3 Building on a strong co-construction process

This chapter analyses the implications of Wales' commitment not only to engage stakeholders in policy making, but also to co-construct the new Curriculum for Wales. Co-construction can help stakeholders get deeply involved in educational change, seeing the new curriculum as a common endeavour to enhance education in Wales. Paired with strategic leadership and support from the Welsh Government, co-construction can contribute to building trust and collaboration between education stakeholders, crucial for the long-term sustainability of the new curriculum. For the next stages, there is a need to review and provide more clarity in roles and responsibilities between the various stakeholders involved in the process, as well as in the support that the Welsh Government and the middle tier can bring to help schools as they put the new curriculum into practice.

Why co-constructing the curriculum?

The drive for co-constructing policies has become characteristic of the Welsh Government's approach to reform. In recent years, the Government attempted to co-construct a number of its education policies in collaboration with key stakeholders, whereas Welsh policy making has in the past followed a more top-down approach (OECD, 2014[1]). Maintaining stakeholder engagement facilitates ownership of the vision and trust in the process, which are key for design, implementation and eventually for the sustainability of policies in the medium and long term (Viennet and Pont, 2017[2]). Stakeholders see their involvement being valued in the policy process, they are more likely to co-operate to shape the policy, to offer constructive criticism, and to contribute to making the policy happen. As stakeholders engage with the policy, they can also help adjust its design to their context, building on their knowledge and experience.

Wales' reform journey has engaged education stakeholders throughout the process, in consultations, in shaping the design of the curriculum, in piloting assessment approaches, and in preparing the terrain for the curriculum to be implemented. The next stage to realise the curriculum across all schools in Wales will require some revisions of the roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders. The country successfully embedded co-construction across the system as a principle of curriculum development and education policy making in general. Stakeholders across the board see the curriculum reform as a shared endeavour, with a considerable number of them strongly committed to making the reform happen.

The next steps for Wales in terms of co-construction and stakeholder engagement are vital if Wales wants to successfully realise the Curriculum for Wales across the country. This will require clarifying the different player's roles and responsibilities in relation to each other, as collaboration will be key to make this curriculum reach its potential. It will also require fully engaging all those who may be waiting to see what are the next steps. The Education Directorate and system leaders have a central part to play, helping all stakeholders build confidence and do their part to change a system while making sure efforts are co-ordinated. If this is not achieved, the risk is that the Curriculum for Wales remains limited to schools which have already been engaged, but does not reach all schools.

An overview of the roles and responsibilities in the Curriculum for Wales

Table 3.1 summarises the roles of the key stakeholders in the development and implementation of the new curriculum.

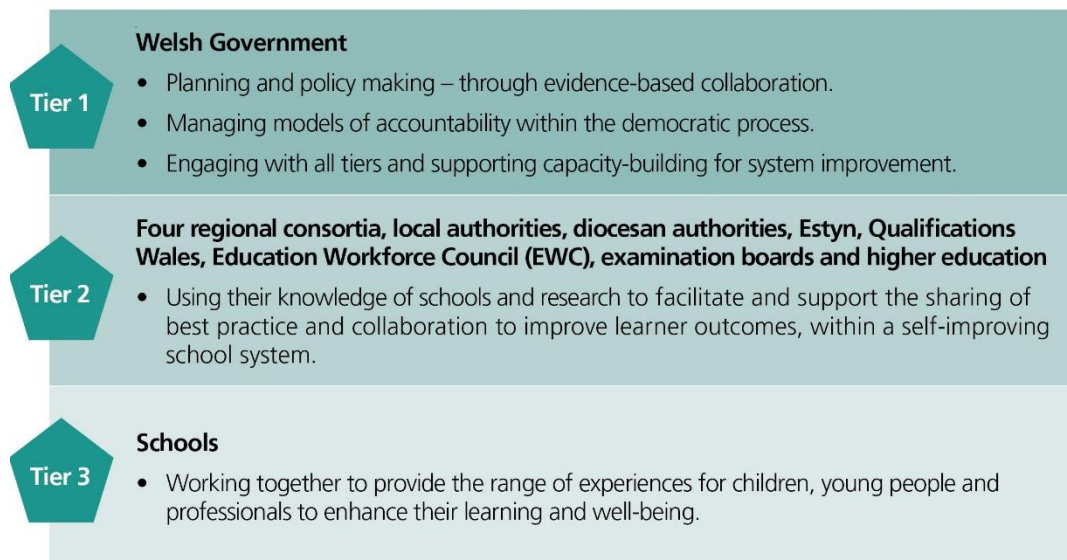### Table 3.1. Key stakeholders in Wales' curriculum reform

Stakeholder group	Characteristics and roles regarding the new curriculum
Welsh Government's Education Directorate	Highest-level planner and policy maker responsible for administering pre-school and school education.
Regional consortia	Four regional consortia established in 2012 to help local authorities streamline their school improvement services to improve quality and consistency across Wales. Key role to play in helping schools take ownership of and realise the new curriculum, and in ensuring coherence across schools.
Local authorities	22 local authorities responsible for direct allocations of funding to publicly funded schools and for supporting vulnerable students. Members and drivers of the regional consortia, they are just as essential to help schools design local curricula and guarantee balance between local relevance and coherence across schools.

Stakeholder group	Characteristics and roles regarding the new curriculum
Estyn	Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales, responsible for inspecting the education system. Main role is to help transition from a high-stakes accountability system to a learning system where accountability practices are based on trust among capable and learning professionals.
Qualifications Wales	Independent regulator of qualifications in Wales (2015), aims to ensure that qualifications and qualifications system are effective and hold public confidence. Leads on the design of new qualifications so they are coherent with the new curriculum.
Education Workforce Council (EWC)	Independent regulatory body (2014) for teachers in public schools and further education institutions responsible for safeguarding the interests of learners, parents and the public; improving and maintaining confidence in the education workforce.
Teacher, head teacher and support staff unions	Independent unions and professional associations for teachers, head teachers and support staff are social partners of the Welsh Government representing their professional member base.
Higher education institutions	The eight Welsh universities take part in the development of the curriculum and in the implementation of recent teacher policy reforms, including the new professional standards, initial teacher education and professional learning. Some are investigating the curriculum reform's process, quality and expected effects.
National Academy for Educational Leadership (NAEL)	Independent organisation established by the Welsh Government (2018) promoting a whole-of-system approach to leadership. Frames Wales' vision for educational leadership and endorses training for leaders.
School governors	School governors are elected members of a school governing board that has a central role in decisions about budgets and recruitment of the school. Members consist of teaching staff, parents, councillors and community representatives.
Teachers	25 802 qualified teachers in service in 2019, expected to teach and to participate in school curriculum design.
School leaders	3 656 school leaders (head teachers, deputies and assistants) among the qualified teachers, expected to lead teachers' collaborative effort to design and realise the new curriculum in their schools.
Support staff	27 101 support staff including 14 979 high-level teaching assistants, special needs and administration staff.
Parents	Parents are involved with the curriculum reform via the national consultation and information sessions at some schools. Their participation is central.
Students	468 000 students in 1 494 maintained schools in Wales (2019). Students are involved in the curriculum reform via focus groups in national consultations, working groups and at their own schools.

Source: Based on qualitative information collected by the OECD team and on Welsh Government school census (2019[3]).

As for any policy, these roles evolve throughout the policy process from design through to implementation. The Welsh education system is organised in three tiers (shown in Figure 3.1). The schools' tier (tier 3) is responsible for making the curriculum happen in classrooms, while the Welsh Government co-ordinates and provides support from tier 1. The middle tier (tier 2) consists of a number of actors with various key responsibilities in the education system. EWC and Qualifications Wales are regulators, while other actors play essential roles in supporting schools and collaborating with each other. It is crucial to engage this middle tier when reforming a school system, as this level has high capacity to lead reforms forward (OECD, 2015[4]; Hargreaves and Shirley, 2019[5]).

Figure 3.1. Wales' three-tier model in education policy

Tier 1

Welsh Government
- Planning and policy making – through evidence-based collaboration.
- Managing models of accountability within the democratic process.
- Engaging with all tiers and supporting capacity-building for system improvement.

Tier 2

Four regional consortia, local authorities, diocesan authorities, Estyn, Qualifications Wales, Education Workforce Council (EWC), examination boards and higher education
- Using their knowledge of schools and research to facilitate and support the sharing of best practice and collaboration to improve learner outcomes, within a self-improving school system.

Tier 3

Schools
- Working together to provide the range of experiences for children, young people and professionals to enhance their learning and well-being.

Source: Welsh Government (2017[6]), *Education in Wales: Our National Mission*, http://gov.wales/docs/dcells/publications/170926-education-in-wales-en.pdf.

Under the new curriculum framework, teachers and school leaders are expected to become curriculum designers, which implies a number of additional tasks. These tasks require teachers to take the time to work collectively on elaborating their school's curriculum, and on rethinking the functioning of their schools accordingly. Teacher collaboration around pedagogical content, methods and tools is particularly essential in the absence of curricular prescription and with the view to provide fulfilling learning experiences. The leadership role of head teachers becomes prominent, for senior leadership is essential to help teachers get the time and the resources to collaborate (Chapman, Wright and Pascoe, 2018[7]; Cheung and Yuen, 2017[8]; Hamilton et al., 2013[9]; Simmons and MacLean, 2018[10]; Desimone, 2002[11]). Reporting on their experience testing the new curriculum, Innovation schools emphasised school leaders' ability to facilitate collaboration was essential to the implementation process (Wavehill, 2019[12]).

The principle of a curriculum designed locally also suggests that schools should engage with students, parents, local actors and other schools as they define their own school curriculum, although specific guidance on how to implement this principle has yet to be developed. In this area, the role of schools' governing boards will be crucial. Some schools in Wales already have strong relationships with their local community and with the other schools within their cluster, and some have involved students in reflections around the new curriculum (OECD visits and (Wavehill, 2019[13])). However, collaboration with these actors needs to become more systematic as the new curriculum is implemented, to guarantee some coherence locally and nationally. In New Zealand, for instance, the Ministry of Education emphasises seeking inputs from students, parents and local actors as a high-impact practice for local curriculum design. As a result, educators are expected to work together with parents and the community to design a curriculum relevant to their own local context (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2019[14]).

Key actors of the middle tier are also expected to evolve in their role in response to the new curriculum. Estyn, for one, continues to play an essential role as the Inspectorate, however the new curriculum implies a change in the shape and focus of inspections. The Inspectorate is responsible for informing the public and the

government about the quality of the education provided by schools, their contribution to students' health and well-being, as well as their performance and the quality of their management. Estyn was already revising its inspection framework in 2018-19, but further adaptations will be needed including in inspection practices, analysis and diffusion once the national curriculum framework is settled (Donaldson, 2018[15]).

Local authorities and regional school improvement partnerships ("regional consortia") also have a major role to play, including to support all schools in developing and implementing the curriculum in a manner that guarantees high quality local curricula are designed by all schools in their jurisdictions and that pupils in their jurisdictions have a high-quality curriculum experience. The 22 local authorities in Wales are responsible for direct allocations of funding to publicly funded schools and for supporting vulnerable students. The local authorities work closely with the governing bodies of education institutions, and lead the four regional consortia, established in 2012 to help streamline local school improvement services among other purposes. It was reported to the OECD that the four regional consortia undertake a range of activities in support of curriculum realisation. Some initiatives are nationally common, such as the development and delivery of the Professional Learning Programme supporting schools to realise the new curriculum or the common role of the Challenge Adviser in supporting schools. Other initiatives are regionally distinctive, such as the way regions work with their networks and clusters of schools in relation to the Schools as Learning Organisations model (SLO) or the development of critical enquiry (OECD interviews).

Higher education institutions also have a role to play in both adapting initial teacher education, advising on most appropriate professional learning offers for teachers, and generally in monitoring the developments of the new curriculum through research. Wales' universities have been involved with the reform of initial teacher education (2018) and the development of enquiry-based teaching with some practitioners. Some investigations have been carried out around the new curriculum (Newton, Power and Taylor, 2019[16]), and discussions with the Welsh Government around a national strategy for educational research have taken place. However, interviews led by the OECD team with key stakeholders pointed out that Welsh universities could contribute even more fruitfully to curriculum implementation by collaborating on a common effort to support implementation based on evidence and scholarship.

Actions by other middle-tier organisations play a determinant role in the near future of the curriculum. Qualification Wales is leading a consultation on the future of Welsh certifications including GCSEs. The shape of these qualifications and examination modalities will affect implementation of the new curriculum at secondary level (see Chapter 3).Specifically, the OECD team observed that a number of practitioners in secondary education were holding off engaging too much with the new curriculum until they had a more precise idea what the new qualifications would consist of. Qualifications Wales was conducting a multiple-year consultation on the topic at the time this report was written. Given the weight that qualifications hold in evaluation and accountability, and until they are known, there is some work to be done on reassuring all stakeholders on the fact that qualifications can hold both validity and reliability, and reflect the philosophy promoted by the new curriculum. Schools have until 2022 to get ready to implement the new curriculum from Year 7 onwards. As the new qualifications are only expected to be enacted starting in September 2025, this leaves time to discuss them further.

As the planner and co-ordinator of education policy committed to co-construction, the Welsh Government has to maintain a challenging equilibrium between providing the necessary guidance for all other stakeholders to act in a co-ordinated manner, and leaving enough space for them to take ownership of the new curriculum. The government should be acknowledged for the energy, the resilience, and the structure it has fuelled in leading the Welsh reform journey. The involvement of the Welsh Minister for Education, of every deputy director and their team is commendable. As the curriculum moves toward national implementation, the Welsh Government needs to maintain its role as a supporting leader. This requires continuing to trust stakeholders with their responsibilities and co-constructing the process throughout implementation, while providing them with guidance and support when needed. Specifically, schools and the middle tier will need clarity and support to act coherently with each other. This also means guaranteeing that this guidance, and especially the national curriculum framework, evolves with the needs of schools as more start implementing the curriculum.

Observations and issues in co-construction

Responsibilities to facilitate collaboration

Collaboration has been a key aspect of the Welsh education reform journey (OECD, 2017[17]). Constant engagement and participation in co-construction activities, involvement of representatives of key stakeholders in working groups and monitoring boards at national level, have consolidated a systematic dialogue. Schools, school leaders and others are participating in many of these activities. The progress of the Schools as Learning Organisations model (SLO), a policy actively implemented in 2018, is also a sign of the growing culture of collaboration within and between schools, especially at primary level (Stoll and Kools, 2017[18]; Sinnema and Stoll, 2020[19]). Figure 3.2 displays all SLO dimensions, of which two give an indication of how much staff perceive they are learning as a team and collaborating with other staff, and with the external environment and wider system (OECD, 2018[20]).

Figure 3.2. Dimensions of schools as learning organisations in Wales, 2018

Average score per SLO dimension, by education level
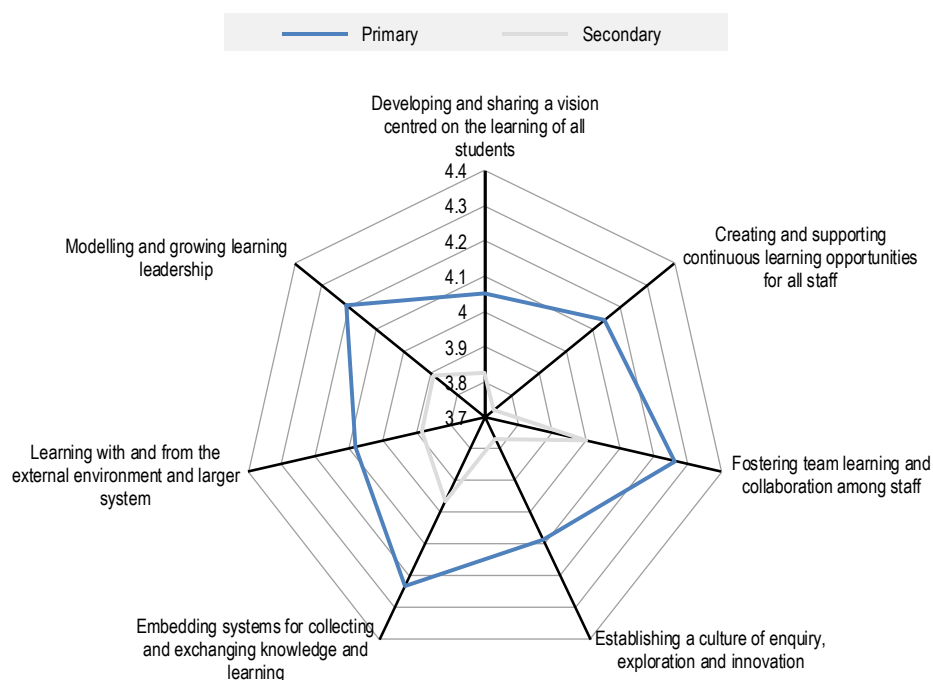
Note: Survey data are analysed at the school level. The SLO survey items were generated in the form of a five-point Likert scale: 1) strongly disagree; 2) disagree; 3) neutral; 4) agree; and 5) strongly agree. An average school score of 4 or more across the survey items that make up one dimension was defined as the threshold for when a school is considered to have put the dimension into practice. N is 151 for primary schools and 23 for secondary schools so 15% of schools in the sample are secondary schools. This is slightly above the national share (13%).
Source: *OECD Schools as Learning Organisations* Survey, 2017.

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The importance of these dimensions for curriculum implementation are highlighted in recent work by Sinnema and Stoll (2020[19]). The authors outline four interrelated challenges linked to curriculum realisation – depth, spread, reach and pace – and the associated learning demands, and emphasise the role of the SLO model in meeting those challenges and addressing the learning demands.

Just as the SLO can support curriculum implementation in schools, the model might also support curriculum leadership at the system-level. Following the introduction of the SLO policy in 2018, the Education Directorate of the Welsh Government committed to becoming a learning organisation itself, joining schools and middle-tier bodies. This decision stemmed from the recognition that the Welsh Education Directorate needed to work in new ways and to further support the efforts to establish a culture of self-improvement, continuous learning and collaboration across the education system. A joint project by the OECD's Directorate of Education and Skills and Observatory for Public Sector Innovation found that all the dimensions of the learning organisation were present in the Welsh Education Directorate, but that some work remained to be done to embed the model and strengthen its benefits. Especially, the study showed that staff in the Education Directorate were very

positive towards collaboration overall, and that at least some of them collaborated quite intensely with stakeholders outside of the Education Directorate. However, an in-depth qualitative analysis observed that this systemic collaboration was concentrated in some policy areas at the expense of others; and that the scope of collaboration was sometimes limited (Santos, Tonurist and George, forthcoming[21]).

Throughout interviews with key stakeholders in Wales, the OECD team was made aware of a number of opportunities for improvements in relation to collaboration. The first step to improve collaboration is to guarantee that the responsibility of each actor is clear to themselves and to the others, and that each honour their own role and responsibilities (Viennet and Pont, 2017[2]). Within the school tier, several issues were raised around the new roles. Across all tiers, some remain unclear about the extent to which stakeholders should be involved in designing schools' curriculum. Whereas in some schools interviewed by the OECD, both for primary and secondary education, all teachers were involved in the curriculum design exercise, other schools left it mainly for senior leadership and subject heads (in secondary schools) to decide. Some schools had discussed the topic of curriculum with schools within their cluster, and a few expressed the need for a co-ordinated curriculum at cluster level. Students contributed or were at least consulted on parts of the curriculum, but in some cases, the involvement of parents and local actors remained anecdotal (OECD interviews).

Throughout the OECD team's visits, many highlighted that the role of Pioneer and Innovation schools in the next stages of implementation remains to be clarified, as their collaboration could benefit the rest of the schools as they themselves progress with the curriculum. These schools' experience at both primary and secondary levels is rich, and most schools across Wales are located within reach of other Pioneer schools (OECD interviews). The OECD team understands the Welsh Government's position on Pioneer schools not being promoted as model schools, but there is much other schools can learn from them. Experience with similar curricula in British Columbia (Canada) or New Zealand, for instance, shows that compiling and sharing experience from practitioners can inspire other practitioners (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2019[22]).

As for the middle tier, a general concern raised was the need for better co-ordination between the different initiatives adopted. The OECD-OPSI study on the Welsh Education Directorate found that the relationship between Welsh Government and key middle-tier bodies around the education reform agenda was not fully delineated (Santos, Tonurist and George, forthcoming[21]). In spite of the progress in communication between them, it would appear that in practice their actions take longer to co-ordinate. For instance, the responsibilities to provide professional learning to support the new curriculum seemed unclear. Some regional consortia consider this falls in their remit, while the Welsh Government also partnered with higher education institutions for enquiry-based teaching. The OECD team was further informed that several institutions hold events around the curriculum reform in a manner that is difficult to read from a school's perspective. Clarifying who fulfils which role would likely liberate some capacity for other actors and ensure effective co-operation. In addition, where multiple agencies and organisations are responsible for providing professional learning, it is vital that their efforts are co-ordinated and there are shared understandings about the learning the new curriculum demands.

Another key issue regarding clarification of roles is around the responsibility regarding school evaluation and improvement. There is a need for further clarifying the roles and responsibilities between the local authorities, regional consortia and Estyn, under the new framework for accountability and improvement. To inform the ongoing discussion between the middle tier agencies and the Welsh Government, the OECD team urges for caution in interpreting some of the recommendations of the Learning Inspectorate report (Donaldson, 2018[15]). These point to the option of inspectors engaging with schools more regularly, as part of a collaborative approach to self-evaluation to be developed involving trained peer reviewers, consortia staff and inspectors. Although in principle agreeing with these recommendations, there is a need to clarify what such increased

engagement of Estyn inspectors means in practice. It should be clear to schools who will provide school improvement support – currently the mandate of the regional consortia.

Stakeholders interviewed by the OECD team expressed that Estyn appeared to be engaged in a range of activities, partly due to its commitment to support the curriculum reform, including conducting training and dissemination events. Several of the people the OECD team spoke with wondered whether Estyn as an inspectorate body was best placed to undertake such activities, and noted that for Estyn to be able to engage in such collaborative ways of working, new to many of its staff, would call for a major organisational transformation. As the dialogue is ongoing between Estyn, the Welsh Government, regional consortia and local authorities, there is a need for caution about the inspectorate's capacity to expand its role and responsibilities beyond its role of independent inspector and advisor on the quality of education, and not to stretch the organisation's capacity.

This is important also considering the ambitious reform agenda that is proposed for Estyn in the Learning Inspectorate report (Donaldson, 2018[15]) which may call for prioritisation and/or defining a longer-term strategy for organisational development. For example, the proposed changes to Estyn inspections and the expansion of its research function – both important changes and arguably core functions of the organisation – will already require a considerable amount of resource to be realised.

At the same time, stakeholders warned about the risk of the review of the schools' self-evaluation and improvement plans by the improvement advisors of the regional consortia becoming a "mini-inspection". Regional consortia seemed well aware of this risk. They see their role as what one interviewee noted "a critical, but supportive friend" to schools. This combination of critical and supportive friend is central to help schools design and implement the new curriculum with success (OECD interviews).

Successful realisation of the curriculum will depend on the continuous co-ordination and collaboration between all the key stakeholders of the reform, especially within the diverse middle tier. Having clarity on each other's roles is necessary to help stakeholders move the Welsh system from one based on high-stakes accountability to one based on trust and professionalism. The Welsh Government plays a major role as a supportive leader in this regard. Trust and collaboration can only work effectively if stakeholders know their role and that of their peers, and if they trust each other to comply with their role.

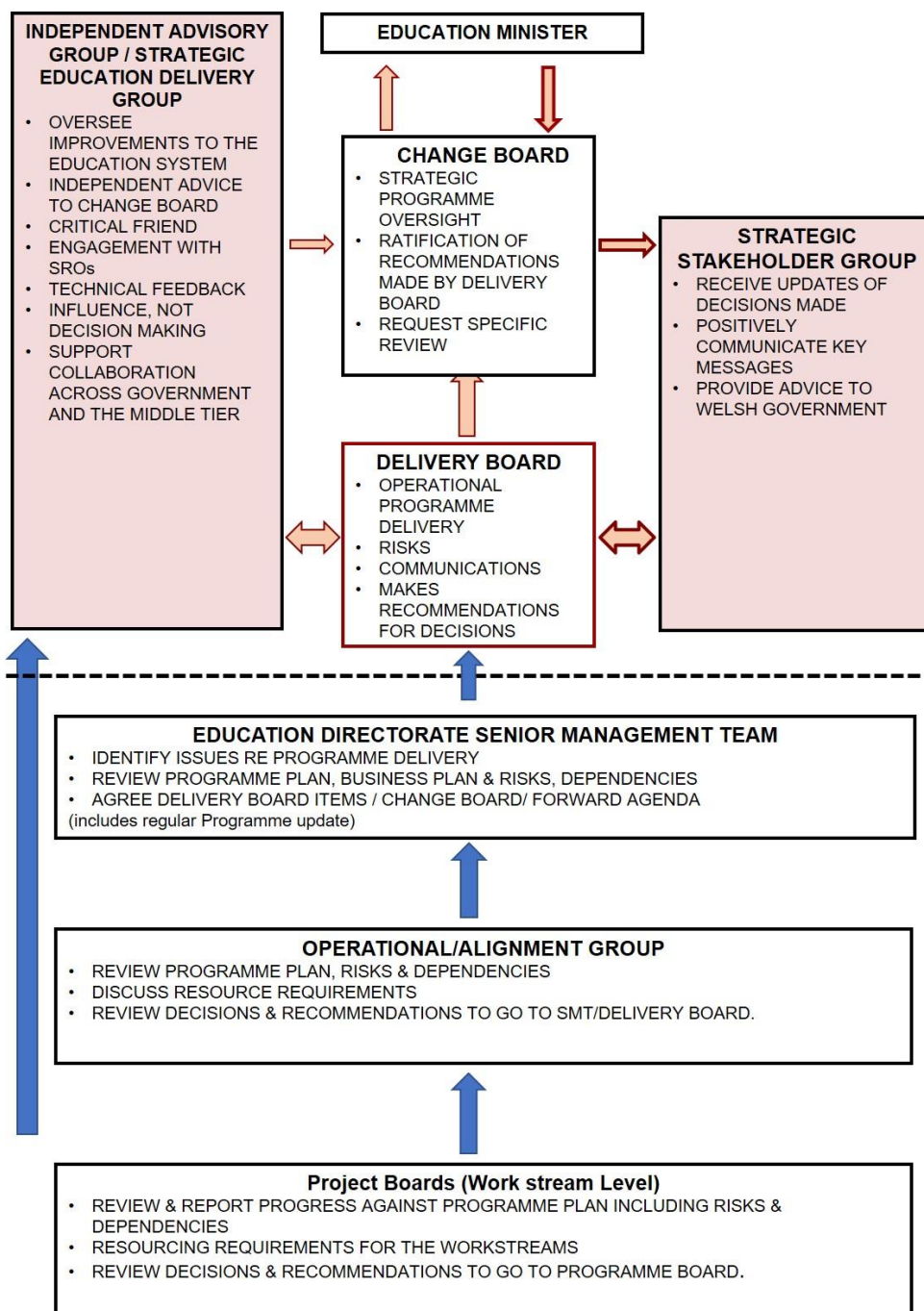### *Co-construction to build trust across the system*

This co-construction of the curriculum in Wales reflects an international trend toward open government, an attempt to better respond to citizens' demands and to restore their trust in public institutions (OECD, 2017[23]). As traditional representative bodies have evolved and technologies have expanded possibilities to participate, more actors have entered the public debate worldwide. In addition, awareness of the importance of the quality of education for the future of societies has expanded beyond education professionals and parents to occupy both international and national policy agendas (Lessard and Carpentier, 2015[24]; OECD, 2015[25]; OECD, 2016[26]). As a result, governments cannot rely on linear forms of participation only, but have to engage with a broader range of stakeholders (Rouw et al., 2016[27]).

The curriculum reform in Wales engages stakeholders by design through co-construction and through its new approach to curriculum design. First, the curriculum policy in Wales has been co-constructed from the early stages of conception, effectively developing the curriculum based on the conjunction of practitioners' knowledge, Pioneer schools' experience and experts' input. The widespread and systematic use of co-construction in Wales is commendable. Three key mechanisms have supported co-construction throughout the policy process: the Pioneer Schools Network, working groups and consultations. Indeed the small size of the education system has also contributed to the success of these mechanisms.

The Pioneer Schools Network engaged over 200 schools in developing the curriculum and enabling policies, and 16 Innovation schools – the network's successors for curriculum implementation – are formally mobilised to test and enrich the curriculum framework through local design (see Box 2.1 in the previous chapter).

Working groups bring multiple stakeholders together to address policy topics in more depth and to monitor and steer their development. Examples include groups of practitioners developing the Areas of Learning and Experience for the draft framework, the Curriculum and Assessment Group mixing international and local experts, and the Strategic Education Delivery Group bringing all members of the middle tier together for co-ordination. The Welsh Government structured the reform's governance around bodies like the Delivery Board and the Change Board that include representatives of key education organisations, ensuring that all efforts are directed towards the realisation of the new curriculum and for maintaining momentum (see Figure 3.3).

Figure 3.3. The Welsh education reform's governance structure

INDEPENDENT ADVISORY GROUP / STRATEGIC EDUCATION DELIVERY GROUP
- OVERSEE IMPROVEMENTS TO THE EDUCATION SYSTEM
- INDEPENDENT ADVICE TO CHANGE BOARD
- CRITICAL FRIEND
- ENGAGEMENT WITH SROs
- TECHNICAL FEEDBACK
- INFLUENCE, NOT DECISION MAKING
- SUPPORT COLLABORATION ACROSS GOVERNMENT AND THE MIDDLE TIER

EDUCATION MINISTER

CHANGE BOARD
- STRATEGIC PROGRAMME OVERSIGHT
- RATIFICATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS MADE BY DELIVERY BOARD
- REQUEST SPECIFIC REVIEW

STRATEGIC STAKEHOLDER GROUP
- RECEIVE UPDATES OF DECISIONS MADE
- POSITIVELY COMMUNICATE KEY MESSAGES
- PROVIDE ADVICE TO WELSH GOVERNMENT

DELIVERY BOARD
- OPERATIONAL PROGRAMME DELIVERY
- RISKS
- COMMUNICATIONS
- MAKES RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DECISIONS

EDUCATION DIRECTORATE SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM
- IDENTIFY ISSUES RE PROGRAMME DELIVERY
- REVIEW PROGRAMME PLAN, BUSINESS PLAN & RISKS, DEPENDENCIES
- AGREE DELIVERY BOARD ITEMS / CHANGE BOARD/ FORWARD AGENDA
(includes regular Programme update)

OPERATIONAL/ALIGNMENT GROUP
- REVIEW PROGRAMME PLAN, RISKS & DEPENDENCIES
- DISCUSS RESOURCE REQUIREMENTS
- REVIEW DECISIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS TO GO TO SMT/DELIVERY BOARD.

Project Boards (Work stream Level)
- REVIEW & REPORT PROGRESS AGAINST PROGRAMME PLAN INCLUDING RISKS & DEPENDENCIES
- RESOURCING REQUIREMENTS FOR THE WORKSTREAMS
- REVIEW DECISIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS TO GO TO PROGRAMME BOARD.

Note: The Welsh Government regularly reviews and updates the reform's governance structure.
Source: Welsh Government (2019[28]), *Programme definition document*.

Consultations engage schools, local authorities, regional consortia and other stakeholders in discussing at breadth elements such as the vision, policy priorities and the various reform levers. Consultations and national discussions around the curriculum in Wales are an integral part of the co-construction effort, given that they either form the basis of a new policy or review elements that were co-constructed themselves. Examples include the seminal national discussion leading to the Donaldson report (2015[29]) and the 2019 feedback process organised around the draft curriculum framework.

Secondly, the principle of local design implies that schools and their community design their own school curriculum within the new national framework. This principle enshrines stakeholders' engagement throughout the policy process, acknowledging the responsibility each school holds in conceiving and realising locally relevant curricula (see Chapter 2). The OECD team met with some of the schools who have been exploring approaches to design local curricula, including regular schools and schools from the Pioneer and Innovation networks. Unanimously, these schools declared that having to design the school's curriculum mobilised teachers as well as school senior leadership, and sometimes even support staff and students.

The OECD team observed how co-construction has taken roots in education stakeholders' minds in Wales, forging a sense of pride and ownership and readying stakeholders for the curriculum reform. As emphasised by an expert of education reforms during an interview with the OECD team, the degree of stakeholders' engagement in Wales at this time of the reform process is notably high. For instance, multiple activities were organised as part of the 2019 consultation on the draft curriculum framework, in which thousands of school practitioners and middle tier representatives participated (Wavehill, 2019[13]). A survey administered by the Welsh Government on schools' readiness for change, complementing the OECD assessment, found that 63% of the respondents wanted to see curriculum change happen, and more than 59% thought the new curriculum was appropriate for their school and pupils. What's more, 95% of the respondents said they were willing to learn new skills to bring curriculum change to life (Welsh Government, 2019[30]).

The OECD team found that education stakeholders welcomed the relatively new process of policy co-construction in Wales. A number of them noted co-construction facilitates understanding and implementing the new curriculum, and to further realise Wales' ambitions for a self-improving school system. While policy co-construction requires a significant investment in time and effort in the short term, it also encourages stakeholders to collaborate, trust each other, and own and support reforms in the longer term (OECD, 2017[17]). Building trust between stakeholders and with the government is vital to the success of the curriculum, as Wales transitions from an education system relying on high-stakes accountability measures to one based on collaboration and trust between high-quality professionals. However, sustaining this level of trust and engagement over the long run will require leadership and continued investment in these approaches and trust, as well as clear communications, to show the value of the contributions and co-construction.

A strong communication strategy

Wales' success in mobilising all key education stakeholders for its reform agenda is due, at least in part, to the active communication strategy the Welsh Government and some of the middle tier actors have consistently adopted. A clear communication strategy is a key tool for successful policy implementation (Viennet and Pont, 2017[2]). The brand "education in Wales: our national mission" (Welsh Government, 2017[6]), the systematic use of the same terms for its intent and its policy tools, have effectively brought coherence and clarity to the development of the education reform journey, laying some strong basis for stakeholders to make this mission their own. The "national mission" intends to raise school standards, reduce the attainment gap between different groups of learners and ensure an education that is a source of national pride and public confidence. The repetition of this intent and of the policy tools at work to achieve it – such as "transformational curriculum"

and "enabling objectives" – further reinforced the clarity and the identification of the reform. The OECD team could see that all schools visited were familiar with this vocabulary, as well as with the key concepts of the curriculum.

The Education Directorate's communication strategy used a variety of channels online, paper and live. The Welsh Minister for Education held Question & Answer sessions and was consistently present at events. So was the Education Directorate, who was also active on social media, maintained a blog to help stakeholders keep up with the reform, and worked with designers to make the published content easier to read (OECD interviews). A constant presence of key figures such as the Minister and practitioners from all parts of Wales also helped disseminate the message. Careful monitoring of discussions both online and during events allowed for adjusting the communication strategy, clarifying some issues with the curriculum policy, and debunking some of the myths tied to it. Interviews by the OECD team of several stakeholders suggested that the efforts made in terms of communication were widely appreciated. Stakeholders also mentioned that, moving forward with implementation, a challenge for the Welsh Government and other system leaders would be to fine-tune and maintain unity in their messages to all relevant stakeholders, while offering some tailored communication for specific key actors, such as teachers, students, parents and school governors (OECD interviews).

When interviewed by the OECD team, the Education Directorate's communication team was conscious of the upcoming challenges to continue with the same clarity while providing the depth of support other actors need from the government, as the issues of implementation became more prominent. The OECD team was told repeatedly, for instance, that schools were unsure about their actions during the two-year period before compulsory implementation of the curriculum was to happen. Regional consortium representatives insisted that part of the effort in communication resided in helping school prioritise their effort and sequence their activities throughout implementation, to avoid rushing the process. Initiatives suggested were the creation of user experience methods, using milestones and staging what schools at different stages of implementation looked like, and what was needed to be ready by 2022. At both national and local levels, the concern was to keep the message clear about the next stages of implementation, and to make sure it reached all schools (OECD interviews).

Support for curriculum change across schools

Continuous engagement with education stakeholders can enable governments to learn essential information about stakeholders' readiness to implement by gaining insights into their perceptions of the proposed policy or reform (Viennet and Pont, 2017[2]). In the case of a curriculum change such as in Wales, a powerful element is that educators are convinced, in majority, that the new curriculum will make a positive difference for their students (Wavehill, 2019[13]; Welsh Government, 2019[30]). According to teachers from across the OECD, influencing the development of children and young people was their first motivation in deciding to become a teacher (Figure 3.4).

Figure 3.4. Motivations to become a teacher, TALIS 2018

Percentage of lower secondary teachers who report that the following elements were of moderate or high importance in becoming a teacher (OECD average-31)
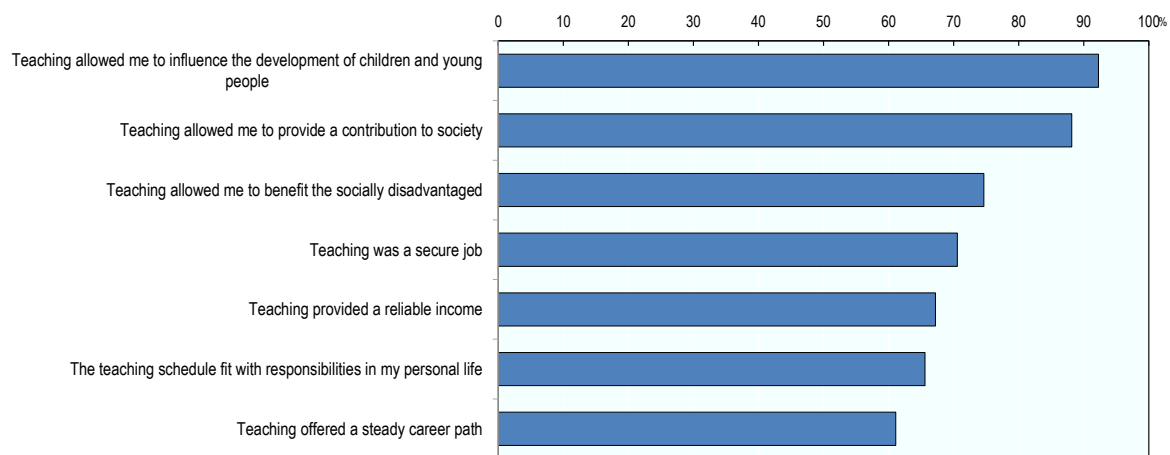
Note: Values are ranked in descending order of importance for the motivation for becoming a teacher.
Source: OECD (2019[31]), *TALIS 2018 Results (Volume I): Teachers and school leaders as lifelong learners*, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/1d0bc92a-en.

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How does stakeholder commitment to the Welsh reform hold up, as schools have had or are getting ready to implement the curriculum? The reform counts on strong champions among stakeholder groups such as teachers, head teachers and middle-tier organisations. These supporters emerged from the various forms of engagement, events and working groups around the curriculum reform. It would seem that those early champions who have been involved longer with the new curriculum are strong advocates for it. They have some concerns however, regarding the draft curriculum framework, including the clarity of its language and of its provision regarding assessment (Wavehill, 2019[12]).

As well as being committed, school staff in Wales seem to be reasonably confident in their ability to implement the new curriculum. As pointed out in the literature, teachers' self-efficacy is correlated with a number of positive outcomes for students' and their own experience (OECD, 2019[31]), and can reinforce their ability to change their practices when the change aligns to their beliefs about teaching and learning (Schleicher, 2018[32]; März and Kelchtermans, 2013[33]; Roehrig, Kruse and Kern, 2007[34]). A readiness for change survey carried out by the Welsh Government in 100 schools across the country in November 2019 showed that more than 75% of the teachers, school leaders and support staff responding felt they had the capabilities needed to put curriculum change into practice. More than 80% of the respondents also stressed that the school's head teacher encouraged them to embrace curriculum change and supported them in realising it (Welsh Government, 2019[30]). The OECD team met some of these engaged practitioners, whose deep understanding of the new curriculum, teaching and leadership skills clearly set them on the path to a successful implementation.

However, not all schools are as involved, ready, nor confident in their ability to implement the change. First, even among the schools whose staff are involved in the Pioneer process, very few have tested the entire

curriculum, sometimes focusing on only one Area of Learning and Experience (of six Areas that integrate all current subjects) for the students of one Year. Implementing the curriculum in whole requires some degree of organisational readiness, understanding of the curriculum, and some teaching and collaboration skills which might not have yet been triggered in those schools, as the OECD observed during its visits. Although there is no specific study about those schools that were less involved in the process, and whether there are specific contexts that may be more conducive, there seems to be a tendency to adopt a wait-and-see attitude in many schools. Some of their concerns include the uncertainty around the evolution of GCSE and A-level qualifications, the lack of clarity over the upcoming framework for inspection and accountability regime in general, and the fact that secondary schools will need to maintain two curricula for several years from 2022 onwards (OECD interviews).

Wales has made notable progress in co-construction and in developing collaborative networks that share expertise, especially that of practitioners, and there will be much to gain from fostering this collaboration to consolidate readiness for change. A crucial initiative to support organisational readiness for change of curriculum and beyond is the SLO model, which encourages a culture of continuous learning and systematic collaboration within schools. The SLO model is part of Wales' efforts to turn its education system into a learning system (see Chapter 4 for more information on the SLO model) (OECD, 2018[20]).

Curriculum change efforts, like other reform efforts are often enacted with a focus on formal structures and processes that target individual capacity or "human capital" of teachers to improve performance (Pil and Leana, 2009[35]). While these more formal, technical, and often top-down approaches at improvement are important, the relational ties between people support or constrain the flow of expertise, knowledge, and practices related to improvement and reform efforts (Daly, 2010[36]; Coburn and Russell, 2008[37]; Penuel et al., 2009[38]) such as that involved in the Curriculum for Wales. Informal social structures in schools provide opportunities for information flow and the creation of new knowledge between individuals and organisational levels and can contribute to improve capacity and readiness for change (Ahuja, 2000[39]; Spillane and Kim, 2012[40]; Tsai and Ghoshal, 1998[41]).

In Wales, at this important juncture, it will be important not to take for granted the interactions, relationships, networks and collaborations of those across the system and over time. The interdependence of those relational ties are known to ultimately moderate, influence, and even determine the direction, speed, and depth of a planned change (Mohrman, Tenkasi and Mohrman, 2003[42]).

Conclusions

Wales' commitment to co-construction has laid a strong foundation for the new curriculum to take root and flourish. Stakeholders throughout the education system are strong advocates for co-construction as well as for the new curriculum itself. They have made considerable progress in dialoguing, collaborating and earning each other's trust. Co-constructing the curriculum policy framework is not enough, however. Challenges arise as the process unfolds and the middle tier and schools turn to local design and implementation. As stakeholders' functions evolve, there is a need to clarify their new roles and responsibilities, in order to co-ordinate better the system's effort. Wales has also pursued a clear and targeted communication strategy so far, and it will be important for the Welsh Government and regional consortia to clarify what the next stages of the reform process look like from a school's perspective, and to communicate it clearly. Efforts to support all schools in getting ready to implement the new curriculum, in mind-set, skills, capabilities and resources, will be needed to facilitate the implementation process for all schools, and to ensure alignment, shared purpose and dissemination of knowledge and good practices across the country.

Next for Wales is to clarify the different players' evolving roles and responsibilities in relation to each other. This should allow for a smoother collaboration, which will be key to make this curriculum reach its potential in schools. The Education Directorate and system leaders have a central part to play to sustain the process, helping all stakeholders build confidence and do their part to change a system while making sure their efforts are co-ordinated. In addition, actions to support readiness for change across all schools in Wales can enhance the engagement and capacity required for the implementation of the new curriculum.

This chapter has presented a detailed analysis of how different education stakeholders are involved in the process of developing the curriculum, highlighting how the communication strategy and strong co-construction process can provide a solid foundation for its implementation. For the next steps, it will be important for Wales to focus the co-construction process on refining roles, communication and change in schools. Building on the analysis developed in this chapter and others, Chapter 5 develops and weaves together a set of concrete recommendations and actions for a coherent implementation strategy to ensure the Curriculum for Wales reaches schools and classrooms.

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