3 Stakeholder engagement at the heart of Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence

In Scotland (United Kingdom), significant efforts have been made to engage stakeholders throughout the lifecycle of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE). Such efforts have contributed to its success. The great degree of stakeholder involvement around CfE has created the conditions for shared ownership and wide support of CfE's vision. However, progress is required at the system level so stakeholders are fully empowered and engaged in the decision-making process. This chapter analyses the progress made and pending issues of engagement in stakeholder involvement, transparency of responsibilities and communication.

An overview of stakeholder engagement with Curriculum for Excellence

In curriculum policy, stakeholders are individuals (e.g. teachers, parents, school leaders, students and politicians), experts in subjects, pedagogy and curricular studies (scientific community), and collective entities (e.g. ministry of education, national agencies, local authorities, teacher unions) concerned with a curriculum. Their engagement refers to the processes via which they get involved, take responsibilities and interact throughout a curriculum's lifecycle, from design to implementation, in daily practice and during reviews.

In Scotland (United Kingdom), the ecosystem around Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) comprises numerous stakeholder groups, bodies and individuals, all very engaged by the curriculum policy's evolutions. The OECD team met with a significant number of CfE stakeholders, who provided their perspective on implementation and explained the way they engage with CfE and with other stakeholders around CfE. CfE stakeholders include practitioners, learners and their parents, national, regional and local government bodies, public agencies, professional unions and associations, and specialist organisations. Specific structures also developed around CfE, resulting in a number of governance committees, advisory bodies and other stakeholder consultation fora that further populate the ecosystem (Table 3.1).

Table 3.1. Overview of major Curriculum for Excellence stakeholders

	Role in education in relation to Curriculum for Excellence
Stakeholders	
Scottish Government's Learning Directorate	Scottish Government department dedicated to the school system and wider learning environment. The Learning Directorate is responsible for promoting quality implementation of CfE; developing the teaching workforce and educational leadership; ensuring infrastructure and access to digital technology; and pursuing performance improvement, innovation and good practice in education overall.
Scottish Parliament's Education and Skills Committee	Monitors education and education policy on behalf of the Scottish Parliament. The Committee investigates specific aspects of CfE and its implementation, provides recommendations and holds the Scottish Government accountable.
Education Scotland	Public agency under Scottish Government authority, responsible for quality assurance and improvement in education. Education Scotland's mandate includes overseeing the implementation and quality of curriculum and assessment; carrying out school evaluations as Scotland's Inspectorate; providing support for teachers and education, including continuous professional development; providing instructional and support materials for teachers in specific areas (such as emotional well-being and raising attainment for all); and conducting research. Education Scotland and predecessors have been key actors of CfE policy developments, monitoring and implementation support since 2009-10.
Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA)	Statutory body for qualification awarding and regulation in Scotland. SQA's duties are to develop or accredit, validate, assure quality, award and inform on the attainment of a broad range of Scottish qualifications including "National 5", "Highers" and "Advanced Highers", and "National Progression Awards". SQA sits on key governance committees and working groups regarding CfE implementation. It was especially involved in the revision of national qualifications and provision of material in early CfE implementation.
Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Partnership	Body managing the SCQF, which classifies and allows for comparing all qualifications available in Scotland into one framework. Awarding bodies such as the SQA use this information to develop course content and assessment. The SCQF Board of Directors includes representatives of College Development Network, Quality Assurance for Higher Education, Scottish Qualifications Authority, Universities Scotland and employers.
Local authorities (LAs)	Local level of government in Scotland. The 32 local authorities and their Directors of Education have statutory responsibility for the delivery of education and its quality. They take part in CfE developments at the national level (e.g. the Curriculum and Assessment Board includes representatives from the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland [ADES]) and support implementation at the school cluster or neighbourhood level in various forms (funding, discussion of subject selection and time allocation, provision of authority-wide CfE guidance, specific support at the school or cluster level). LAs also provide support via the six Regional Improvement Collaboratives.
Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs)	Sub-national bodies established in 2017 to promote effective collaboration around educational improvement and equity across local authorities. The six RICs are responsible for promoting educational improvement initiatives (including in the form of school support and professional learning offers for teachers) and supporting collaboration across local authorities, and with schools, Education Scotland and other stakeholders.

	Role in education in relation to Curriculum for Excellence
Teachers and school leaders ("headteachers")	Develop and use own school curriculum based on the CfE framework to support student learning. Most teachers develop their own materials to teach according to the school's curriculum (especially in Broad General Education [BGE]); prepare students for qualifications (in Senior Phase); assess and report on progress; and communicate with parents. School leaders support teachers; lead curriculum design; manage the school and its partnerships; translate policy into school practice. Teachers and school leaders usually collaborate with peers from other schools and with local, regional and national bodies to share practice and further develop CfE.
Teachers' and school leaders' unions	Represent the teaching profession's interests in education policy and professional negotiations and generally support the profession via training and other professional network activities. Union representatives sit on key governance committees and working groups to share their perspective with system leaders, agencies and other stakeholders. Major unions include School Leaders Scotland (SLS) and Association of Headteachers and Deputes in Scotland (AHDS), Education Institute of Scotland (EIS), Scottish Secondary Teachers' Association (SSTA), National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT).
BOCSH group	Consortium of senior curriculum managers from half of the 32 local authorities working with national bodies to support curriculum leadership. BOCSH members provide exemplar materials to support local authorities, schools, curricular leaders and teachers engaged in implementing CfE, and highlight good practice in a whole-school approach to CfE in BGE and Senior Phase.
General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS)	Independent professional body promoting and regulating the teaching profession in Scotland. GTCS maintains professional standards; sets the requirements and advises ministers for teacher training; supports new teachers during induction; assesses teachers' qualifications and experience; manages the professional register.
Students ("learners")	Participate in learning in school and other settings from age 3 to 18 years and beyond. CfE promotes active participation from learners in their learning and society in general.
Children and young people organisations	Defend children's rights and promote their citizen participation. Scotland's Children's Parliament supports children's participation and engagement, and works with the Scottish Government, local authorities and other public bodies to promote and protect children's rights. The Scottish Youth Parliament aims to represent the democratically elected voice of Scotland's young people and their views of young people on societal issues.
Youth work agencies	Ensure every young person has access to quality youth work opportunities (e.g. Youth Link Scotland, Young Scot). Youth work is part of community learning and development (CLD), whose professionals help people of all ages with their professional orientation and development. National youth work agencies are partners in CfE implementation for diversification of Senior Phase pathways and positive post-school destinations, career education and other activities related to the "world of work".
Parents and parent organisations	Parents (and guardians) participate in students' education, are informed by schools and can take part in schools' parent councils. Organisations support parent engagement with their local schools (e.g. via parent councils) and represent parent interests in national policy making. The National Parent Forum of Scotland (NPFS) represents parent councils across Scotland, with national and local government and other organisations. Connect supports parents' groups nationally to get involved in schools.
Higher education institutions (universities)	Nineteen institutions offer higher education in Scotland. University representatives sit on the Curriculum and Assessment Board; work with other key stakeholders to ensure CfE prepares learners for university and qualifications provide clear pathways to learners. Universities Scotland works for and represents the 19 institutions, and the Scottish Council of Deans of Education represents their School of Education.
Education researchers	Investigate various themes in education, including CfE. Researchers provide central insight for CfE developments, feed into the evidence base for educational and policy leadership and practices and contribute to informing and advising system leaders. They sit on key governance, advisory and working committees and participate in specific programmes contributing to CfE developments.
Further education institutions (colleges)	Twenty-six colleges offer further education in Scotland. College representatives and their organisations participate in CfE developments and implementation. For example, Colleges Scotland is part of the Curriculum Narrative Strategic Engagement Group (2018). Colleges Development Network sat on the CfE Management Board (2007-17) and provides colleges with trainings, events and specialist projects.
Scottish Funding Council (SFC)	Public arms-length body responsible for funding teaching and learning provision, research and other activities in colleges and universities. SFC is identified among the national partners for CfE implementation, including to fund teacher professionalisation aligned with CfE priorities, support Developing the Young Workforce: Scotland's Youth Employment Strategy (DYW) and other programmes to implement CfE priorities in relation with colleges, facilitate partnerships between schools, local authorities and colleges, and contribute to data collection in the college sector.
Employers	Work with colleges, schools and other stakeholders (e.g. Skills Development Scotland) to provide work-based experiences in line with CfE.
Skills Development Scotland (SDS)	Helps individuals manage their career and build employability skills from school onwards. SDS works with employers under ministerial guidance on a national, sectoral, regional, local and individual basis to recognise and articulate current and future skills needs, and to engage with the skills system to cater to those needs.

	Role in education in relation to Curriculum for Excellence
Governance committees, advisory bodies and fora for stakeholder consultation	
Scottish Education Council (SEC)	Main forum for oversight of education improvement since 2017. The SEC provides strategic advice to ministers on education improvement and aims to lead and support collaboration between system leaders and key stakeholders to deliver education. The SEC links up with the Curriculum and Assessment Board and the Strategic Board for Teacher Education and is informed by the International Council of Education Advisers.
Curriculum and Assessment Board (CAB)	Main forum for oversight of curriculum and assessment activity in Scotland since 2017. The CAB oversees and leads the curriculum and assessment policy framework in Scottish education; considers actions needed to ensure CfE delivers for all; supports the SEC but is directly accountable to Scottish ministers. It replaced former CfE management groups. It is chaired jointly by the Director of Learning, Scottish Government and Education Scotland, and members include teachers' professional associations, colleges, universities, scholars, parent associations, SDS, and CLD representatives.
International Council of Education Advisors (ICEA)	Established in 2016 to advise the First and Deputy First Ministers on how best to achieve excellence and equity in the Scottish education system based on international best practice. ICEA members are education experts from Scotland and worldwide.
Education Leaders Forum	Established in 2018 to capture the views of a wide stakeholder group on the development of the education system. It is chaired by the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills and has input from young people, teachers' professional associations, scholars, parent associations, SDS, and CLD representatives.
Teacher Panel	Established in 2016 to provide views on de-cluttering, workload and bureaucracy in order to enhance the effectiveness of the interaction between pupil and teacher.
Strategic Board for Teacher Education	National forum for discussion between key education stakeholders on teaching standards and teacher education. The Board oversees and evaluates reforms to teacher education from the perspective of the *Teaching Scotland's Future* report (2011).
Scottish Learner Panel	Comprised of 30 children and young people from nine school settings from across Scotland. The panel deliver their views on education policy to the Scottish Government. The panel met on five occasions in 2018-19 and published a final report.
Commission for Widening Access to University	Gathers Scottish Government officials and stakeholders to tackle socio-economic inequality in higher education by leading the implementation of recommendations contained in the final report of the Commission on Widening Access.

Source: The roles summarised here are based on official documentation and stakeholders' views collected during OECD interviews (OECD, 2020[1]).

Stakeholder engagement, and more specifically, involvement, communication and transparency matter in the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence for several reasons.

First, in Scotland, as around the world, education systems are now characterised by multi-level governance, with multiple actors operating at different levels, whose links to each other are to a certain extent fluid and open to negotiation. Attention to stakeholder engagement in education policy implementation has increased as a result of three trends: a greater awareness of the importance of education quality for a country's future; new technologies allowing citizens to be more vocal about policy matters outside of traditional engagement mechanisms; and high degrees of citizen participation as a result (Burns, Köster and Fuster, 2016[2]). In addition, governance arrangements have become more complex and decentralised, with greater engagement in policy and implementation processes across different levels of education systems (Viennet and Pont, 2017[3]). Against this backdrop, different stakeholders are more likely to exert their agency, either to support or oppose curriculum changes, and influence the organisations or communities they are embedded in (Lemke and Harris-Wai, 2015[4]).

Second, collaboration, consensus, co-design, partnership and empowerment are central to the rhetoric around CfE and education in Scotland. They are also important to implement if curriculum processes are to respect CfE principles. In particular, school-based curriculum design requires meaningful engagement to develop shared meaning and ownership of CfE concepts and empower key curriculum actors. Such meaningful forms of engagement imply trust and allow for collaboration and practice sharing between stakeholders; clarity on whose responsibility it is to provide school support and professional learning; and clear two-way communication about policy evolution, priorities and difficulties at local and national levels.

Finally, ongoing needs for adjustment throughout the CfE lifecycle also require shared meaning, deep involvement of stakeholders, trust and effective decision making for effective change. In a system seeking collaborative leadership and empowerment, decision making is not top-down but consists of inclusive and fruitful discussions between stakeholders who know and have the resources to assume their responsibilities, which results in effective and trustworthy decisions.

Significant efforts have been made to engage stakeholders throughout CfE's lifecycle (2004-present), which contributed to some successes with CfE and shall be explained. However, issues related to stakeholder engagement remain that complicate CfE implementation, and at times even hinder it. The following sections analyse the progress made and pending issues of engagement in terms of stakeholder involvement, transparency of responsibilities and communication.

From inclusive involvement to collective ownership of Curriculum for Excellence

Involvement refers to the opportunity stakeholders have to influence and shape the policy, whether it is through its design or implementation. It is determined on the one hand by government-created channels to encourage stakeholder participation, and on the other hand, by stakeholders' willingness and capacity to take part in the process. Stakeholders can get involved in many different ways, such as through public or internal consultations, boards, councils and committees, union dialogues, networks, surveys, research projects and publications (OECD, 2020[5]). Key stakeholder involvement in education policy development and implementation can help cultivate a sense of joint ownership over policies and hence build more effective and relevant reforms (Finlay, 1998[6])).

The process preceding and developing CfE aimed to engage stakeholders widely and in a more involved way than previously in Scotland. In the past, the national curriculum was essentially developed following approaches from the top down, providing central guidelines and using cascade models of staff development to help schools implement those guidelines. In comparison, the approach to CfE development aimed to engage practitioners from the beginning, involving them in thinking about the educational aims, values and classroom practice. The engagement consisted in work about various components of CfE carried out in collaboration between the Scottish Executive, Learning and Teaching Scotland, the Scottish Qualifications Authority and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education with involvement by local authorities, schools, colleges, professional associations and scholars (Scottish Government, 2006[7]).

Consultation and collaboration are at the core of CfE processes, as much in policy design as in curriculum delivery. As a result, stakeholders get involved frequently and intensely with CfE, which, as acknowledged to the OECD team by system leaders, top advisory groups and practitioners, marks remarkable progress from a time when there was admittedly a lack of engagement and support across the system (OECD interviews). An extensive range of options for stakeholders' involvement with CfE exist, both at the initiative of system leaders and other stakeholders themselves. This tendency emerged from the beginning of CfE, through its development, and continues to characterise the stakeholder ecosystem (Scottish Government, 2008[8]; 2021[9]). Stakeholders have been involved in the design of CfE and are still involved in its daily implementation and ongoing evolution via:

- participation in governance committees, such as the Curriculum and Assessment Board, formerly CfE Management Board
- feedback provision through advisory and consultation entities, such as the International Council of Education Advisers (ICEA), Learner Panel
- expression of organised interests through platforms and representative bodies, such as teacher unions, children and youth organisations, parent organisations

- discussion between professionals and education leaders at various levels, including in ADES, Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA), BOCSH group and initiatives of practice sharing between schools

- decisions made by school communities as part of the ongoing process of curriculum design

- submissions to Parliamentary enquiries, for instance via the Parliamentary Committee on Education and Skills

- research projects and publications around CfE.

The high degree of stakeholder involvement contributed to wide support for CfE as a direction of travel for Scottish education, which matters greatly considering this vision fits both Scottish ambitions and what the international community understands as essential for learners in the 21st century. Both the stakeholders met and the documentation reviewed by the OECD team show broad support for a curriculum policy that helps students develop into successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors (the "four capacities"); and that enables school communities to design their curriculum and teachers to teach in the way they see best fit their students' needs (Priestley, 2018[10]; Priestley and Minty, 2013[11]). A clear signal of the width of this support is that critiques of CfE tend to highlight the way the policy is implemented as the main issue, especially in secondary education, rather than the vision it pursues. The counter-proposals to CfE that the OECD team could observe consist more of going back to CfE's vision and basic principles and assessing whether current practices realise them, than questioning the basic principles altogether (Humes, 2020[12]; Commission on School Reform, 2020[13]; Biesta G, 2015[14]; OECD, 2020[1]).

The many ways to get involved with CfE aim to offer various kinds of stakeholder participation, from information and consultation to collaboration and empowerment. CfE is described by policy makers as being co-designed and delivered collaboratively and by consensus through joint planning, implementation and monitoring between local and national partners (Scottish Government, 2021[9]). Stakeholders appreciate the constant efforts made by system leaders to engage with them and welcomed the many opportunities they have to communicate their perspectives on CfE. Referring to the development of CfE, several practitioners and local officials acknowledged that the policy had been "developed from the ground up", with national authorities guiding the process and practitioners getting involved in developing and testing the learning areas (OECD, 2020[1]). Extensive evidence highlights that consensus between stakeholders is an important factor for the successful implementation of policy reforms (Corrales, 1999[15]; Connell and Klem, 2012[16]; Viennet and Pont, 2017[3]). Enabling this consensus to extend to a sense of shared values and shared mission can improve educational outcomes (OECD, 2018[17]).

Like Scotland, other education systems established the principle of local design, which implies that schools and their community design their own school curriculum within the new national framework. This principle enshrines stakeholders' engagement throughout the policy lifecycle. Local curriculum design suggests that schools should engage with students, parents, local actors and other schools, both when they change and implement their curriculum. 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 local context (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2019[18]).

With more than a decade of implementation, CfE shows that continuous and proactive involvement by stakeholders is central to the policy's functioning. CfE implied significant shifts in the way education is delivered in Scotland, including greater professional agency and progressive empowerment of schools (see Chapter 4 for a detailed analysis of the policy environment).

"Empowerment" is, to some extent, the ultimate form of stakeholder engagement and adequate to core aspects of CfE, such as school-based curriculum design. Stakeholders appreciated the efforts made by national authorities to help empower schools and the profession. Initiatives of enquiry-based, continuous professional development (CPD, also referred to as "professional learning") and professional collaboration

were especially highlighted as having a beneficial impact on teachers' deep understanding of CfE and self-efficacy in curriculum design. Scholars interviewed by the OECD team described, for instance, that enquiry into teachers' own practice seemed to empower them to exert their professional agency and to embed it into practice, although these developments still needed to be consolidated to be fully embedded in daily curriculum design practices (Priestley and Drew, 2019[19]; Drew, Priestley and Michael, 2016[20]; OECD, 2020[1]).

CfE requires collaboration between stakeholders, both as part of governance and daily implementation of schools' curricula, given the diversity of knowledge, skills and values students are expected to gain to develop the four capacities. School practitioners and local actors consistently reported to the OECD team that the best curriculum experiences for students were provided where there was communication and collaboration within the school (between teachers, school leadership and students) and with school partners.

A central characteristic of CfE is its attempt to offer and promote diversified pathways to fit what learners want and need to study. In this, collaboration and partnerships between schools and their partners were especially highlighted as a key factor of success. The OECD team met, for instance, with practitioners and learners from two high schools who entered a formal partnership that significantly widened the courses on offer for students of the smaller school while creating systematic professional exchanges that benefitted both schools. Other ways to offer diverse learning to students included schools' partnerships with colleges and universities (for additional subjects and qualifications); with Skills Development Scotland (for career education); and with local charities and firms (for work-based experiences, including apprenticeships). CfE is seen by schools and some actors from higher and further education as an underpinning factor to make the tertiary sector more coherent (Box 3.1).

Box 3.1. Multi-stakeholder partnership to diversify learner pathways

Learning outside schools, in the community

Partnership is central to the everyday implementation of schools' curricula within the CfE framework, including to fulfil CfE's aim to diversify the possible pathways learners can shape and take to fit their ambitions. One of the many possibilities offered with CfE curricula is for learners who do not feel at ease in a very academic setting, to design a flexible learning setting that fits their needs and preferences while keeping them interested in learning. The OECD team met with representatives from the CLD sector, one of schools' many possible partners for diversifying learning experiences. According to CLD actors, the quality of outcomes and experiences for learners depended largely on whether there were strong partnerships between schools, CLD actors and third-sector providers (e.g. football clubs). These partnerships allow for designing a personalised curriculum, starting where the young person is and what his or her needs are. A customised curriculum can be delivered in a combination of the school setting, a college and/or a community setting. Some of the curricula initially developed for one young person can be scaled up into a larger pathway, e.g. partnership programmes, homeschool learning partnerships using Pupil Equity Funding, Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), summer/Easter programmes.

> **... and at other education levels**
>
> Another possible type of partnership for schools to diversify their learners' experience is with colleges and universities. Both colleges and universities help widen the perspectives of students in upper-secondary education and provide special programmes (in universities) and early courses (in colleges) to help school students adapt their learning styles. Where partnerships are strong, schools plan to leave time for school students to engage with college courses and beyond, becoming part of the college communities.
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> Note: Stakeholder interviews performed by the OECD team for the assessment.

Beyond a great degree of involvement and collaboration, CfE's philosophy required that stakeholders, and especially teachers and school leaders, take ownership of the curriculum policy, a central factor for its successful implementation (Mikser, Kärner and Krull, 2016[21]).

Curriculum ownership implies two things for stakeholders, according to Pierce, Kostova and Dirks (2003[22]). First, it provides individuals with a sense of satisfaction related to psychological comfort and security, a conducive condition for stakeholders to support and carry out a new curriculum. Second, ownership is accompanied by the willingness to assume responsibilities, risks, and sacrifices. Experienced responsibilities motivate stakeholders to invest time and energy to advance the cause of curriculum reform.

In order to capture stakeholders' perspectives on these two aspects of ownership, the OECD team asked the question, "Who owns CfE?" during interviews. Responses consistently pointed in a similar direction: all key stakeholders felt they shared ownership of CfE to some degree. They all agreed that this sense of ownership should be felt first by teachers, school leaders and learners, which was the case in an increasing number of schools. However, stakeholders also consistently pointed out that this sense of collective ownership, although in line with CfE's philosophy, was misaligned with the actual distribution of responsibilities, trust and influence in decision making (OECD, 2020[1]). This possible misalignment will be investigated further in the following section.

CfE largely shifted the locus of curriculum design into schools, which calls for stakeholder involvement to go beyond consultation towards collaborative decision making. The literature on stakeholder engagement and participation in public decision making classifies several stakeholder involvement mechanisms that have different purposes and various degrees of intensity (Arnstein, 1969[23]; Pretty, 1995[24]; White, 1996[25]). The classifications vary around the following, by order of intensity (International Association of Public Participation (IAP2), 2014[26]):

- information
- consultation
- involvement
- collaboration
- empowerment.

Most Scottish stakeholders take available opportunities to communicate their views (through consultation and involvement in working groups and governance committees), yet there seems to be a limited impact of these views on effective enhancements to CfE implementation. Stakeholders from several groups reported to the OECD team a general feeling that their involvement and collaboration in decision-making processes was rather informative and removed from the actual decisions made (OECD, 2020[1]). For a system that engages quite systematically with stakeholders, it is impossible to satisfy all views on every issue: some decisions must be taken, and compromises reached. Yet, when seeking consensual and collaborative decision making and delivery in a system, trust between system leaders and other stakeholders is essential. Although some of the stakeholders interviewed were already involved in

governance committees and thus close to decision making, they did not necessarily trust that their participation had real weight on decision making. Trust is built through repeated interaction in which actors show trustworthy behaviour (Cerna, 2014[27]). System leaders (whether at the national, regional or local level) need to, therefore, nurture this trust so stakeholder engagement fulfils its potential for CfE implementation.

Two aspects of stakeholder engagement around CfE seem to weaken this potential: the clarity of purpose of engagement initiatives and consistency in terms of using stakeholders' input. According to the stakeholders interviewed and observations by the OECD team, the purpose of engagement initiatives around CfE is not always clear nor consistent. Clarifying the purpose of engagement initiatives helps adjust stakeholders' expectations of the impact of their contribution. In a consultation, stakeholders may expect their input to feed into the reflection prior to a decision but not determine it. As part of a governance committee or group intended to participate in decision making, stakeholders may expect their input to weigh equally with their counterparts'. Empowerment is a process that requires trust between decision makers and stakeholders: it takes time to take root, as well as resources and support, as the stakeholders empower themselves and develop the necessary capabilities, expertise and self-confidence to fulfil their mission.

The Scottish Empowerment Agenda, aligned to support the teaching profession's role in CfE, had clear effects on school leadership empowerment. The OECD team noted several elements of this empowerment through its interviews, including headteachers' leadership practices in schools' curriculum design and implementation processes, and how they felt they were able to interpret and prioritise policies that cater best to the needs of their staff and students (OECD, 2020[1]). Policy progress made to advance the Empowerment Agenda include publishing a draft Headteachers' Charter; further developing the Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs); elaborating revised Devolved School Management Guidelines; proposing new career pathways for teachers; and concluding an enhanced pay agreement for teachers, all of which in pursuit of reinforcing commitment (Scottish Government, 2021[9]; Education Scotland, 2021[28]).

Additional initiatives aim to support teacher empowerment and agency, including with curriculum design. The Scottish national professional learning model seeks to support teachers' agency through continuous professional development (such as the Teacher Leadership Programme) and professional standards. Further supported by RICs and local authorities, this support for agency translates into strong local examples of teacher empowerment and distributed leadership. For instance, the South Lanarkshire Council has encouraged its school leaders to empower their teachers to lead improvement work and developments. For many schools, this has meant making a teacher the "lead" on an element of the annual School Improvement Plan, of which priorities are decided on collegiately. For example, teachers have been leading the development of outdoor learning, a curriculum area or another aspect of school life such as community engagement. This engagement is intended to help empower teachers to lead training, communicate with parents and decide on next steps with regard to their lead role. Most schools will dedicate ring-fenced time to initiatives allowing teachers to plan and develop projects within their schools (Scottish Government, 2021[9]).

The Empowerment Agenda does not yet seem to have allowed the same empowerment for teachers as for school leaders. This is possibly due to the fact that many of the initiatives are still recent policy endeavours. Several of the stakeholders interviewed acknowledged that system leaders' efforts to support the empowerment of school leaders and teachers are going in the right direction. However, the way the Empowerment Agenda is structured seems to prevent the very agency, both individual and collective, that that empowerment is about: according to the stakeholders interviewed, empowerment is handed to people (OECD, 2020[1]).

Scottish stakeholders expect their input to be taken into account effectively and in agreement with the purpose given to the initiatives they participate in. Clarifying how decisions are reached and highlighting

how evidence has been considered help make decision-making processes transparent and comprehensible. Specific tools include publicly accessible documents and exchange formats that discuss decisions and how they were reached (Köster, Shewbridge and Krämer, 2020[29]).

The Scottish education system made notable progress in creating space and time for a wide range of stakeholders to contribute to discussions about education policy, which suggest a transition from traditional approaches of direction from the centre to more openness and collaboration. However, these changes seem not to have granted equivalent degrees of influence to stakeholders most recently involved, as compared to that yielded by more traditional actors, including civil servants and officials at various levels of the system (Humes, 2020[12]). Table 3.1 includes the range of governance committees related to CfE in which stakeholders have been engaged. The OECD team noted genuine commitment to open and transparent collaboration in its interviews, but stakeholders participating in various committees, boards or panels expressed concerns that their input had little impact on the advice provided and the decisions made in the end (OECD, 2020[1]). On the one hand, this may be due to the influence of traditional actors on decision making, which has been in practice for a longer period of time than for other stakeholders. It may also be due to the challenges that arise from integrating different perspectives systematically and purposefully into policy making. This difficulty in integrating contributions systematically sends confusing messages to stakeholders within a system that seeks collaborative decision making. This concern was raised especially around the learners' perspective. The OECD team was repeatedly told that although a number of initiatives existed to get learners involved around CfE, both at school and the national level, stakeholders found that the outcomes were not taken into account enough within decisions.

> *"We have heard so many times what learners want… It is time for adults to act on what we already know."* (OECD, 2020[1])

Making space for student voices and taking students' input into account is central in curriculum reform (Mitra, 2007[30]; OECD, 2020[31]). Successful examples of stakeholder involvement around curriculum issues nurture trust with stakeholders and build upon clarity of purpose and consistency. Box 3.2 highlights examples of two different but similarly promising processes of stakeholder involvement: Ireland's National Council on Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) review of upper-secondary education and Wales' co-construction process of its new Curriculum for Wales.

Box 3.2. Stakeholder involvement around upper-secondary education in Ireland and Wales (United Kingdom)

Stakeholder involvement around upper-secondary education in Ireland

Ireland's National Council on Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) initiated a comprehensive review of its upper-secondary education (Senior Cycle), which had not been revised in decades. The aim was to engage all key Senior Cycle stakeholders early in the policy process, to gather their perspective and to report to the Minister based on their contributions. More specifically, the review aimed to get a range of perspectives on the purpose, future, structure and functioning of Senior Cycle education.

The review was conceived around three phases. The first phase (2016/17) consisted of identifying topics to explore in relation to upper-secondary education, exploring the various approaches to conduct the Senior Cycle review as well as conducting a comparative study with other jurisdictions. The second phase (2018/19) involved two full cycles of reviews at both school (through school-based reviews) and national levels (through national seminars). The Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) served as a scientific adviser and contributed to analysing all the collected data throughout the process. Each cycle of the school-based reviews concluded with a series of national seminars.

The first series of seminars was built mainly on presenting the results from Cycle 1 school-based reviews. In response to participants' feedback on these first seminars, the NCCA re-designed the second series of seminars to shorten the presentation time and allow more time for discussions among the participating stakeholders. At the end of each seminar series, the NCCA published a bulletin with the results and sent this to schools and stakeholders. In addition, all materials produced in this review, and discussions, are published online for the general public to consult.

The third phase (2019) consisted of a round of public debate and discussions around a consultation document produced by the NCCA from the information collected in the first and second phases. An advisory report will be prepared once the third phase of the review is completed, which will be presented to the Department for Education and Skills to inform its decision about whether and how to change the Senior Cycle curriculum.

Co-construction of curriculum policy in Wales (United Kingdom)

As it started reforming its curriculum policy, Wales (United Kingdom) also initiated an altogether new approach to education policy making in its system. Co-construction consists of continuous collaboration with stakeholders from across the education system in policy making. 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. 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. 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.

Source: OECD (2020[32]) *Education in Ireland*, https://doi.org/10.1787/636bc6c1-en. OECD (2020[33]) *Achieving the New Curriculum for Wales*, https://doi.org/10.1787/4b483953-en.

The great degree of stakeholder involvement around CfE creates both the conditions for shared ownership and wide support of CfE's vision and a risk of confusion if stakeholders have little transparency on where their responsibilities lie compared to the roles and responsibilities of other stakeholders.

Responsibilities for more transparent engagement with Curriculum for Excellence

Transparency of responsibilities refers to a set of measures that enable multiple stakeholders involved in the policy implementation process to know what everyone's role is and to be able to track their own and others' progress throughout the implementation period. A transparent process fosters trust among stakeholders, is collective, and involves stakeholders in defining their roles and monitoring their performance. Transparency of responsibilities and accountability mechanisms is essential for effective decision making and for stakeholders to find the self-confidence and support to implement CfE, especially within complex governance of the existing system. Ambiguous or overlapping responsibilities and roles can lead to confusion, and considerable effort may be needed to overcome initial misunderstandings and associated anxiety. The question of which actors at which levels should be accountable for which outcomes and how to resolve potential accountability tensions is a challenge for many education systems (Burns, Köster and Fuster, 2016[2]).

Curriculum for Excellence establishes that governance of, and accountability for, the curriculum in Scottish schools is a shared responsibility between the Scottish Government's Directorates, national bodies, including SQA and Education Scotland, local government and schools. The Scottish Government sets the national policy context and is accountable for system performance. Advisory boards and committees such as the Curriculum and Assessment Board (CAB) and the International Council of Education Advisors (ICEA) feed advice into the Scottish Government's decision-making process. Education Scotland and SQA support implementation and ensure the quality of the curriculum and qualifications, respectively. Local authorities have a statutory responsibility for the delivery of education and its quality at the local level and are accountable locally for the nature and quality of delivery and outcomes (Scottish Government, 2021[9]).

School leaders (referred to as "headteachers" in Scotland) are responsible for ensuring a curriculum that meets the needs of children and young people in their schools. As per Scotland's Empowerment Agenda and the Education Reform Joint Agreement, school leaders are the leaders of learning and teaching in their schools, "senior officers of the local authority and have operational responsibility for the service they provide, therefore the majority of decisions should be made at school level". As such, school leaders are invested with wide responsibility for leading the curriculum design process of their school in line with CfE, and working collaboratively with the local authority, partners, teachers, learners and their parents, and other schools on curriculum design and school improvement (Scottish Government, 2018[34]).

Sharing responsibility for CfE with schools, teachers and learners as central owners aligns with CfE principles. As the OECD team observed, stakeholders generally agree that CfE relies on collective responsibility. Stakeholders agree that schools and the profession should hold responsibility for conception, implementation and outcomes of their own curricula, provided the rest of the system fulfil their own responsibilities (including local authorities, RICs, professional networks and unions, national bodies and the Scottish Government) to support schools and the profession within a clear policy framework, through curriculum delivery and policy changes. Admittedly, the Scottish Government and its Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills retain political responsibility for the progress of CfE as a major education policy (OECD, 2020[1]). This commitment to shared responsibility signals progress towards a form of "leadership from the middle" that a former OECD review called for in Scotland. Leadership from the middle is characterised by different organisations taking responsibility to drive educational improvements on behalf of the system and therefore relies on transparency of responsibilities (OECD, 2015[35]).

Education systems find various ways to distribute responsibility around curriculum policy and implementation. With CfE shifting curriculum design to schools and teachers, and willing to evolve toward a more trust-based system of accountability, the example of Finland may be of interest (Box 3.3).

Box 3.3. Trust-based transparency in Finland

Finland has consistently ranked among the top-performing education systems since the beginning of the 21st century. Among the factors of its success, Finland's culture of trust, co-operation and responsibility underpin the system's high performance. The National Board develops its strategic guidelines on educational funding, legislation, evaluation, and curriculum content based on educational research and through consultation and discussion. As such, the central authority steers but does not prescribe in detail the national curriculum. Instead, trusted teams of highly qualified teachers effectively write most of the curriculum together at the local level to adjust to their students within the national framework.

Trust in the profession and in school leaders owes, on the one hand, to their high qualifications, expertise and widespread commitment and responsibility. On the other hand, trust is actively built through deliberate structures and initiatives. These structures combine horizontal and vertical teamwork, networking, participation, target setting and self-evaluation. Interventions from the top are

most often replaced by co-operative problem solving, and relationships with hierarchies are appeased.

Instead of top-down external interventions that concentrate on issues such as closing achievement gaps or raising performance, high performance and equity levels are a consequence of dynamic learning systems where highly qualified and responsible professionals produce these results for themselves.

These relationships of responsibility, co-operation and trust allow Finland's systemic leadership to follow common strategic orientations while responding to local specificities.

Source: Hargreaves, A. and D. Fink (2008[36]), "Distributed leadership: democracy or delivery?", https://doi.org/10.1108/09578230810863280.

Divisions of responsibility between central government, local governing authorities and schools in policy making, is an ongoing question for education systems. In a recent survey about education policy priorities, OECD countries highlighted the need to clarify responsibilities as a pressing issue. Responsibilities broadly included decision making about teacher recruitment, salary increases, school budgets and curricular content (OECD, 2016[37]). As shown in Figure 3.1, between 2008 and 2019, this policy priority was identified in at least 32 education systems, either by the OECD in previous country-based work (26 education systems), by participating education systems (20 education systems), or both (14 education systems). Clarifying this division was considered a priority in three UK systems, including England, Scotland and Wales (OECD, 2019[38]).

The stakeholders interviewed noted that a shared responsibility of CfE has yet to be reached at the system level. To the OECD team's question, "Who owns CfE?" stakeholders signalled their sense of shared ownership and highlighted its misalignment with the distribution of responsibilities. CfE ownership was most often described as fragmented, with only some schools having complete ownership while others lacked confidence and empowerment. The general perspective was that too many stakeholders claimed ownership of CfE, on the one hand, and that the actual responsibilities that come with such ownership were unclear, on the other.

> *"At the beginning, it seemed like everybody wanted to produce their own perception of what CfE was, how it should be delivered, instead of having one. There were too many chiefs and not enough Indians."*
>
> *"It has to be a collaborative ownership, but at the moment, there is too much political ownership, which is disturbing."*
>
> *"We never managed whole ownership of the CfE system completely, partly because we never got the metrics right for CfE success." (OECD, 2020[1])*

Figure 3.1. Clarifying the division of responsibility between the levels of an education system, 2019

Number of participating education systems in which the division of responsibility is considered a priority according to either the OECD or participating education systems.
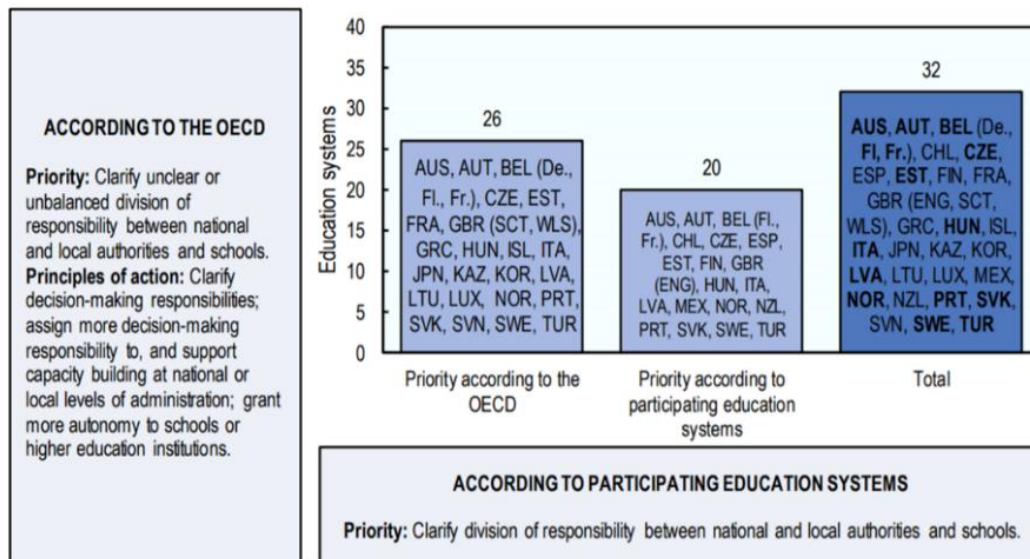
Notes: For priority "according to the OECD", see OECD (2019[38]), Annex A (OECD publications consulted) and Reader's Guide (years covered). "Principles of action" refers to a component of a recommendation that draws from international evidence produced on a specific topic, either by the OECD or externally. Priority "according to participating education systems" is based on responses to *Education Policy Outlook (EPO) Surveys* 2013 and 2016-17, although responses for Austria, Belgium (Flemish, French and German-speaking Communities), Italy, Kazakhstan, Spain and Sweden are based on the *Education Policy Outlook (EPO) Country Profiles* published during 2017 and 2018. Responses given during the validation processes for all education systems in 2019 are also included (see the Reader's Guide). Regarding comparing previous OECD analysis and country responses, education systems highlighted in bold are those where the policy priority was identified by both the OECD and the education system.
Source: OECD (2019[38]), *Education Policy Outlook 2019: Working Together to Help Students Achieve their Potential*, https://doi.org/10.1787/2b8ad56e-en.

StatLink ⟲⟱ https://doi.org/10.1787/888934240845

Transparency in the division of responsibilities among stakeholders is a necessary condition for policy success in a system that promotes shared responsibility of its curriculum. Along with trust, transparency is essential to inspiring ownership and supporting sustained implementation (Burns, Köster and Fuster, 2016[2]). Opacity of responsibilities can harm CfE to the extent that it can be difficult for stakeholders to address the relevant interlocutors. As a result, schools' needs might go unaddressed, or alternatives to the system in place might be found, which contributes again to the confusion of roles and responsibilities.

The CfE-related responsibilities of different natures – policy governance, political responsibility, everyday implementation – are described on paper, but the OECD team noted a lack of clarity in their definition and distribution between stakeholders. In practice, this lack of clarity can be noted at almost all levels of the education system. Stakeholders met by the OECD team highlighted the duplication of functions between different groups. They also emphasised a need for clarity about the roles and responsibilities of each actor and their boundaries, especially between Education Scotland and SQA, RICs and local authorities, and between schools, local authorities and central government (when it comes to curriculum design) (OECD, 2020[1]).

Parliamentary enquiries conducted in 2017 looked into the roles of key education bodies, with specific attention to the link between their overall role in education and their responsibilities in CfE implementation.

The enquiries found, for instance, that the distribution of responsibilities between Education Scotland and the Scottish Government in the different areas of development and implementation of CfE required more clarity. Response to the enquiry included a commitment by the Cabinet Secretary to undertake a review of the issue (The Scottish Parliament Education and Skills Committee, 2017[39]).

The distribution of CfE-related responsibilities between local authorities and Regional Improvement Collaboratives also lacks clarity in practice. The 32 local authorities and their Directors of Education have statutory responsibility for the delivery of education and its quality. As mentioned above, local authorities participate in CfE developments at the national level and support implementation at the school cluster or neighbourhood level in various forms. Established in 2017/18, RICs intend to promote local authorities' collaboration, thus increasing their reach and effectiveness in supporting schools and working from a meso-level to build capacity in teachers and curriculum leadership across the system. This initiative was launched in part in response to the 2015 OECD recommendation to "strengthen the professional leadership of CfE and the 'middle'" and "develop a coherent strategy for building teacher and leadership social capital" (OECD, 2015[35]). A full review of RICs' performance is expected to report in 2021. In general, the practitioners interviewed by the OECD either had difficulties identifying the responsibilities of local authorities compared to that of RICs, or they were not aware of RICs' role altogether:

> *"If you ask most teachers and headteachers across Scotland, they don't see what RICs are about. The RICs discuss a lot, but between other players, of school improvement. It is a nice idea, but not adding much for practitioners. They forgot that local collaboration happens at local level, and that the funds used for RICs would be much more useful at local level." (OECD, 2020[1])*

In some instances, however, evidence reported to the OECD shows that RICs hold potential to increase collaboration across local authorities, as some have already achieved greater and needed collaboration:

> *"For instance [a particular RIC] has provided great support for schools to ask pupils what they want every year and use that to plan their curriculum areas and industry partnerships to offer greater choice in a cohesive manner through the eight local authorities." (OECD, 2020[1])*

The responsibilities assumed by local authorities vary significantly across Scotland, and similarly for Regional Improvement Collaboratives, which accentuates the lack of readability of the system around CfE. The majority of legal responsibility for education sits with local authorities. Theoretically, such a system can help in the context of a curriculum policy that, like CfE, seeks flexibility to best answer students' needs while not letting full responsibility rely on schools alone. However, the variability observed in local authorities' approaches means that decisions that one school leader has the power to make in a given local authority can be taken by the local authority itself elsewhere in Scotland. As highlighted in both OECD interviews and other reports, this adds to the system's lack of transparency for teachers, school leaders and parents (Scottish Government, 2017[40]).

> *"Education is devolved to local authorities. So the government sets the objective, but the strategy to achieve it is up to local authorities, who all have their own understanding, which often results in very different strategies. So teachers themselves have to interpret their local authority's strategy to deliver." (OECD, 2020[1])*

Over the last few decades, many OECD countries have decentralised their education systems, giving schools and local school authorities greater autonomy to respond more directly to citizens' needs. Yet ministries of education remain responsible for ensuring high-quality education for all. Traditional forms of accountability, based on a vertical hierarchy between lower decentralised levels and central ministries, are increasingly being complemented by new forms of accountability that involve the voices of more stakeholders. The most successful systems are able to constructively combine the multiple sources of information to ensure adequate transparency and adherence to achievement goals as well as reflect broad societal aims for education (Burns, Köster and Fuster, 2016[2]).

The case of Sweden's shift of education decision-making responsibilities to the municipal level in the early 1990s speaks of the importance of clarifying responsibilities among stakeholders. The reform increased

municipal autonomy and devolved virtually all responsibility regarding education to the municipal governance structures, in a system with a strong tradition of vertical accountability. However, lacking a clear understanding of new responsibilities and roles of local stakeholders, municipalities did not change their processes as envisioned. Instead, municipalities generated a variety of different structures and strategies for educational governance, which inhibited mutual learning and were often unsuited to internal evaluation and meeting local demands (Burns, Köster and Fuster, 2016[2]).

One key area in which school practitioners wish there were more transparency on responsibilities is in professional learning and support for curriculum design. Some opportunities are offered through Education Scotland and the RICs, as well as through local authorities' own support strategies. However, teachers also seek opportunities via national professional associations (such as EIS, SSTA, SLS, NASUWT, AHDS) and programmes with universities, private foundations, or selective professional networks (such as BOCSH). Although there are many development opportunities, they depend most often on teachers' own knowledge and research. Repeated requests by practitioners were made during interviews with the OECD team for more clarity on providers of quality support for curriculum design, and a more streamlined offer (OECD, 2020[1]).

Inherited from the intense involvement of stakeholders in Scotland, a significant number of bodies, committees and other councils are involved with implementing and advising on CfE, including the Scottish Education Council, the Curriculum and Assessment Board, and the Strategic Board for Teacher Education (Table 3.1). Overall, these platforms for stakeholder engagement contribute to creating confusion and slow process around CfE. The OECD team interviewed representatives of key bodies and consulted their meeting minutes available online to understand how the various bodies, and especially the SEC and CAB, contribute to CfE implementation.

The SEC is the main forum for oversight of education improvement since 2017, which aims to provide strategic advice to ministers on education improvement; and lead and support collaboration between system leaders and key stakeholders to deliver education. The SEC links up with the CAB and the Strategic Board for Teacher Education and is informed by the International Council of Education Advisers.

The CAB is the main forum for oversight of curriculum and assessment activity in Scotland since 2017, which oversees and leads the curriculum and assessment policy framework in Scottish education and considers actions needed to ensure CfE delivers for all. It supports the SEC but is directly accountable to Scottish ministers. It replaced former CfE management groups and is chaired jointly by the Director of Learning, Scottish Government and the Chief Executive of Education Scotland. Members include teachers' professional associations, colleges, universities, scholars, parent associations, Skills Development Scotland and CLD representatives.

Both bodies were praised for opening a wider channel of communication between the Scottish Government and national agencies, and stakeholders. The CAB also successfully provided a few actionable inputs, including the drafting and publishing of the "refreshed CfE narrative" in 2019, following OECD recommendations (OECD, 2015[35]).

In terms of the bodies, committees and other councils mentioned above, their respective mandate and relationships to each other are defined, but clear processes to organise their interactions and the outcomes from the various groups' actions are amiss. The role of SEC as the overarching body was questioned during OECD interviews, contrasting the willingness to embody a partnership approach to education policy making and its ability to translate policy in practical terms, with a purported lack of innovative thinking and imbalance between its members (Humes, 2020[12]). Despite CAB's achievements, its members themselves acknowledged being uncertain about the roles and responsibilities of CAB in relation to other stakeholders and about their own role on the Board (OECD, 2020[1]). The communication between CAB and SEC was reportedly limited, with little time granted to discussing each other's input, and no clear sign of action following presentation of CAB papers to SEC, for instance (Scottish Education Council, 2017-19[41]).

Several reasons could be noted for the lack of clarity among Scottish stakeholders' responsibilities. First, sometimes the bodies, committees and institutions recently created to evolve with CfE policy took time to establish their role and find their voice in an already crowded system. The examples of the Curriculum Assessment Board and the Scottish Education Council highlighted above can in part be explained by the fact that both bodies were established in 2017, in replacement of – but with different mandates than – previous bodies, such as the Curriculum for Excellence Management Board and supporting structure. Furthermore, although Education Scotland was not restructured for CfE specifically, the development of its inspection and scrutiny functions, and of supporting leadership development and regional working in 2017, might contribute to the difficulties in identifying and fulfilling the institution's remit.

Second, instances were reported to the OECD team of organisations who took on responsibilities de facto because they had resources to respond to stakeholders' demands when they formulated them, even if such responsibilities might have been beyond their official mandate. Such shift is illustrated, for instance, in the fact that resources produced by the Scottish Qualifications Authority have remained the primary reference for teachers in upper-secondary education (Senior Phase), before resources produced by other bodies with statutory responsibility for curriculum support, such as local authorities and Education Scotland and predecessors.

As revealed by some practitioners, secondary schools tend to prioritise information and guidance on examinations coming from the SQA over other CfE-related guidance. The SQA produced detailed guidance as part of the development of updated qualifications (2012-16) when CfE was still in the early years of its implementation. The teaching profession was adjusting to its new role in curriculum design; the balance between schools' autonomy in curriculum design and central support and guidance was not yet found; national agencies had also developed a few resources to support curriculum design; and local authorities worked closely with their schools to offer them resources in support of CfE implementation. As a result, the offer of support resources varied across the system, often timely and useful but at times overwhelming and unclear to practitioners.

The challenge was especially significant in secondary schools, where the new CfE framework required learning to go beyond preparation for national qualifications. The teaching profession, seeking guidance to develop their curricula, turned to SQA's high-quality resources, which provide for each qualification a detailed course content, coursework, assessment structure and example of teaching resources in open share (see national qualifications pages in Scottish Qualifications Authority (2020-21[42])). SQA's resources tended to be used as primary coursework in classrooms instead of coursework designed at the school level based on the CfE framework. This expanded use of SQA resources contributed to reinforcing the influence of SQA's work, from providing teachers with optional assessment guidance to effectively replacing curriculum resources (OECD, 2020[1]).

A third reason why the distribution of responsibility is somewhat blurred is that most top administrative and executive positions in Scotland's education system tend to be held successively by a small number of agents. This tendency is shared with a number of other systems and is especially noticeable in Scotland due to the relatively small size of the education system. This rotation of high-ranking officials between positions in government, administration and agencies can help facilitate the dialogue between institutions and maintain a continuity sometimes necessary in public policy. It can, however, become an issue if this striving for dialogue and continuity cultivates a single perspective on education and prevents creative thinking and constructive challenging from within top decision-making processes (OECD, 2020[1]; Burns, Köster and Fuster, 2016[2]). Although this might contribute to inter-organisational relations, it has been raised in discussions with the OECD team as a risk. If only the same people are constantly involved, where do new ideas and perspectives come from?

Scotland's system is heavily governed relative to its scale and numbers of schools. The multiple layers of governance and additional responsibilities created around CfE can complicate implementation processes by generating additional policy priorities and supplementary materials with little co-ordination. The

overwhelming number of organisations also draws quite heavily on system leadership capacity, with staff often moving from one organisation to the next or from one division to the next.

Communication for a shared meaning of Curriculum for Excellence

Communication is an important channel to develop shared meaning between stakeholders and foster ownership of a policy. There is a wide range of tools for communication in curriculum policy implementation, from official publications on professional or public channels, to dialogue and consultation exercises, and informal discussions through all the initiatives for stakeholder involvement. Developing an effective communication strategy that brings all these tools together is a stepping-stone for engaging stakeholders and garnering support and clarity around the change.

Scotland succeeded in establishing the education language of CfE over time, which the OECD team could observe while interviewing stakeholders from all levels of the system. The key terms of CfE, from the four capacities to curriculum entitlements, learner progression, and Experiences and Outcomes ("Es and Os") seem to have made their way into daily discussions of education policy makers, teachers and learners alike. This ease with CfE language seems to owe in great part to teachers' discussions around curriculum design within their schools and with other units, with learners and their parents. Entry to the profession of teachers taught about CfE during initial teacher education (ITE) has also helped install CfE language in schools. It was also helped originally by the ongoing discussions at the national level and within professional organisations, as well as by the publication of some common documents, including the *Building the Curriculum* series, the "Refreshed curriculum narrative", and local authorities' own support documents for schools.

By establishing a specific language, Scotland set the conditions necessary for stakeholders to develop a shared understanding around CfE. Generally, the key terms of CfE seem well understood by the education community and are especially in use by teachers and learners in Broad General Education. The OECD team also noted a clear willingness in teachers' and schools' collaboration efforts to guarantee that their understanding of CfE terms, especially of CfE levels and benchmarks, were the same across the system. Practitioners mentioned several ways in which they communicated and collaborated with teachers and other experts, including schools' own initiatives, local authority and sometimes, RIC support, and organised professional networks. These types of collaborative structures help develop collective sense making and can further support curriculum implementation since they allow for discussion on the outcomes of the curriculum; create space for continuous feedback and knowledge sharing; reduce stakeholders' anxiety and facilitate the shared interpretation; and contribute to building curriculum coherence (Pietarinen, Pyhältö and Soini, 2017[43]).

Within a national framework, CfE allows for flexibility in school curricula, so it was pivotal in ensuring a shared understanding of the CfE vision and policy objectives, which seemed understood by the stakeholders, as reported to the OECD team. This is not an easy task, as evidence points to a number of instances where definitions and understandings differed within education systems. Stakeholders in education reform need a shared knowledge and understanding of the challenges they are seeking to address along with the meaning of the different facets or tools of reform (Kania and Kramer, 2011[44]; Penuel et al., 2011[45]). Even well-recognised key terms are not always understood in the same way. For instance, the Pupil Premium evaluation in the United Kingdom (England) noted that each school worked according to its own definition of educational disadvantage. Developing modalities for ensuring that policies are well understood and not taking for granted that understanding of phenomena and specific challenges will be the same across the system can help avoid problems in implementation processes (OECD, 2018[17]).

Effective policy implementation requires having shared values and a shared mission, as it can foster the collaborative processes essential for success (Huffman, 2003[46]; Innes and Booher, 2018[47]). In many

school systems, this may require a greater focus on long-term goals in school systems in order to meet the immediate challenges a reform may bring (Duckworth, Quinn and Seligman, 2009[48]). In addition, regardless of the level of decentralisation of a system, national leadership to "co-ordinate through partnership", by developing clear guidelines and goals and providing feedback on progress, remains very important to support stakeholders in implementation processes (Burns and Köster, 2016[49]).

One issue acknowledged by stakeholders is that communication around CfE has become confusing and unhelpful (OECD, 2020[1]). The documentation originally aimed to clarify CfE grew significantly, reaching what was sometimes referred to as "the 20 000 pages" of CfE. In part due to a willingness to support schools as they developed their curriculum, many entities, including government, national agencies and local authorities, published guidance and information about CfE until 2015, sometimes re-interpreting elements and creating possible confusion for teachers and learners (Scottish Government, 2019[50]). The constant production and recycling of documentation was often described as "overwhelming" by the practitioners it was designed to support, and as "confused" or "hard to find" by the parents and learners it was supposed to guide (OECD, 2020[1]). Surveying the documentation available on the websites of Education Scotland, the Scottish Government, local authorities and partners gave a similar impression to the OECD team. Sustaining effective and constructive communication is difficult, especially about a curriculum designed by schools, but it is possible to design and follow a communication strategy that helps implementation. The example of Wales' successful communication strategy around its new curriculum policy is enlightening (Box 3.4).

Box 3.4. An effective communication strategy around the Curriculum for Wales (United Kingdom)

The new Curriculum for Wales 2022 is the cornerstone of the country's efforts to pivot its education system from a performance-driven education with a narrow focus to an education led by commonly defined, learner-centred purposes. It is embedded in "Education in Wales: Our National Mission", a plan for 2017-21 that presents the national vision for education and calls for all children and young people to achieve the four purposes of the new curriculum.

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. The brand "Our National Mission" was developed, and associated terms such as "transformational curriculum" and "enabling objectives" have effectively brought coherence and clarity to the development of the education reform journey, laying a strong basis for stakeholders to make the mission their own.

The Directorate's communication strategy used a variety of channels online, on paper and live. The Minister held Question & Answer sessions, was consistently present at events, along with the Directorate, which 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. 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 on line and during events allowed the communication strategy to be adjusted, to clarify some issues with the curriculum policy, and debunk some of the myths through a variety of channels.

Source: OECD (2020[33]) *Achieving the New Curriculum for Wales*, https://doi.org/10.1787/4b483953-en.

In 2016, Education Scotland published a "Statement for practitioners" and took down much of the documentation then online on a different website, in an attempt to streamline the CfE framework (Education Scotland, 2016[51]). The effort continued with the "Refreshed curriculum narrative" published in 2019 by the

Scottish Government, intending to do away with the "technical jargon" that was not understood consistently. Stakeholders appreciated both efforts but remained cautious in reporting the effectiveness of clarity. For instance, the refreshed curriculum narrative was a welcome initiative, but it did not seem to address perceived ambiguities in the overall education mission and received little attention from stakeholders, given all the other policy documents.

Stakeholders qualified parts of the CfE language as "technical jargon" that had lost educational meaning and lent itself to interpretation. Often, the issue for effective communication is not in publishing long documents repeating the curriculum framework or developing each aspect separately. It is rather about going back to the meaning behind the words and guaranteeing that all stakeholders give the same meaning to key CfE words, such as "benchmarks" and "interdisciplinary learning". Although discussions about curriculum and policy should not turn into semantic debates, the choice of words is important. If in the future, the CfE framework were to evolve to respond to needs, collaboration with scholars and practitioners would be desirable at the time of designing communication. The absence of consensus on educational terms and underlying values concerning education would make systematic improvement of curriculum difficult (Benavot, 2011[52]). Continuous reference and integration of evidence as part of the dialogue between stakeholders during policy design and implementation can help to build a strong and informed consensus on the path forward. This is particularly vital in situations where stakeholders may have strong *a priori* beliefs tied to their identities and experiences (Burns and Köster, 2016[49]).

Conclusion

This chapter considered the stakeholder engagement needed to support and sustain the implementation of CfE. Stakeholder engagement is at the heart of Curriculum for Excellence. Significant efforts have been made to engage stakeholders throughout CfE's lifecycle, which have contributed to successes with CfE. The great degree of stakeholder involvement around CfE and the communication and development of a shared language created the conditions for shared ownership and wide support of CfE's vision. Stakeholders agree that schools and the profession should hold responsibility for conception, implementation and outcomes of their own curricula, provided the rest of the system fulfil their responsibilities to support schools and the profession within a clear policy framework through curriculum delivery and policy changes.

Several challenges inherent to stakeholder engagement around CfE were highlighted, however:

- First, there is a gap between the seemingly intense involvement of stakeholders at all levels of the system and the confidence they have in their effective influence on decision making. Decision makers should earn back and nurture stakeholders' trust so their engagement fulfils its potential for CfE implementation. Two aspects of stakeholder engagement around CfE seem to weaken this potential: the clarity of purpose of engagement initiatives and consistency in terms of using stakeholders' input.

- Second, CfE ownership was most often described as fragmented, with too many stakeholders claiming ownership of CfE while not necessarily fulfilling the responsibilities that come with such ownership. Transparency in the division of responsibilities among stakeholders is a necessary condition for policy success in a system that promotes shared responsibility of its curriculum.

- Third, communication around CfE remains confused, which can hinder implementation by leaving CfE open to wide interpretations and overwhelm schools, learners and parents.
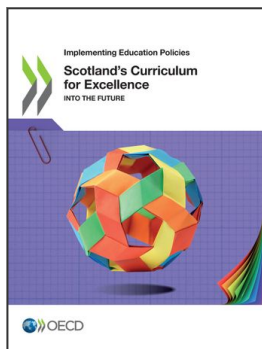
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