plan by future governments (ibid).

School and teacher autonomy

The granting of school and teacher autonomy from educational reforms played a key role in their success. The *Project for Autonomy and Curriculum Flexibility,* a pilot project in the school year 2017/2018, encouraged schools to enrich existing curricula with knowledge, skills and attitudes that contributed to the achievement of competencies in the *Students' Profile*. The project and the legislation which followed provided legal space for schools to explore alternative possibilities for curriculum design. For example, through innovative projects, pedagogy, and assessment, which could be implemented in a spontaneous and school-based approach. The pilot legitimised innovative pedagogies that some teachers had already been practising for some time, many of which could previously only be practised through special authorisation (ibid).

As more interdisciplinary work was promoted, teachers collaborated more spontaneously and out of necessity, for example through cross-classroom and cross-grade activities. This facilitated educators to share ideas and expertise and observe and learn from their peers. For example, in one school, art, history and physical education teachers worked together to develop a "human chess game", which introduced students to different concepts, including medieval history, movement and critical thinking, to demonstrate how conflicts can be resolved peacefully. The teachers reported to the OECD that such practices provided

the opportunity to reflect and thoughtfully design curricula and receive helpful feedback and inspiration from their peers simultaneously.

The implementation of diverse curricular content also enabled teachers to develop student-centred learning which was able to meet the diverse needs of students. For example, teachers in schools visited by the OECD reported that they saw the reforms as an opportunity to encourage different styles of teacher learning, such as designing projects wherein students were able to design products rather than just recall facts or providing opportunities for students to raise questions and find answers collaboratively with their peers, rather than just responding to questions raised by teachers on exams. They reported that this was having a positive impact on the engagement and enthusiasm of students, including students with special needs, which was corroborated by student conversations with the OECD (ibid).

Providing the ability for schools to manage up to 25% of the curriculum, which was later enshrined in law more widely through the enactment of Decree Law 55/2018, created a sense of shared responsibility and curriculum co-authoring. It encouraged an interdisciplinary integrative approach to curriculum management and combining cross-curricular competencies, which were planned, implemented, and evaluated by teachers. Simultaneously, it allowed for contextual flexibility in schoolwork and school groupings, whilst supporting the development of an integrative curriculum, which aggregates all school activities (DGE, 2018b[9]). This had numerous benefits, including supporting inclusivity in school, wherein diversity, flexibility, innovation and personalisation could ensure that the needs of all diverse students are met. It ensured a better alignment of primary, lower secondary and upper secondary, through integrated and gradual curriculum management. In addition, it supported the emphasis on valuing upper secondary education through providing a variety of academic options, which were stereotype free and allied labour market integration and the pursuit of further studies for all students.

Furthermore, a set of different National Programmes have been developed to help promoting cross-curriculum learning and each school can choose to integrate them in their school project:

The School Libraries Network Programme (*Rede de Bibliotecas Escolares – RBE*) was launched with the objective of installing and supporting the dynamization of libraries in public schools of all levels of education making available to users the necessary resources for reading, accessing, using and producing information in different media.

After more than two decades, libraries have become flexible structures, and continue to be innovative and inclusive services that combine physical spaces with virtual learning environments, physical document collections with digital resources, and are centres of support for the education of students and the pedagogical activity of teachers.

The National Reading Plan (PNL) is the Portuguese public strategy to promote reading habits and to increase literacy levels. PNL works closely with schools and families, by providing guidelines about reading instruction and reading promotion, by suggesting books, creating reading resources for use in classrooms, providing teacher training and tutorials. In close articulation with RBE, the national network of school libraries, PNL funds schools to update every year their book collections.

The mission of the National Cinema Plan (PNC) is to create conditions in public and private schools to develop a taste for cinema, valuing it as an art form, and to carry out a program of cinema literacy and promotion of national cinematographic works in schools.

Ensuring universal access to Portuguese Cinema, and with the aim of valuing the presence of the arts and culture in the educational system, in 2021 the project launched two integrated instruments: a streaming platform of films and a collection of pedagogical resources for schools, both available in the project's website: https://pnc.gov.pt/.

The National Plan for the Arts is a mission-structure created by the Portuguese Government for a period of 10 years with the mission of fostering social transformation in the life of citizens by mobilising the educational power of arts and heritage.

The plan advocates a transdisciplinary vision, stating that arts and heritage are essential in the curriculum, and not only for the development of creative skills and aesthetic sensibility. It pursues the goal of removing the walls that scatter knowledge into disciplinary areas, of bringing cultural and educational agents closer together, and of promoting cultural democracy as a modus operandi that reinforces participation, doing with and for people.

It is anchored on three axes: cultural policy, training and education and access.

In the fourth year of its implementation, the PNA is already working in close collaboration in the development of the measures set out in its strategic plan with more than 50% of the country's school clusters and municipalities.

The PNA works together with the National Reading Plan, the School Libraries Network, the National Cinema Plan, the Network of Portuguese Theatres, and the Portuguese Network of Contemporary Art to articulate and enhance their action.

As far as science is concerned, the "network of live science clubs at school", called "*Rede de Clubes de Ciência Viva da Escola*", covers public and private schools since 2018. The live science clubs function in schools as open spaces for contact with science and technology, for education and for generalised access by students to scientific practices, promoting the experimental teaching of science. At this stage Portugal has Clubs throughout the national territory, that are the result of solid partnerships with Universities, Research Centres, Museums and Science Centres, Companies, Associations and NGOs that encourage interdisciplinarity and the openness of schools to the community.

Teacher training

The Government invested EUR 21 million for in-service training to support teachers to implement the educational reforms and to exercise their abilities in curriculum management. The training addressed the following three principles:

- Relevance: To ensure relevance, training areas were selected in accordance with the diagnosis of the National Programme for Promoting School Success to ensure an effective alignment of different initiatives.
- Quality: To ensure high-quality training, a funding mechanism gave incentives for partnerships with universities and research institutes.
- Impact: To ensure impact, Portugal funded workshops with smaller groups, as well as workshops that encourage experimentation based on the results of training in classrooms (OECD, 2020a[17]).

Training was also provided to school leaders, such as through the National Programme for Promoting School Success, which aimed to train school leaders in strategic planning. This programme focused on issues within the classroom, such as co-operation among teachers and early interventions at the first sign of difficulty. For example, schools were invited to design strategies according to the local context addressing what they identified as the sources of poor school retention (Ibid).

Providing teachers and school leaders with access to high-quality training is crucial, given they are the primary implementers of educational reforms. Training is also necessary for teachers to exercise the autonomy granted to them in curriculum management and delivery and to support the achievement of high-quality outcomes for students.

Box 11.5. Success factors for curriculum reform

- Policy coherence and deliberate attention to alignment of actions;
- extensive consultation and communication to build consensus and commitment;
- the creation of a sense of shared responsibility and co-ownership of curriculum in schools;
- investment in training for teachers and school leaders.

Concluding reflections

The strategic and comprehensive approach of Portugal to education reform has ensured a successful implementation of the *Students' Profile*, resulting in the provision of a more inclusive education system where all students have the opportunity to achieve, regardless of background, receive high-quality learning tailored to their needs, and are equipped with the required competencies and skills to thrive in the modern world.

There are several aspects of the design and delivery of the initiative which should be reflected upon positively. From the outset, the diagnosis and analysis of the need for such an initiative was commonly recognised and the rationale for change was based on sound evidence. The coherence and cohesion in the production of the structural documents was also influential, particularly the involvement throughout the process of different stakeholders. A wide range of stakeholders were consulted throughout the process, including students and teachers, and their voices were always reflected upon when developing the initiative. This open consultation provided stakeholders with a strong sense of ownership and investment in the success of the initiative, and thus ensured widespread agreement on reform plans. In addition, by seeking expert advice, shareholder input, and open communication and debate, Portugal has invested in the continuance of the initiative by future governments, which is key to long-term success (OECD, 2018a[7]).

Developing strong and clear support and monitoring systems also ensured that schools were supported to undertake their responsibilities and to effectively implement the initiative, whilst simultaneously making space to acknowledge any challenges and areas for improvement. Providing structures of support further strengthened this, particularly the development of networks to share expertise, knowledge, and advice between relevant groups.

Since 2018, curriculum autonomy and flexibility has been successfully implemented in all school clusters and a wide range of networks and practice sharing events have indicated positive feedback from students, parents, and teachers. For example, a 6th grade student commented about the creation of new subjects and co-teaching:

> "I think I have improved my success because I am attending these new subjects. We have less students in the classroom and are divided into groups. We have three teachers, and they manage to give us more support. In these new subjects, the teachers evaluate what we do continuously but in other classes not so much" (DGE Me YouTube Channel, 2022a[22]).

Her guardian also acknowledged how the development of new tailored subjects has supported her child, commenting that:

> "The workshops - *Oficina Vida Ativa* (Natural Sciences, Technological Education, Physical Education and Citizenship and Development) - have helped her very much because she has many difficulties. Since this new subject is taught by three teachers, she feels more supported than in other subjects of the curriculum".

There were also positive comments on the new pedagogical style enabled by the initiative; for example, one fifth grade student commented on the new collaborative style of learning by the students:

> "I like to work in a group because that way we have more ideas and we're not so indecisive. We can vote to see which one you think is best, and if someone doesn't think it's good, we can exchange ideas until everyone comes to an agreement." (DGE ME YouTube Channel, 2022b[23]).

School staff also reflected positively on the impact of new teaching and learning perspectives on preparing students for the modern world; for example, a school director commented that:

> "I don't know if we are teaching more or if we are teaching better, but we are certainly creating different citizens, who learn more and that is truly creating the men and women of tomorrow, with other values and with a different knowledge that can be developed in the labour market."(ibid)

In a TED talk by a student, who represented the students voice in the National Meeting of Curriculum and Flexibility in May 2022, she outlined how teaching prior to the reforms was very focused on teachers being in a classroom giving lectures on subjects (DGE ME YouTube Channel, 2022c[24]). This, in turn, created an environment wherein students merely memorised information for exams and did not have a good sense or understanding of their own learning. In contrast, she reflected on changes in practice at her school and highlighted positive impacts as a result of diversifying competencies outside of the Essential Learning, including:

- A broadening of focus outside of Essential Learning, to focus additionally on other types of competencies – for example, interpersonal relationships, critical thinking, creative thinking and problem solving – to better prepare students for their future.
- Creating a more inclusive classroom; for example, through learning activities in groups wherein students with more difficulties and students with less difficulties work alongside each other, thus creating an environment wherein those students with more difficulties feel more supported by their peers in the groups.

- Developing fairer assessment structures and formats which allow a student to demonstrate the competencies they have rather than, for example, relying on students demonstrating that they are "good at tests".
- Creating more autonomy for students, who are encouraged to take the lead in initiatives and develop a motivation to lead their own learning.
- Improved collaborative work between students and, thus, better planning and organisation from students.
- Connecting more closely what is learnt in the classroom and an understanding from students on where it applies in their daily lives, thus motivating them more, facilitating their greater understanding and interest in the subject at hand.
- A greater focus on interdisciplinary learning. Teachers from multiple subjects dealing with similar content, but from different perspectives, work together to link their teaching and collaborate to deliver a shared class and teach the same content from various points of view. This facilitates a better understanding of the subjects from students and an acknowledgment that knowing one subject can help to understand another.
- An overall better preparation for students for their future and for all aspects of their lives.

Thus, evidence suggests several key strengths that contributed to a successful implementation of the initiative. However, any process of education reform on this scale will always face challenges. For example, throughout the process there was natural resistance from teachers and families to change, as often occurs during initiatives of great educational reform. Furthermore, global engagement of professional and public opinion presented a challenge, as did the pressure of external evaluation. Steps were taken early on to address these challenges. For example, the development of school networks by Regional Teams from the Ministry of Education to promote more practice sharing created greater support for teachers resistant to change, alongside training programmes for headmasters and teachers. The facilitation of national and regional meetings with different experts were co-ordinated, in addition to a national involvement campaign with members of civil society, to improve engagement with professional and public opinion. The personal involvement of the Secretary of State for Education also elevated the initiative and helped to positively influence stakeholder and public opinion. In turn, students have also become more empowered with the development of different students' networks across the country to provide more student agency.

The process of implementation has been dynamic, and the Ministry has shown a willingness and commitment to feedback and a desire to improve, as acknowledged by the OECD in their first report on the initiative (OECD, 2018a[7]). Reflecting on the overall success of the initiative, the Ministry would not necessarily change any aspects of process development and implementation. However, there is an acknowledgment that further work must be done in this area, particularly in continuing to support progress of the reform and monitoring the impact.

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Notes

[1] Decreto Lei n.º 55/2018 defines the new curriculum framework , the guiding principles of curriculum design, the implementation and assessment of learning, in order to ensure that all students acquire knowledge and develop skills and attitudes that contribute to achieving the skills set out in the Students' Profile at the end of Compulsory Schooling. For this purpose, in a process of close articulation with associations of professors and scientific societies, in partnership with experts and other entities, The Essential Learning (AE). AE are curricular orientation documents that describe the bases for the planning, realisation, and assessment of each school subject for each year of schooling to Basic Education, Scientific- Humanistic Courses, Vocational Courses and Artistic Specialised Courses.

[2] Two reviews were conducted, one by the OECD (2018) Curriculum Flexibility and Autonomy; the second by Cosme, A.at the *Universidade do Porto,* Projeto De Autonomia E Flexibilidade Curricular (Pafc): Estudo Avaliativo Da Experiência Pedagógica Desenvolvida Em 2017/2018 Ao Abrigo Do Despacho Nº 5908 / 2017 Available at estudo_pafc.pdf (mec.pt).

12 Sweden: Knowing students' learning needs

The Swedish education system acknowledges that every student is unique and has diverse learning needs. This chapter describes an assessment programme that was designed to ensure that Syrian refugee children, and others new to the Swedish school system, were placed in appropriate class groups. To achieve this, Sweden developed a toolkit for schools to map students' learning needs. This process identifies their language and experiences, specific subject knowledge and knowledge in core areas such as numeracy. A similar system could be beneficial to Ukraine to help identify the strengths and needs of children who have had many different experiences during the war.

Introduction

Sweden is a small country with a strong welfare system and has historically had a relatively liberal immigration policy. This case study looks at one initiative reflecting that policy approach. It describes an assessment programme implemented in Sweden to ensure that children who are new to the Swedish school system are placed in appropriate class groups in schools. In this case, the children are generally migrants, and the aim is to ensure that their language, learning and psycho-social needs are acknowledged and addressed. As a result, an assessment tool for school leaders and teachers was developed

Planning for the learning needs of a diverse student body is challenging at the best of times. It requires access to information about individual students, resourcing to address those needs, and training and support for their teachers. Where the students have also experienced trauma and interruption to their education, it is imperative that appropriate systems are developed to identify and respond to their unique needs, while also ensuring that they are fully included in the life of their school.

Sweden has a decentralised education system, steered by goals and learning outcomes defined at a central level. The government has overall responsibility for education and sets the framework at all levels. Municipalities (*kommuner*) in Sweden are responsible for organising education within:

- preschool (*förskola*, ages 1-5);
- preschool class (*förskoleklass*, age 6);
- compulsory school (grundskola, ages 7-16);
- upper secondary school (gymnasieskola, ages 16-19).

Migrant children can and do enter the Swedish education system at each of these levels. Municipal adult education, Swedish tuition for immigrants and leisure-time centres also come within the remit of the municipalities.

Recognising that new students, or students returning to an interrupted educational experience, are not a homogenous group is an important first step. It is crucial to develop processes and procedures which help identify their priority learning needs. These must acknowledge that it is important to not assume what students should, or can, do based on perceptions of their identity. This is because assumptions about students, while not immediately leading to negative consequences, can potentially help perpetuate larger forms of discrimination. Making such assumptions comes at too high a cost for children who have already been disadvantaged.

This case study outlines the creation and implementation of a Swedish assessment programme in 2016 to ensure that Syrian immigrant children, who arrived in large numbers following the start of the Syrian civil war, could be placed and integrated into Swedish schools. It also highlights the challenges and areas that could be improved.

What motivated change?

In March 2011, a series of pro-democracy protests in Syria against the rule of President Bashar al-Assad led to a government crackdown that quickly evolved into full-scale civil war.

The war brought about one of the worst humanitarian crises in recent times, with hundreds of thousands killed and cities left in ruins. By March 2016, more than 4.5 million people had fled Syria, mostly women and children (BBC Syria: The Story of the Conflict, 2016[1]). An estimated 10% of these refugees fled to Europe. Sweden was among the countries which witnessed a sudden and significant increase in the number of Syrian asylum seekers. Until 2012, only a few hundred Syrians applied for asylum each year. But the numbers quickly rose and a record 163 000 asylum seekers arrived in Sweden in 2015 alone. The following year, in 2016, more than 44 000 Syrian asylum applications (out of almost 48 600 applicants)

were accepted, giving them the legal right to remain in Sweden. Sweden granted more refugees asylum than any other European country in proportion to its population, and also took in the greatest number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (Lundahl, 2018[2]). And by 2016, immigrant children represented a quarter of students in Swedish compulsory schools (ibid).

This created challenges for the Swedish education system. The majority of Syrian arrivals spoke little or no Swedish and many were without educational records. The Swedish educational authorities needed to take action to avoid the system becoming overwhelmed. Among the top concerns was the urgent need to quickly integrate foreign born children and to give them comprehensive and holistic support to ensure they did not fall drastically behind in their education. Many of the children were suffering from substantial trauma and the conflict had also severely restricted access to schooling. The response of the Swedish educational system would be instrumental in determining the future of these immigrant students.

Fortunately, Sweden was not entirely new to the concept of integrating immigrant children. For many years, immigrant and refugee children had been integrated into its education system through a measure known as preparatory classes. In many areas, new refugee and immigrant children were placed in separate class groups, often referred to as “immersion classes”. These classes were part of mainstream schools but separate to regular class groups. They covered broader content and operated at a lower academic level than regular classes, covering areas such as literacy, numeracy, language and social skills. In general, children stayed in these classes for a short period of time before transferring to regular classes that matched their age group.

However, the sheer number of arrivals from Syria presented significant challenges to this approach. Given the large numbers, the preparatory class system was considered too difficult to operate. Perhaps, most significantly, the immersion classes were not viewed as a viable long-term solution. This was because the academic and social needs of children would not be fully met if they remained separated from regular student classes for an extended period. As a result, there was an urgent need to ensure that immigrant children were fully integrated into the school system as soon as possible.

Other factors also indicated that a different approach was needed. It was evident that long-term integration was working well; 57% of second-generation immigrant students attained proficiency level 2 compared to 39% of first-generation immigrants in the 2015 PISA tests. However, PISA 2015 also highlighted significant gaps in educational performance. For example, 76% of native-born students with native-born parents attained at least proficiency level 2 in the three PISA domains (reading, maths, science) compared to 49% of immigrant students. First-generation immigrant students in particular were disadvantaged, and 39% more likely than native students to under-perform academically (Cerna et al., 2019[3]).

In 2016, approximately 17% of the country’s inhabitants were estimated as being born outside of Sweden. As mass immigration was reaching its peak, the Swedish government moved to tackle existing gaps and ensure that immigrant students were supported to integrate and excel within the Swedish education system.

In January 2016, a new set of regulations (Regeringens.se, 2014[4]) was adopted which classified immigrant children as “newly arrived” for up to four years. It ensured they were entitled to the same additional support that existing students received. There were also important changes to immersion classes. The Swedish government recommended they were located close to regular classes to improve co-operation and transition for immigrant students, as well as avoid segregation between groups. In practice, not all schools held preparatory classes, particularly in the Swedish countryside, as there were fewer new students in these locations. In such cases, there was often one immersion class for several schools.

The regulations decreed that immigrant students could no longer be placed in preparatory classes full-time, with a maximum placement of two years. They also had to be granted some teaching hours in regular classes. There was no regulation of how and in which subjects; it became the responsibility of

headteachers to identify the needs of immigrant students, allocate resources accordingly and ensure that newly arrived students had adequate support (Crul, 2019[5]). Importantly, the regulation required principals to make a decision regarding the grade placement of newly arrived students within two months, and on whether to enrol them in preparatory or regular classes (Bunar, 2017[6]). Students could be transferred to regular classes at any point and their inclusion in preparatory classes was not mandatory but would be based on the initial assessment of the principal.

To support principals, the Swedish Education Agency was made responsible for developing a new assessment tool for newly arrived immigrant student knowledge. The Ministry of Education gave broad guidance but, as is common in urgent situations, the policy document was rather broad and left the interpretation and design of the initiative entirely to the Agency.

In 2017, the Government (Utbildningsdepartementet, 2017[7]) implemented an investment programme, to run until 2025, which aimed to build the capacity of schools to provide high-quality education to newly arrived students. The programme is managed by the National Agency for Education.

Box 12.1. Push Factors

1. Sudden and sustained influx of migrant children into the education system;
2. evident gaps in attainment between first-generation immigrant students and their peers;
3. new Government regulation and investment for schools;
4. an imperative to support school principals and teachers' decision-making.

What opportunities existed?

The Swedish Education Agency is one of three national agencies under the Ministry of Education and Research. It is the central administrative authority for the public school system, publicly organised pre-schooling, school-age childcare and for adult education. In 2016, it published general advice on education for newcomer students (Skolverkets, 2016[8]). Its aim was to provide support to school authorities, principals, teachers and students. One of those supports is the provision of mapping material for assessing newly arrived students' knowledge and language levels.

The Agency was able to harness established connections and resources for the process of designing the new assessment tool. The Agency already worked closely with a number of universities within the design process for the national test. For example, they had a partnership with a university responsible for developing the mathematics national tests, alongside partnerships with universities which designed the English and science national tests. The Agency was able to reach out to these university partners and enlist their support in designing the specific elements of the new assessment tool. The partner university who usually developed the mathematics national tests, was enlisted to design constructs that could be used to assess levels of numeracy for incoming immigrant students as part of the new assessment tool. The universities, in turn, were able to draw on their own experience in constructing the national tests, to inform the design of their elements for the assessment tool, and to do so promptly, allowing the tool to be designed in as little as six months. Similar processes for the established national tests usually take a minimum of two years.

The Agency also took advantage of existing materials that could be used within the design of the new guidance for principals and teachers on implementing the assessment tool. The development of the guidance material could therefore be supplemented with selections from the existing assessment support used by the Agency. Existing course and subject plans could also be utilised within the design of the assessment material, which aided its rapid development. Had it been necessary to rely on external, new,

sources, it is likely that each stage of the process would have been much more time-consuming and more expensive.

The Agency used existing expertise within the organisation, including communication professionals and school developers, to communicate the initiative, rather than use an outside source. A successful communication campaign would prove be critical to the success of the initiative.

Box 12.2. Opportunities

1. Existing design and innovation experience;
2. established connections and resources;
3. existing materials including national and internal guidance.

What actions were taken?

With the exception of the national test, this legislation was the first time that schools in Sweden were required by law to carry out an action. Sweden's education system is in a unique position, in that schools and teachers are given significant autonomy in deciding their own teaching practices. There are no specific laws regarding pedagogy, nor are there mandatory set materials for schools. Therefore, the passing of this law was of great significance and it posed challenges to the Education Agency in relation to communication and capacity building. The first challenge was how to communicate to schools that this was a responsibility that schools were legally obliged to fulfil. The second challenge related to the support needs of schools. Principals needed support, specifically with assessing the learning needs of students within two months of their arrival. Actions were taken in two specific strands – process development and clear communication.

Process development

Work got underway to design the process and to create the assessment materials. The Agency used the concept of 'mapping', a process by which the learning strengths and needs of the individual student are identified. The mapping process is intended to support the school's work to plan and adapt teaching to the student's conditions and needs. The mapping material consists of:

- Stage 1 The student's language and experiences.
- Stage 2 The student's knowledge in some essential areas of knowledge – literacy and numeracy.
- Stage 3 The student's subject knowledge.

The first two stages are mandatory and are used for an initial assessment within two months of enrolment. The third stage, which is not mandatory, considers the student's subject-specific knowledge, such as in Geography or Biology, in order to support the teacher to plan the student's learning in that discipline.

The mapping material has an educational purpose and focuses on the student experiences and knowledge. It also aids the principal's decision over grade placement of the student, but cannot be the single determinator, and must be taken into consideration alongside factors such as a student's social maturity and previous school experience, alongside data from mother tongue teachers and student health. The Education Act stipulates that all students must be given the guidance and support that is required to meet their individual needs so that they can learn and develop as far as possible. As such, it was emphasised that the school must adapt teaching to a student's needs; for example, a newly arrived student should not be placed in a class with students a lot younger.

The assessments are based on grade levels where knowledge requirements already existed for curricula in primary schools and for courses in upper secondary schools. The tasks that students are asked to complete contain a selection of central content and competencies which were already included in course and subject plans. The alternative option was to assess general subject knowledge or specific abilities. However, this could result in the correlation to knowledge requirements for different year groups or courses becoming unclear and, thus, would not prove as useful of a basis for teachers to plan a student's further education.

Interviews are an essential part of the assessment process at each stage. The interviews are designed to operate in the manner of conversations between the teacher and the student, which could demonstrate what the student know or is able to do, based either on school experiences or on experiences outside of the school environment. The student can read, write, reason, argue or illustrate with the help of pictures. Following the interview, the teacher then moves onto the mapping stage of the process. Literacy and numeracy are mandatory parts to assess. After that, the teacher can determine which subject or courses should be mapped in more detail. This last part of the process is voluntary.

The results of this mapping exercise are then used to compile a knowledge profile for the student, which demonstrates a student's strengths and improvement areas, and which can be used to support teachers to plan the student's further development.

Assessment materials were developed for primary schools initially. This reflected findings from an earlier Agency research review during the consideration phase, which demonstrated that the critical immigration age is nine years old. This is because newly arrived students, aged nine or younger, were more likely to perform well in school and acquire knowledge, when compared to Swedish-born students. As such, it was considered that assessment should be carried out as early as possible, in order to provide the best circumstances to support a student's development. The mapping material for primary school could then also be used as a basis for mapping material in secondary education.

The mapping materials were developed quickly, utilising existing resources and opportunities available, rather than engaging new support. This ultimately allowed the initiative to progress at a much faster rate than usual. The Agency already had a lot of experience in designing assessments, as they are also responsible for designing the national test, which is mandatory for all schools and students in Sweden. Utilising their connections, the Agency reached out to their university partners responsible for designing Sweden's national tests and enlisted their help in developing the relevant elements of the assessment tool design. The universities were responsible for designing concrete elements of the tool - for example, identifying the text that students would be asked questions on - rather than the interview questions themselves. The constructs were then trialled with students in some of the preparatory classes before the mapping materials were finalised.

The design of the assessment materials also produced a number of challenges at an early stage. One of the main challenges was providing a variety of tasks based on different language levels while ensuring that these tasks were also age-appropriate. For example, a student at early stages of language learning must still be tested on age-appropriate texts to ensure they are best able to demonstrate their knowledge. A second challenge related to the fact that the ability of students to express knowledge may vary according to the context. For example, a student might be able to express multiplication within a known context, but not be able to do so effectively within the Swedish school context. Any assessment must consider that school experiences can look different within different countries and cultures. The design of the materials had, therefore, to include a section to support teachers to understand how schooling and subject teaching can look in different contexts and how knowledge can be demonstrated in different ways.

A digital version of the assessment materials was also developed, which not only reduced printing and distribution costs, but also enabled greater flexibility and access. Furthermore, it allowed material to be continuously expanded and revised, in order to reflect variation in factors over time and reflections throughout implementation.

Clear communication

Given that teachers were not accustomed to being required to follow specific directives in their classrooms, it was imperative that they understood the new requirements and the supports available to them. Once the design phase was complete, there was a need to be creative in the ways in which the information was disseminated. As the Agency had commissioned different universities to design different elements of the assessment tool quite quickly, the language and terminology used across the materials was inconsistent in the draft phase. The Agency drew on the expertise of communicators and school developers to create a document which was easy to understand but which also highlighted the mandatory responsibilities of principals and teachers.

Prior to the official start date for the requirements, there were a number of advertisements designed to inform schools and the general public about them. Schools were encouraged to discuss the new material during teacher inset days. The new requirements were also communicated via a variety of films, YouTube clips and images. These methods were employed to ensure that teachers would not need to read long pieces of text and so that the content was easy to understand and access.

Perhaps the most significant means of communication was the website, which was created for the purpose of providing an easy-to-access, comprehensive source of information for all teachers. The website provided context and explanation of the initiative, including why the assessment was to be carried out, how it should be carried out and how the assessment should inform the principal’s decision about which level to place a student at. It also gave advice on planning for the student’s teaching and how teaching time should be allocated between different subjects.

The website also provided links to further resources. In addition to detailed information on the three stages of the mapping material, a link was also provided to a specific information sheet for teachers and principals. The website also contained a film entitled ‘Starting and Ending Conversations’, which had evidenced examples of how teachers can approach conversations with students from different backgrounds and ages.

Other resources included links to further materials and assessment support which principals could use to carry out steps in the assessment process. Information was provided to support and guide the principal and teachers on how to use the tool to carry out effective assessment in the three stages.

The website also provided further guidance for schools on the most suitable staff to conduct the mapping, which was decided by the principal of a school. For stages one and two in literacy, the importance of having competency in mother tongue, multilingualism or Swedish as a second language is stressed, whilst for the second step of numeracy, mathematical subject competence is important. For the third stage, subject competence according to the subject being mapped is required. In addition, there are also filmed examples provided which demonstrated best practice of each of the different stages of the tool.

Communication efforts were made to reach all relevant audiences. A specific document was designed and circulated for parents that explained the assessment’s purpose and how it worked. This was important so that parents understood the reasoning behind the tests and did not perceive them as barriers to their child attending school. In these information leaflets the word ‘test’ was consciously avoided in order to deter any such perception by parents, with a preference for using words like ‘assessment’ instead. Ensuring parents were properly informed about the process may also help in situations where parents were informed that their child was being placed in a lower grade than the parents may have anticipated. Building a two-month ‘settling in’ period before the assessment was legally required may also have reassured parents that they belong to the school community, that their child was being accepted into the school, and that the assessment was taking place so the school could help the student learn.

Similar documentation was also circulated to students, explaining the process of the assessment, why it was being carried out and what the students would be assessed on. A further tailored document was designed for younger students that explained in easier terms the assessment process, reassured students that a parent could attend their interviews, and that the teacher would inform them about school life. This

communication with students was of great importance, given that a lot of the children were arriving to Sweden in difficult circumstances, many having experienced trauma, and all undoubtedly nervous and apprehensive about attending a new school in a different country.

Support for principals and teachers

Once the first stages of implementation were underway, there were several different support options available to principals and teachers. Teachers were provided with the option of completing a voluntary web course which would aid their implementation of the tool. They were also encouraged to share resources and discuss feedback with their peers through a number of different routes, such as Facebook pages and learning platforms.

As part of the mapping process, schools were obliged to provide an interpreter for every interview, as the majority of participating students did not speak Swedish. Effective interpretation is important to ensure that an accurate mapping is achieved, however, having interpreters in the classroom was a new experience for many teachers. There was a need for guidance on how to use the interpreters' skills appropriately during the interview process. Quite early in the implementation of the assessment requirements, it was evident that additional support was needed in this area.

A guidance document was made available for school principals and interpreters, which outlined good interpreting etiquette including behaving impartially towards what is discussed. Those leading the conversation were also encouraged to follow a number of rules, such as informing the interpreter in advance of the purpose of the mapping and materials, ensuring that the interpreter and student understood each other at the beginning, and checking themselves that the students understood the focus of the questions.

There was also guidance for the interpreters themselves, with suggestions that they read through the mapping material in advance, make a glossary of key terms and do not engage in long monolingual dialogues with any of the participants. The importance of ensuring that the student feels comfortable was also emphasised, and the document recommended that the interpreter always initiates small talk to start. The text was also accompanied by a film entitled 'Interpreted Conversations', wherein an expert on interpretation and translation discusses what good interpreting practice is.

Whilst the assessment material for stage 3 is voluntary, the Agency encouraged teachers to utilise it and offered support for teachers to understand and use the model, through the provision of templates to document a student's language development and online support. The Agency additionally held twenty-three 'dialogue seminars' across different regions in Sweden to support principals and teachers to implement the programme, which included a focus on embedding support mechanisms for the language and knowledge development of newly arrived students. Additional online webinars were also executed to increase access for teachers who might not be able to attend such events physically (ibid).

A recent initiative by the Agency which aims to further improve language learning for newly arrived students in upper secondary schools is also a valuable support. It provides a faster language and subject learning model through "Intensive Swedish" (ibid). This is particularly targeted at students who may arrive with little to no Swedish language ability but are required to meet certain language levels to be eligible for upper secondary school.

Prior to the first implementation phase, extensive mapping of education and knowledge was carried out for newly arrived students. Challenges and opportunities in schools were identified and alternative models for language teaching were assessed. The first implementation phase was initiated at two schools in the 2017/18 academic year. Assessment of this phase demonstrated the need for close co-operation between principals, teachers and project staff. Through such collaboration, the model was revised and adjusted to suit different student groups. A further implementation phase during the academic year 2018/19 further tested feasibility and functionality of the initiative (ibid).

Box 12.3. Actions taken

1. Process development;
2. clear communication;
3. support for principals and teachers.

What supported success?

Inclusive stakeholder engagement

The Government held a number of hearings with relevant bodies on the introduction of the regulation. These informed the development of detail within the regulation. For example, the timeframe in which a student was to be assessed was a topic of debate, with some making the argument that a lot of time was needed for a thorough assessment of student needs, whilst others argued that achieving speedy inclusion in mainstream classes was of greater importance. After consideration, the decision was made that the principal teacher would be responsible for deciding the student's placement in a teaching group and grade within two months of enrolment. It was considered a suitable timeframe to enable enough time for the student to begin to settle into the school and for a thorough assessment, whilst moving quickly enough to ensure adequate support was given to the student.

The general recognition from the public that there was a real need for action in this area was significant in limiting criticism of the cost of implementing the regulation. The government was transparent about the cost of the development and implementation of the assessment tool and it provided a budgetary line for this purpose. That budget would cover the cost associated with the time taken for the required meetings of those involved in the design of the assessment tool, hearings with relevant parties, the design of the materials themselves and the actual implementation of the initiative by the Agency.

Consultations were also held by the Swedish Education Agency with representatives from teachers' unions, principals' associations and student unions during the design stage for the assessment material, in addition to bodies such as the National Centre for Swedish as a Second Language and Sweden's municipalities and county councils. The Agency wanted to involve these bodies early on in the development process so that they would have time to reflect on feedback and incorporate any changes to the design of the tool before the design process had finished. For example, a particular criticism from the teachers' unions was that the implementation of the tool by principals would be too time-consuming and create an additional burden on principals and teachers. In response, the Agency focused on fully assessing the demands of the tool and whether any unnecessary elements could be removed or altered, such as shortening the texts used. There was also a focus on demonstrating to the unions the useability of the assessment instruments and the support they provided to schools. As a result, it was decided that, while the assessment process would include three stages, only the first two stages would be mandatory. Schools and teachers were given the ability to exercise their autonomy regarding the third element. Another concern raised by the teacher's unions was that of parental involvement and how to ensure that information about the assessment purpose and process was accessible to all parents. In response, the Agency developed information letters in different languages which are given to both students and parents to ensure inclusion.

The involvement of students' organisations in the consultation process also proved to be valuable. During the assessment process, the views of the student regarding appropriate class placement are sought. However, the student organisations noted that there is a need for a different approach to interviews with younger students. For example, seven-year-old students cannot be interviewed in the same manner about schools as fifteen-year-old students, due to their different levels of understanding, knowledge and

experience. The discussion informed the development of differentiated communication leaflets for older and younger students. It also prompted the conclusion that the best approach was to place more value on the views of the teacher regarding the class placement of younger students, and to give additional weight to the opinions of the students themselves for older class groupings.

Through conversations and contact between the Agency and principals across the country, the need for flexibility within the design of assessment material was also made clear. There is great variation between local contexts in Sweden, such as between the organisation in municipalities, the local availability of native language teachers and teachers' experience of working with language and knowledge development across subjects. Any construction of assessment material must take variations such as these into consideration and be applicable across contrasting local contexts, as well as applicable across different levels of experience, regardless of whether a municipality or school was receiving newly arrived students for the first time or if they had years of experience in this. The need for flexibility was further emphasised through the Agency's previous experience with test construction, particularly that tasks must suit students from different backgrounds, and that students must be able to solve tasks within a context that they are familiar with.

Drawing on the research evidence

In addition to consultations, the Agency also participated in studies and drew on current research on the subject to ensure they were well-informed and aware of any important considerations in advance. For example, the research literature, along with the Agency's experiences with continuing education initiatives, highlighted the importance of the role of the principal if new initiatives are to be effective in schools. For the assessment tool to be efficiently implemented in schools, the principal must facilitate the opportunity for teachers to familiarise themselves with materials, and an emphasis must be placed on this when constructing and communicating material. The importance of collaboration between native language teachers and subject teachers for effective utilisation of mapping and assessment material was also highlighted. Facilitating this collaboration is required in addition to further training in language and knowledge development methods for subject teachers and for mother tongue teachers in the school's subjects.

Existing strengths

One very positive consideration which informed the development of the assessment process was that of the long tradition of school and classroom level decision-making within the Swedish education system. An emphasis on school and teacher autonomy had resulted in strong decision-making capacity at school level and, thus, the Agency had evidenced confidence in the ability of school principals to effectively carry out this task and ensure efficient assessment of newly arrived students. Teachers in Sweden perceive themselves to have significant professional autonomy, and as having a large amount of flexibility and responsibility for creating a good learning environment. They make more decisions collegially and draw on the support of their professional colleagues in meeting their responsibilities for students' learning (Paulsrud, 2018[9]).

However, introducing a new compulsory regulation for the first time since the introduction of the national tests could be perceived as diminishing the long-held autonomy at school level, so the introduction and communication of this initiative needed to be managed carefully. The teaching fraternity within a school is highly influential on the actions and decisions of individual Swedish teachers (ibid.). It was critical to the initiative's success that the rationale and procedures for implementing the new assessment materials was understood and accepted by teachers.

Box 12.4. Success factors

1. Inclusive stakeholder engagement;
2. drawing on the research evidence;
3. existing strengths.

Reflections

This initiative undoubtedly was instrumental to helping newly arrived students to integrate into an entirely new system in a rapid manner, support their grade placement, as well as enable teachers to plan further learning and development for students. Sweden has been noted in particular as being exemplary in facilitating such rapid assessment (Cerna et al., 2019[3]). However, the urgency at which the initiative was designed and implemented ultimately resulted in some areas needing improvement.

When reception and assessment of newly arrived students was managed at a municipal level, rather than in the school, principals and teachers are not as engaged, despite their individual responsibility for the student. Communication challenges arise, and specifically, the risk of inadequate communication of assessment outcomes between relevant bodies in a student's life. Many municipalities organised the initial reception and carried out the diagnostic tests at a central level, which resulted in a risk that relevant data and assessment would not be properly communicated between all teachers when a student transferred to regular school. This risk was further increased by the fact that the majority of information was conducted and transferred solely in written form, without any direct communication between those who conducted the tests and the teachers themselves. In addition, in the instance when a student moved to a different municipality, there was a risk that the documentation concerning the students' background, previous knowledge, progress and educational needs was not transferred properly to the authorities in the new municipality.

A lack of robust monitoring of the implementation of the assessment programme reduces capacity to achieve a full understanding of the impact of the assessment and placement of a student, and whether their educational needs were properly assessed and met efficiently (ibid). Schools are required to log how many students they interviewed, but they were not required to log interview outcomes directly. The organisation best suited to understand and evaluate the impact of the initiative would have been the National Schools Inspectorate, due to the fact that they were already regularly visiting schools and witnessed first-hand whether and how schools were implementing this initiative. At the end of 2017, almost two years after the legislation was passed, the Inspectorate published a report focused on the support of schools' for newly arrived students (Bunar, 2017[6]). The report considered how municipalities organised and governed the reception of newly arrived children in elementary schools, how they assessed students' previous knowledge and how student information was shared and used in schools.

Whilst the Inspectorate identified many positive aspects in the work of the audited schools in this area and an overall general positive development, they concluded that even when schools made use of diagnostic tests for assessing literacy and numeracy, the assessment of a student's knowledge level in subject matters was still inadequate. Whilst the mandatory elements of the assessment were extensively used, the voluntary subject assessments were frequently not. When this part of the assessment was used, it was often on the initiative of individual teachers and only in one or two subjects.

As the process was embedded, the Schools' Inspectorate began to play a greater role in monitoring whether schools were implementing the assessment process, but in the short-term this was not the case.

In hindsight, a deeper relationship between the Education Ministry and the Schools Inspectorate to carry out closer monitoring would have been beneficial.

It is important to note that the development of this assessment tool was significant in Sweden as it was the first form of mandatory education legislation since the introduction of the National test in 1997. This had an impact on future education initiatives. For example, several years later, the Ministry passed new legislation focused on material for preschool, which imitated the design of the 2016 legislation. For example, it also made certain actions mandatory and used the term ‘assessment tool’, alongside guidance on how to implement the initiative. This reflected the positive experience of the implementation of the 2016 legislation.

This initiative also resulted in the development of further projects to support immigrant children in Swedish education. For example, in 2017, as a result of reflections and feedback on the implementation of the assessment tool, the Agency published ‘Build Swedish’ voluntary guidance, which supported teachers to assess the language abilities of newly arrived students. The material supported three different groups of students: grades 1-3, grades 4-6 and grades 7-9. It was created by the Department of Language Didactics at Stockholm University in collaboration with the Agency. It emphasised social interaction and supporting roles in the learning process and was based on several key factors: participation in linguistic activities, degree of independence, degree of variety and security in language use. It included an assessment model, age-related descriptions of the student’s language development and reconciliation points for students who had not yet reached the first language level (Cerna et al., 2019[3]).

Overall, the 2016 regulations proved to help newly arrived Syrian students integrate into the Swedish education system. However, ensuring that each student receives an individualised study plan and continuous follow-up assessments has proven to be a challenge. This is an important area to consider improvements, particularly as it has been shown that some students, who may not display difficulties during the initial assessment phase, can later fall further behind their peers over time. This is due to range of factors, including a lack of support or language practice at home (Cerna et al., 2019[3]).

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13 Education Management for post-Disaster Recovery in Türkiye

This chapter, a case study from Türkiye, outlines the actions taken by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) to mitigate the effects of two major earthquakes on children's education. It describes the three-step management model followed by the government in the wake of the disaster, which focuses on firstly protecting populations, then getting students back to education, before finally improving equality in educational opportunities. It also discusses how MoNE implemented its experience of school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic to adapt human and production capacity to ensure a quick return to education for students and teachers.

Introduction

On 6 February 2023, Türkiye was struck by one of the most severe and devastating earthquakes in recent memory. The impact of the two earthquakes, measuring 7.8 Mw and 7.7 Mw respectively, spread to ten provinces impacting more than 13.5 million citizens (ITU, 2023[1]) More than 160 aftershocks occurred in the first five days after the earthquakes, with over 298 000 buildings destroyed or severely damaged. Tragically, the death toll rose to 50 783 with the impact of two major earthquakes back-to-back contributing to the widespread devastation. Search and rescue efforts and humanitarian assistance were prioritised in the initial period, but the impact on education could have long-term consequences that the Government of Türkiye is working to mitigate.

Natural and man-made disasters wreak havoc on populations. In addition to loss of life and destruction of property, they can also lead to large-scale displacement of children and families, leading to rapid and unpredicted changes in population distribution. As a result, educational systems are faced with significant challenges (UNESCO, 2020[2])

Protecting access to education is paramount in such situations. The risks of a lengthy disruption to schooling for children are significant - those who experience frequent or continuous disruption are more likely to remain out of school, be drawn into criminal activities and are more susceptible to exploitation (World Vision, 2020[3]).Those who do return to school are likely to be traumatised, may have experienced the loss of a parent or sibling, and have complex support needs which must be met if they are to benefit from the education being offered to them (CPHA, 2019[4]).

The difficulties are even greater for students from disadvantaged backgrounds and those with special educational needs (SEN). The challenge for education systems is to devise response measures which prioritise psychosocial and emotional support, identify and address the needs of all students and support teachers with training in crisis management.

This case study outlines the actions taken by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) to mitigate the effects of the disaster on children and their communities. Specifically, it describes the development and implementation of a post-disaster education management strategy.

What motivated change?

MoNE's primary objective after the disaster is to ensure the safety of students in the affected areas, and to ensure that they have access to quality educational opportunities. Children are particularly vulnerable in disaster situations so establishing a semblance of normalcy in a crisis was a priority (Le Brocque, 2017[5])).

All educational institutions under the purview of MoNE that had the capacity to provide accommodation were repurposed as shelters for earthquake victims immediately following the disaster. This decision was instrumental in meeting the urgent sheltering needs of nearly 450 000 individuals affected by the earthquakes 2023 (Özer, 2023[6]). Additionally, MoNE offered students impacted by the earthquakes the opportunity to stay in all school dormitories throughout the country free of charge. This served as a crucial support system for students who had been most impacted by the disaster while allowing them to pursue their education in the province of their preference.

Naturally, the disruption to schooling was significant. One fifth of all educational institutions affiliated with MoNE are located in the ten provinces affected by the earthquakes. Those provinces are home to 21.4% of students, approximately 3.6 million people, and 19.1%, or almost 210 000, teachers in Türkiye (World Bank, 2023[7]). Once immediate security and health needs were met, MoNE's priority switched to implementing a strategy to ensure continuity of education and employment.

What opportunities existed?

Drawing on existing frameworks

As part of its mission to provide the best possible conditions for its students and families, MoNE drew on several international models and frameworks developed specifically for education in emergencies in the post-disaster period ((Bensalah, 2002[8]; CPHA, 2019[4]; GFDRR & The World Bank, 2019[9]; Sinclair, 2007[10]). The models and frameworks typically contain minimum standards for children and their families in crisis situations, as well as recommendations on how to achieve these standards.

For example, the World Bank and Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery have developed a model which provides a roadmap, from short to long-term response, across a five-dimensional action plan to increase access to and improve the quality of educational services (GFDRR & The World Bank, 2019[9]). A second example is the work done by Bensalah et al on providing a reference source for education in emergency and crisis situations (Bensalah et al., 2001[11]; Cohen and Bradley, 2010[12]). This emphasises the importance of attending to the psychological and emotional impact of disasters on victims, as well as the physical.

Educational environments provide a sense of security for children, where the provision of multi-dimensional support can play a crucial role in helping students with anxiety disorders and post-traumatic stress (Creed and Morpeth, 2014[13]). Drawing on the international examples, MoNE has developed a model that ensures that students are physically and psychologically protected, their access to education is ensured, and the quality of education is improved (see Figure 13.1).

Leveraging learning from the COVID-19 pandemic

MoNE had developed significant expertise in ensuring educational continuity during school closures as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (OECD, 2023[14]; Özer, 2020[15]; Özer, 2022[16]). It had invested heavily, with the support of the World Bank, in developing its online digital education portal, EBA, which had been active since 2011. Through the interactive portal, students, teachers and parents have access to a wide range of teaching and learning materials, including over 5000 textbooks. The EBA also supported the professional development of teachers during the pandemic, with the development of online training programmes covering a range of topics (Özer, 2020[17]; Özer and Suna, 2020[18]). The investment in improved educational content, as well as the development of technical expertise, built a stronger, more resilient system which is able to support continuing education in the face of the current crisis.

The vocational education and training (VET) sector made a particular contribution to national efforts to deal with the impact of the pandemic (OECD, 2023[14]; Özer, 2020[17]). This sector adapted quickly to the challenges faced, focusing on both the production of essential materials, for example personal protective equipment, and enhancing its research and development capacity (Özer et al., 2022[19]). This was possible for several reasons: firstly, VET has a large production capacity in a range of fields. This means that the VET institutions have the physical infrastructure and skilled human resources for large-volume production and provision of services. Secondly, the production capacity of VET is flexible. Therefore, VET can easily adapt their processes to produce urgently needed items and services. Thirdly, with the experience of its skilled trainers, VET is innovative, having huge potential for finding new solutions to production-related challenges. This agility developed during the pandemic was crucial when the earthquakes struck, as the VET sector was able to build on this to address the most pressing needs of affected populations.

MoNE developed innovative approaches to supporting the well-being of students and their families during the pandemic. The department established a helpline staffed by a network of psychological counsellors from the General Directorate of Special Education and Guidance. This service allowed parents and students to directly engage with a comprehensive range of psychosocial support via telephone. In addition,

a range of pamphlets addressing the well-being of children and their families was published and distributed nationally.

The actions taken by MoNE during the pandemic – establishing an extensive distance education environment which supports students academically and socially, exploiting the resourcefulness and skill set of VET institutions to produce protective and medical equipment, and developing a psychosocial support system – resulted in a system which was highly prepared to respond to the extraordinary and urgent challenges of the disaster.

Box 13.1. Existing opportunities

- Best practice guidance on continuing education is available internationally.
- MoNE had developed significant and relevant capacity to respond to crises through its experience in managing the challenges posed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

What actions were taken?

Creating a planning and implementation infrastructure

Following the earthquakes of 6 February 2023, MoNE formed a crisis desk with the participation of all its General Directorates. The crisis desk has taken responsibility for all decisions related to the execution of the post-disaster education management strategy. One of its key responsibilities is establishing and maintaining a data and news line to support strategic planning with up-to-date information. This line continuously covers the data collection from impacted areas by the regional divisions of MoNE, then shares the data with the MoNE crisis desk at headquarters. The data mostly covers the humanitarian and educational needs of students & parents. Then, the crisis desk uses the data for decision making and sharing those decisions with regional divisions. Additionally, the provincial divisions of MoNE were assigned to crisis management boards in the affected regions to assist students and their families and determine their needs.

An assessment of the situation of educational institutions in the disaster area was carried out and schools in the ten most affected cities were categorized into three groups based on the level of damage and need for improvement (Özer, Sensoy and Suna, 2023[20]). This facilitated planning for re-establishing in-school education as quickly as possible, in districts where security controls and infrastructure improvements were complete.

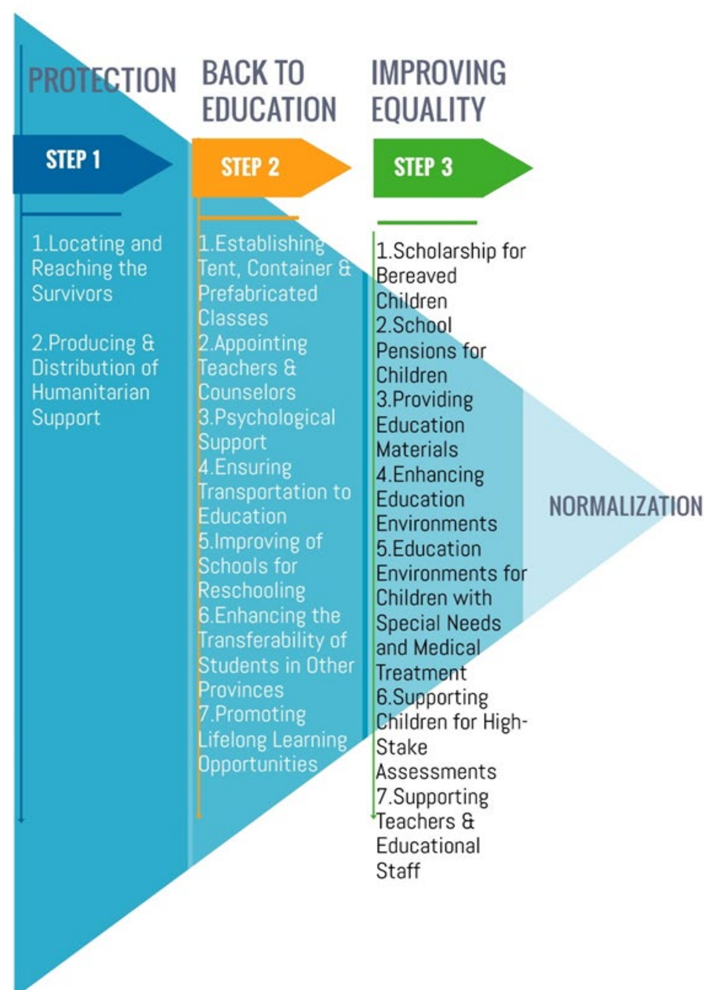
Developing a three-step management model

The post-disaster education management process was designed by MoNE as a carefully structured, responsive model in line with international best practice. The most important factor after a disaster is to reach the victims as soon as possible and provide them with humanitarian assistance.

As soon as a safe environment is established, the first and perhaps most important step towards normalisation is the provision of education services. The initial step focuses on the establishment of education services in emergency circumstances, followed by gradual improvements in the educational environment, transitioning to in-school education as soon as possible. The model developed by MoNE reflects this staged process.

The model, as illustrated in Figure 13.1, is designed to safeguard the welfare of earthquake victims, provide them with necessary humanitarian support, promptly transition them to educational services and ultimately achieve normalisation by consistently enhancing the quality of education.

Figure 13.2. Management Model Implemented by the Ministry of National Education after the 6 February 2023 earthquake disaster



Source: Özer, M., S. Şensoy and H. Eren Suna (2023[20])(2023), *The Impact of Post-Disaster Education Management for the Recovery of a Region following the 6 February 2023 Earthquakes in Türkiye*, https://researchcentre.trtworld.com/discussion-papers/the-impact-of-post-disaster-education-management-for-the-recovery-of-a-region-following-the-6-february-2023-earthquakes-in-turkiye/ (accessed on 16 August 2023).

Step One: Protection

MoNE made a significant contribution to both the search and rescue efforts and the humanitarian relief efforts in the wake of the earthquakes. This took a number of forms. For example, buildings affiliated with MoNE were made available to provide shelter for both earthquake victims and officials working on the ground. Furthermore, the AKUB (Search and Rescue Unit), operating under MoNE, provided rapid assistance in the ten provinces that were affected by the earthquakes. Over 5 000 experts from more than 250 sub-departments make up the AKUB, including teachers trained in first aid and search and rescue.

Another effective measure was to use MoNE institutions with production capacity, particularly those engaged in vocational education (VET institutions) to produce urgently needed items for earthquake victims. MoNE has also deployed 97 mobile kitchens to support food production in the most-affected provinces. As a result, VET institutions have become the main producers of humanitarian aid. MoNE institutions produce an average of 102 000 hot meals per day, 26 000 packaged meals per day, and 184 000 loaves of bread per day. Overall, more than 57.5 million hot meals, 5.3 million packaged meals and 45.2 million loaves of bread were produced by VET institutions up to the beginning of June 2023.

All children in disaster areas encounter traumatic experiences, regardless of whether they are directly or indirectly affected. Consequently, as part of its response, MoNE set up psychosocial support tents on the ground. 2 000 psychological counsellors were deployed in the first week and, three months after the earthquakes, more than 5 000 were still on the ground. To ensure the efficient deployment of teachers and counsellors, MoNE provided guidelines for their assignment in the most-affected provinces, considering the student population.

The provision of psychosocial support to earthquake survivors is one of the top priorities of MoNE in its post-disaster education management efforts. A Psychosocial Coordination Unit has been established within the General Directorate of Special Education and Guidance Services. On 3 March 2023, MoNE published a "Psychosocial Support Education Plan", providing a roadmap for counsellors and teachers in providing support for earthquake victims. The plan aims to prevent short-term trauma-related problems and support normalisation through education. The programme is inclusive, providing psychosocial support to students, teachers, and their families. To achieve this goal, the programme gradually transitions from psychosocial to psychoeducational support.

MoNE has also provided psychosocial support to earthquake victims through the assignment of school counsellors. Psychosocial and psychoeducational support programmes expanded over time, with the number of psychological counsellors reaching 5372 by the tenth week of the disaster. Counsellors working in neighbouring provinces and volunteer counsellors were able to reach the disaster area as soon as possible. Subsequently, the service capacity was greatly increased, with over 900 000 sessions conducted with students and 480 000 with parents (Özer, Sensoy and Suna, 2023[20]). Since the beginning of June 2023, more than 2.71 million children and parents participated in counselling sessions related to the disaster.

Step Two: Back to education

Immediately following the earthquakes, MoNE was committed to relaunching education services and ensuring access to education for all students in the region. Following established post-disaster management models, educational services were initiated in safe areas using temporary structures such as tents, containers, and modular classrooms. During the construction process, particular attention was paid to placing the classrooms in common living and community spaces, as well as close to healthcare units. The established classes cater to students from early childhood education to upper-secondary education.

The number of these structures steadily increased, reaching 2 026 across ten provinces by late April 2023. These educational facilities include 403 kindergartens, 293 primary schools, 239 secondary schools and

277 high schools (Özer, Sensoy and Suna, 2023[20]). For students who were injured during the earthquakes and treated in hospital, MoNE's "Hospital Classroom" provision ensures that they have access to education. In all, 93 hospital classrooms have been established for students with illnesses or disabilities, thus ensuring universal access to education 2023 (Özer, 2023[6]).

To enhance the educational opportunities offered to students, MoNE also sent a "mobile science centre" to the disaster area. This centre is equipped with various experiments in natural sciences such as physics, biology, astronomy, and geography, and provides a hands-on learning experience for students. MoNE also established "support, game, and activity tents". These tents were designed to provide a safe and enriching environment for children to engage in play and activities, which can help alleviate the negative impacts of trauma experienced after a disaster. A total of 416 tents were set up in the ten provinces most affected by the earthquakes, and they continue to serve students in these areas. During the three months following the earthquakes, these services were provided to over 1.6 million students (Özer, Sensoy and Suna, 2023[20]).

The transition to academic education was initiated as part of the psychosocial support programme. During the initial stage intense psychological support is offered, followed by a gradual transition to education. Over 20 000 teachers were deployed in the region, comprising those employed in nearby provinces and volunteer teachers, in addition to teachers with an expertise in post-trauma disorders and/or experience with disaster management.

Teachers provided education services in tents, containers, and modular classrooms, as well as in hospital classrooms, academic support programmes, and special education tents. Education materials were reprinted and stationery sets were distributed to all students in the area affected by the earthquakes. "Academic support tents" were set up in the region to assist students in preparing for the central exams used in the transition to secondary and higher education. Teachers assisted in the preparation of exams by delivering supplementary education materials developed by MoNE and distributed free of charge to students.

Displacement of people is a significant consequence of disasters, as highlighted by Cohen and Bradley (2010[12]). In the early stages following the earthquakes, more than 250 000 students transferred to schools in less affected provinces.

This opportunity to access education was facilitated by MoNE in two ways. First, the rules regulating student transfers between schools were abolished so that, subject to capacity, schools in less affected areas could accept those students who preferred to move from the ten highly affected provinces. Second, the state covered the costs and logistics of transporting students in the earthquake zone to education centres. This approach has contributed to ensuring equal access to education for all students, regardless of their location or economic status. Ensuring transportation is a critical support for successful school re-opening (Hassan, Mahmoud and Ellingwood, 2020[21])More than 371 000 students have benefited from transportation for education in the earthquake area as of 13 April 2023.

MoNE also increased the share of students receiving full scholarships to private educational institutions, increasing the number of students receiving full scholarship education in each private school from 3% to 10%. Moreover, these extra scholarships are only available to earthquake victims. The measures taken by MoNE after the earthquakes resulted in 242 556 students moving to unaffected provinces to resume their education within seven weeks. Among these students, 35 902 benefited from the increase in the number of students receiving full scholarships at private schools.

MoNE's crisis desk, working with the crisis management boards at provincial and district level, has overseen a phased reintroduction of in-school education. Following the damage assessment process and the categorisation of the schools in the ten most affected cities noted earlier, school reopening was carefully managed to allow time for necessary repairs and improvements. Thus, schools in three of the least affected provinces reopened three weeks after the earthquakes, those in moderately damaged

provinces reopened after five weeks and, in the most heavily damaged areas, seven weeks after the earthquakes. Additionally, after the transition to face-to-face education, 98 321 students who had previously been transferred to less-affected provinces were able to return to their home provinces (Ibid).

Step three: Improving equality

While MoNE ensured that all students in the earthquake zone had access to education, it also worked to improve the quality of the education provided and to enrich the educational opportunities for these students. The contribution made by MoNE in providing shelter, free of charge, in educational institutions and school dormitories ensured the safety of learners, regardless of their socio-economic background.

In disaster situations such as earthquakes, all students become more vulnerable, with marginalised and disadvantaged groups among the most affected. Many previous disasters have demonstrated that these students have great difficulties accessing and benefitting from education. In order to achieve equality of opportunity, it is extremely important to provide these students with appropriate support.

The lack of access to basic educational materials can pose a significant challenge in these circumstances, exacerbating inequality. Within seven weeks of the earthquakes, MoNE distributed over 15.5 million textbooks and over 11 million supplementary resources to students in need, from all socio-economic groups. In addition, MoNE provided stationery sets containing basic stationery supplies and clothing items to all earthquake survivors.

The Education Informatics Network (EBA), the digital education platform of MoNE, was a crucial resource in ensuring access to educational materials. Much of the rich reservoir of teaching and learning resources available on EBA can be accessed at any time through televisions installed in classrooms. To ensure that all students and their teachers could access these resources as soon as possible after the disaster, televisions were installed in all tents, container classrooms, and modular schools. By mid-April, the number of television sets installed in educational areas in the region exceeded 30 000. Over 17 000 tablets were also distributed to support students in accessing the online portal (Özer, Sensoy and Suna, 2023[20]).

Ensuring that all children have access to education and can benefit from the opportunities it provides is a cornerstone of equality measures in Türkiye. Due to the long-term effects of sudden parental loss on students (Brent et al., 2012[22]; Case and Ardington, 2006[23]), students who lost their families in the earthquakes were given scholarships by MoNE. A similar service was provided to earthquake victims in both the earthquake zone and other provinces affiliated with MoNE.

In its reconstruction efforts, MoNE has paid particular attention to the needs of students with SEN. "Special Education Tents" provided in the early stages of the disaster were equipped with educational materials and have been transformed into environments where their needs can be met. The provision of assistive technologies and devices such as hearing aids and wheelchairs to students with disabilities has supported the inclusion of children with SEN in an appropriate learning environment. In partnership with various organisations and universities, MoNE has also provided additional teacher training on inclusive and special needs education. Measures like these have meant that students are able to receive education according to their individual needs, regardless of disaster conditions.

Other measures targeted students whose exam preparations were severely disrupted. These include restricting assessment to only work done during the first semester, prior to the earthquakes, thereby ensuring that all students, regardless of location, are assessed to equal standards and content. MoNE has established support classes across 3 205 education environments for 129 652 participating students in the disaster area. These classes enable students to re-join their preferred courses and access educational materials to prepare for the assessments (Özer, Sensoy and Suna, 2023[20]).

Whatever measures a system may take to mitigate the effects of a disaster on its children, the role played by teachers is crucial (Bensalah, 2002[8]; GFDRR & The World Bank, 2019[9]). They are often the first point

of contact for students and are responsible for providing care, taking them to safe educational environments, and addressing psychological and physiological needs (Özer, Sensoy and Suna, 2023[20]).

Ensuring an adequate supply of suitably qualified teachers is critical at times of disaster to protect continuity of education, teaching and learning (European Commission, 2019[24]). Providing relevant and timely support to teachers is necessary to ensure that they have both the professional capacity and emotional resilience to effectively support the children in their care.

Recognising this, MoNE provided professional development opportunities for teachers to enhance their skills and knowledge to support students affected by the earthquakes. Seminar programmes were launched via the Teacher Informatics Network (ÖBA) to train approximately 1.2 million active teachers across the country on various topics including disaster and crisis management and post-disaster mental health (World Bank, 2023[7]). MoNE organized training sessions for teachers on psychosocial support and trauma-informed teaching practices, as well as providing educational materials and equipment. The Ministry also considered the teachers' practical support needs, providing temporary housing and transportation assistance to ensure that they could continue to provide quality education to their students despite the challenges they faced.

Box 13.2. Actions

- Establishing crisis management desks at national, provincial and district-level;
- auditing and categorising schools to facilitate structural rehabilitation and provision planning;
- developing a three-step management model to support decision-making and implementation planning;
- implementing a range of targeted measures to meet immediate needs and support the transition back to in-school education;
- prioritising psychosocial supports in the initial phases and transitioning to psycho-educational supports as schools re-opened;
- maintaining a focus on equity and quality.

What supported success?

The importance of education in emergencies has been proven by research and case studies, which demonstrate the many benefits of education in disaster situations, including safeguarding children, meeting their needs, fostering societal normalisation, and protecting national investments and sustainable development 2023 (Özer, 2023[6]). Schools can provide a safe place for children affected by disaster, attending to their well-being needs and protecting them from further harm by re-establishing a sense of normalcy. In addition, education in self-care and danger avoidance, together with the provision of reliable information about the crisis situation, can mitigate the anxiety levels experienced by children. Re-opening schools is therefore an essential step in protecting children.

The disastrous earthquakes in Türkiye occurred very recently but the prompt action by MoNE has led almost full restoration of in-school education, despite the level of destruction initially. Three strategies deployed by MoNE can be identified as contributing to the progress made to date.

Strategic and co-ordinated planning and decision-making

The disaster is of such a scale that a whole-of-government response was necessary and close co-ordination across departments was key to achieving a coherent and comprehensive response. MoNE's

post-disaster education management plan is wide-ranging, from humanitarian relief to rapid initiation and enhancement of education services. This required significant financial resources and, in some cases, swift amendments to existing regulations. The state's support has been key to MoNE's ability to proceed quickly and effectively in the post-disaster management process.

MoNE’s crisis desk collaborated fully with the national Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD), which is responsible for disaster management in the region. AFAD established local disaster management centres that also included administrators appointed by MoNE. Careful co-ordination across government departments facilitated prompt actions. For example, MoNE and Ministry of National Defense established *Mehmetçik* tents in Hatay, one of the cities hardest hit by the earthquakes. This allowed 240 classrooms to be constructed and equipped on a very large site to provide students with education in a supportive environment, with a range of social support available to enhance the educational experience.

The close collaborations with other state departments and agencies involved in disaster management established by MoNE enabled it to make effective use of social policies and human resources to respond to the crisis. Including others, and being included by them, in decision-making processes related to humanitarian assistance and education enhanced the system’s capacity to move quickly and effectively. As a result of this approach, education activities were launched in all provinces roughly seven weeks after the earthquakes, and preparations for school-based education were completed ten weeks later.

Community-level delivery

As expressed in many international post-disaster education models and frameworks, central government requires accurate and immediate information from the field to make correct decisions during times of crisis. Consequently, MoNE has used live data to inform its strategy since the onset of the disaster. Local administrators were assigned to all affected provinces, and information regarding humanitarian and educational needs in earthquake areas was quickly transmitted to the central crisis desk (Özer, 2023[6]). Provincial administrators with experience in disaster management in earthquake-prone regions were appointed by MoNE to work alongside each affected province's administrator. Those local administrators, together with teachers and psychological counsellors associated with MoNE, have been primarily responsible for the steps taken by MoNE throughout the process.

The prompt deployment of over 20 000 teachers and 5 000 psychological counsellors played a crucial role in providing much-needed support to the victims, highlighting the importance of building human resource capacity in disaster management frameworks. It is particularly important to note that many of the teachers who working with disaster victims in the initial stages had some training in the field of psychology.

Management of public awareness and support for the post-disaster education management plan

Public awareness of MoNE's actions in the earthquake area was raised using a number of important tools. MoNE’s official social media accounts gave daily updates of the actions taken, as well as the benefits provided and the number of people helped. Additionally, press conferences were held in the provinces most impacted by the earthquakes, informing the public of the situation and developments in those as well as in other affected provinces.

Traditional media, particularly newspapers and television, published extensive coverage of education in the earthquake area. The provincial administrators, teachers, psychological counsellors, education experts and units working directly with the public also continue to update them directly.

Participation by parents and students in support schemes was monitored both on the ground and centrally. Central administration evaluated these participation numbers to assess the response to the steps taken within the post-disaster education management plan. For example, more than 450 000 students and

parents stayed in MoNE institutions in the first week following the earthquakes. Over 242 000 students expressed an interest in studying in different provinces during the first three months of the academic year.

A significant increase in the number of districts where face-to-face education has been implemented in schools has led to 98 321 of those students returning to their own provinces. As of the beginning of June 2023, over 2.7 million individuals have participated in the psychosocial support programs offered and over 340 000 people have participated in lifelong learning activities in the region. This data was shared with managers in the field, who considered further actions to increase the impact of the plan.

Box 13.3. Success factors

- Strategic collaboration across government departments and agencies;
- provincial and district-level structures to support delivery of the post-disaster education management plan;
- ensuring public awareness and engagement in the range of initiatives available.

Reflections

In the aftermath of the earthquakes, education services largely began to be provided in schools. Moreover, students continue to receive access to psychosocial support, vocational training, academic support programmes, special training tents, hospital classrooms and lifelong learning activities in the region as well as education in different provinces. Nevertheless, careful attention must be paid students and teachers in the areas most affected by the disaster.

There is one significant challenge that has been observed throughout this process. The earthquakes of 6 February 2023 caused significant damage in ten provinces, and the steps announced were taken simultaneously throughout this large area where 13.5 million people reside. At this scale, it is difficult to implement the suggestions offered by the models on post-disaster education management.

The approach taken was to group provinces based on the scale of destruction caused by the earthquakes and to develop different roadmaps through the post-disaster education management plan for at least three provincial groupings. The plans were implemented simultaneously so that no area was disadvantaged but this did demand significant organisational resources and energy. Related to this was the challenge of gathering reliable data, given the displacement of students and their families.

In-school learning was disrupted, even if only for some weeks, and so it is crucial to implement measures to address possible learning losses among students who were heavily affected by the earthquakes. MoNE plans to implement "free summer school programmes" in the provinces most affected by the earthquakes. These will provide tuition to students at all levels during the summer, ranging from 2nd to 12th grade, and will last for approximately one month (Özer, 2022[16]).

The initiatives implemented to support students and teachers described earlier are still in place and MoNE is committed to improving education provision in the disaster-affected regions as a top priority. As for normalisation, it has gained momentum with the resumption of educational activities in schools and other social assistance programmes. The impact of the interventions under the post-disaster education recovery plan on other, pre-existing educational policies will be felt for some time. Amendments to central examinations used in transitioning from primary to secondary and from secondary to higher education were necessary but it is currently unclear what their impact has been on students' readiness for those transitions.

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