# Enhancing Scotland's multi-level school improvement support system

Scotland (United Kingdom) was among the first education systems to embrace the 21st century learning movement in the early 2000s. This resulted in the development of the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) whose implementation started in 2010. Recently, Scotland has engaged in a national discussion to renew its vision for education and initiated work to restructure and strengthen the education system. This includes the planned establishment of a new public body for developing and awarding qualifications that will replace the Scottish Qualifications Authority and the establishment of an independent Education Inspectorate that is separate from Education Scotland. These changes planned for 2025 and the built-up momentum in strengthening school improvement support in recent years have provided a timely opportunity for exploring how to further strengthen Scotland's multi-level school improvement support system.

To help inform Scotland's reform agenda, the Scottish Government asked the OECD to co-facilitate an international peer learning event in May 2023 to discuss and explore ways and approaches to clarify the roles and responsibilities for school improvement support provided by the central government, Education Scotland, Regional Improvement Collaboratives and local authorities within the Scottish education system. The event brought together international experts from Ireland, Norway and Wales (United Kingdom), as well as stakeholders from all levels of the Scottish education system in order to collectively reflect on how the country's school improvement support system could be further improved including by learning from international experiences and practices. This report, written between May and September 2023, captures and summarises the peer learning event discussions and stakeholders' reflections and proposes a number of policy options to help advance Scotland's education reform agenda.

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# 1 Introduction

## Background

Since the start of the implementation of the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) in 2010, Scotland has been at the forefront of bringing 21st century learning to the classroom, while priding itself on a tradition of non-directive central governance and the decentralised delivery of school education. Scotland's 32 local authorities oversee a highly heterogeneous school network of about 2 500 schools, ranging from the large cities of Glasgow and Edinburgh to the small islands and sparsely populated regions of the Scottish Highlands. Ensuring that all schools – regardless of their location and circumstances – are successful in fostering the CfE's four capacities in their learners ('Successful Learners', 'Confident Individuals', 'Effective Contributors' and 'Responsible Citizens') (Education Scotland, 2023[1]) requires a strong system for school improvement support.

During the past few years, Scotland has engaged in a concerted effort to re-think and further strengthen the improvement support that schools receive from bodies and agencies at different levels of the system. These debates were (among others) informed by the publication of a series of reports. These include two reports by the OECD, *Improving Schools in Scotland* (OECD, 2015[2]) and *Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence: Into the Future* (OECD, 2021[3]), and a report prepared by Professor Kenneth Muir, *Putting Learners at the Centre: Towards a Future Vision for Scottish Education* (Scottish Government, 2022[4]) (in Scotland often referred to as the "Muir Report"). These reports have prompted a national discussion to renew the vision for Scottish education (Campbell and Harris, 2023[5]) and motivated ongoing work to restructure and strengthen the system, including through the creation of new education agencies that would work together to drive improvements. These include the creation of a new public body responsible for developing and awarding qualifications that is to replace the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) and the establishment of an independent Education Inspectorate. The separation of the Inspectorate of Education from Education Scotland will result in a new education agency (whose name will be defined in due time) that focusses on supporting improvement across the Scottish education system and will be responsible for the review of curricula. These national agencies are expected to work collaboratively and take on a system leadership role.

These planned changes (for 2025) and the built-up momentum in strengthening school improvement support in recent years have provided a timely opportunity for exploring how to further strengthen the multi-level school improvement support system of Scotland. This is important also considering the perceived lack of clarity and duplication in the support offered by different agencies and bodies across the system. In addition, school leaders (and teachers) were dealing with workload challenges, partly due to what some perceived as a high number of reform initiatives, sometimes described as top-down or politicised reform initiatives that schools are expected to engage in.[1] The envisaged further strengthening of the school improvement support system is to respond to these and other challenges, including by making the school

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[1] Some of these challenges have been identified in earlier studies (OECD, 2021[3]; Scottish Government, 2022[4]) and were echoed during semi-structured interviews with stakeholders conducted during the OECD team's fact-finding visit (see **Error! Reference source not found.** in Annex).

improvement and professional learning support more responsive to the needs of the education profession and by clarifying where this support can be obtained (i.e. from central government, Education Scotland, Regional Improvement Collaboratives and local authorities).

Against this backdrop and to help advance Scotland's education reform agenda, the Scottish Government asked the OECD to co-facilitate an international peer learning event to discuss and explore ways and approaches to clarify the roles and responsibilities for school improvement support of the central government, Education Scotland, Regional Improvement Collaboratives and local authorities within the Scottish education system. The event took place on 18-19 May 2023 in Edinburgh and brought together international experts from Ireland, Norway and Wales (United Kingdom) as well as stakeholders from all levels of the Scottish education system in order to collectively reflect on how the Scottish school improvement system could be further optimised and to compare and contrast its approach with international practices. In particular, the event sought to address three guiding questions:

- How to ensure that support for school improvement is user-focused, based on the best and latest data and evidence and secures the largest possible improvement in learners' outcomes?
- What types of support should be provided by organisations at different levels of the system (from national, regional to local levels)?
- How does an empowered, non-directive education system avoid duplication in school improvement efforts undertaken at different levels and create clarity on how to access the available support?

This report which was developed between June and September 2023 captures and summarises the peer learning event discussions and stakeholders' reflections. It presents what seemed to be an emerging consensus among Scottish stakeholders on "a way forward" for strengthening optimising the roles and responsibilities for school improvement support across different levels of the system.

Following the introductory Section 1, the remainder of this report is organised in two sections. Section 2 provides a brief overview of Scottish school education and its school improvement system, in an international comparative context. By comparing the Scottish education system with the three selected peer learning countries (Ireland, Norway and Wales (United Kingdom)) the section highlights commonalities and the unique features of the Scottish system and thus provides a basis to contextualise the reflections emerging from the peer learning event. Section 3 summarises the peer learning event discussions and stakeholders' reflections and proposes a number of policy options to help advance Scotland's education reform agenda.

## Overview of the project and methodology

To inform the peer learning event and gain an in-depth understanding of Scotland's multi-level school improvement support system, the OECD team (see Annex A) conducted a desk study of key documents and engaged with key stakeholders from different levels of the education system. For this the OECD team travelled to Scotland for a six-day visit. On 15-17 May 2023 the OECD team conducted a series of face-to-face and online interviews with around 40 education stakeholders, including school leaders, Directors of Education in local authorities, representatives of all Regional Improvement Collaboratives and a range of teams within the Scottish Government and Education Scotland (see Annex B).

The peer learning event was organised during the following two days (on 18-19 May 2023) in Edinburgh and attended by more than 30 education stakeholders involved in providing school improvement support from different levels of the Scottish education system (see Annex C).

Government representatives from Ireland, Norway and Wales (United Kingdom) were invited to share their experiences and practices in organising school improvement support in their countries. The representatives of these peer learning countries provided a brief overview of their education systems

(based on a structured presentation template that was prepared with the support of the OECD team), sharing key challenges and strengths of their school improvement systems. These presentations were followed by a series of facilitated plenary and small group discussions that focused on addressing the above-mentioned guiding questions. The event was facilitated by the Scottish Government and the OECD team.

This report was developed in the months that immediately followed the peer learning event, i.e. May to September 2023. It synthesises stakeholders' reflections, summarises the peer learning event discussions and proposes a number of policy options to help advance Scotland's education reform agenda.

# 2 Scotland's school education and improvement system

This section provides an overview of school education and of the school improvement system of Scotland as of September 2023, and where relevant (and data and information were available) in an internationally comparative perspective. By comparing the Scottish school system with peer learning countries invited to participate in the peer learning event – Ireland, Norway and Wales (United Kingdom) – the section highlights commonalities and the unique features of the Scottish system and thus aims to provide a basis to contextualise the reflections emerging from the event (see Section 3).

## School education in Scotland – an overview

### *Curriculum for Excellence*

Scotland (United Kingdom) was among the first education systems to embrace the 21st century learning movement, when it reformed its curriculum policy in the early 2000s. Following a large-scale public debate, the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) was published in 2004 and was developed in subsequent years, before being phased into schools from 2010/2011 onwards. The CfE aims for students to grow into successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors (referred to as "the four capacities"). Based on this common philosophy, primary and secondary schools develop their own curriculum to help students develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to thrive in the 21st century (OECD, 2021[3]).

### *Structure of school education in Scotland*

Education is compulsory for 5-16 year-olds in Scotland, but many children begin their education earlier and continue beyond the age of 16 (see Table 2.1). The CfE caters for children aged 3 to 18 years, beyond the boundaries of compulsory education. Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC, referred to as "early learning and childcare" in Scotland) is provided for children up to five years of age (International Standard Classification of Education [ISCED] 0), and while it is not compulsory, 98% of eligible children aged three and four were registered in 2020. The seven years of primary education place Scotland's duration above the OECD average, at the same length as in Australia, Denmark, Iceland and Norway. Students usually complete primary education by age 11 or 12 (OECD, 2021[3]).

Secondary schools offer up to six years of education. It consists of two phases, starting with lower secondary education, known in Scotland as "Broad General Education" (BGE) that lasts three years (S1 to S3). The following three years (S4 to S6) form the upper secondary education cycle, known as the "Senior Phase".

## Table 2.1. Structure of education provision in Scotland (United Kingdom)

| Age (years) | ISCED | Education level | Institutions |
|---|---|---|---|
| 0/3-5 | 0 | Early learning and childcare | |
| 5-12 | 1 | Primary: Seven years, P1 to P7 (compulsory) | Primary schools |
| 12-15 | 2 | Secondary: Three years, S1 to S3 (compulsory) | Secondary schools: comprehensive and mostly co-educational |
| 15-18 | 3 | Upper-secondary: Three years, S4 (compulsory) and S5-S6 (optional). Subjects studied at different levels for various qualifications including general and vocational | Secondary schools, colleges of further education or independent training providers |
| | 4 | Further education (non-advanced courses: vocational and general studies, etc.) Higher education (advanced courses: Higher National Certificate, Higher National Diploma, etc.) | Colleges |
| 17+ | 5 | Higher education: Higher National Certificate, Higher National Diploma, professional training courses and postgraduate | Higher education institutions (universities and colleges) |

Source: OECD (2023), "Diagram of the education system: United Kingdom", *OECD Education GPS*, https://gpseducation.oecd.org/Content/MapOfEducationSystem/GBR/GBR_2011_EN.pdf; European Commission (2020), "United Kingdom – Scotland Overview", https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/united-kingdom-scotland_en [accessed on 22 March 2021].

General upper secondary education covers three years, preparing young people for moving to further education (i.e. tertiary education), training or into the workforce. Vocational educational pathways are also offered in colleges of further education with opportunities to continue to professional studies and tertiary education. There is no school-leaving certificate in Scotland but students in upper secondary education can choose between a variety of educational pathways leading to a broad range of qualifications, including the single-subject Scottish National Qualifications or Awards certificated by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), Scotland's awarding body (OECD, 2021[3]).

In 2022, the Scottish education system counted 1 994 publicly funded primary schools and 358 secondary schools. The publicly funded education system catered to 92 615 students in ECEC, to 388 920 students in primary education, and to 309 133 students in secondary education. In addition, 109 publicly funded schools for special education needs were serving 7 821 students (although the majority of students with a recorded additional support need attended mainstream schools), and around 100 independent schools operated by private entities were catering to about 30 000 students (OECD, 2021[3]; Scottish Government, 2023[6]). Based on PISA 2018, 4.5% of 15-year-old students attended government-dependent or independent private schools in Scotland. This was similar to the proportions in Wales (United Kingdom) (3.3%), above that in Norway (1.4%) and significantly below the proportion in Ireland (60.9%), where the government-dependent private sector accounts for a large share of secondary schools (see Table 2.2).

### *Teachers and school leaders*

In Scotland, all teachers need a graduate degree or equivalent, plus a teaching qualification to gain Qualified Teacher Status. Teaching qualifications include undergraduate degrees (Bachelor of Education, Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Science; ISCED 6) and postgraduate qualifications (Professional Graduate Diploma in Education [PGDE]; ISCED 7). For all levels of education (pre-primary to upper-secondary), the minimum qualifications required for the Standard for Full Registration (SFR) are a bachelor's degree (ISCED 6) and a postgraduate teaching qualification (ISCED 7) or a bachelor's degree in education (ISCED 6). The Standard for Provisional Registration (SPR) specifies what is expected of a student teacher at the end of initial teacher education seeking provisional registration with the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS). Having gained the SPR, all provisionally registered teachers continue their professional learning journey by moving towards attaining the SFR. The SFR is the gateway to the profession and is the benchmark of teacher competence for all teachers.

Table 2.2 presents a selection of additional OECD education indicators comparing Scotland with the peer learning countries. Scotland's public school system employed more than 53 000 teachers in 2022 (Scottish Government, 2023[6]). Compared with the peer learning countries, teachers' statutory salaries in lower secondary education were above the OECD average, with USD 43 895 at the start of teachers' careers and USD 55 096 with 15 years of experience on average. This was comparable to salary levels in Norway, but offered a less steep salary progression than Ireland where starting salaries were lower but those of experienced teachers were higher.

In Scotland teachers are also expected to complete 35 hours of professional development per annum. Professional development is excluded from statutory teaching time. In PISA 2018, 69% of Scottish teachers reported having attended a professional development programme in the previous three months – significantly above the OECD average of 53%, but below the participation rates of Ireland and Wales. Teachers in Scotland also appeared to already possess a good level of digital capacity, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2018, in 68.7% of Scottish students attended a school whose principal agreed that teachers possess the technical and pedagogical skills to integrate digital devices in instruction – above the OECD average (64.6%) and that of Wales (United Kingdom) (49.3%), but below that of Norway (74.5%) (see Table 2.2).

### Table 2.2. Selected OECD education indicators for Scotland and peer learning countries

|  | Scotland | Ireland | Norway | Wales |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Number of students (2021) | 390k (ISCED1) 307k (ISCED 2+3) | 557k (ISCED 1) 219k (ISCED 2) 230k (ISCED 3) | 444k (ISCED1) 201k (ISCED 2) 256 (ISCED 3) | 272 (ISCED1) 174k (ISCED 2+3) |
| Duration and age of compulsory education | 11 years (5 to 16) | 10 years (6 to 16) | 10 years (6 to 16) | 11 years (5 to 16) |
| Enrolment in (government-dependent and independent) private schools (PISA 2018) | 4.5% | 60.9% | 1.4% | 3.3% |
| % of students whose principals agree that teachers have the necessary technical and pedagogical skills to integrate digital devices in instruction (PISA 2018) | 68.7% | 60.0% | 74.5% | 49.3% |
| % of teachers who attended a programme of professional development in the previous three months (PISA 2018) | 69.2% | 77.8% | 23.3% | 78.5% |
| % of students whose principals report they systematically record data, such as attendance and professional development (mandatory [M] or on schools' initiative [SI]) (PISA 2018) | Yes (M): 83.9% Yes (SI): 14.9% No: 1.2% | Yes (M): 51.1% Yes (SI): 45.0% No: 3.8% | Yes (M): 42.6% Yes (SI): 43.9% No: 13.5 % | Yes (M): 63.0% Yes (SI): 35.9% No: 1.1% |
| % of students whose principals report they had regular consultations with experts aimed at school improvement over a period of at least six months (mandatory [M] or on schools' initiative [SI]) (PISA 2018) | Yes (M): 24.1% Yes (SI): 42.7% No: 33.2% | Yes (M): 9.0% Yes (SI): 60.9% No: 30.1% | Yes (M): 42.5% Yes (SI): 37.8% No: 19.7% | Yes (M): 55.3% Yes (SI): 36.2% No: 8.5% |
| Teacher' statutory starting salaries (ISCED 2, 2021), USD converted using PPPs | 43 895 | 36 281 | 43 108 | - |
| Teachers' statutory salaries with 15 years of experience (ISCED 2, 2021), USD PPPs | 55 096 | 61 498 | 51 727 | - |

Note: Teachers' statutory annual salaries in general public institutions are expressed in in equivalent USD converted using PPPs for private consumption and are based on the most prevalent qualifications at different points in teachers' careers.
Source: OECD (2023[7]), *Education at a Glance 2023: OECD Indicators*, https://doi.org/10.1787/e13bef63-en (Table D3.1.); Eurostat (EDUC_UOE_ENRP04; EDUC_UOE_ENRS01, EDUC_UOE_ENRS04); Welsh Government; Scottish Government (2023[6]), *Schools in Scotland 2022: Summary Statistics*; OECD (2020[8]), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume V): Effective Policies, Successful Schools*, https://doi.org/10.1787/ca768d40-en (Tables V.B2.7.1, V.B2.4.7, V.B1.5.15, V.B1.8.11).

### *Student performance and attainment*

During the last cycles of the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), Scotland has ranked at or above the OECD average for 15-year-olds' performance in mathematics, reading and science (see **Error! Reference source not found.**). In PISA 2018, Scotland's student performance was above the OECD average in reading and similar to the OECD average in maths and science. In PISA 2018, Scotland's average score in reading was 504, representing an 11 score-point improvement on its 2015 performance, almost on par with its 2012 performance. This was higher than the OECD average performance, as well as that of Norway and Wales (United Kingdom), but below the performance of Ireland (518). In mathematics, Scotland performed at the OECD average with 489 score points, close to Wales, but below the performance of Ireland (500) and Norway (501). In science, Scotland scored 490, close to the OECD average and Norway and Wales, but slightly below Ireland (496) (OECD, 2019[9]).

**Figure 2.1 Trends in average reading, mathematics and science performance in Scotland and peer countries, PISA 2012 - 2018**
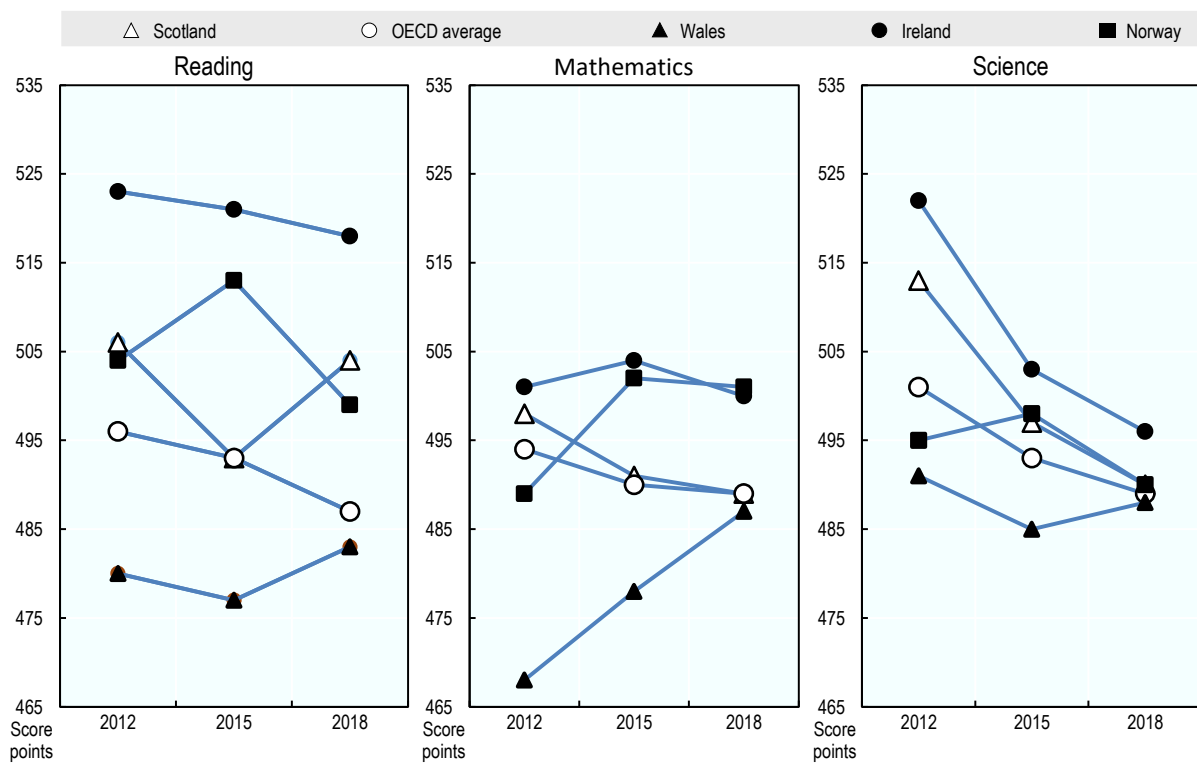


Source: OECD (2019[9]), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume I): What Students Know and Can Do*, https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/5f07c754-en (Tables I.4.4, I.4.5, I.4.6).

Students' socio-economic status in Scotland had a relatively small impact on their performance, compared to other OECD countries and economies. In PISA 2018, students' socio-economic status as measured by the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status (ESCS) explained only 8.6% of the variance in reading performance between students from the most and least advantaged backgrounds in Scotland. This was significantly below the OECD average of 12%. Compared to the peer learning countries, it was above the variance in performance explained by students' ESCS in Wales (United Kingdom) (4%), similar to Norway (7.5%) and below the proportion in Ireland (10.7%) (OECD, 2019, p. 340[10]).

In 2023, Scotland's Annual Participation Measure showed that 94.3% of 16- 19 year-olds were in some form of education, employment, training or other personal development for most of the year – the highest proportion since 2015. The proportion of participating young people ranged from 89.6% in the most deprived areas to 97.9% in the least deprived areas (Scottish Government, 2023[11]). In 2023, of the Scottish students leaving school education in 2021/22, 95.7% had entered a "positive initial destination", including tertiary education, further education, employment, training, voluntary work or personal skills development. Only 4.3% were either unemployed or in an unknown destination – down from 6.1% in 2016/17. In addition, more than six out of ten (62.8%) students leaving school education after S6 (i.e. the last year of upper secondary education) entered into tertiary education (Scottish Government, 2023[12]).

### *Governance and school funding*

#### *Governance*

Scotland has a long tradition of governing its own education system and wields full legislative power and executive authority in all areas of education since the Scotland Act of 1998. The Scottish Government, via the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, sets policy for all aspects of education in Scotland and holds overall responsibility for Scottish education, in collaboration with supporting ministers and with support from a number of directorates, including the Learning Directorate, the Education Reform Directorate, the Directorate for Early Learning and Childcare, the Directorate for Lifelong Learning and Skills, and Education Scotland (see Figure 2.2) and other statutory agencies, including the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) and Skills Development Scotland (SDS)

### Figure 2.2. Organisation of the central education administration in Scotland
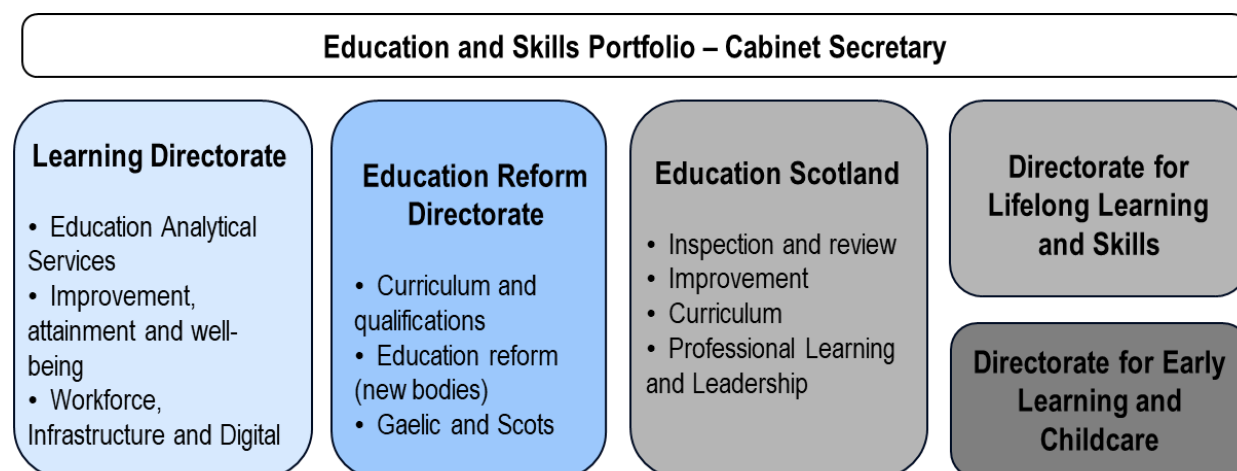


Source: Presentation by Scottish Government at the international peer learning event.

The Learning Directorate works with statutory agencies, including Education Scotland, the SQA and SDS, to implement policies in primary and secondary education. Responsibility for implementing reforms in the post-school education and skills sector lies with the Directorate for Lifelong Learning and Skills. The Directorate for Early Learning and Childcare is responsible for the implementation of education reforms in ECEC. With joint strategic leadership by the Cabinet Secretary but separate directorates responsible for programmes and operations at the ECEC, school and skills levels, the Scottish education administration constitutes a hybrid form of administration.

Like Scotland, Norway operates a hybrid form of administration with responsibilities for ECEC and schools, and tertiary education led by the Ministry of Education and Research, but responsibilities are divided across separate departments within the Ministry and with two Ministers responsible for Education and for Research and Higher Education, respectively. The Ministry is home to the Department for Schools and Kindergartens and the Department for Education, Training and Skills Policy, as well as the Directorate for Education and Training, the Ministry's executive agency responsible for kindergartens, primary and secondary education (Government of Norway, n.d.[13]).

Likewise, Wales (United Kingdom) operates a hybrid system in which responsibilities for schools and tertiary education (but not early childhood education) are led by one minister and the Department for Education and Skills, but operationally managed by separate organisational units and separate Directors for Education and Welsh Language on the one hand and Skills, Higher Education & Lifelong Learning on the other hand (Welsh Government, n.d.[14]). In Ireland, the responsibilities for ECEC, schools and tertiary education are also separated, but across different departments and three responsible ministers. Ireland has a Minister of Education that is responsible for the Department of Education and two ministers, i.e. the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science and the Minister of State with responsibility for Skills and Further Education, leading the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Welsh Government, n.d.[15]).

As of 2023, responsibility for the improvement and inspection of schools in Scotland lies with Education Scotland. Education Scotland is overseen by the Cabinet Secretary and works with the Learning Directorate to fulfil its duties. As described above, the responsibilities of Education Scotland and other national education bodies are currently undergoing revision.

Within the policy guidelines set by the Scottish Government, responsibility for the organisation, operation and staffing of schools is decentralised. The 32 local authorities, which are led by councils that are elected every four years, have responsibility for running schools, hiring school staff, providing and financing most educational services and implementing Scottish Government's policies in education. Local authorities commit to pursuing national educational objectives and also help schools in designing and implementing their curriculum based on the CfE framework (OECD, 2021[3]).

### *School funding*

Figure 2.3 provides a schematic overview of funding flows in Scottish school education. The Scottish Government allocates funding for schools to local authorities (except for targeted funding of national programmes, such as the pupil equity funding). Since 2007, education funding has been rolled into the local government settlement (a block grant), leaving local authorities to prioritise funding across areas of expenditure and to allocate budgets to individual schools. The Scottish Government provides 70% of all local government revenue, while the remaining 30% is derived from business rates and council taxes levied on residents. In terms of gross revenue, expenditure across pre-school, primary, secondary, special school and non-school funding in 2018/19, GBP 5.5 billion was spent in total on all education levels in Scotland, an increase of 4.9% in real terms since 2013/14 (OECD, 2021, p. 29[3]; Scottish Government, 2021[16]).

The Scottish Government also allocates targeted education funding to specific purposes, including for CfE-related spending (GBP 12.3 million in 2019/20). Local authorities devolve the management of some expenditures to the school level, leaving school leaders to make decisions about part of their budget to serve local needs. Devolved School Management Guidelines were revised in 2012 to empower school leaders to meet local needs and deliver the best possible outcomes for young learners, in line with several Scottish policy objectives of the CfE, the Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC) and the Early Years Framework (OECD, 2021, p. 28[3]).

<span style="color:#00B0C0">**Figure 2.3. Funding school education in Scotland**</span>

Public primary and lower secondary schools
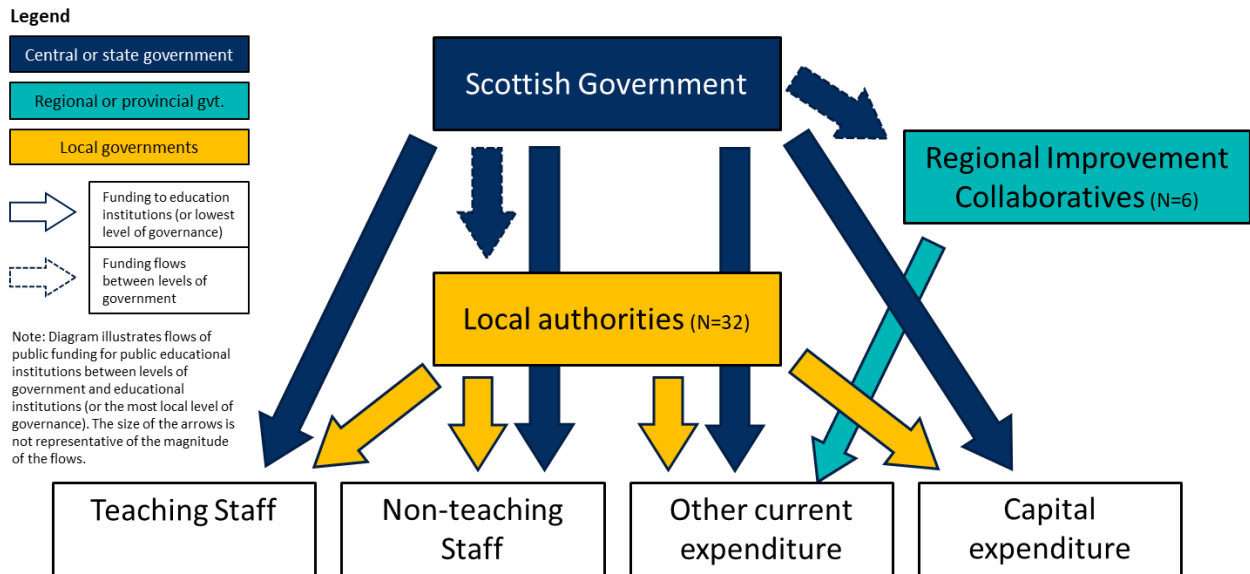


Note: The diagram is indicative of the flows of public funding for public educational institutions between levels of government and the final education provider. The size of the arrows is not representative of the magnitude of the funding flows.
Source: Presentation by Scottish Government at the international peer learning event and authors' elaboration.

### *School autonomy and accountability*

There is a strong commitment to school empowerment in Scotland and schools enjoy a high degree of autonomy when it comes to designing their own curricula. The CfE does not prescribe input requirements or time allocations and explicitly expects schools to design their own curricula to best respond to students' needs. At the same time, the Scottish school system is characterised by strong policy leadership from the centre through a range of central guidance documents (e.g. a Headteachers' Charter), while also ensuring a strong role for local government (OECD, 2021, p. 34[3]).

As mentioned above, Scotland's 32 local authorities have the statutory responsibility to ensure adequate and efficient provision of school education in their area. Local authorities are democratically accountable for the performance and improvement of their schools and have the responsibility to take forward nationally agreed policies and guidelines, as well as to ensure that statutory requirements are met. Local authorities are also responsible for education funding and ensuring accountability around its spending. Based on national guidelines, co-produced by the Scottish Government and local government, each local authority has a Devolved School Management Scheme, which sets out their processes for school funding and accountability arrangements. Local authorities across Scotland have adopted different service structures but education is increasingly part of a larger department, which may include services such as leisure, culture, sports, the arts, community learning and social work.

School leaders are directly accountable to their local authority's Director of Education or Chief Education Officer and schools in Scotland are required to undertake an annual self-evaluation. The process is carried out in line with statutory guidance set out in Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000 (Scottish Government, 2017[17]). Education Scotland provides guidance on key principals for improvement planning and self-evaluation (Education Scotland, 2022[18]) including the *How good is our school?* resource which has drawn considerable international attention (Education Scotland, 2017[19]). School self-evaluation is

intended to be led by schools with support and/or challenge by local authorities and should be based on a collaborative process involving all stakeholders, including learners.

Data from PISA 2018 provides an insight into Scotland's school-level improvement practices in international comparison (see Table 2.2). In 2018, 99% of principals in Scotland reported that they systematically record data aimed at quality assurance and improvement (on matters such as attendance and professional development), compared to 92% on average across OECD countries. Furthermore, 67% of Scottish principals reported to regularly consult with experts on school improvement – significantly more than the OECD average (53%), but less than in Ireland (70%), Norway (80%) and Wales (United Kingdom) (92%) (OECD, 2020[8]).

The self-evaluation process in Scotland is complemented by external evaluations carried out by the Inspectorate. This is a common arrangement in many OECD countries. Norway was the only system among the peer learning countries that did not require schools to undergo external evaluations. While all peer learning countries required schools to engage in annual self-evaluations, the frequency of external evaluations varied. Compared with Wales and Ireland they took place less frequently in Scotland with some schools reporting not having had an inspection in 10 years.

## Scotland's school improvement system

School improvement support can be defined as multidimensional development efforts to support schools in their improvements – and ultimately in enhancing teaching and student outcomes. The school improvement support could consist of providing system guidance (e.g. guidance on how to implement a policy); evaluation and monitoring and advise for improvement (e.g. done by inspectorates and/or local authorities); the provision of support (e.g. follow-up support to external evaluations and targeted interventions for schools that are underperforming) and (other) capacity development (e.g. promoting the professional learning of school staff, including collaborative working and learning within and between schools); and the management and allocation of resources. These and other types of support can be provided by different actors, at different levels of the system (i.e. national-, regional-, local- and school levels).

Table 2.3 provides an overview of the main bodies responsible for the provision of school improvement support in Scotland and peer learning countries.

## Table 2.3. Bodies responsible for school improvement support

Overview of the bodies responsible for providing school improvement support at the national, regional and local levels in Scotland and peer countries

| Level | Scotland | Ireland | Norway | Wales |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| National | • Scottish Government<br>• Education Scotland<br>Supporting roles:<br>• Scottish Qualifications Authority<br>• General Teaching Council Scotland<br>• Skills Development Scotland | • Inspectorate<br>• Teaching Council<br>• National Council for Special Education<br>• National Council for Curriculum and Assessment | • Directorate for Education and Training<br>• Statped (National Service for Special Education Needs)<br>• Universities and Teacher Colleges<br>• Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS) | • Welsh Government<br>• Estyn (Welsh education and training inspectorate) |
| Regional | • Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs) | • Education and Training Boards (ETBs)<br>• Education Support Centres (ESCs) | • County Governors<br>• County administrations (ISCED 3)<br>• Universities and Teacher Colleges | • Regional consortia<br>• Universities |
| Local | • Local authorities<br>• School clusters | • School boards of management | • Municipalities and private school owners | • Local authorities |

Source: Country presentations shared during the international peer learning event.

### *Responsibilities at the national level*

*The Scottish Government sets national policy and priorities for school improvement*

Besides its responsibility of setting national education policy concerning the curriculum, qualifications, workforce and school buildings, the Scottish Government has a number of responsibilities related to school improvement support. Scottish Ministers have a statutory duty to review the National Improvement Framework (NIF) and publish an annual Improvement Plan (Scottish Government, 2022[20]). These policy documents set out the vision and priorities for Scottish education that have been agreed across the system and the related national level improvement activities to undertake. The NIF can also be used to inform improvement planning at the regional, local authority and school levels. In addition, the Scottish Government also collects national data, develops tools to support school improvement activities and sets the overall framework of national bodies to support school improvement (see below).

*Education Scotland is responsible for supporting improvement and ensuring quality in Scottish education*

Education Scotland is an Executive Agency of the Scottish Government that is responsible for supporting education quality and improvement and thereby securing better learning experiences and outcomes for Scottish learners of all ages. Since its establishment in 2011, Education Scotland has taken on a range of

functions related to educational quality and improvement, professional learning and leadership, and the curriculum. As part of its responsibilities, Education Scotland provides external support and advice to support local authorities' school improvement work. Local authorities hold annual discussions with Education Scotland's Senior Regional Advisor to agree on priorities and area of focus for school improvement efforts. An Attainment Advisor provides input in this process. These priorities can include professional learning, leadership training or follow-up support on implementation of school improvement plans.

Education Scotland is also home to Her Majesty's (HM) Inspectors of Education since it assumed the inspection and review functions formerly held by the independent Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIE). Inspectors (62 full-time equivalent staff) engage in inspections of a sample of about 240 schools every year across all Scottish education sectors. Inspectors provide quality assurance of learning and educational standards, gather evidence to advise ministers, and build capacity through the system by collaborating and sharing practices with practitioners. As part of the inspection process, they identify key strengths, indicate where improvement is needed and offer suggestions drawing on effective practices. Inspectors continue to engage with schools beyond the inspection visit to ensure that schools reach a satisfactory or better standard. Evidence collected through inspections plays an important role in informing the development and review of educational policy and practice in Scotland. Individual inspection reports and summaries of inspection findings are published on Education Scotland's website along with, if needed, recommendations for support by the school's local authority (OECD, 2021[3]).

Combining responsibilities for both the inspection and the improvement of schools in a single body – Education Scotland – was intended to ensure a strong link between quality assurance and educational improvement support (OECD, 2021[3]). This arrangement is not without precedent among OECD countries. In Ireland, for example, the inspectorate is a division of the Department of Education and Skills (DES) (Scottish Qualifications Authority, 2022[21]).

However, in Scotland there have been concerns that combining inspection and school improvement functions within the same body could create conflicts of interest and compromise the organisation's ability to perform both roles well (Scottish Government, 2022[4]). In part because of this issue, many OECD countries have chosen to make their education inspectorates more explicitly independent of government and separated from school improvement functions. These include Estyn in Wales (United Kingdom), Ofsted in England (United Kingdom) and the Education Inspectorate in the Netherlands, for example. In Norway, inspections are not carried out centrally but by county governors.

*The Scottish Government and Education Scotland have developed a range of digital services to support teaching and learning*

The quick pace of development of digital technologies raises new challenges for many, if not all professionals, and this is also true for those working in the field of education. One of the legacies of the COVID-19 pandemic is the renewed attention for digital technologies in education internationally (Hall et al., 2022[22]; Schleicher, 2022[23]; OECD, 2023[24]). Ministries and other national level agencies should have the capacity to support the creation (and maintenance) of digital learning infrastructures that are accessible to all in and outside of school, regardless of gender, socio-economic background, geographic location, disability, race or ethnicity (OECD and Education International, forthcoming[25]). Scotland is among the OECD systems that have invested in their digital learning infrastructure in recent years.

The Scottish Government and Education Scotland maintain a range of digital platforms and tools to support teaching and student learning, that provide good examples of school improvement support provided at the central level (see Box 2.1). An example is the National e-Learning Offer (NeLO). Education Scotland led the development of the NeLO, in partnership with the Scottish Government, Scotland's national e-learning service, the Association of Directors of Education (ADES) and the Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs) (Education Scotland, 2023[26]). NeLO was launched during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic and

provides a platform for educator-created teaching resources, including interactive online classes, recorded teaching resources, as well as assessments, practical experiments, and revision resources.

Education Scotland is also a member of the Scottish Wide Area Network (SWAN), a framework that delivers a shared network infrastructure across Scotland's public sector organisation. Education Scotland thereby engages in the joint procurement of connectivity and Information and communication technologies (ICT) infrastructure for schools (SWAN, 2023[27]). The peer learning event discussions on strengthening Scotland's school improvement support system suggested that education stakeholders were satisfied with the suite of digital teaching and learning resources currently available to schools.

### Box 2.1. Digital platforms and tools to support teaching and student learning in Scotland

*Glow, giving access to a safe digital environment*

Glow works as a national intranet for education. It provides learners and educators with access to a digital cloud-based environment through which they can communicate, create webpages, blogs, interactive reports and presentations, collaborate on shared documents, and take part in professional learning activities. Glow provides learners and educators with a single access to Microsoft 365 Suite, Google Workspace for Education and WordPress blogs packages.

Glow is provided by Education Scotland and funded by the Scottish Governments. Access is restricted to learners and educators and is provided through Local Authorities.

*DigiLearn for educators*

DigiLearn supports educators' use of digital technology. Through the provision of documents, guidelines, news information and professional learning webinars, it aims to improve educators' and learners' digital literacy skills and use of digital across the curriculum. Topics include cyber safety, the use of online tools and apps, and the design of digital games and activities. For example, in November 2023 it delivered around 20 hours of live professional learning sessions ranging from a session on accessibility of digital tools for special education needs learners, to an introduction to block-based coding using Scratch Junior or to the use of Microsoft Forms and Excel to gather, visualise and analyse data (Education Scotland, 2023[28]).

*National e-Learning Offer (NeLO)*

Scotland's National e-Learning Offer (NeLO) is designed to complement the delivery of teaching and learning by schools, local authorities and the Regional Improvement Co-operatives (RICs) (Education Scotland, 2023[26]). It was developed during the COVID-19 pandemic to support remote learning and continues to be used. The platform brings together live and recorded online classes, as well as learning and teaching resources (assessments, lessons, learning activities, revision resources and more) onto a single platform. It also provides access to BBC and Scholar materials.

Resources are community-generated, meaning that they are created by educators for educators to support the development of learning across the curriculum from early years to senior phase. While some resources are commissioned by local authorities and the RICs, others are shared by teachers who have developed them for their own classrooms. Educators can contribute via a *Suggestions* form on the platform and resources are then curated to be published on the platform.

NeLO is administered through a partnership between Education Scotland, Scottish Government, Scotland's national e-learning service, the Association of Directors of Education (ADES) and the RICs. Learners and educators have access to the resources through their Glow accounts (see below).

Source: Education Scotland (2023[26]), National e-Learning Offer, www.nelo.education.gov.scot/nelo/ (accessed on 20 November 2023); Education Scotland (2023[29]), Glow Digital Learning Scotland, www.glowconnect.org.uk (accessed on 20 November 2023); Education Scotland (2023[28]), Digilearn Scot Webinars, www.blogs.glowscotland.org.uk/glowblogs (accessed on 20 November 2023).

### *Responsibilities at the regional level*

In 2017, Scotland introduced a new layer of governance in education, establishing six Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs) across the country, which have assumed an important regional role in Scotland's school improvement support:

- The Northern Alliance RIC

- The West Partnership RIC

- The South East RIC

- The Forth Valley & West Lothian RIC

- The South West RIC

- The Tayside RIC[2].

The RICs were established to bring local authorities together alongside the central administration, and to collaborate more effectively for greater equity and quality in education. This followed an OECD recommendation made in 2015 to shift the system's centre of gravity towards schools and their local communities, including by fostering mutual support and learning across local authorities and networks of schools, and giving them a more prominent role as part of a "reinforced middle" (OECD, 2015[2]).

The RICs are not statutory bodies but a framework operating across and through local authorities. Each RIC is accountable to the elected leadership of its member authorities. At the time of writing, the RICs received public funding through a Scottish Government grant, which has amounted to around GBP 6 million per annum in recent financial years. Each of the six RICs is led by a Regional Improvement Lead who is appointed by a joint steering group made up of officials from both the Scottish Government and local authorities. The regional improvement lead is formally managed by the chief executive of the employing local authority while reporting to all collaborating local authorities and the HM Chief Inspector and Chief Executive of Education Scotland (OECD, 2021, p. 28[3]).

In addition, the RICs are supported by Education Scotland's six Regional Improvement Teams (RITs) and their Senior Regional Advisors. The RITs include staff in a diverse range of roles that contribute to providing professional advice and bespoke support to early learning and childcare and community learning establishments, schools, local authorities and RICs (Education Scotland, 2021[30]).

The primary focus of each RIC is to improve education outcomes through collaboration across local authorities. In addition to support for school leadership, learning and teaching in schools, their work can include support for well-being, protection and other related activities to more broadly support young people and staff. Each RIC establishes an annual regional plan, as well as a work programme aligned to the National Improvement Framework (Scottish Government, 2022[20]). Each workplan is developed in partnership across members and with advice from Education Scotland, based on an assessment of school priorities, local authority priorities, and regional evidence/shared identification of need, including consideration of national priorities.

The intention is for the RICs to provide a regional focus to school improvement activities and provide capacity for collaborative working between local authorities and partners. An external evaluation of the RICs was published in 2021 (Scottish Government, 2021[31]). Despite the relatively early stage of their development, local authorities valued the positive contributions of the RICs, including their efforts to foster collaboration, share good practices and jointly develop and implement policies and tools not only within,

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[2] Scotland's national policy for RICs was agreed between the Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) in 2017. Two of the six RICs (the Northern Alliance and Tayside) had already been in existence.

but also between regions (see Box 2.2). The active collaboration between the RICs stood out to the peer learning event participants as a strength to build on. We will return to this issue in Section 3.

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**Box 2.2. Collaborative Improvement in Scotland**

**Collaboration between Regional Improvement Collaboratives**

In 2017, Scotland introduced a new layer of educational governance and school improvement support by establishing six Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs) across the country to bring local authorities together alongside the central administration and collaborate more effectively for greater equity and quality in education. Since then, Scotland's six RICs have not only supported collaboration between the local authorities they represent, but also collaborated among each other in a number of areas. One example has been the topic of student attendance. The Forth Valley & West Lothian (FVWL) RIC had chosen student attendance as a priory area for its 2019-2022 Improvement Collaborative Plan and developed a number of resources, including a research library and self-evaluation toolkit, which it made available for local authorities in other RICs to use and adapt to their needs.

Another example for collaboration across RICs is the creation of dashboards as part of a Data Development Project jointly undertaken by the Northern Alliance and the South East Collaborative (SEIC, 2022[32]). Other areas of collaboration among RICs have included the joint development of resources for learners with additional support needs (by the FVWL, the West Partnership and Tayside), as well as the development of e-learning resources for students (Scottish Government, 2021[31]). This collaboration between RICs is clear strength to maintain and build on in the further strengthening of Scotland's multi-level school improvement system.

Source: Education Scotland (2023[33]), *Collaborative Improvement*, https://education.gov.scot/improvement/research/collaborative-improvement/ (accessed on 30 May 2023); Scottish Government (2021[31]), *Review of the Regional Improvement Collaboratives* https://www.gov.scot/publications/review-regional-improvement-collaboratives/pages/7/ (accessed on 30 May 2023); SEIC (2022), *SEIC Regional Improvement Plan 2022-23*, https://blogs.glowscotland.org.uk/glowblogs/public/seicollabportal/uploads/sites/9165/2022/08/25221547/SEIC-Plan-2022-23-FINAL.pdf (accessed on 24 July 2023).

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Other OECD countries have made similar efforts to strengthen "the regional dimension" of their school improvement support system, although their organisational arrangements vary. For example, Wales (United Kingdom) established four Regional Consortia in 2012 to help local authorities streamline their school improvement services and to reshape local school improvement functions. Unlike the RICs in Scotland, the Welsh Regional Consortia are statutory bodies. In 2014 the Welsh Government established its National Model for Regional Working that further clarified the consortia's core responsibilities and services (see Box 2.3). The model has helped promote improvements in the quality of services provided to schools by the Regional Consortia and signalled a deeper commitment to regional working (OECD, 2018[34]).

In Ireland, schools can seek the support of regional level school improvement services through the established regional network of Education Support Services. These regional-level statutory bodies (21 full-time and 9 part-time) aim to respond to the learning needs of teachers, school management and parents at the local, regional and national levels. The centres also organise after-school activities, learning support and training sessions and often provide spaces for teachers, parents, students and community groups to convene (OECD, 2023[35]).

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### Box 2.3. Regional Consortia in Wales (United Kingdom)

Wales (United Kingdom) established the Regional Consortia (RCs) in 2012 to help local authorities streamline their school improvement services and to reshape local school improvement functions. In 2014, the Welsh Government established the National Model for Regional Working that further clarified the consortia's core responsibilities and services. These include challenge and support strategies to improve teaching and learning in classrooms, the collection and use of data from local authorities and schools for monitoring school and student performance and progress, using that data for improvements, and delivery of the national system for categorising schools. The model has helped promote improvements in the quality of services the regional consortia provide to schools and signalled a deeper commitment to regional working. It emphasised a model of school improvement based on mutual support that was largely new across most of Wales.

Since the structure of school improvement support and professional learning in Wales is flexible at the regional and local levels, the regional consortia have adopted different models and approaches to the provision of school improvement support. Their capacity ranges from 2 to 60 staff, mostly drawing on head teachers and other practitioners to support school improvement, and Regional Consortia have also embedded elements of their school improvement support within their local authorities to different degrees.

Source: Wales' (United Kingdom) presentation at the international peer learning event; OECD (2018), *Developing Schools as Learning Organisations in Wales, Implementing Education Policies*, https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264307193-en (accessed on 1 September 2023).

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Norway has taken a different approach and (initially) emphasised strengthening school improvement support provided by municipalities, in collaboration with universities. In 2017 it introduced a new competence development model for schools, to provide municipalities and schools with greater freedom of action and to empower them to carry out systematic school improvement. An OECD review of the model in 2019 concluded however that there was scope for further strengthening the regional dimension of the model, with the county governors' network potentially playing an essential role in addressing the varying capacities among municipalities to fulfil their quality oversight responsibilities (OECD, 2019[36]).

### *Responsibilities at the local level*

Scotland's 32 local authorities have a statutory responsibility for the delivery of school education and for ensuring its quality and play a key role in the school improvement process. Local authorities, under the leadership of the Director of Education, work closely with their schools to set objectives on the basis of which schools develop and publish their annual improvement plan.

Each local authority also has a Quality Improvement (QI) team, which engages in ongoing discussions with schools and provides them with external support and advice throughout the year. QI teams help schools in the selection of appropriate measures to support their improvement, including professional learning, the collection and analysis of data, leadership development, and follow-up support in the implementation of school improvement plans. Local authorities also facilitate school-to-school support through peer networks, local subject groups or mentorship arrangements for school leaders.

The Directors of Education are organised in ADES), an independent professional network for leaders and managers in education and children's services. ADES works in partnership with local and national government, RICs, Education Scotland and other relevant agencies to inform and influence education policy in Scotland (ADES, 2023[37]). In response to the reported variable capacities of local authorities (OECD, 2015[2]), Education Scotland and ADES launched the Collaborative Improvement initiative in 2021.

This initiative brings together local authorities to intensively exchange practices and collaborate on shared school improvement priorities (see Box 2.4).

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**Box 2.4. The Collaborative Improvement initiative**

Scotland's Collaborative Improvement (CI) initiative aims to bring together local authorities to work on shared priorities and to exchange effective practices. The initiative was launched in 2021 by Education Scotland and the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES). Each month, a different local authority is selected to host a CI exercise. This process typically involves a CI team of eight to nine members (comprised of Education Scotland staff and volunteers from other local authorities) intensively working with the host authority for three days to support them in their school improvement process.

The hosting local authority proposes a topic of discussion as the focus of the CI exercise, drawing from its self-evaluation – which is further defined with Education Scotland staff. ADES then selects members for the core CI team from its pool of volunteers, based on their expertise and to ensure the diversity of participating local authorities. A fieldwork visit follows during which the core CI team works with and offers support to the host local authority. The CI also encourages the engagement of school leaders and practitioners. After the visit, the host local authority records the process in an evaluative summary, identifying strengths and areas that may require further focus. Progress reports on the identified action points are incorporated into the local authorities' regular improvement planning processes.

The CI initiative has been well received by the 32 local authorities, all of which have joined the programme. The CI support process is designed to benefit the host authority through direct support, while also serving as a professional learning experience for the participating volunteers, who can share the good practices they observed within their organisation or local authorities. Participating local authorities are encouraged to continue their collaboration beyond the visit, although this is not formally part of the CI programme. By October 2024, it is envisaged that all local authorities will have hosted a CI exercise. At the time of writing, the project's continuation beyond this point was still being discussed.

Source: Education Scotland (2023[33]), *Collaborative Improvement*, https://education.gov.scot/improvement/research/collaborative-improvement/ (accessed on 30 May 2023).

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In contrast to several other OECD systems where local authorities are responsible for the quality of education of their schools and bear responsibilities for school improvement, the work of local authorities in Scotland was not subject to regular external evaluation or guided by a quality framework that could guide their self-evaluations. In Norway, for example, municipalities are responsible for ensuring the quality of their schools and are, in turn, inspected by county governors (OECD, 2019[36]). In Wales this is done by Estyn, the education and training inspectorate for Wales (OECD, 2018[34]) (see Box 2.5).

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**Box 2.5. Evaluation of local authorities in Norway and Wales (United Kingdom)**

**Inspections of local authorities in Norway**

Municipalities in Norway are responsible for ensuring the quality in their schools and are, in turn, inspected by county governors. The inspections of municipalities are guided by themes from the national Education Act and a range of data is used to evaluate the performance of their schools, including data from national testing and exams as well as student surveys. Municipalities that persistently underperform are provided with follow-up services and support.

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**Inspections of local authorities in Wales**

In addition to school inspections, Estyn (i.e. the education and training inspectorate for Wales) carries out inspections of local authorities' education services based on the Education Act 1997. The inspections review how the authority is performing all functions relating to the provision of education for school-age persons and other students attending schools maintained by the authority. Inspections are based on a self-evaluation and guided by the Common Inspection Framework. The guidelines for inspectors provide a structure of the inspection reports as well as a framework covering three inspection areas:

1) **Outcomes**: Standards and progress overall; Standards and progress of specific groups; Well-being and attitudes to learning.

2) **Education Services**: Support for school improvement; Support for vulnerable learners; Other education support services.

3) **Leadership and management**: Quality and effectiveness of leaders and managers; Self-evaluation and improvement planning; Professional learning; Safeguarding arrangements; Use of resources.

Inspection areas 1 and 3 are covered in full, whereas the coverage of inspection area 2 can be adapted based on the circumstances of the local authority under inspection. Inspection reports are published and follow-up processes are arranged for local government education services that are 'causing significant concern'. Between 2016 and 2023, Estyn has on average carried out inspections five to six of the 22 local government education services each year (with fewer taking place in 2017/18 and 2020/21).

Sources: Countries' presentations at the international peer learning event; Estyn (2022[38]), *Guidance for inspectors - What we inspect: Local government education services for inspections from 2022*, https://www.estyn.gov.wales/system/files/2022-08/Guidance%20handbook%20for%20the%20inspection%20of%20LGES%202022.pdf.

# 3 Reflections from the international peer learning event

On 18-19 May 2023, the OECD and Scottish Government organised an international peer learning event to explore ways to clarify the roles and responsibilities for school improvement support of the central government, Education Scotland, Regional Improvement Collaboratives and local authorities within the Scottish education system. Ireland, Norway and Wales (United Kingdom) were invited to participate in the event, given the particular relevance of their school improvement systems for the Scottish context. Peer learning countries were encouraged to reflect on their own systems and to share their experiences with clarifying the roles and responsibilities of education bodies/agencies across different levels of the education system. The peer learning event was organised to inform the education and skills reform agenda of the Scottish Government (see Section 2), which envisages establishing several new national level education bodies in 2025. These as mentioned earlier include a new qualifications body (that will replace the Scottish Qualifications Authority) and an independent Inspectorate of Education. The separation of the Inspectorate of Education from Education Scotland will result in a new education agency (whose name is to be defined in due time). The planned changes of these national level agencies, as well as the momentum gained in strengthening of school improvement support in recent years (see below), provided an opportunity to revisit and explore ways to strengthen the multi-level school improvement support in Scotland.

This section captures and summarises the peer learning event discussions and stakeholders' reflections. It starts by presenting the key principles that were formulated by participants to guide the reform of the multi-level school improvement support system. This is followed by a presentation of stakeholders' reflections and views for enhancing and clarifying the roles and responsibilities among key bodies and agencies that are involved in the provision of school improvement support. The section concludes by proposing several policy measures, strategies and processes to enhance Scotland's multi-level school improvement support system.

## Key principles

Following the presentations by the representatives of these peer learning countries on their education systems (based on a structured presentation template that was prepared with the support of the OECD team), the peer learning event was given shape through a series of facilitated plenary and small group discussions (see Annex C).

Participants were asked to formulate the key principles that should guide the optimisation or – as several stakeholders referred to it – "recalibration" of roles and responsibilities in Scotland's system for multi-level school improvement support. For this, the Scottish and international participants were randomly divided into groups to jointly reflect on key principles and present their suggestions in a plenary session. Participants were asked to discuss and write down i) the key principles to guide the reform of multi-level school improvement support, and ii) suggestions for the distribution of roles and responsibilities between bodies at different levels of the system. The outcomes of the latter will be discussed in the following sub-section.

The group presentations and plenary discussion showed a high degree of consensus among stakeholders about the key principles that are to guide the reform of the multi-level school improvement support (see Figure 3.1). The text below presents these key principles.

**Figure 3.1. Word cloud for formulating the "key principles"**

recalibration
purpose
accountability
collaboration
trust
clarity
celebrating
curriculum
success
collective
student
efficiency
ownership
openness
honesty
relationships
coherence
multi-agency
subsidiarity
empowerment
compassion
shared
respect
governance
responsibility
professional
recognition
needs-based
excellence
transparency

Note: This word cloud was generated based on the flipcharts participants filled out in groups during the peer learning event, as well as the OECD team notes.

### *Support is user-focused and empowering*

Stakeholders acknowledged that the Scottish education system has undergone a period of significant change and adaption since the start of the implementation of the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) in 2010. This was followed by the establishment of Education Scotland in 2011, with responsibilities to support educational quality and improvement, bringing together functions held by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) and Learning and Teaching Scotland (LTS). In 2017, the establishment of the six Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs) across Scotland reshaped the landscape of school improvement support (see Section 2). The National Improvement Framework (Scottish Government, 2022[20]) and the Scottish Attainment Challenge (Scottish Government, 2022[39]) have sought to provide direction and shared goals for improvement efforts across the system. Since then, and partly as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, progress has been made in strengthening the school improvement support at the local and regional levels. This includes the trust that the RICs have gradually gained among local authorities (and other stakeholders) as adding value to their work and school improvement efforts (OECD, 2021[3]).

Despite these positive developments, many stakeholders expressed concerns. The high pace and volume of reforms and policy initiatives by central government were perceived to dilute efforts and challenge schools, as well as their local authorities, in their capacities to bring about sustainable improvements. Several stakeholders also highlighted the risk of reform fatigue since changing and sometimes competing demands on school leaders, teachers and other actors in the system had tied up capacity and diverted their attention from improving teaching and learning in their schools.

Furthermore, the peer learning event discussions, as well as the OECD teams interviews with other education stakeholders (see Annex B) pointed to concerns about the suboptimal co-ordination in the planning of school improvement and professional learning support among local authorities, the RICs and Education Scotland. This has contributed to duplication of efforts and some schools reporting confusion about who to go to for support.

The peer learning event discussions revealed a recognition of the positive developments for strengthening the school improvement support system of recent years, as well as the need to respond to these challenges and work towards further strengthening the system. This includes moving away from what has sometimes been perceived as a top down and politicised reform dynamic and instead place **a stronger emphasis on a bottom up and collaborative approach to policy making.** Stakeholders noted the need to ensure that school improvement and professional learning support responds to the needs of teachers and other practitioners – in other words, **support should be needs-based and empowering**. This calls for greater engagement with and what some stakeholders noted as "listening to the education profession" to identify their professional learning needs. The school self-evaluation and improvement planning process, as well as the use of research were noted as key to ensure that support is evidence-based and responds to the needs of the education profession and school improvement priorities.

This also calls for a **climate of trust and professional respect** in which teachers and other practitioners feel confident to be open and honest about their weaknesses and areas for improvement, want to engage in professional learning, and dare to experiment and innovate in their practice.

In line with international research evidence, stakeholders were also adamant that school improvement support and professional learning should be **focused on student learning and school improvement priorities** for it to be empowering and effective (Hallinger, 2016[40]; Mintrop, 2020[41]; OECD, 2016[42]). In recent years, student voice and agency have received growing attention among policy makers and educators in OECD countries (Beaudoin, 2013[43]; OECD, 2018[44]; OECD, 2020[45]; Jerome and Starkey, 2022[46]) – and this includes Scotland. Children's rights, embedded in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, are at the heart of CfE (Education Scotland, 2018[47]). It was therefore not surprising to hear stakeholders stress that **the learning needs of *all* students** should be central to the provision of school improvement support and to the Scottish approach to reforms more generally. This emphasis on **promoting equity and inclusion** echoed the key messages from the 2022 Muir Report (Scottish Government, 2022[4]).

Participants were also cognisant of the diversity of desirable outcomes and the danger of focusing on a narrow conception of students' outcomes or discrete metrics. Stakeholders stressed the importance of taking a **holistic view of student learning as defined by the CfE and its four capacities** (Section 2). The school improvement and professional learning support should therefore support schools in helping their students gain the broad range of knowledge, skills and attributes set out in the CfE.

### *Promoting collaboration at all levels of the system*

In recent years, there has been a significant increase in the collaboration between actors at all levels of the Scottish education system. This includes school-to-school collaboration and networking, which has shown to be effective in enhancing the capacity and reducing the isolation of schools. Collaboration can help schools transform into "learning organisations", to innovate in teaching and bring about sustainable improvements in student learning and well-being (Baars et al., 2014[48]; Hutchings et al., 2012[49]; Armstrong and Borwn, 2022[50]; Chapman and Muijs, 2013[51]; King Smith, Watkins and Han, 2020[52]; Jensen and Farmer, 2013[53]; Boeskens, Nusche and Yurita, 2020[54]). That said, as will be elaborated on below, stakeholders noted the need for further strengthening collaborative working and learning between schools.

Peer learning event participants considered the collaborations between the RICs as well as the ongoing collaboration and peer learning between local authorities as strengths to maintain and build on (see Box 2.4). Participants unanimously called for the school improvement support system to maintain and expand on these forms of collaboration.

Stakeholders also acknowledged the risk of focussing only on the schools and students under their immediate responsibilities while losing sight of those in other schools, local authorities or regions.

Participants agreed that all actors should work collectively for the benefit of all children and young people across Scotland. This includes identifying and sharing good practices to inspire and support all schools in their improvement efforts.

### *Coherence and subsidiarity in a system based on trust*

Stakeholders recognised that recalibrating the roles and responsibilities for school improvement support offers an opportunity to **work towards greater coherence** and to **avoid duplication of support** provided at different levels of the system. Some areas of school improvement, such as teachers' professional learning for example, are currently addressed by more than one body, and not always in a co-ordinated manner. Apart from the inefficient use of resources, the multiple offers and lack of clarity for schools on where to go for support has caused confusion among some school leaders, teachers and other recipients of support.

It is therefore essential that each part of the school improvement support system works together, avoiding overlaps or duplication by assigning clear roles and responsibilities and better co-ordination. Stakeholders agreed that decisions on "who does what" should be based on a **transparent and collective reflection on respective strengths of bodies** and **where they can add most value**. This does not necessarily mean that one body would be allocated responsibility for developing and implementing a specific type of support. The decision may be made, for example, to ask all RICs to collaborate in the design of a specific type of support and then offer these to the schools of their respective local authorities.

The **principle of subsidiarity** (where a central authority performs only those tasks that cannot be performed more locally) was recognised by the different stakeholder groups as vital for optimising Scotland's school improvement support system. The Scottish Government and Education Scotland noted their support for adopting the principle of subsidiarity. In practical terms this would entail recalibrating the roles and responsibilities for school improvement support between different bodies. This includes, for example, Education Scotland focusing its support on specific areas where it has a comparative advantage (see below).

The success of such a recalibration of roles and responsibilities for school improvement support also depends on the giving and receiving of **trust and respect** for the professionalism of the different bodies and individuals involved. Collaboration, professionalism, trust and smart accountability can positively reinforce each other (Cerna, 2014[55]). Peer learning event participants recognised that trust also requires a commitment among actors to self-evaluate their work and to be held to account.

How to build trust remains a difficult question, however. Trust does not just magically appear, but it takes time to develop and can break down easily (Borgonovi and Burns, 2015[56]; OECD, 2022[57]) as was also noted by several peer learning participants. Facilitating open communication, transparency and collaboration, and preventing the abuse of power can avoid breakdowns in trust. To build trust, respect in the education profession and education stakeholders in general is a first step, trust and competencies will follow over time (Cerna, 2014[55]). While several Scottish participants noted a positive trend in the building of trust among actors in recent years, they also noted this is an issue for further work. They however considered it essential for advancing the Scottish reform agenda and making sustainable improvements in teaching and student learning.

## Further strengthening the school improvement support system

Participants at the peer learning event agreed that the timing was right for optimising - or as several participants referred to it, "recalibrating", the roles and responsibilities for school improvement support provided by bodies and agencies at different levels of the system. The peer learning event and possible

follow up discussions and actions to be taken in 2023 and 2024 provide ample time to inform and initiate supporting work for the education and skills reform agenda of the Scottish Government that is to result in the establishment of several new national level education bodies in 2025.

Scottish and international participants provided their suggestions for further streamlining and optimising the multi-level school improvement support, and (to the extent possible) indicated what types of support may be provided at what level of the system, by:

- Education Scotland or the new national education agency to be established in 2025

- Regional Collaborative Improvements (RICs) and Education Scotland's regional teams at the regional level

- Local authorities.

Similar to the discussion on the key principles (see above), the OECD team found that participants shared remarkably common views in terms of how the school improvement support system could be optimised or recalibrated, though noting the importance of considering other implementation partners such as institutions in teacher education and professional learning, and their engagement with local authorities and schools for supporting improvement efforts. The text below summarises the outcomes of these discussions that showed a collaborative spirit and open-mindedness among education stakeholders. The discussion outcomes could serve as input for further discussions among education stakeholders in Scotland.

## *Schools*

The stakeholder event focused on reviewing the roles and responsibilities of the school improvement support offered to schools by national, regional, and local level bodies. Although the implications for students and schools were at the heart of the discussions, representatives from schools did not participate in the peer learning event. The Scottish Government and other stakeholders noted their commitment to engaging school leaders, teachers, students and possible other partners in follow up discussions for strengthening the Scottish multi-level school improvement system.

Nevertheless, participants recognised the important role of school leaders in realising school improvements, as well as in promoting school-to-school collaboration and networking. Although some examples of school-to-school collaborations and networking exist in Scotland (Armstrong and Brown, 2022[58]), the findings from the desk study and interviews with various education stakeholders suggested there was considerable scope for expanding and promoting these systematically across all local authorities. This finding was corroborated by the peer learning event discussions.

Scotland's school self-evaluation and improvement planning model presented in the resource *How good is our school?* (Education Scotland, 2017[19]) was raised as a clear strength to build on for strengthening the improvement support offered to schools. Participants in the peer learning event noted the potential for further utilising the school self-evaluation and improvement planning process (i.e. the identified strengths and areas for improvement) to inform and guide school improvement support at different levels of the system. As one participant noted, while school self-evaluations and improvement plans are used by local authorities to plan and resource school improvement support, these efforts could benefit from a more common and systematic approach across local authorities.

Participants were also adamant about the potential of using the school self-evaluation and improvement planning process to inform the provision of support at other levels of the systems. The OECD team agrees that the systematic analysis of the school self-evaluation data, and identified strengths and areas of improvement could be of great relevance for identifying common and/or emerging school improvement and professional development needs at the national level. Participants considered further strengthening this "bottom-up" approach to school improvement support planning essential to making it more responsive to the needs of schools and the education profession.

Participants noted the paper-based process of self-evaluation and improvement planning as a potential hurdle for this bottom-up approach, however. In response, several participants proposed the development of an online tool to capture these self-evaluation and improvement planning data – an approach adopted also by OECD member countries and jurisdictions such as Estonia, Romania and New South Wales (Australia) (OECD, 2023[59]; OECD, 2023[60]). Such an online self-evaluation and improvement planning tool that would feed into and/or be integrated in the (updated) Scottish local government's Education Management Information System (SEEMiS) and aggregates, analyses and presents these data (or a selection of these) in an easy-to-understand format (e.g. a dashboard). This could empower local authorities in the planning and resourcing of school improvement support – including by matching schools for collaborations and peer learning. Local authorities and the RICs are well-positioned to facilitate their schools' engagement in such collaborations and to ensure that these networks remain accessible and relevant to schools' needs.

For this bottom-up approach to the planning of school improvement support to work, it is essential that the RICs, Education Scotland and the Scottish Government are provided with access to (selected) data and information to facilitate them in the planning and resourcing of school improvement support. However, as was also noted by several peer learning event participants, such a measure should not unintentionally undermine the formative function of the school self-evaluation and improvement planning process. Instead, it should provide schools with an opportunity to critically reflect on what is working well and what is not in a trusting and open atmosphere. It should allow schools to be honest and learn from each other's successes and mistakes without fear of any sort of punishment (OECD, 2023[60]; OECD, 2013[61]). It would be advisable to decide on what self-evaluation and improvement planning data and information would be shared (and what not) and how they should be shared (i.e. aggregated or not).

### *Local authorities*

Scotland's 32 local authorities are responsible for the delivery of school education and ensuring its quality. Local authorities work closely with their schools to support self-evaluation activities, the development of annual school improvement plans and selection of appropriate improvement measures, including professional learning. Although the capacity of local authorities varies, stakeholders shared the view that local authorities have a unique insight into schools' strengths and challenges and the types of support they need. The proposed development of an online tool for self-evaluation and improvement planning has the potential to greatly facilitate their work, particularly if linked to or integrated in the SEEMiS. Such a tool could help local authorities validate self-evaluations and identify strengths and improvement priorities at the local level, in schools and in other parts of the system. It could also inform the planning of school improvement support, making it more responsive to the needs of schools and the teaching profession.

A recurring challenge raised by peer learning event participants was the lack of clarity over which body at which level of the system is responsible for providing schools with specific types of support. Overlapping responsibilities and limited co-ordination appeared particularly problematic in the field of professional learning, which is currently provided at the local, the regional and the national levels. This risks duplication and inefficiencies, and reportedly creates confusion among some teachers and school leaders about the types of support available and how to access them. Participants called for greater co-ordination and a strategic approach to the planning of school improvement support.

Although stakeholders valued the key role that local authorities play in school improvement support, they also recognised that some types of support are best provided at scale, with the RICs and/or a new national education agency taking the lead (in line with the subsidiary principle). Even so, local authorities would still be key in helping schools identify their strengths and challenges, in providing direct support, and/or in directing them to suitable support available elsewhere. As mentioned, this should include the promotion of

school-to-school collaboration, whose potential in supporting school improvement in Scotland could be further exploited.

Participants were also adamant about the importance of local authorities continuing to work collaboratively and supporting each other to strengthen their operations and provision of school improvement support. The potential of this inter-authority collaboration has been demonstrated by the Collaborative Improvement initiative, which was started in 2021 (see Box 2.4).

In addition, (as for the RICs and the new education agency) participants noted that local authorities would benefit from regular self-evaluations to facilitate double loop learning[3] and to ensure the continuous improvement of their own work (see below).

### *The regional level*

As described in Section 2, Scotland established six RICs in 2017 to facilitate the collaboration between local authorities for greater equity and quality in education. Over the past few years, and particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic, stakeholders appear to have increasingly come to appreciate the contribution that RICs are making to the Scottish school system (Scottish Government, 2021[31]). Despite the challenging circumstances of their initial creation and the relatively early stage of their development, local authorities valued the positive contributions that "their RICs" are making to the improvement efforts of their schools.

Participants in the peer learning event also noted that the RICs are uniquely positioned to facilitate communication and further collaboration among local authorities, while also serving as an interface between the local, regional and the national levels, including the Scottish Government, the new education agency and other (national) bodies. Across regions, the RICs seek advice, share good practices and jointly develop and implement policies and tools. Participants were adamant that such practices should be continued and extended where possible (see key principles). It should also be noted that investing in collaboration through the RICs does not exclude other forms of formal or informal networks to arise within the system and that should also be continued.

However, several participants at the peer learning event raised questions about Education Scotland's Regional Improvement Teams (RITs) in relation to the proposed subsidiarity principle of the multi-level school improvement support system. Participants also noted several challenges resulting from the lack of clarity in roles and responsibilities between the RICs and the RITs and the types of support offered by them, further adding to the confusion among some schools of where to go for support and risking duplication in efforts and policy coherence.

Representatives from the Scottish Government and Education Scotland stated their support for the subsidiarity principle. For Education Scotland this could mean focusing its support on areas where it has a comparative advantage. It was proposed that this would also entail a gradual refocusing of its regional support. Most participants seemed to agree that the RICs in turn would take on a more prominent role in the design and delivery of support at the regional level.

However, participants concurred that a clear commitment to the future of the RICs and their strengthened role in Scotland's school improvement support system would require investing in their organisational capacities. Currently, the RICs operate on an annual plan and budget and most of their staff are on secondment, which makes it difficult for them to engage in strategic planning and to attract and retain staff. Stakeholders at the local and regional levels strongly agreed that a multi-year work programme and

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[3] Double-loop learning entails the modification of goals or decision-making rules in the light of experience. The first loop uses the goals or decision-making rules, the second loop enables their modification, hence "double-loop". This type of learning can be useful in organisational learning since it can drive creativity and innovation, going beyond adapting to change to anticipating or being ahead of change (Argyris, 1991[79]).

supporting funding arrangements (e.g. a three-year budget) could significantly improve the RICs' organisational capacities. It could also reduce their reliance on seconded staff and allow them to offer more stable working conditions. To continue providing high-quality services and to take on a more prominent school improvement support role, the RICs may need additional resources and staffing.

The possible increase in the RICs' roles and responsibilities should be accompanied by corresponding accountability. There was a prevailing sense that the RICs were already "heavily governed", due to the annual reporting requirements that were considered administratively burdensome. The proposed multi-year work planning cycle could offer a means to revisit these reporting requirements.

In addition, participants learned at the peer learning event that the RICs have already adopted a peer review approach. The suggestion was made to take this horizontal approach to accountability forward on the basis of a self-evaluation framework, which the RICs have collaboratively created over the last year. This framework of indicators could add rigour, focus and coherence to the self and peer evaluation processes, as well as serving as the basis for external inspections by the Education Inspectorate (see below).

### *National level bodies*

The Scottish Government has announced its plans to develop a new education agency to replace Education Scotland, as well as a new public body to replace the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) (see Sections 1 and 2). As part of this transformation, the Inspectorate of Education would become independent and separated from the new education agency replacing Education Scotland. Given this new institutional arrangement, stakeholders at the peer learning event discussed the new education agency's roles and responsibilities for school improvement support and in relation to the support (to be) provided at regional and local levels.

Overall, the creation of an independent Education Inspectorate was welcomed by peer learning participants. Several participants reiterated the findings of the 2022 Muir report which warned that bringing together inspection and school improvement functions in the same body created potential conflicts of interest and compromised the organisation's ability to perform both roles well (Scottish Government, 2022[4]). Participants noted that assigning these functions to separate agencies could indeed resolve this issue.

Participants also suggested the new national education agency would seem particularly well placed to provide support in areas such as curriculum and assessment, digital solutions to enhance teaching and learning. In addition, several participants argued for developing a "one-stop-shop" that would consolidate the different types of support on offer and make them easily accessible to schools and local authorities, for example through a website. The development and maintenance of this website could be overseen by Education Scotland and from 2025 onwards the new national education agency. The proposed co-ordination and strategic planning effort could inform the development of such a website.

As for schools, local authorities and the RICs, the new national education agency should also be subject to regular self-evaluations and external evaluations to ensure the continuous improvement of its work (see below).

As noted above, Scotland would benefit from a strategic approach to the planning of school improvement support with all stakeholders involved. Building on the momentum gained, including through the international peer learning event, the Scottish Government could take a leading role in the organisation of this collective planning effort to 1) define what types of support are needed (drawing on aggregated school self-evaluation and improvement planning data and other information) and 2) who is best placed to design and/or offer the support (see below). It should consider establishing a specific body or steering committee that meets regularly to plan for and co-ordinate school improvement support and monitor progress. This

should include representatives of the local authorities, the RICs, the Education Inspectorate, tertiary education institutions, the education profession, students and other possible stakeholders.

### *Tertiary education institutions*

Following the examples of countries such as Norway, Wales (United Kingdom), Ireland, the Netherlands and Sweden (OECD, 2019[36]; OECD, 2018[34]; OECD, 2023[62]) and building on several of its own good practices (see Box 3.1), Scotland should consider giving universities a more explicit and prominent role in its school improvement support system. The international participants highlighted how universities can support teaching and learning through collaborative partnerships with schools. Such partnerships can benefit both parties. For example, tertiary education institutions can share their research, pedagogical expertise and innovative ideas with schools while schools can offer first-hand knowledge and insight into practitioners' needs for support and professional learning. This could inform teacher education and professional learning programmes and improve their overall quality and relevance (Boeskens, Nusche and Yurita, 2020[54]; OECD, 2016[42]; OECD, 2023[62]).

Several participants proposed that the RICs play a central role in building such partnerships between schools, local authorities and tertiary education institutions within and across regions. In addition, local authorities, the RICs and the national education agency should (continue to) engage with universities to benefit from their research expertise, including for undertaking evaluations of key policy initiatives and support programmes to examine their (cost-)effectiveness.

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**Box 3.1. Mobilising the capacity of tertiary education institutions for school improvement support – examples from Scotland, Norway, Wales (United Kingdom) and Ireland**

**Collaboration between a RIC and university to improve student attendance in Scotland**

The Scottish Forth Valley & West Lothian Regional Improvement Collaborative (RIC) has partnered with Strathclyde University to stabilise and improve attendance in schools. The Forth Valley & West Lothian RIC covers four local authorities: Clackmannanshire, Falkirk, Stirling and West Lothian. During the 2019-2022 period, the RIC's local authorities decided to focus on improving students' attendance. In response, the RIC established a steering group and a partnership with Strathclyde University, as well as with Birmingham City Council, which had experience in working with schools to stabilise and raise attendance.

In collaboration with Strathclyde University, the RIC created an Interactive Attendance Guide, which features a research library gathering and cataloguing evidence on attendance for practitioners, as well as an Attendance Self-evaluation Toolkit for schools and local authorities. The RIC also linked a seconded officer to each local authority to work with their schools on improving attendance. In March 2023, the RIC, in collaboration with Strathclyde University, organised a professional learning event for educators (the "Attendance Symposium"), which included a range of workshops on practical, data-informed strategies to address school attendance. The RIC also organised an Attendance Campaign in August 2023 to raise awareness on the importance of school attendance through radio adverts, bus advertising and social media. This work was shared and taken forward by the other RICs to support their local authorities and schools in enhancing student attendance.

**School-university collaborations for educational improvement in Norway**

Tertiary education institutions are central to supporting the improvement of schools in Norway. Many Norwegian municipalities collaborate with universities who develop professional learning opportunities for schools and in turn benefit from engaging with practitioners and linking theory with practice.

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Universities and teacher education colleges are the main providers of professional learning opportunities in Norway. Municipalities are autonomous in deciding which types of support their schools need for further improvement and many of them rely on their existing partnerships with local tertiary education institutions to provide schools with training tailored to their needs (see also Box 3.3).

**Delivery of initial teacher education programmes by partnerships of schools and tertiary education institutions in Wales**

Based on recommendations from a 2015 independent review, initial teacher education in Wales has been reformed to be delivered through strong partnerships between schools and HEIs (Furlong, 2015[63]). As part of the reforms, accreditation criteria for initial teacher education (ITE) programmes were updated to require an increased role for schools, a clearer role for universities, structured opportunities to link school and university learning, and the centrality of research. Schools and tertiary education institutions are meant to collaborate on the initial development and ongoing quality assurance of ITE programmes, as well as staff professional learning and international research.

As of 2023, seven such ITE partnerships had emerged across Wales, including the Cardiff Partnership around Cardiff Metropolitan University (Cardiff Metropolitan University, 2023[64]). The Cardiff Partnership's ITE programmes use a clinical practice model underpinned by principles of the Oxford Internship Scheme. The university is working with a set of Lead Partnership Schools / Lead Alliances on the governance of its postgraduate certificate in education (PGCE) Primary, PGCE Secondary and bachelor's in arts (Hons) Primary with Qualified Teacher Status programmes, including the programmes' design, evaluation, and ongoing development of their content, structure and pedagogical strategies. The Partnership schools also lead 15 training days as part of student teachers' clinical practice placements, which bring them in contact with expert practitioners. The participating schools can benefit from the Partnership to reinforce professional learning opportunities for their own staff, for example by identifying Research Champions who work with the university to develop student teachers' research projects aligned with their schools' priorities.

**Development of professional learning in response to local needs by the regional Laois Education Support Centre and a university in Ireland**

Education Support Centres (ESC) in Ireland support school improvement within their regions by delivering training programmes on behalf of the Department of Education and by developing professional learning opportunities responding to the needs of their local education communities. One example is the "Community of Belonging" project led by the Laois Education Support Centre (LESC) in the country's Eastern and Midland Region, which focuses on interculturalism and diversity (The Teaching Council and Laois Education Centre, 2021[65]). The project comprises a Professional Learning Community (PLC) and a wide range of cross-community collaborative projects involving schools, management bodies, parents' groups, community groups, advocacy groups, local County Councils, Arts Offices, immigrant groups, sports organisations and third level institutions.

In partnership with the local South East Technological University Carlow (SETU), LESC has developed a corresponding professional learning offer on interculturalism. This includes a Certificate in *Building Capacity in Intercultural Leadership* for schools. It draws on the university's expertise in assistive technologies, delivered training with a focus on interculturalism to hundreds of teachers, particularly in the area of translation technologies.

Source: Authors' elaboration based on the peer learning discussions; Forth Valley & West Lothian Regional Improvement Collaborative (2022), *Interactive Attendance Guide*, https://www.thinglink.com/scene/1623658654429347842 (accessed on 24 July 2023). Cardiff Metropolitan University (2023[64]), *Cardiff Partnership for ITE: Accredited Teacher Training,* https://www.cardiffmet.ac.uk/education/cardiff-partnership/Pages/default.aspx (accessed on 24 July 2023); The Teaching Council and Laois Education Centre (2021[65]) *BEACONS*

*Portlaoise: Building a Community of Belonging,* https://docplayer.net/206762177-Beacons-portlaoise-building-a-community-of-belonging.html (accessed on 24 July 2023).

## Policy options to support the realisation of the proposed multi-level school improvement support system

The text below offers policy options to support the realisation of the proposed multi-level school improvement support system. These could inform an action plan in support of the Scottish Government's reform agenda that includes the establishment of the mentioned new national education bodies in 2025.

### Invest in schools' capacity for effective self-evaluation and promoting bottom-up school improvement support planning

Stakeholders agreed that a strong culture of self-evaluation should play a central role in driving improvement at all levels and saw it as an important condition for subsidiarity, empowerment and trust in the system. They recognised the importance of effective self-evaluation to identify different actors' priorities, strengths and challenges, to increase schools' improvement capacity and to direct improvement support towards schools that need it most. For this, Scotland may build on its existing strengths and look towards the examples of countries and jurisdictions such as Ireland, Norway, the Netherlands, New South Wales (Australia) and Singapore (Van Twist et al., 2013[66]; Schleicher, 2018[67]; OECD, 2013[61]; OECD, 2023[59]) as it develops a more systematic approach to responding to schools improvement needs.

Since its introduction in 1996, Scotland's school self-evaluation and improvement model has been nationally and internationally recognised for its capacity to promote effective school self-evaluation. The process, laid out in the *How good is our school?* publication (Education Scotland, 2017[19]), is built on participatory stakeholder engagement and a holistic framework of 15 school quality indicators.[4] This resource has been developed to support learner participation in school self-evaluation. It offers guidance for school staff and partners to ensure that the culture and ethos of their school promotes and underpins effective learner participation.

The evidence suggests there are several ways for Scotland to further enhance the school self-evaluation and improvement process and to ensure that it effectively informs the school improvement support provided by local authorities, the RICs, Education Scotland and – from 2025 – the new national education agency.

First, an option to make the self-evaluation process more efficient could be moving it from a paper-based to an online format and linking or integrating it into the SEEMiS. This could facilitate the work of local authorities in validating the self-evaluations and identifying strengths and improvement priorities. In addition, such an innovation could help ease the administrative burden placed on school leadership teams, for example by allowing recurring information to be auto-filled and revisions to be made electronically. In general, participants considered that further strengthening the "bottom-up" self-evaluation approach could make school improvement planning more responsive to the needs of schools and the education profession.

The OECD team learned of ongoing efforts to update the SEEMiS system. Various stakeholders expressed concerns about the system not being "fit for purpose" and noted that strengthening the system should be a priority. Interviews and discussions at the peer learning event also revealed that stakeholders devoted

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[4] The development of the *How good is our school?* toolkit built on previous papers and initiatives developed by the Inspectorate's Management of Education Resources Unit (MERU), which was set up in the 1980s and later became the Audit Unit (Croxford, Grek and Shaik, 2009[78]).

considerable energy to the development of "dashboards" and "data sheets", seemingly responding – at least in part – to shortcomings of the SEEMiS. In addition, several stakeholders reported facing difficulties in accessing and sharing school-level data and information due to data protection rights. These issues would have to be resolved as soon as possible for the new school improvement support system to work effectively and thrive on the principles of collaboration and trust (see above).

Second, Scotland could explore digital approaches to update the *How good is our school?* framework. The Welsh online National Evaluation and Improvement Resource was mentioned as a source of inspiration for expanding and digitalising (parts of) the framework's toolkit. The Welsh resource includes various tools that schools can use for self-evaluation and improvement planning (see Box 3.2).

Third, as was also noted by several stakeholders, it would seem vital for the school self-evaluation and improvement planning process to support schools in realising the full breadth of the CfE and its four capacities, rather than narrowly focusing on cognitive outcomes and other more easily measured components of the curriculum. In order to "measure what we value" rather than evaluate "what we can measure," it is important that all stakeholders have a shared understanding of what is valued and expected. Importantly, the Scottish Government and education stakeholders have initiated a strand of work to explore the assessment of student outcomes across the full breadth of the CfE, including the assessment of socio-emotional skills (OECD, 2023[68]). This important work is expected to result in additional guidance and resources for supporting the learning towards and assessment across the CfE. It could allow for further expanding the suite of resources of Scotland's school self-evaluation model.

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### Box 3.2. Wales' National Evaluation and Improvement Resource (NEIR)

In 2022, the Welsh Government launched a National Evaluation and Improvement Resource (NEIR). The online national resource consists of various tools that schools can use to support their self-evaluation and improvement efforts. They include practical guidance on a range of approaches for school self-evaluation and improvement, evaluation prompts, interactive resources and training materials, case studies of good practices, and links to additional resources and other toolkits. The NEIR is aligned with other education initiatives and quality standards in Wales, including the Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership (PSTL), the Schools as Learning Organisations (SLO) approach, the National Professional Enquiry Project (NPEP), and the Curriculum for Wales.

Use of the NEIR is optional and the tools were designed to be adaptable to schools' context and needs. The national resource was envisioned as a simple and accessible menu with various support tools for schools to choose from (see Figure 3.2). NEIR can also support the work of practitioners, school clusters, and actors at the regional and national levels. At a practitioner level, the national resource can be used to support professional learning of teachers and school leaders since it provides a platform for collaboration and for sharing expertise.

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**Figure 3.2. Site map of Wales' national resource website**
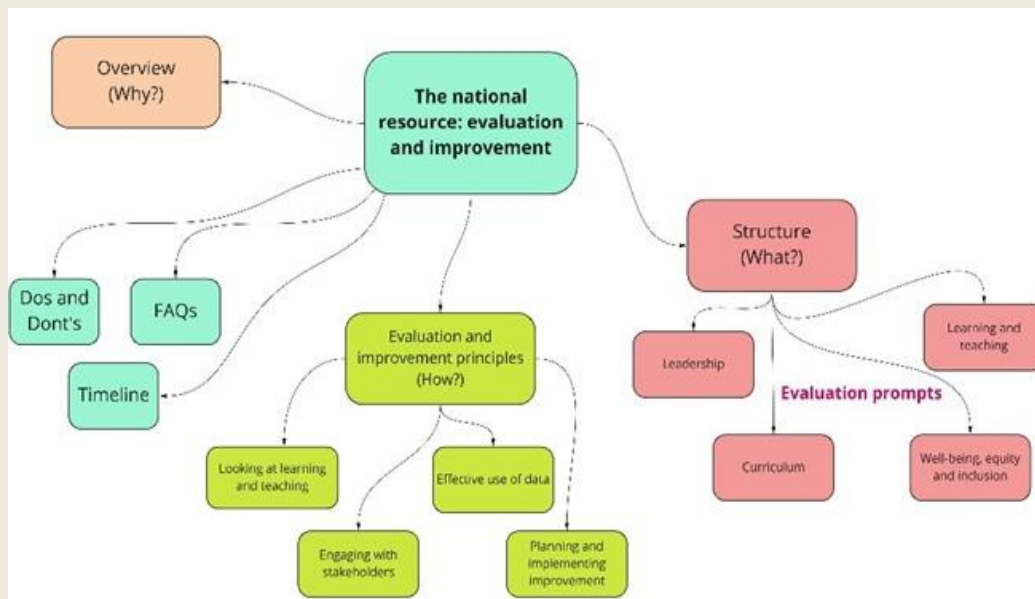


The NEIR was designed through a process of co-construction with education practitioners and was first piloted for a set of schools in late 2021 before its public launch in 2022. The NEIR is designed to evolve over time as it is enriched with new materials, case-studies and incorporates stakeholders' feedback. The NEIR is under regular review and feedback is collected an ongoing basis via the website to ensure that it remains relevant and effective in supporting school improvement.

Source: Welsh Government (2021[69]), *The national resource: Evaluation and improvement,* https://hwb.gov.wales/evaluation-improvement-and-accountability/the-national-resource-evaluation-and-improvement (accessed on 1 June 2023).

### *The need for greater policy coherence and clarifying "what is a good school" in the Scottish context*

In discussions with the OECD team, several school leaders, local authorities and other stakeholders referred to "competing interpretations" regarding the desired focus of school improvement efforts. Some reported being confused by different interpretations of school quality promoted through various policy documents, notably the 15 school quality indicators included in the "How good is our school?" framework, the National Improvement Framework (NIF) and Improvement Plan, and the Scottish Attainment Challenge (see Table 3.1). This points to a need for greater clarity and coherence in order to avoid undermining the effectiveness of the school self-evaluation process in informing the bottom-up planning of school improvement support.

The National Improvement Framework and Improvement Plan set out a vision for Scottish Education based on delivering Excellence and Equity (Scottish Government, 2023[70]). Its 2023 version identifies five priorities (while the 2022 NIF and Improvement Plan had four):

- Placing the human rights and needs of every child and young person at the centre of education

- Improvement in children and young people's health and well-being

- Closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged children and young people

- Improvement in skills and sustained, positive school-leaver destinations for all young people

- Improvement in attainment, particularly in literacy and numeracy.

To deliver this improvement six "drivers" were identified. The 2022 NIF included the driver "school improvement". This driver stated that "every school has a responsibility to evaluate how well it is doing against the National Improvement priorities and other performance measures. These are evaluated by the schools themselves, by the local authority and by HMI inspections" (Scottish Government, 2023[70]). As one stakeholder noted, it is not surprising that many schools have narrowed the focus of their self-evaluation and improvement efforts to only a limited number of quality indicators in response to the NIF priorities. This issue has been recognised amended in the 2023 NIF and Improvement Plan, however, that updated the six drivers for improvement (see Table 3.1).

That said, several stakeholders noted their concerns about how the NIF priorities may have also affected schools' and local authorities' efforts in implementing the CfE. They voiced their concerns about unintended consequences such as the "narrowing of the curriculum" with curriculum areas such as social studies, technologies and expressive arts receiving less attention in Scotland's' schools.

## Table 3.1. Key policy documents guiding school improvement efforts

| How good is our school? – framework of school quality indicators | National Improvement Framework (NIF) 2023 | Scottish Attainment Challenge - local stretch aims: 2022 to 2023 |
|---|---|---|
| Theme – Leadership and management <br> • 1.1 Self-evaluation for self-improvement <br> • 1.2 Leadership of learning <br> • 1.3 Leadership of change <br> • 1.4 Leadership and management of staff <br> • 1.5 Management of resources to promote equity | Five priorities: <br> • Placing the human rights and needs of every child and young person at the centre of education <br> • Improvement in children and young people's health and well-being <br> • Closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged children and young people <br> • Improvement in skills and sustained, positive school-leaver destinations for all young people <br> • Improvement in attainment, particularly in literacy and numeracy. | Core stretch aims: <br> • Achievement for Curriculum Excellence Levels (ACEL) - Primary school literacy <br> • ACEL - Primary school numeracy <br> • School leavers, 1 or more pass at SCQF 5 or better <br> • School leavers, 1 or more pass at SCQF 6 or better <br> • Annual Participation Measure (APM) |
| Theme - Learning provision: <br> • 2.1 Safeguarding and child protection <br> • 2.2 Curriculum <br> • 2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment <br> • 2.4 Personalised support <br> • 2.5 Family learning <br> • 2.6 Transitions <br> • 2.7 Partnerships | Six drivers of improvement: <br> • School and early learning childcare (ELC) Leadership <br> • Teacher and practitioner professionalism <br> • Parent/carer involvement and engagement <br> • Curriculum and assessment <br> • School and ELC improvement <br> • Performance information | Plus stretch aims: <br> • The "Plus" aims are to be determined by local authorities. |
| Theme - Success and achievements <br> • 3.1 Ensuring well-being, equality and inclusion <br> • 3.2 Raising attainment and achievement <br> • 3.3 Increasing creativity and employability | | |

Source: Scottish Government (2023[71]), *National Improvement Framework (NIF) and improvement plan 2023: summary,* www.gov.scot/publications/2023-national-improvement-framework-nif-improvement-plan-summary-document/ (accessed on 1 September 2023); Education Scotland (2017[19]), *How good is our school?,* https://education.gov.scot/media/2swjmnbs/frwk2_hgios4.pdf (accessed on 1 September 2023); Scottish Government (2022[39]), *Scottish Attainment Challenge – 2022 to 2023 – 2025 to 2026: fairer Scotland duty assessment,* www.gov.scot/publications/fairer-scotland-duty-assessment-scottish-attainment-challenge-2022-2023-2025-2026/ (accessed on 1 September 2023).

Several participants to the peer learning event and stakeholders that the OECD team interviewed also pointed to the stretch aims causing further confusion about school quality, or differently stated, the question "what is a good school in the Scottish context?". The Scottish Attainment Challenge Framework for Recovery and Accelerating Progress introduced a requirement for local authorities to set ambitious, achievable annual stretch aims for progress in overall attainment and towards closing the poverty-related attainment gap (Scottish Government, 2022[39]). The "core" stretch aims concern five outcome indicators and are to be embedded in local authority education service improvement plans (see Table 3.1). Local

authorities are expected to also include "plus" stretch aims that respond to their local context and own datasets (Scottish Government, 2022[39]).

In addition, (and not shown in the table above) the Headteachers' Charter for School Empowerment lays out the expectations for schools and school leaders that risk adding to the confusion. The charter calls for school leaders to lead learning communities and sets out expectations in terms of desired strategies, processes and behaviours in three key areas: 1) leading learning and teaching, 2) empowering the learning community and 3) making the best use of resources (Government of Scotland, 2022[72]). A review of the charter and comparison with the above-mentioned policy documents confirms what several school leaders, local authorities and other stakeholders referred to as "competing interpretations" of what they should focus their school improvement efforts on.

In sum, the interviews with key stakeholders (see Annex B) and the peer learning event discussions pointed to a need to ensure greater policy coherence and aligning of the expectations for schools and local authorities. This should start with a clarification of what is understood by school quality or "a good school", in the Scottish context, and what school improvement efforts should focus on. Failing to do so risks diluting efforts to strengthen the "bottom-up" school improvement planning and schools' efforts to improve teaching and learning and, ultimately, to undermine the realisation of the ambitions set out in the CfE.

### *Continue efforts to strengthen self-evaluation at all levels of the system*

The peer learning event revealed a clear commitment among local authorities, the RICs and Education Scotland to further strengthen their own self-evaluation processes and work towards embedding a continuous improvement culture in their organisations and in the Scottish education system at large. Representatives from ADES for example noted ongoing efforts to develop a framework of quality indicators and a process for the self-evaluation of local authorities that is based on a peer review approach. Participants were keen to see this initiative continued and (after trialling) having it rolled out across all local authorities. Its potential for promoting peer learning, for further strengthening operations and for providing improvement support for all schools in the country was seen as promising.

Similarly, as mentioned above, participants noted that the RICs had already started a similar peer review approach on the basis of a common quality framework to improve their functioning and the support they offer to schools and local authorities. Such a self-evaluation process that includes an assessment against the proposed multi-year (e.g. three-year) work programme would seem important for further strengthening the RICs and embedding a culture of continuous improvement within them and other parts of the system.

Representatives from Education Scotland also noted their commitment to a similar self-evaluation process as part of the development of the new national education agency, drawing on a more effective use of research, evaluation and data to inform a system-wide view of Scottish education.

Furthermore, recognising the need to ensure accountability for the use of public funds and other resources devoted to supporting schools in their improvements, some peer learning event participants suggested using local authorities' and RICs' self-evaluations as the basis for external inspections by the Education Inspectorate. This could contribute to ensuring a constructive, transparent and evidence-led process that promotes a culture of continuous improvement aligned with the vision of putting learners at the centre and incorporates the implications of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Scottish Government, 2022[4]).

Audit Scotland will continue to audit Education Scotland, and the to be established new national education agency and the independent Education Inspection, and the Scottish Government.

### *Reflections on the emphasis placed on and time and resources devoted to annual planning and review*

The peer learning event discussions and the OECD team's interviews with education stakeholders highlighted "the busyness" of the system. As mentioned, school leaders and other stakeholders expressed concerns about the many policy initiatives they are expected the engage with and that are believed to dilute efforts for making sustainable improvements in teaching and student learning. In addition, it was clear to the OECD team that stakeholders at different levels of the system devote considerable efforts to planning, reviewing and reporting – on an annual basis. For example, as discussed above, the RICs currently operate on the basis of an annual plan and budget, which is recognised as limiting their capacities.

Another example is provided by the local authorities that are expected to set and work towards realising annual stretch aims as part of the Scottish Attainment Challenge (Scottish Government, 2022[39]). Several stakeholders raised their concerns about the focus on achieving annual stretch aims(/targets). These concerns resonated with a similar discussion the OECD team had recently with education stakeholders in New South Wales (Australia) about the practice of setting and working towards similar yearly improvement targets for schools (OECD, 2023[59]). These stakeholders argued for seeing school improvement as an "improvement journey" that may take a few years before sustainable results are achieved. Research evidence indeed suggests schools may face an "implementation dip" in their improvement efforts (Fullan, 2001[73]; Borman et al., 2002[74]), which arguably complicates the practice of annual stretch aims.

In addition, Scottish Ministers have a statutory duty to review the National Improvement Framework (NIF) and publish an Improvement Plan on an annual basis. As part of the review, it provides education authorities, teachers, young people, and parents with the opportunity to express their views, and these have been taken into account in the drafting of the NIF and Improvement Plan (Scottish Government, 2023[71]). Several interviewees shared their concerns about the time and resources devoted to this annual review and planning process, noting that these are diluting efforts to bringing about the desired changes and improvements in schools. They also noted that this annual review process adds further risk of politicising the reform dynamic.

This highlights that there could be scope for a stronger emphasis on a medium-term planning cycle (e.g. three years) in the Scottish education system. Potential benefits include the ability to plan more strategically, to work towards a common vision and roadmap for realising the CfE, to increase operational efficiency, to ensure policy coherence, to reduce opportunity costs (due to annual planning, reviewing and reporting) and the risk of a politicised reform dynamic, among others.

*Sharing good practices and innovations, peer learning and collaborative working*

The OECD team's interviews with key education stakeholders and the following international peer learning event revealed a wealth of initiatives and promising practices that aim to support schools and other parts of the system in their improvement efforts. Stakeholders clearly valued the prospect of further sharing of knowledge, peer learning and collaboration to strengthen the school improvement support system in the years to come. Stakeholders repeatedly stressed that they valued a non-prescriptive approach to collaboration that is based on an open exchange about good and promising practices, as well as challenges and less successful practices.

As such, there was a clear call for the Scottish Government's education reform and the school improvement support system to continue to promote and "build in" opportunities for sharing knowledge and good practices, peer learning and collaborative working. This can be facilitated through various means including formal and informal networks, conferences or meetings on specific topics at the regional or national level, or though international peer learning events.

Furthermore, Scottish participants showed an interest in further building up the evidence base of "what works" (and what does not) in terms of the offered school improvement and professional learning support for improving student learning towards the ambitions of the CfE. The proposed more prominent role for Scotland's tertiary education institutions in its school improvement support system could support such a research-based approach to exploring and developing effective programmes and practices.

The OECD team learned of initial ideas for the Scottish Government's education reform including a strong emphasis on data analysis and research evidence. These ideas resonate well with the key messages coming out of the peer learning event discussions and indeed are most relevant for strengthening the school improvement system and ultimately for enhancing teaching and learning towards the CfE.

*Using data and research evidence to ensure support responds to teachers' and students' needs*

Stakeholders across the Scottish education system recognise the importance of evidence-based decision-making and value high-quality data for ensuring needs-based school improvement support. Scotland can build on its strengths to realise this objective, including the current practice of using the school self-evaluation and improvement planning process for informing the support to be provided at other levels of the systems. The proposed online school self-evaluation and improvement planning tool that would be linked to or integrated in the SEEMiS, could facilitate the systematic analysis of (selected) school self-evaluation data to identify strengths and areas of improvement. As mentioned earlier, participants considered that strengthening the "bottom-up" approach to the planning of school improvement support of great importance for making it more response to the needs of schools and the education profession.

Another strength to potentially build on are the National Standardised Assessments for Scotland (NSA). These adaptive tests generate rich diagnostic data on students' progress in literacy and numeracy in Primary Grades 1, 4 and 7 and Secondary Grade 3 (Scottish Government, 2023[75]). Teachers can use this information, along with evidence from a range of other sources, to identify strengths and areas for improvement to inform plans for next steps in learning. The Scottish Government has access to anonymised, national level data only. The OECD team learned there may be scope for further in-depth analysis of these data, as well as the data of international student assessments such as PISA, to identify the knowledge and skills students master and need further support on – and thereby their teachers. Such granular analysis could for example greatly inform the design and delivery of potential additional learning resources for students and the professional learning needs of teachers.

Furthermore, many OECD countries examine teachers' and school leaders' professional development needs through surveys and other means. While Scotland does assess teachers' development needs,

discussions at the peer learning event suggested that there is scope for strengthening the use of research for this purpose. In response also to Scotland's ambition for placing students at the centre of education (Scottish Government, 2022[4]), it may look towards the example of the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training which administers an annual Student Survey that lets students share their opinion about their learning and well-being in school. In addition, the Directorate also sets out an annual Teacher Survey that asks teachers to share their views on their students' learning and well-being at school, as well as on questions concerning the organisation of schools and their professional development (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2023[76]). These surveys have proven very helpful to schools, municipalities and the government in identifying strengths, but also areas for improvement, including areas for professional development of teachers (see Box 3.3).

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**Box 3.3. Gathering students' and teachers' views to (among others) inform professional learning – Example from Norway**

Norway's Pupil Survey is an online questionnaire that allow students to express their views on their learning environment and experience at school. The survey is conducted annually and it is compulsory for schools to distribute the survey to students in Year 7, Year 10 and the first year of upper secondary education. In addition, school can choose to administer the survey to students in Years 5, 6, 8 and 9. Students complete the survey voluntarily and approximately 460 000 students did so in 2022.

The 2023 Pupil Survey will be carried out in autumn and covers the following topics: well-being; motivation, working conditions and learning; home-school collaboration; support from teachers; assessment for learning; co-operation; rules at school; safe environment; and counselling. Although most questions are set in advance, there is room for schools to add some questions based on specific interest and needs.

Every year, the Pupil Survey results are published in a main report, which includes a deep dive into a selected focus theme (e.g. students' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021 or student's learning environment and the digital world in 2018). The main report sometimes includes analyses of results from the Parent and Teacher Surveys and is accompanied by additional thematic reports on issues such as bullying.

The Pupil Survey results are used for school improvement purposes at the school, municipal and national level, as well as for research. National authorities use the results to monitor municipalities' performance, send follow-up surveys and propose different forms of support. The survey results are not tied to sanctions and municipalities can decide on how to follow up on them. The results (aggregated at the school-, municipality-, county- or national levels) are publicly accessible alongside national test results as well as those from the parent and teacher surveys.

The Teacher Survey is also conducted annually but, contrary to the Student Survey, it is voluntary for schools and teachers. It includes questions about the organisation of schools, their professional development and their views on students' learning and well-being. The questions mirror the Student Survey, as a way to get a better picture and triangulate the results. The results are useful for identifying strengths and challenges at various levels, including for example areas where professional learning is needed. They are used by schools, school owners and government administrative bodies, as well as for research purposes. Other voluntary surveys include the Parents Survey and the Adult Education Survey.

*Source*: Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training (2023[76]), *The Pupil Survey*, https://www.udir.no/tall-og-forskning/brukerundersokelser/elevundersokelsen/. Accessed on 1 June 2023. Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training (2022[77]), *The Teacher Survey*, https://www.udir.no/tall-og-forskning/brukerundersokelser/larerundersokelsen/

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# Implementing Policies: supporting change in education

This document was prepared by the Implementing Education Policies team.

The OECDs work on *Implementing Policies: Supporting Effective Change in Education* offers peer learning and tailored support for countries and jurisdictions to help them achieve success in the implementation of their policies and reforms in school education. The tailored support consists of three complementary strands of work that target countries' and jurisdictions' needs: policy and implementation assessment, strategic advice and implementation seminars.

**For more information**

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# Annex A. The OECD team

**Professor Steve Davies**, OBE, has been a Professor of Practice at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David since 2021. Before that he served as the Director of Education of the Welsh Government, from 2015 to 2021. In this senior leadership position, he worked directly with the Minister for Education to develop and deliver the most significant reform since devolution of the education system (in 1997). In this position, Steve worked closely with the key representatives of the middle tier of the Welsh education system and led the collaborations with the OECD and the Atlantic Rim Collaboratory, which is a global education movement that advances equity, broad excellence, inclusion, well-being, democracy, sustainability, and human rights in education.

Prior to this, Steve worked in the public and private education sectors within the UK and internationally. Steve was appointed Managing Director of the Education Achievement Service for South-East Wales in March 2012 after a successful spell as Managing Director of Gleeds-Cocentra Ltd, an education company that worked with more than 5000 schools in the UK and internationally and 147 local authorities in England and Wales. Steve held Senior Leadership roles in four Local Authorities including senior school improvement roles in Cumbria and West Sussex and developed education delivery expertise through his work as Chief Inspector of Schools and Director of Education in two London Boroughs. Steve started his career as a teacher in secondary schools in Kent and Bristol. In 2022, Steve was awarded the Order of the British Empire (OBE) in The Queen's Birthday Honours.

**Luka Boeskens** is an Analyst in the OECD Directorate for Education and Skills, where he is currently working on the *Resourcing School Education for the Digital Age* project. Previously he contributed to the School Resources Review and the Teachers' Professional Learning Study. Since joining the OECD in 2015, he has worked on private education, school funding, the organisation of rural and urban school networks, as well as teacher's professional learning, career structures and working conditions. He has co-authored the School Resources Review's synthesis reports on *The Funding of School Education* (2017), school infrastructure (*Responsive School Systems*, 2018) and human resources (*Working and Learning Together: Rethinking Human Resource Policies for Schools*, 2019). Luka holds an MSc in Sociology and a BA in Philosophy, Politics and Economics from the University of Oxford.

**Inés Sanguino** is working with the Implementing Education Policies Team at the OECD Directorate for Education and Skills. Inés is co-ordinating and supporting several tailored policy implementation support projects, including for Flanders. She has previously worked with organisations such as What Works for Children in Social Care and Unlocked Graduates. Most of her work has been in research, collaborating with various projects at the Junior Researcher, King's College London and The University of Oxford where she also engaged in tutoring undergraduates. Inés completed a BSc in Psychology, and an MPhil in Evidence-Based Social Intervention and Policy Evaluation as a "La Caixa" Scholar.

**Solène Burtz** is working with the Implementing Education Policies at the OECD Directorate for Education and Skills. Solène is serving as a project manager and analyst for several tailored policy implementation support projects, including for Ireland, Latvia and Spain. Prior to joining the OECD, Solène worked at the French National Institute for Public Service (former ENA) in Paris on international governance projects and capacity building for high-level civil servants in Europe and Africa. She previously worked for the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, specialising in bilingual education in the United States. Solène holds a Master's in Education Policy and International Development from University College London (UCL) Institute of Education in the United Kingdom.

**Marco Kools** is a project manager and education analyst with the OECD Directorate for Education and Skills. He currently leads the Implementing Policies: Leading Education Change work that consists of a complex portfolio of implementation support/technical assistance projects, including in the Flemish Community of Belgium (Belgium), Ireland, Latvia, Moldova, New South Wales (Australia) and Spain. He has specialised in various areas of education policy, including effective policy design and implementation, assessment and evaluation, and the development of (schools as) learning organisations. Marco in September 2021 returned to OECD after a two-year secondment with UNICEF Lao PDR where he served as Education Manager of the Partnership for Strengthening the Education System of Lao PDR Project. Before that he worked at OECD with individual countries such as the Netherlands, Latvia, Sweden and Wales (United Kingdom) in support of their school improvement reforms. Between 2005 and 2012, Marco worked with UNICEF in the Solomon Islands, Lao PDR and at the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre in Italy. Before that he worked in the field of education in the Netherlands, where he in 1999 started his career as a secondary school teacher. Marco has written and co-ordinated several publications and academic articles. He holds several degrees, including a PhD in Public Administration and an MBA.

# Annex B. Agenda of the OECD fact-finding visit

| Monday, 15 May 2023 | |
|---|---|
| 9:00 – 10:30 | Interview with representatives from Scottish Government: Education Reform Division and National Improvement Framework Unit |
| 10:45 – 12:15 | Interview with representatives from Education Scotland: Executive Leadership, Inspectorate, Strategy, Professional Learning and Leadership |
| 12:30 – 14:00 | Working lunch: Scottish Government & Education Scotland |
| 14:00 – 15:30 | Interview with representatives from Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES) |
| **Tuesday, 16 May 2023** | |
| 10:00 – 12:30 | Focus group interviews with the Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RIC), including representatives from:<br>• Northern Alliance RIC<br>• West Partnership RIC<br>• South East RIC<br>• Forth Valley & West Lothian RIC<br>• South West RIC<br>• Tayside RIC |
| 13:45 – 15:15 | Interview with Education Scotland: Intensive Support |
| 15:30 – 17:00 | Online focus group interviews with head teachers |
| **Wednesday, 17 May 2023** | |
| 10:00 – 12:00 | Interview with representatives from the West Lothian Council local authority |
| 13:30 – 15:00 | Interview with representatives from ADES & Education Scotland: Collaborative improvement |
| **Thursday, 18 May 2023** | International Peer learning Event: Day 1 |
| **Friday, 19 May 2023** | International Peer learning Event: Day 2 |

Note: The OECD team conducted an additional interview with representatives of the Scottish Government's teams working on education and digital services after the fact-finding visit.

# Annex C. Peer learning event: country experts and agenda

To help advance Scotland's education reform agenda, the Scottish Government asked the OECD to co-facilitate an international peer learning event to discuss and explore ways and approaches to clarify the roles and responsibilities for school improvement support of the central government, Education Scotland, Regional Improvement Collaboratives and local authorities within the Scottish education system.

The event took place on 18-19th May 2023 in Edinburgh and brought together international experts from Ireland, Norway and Wales (United Kingdom) as well as stakeholders from all levels of the Scottish education system in order to collectively reflect on how the Scottish school improvement system could be further enhanced and to compare and contrast its approach with international practices.

## *International experts*

Ireland

- Tomas Ó Ruairc, Department of Education, Reform, Evaluation, Policy, Statistics, International

- Dalton Tattan, Department of Education, Curriculum, Assessment and Teacher Education Policy

- Yvonne Keating, Inspectorate

Norway

- Siv Lien, Head of department, County Governor of Oslo Viken

- Kirsti Aandstad Hettasch, Head of Department for Schools, Lillestrøm Municipality

- Lisa Mari Lorentzen, Principal at Vigernes Primary School, Lillestrøm Municipality

- Anne-Berit Kavli, Senior Advisor, Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training

Wales (United Kingdom)

- Georgina Haarhoff. Deputy Director for Curriculum, Assessment, and School Improvement, Welsh Government

- Kevin Palmer, Deputy Director for Pedagogy, Leadership and Professional learning, Welsh Government

## *Agenda*

| Thursday,18 May 2023 | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Time** | **Agenda item** | **Presenters / Format** |
| 8.45-9.00 | Welcoming and introduction | • Government of Scotland & OECD |
| 9.00-10.30 | Country presentations and Q&A<br><br>• To present the context of the participating countries (answering predefined questions) to jointly help the DoE Scotland to consider policy options. | • 20-25 min presentation + 20 min Q&A per country/jurisdiction. Presentations are based on a common template, including information on key questions predefined by the DoE Scotland.<br><br>• Ireland<br><br>• Norway |
| 10.30-10.45 | **Coffee break** | |
| 10.45-12.15 | Country presentations and Q&A (continued) | • Wales (United Kingdom)<br><br>• Scotland |
| 12.15-13:00 | **Lunch break** | |
| 13.00-15.00 | Plenary discussion on key question 1 | • How do we ensure that support for school improvement is always user-focused, based on the best and latest data and evidence and secures the largest possible improvement in learner outcomes? |
| 15.00-15.20 | **Coffee break** | |
| 15.20-16.45 | Plenary discussion on key question 2 | • Are there general principles, or good practices, about what types or categories of support should be provided by organisations at different levels of the system (from national, regional to local levels)? |
| 16.45-17.00 | Closing day 1 | • Government of Scotland & OECD |
| **Friday 19 May** | | |
| 8.45-10.45 | Plenary discussion on key question 3 | • How does an empowered education system that is non-directive avoid duplication in school improvement efforts by schools and support provided by local authorities, regional improvement collaboratives and the national level? And the potential confusion in terms of what type of school improvement support is available and where it can be accessed? |
| 10.45-11.15 | **Coffee break** | |
| 11.15-12.00 | Reflections by DoE Scotland | • Policy options and next steps |
| 12.00-12.15 | Closing day 2 | • Government of Scotland & OECD |

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