Peer counselling on modernising the Polish curriculum to enhance key competences

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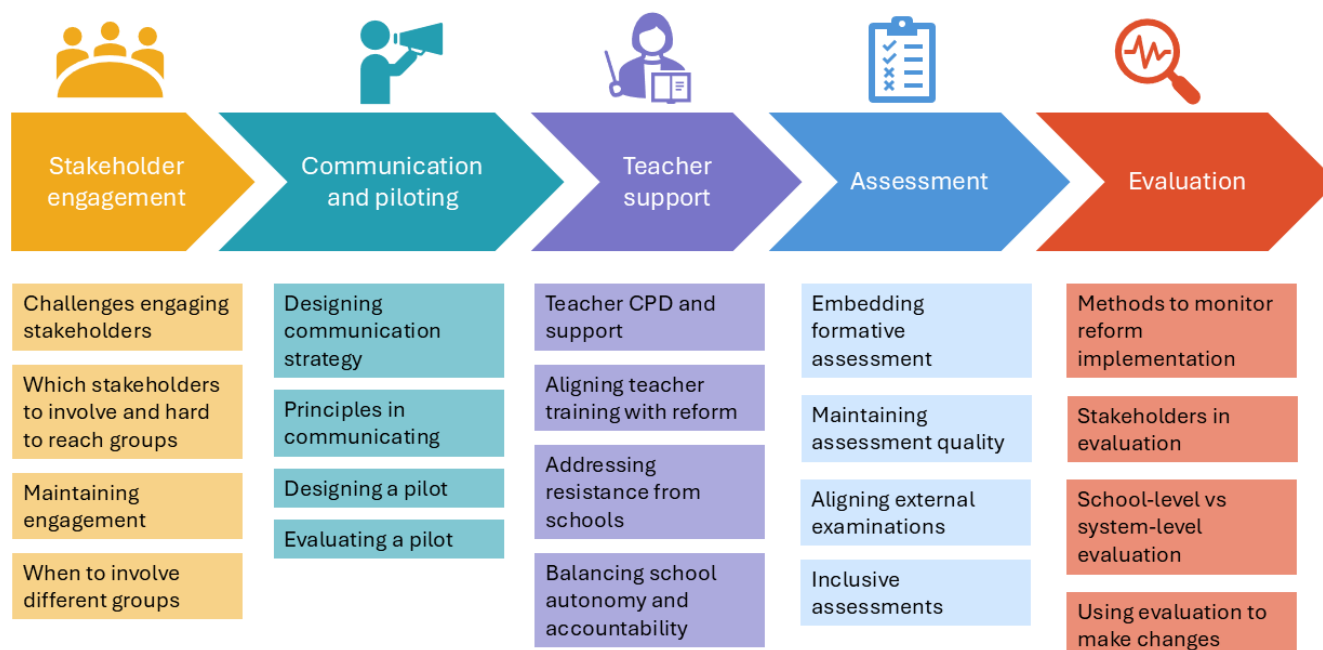# Contents

Executive summary

This report presents policy advice and reflections resulting from a peer counselling process in Poland co-organised by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, the Polish Ministry of Education and the Educational Research Institute – National Research Institute (IBE PIB), Poland. Peer counselling is part of the mutual learning toolbox of the European Education Area strategic framework until 2030 [1], providing evidence-based support for education policy development. It brings together peers from national administrations and independent experts to advise an EU Member State in a process of reform, based on experiences from their own national contexts and available research evidence. Their recommendations are intended to inform the design and implementation of policy solutions for the Member State. The impact of the process and implementation of the recommendations remains the full responsibility of the Member State that initiated the peer counselling.

This peer counselling supported Poland in the design and implementation of a curricular reform aimed at enhancing key competences by focusing on the key dimensions of a successful reform process from the perspective of sustainable implementation. The peers from three Member States (Ireland, the Netherlands and Portugal) have all engaged in introducing competence-based curricula over the last 10 or more years. Independent experts in education policies with international expertise provided further support. The process included an online webinar, data collection from a questionnaire, an in-person visit to Warsaw and bilateral meetings. The workshop in Warsaw took place on 9–10 December 2024 and examined some of the steps for designing and implementing competence-based curricula intervention and identifying potential challenges and lessons learned, based on examples from the three Member States.

The reform in Poland is at an early stage, and a bird's-eye view of all key areas was deemed most useful in this context of strategy development. The timeline for the competence-based curricula reform in Poland is both accelerated and ambitious, and the policy advice from peers is also adapted to reflect these circumstances. The peer counselling touched upon supporting stakeholder engagement throughout the process of design and implementation, developing effective communication channels, building teacher capacity, ensuring the consistency of assessments, and embedding evaluation throughout the process from inception. Details discussed in each of these topics during the peer counselling are outlined in Figure 1.

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[1] European Commission, 'Strategic Framework', European Education Area website, updated 25 October 2023, https://education.ec.europa.eu/about-eea/strategic-framework.

Figure 1. Overview of the topics discussed during the peer counselling process

Stakeholder engagement	Communication and piloting	Teacher support	Assessment	Evaluation
Challenges engaging stakeholders	Designing communication strategy	Teacher CPD and support	Embedding formative assessment	Methods to monitor reform implementation
Which stakeholders to involve and hard to reach groups	Principles in communicating	Aligning teacher training with reform	Maintaining assessment quality	Stakeholders in evaluation
Maintaining engagement	Designing a pilot	Addressing resistance from schools	Aligning external examinations	School-level vs system-level evaluation
When to involve different groups	Evaluating a pilot	Balancing school autonomy and accountability	Inclusive assessments	Using evaluation to make changes

The peer counselling formulated concrete policy advice for Poland, assessing existing strengths and weaknesses and building on lessons from the peer Member States. These include (but are not limited to) the following.

1. **Ensuring early, ongoing and inclusive stakeholder engagement.** Supporting and further developing existing horizontal networks (of schools and stakeholders) are particularly recommended in the Polish context. Proactive stakeholder involvement is key for building trust and overcoming reform fatigue. The Irish methods of closing the feedback loop could serve as an example for continuous stakeholder engagement, which has not yet been developed in Poland. This approach might be further strengthened in Poland if dialogue and debate is structured around a more unified 'Polish vision' for education.

2. **Designing a coherent communication strategy.** Due to the low levels of public engagement in Poland, there is a strong need to develop communication channels to facilitate buy-in and ownership of the reforms. Such a strategy should be informed by lessons from the introduction of the civic and health education in the first stage of the reform. Communicating in an accessible way and mitigating misinformation could be aided by developing websites and explanatory videos of key concepts, as Portugal did on

the margin of their reform. 'Ambassadors of change', based on the example of the Netherlands, could help promote the reform at the local level.

3. **Supporting teachers and school leaders in reform implementation aligned with key competence development.** Poland already has teacher training systems in place that enable the consistent and effective dissemination of information. It is recommended that this be complemented by practical support, possibly through 'implementation teams' providing coaching, mentoring and supervision, as well as ready-made teaching materials. Priority should be given to empowering school leaders, as Polish school leaders have high levels of autonomy for the curriculum but low levels of resource allocation. Initial teacher education also needs to be adjusted to the competence-based curriculum. Inspirational practices include investing in teacher support in the implementation of transversal competences in Finland or the Centre for School Leadership in Ireland.

4. **Moving from summative to formative assessments.** Developing formative and summative assessments of key competences will require the mobilisation of significant resources. In Poland, multidisciplinary Child Guidance Centres are well placed to take on a new role in leading and supporting teachers in the design and implementation of classroom-based formative assessments. A good example is Portugal, where a national project helped teachers improve their assessment practices. Creating new middle management structures in schools could also support new instruction assessment practices.

5. **Planning and capacity building for policy evaluation.** There is a strong need for capacity building, skills development and developing a culture of evaluation at the central policy level, which are prerequisites for planning for policy evaluation already at the design phase. School self-evaluation is not carried out systematically in Poland; therefore, capacity building is also needed at the school level, particularly with school leaders. A multi-level approach to evaluation could be beneficial, such as the one in Ireland, which examined the effectiveness of teacher professional development, student's responses to their changing learning experiences, quality of classroom-based assessments, and parental attitudes.

6. **Developing a long-term strategic approach for sustainable implementation.** Given the challenges of past curricular reforms in Poland, the peer counselling gave particular emphasis as to how to sequence the proposed interventions and capacity building across the different topics in time to ensure the long-term sustainability of the reform implementation. A sequencing framework was used to ensure consistency across the recommendations, which could also serve as an evidence base for the development of an implementation roadmap.

A summary of the policy recommendations developed for each of these topics is provided in Figure 2, and each recommendation is further detailed in the respective chapters of the report.

Figure 2. Overview of recommendations across all topics and stages of the reform

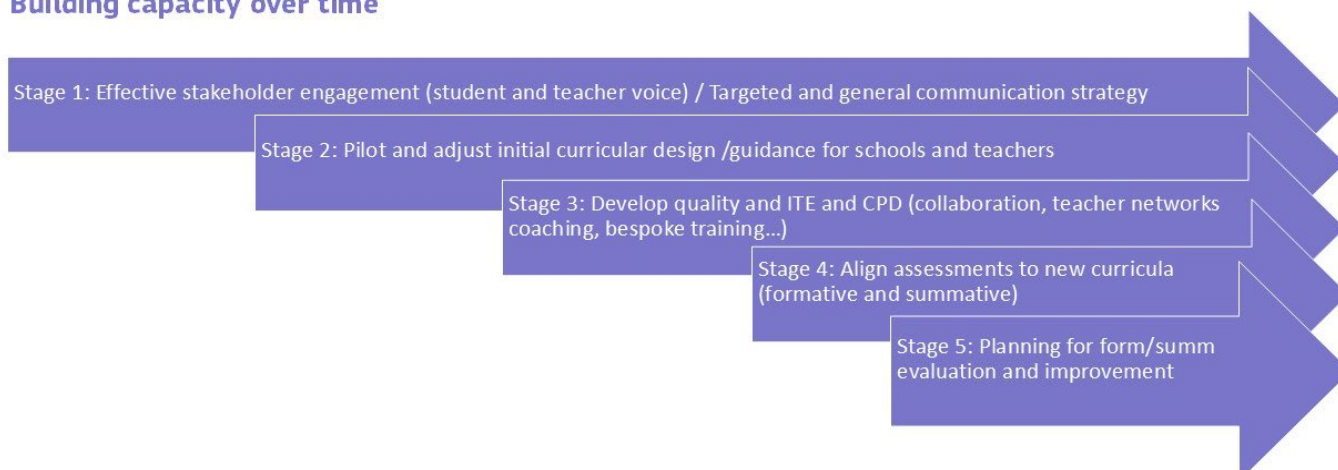| Stage One Set up communication channels and deliver clear information	Stage Two Deliver reform materials and support systems	Stage Three Deepen work with key actors across systems	Stage Four Adapt based on monitoring data and stakeholder input
Build and sustain trust-based relationships with stakeholders	Build linkages among Ministries and key agencies	Identify ambassadors of change	Align stakeholder engagement activities with the policy cycle
Engage a broad diversity of stakeholders, ensuring inclusive engagement	Identify key principles in communicating the reform effectively	Develop sound stakeholder activities around a unified vision	Adopt learnings from the first stage of the reform
Communicate rationale for the reform widely and effectively	Create support networks for teachers	Develop structures and processes for ongoing communication	Be open with teachers
Initiate coordination with HE teacher training institutions	Provide curriculum resources and materials	Prioritize empowering school leaders	Coordinate with the Central Exam Board
Address teacher attitudes regarding the reform	Provide support to meet diverse student needs	Listen to on the ground experiences	Develop capacity to respond to changing need
Share assessment information with parents	Provide classroom assessment materials	Create within-school assessment committees	Include response to diverse student needs in national and school evaluations
Decide parameters for evaluation at national and school levels early in the reform process	Capitalize on existing roles within the system	Build capacity to conduct self-evaluation	
	Pilot an evaluation in subset of school	Build expertise on national assessment	

Methodology

Many Member States are currently either adopting specific measures or implementing overarching national strategies to introduce competences into their systems. One recent mapping exercise identified competence-related initiatives across all 27 Member States. Of 79 relevant reforms identified (not exhaustive), most focused on curriculum development (51), followed by teacher capacity (40) and assessment (39) (European Commission et al., 2022b, p. 25). In general, competence-based curricula require changes in assessment methods and support for teachers to integrate student-centred pedagogies (e.g. project-based approaches), which were a key focus of the peer counselling.

The framework in Figure 3 was used to guide discussions across the topics, gathering a bird's-eye view of the overall strategy for the reform with an emphasis on the sustainability of the reform. The framework sets out a sequencing strategy for introducing new curricula and building capacity over time (e.g. new teaching methods and new approaches to assessment). A number of theorists have emphasised the importance of sequencing. For example, Senge (1990) suggests that learning organisations need to identify leverage points and feedback loops and to sequence interventions in order to change system behaviour over time. Others have highlighted the importance of the timing and the order of interventions to achieve complex policy goals (Holland, 1995), as well as to adapt strategies based on feedback (Zimmerman et al., 1998).

Figure 3. Framework for building capacity to implement curriculum reform (European Commission et al., 2022b)

Building capacity over time

Stage 1: Effective stakeholder engagement (student and teacher voice) / Targeted and general communication strategy

Stage 2: Pilot and adjust initial curricular design /guidance for schools and teachers

Stage 3: Develop quality and ITE and CPD (collaboration, teacher networks coaching, bespoke training…)

Stage 4: Align assessments to new curricula (formative and summative)

Stage 5: Planning for form/summ evaluation and improvement

The sequential steps outlined above were agreed with the peer counselling participants in Poland along with the external experts.

- **Stage 1** (early engagement with stakeholders) highlights the importance of effective communication about overall goals of the reform during the design stage, along with ongoing stakeholder engagement – not only at the design stage, but also during implementation and evaluation.

- Piloting of the reform (**Stage 2**) allows systems to 'test' new approaches and to identify areas for improvement. Piloting itself may be sequenced – e.g. implemented in a small subset of schools and at one school level or introduced across the whole school system – with the intent to introduce improvements based on feedback very early on. Over the longer term, additional innovations related to competence-based curricula may be piloted.

- **Stage 3** emphasises the importance of initial and continuing professional development for teachers. This may include bespoke training, such as in-service workshops organised by the school to address specific school and teacher development aims, teacher induction and ongoing teacher collaboration within schools and across networks, and formal seminars. These different approaches may be combined to support capacity building over time (OECD, 2018a).

- **Stage 4** highlights the importance of aligning student assessment and new competence-based curricula. Student assessments, whether formative or summative, will need to measure whether students have achieved the learning aims of the curricula – e.g. using knowledge in different contexts, problem solving, etc. This may require new assessment formats and content (e.g. performance-based examinations, open classroom-based dialogues rather than multiple-choice examinations or yes/no questions in a classroom context to measure the ability to use knowledge in different contexts).

- **Stage 5** highlights the importance of formative and summative evaluations ([2]) of the curriculum change itself. Formative evaluations are essential to feedback and adaptations of curricula and of implementation strategies. Summative evaluations – conducted at longer intervals (e.g. 5 or 10 years) – focus on measuring the impact of curriculum and policy changes.

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[2] NB: The term 'assessment' is used to refer to assessments of students, and 'evaluation' to judgements of organisational or system-level implementation and impacts.

Context

The historical context in Poland

Since significant political transformation in 1989, Poland has faced challenges in modernising its education system. In 1999, wide-ranging reforms meant replacing an eight-year primary school (covering International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) levels 1 and 2), with a six-year primary school and the newly established three-year lower secondary school. Consequently, comprehensive general education was extended to nine years and the tracking of students into vocational or general education pathways was postponed by one year, reflecting evidence of better student outcomes when tracking is postponed (Jakubowski et al., 2010; Jakubowski et al., 2016). Furthermore, the examination, admission and assessment systems were changed. The reform led to notable improvements, including a significant reduction in educational inequalities and better performance in international assessments such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) (Drucker and Horn, 2016). However, the implementation process was rushed, and the objectives of the reform had not been always well understood by the public, leading to dissatisfaction especially in the initial years (Zahorska, 2009).

In response to persistent challenges, a reform initiated in 2009 aimed to modernise the curriculum further by focusing on cognitive and analytical skills, problem solving and raising competences in vocational education. Against the reform objective to focus on key competences, teachers felt under pressure to cover all content, leading to surface-level teaching rather than deep understanding. In parallel, the lowering of the schooling starting age was attempted, which faced resistance and fuelled political conflict over education (Herbst and Sobotka, 2016).

In 2017, new reforms marked a dramatic shift away from, and a reversal of, previous reforms. Lower secondary schools were removed, and the eight-year primary school structure was restored, shortening the general education period and advancing the tracking of students between the general and vocational paths by one year. The curriculum became more detailed, condensed and incoherent, risking surface-level teaching rather than deep understanding as teachers were left with little room to introduce new student-centred pedagogies. The reforms were rushed, implemented without sufficient consultation with educational stakeholders, despite official and widespread public protests, and were widely criticised by researchers, educators and local authorities (European Commission, 2017; Supreme Audit Office, 2019).

Current challenges

Poland's education system is now at a crossroads. Past reforms have shown that progress is possible but shifting political priorities, frequent changes and a lack of consultation with teachers, parents and other stakeholders have repeatedly stalled meaningful improvements.

Poland has the lowest number of teaching hours per year in general lower secondary education among Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries (although timetables are overloaded in the later grades, and homework overload is a significant problem) (OECD, 2020b). Recent PISA data shows Poland is one of the lowest-ranking countries in terms of students' sense of belonging and well-being at school. Student performance in mathematics, reading and science is worrying – the decline in basic skills between 2018 and 2022 was sharper than the EU average, with a noticeable increase in the impact of students' socioeconomic background on their results (European Commission, 2022a; OECD, 2023b). The achievement gap between urban-rural schools has widened since 2018, deepening educational inequalities. There were particularly large declines in terms of the proportion of top performing students in all three areas of basic skills (European Commission, 2022a; OECD, 2023b).

Reflecting the inequitable distribution of school financing, there are considerable regional disparities, with schools in smaller towns and rural areas often being less well-equipped, having fewer qualified teachers and limited access to modern technologies – all reflected in lower student performance in these regions (Centralna Komisja Egzaminacyjna, 2024).

Additionally, teachers' professional satisfaction index is low, and Poland is also struggling with widespread teacher shortages (despite substantially increased salaries in 2024) and expected widespread teacher retirements (given teacher age demographics), likely to affect students' results (European Commission, 2024; OECD, 2023a). Teachers in Poland have been through many educational reforms, and reform fatigue is a critical issue. Traditional teaching methods, such as rote learning, have persisted. There is a lack of support and professional learning to develop teachers' expertise in content adaptation, and teachers do not make use of the flexibility in pedagogy that they have (OECD, 2024).

A new vision for education

In 2019 and 2020, the Ministry of National Education, in collaboration with all stakeholders, and supported by the OECD, developed the Integrated Skills Strategy (ISS) 2030, endorsed by the Polish government (Government of Poland, 2020). The ISS provides a policy framework for the development of skills to enhance social capital, foster social inclusion and economic growth, and achieve a high quality of life. It covers skills development in the field of education

and training, including formal learning (general, vocational and higher education), and non-formal and informal learning. It includes the six following priority areas (Kolanowska et al., 2025).

1. Improving key skills in children, young people and adults. Develop key competences for active participation in social and economic life as part of formal, non-formal and informal education; adapt education and training to the needs of diverse learners; develop ICT skills; strengthen the system supporting the development of skills and abilities in all pupils and students, including specific support measures for particularly gifted pupils and students; develop effective and diverse funding and quality assurance mechanisms in the area of skills development.

2. Fostering a learning culture geared towards active and continuous development of skills. This includes the promotion of the learning paradigm, as opposed to the teaching paradigm, in core curricula, pedagogical approaches and lifelong learning.

3. Increasing employer involvement in the development and better use of skills.

4. Building an effective system for skills assessment and anticipation and the dissemination of related information.

5. Developing effective and sustainable mechanisms for inter-ministerial and inter-sectoral collaboration and coordination in the area of skills development.

6. Ensuring equal access to opportunities for the development and use of skills.

Meeting the increasingly diverse needs of students, in terms of migrant populations and a growing prevalence of special educational needs, will be a key challenge for the reform process. Broad objectives in relation to equity in education in Poland include reducing achievement and skill gaps across socioeconomic groups and between migrant and non-migrant groups. The most recent 2022 PISA data indicate socioeconomically advantaged students outperform disadvantaged students by 96 points in maths (compared with the 93-point score difference across all OECD countries; OECD, 2023a). In relation to reforms to support the inclusion of students with special or additional educational needs, reforms are centred on increasing the number of psychologists and special pedagogues in schools and improving the competences of teachers. There has been less focus on adapting curricula to meet the diverse needs of students. Special schools are being transformed into inclusive education specialist centres (using European Social Fund Plus funding), which are also intended to support mainstream schools in addressing the needs of students with special educational needs (SEN). Additional private special schools have been established, particularly in Warsaw, due to the increasing numbers of SEN students, a trend seen in many European countries. There has also been a focus on using digital technologies – teachers and schools have access to guidance and materials (i.e. tools, exemplary lessons) on using technology in teaching students with special needs (Roseme et al., 2021). In addition,

students with disabilities can apply for funding for assistive technologies from the 'Active local government' programme of the State Fund for Rehabilitation of Disabled People (Roseme et al., 2021).

Developed in 2024, a key element of this reform is the primary school student **graduate profile** – a set of skills that every student should acquire at school, at each ISCED level. In 2025, the IBE PIB will develop the graduate profile for secondary school students. The profile is a reference point for Polish schools and responds to the challenges of the modern world. It includes key domains across competences (cognitive, social and personal), agency (such as self-fulfilment, self-efficacy and sense of belonging to a community) and values (including respect, fairness and truth). Overall, the ministry's strategy reflects a commitment to creating a more modern, equitable and future-ready education system in Poland. The phased approach to curriculum changes and the focus on competence-based education are key elements of this long-term vision for educational transformation.

The reforms are intended to address the pressing need for a more effective and sustainable approach to curriculum reform, drawing on lessons from past reforms and aligning it to the best practices and experiences from other countries. A modern curriculum and a definition of learning objectives based on research results are needed. Curriculum reform can help reduce inequalities and better adapt education to the requirements of the 21st century, but effective implementation is key, which requires, among other elements, the involvement of teachers and regional educational authorities.

Poland seeks to understand the rationale and main goals behind the reforms in the peer Member States, and whether and how they achieved these objectives. Overall, the main aim of the peer counselling was to allow Polish colleagues to learn from both the successes and challenges in other Member States that had initiated reforms at an earlier stage.

Member State reforms used in the peer counselling

Ireland

The senior cycle of education in Ireland, typically encompassing students aged 15 to 18, is undergoing a significant transformation, after an extensive review of this phase of education (NCCA, 2022). The redevelopment plan aims to modernise the curriculum with an emphasis on the development of key competences, along with introducing new assessment methods and better preparing students for life and learning beyond school. Students can now choose from a wider array of subjects and modules, allowing them to tailor their education to their aspirations and strengths, such as drama, film and theatre studies or climate action and sustainable development. Level 1 and Level 2 learning programmes will be available for students who have delayed development across a number of areas, including learning, communication, language and adaptive skills. A significant shift in assessment practices will reduce dependence on written summative examinations and provide a broader assessment

system to reflect on student learning, boost students' motivation to learn, and enhance opportunities for formative feedback practices. The success of the redevelopment hinges on extensive engagement and consultation with school communities and stakeholders. It also requires a series of comprehensive professional development programmes offered by Oide, a dedicate teacher support service. This senior cycle reform comes off the back of a recent junior cycle reform in Ireland, the *Framework for Junior Cycle* (Department of Education and Skills, 2015). The junior cycle reform held similar aims to modernise the curriculum with a focus on key competences and introduce a wider array of assessment practices. The junior cycle reform is now fully embedded in the Irish education system, and a rigorous, longitudinal external evaluation of the reform was recently completed. Lessons learned during the junior cycle reform, such as stakeholder engagement, teacher professional development and communication strategies, are valuable for both current reforms in Ireland and Poland.

Portugal

The Portuguese education system underwent a significant curriculum change between 2016 and 2018, aimed at promoting inclusion, autonomy and curricular flexibility and combating school failure (Diario da Republica, 2016, 2018a, b). In 2016, the 'National programme to promote school success' was created, to promote equity, improve the quality of teaching and reduce school failure rates. In 2017, the 'Pedagogical innovation pilot projects' began, which introduced experimental practices in school clusters. A 'National strategy for citizenship education' (Monteiro et al., 2017) was drawn up to train active, critical and aware citizens. In the 2017/2018 school year, the 'Autonomy and curricular flexibility project' involved 226 school groupings and non-grouped schools who had a choice in managing up to 25 % of the curricular workload, adapting teaching to its specific needs. After evaluating the implementation of this project in the form of a pedagogical experiment, these curricular changes culminated in the enactment of Decree-Laws 54/2018 (2018a) and 55/2018 (2018b), both of 6 July (Diario da Republica, 2016, 2018a, b). Decree-Law 54/2018 deepened the understanding of inclusion as an essential element of education, ensuring that every student is supported in their learning process, regardless of their individual needs. Decree-Law 55/2018 strengthened schools' curricular autonomy, allowing them to adapt the curriculum to their specific realities to promote learning by managing up to 25 % of the curriculum. This set of educational policies that embody autonomy and curricular flexibility is based on the vision of an education system that values inclusion and equity. The focus is on providing students not only with academic knowledge but also with skills and attitudes that culminate in the competences set out in the curriculum document '[Profile of Students at the End of Compulsory Schooling]' (d'Olveira Martins et al., 2017). Lessons learnt during these reforms, in particular regarding embedding curricular flexibility and encouraging teacher autonomy, are relevant for the current reforms in Poland.

The Netherlands

The ongoing curriculum reforms are part of the Platform on Education 2032 (which functioned from 2014 to 2016), which is an update and revision of the attainment targets from 2006. Sessions were organised, and many stakeholders in the education field were involved in developing the new reforms. The four steps in the process were (i) a national brainstorm; (ii) a dialogue phase, including online sessions on social media, and talks with students, teachers, parents, education professionals and entrepreneurs; (iii) a consultation phase; and (iv) the final advice. It was followed by Curriculum.nu, until 2019. In October 2019, an advisory report was prepared by teachers and school leaders with building blocks for the revision of nine learning areas in primary and secondary education (Curriculum.nu). In 2020, a temporary scientific committee was established to advise the government on the curriculum reform. Currently, the new concept attainment goals for both primary education and the first half of secondary education have been developed by SLO (the Dutch institute for curriculum development), in close collaboration with educational experts, researchers and teachers to ensure there is broad consensus. Those in the educational field (teachers, schools, etc.) have expressed they are content with the concept goals and would like to start using them in their practice as a pilot and to develop the final goals. Lessons can be learnt from the Netherlands on developing a new curricular structure and goals and stakeholder engagement in this process of redevelopment.

Topic one: effective stakeholder engagement

Key recommendations

1. Build and sustain trust-based relationships among, and with, stakeholders.

2. Engage a broad diversity of stakeholders and ensure stakeholder engagement is inclusive.

3. Develop sound and comprehensive stakeholder activities (e.g. structured workshops, consultations, (social) media campaigns) around a unified vision for the aims and benefits of the reform.

4. Align stakeholder engagement activities with the timeline of the policy cycle to ensure engagement throughout design, implementation and evaluation stages, where possible.

Introduction

The peer counselling saw considerable focus on stakeholder engagement from across the participants. Given the 'top-down' tradition of policy formation and implementation in Poland, stakeholder engagement has not been systematically embedded in the early stages of the reform processes. Tikkanen (2020) cautions that top-down reforms tend to have a weak impact on the everyday life of schools because they often 'fail to enhance ownership over the reform' or build sufficient understanding of the reform across different levels of the educational system. A more balanced combination of top-down and bottom-up strategies is more likely to be effective in bringing about sustainable change (Fullan, 2007) and meaningful engagement. Horizontal governance may also be particularly important in the Polish context, whereby school networks can share information and learning about the reform as it is rolled out. The long-term sustainability of the reform will hinge on effective and inclusive stakeholder engagement as the process through which the reform gains social and political support.

Evidence internationally increasingly points to the importance of early and ongoing engagement with a broad spectrum of stakeholders in policy design and implementation.

Research has consistently shown that inclusive stakeholder engagement supports accountability, efficiency and good governance (Yetano et al., 2010). Engagement with a broad diversity of stakeholders (including educators, parents, students and regional authorities), a focus on building and sustaining trust-based relationships, and decision-making underpinned by clear and transparent processes are key (European Commission, 2019). Sound and comprehensive engagement activities facilitate shared sense-making, ensuring a deep and collective understanding of competence-based curricular change, including its significance and its implications for schools and learners. 'This involves building bridges between the old and new understanding and designing interpersonal arenas for learning across the layers of the educational system (i.e. a systemic approach)' (Soini et al., 2021, p. 249). However, efforts to engage a broad group of stakeholders in policy design and implementation are relatively recent in general (European Commission et al., 2022b), and many countries are still learning in this regard, including effective ways to involve stakeholders in structured processes and receive and incorporate feedback.

Strengths

In Poland there is an appetite among students, parents and (many) teachers for their voices to be heard and to contribute in a meaningful way to the reform process, as evidenced in the feedback received on the initial reform of civic and health subject areas.

Some horizontal networks between teachers and school leaders are already informally in place, which could be further developed. The importance of a context-specific engagement process was repeatedly emphasised, given the complex history of educational reforms in Poland.

The IBE PIB has begun engaging specialists, primarily through open calls for proposals, to ensure the curriculum's development involves external experts, including teachers, non-governmental organisation (NGO) representatives, academics, teacher training institutions and psychologists. The IBE PIB has already organised public consultations of the pre-school and primary education graduate profile, which resulted in a change of the model description. A reform monitoring council of experts has been established to monitor and guide the implementation of the reform. Regional coordinators have been appointed to organise communication with school stakeholders. A series of regional meetings with all groups of stakeholders was launched in 2025 informing them about the reform and the value of formative assessment.

Challenges

Stakeholder engagement has not been central in the early stages of the reform in Poland. Polarisation in society and frequent shifts in political priorities have resulted in scepticism and an unwillingness to participate in or support the reform. Opposition has been strongest in

relation to the civic and health education proposals, largely due to the inclusion of sex education in the latter curriculum.

There is a lack of structured stakeholder representation in Poland, for historical and cultural reasons. Parents, for example, do not have structured representation (a council of parents was disbanded around a decade ago). There are also few representative bodies for other key stakeholders like teachers and students. The existing representation is also fragmented, with teachers' voices represented by several different trade unions. Current working conditions also mean teachers feel unheard and undervalued and are weary of reform, which poses a challenge for their engagement.

Feedback from stakeholders to date has tended to be reactive to media appearances by government ministers, so there has been an absence of clear messaging or a collaborative approach. There has also been a lack of feedback loops in consultations. Some consultations were organised (public consultation of the graduate profile during the 27.09.–31.10.2024 period ([3]), Drzymulska-Derda, 2024; Fundacja Stocznia, 2024). The suggestions collected during the consultations of the graduate profile contributed to the change of its description. Low levels of trust in government and reform fatigue have affected stakeholder engagement and the willingness to accept the new curricula and assessment approaches.

Recommendations

Build trust-based relationships among and with stakeholders

Early and ongoing engagement and collaboration with stakeholder groups is important to build engagement and greater sustainability of the reforms, which will then be less vulnerable to radical shifts in priorities. Such early and meaningful engagement will develop honest, trust-based relationships across stakeholder groups, which is key to fostering buy-in for new policies and practices, and in terms of reflecting the on-the-ground experience in design and re-design processes. There is a need for greater transparency, beginning with clear public messaging about the importance of competences, the vision for assessment, etc. Time pressures have curtailed opportunities for meaningful stakeholder engagement – it should be openly communicated that time for involving stakeholders at this stage is limited. Stakeholders could also be asked how they see their role within the coming months and in the later stages of the reform process. Honesty is important – stakeholders should be aware that at this stage there is limited space to reflect their ideas and insights in policy design but there will be space as the process evolves and as stakeholder capacity is built and a culture of engagement reinforced.

([3])   https://ibe.edu.pl/pl/konsultacje-spoleczne.

Engage a broad diversity of stakeholders for inclusive stakeholder engagement

Developing appropriate, tailored and responsive strategies is needed to facilitate collaboration between policymakers and a broad spectrum of stakeholders across system and school levels. Supporting the development of structured/representative groups will be important. This includes representative groups for school leaders, teachers, specialist support personnel, parents and students. The student voice is particularly important, and lessons from Ireland are valuable. Targeted and outreach engagement with families experiencing social exclusion will be important, particularly given the rise of home schooling (and private online learning). In this way, all key stakeholders are part of the implementation journey and own the reforms. This includes developing dialogue with the whole school community, through new and existing structures and not limited to a one-off consultation. There is a need for ongoing two-way engagement throughout the reform process.

Develop sound and comprehensive stakeholder activities around a unified vision

There is significant merit in striving for a unified vision that will guide constructive dialogue and debate, starting with the student profile. This vision, developed in conjunction with stakeholders, will need to be flexible – built and re-built as the implementation process evolves – and broad enough to sustain adjustments to policy over time. While already designed, the reform process will need to reflect on, and be refined by, stakeholders' aspirations for education (which may be diverse) and on-the-ground experiences and underpinned by (emerging) research evidence. Engagement activities should be tailored and respond to the needs and preferences of different groups. This might include structured workshops and formal events, consultations, online webinars and (social) media campaigns, along with engagement with representative groups and individuals, taking different formats. In terms of regional structures, there is the possibility of working with the 16 regional authorities to organise stakeholder events and bring together experiences, insights and recommendations.

Align stakeholder engagement activities with the policy cycle

While the initial stage is short, the overall reform runs until 2032. This means that stakeholder engagement will need to be built for longer-term implementation. Stakeholders should have a constant place at the table, although their roles and contributions may change over time as the stages of the reform process evolve. Structures and systems for engagement will be key and will shape ongoing engagement and involvement. One approach might be sending thank-you notes where stakeholders have contributed, explaining what was changed in response to their contributions and that their voice has been heard. Ireland has this kind of system of closing the feedback loop (e.g. through publishing papers and newsletters for schools, which provide a mechanism for schools to engage with the reform process, learn and provide reflections on experiences in different school settings).

Member State case studies

Ireland

The *Framework for Junior Cycle* (Department of Education and Skills, 2015) was introduced following a lengthy period of deliberation and consultation with stakeholders. Development work was undertaken by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), a statutory body of the Department of Education. The structure of the NCCA allows significant and authentic engagement by all education partners with curriculum proposals as they are being designed and developed. Evidence from a network of schools was gathered, testing aspects of the developments, and underpinned the proposals for change. Students and teachers were given a platform to share their voices. The student voice became central to the process, with diverse student representation, not just those in leadership roles within their schools. The national student council now have a seat at governmental council boards and are involved in decision-making on all topics, such as post-pandemic changes. Students speak via the public media, radio and social media to the wider Irish society about issues that affect them, including curricular and assessment reform. In preparation for implementation, a joint group was established to support, advise on and communicate messages about the implementation of policy.

The Netherlands

The first phase of the reform involved significant consultation and involvement of all stakeholders in setting out a vision for education for the future, resulting in the publication of the advisory report *Education 2032* (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2015). Following this, there was a teacher-led phase of development of the curriculum's building blocks, Curriculum.nu. A number of political changes impacted the further development of Curriculum.nu, and currently the country is following a step-by-step approach to curriculum revision with more structured stakeholder engagement processes (Rouw and van der Hoeven, 2023, p. 87). A prior 1998 curriculum reform used a top-down approach to implementation, meeting a lot of resistance. There was also insufficient investment in communication and outreach activities. Reforms currently under way are being worked out and implemented with more structured collaboration with stakeholders – there is more involvement of advisory boards, trade unions, teachers, parents and students, and the government is also using social media and other channels to communicate broadly about the reforms (European Commission et al., 2022b, p. 120). More recent reforms in the Netherlands, for example the Master Plan on Basic Skills, have emphasised the importance of reaching out not only to teachers or school boards, but also to school leaders.

Portugal

In Portugal, university researchers and teacher educators were engaged throughout the early stages of policy design. The developments in Portugal were initially launched as a pilot project, the 'Project for autonomy and curriculum flexibility', in the 2017/2018 school year. The pilot included 226 schools to start with, and 130 of these continued to the last phase of the pilot. There were a series of webinars, an exchange of experiences with schools, and student voice events. The implementation strived to involve all major stakeholders; several national initiatives were developed to promote the ownership of this document by all those who are involved in the education of Portuguese young people. To implement the reform, the ministry created interdisciplinary teams that included representatives from schools, the ministry, teachers, local authorities, parents and researchers. Lessons from Portugal include focusing on involving those people who had leverage to support the understanding of the reform assumptions of others and inspire commitment to the reform and providing information and news well in advance so people do not feel that changes are rushed or coming out of nowhere – that is, including people in the conversation early on. The message was that people don't necessarily hear information the first time around, it needs to be repeated again and again. It also proved valuable to reflect on the generational and historical perspectives of parents – what things were like when they went to school – since that is their reference point in shaping their expectations and opinions.

If you don't include stakeholders, you will fail, no matter what change you're making. That might be what has to happen, if there are political pressures, but any deliberate change needs stakeholder engagement. – Peer, peer counselling workshop.

Topic two: principles for communicating and piloting the first phase of the reform

Key recommendations

1. Develop a clear structure for ongoing wide communication on the rationale for reform.

2. Build linkages among ministries and key agencies, such as the Ministries for Education, and for Science and Higher Education, and representatives in academia (responsible for the training of new teachers), to ensure all communications have a shared understanding and vision.

3. Identify ambassadors of change, including students and teachers, who can become advocates of the reform and mentor at a local level in advance and throughout the reform.

4. Learn from the first stage of the reform through formative evaluation.

Introduction

The peer counselling identified that clear and honest communication on the rationale for reform, the objectives and the process of change is key at each stage of the reform process, from policy design through to implementation and adaptation. This includes consistent communication between central policy stakeholders, regional authorities and those at the local/school levels, as well as between school networks and within schools and their communities. Earlier research has highlighted the importance of language and how the message is pitched. For example, references to 'reform' may alienate school leaders and teachers, as the term communicates that those prior approaches have been wrong. Messages that highlight the need to enrich approaches to better fit the changing needs in society are more widely accepted (European Commission et al., 2022b).

Implementation of first stage: civic and health education

In relation to the introduction of civic and health education in Poland, particular issues in relation to communication and rollout were noted. Webinars (which were open to everyone) were used to introduce the health curriculum, and email submissions were invited from

the public. The number of submissions was large, and unmanageable, prompting the need for more efficient submission systems (such as using Google Forms) for the future. The lack of teacher preparation for teaching this subject was highlighted by many, including teachers, raising the need for greater consideration of who is best placed to teach this subject and how they should be prepared to do so. Communications from stakeholders also raised concerns over the displacement of religious education as a consequence of the reform (reduced from two lessons to one lesson per week). Ongoing communication will assess if religion teachers might be well placed to teach health education. There is a particular risk that focusing communication on health education will distract the public from broader reform objectives and mean other domains get less attention in communications with stakeholders. While the health education programme will start when students are in the 4th grade (typically 10 years of age), there were questions over whether and how students of this age can be involved in consultations and communication. As a result of public debate, health education will be an optional subject in the 2025/2026 school year, and after the evaluation, a decision will be taken on the further implementation ([4]).

Key principles in communicating effectively

The risks in relation to miscommunication and misunderstandings as information is filtered down/up the system must be mitigated. This is best achieved through clear principles in communication. These should include the following.

- **Honesty.** Even if it means acknowledging learning and things that need to change, it is important to publicly acknowledge the short time frames and prioritise key messages. Be honest with people, give prompt feedback and information, even if it is simply that there is no news.

- **Positivity and openness.** Positive messages on why reforms are needed, what this will mean and how it will be a two-way process can be achieved through a process of 'sense-making' and 'shared sense-making', which involves 'becoming acquainted with, trying out, reflecting on and discussing abstract concepts' (Nieveen, 2022, p. 53).

- **Communication.** It should be two-way and responsive. It is important to balance bottom-up, top-down and horizontal approaches that include Polish civil society organisations.

- **Value all voices.** Getting students, and a diversity of students, involved is always difficult but extremely worthwhile. School leaders will be valuable and are typically well connected with their communities. It is particularly important to communicate with teachers: 'What's in it for me?', 'How does this change my role, autonomy?' While the

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changes will likely require more work and professional development for teachers in the short term, in the longer term they will have more flexibility and autonomy.

- **Clear messaging.** The key message is that the reform will create more focused schooling that is less knowledge-centred and more based on values and competences, including transversal competences such as cooperation, problem-solving and critical thinking, which encourages learning and inquiry rather than memorising details. The reform will include changes to student assessment to ensure consistency.

- **Communicate early and often.** The aims of the reform, defining new concepts and approaches should be communicated from the very beginning and frequently throughout the whole implementation process. Portugal created a set of YouTube videos that describe new concepts to minimise miscommunication, in addition to websites with materials (such as the MAIA Project's *National Project of Training, Supervision and Research in Classroom Assessment* in 2019) and the sharing of good practices.

- **Consistent presentation.** Material should be developed across all levels and stakeholders (e.g. both teachers and inspectors) to introduce content and methods.

- **Accessibility.** Language and content should be accessible for a wide readership, appropriate for different audiences with varying levels of knowledge regarding education systems/curricula and avoid 'education speak'. Language and communication approaches should be tailored for different groups. Some parents (and students) may struggle with complex, formal language.

Strengths

There is widespread recognition by policymakers of the importance of communicating the rationale for reform and the objectives clearly and consistently. There is evidence of a strong desire among the public to contribute to and be part of the reform process, indicated by the large number of submissions received. A robust network of regional education supervisory bodies (*Kuratoria Oświaty*) is already in place to disseminate essential guidance. Regional coordinators of public consultation have been appointed to encourage teachers to submit feedback on the planned changes. Public consultations have already begun, including an online public hearing on civic education in June 2024, and hybrid meetings were conducted in July 2024 with NGOs to share recommendations and appoint experts to the core curriculum development teams.

Challenges

A lack of clear communication during the preparation of the first phase of the reform and during public consultations (civic and health education) has exacerbated mistrust, scepticism

and resistance to the reforms. Messaging has been mixed, lacking in consistency and often reactionary rather than pro-active. No feedback loops on this new curriculum have been established to date, and the evaluation process has yet to be decided.

Recommendations

Develop a clear structure for ongoing wide communication on the rationale for reform

There is a need to develop a strong communication strategy and communication channels throughout the educational system and with the public, to facilitate buy-in and ownership of the reforms. A successful communication strategy can become a mechanism to develop a more collaborative policy approach and support ongoing changes in beliefs and behaviours that lead to wider change in school culture and classroom practice. Teachers should be supported in understanding the reforms and what this means for their practice; students should understand what the reforms mean for them and their learning and development; parents should know what the reforms will mean for their children's skills development and preparedness for the future. This approach might be further strengthened in Poland if dialogue and debate is structured around a more unified 'Polish vision' for education.

It is important to communicate the many stages and steps in the reform process early and that each will draw on learnings from earlier stages. The development of a website will be important in disseminating this information, and flyers could be circulated to schools and other educational bodies with QR codes with links to the website. New systems will be needed for managing public submissions – so they follow a clear structure and can be analysed systematically.

Communication strategies should draw on and convey research evidence on the current experience of schools and students (overburdened and dated curriculum, overloaded students); cross-national indicators (international student assessments like PISA, for example); experience in other countries; and new evidence on how the reforms are being received, implemented and experienced across a diversity of stakeholders and diversity of settings. There is a need to focus on long-term gains – the benefits for students, teachers and parents – and how the graduate profile aims to support the foundations for lifelong learning. Messaging around the changing role of schools in the digital age and the changing needs of students will be valuable. Ultimately, the core message should be that schools will no longer be teaching obsolete knowledge, rather relevant, transversal and other skills and competences (Council of the European Union, 2018).

Accessible communication methods and language will be essential. A dedicated user-friendly attractive website to be easily reached and read by a public audience should be developed, displaying the rationale for the reform, timelines, new (draft) curricula, consultation reports

and so on. It would also be valuable to develop periodic magazines for schools on the reform process, as was successfully implemented in Ireland to get schools involved (and contributing to the magazine) and get out of the current framing of the school versus the ministry; if schools are promoting the message, then other schools and teachers might be more compelled. The IBE PIB already has links with some engaged and supportive schools, these could be used better to publicise to other schools and bring wider stakeholder groups along.

Build linkages among ministries and key agencies

Strategies will need to support collaboration between layers of the education system, and across ministerial bodies and state agencies, to ensure sustainable reforms. Across the Ministry of Education and the IBE PIB, there needs to be clearer coordination and communication with the public regarding roles, responsibilities, spokespeople and messaging in public debate. Building linkages, particularly between the two central ministries (Education and Science/Higher Education) and between ministries and key academics, will be important. The Ministry for Science and Higher Education oversees the quality standards for initial teacher education providers and links with the Polish Accreditation Committee, which monitors the implementation of these standards. Links with higher education institutions will also be important, particularly to help with the communications strategy. This will allow knowledge sharing among the reform stakeholders and promote collaborative learning and a shared understanding and vision. Given the fragmentation in teacher unions, it would be valuable to organise events drawing on all unions to build linkages and conversations in this regard. Unions that are more positive in relation to the reform agenda could help to foster more positive views among other unions. For example, in Ireland, the curriculum authority vets resources for teachers, and the NCCA works alongside the Department of Health and National Educational Psychological Services when developing resources for schools. All organisations working together is key in developing a consistent and effective communication system.

Identify ambassadors of change

Students and some 'forward-thinking' teachers (those teaching the lower grades in schools, for example) could become advocates of the reform to help spread the word and be agents of change. One suggestion is to create a new role within schools or at the regional authority/district level that serves to mentor or 'coach' local teachers in advance and throughout the reform roll-out. There are learnings from the Netherlands in terms of the potential of identifying 'ambassadors of change'. This started with teachers who were included in expert groups (along with scientists/academics) to develop new curricula. So, teachers were seen as creating the new curriculum, rather than a top-down approach. Similarly, in Ireland, teachers were involved in subject development for social, personal and health education (SPHE) and participated in mainstream media (including opinion pieces). They became ambassadors, which was very important in combatting disinformation. There may also be merit in recruiting an independent consultant to support stakeholder

engagement and messaging (as in Ireland). This was a positive in Ireland, but the risk is that those involved in the reform don't have the in-depth knowledge and experience of stakeholder workshops and survey analysis.

Learning and communication lessons from the first stage of the reform

Ensuring the introductory phase is a success was identified as an important priority, and robust communication, feedback and evaluation is key in achieving this. The relatively small changes with regard to civic and health education could be valuable in providing a template for larger-scale changes to follow. Early enactment reviews should be designed and undertaken once one full round of the reform is implemented. Policymakers visiting schools to meet teachers, school leaders and students to identify any changes needed is important in identifying changes that can then be implemented the next year. More broadly, an evaluation team or teams who report to the ministry should be established and they could take on the role of a critical friend. They should be concerned with improving the implementation of the first subjects first and improving the content (and the process for developing content). Involving all voices in the evaluation process for the initial subject will be central in the development of longer-term reform processes. This will be particularly important in ensuring that teachers implement the changes in practice. It is highly important that policies and plans are adapted to reflect emerging evidence; amended plans, as a result of feedback and evidence, need to be communicated.

Member State case studies

The Netherlands

The Netherlands initially took top-down approaches to the design and implementation of competence-based education. Communication of new initiatives and investment in teacher preparation were limited, which had the effect of changes existing on paper, but having little impact in schools. More recently, significant efforts have been made in the Netherlands to engage stakeholders in revisions to the design and implementation of competence-based approaches. Initiatives to strengthen competence-based education are now based on 'co-creation', with significant teacher and education organisation involvement. In the Netherlands, a clear message was conveyed throughout the process: 'the reforms make things clearer and more focused' for all. This helped to increase involvement in the process and created more acceptance of the reform.

Ireland

In Ireland, communication with stakeholders, particularly schools, was a core priority in the reform. The process began early, centred on building trust and relationships, and was highly responsive to schools' views in particular. The reform was built on research and consultation (particularly with network schools). The national curriculum authority sent an expression of

interest to all secondary schools in Ireland, inviting them to participate in the consultation. A representative sample of 41 'collaborating schools' was selected. An education officer was assigned to liaise with a link teacher in each school. An independent research institute created draft instruments to guide the feedback, which were reviewed by schools and subsequently amended. All voices were represented in the discussions, largely through representative groups, including teacher unions and the collaborating schools, with a particular focus on the voices of students. Information for parents was designed to cater for and be cognisant of the diverse parent body, including variations in language competence and levels of home-school communication. Findings from the consultation were presented at a series of national seminars around the country. Ireland also emphasised the importance of drawing on academic research and subject-matter experts, who have in-depth knowledge and insight and are trusted by teachers, and higher education stakeholders were part of communication systems in policy design and implementation.

Portugal

In Portugal, there was widespread recognition that it may take time to shift parents' and teachers' focus from preparation for national examinations (which carry high stakes for higher education opportunities) as the primary objective of education toward goals relating to broader competences and skills for life development. Regarding civic and health subjects, Portugal also provides a valuable example on the importance of getting teachers into the communication system early during the introductory phase of the subject rollout. This requires not only sharing the civic and health documents ahead of time, but visiting schools, meeting with school staff to discuss the content and setting up structures for questions and communication to be conveyed from schools to the ministry, perhaps through regional authorities/representatives. Communicating with teachers, in particular in relation to the aims of the reforms, the importance of the new content, the approaches to teaching and so on, will be key.

Topic three: supporting teachers in implementing new curricula

Key recommendations

1. Initiate coordination with higher education (HE) teacher training institutions and adapt current pedagogical programmes and training to support the sustainability of the reform.

2. Build trust with teachers by fostering collaboration, following through with their input and explaining decision-making, with the aim of positively influencing teacher attitudes to the reform.

3. Create support networks for teachers through collaborative learning with peers in their schools, professional networks and regional authorities.

4. Strengthen information-sharing and existing resources regarding the reform by bolstering channels of communication, encouraging a culture of teacher engagement and learning, creating a two-way dialogue and providing substantial ready-made materials for teaching and learning.

5. Prioritise empowering school leaders by investing in and engaging with Polish school leaders directly.

6. Be open with teachers when communicating progress and decisions.

Introduction

A competence-based curricular reform may require fundamental shifts in teacher mindsets and in their approaches to teaching, learning and assessment (Halász and Michel, 2011). Active communication and engagement with school leaders and teachers is vital in shifting professional beliefs and practices. Teachers and school stakeholders may need further education and continuing professional development to align their own skills with the reform, which requires time and resources allocated at the school level. Teacher competence standards and frameworks need to align with competences and skills they will be expected to help students to develop (Gordon et al., 2010). Where investment in building teacher capacity is limited, teachers and schools struggle to implement the new arrangements as envisaged. The strong initial education and continuing professional development of teachers

and school leaders are needed, which ensures that teachers are supported in curriculum and assessment implementation aligned with key competence development and that school leaders are supported and encouraged to take up a leading role in developing and supporting their teaching staff in the implementation of the reform.

Strengths

Systems for teacher re-skilling are already in place in Poland; teacher education is provided by higher education institutions, and teacher continuous professional development (CPD) is provided by the regional CPD centres. The Ministry of Education operates the free Integrated Educational Platform (www.zpe.gov.pl), which features interactive e-materials for teachers (e.g. lesson plans) and students to download, designed for primary and secondary schools. Of special note are the resources designed for those with special educational needs, such as textbook adaptations, specially tailored school reading, easy-to-understand materials and translations into Polish sign language. These teacher training and CPD systems allow for unified and consistent messaging, easy dissemination, and links with institutions, such as the Centre for Education Development (ORE), the Centre for Teacher Training (CKN) and school visitors, which can offer coaching and support reflective thinking for educators. The goal of the current reform is not to remove power from Polish teachers, but rather to encourage their autonomy with respect to teaching and learning, a message which should be well received.

Challenges

Initial teacher education (ITE) is open in Poland, and many higher education institutions, even those with a low ranking or without research in the relevant subject area, can train future teachers provided they comply with the central standards for ITE. The teaching specialisation is not considered prestigious, and it does not attract many best performers.

Polish teachers may not have positive or enthusiastic responses to pedagogical changes due to reform fatigue and distrust in the reform itself. Theoretical training may not be sufficient to create an impact on everyday pedagogical practice, and there is a risk of only achieving surface-level change. Practical support may be needed to embed change, possibly through 'implementation teams' providing coaching, mentoring and supervision.

Teachers and school stakeholders have not been systematically involved from the beginning of the reform design. Instead, significant collaboration will be needed with school stakeholders during the introductory phase and subsequent implementation of the broader reform to ensure its success. Some of these systems are being implemented currently, such as regional coordinators organising teacher feedback and questionnaires being circulated by the IBE PIB to gather school-level responses to the curriculum. Polish school leaders hold some of the highest levels of responsibility for curricula and assessments among all OECD

countries, while having below OECD-average levels of autonomy for resource allocation (OECD, 2015).

Recommendations

Initiate coordination with HE teacher training institutions

Currently, ITE is not aligned with the planned curriculum reform. While the focus is on rolling out CPD for practising teachers in schools, initiating discussions with the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, universities and teacher training institutions to adapt ITE programmes will support the sustainability of the reform. Initial teacher education programmes should be reviewed with a view to be modernised to include the latest pedagogies, for example project-based learning and learner-centred teaching, encouraging critical thinking, pro-innovative competences, socio-emotional skills, etc. One example of this is in the Netherlands, where significant government funding has been invested to facilitate teachers obtaining master's degrees that develop teaching and learning skills that align with learner-centred pedagogies and changes in school curricula.

Build trust to improve teacher attitudes regarding the reform

Due to the historical experience of most Polish teachers during previous reforms with limited stakeholder consultation, significant effort will be needed to promote this reform and get teacher buy-in. Building trust entails listening to teachers, following through with their input and explaining decision-making. A culture of collaboration between schools needs to be developed, using partnership schools and organised networks including teacher unions and regional authorities and targeting school leaders. It is important to explain what the competences are and that they enable students to use knowledge, skills and values in different contexts, thereby countering the fear that competence means no knowledge, or the notion that the two are binary. The reform needs to be sold to teachers as being: (1) in response to what they asked for and said previously is wrong with the system; (2) addressing the current needs, with more flexibility in teaching methods to help meet the needs of different children; (3) including new support structures for schools; (4) building in time for school staff to learn about the new curriculum and retrain/upskill. This challenge is not unique to Poland; in Latvia, a key challenge during the implementation of the 'Introduction of competences-based curriculum, 2016-2021' is parents', schools' and teachers' lack of trust and scepticism in the goals, methods and values of the reform. Schools that have been engaged in the piloting stage tend to be more optimistic about the reform than schools that did not take part at that stage.

Create support networks for teachers

Teachers can be supported while they adapt to new approaches through collaborative learning with peers in their schools, professional networks and regional authorities. These

support systems can encourage teachers to change, identify areas of resistance and meet to discuss these. The existing structure of regional inspectorates and regional directors and the expertise of educational psychologists and special education teachers (child guidance centres) could be used for this purpose. These channels of communication must foster two-way dialogue between school stakeholders and policymakers, such that teachers and school leaders can speak to the support required for implementation at the school level. For example, during the implementation of recent reforms in Ireland, a national support service was set up to provide support for schools, ranging from specific resources in subject areas to whole-school capacity building.

Strengthen information sharing and existing resources regarding the reform

Polish colleagues reported low teacher engagement with existing Ministry of Education materials and CPD training. A culture of teacher engagement, self-reflection and learning must be created during this reform. Strengthening the use of resources and information sharing for educators will be critical for the success of the reform. Due to the reform fatigue in Poland, teachers will need ready-made materials, such as lesson plans, activities and assessment ideas, to use in the new curriculum as they develop their abilities to design materials independently. This was seen in Bulgaria, where challenges during the early implementation of its 'National strategy for lifelong learning (2014 to 2020)' due to underdeveloped mechanisms and a lack of participation by all stakeholders led to a deficit of guidelines and other learning materials. This led to a slow pace of implementation.

Support teachers to meet diverse needs

Across all education levels, teachers, school leaders and school inspectors will need professional development on inclusion and how to meet diverse learners' needs. Teachers would benefit from professional learning communities, particularly in the area of inclusion. Teachers should have the time to participate in, and reflect on, these learning opportunities. Models of effective learning communities in schools, and whole-school approaches to inclusion, should be shared. New approaches to school timetabling and financial and human resources may be needed.

Prioritise empowering school leaders

Investing in and engaging with Polish school leaders directly will be critical for enabling schools to build their efficacy with new competence-based approaches. School leaders play a crucial role in translating new systems within schools, including allocation of school resources to ensure that teachers have the time for and access to professional learning opportunities, along with opportunities to collaborate with peers in their schools and school networks. Support for school leaders can improve schools' pedagogical and organisational practices through networking, collaborative research and training. This was seen in Ireland,

where the Centre for School Leadership was established during the recent reform to provide leadership support for school principals and leadership teams.

Be open with teachers

Due to the reform's timeline, involving teachers in the design phase has not been possible. It is important to communicate clearly and honestly with teachers about this, while now focusing on including them into the implementation and evaluation processes. The goal is to give more autonomy to teachers coupled with professional development opportunities, emphasising the role of the school in developing children's skills and learning. This responsibility should be seen as a positive, providing teachers with more satisfaction as they gain more control over how they teach, based on their students' needs. The message is 'we are giving you more autonomy, we are trusting your professional judgement' (in line with 2022 PISA findings; OECD, 2023).

Member State case studies

Finland

In Finland, it was clear quite early in the most recent curriculum change that significant thought and investment was needed in teacher education if schools were to make progress in developing the transversal competences at classroom level. Hence, the establishment of the Teacher Education Forum (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2016; Lavonen, 2020, p. 72), which collaboratively prepared a development programme for teacher education that set out strategic competence goals and action guidelines, and 31 pilot projects were initiated by the end of 2016. An evaluation of the process, by the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre, found that the teacher education reform model prepared at the Teacher Education Forum had several strengths, including the networking and bringing together of different experts and stakeholders, which has supported the teaching and learning of 21st-century competences (Lavonen, 2020, p. 66). Significant financial resources were also allocated to teacher education providers who could support teachers in their classrooms in the implementation of the transversal competences to their teaching and to set up digital learning environments (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017). The collaborative and extensive design process and teachers' involvement in developing local curricula ensured that teachers have a common understanding of the basis of the curriculum change. The involvement of the various stakeholders in the design process for the new curriculum was considered essential for building shared understanding and sense-making (Lavonen, 2020, p. 69).

Ireland

In Ireland, the *Framework for Junior Cycle* (2015) was supported by significant investment in professional development for teachers and school leaders. The national support service (JCT) was set up in 2013 to support teachers and school leaders during the implementation phase.

This involved whole-school support, support within subject areas, support for school leaders and the provision of online resources. School-based coordinators were appointed to assist within-school planning. Significant effort was also put into building capacity at the school leader level. The Centre for School Leadership was established. The principal network and school management bodies engaged external contributors to support the reform at school leadership level. A model of 'associates' placed practising teachers and school leaders in supporting roles for other educators, which provided more grounded capacity building in the system. A 'teach meet' approach involved within-school educator meetings, presentations and feedback, a form of professional development that facilitates whole-staff sharing of skills/ideas/knowledge and engages everyone from newly qualified teachers to the senior leadership teams making presentations to staff.

The Netherlands

The Netherlands invested in its teachers through the 'Teachers' agenda' (2013-2020), which had a specific focus on building schools as learning organisations that are deeply connected and collaborate with other organisations, such as other schools, businesses, NGOs and wider civil society. The implementation of the 'Teachers' agenda' was supported by setting up pilots for various action points in various municipalities. To motivate teachers to continue learning, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science has continued investing every year, enabling teachers to obtain a master's degree, for example. Thus, the ministry had the task of implementing the reform and providing subsidies to schools so that they can implement these new ways of working and invest in their teachers. This strategy has been very important in strengthening the professionalisation of teachers and schools (European Commission et al., 2022b, p. 119).

Topic four: re-designing formative and summative assessment methods and practices

Key recommendations

1. Initiate discussions and information sharing with parents on the reasoning for and benefits of new competence-based assessments to tackle potential negative attitudes.

2. Provide systemic teacher professional development and materials on how to integrate classroom-based formative assessments of competences.

3. Capitalise on current roles and resources within the system to support schools' integration of new formative assessments.

4. Create middle leadership structures within schools that focus on assessments across subject areas.

5. Coordinate with the Central Exam Board to align summative assessment methods and content.

Introduction

Reforming educational assessments, particularly during competence-based curricular reforms, requires both the commitment of key education policy stakeholders, such as external student assessment agencies, and system-wide implementation capacity (Halász and Michel, 2011). The consistency of the reform with existing assessment practices, both classroom-based and external examinations, must be considered (European Commission et al., 2022b, p. 16). Maintaining assessment practices that do not align with a curriculum reform will result in a reform that is not sustained (Nieveen, 2022, p. 73). This has been seen in several Member States recently implementing competence-based curricula while maintaining high-stakes external assessment (European Commission et al., 2022b, p. 56). The format of such summative assessments of discrete knowledge are advantageous due to their reliability. However, they do not assess students' thinking processes or higher order knowledge and ability to apply knowledge in different contexts. In these instances, teachers show a consistent preference to maintain traditional, knowledge-based teaching and learning that prepares students for external assessments, to the exclusion of other forms of assessment.

Teachers' classroom-based assessments will also continue to focus on knowledge rather than competences in these contexts. This leaves little space for integrating competence-based assessments in the teaching and learning process, for example project-based learning, interactive classroom dialogue and peer feedback, which focus on applying knowledge in practice. Shifting from high-stakes external summative assessments focused on discrete knowledge to competence-based summative or formative assessments of using knowledge in practice is one of the slowest components to be implemented within a competence-based education reform. The key component here is consistency with the competence-based curriculum. A successful reform must have a consistent and coherent approach that aligns learning objectives and assessment methods. Assessments must measure what they intend to measure and provide information from which teachers can draw inferences about student understanding.

Strengths

Child guidance centres (*poradnie psychologiczno-pedagogiczne*) are part of the current Polish system and comprise professionals skilled in student competences. These professionals are well placed to take a new role in leading and supporting teachers in the design and implementation of classroom-based formative assessments. Child guidance centres are multidisciplinary, which provides easy and timely access to suitable specialist support. Work is needed to develop the centres to adopt this new role.

Challenges

Moving from the current format of discrete knowledge assessments to incorporating competence-based formative and summative assessments will require significant adaptation by Polish teachers and assessors. Although formative assessment has been promoted in Poland since the early 2000s, mainly by NGOs, and the ministry adopted provisions on providing feedback to students in 2017 ([5]), the traditional (summative) assessment prevails, and comprehensive systemic solutions and support would be necessary. All teachers and school leaders will need the necessary knowledge, skills and beliefs about competence-based assessment before they can make changes in their own classrooms. Polish colleagues anticipate that skills and attitudes will be the most difficult part of this change among teachers in Poland. Poland is facing a teacher shortage, and a significant proportion of older teachers in Polish schools have experienced many educational reforms during their career and may be disillusioned or unmotivated to engage with new assessment practices. Significant resources will also be required to develop high-quality external summative assessments that focus on competences and to train the human scorers needed to examine these assessments (though this is increasingly supported by developments in AI).

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[5] Legal Journal of 3 August 2017 (poz. 1534), and 16 August 2017 (poz. 1611), par. 12, https://sip.lex.pl/akty-prawne/dzu-dziennik-ustaw/ocenianie-klasyfikowanie-i-promowanie-uczniow-i-sluchaczy-w-szkolach-18820499.

Parental attitudes are a barrier to implementing new assessment methods in Poland. Significant parental pressure exists regarding the primary school exams, due to their importance for secondary school entry. In the earlier grades of primary school, parents are more open to competence-based assessments, including formative assessment, but from grade 4 onwards, the parental pressure starts to rise steadily. Parents are concerned about their children being prepared for external high-stakes exams and are more interested in marks than qualitative feedback. This poses a challenge for the integration of new competence-based assessments, and teaching and learning more broadly. School leaders and teachers will need to be supported, in the form of additional professional development and the involvement of higher authorities, in communicating the benefits and articulating the new approach to sceptical parents.

Recommendations

Initiate discussions and information sharing with parents

Parental attitudes and pressure relating to performance in the summative assessments is a significant barrier to the reform's success in Poland. Creating a consistent and frequent information-sharing process is needed to tackle these parental concerns. Parents need to be informed about the new curriculum and assessments, the evidence behind the reform and its consequences for their children's education. Providing parents with forums to ask questions about the reform and particularly issues regarding assessment should help garner parental support.

Teacher professional development and materials on competence-based assessment

Teachers will need significant support to integrate high-quality formative and summative competence-based assessments. This includes providing sufficient teacher professional development training and materials such as sample assessments, guides to designing and evaluating assessments, professional learning communities, networks of schools implementing competence-based assessment, etc. Teachers need support in deciding on what inferences they want to make about student learning, and how this can most effectively be embedded into lesson planning (e.g. via observations, quizzes, dialogues, etc.). This is seen in Portugal, where a national project was rolled out to help teachers improve their assessment practices through continuous training.

Capitalise on current roles and resources within the system

To support schools in designing and integrating classroom-based formative assessments, local authorities could be redefined and used as a support system for schools. This could include school inspectors, regional educational authorities and child guidance centres. The role of these local figures could be adapted from being currently largely evaluative and

critical to providing more support and acting as a mentor or providing guidance for teachers and schools as they navigate new assessment practices.

Create middle leadership structures within schools

Currently there is no middle leadership in Polish schools between school leaders and teachers. These structures of distributed leadership could be introduced to support new instruction assessment practices. Subject teams and department heads could be set up that focus on designing assessments and discussing achievement levels and learning outcomes for each subject or competency. Creating middle leadership structures could also work to motivate teachers who may be disengaged by introducing new career development opportunities. This approach was taken in Ireland with the development of within-school subject learning and assessment review meetings and committees.

Coordinate with the Central Exam Board

Begin engaging with the Central Exam Board as early as possible to discuss new assessment methods and practices for the external summative assessments. The re-design in alignment with competence-based curricula is critical for the successful engagement of both teachers and parents and implementation of the reform.

Member State case studies

Ireland

The *Framework for Junior Cycle* in 2015 set out a vision of how assessment practices, alongside teaching and learning, would evolve in lower secondary education. Supporting documentation was provided that included online examples of assessment guidelines, sample assessment items and various assessment and reporting materials. The new approach to assessment included classroom-based assessments while maintaining state examinations at the end of lower secondary education and students received an overall 'Junior cycle profile of achievement'. The *Framework for Junior Cycle* places an increased emphasis on teachers' professional judgement in making decisions about curricula and assessments, designing programmes that suit the context of the school and focus on the quality of the work over marks, grades and percentages. Within-school subject learning and assessment review meetings facilitate teachers' ability to discuss standards and agree levels of achievement for students in each subject. Despite the considerable efforts made to ensure curriculum coherence, external demands (in the form of high-stakes external examinations) may still inhibit the realisation of the curriculum changes as they were originally intended (McGarr et al., 2024, p. 124). External assessment requirements that focus on discrete knowledge limit opportunities for teachers to exercise their professional autonomy within a learning-outcomes-based curriculum, which can cause curriculum goals, instructional practices and assessment to ill align (McGarr et al., 2024, p. 124).

Portugal

Similar to Ireland, Portugal has introduced competence-based assessments while maintaining summative external assessments of students. Since the reform, assessment methods have been diversified in schools, moving away from using only traditional tests to include a variety of tasks and evaluation instruments. This captures a more holistic view of students' learning and skills. A wider range of assessment tools are used, and each school can make adjustments to the assessment system. However, in the context of this dual-assessment approach, competence-based assessments were still perceived by teachers and parents to not have the same value as summative knowledge-based assessments. To address these challenges, the Directorate-General for Education launched the MAIA Project's *National Project of Training, Supervision and Research in Classroom Assessment* in 2019 to help teachers improve their assessment practices through continuous training. The project is a capacity-building programme at the national level, in collaboration with teachers' training centres, school leaders and teachers, to create conditions for pedagogical evaluation integrated into the curriculum development processes (European Commission, 2023). The project's development strategy included the training of trainers, who replicated the training workshops in which collaborative networks were built for the construction and development of intervention projects in schools by the teachers themselves (trainees). It provides support materials based on up-to-date research, available free of charge on the project's website, to clarify theories and concepts and improve teaching practices. The project created greater clarity regarding pedagogical assessment and the formation of learning communities to reflect on practices, and fostered informed questioning of existing practices.

The Netherlands

In the Netherlands, the assessments and exams are aligned with the curriculum. The attainment targets offer support to the schools in the ways they can assess their students in primary school and lower secondary school, offering examples of how to test certain knowledge, skills and attitudes. In exam years (the last two or three years of secondary school), schools are responsible for 50 % of the total mark in 'school exams'. The other 50 % of the grading is done by external national exams. Teachers have a lot of autonomy in deciding the school exams. This creates an opportunity to test attitudes and skills as well as just knowledge. The examination committee in the school is responsible for following the rules of the school examination and the Inspectorate of Education checks this adherence during school visits. The national exams are centralised, with every student taking the same exam. This ensures a level playing field for all students, despite possible differences in their school exams.

Topic five: measures to embed policy evaluation in the reform

Key recommendations

1. Decide the nature, levels and parameters of the policy evaluation early in the development of the reform.

2. Engage in formative evaluation with a subgroup of schools to gather feedback and guide the refinement of the reform.

3. Build capacity to conduct the policy evaluation at the regional and school levels through communicating clearly, providing resources and appointing leadership roles.

4. Ensure an inclusive approach to policy evaluation at both the national and school levels by assessing whether and how the reform meets the needs of SEN students.

Introduction

Policy evaluation is often overlooked during design stages (Viennet and Pont, 2017). Every change strategy needs an effective system to either monitor and/or evaluate the progress of implementation. Policy evaluation can be formative (consisting of an iterative process involving feedback that contributes to the development and refinement of the educational policy), impact evaluation (consisting of an external evaluation examining the effectiveness of the policy on identified key outcomes or process measures), or both. Short-term formative evaluations of policies on the design and implementation of curricular changes can lead to adjustments in the near- to mid-term. By contrast, long-term impact evaluations require careful planning to ensure systems are gathering data from the beginning of a new policy that can be used in an impact evaluation conducted 5 to 10 years subsequently. Educational policy evaluation involves assessing whether the policy is having its intended impact and determining whether elements of the policy design need to be revised. Potential information that can be used to inform this evaluation of impact includes data aggregated at the national level, for example from student assessments, and complemented by qualitative evaluations of the implementation process in a sample of schools, including teacher and school leader appraisals and wider stakeholder interviews, and examining how these

outcomes may differ across groups and regions. The focus of the evaluations is on the policy rather than the schools.

These decisions will be driven by the objective of the policy but also by the availability of relevant resources to address the questions. Sufficient capacity must be built to conduct an evaluation of high quality that is suitable for purpose. A key factor in the success of policy evaluation is a sufficient understanding of the context into which the reforms are implemented (Golden, 2020). Conducive contexts are necessary for policy implementation to be successful. Education reforms can be enacted differently depending on the interpretation across contexts, and insight into these systemic features are critical for the success of the reform. Any evaluation across the levels, be it formative or impact evaluation, will be most effective when a climate of trust and a focus on quality are fostered. Formative evaluation processes must be designed carefully to ensure reliable data that does not interfere with the implementation process (Viennet and Pont, 2017).

Strengths

The school inspectors and regional education authorities have existing data on schools that could be used as part of an evaluation. External school inspections are carried out by regional education authorities. These agencies can support school self-evaluations, for example by developing tools and checklists for schools and providing support for gathering and interpreting school-level data. Such evaluation toolkits prove to be highly effective in influencing shifts in practices and beliefs.

Challenges

There is little experience in policy evaluation within the Polish Ministry and the IBE PIB, pointing to the need for capacity building, skills development and the development of a culture of evaluation at the central policy level. School self-evaluation is not mandatory in Poland. Schools largely work in isolation and do not engage in shared learning. Therefore, capacity building is also needed at the school level, particularly with school leaders. Moreover, there remains uncertainty regarding plans for evaluation, and there is time pressure to design and embed evaluation in the reform due to the short timeline.

Policy recommendations

Parameters for evaluation

Decide what the evaluation will be, and whether it includes formative and impact components. Decisions must include measures, including their sustainability and useability over time, the timeline and frequency of the evaluation, and who is responsible for the evaluation. If a formative evaluation is included, monitoring indicators should be agreed at the design phase and include gathering qualitative and quantitative data at consistent

intervals. This formative evaluation can contribute to adjusting the reform plans and strategy as needed. A more formal impact evaluation should also be planned at the design phase, if included, which considers overall processes and makes more significant policy adjustments (European Commission et al., 2022b, p. 69). An external contractor, such as a Polish university research team, would provide the most objectivity for this summative evaluation. A multi-level approach to evaluation would provide the greatest insights. For example, in Ireland, the evaluation of the 'Framework for Junior Cycle' has examined the effectiveness of teacher professional development, students' responses to their changing learning experiences, the quality of classroom-based assessments, and parental attitudes.

Qualitative evaluations with a subgroup of schools

To supplement national data for the policy evaluation, qualitative evaluations of the implementation process can be conducted with a subgroup of schools. These schools could give feedback, for example, on their progress and learnings engaging with the policy changes. In a formative evaluation, this feedback could be used to inform adjustments to the policy in the near-term. It is important to handle this process with the right levels of sensitivity to prevent a negative impact on schools. The focus of policy evaluation is on the policy, not the schools, which should be highlighted during the evaluation. High-quality evaluation involves retrieving frequent and reliable data in an appropriate manner for each stage of implementation (Viennet and Pont, 2017). The most appropriate processes for monitoring and evaluating the reform will depend on the Member State's context and governance, and as such, working alongside Polish schools will ensure the evaluation suits the Polish context and provides sound, relevant information without being a burden on schools. Insufficient engagement with stakeholders in the development and piloting of any evaluation risks the evaluation having a negative impact on the reform, on elements such as effective implementation, perceived value and level of public support.

Build capacity for evaluation

Work with regional education authorities and school leaders to build capacity to evaluate the reform based on monitoring indicators that have been decided with the help of stakeholders. This should be an ongoing process throughout the policy change, whereby stakeholders, such as educators, are involved continually and feeding back responses to the reform in real time. This approach facilitates necessary adaptations in the reform; for example, in Finland, the evaluation conducted alongside the reform in 2018 revealed that the transversal competences had been integrated successfully with the aims of the school subjects at the school level. However, challenges arose when integrating competences into classroom teaching and learning, and as such, teacher education reforms were implemented (Saarinen et al., 2019).

Ensure an inclusive approach to evaluation

During policy evaluation, clear attention should focus on meeting the needs of SEN students. Their experiences of school, and of competence-based reforms, need to be carefully recorded and reflected on. This will require a flexible approach and qualitative research methods to include students with a range of SEN and communication profiles. For example, to conduct an impact evaluation, capacity should be developed among those conducting the evaluation to conduct semi-structured interviews with individualised elicitation aids (such as photo-elicitation) to support engagement for students depending on their communication or cognitive profiles.

Member State case studies

The Netherlands

There have been gaps in the evidence gathered from previous education reforms, and this has led to a new emphasis on strengthening the evidence base and investing in the knowledge infrastructure for both policy and practice in the Netherlands. Teacher involvement turned out to be one of the biggest challenges for the 2006 and 2016 policy reforms. Despite the curriculum freedom in the Netherlands, teachers do not always feel like they are involved in the curriculum design. Reforms currently under way are being worked out and implemented with more collaboration with stakeholders – there is more involvement of advisory boards, trade unions, teachers, parents and students, and the government is also using social media and other channels to communicate broadly about the reforms (European Commission et al., 2022b, p. 120). Efforts are also being made to strengthen the structure of the 'curriculum chain'. According to the Scientific Curriculum Committee, the evaluation of both the 'intended as well as the realised curriculum' was limited. The evidence on how teachers implement curriculum goals and materials in classrooms is weak and needs improvement. The inspectorate provides some insights, but there is room for improvement (Scientific Curriculum Committee, 2022, cited in Rouw and van der Hoeven, 2023, p. 90).

Portugal

Implementation of the reform was monitored regularly and resulted in the production of reports that were used to understand how the policy was being implemented, the challenges faced and what could be done to correct them. Feedback from these reports influenced continuing developments. The ministry also organised national seminars, regional seminars and seminars between schools and the community. In addition, a plan was included, in the legal documents, to incorporate a six-year evaluation of the reform. The pilot project, 'Project for autonomy and curriculum flexibility' was reviewed by the OECD in 2018 and showed a strong strategic approach to the reform. Strengths included a coherent strategic plan in the 'Students' Profile' document; achievement of widespread agreement on the reform plans through careful consultation, debate and communication; and policymakers remaining open

to feedback and learning from lessons derived from evidence from reviews and evaluations. Some challenges needed ongoing consideration, for example the disconnect between the pilot project and the centralisation of the education system and the prevailing method of didactic pedagogy (OECD, 2018b).
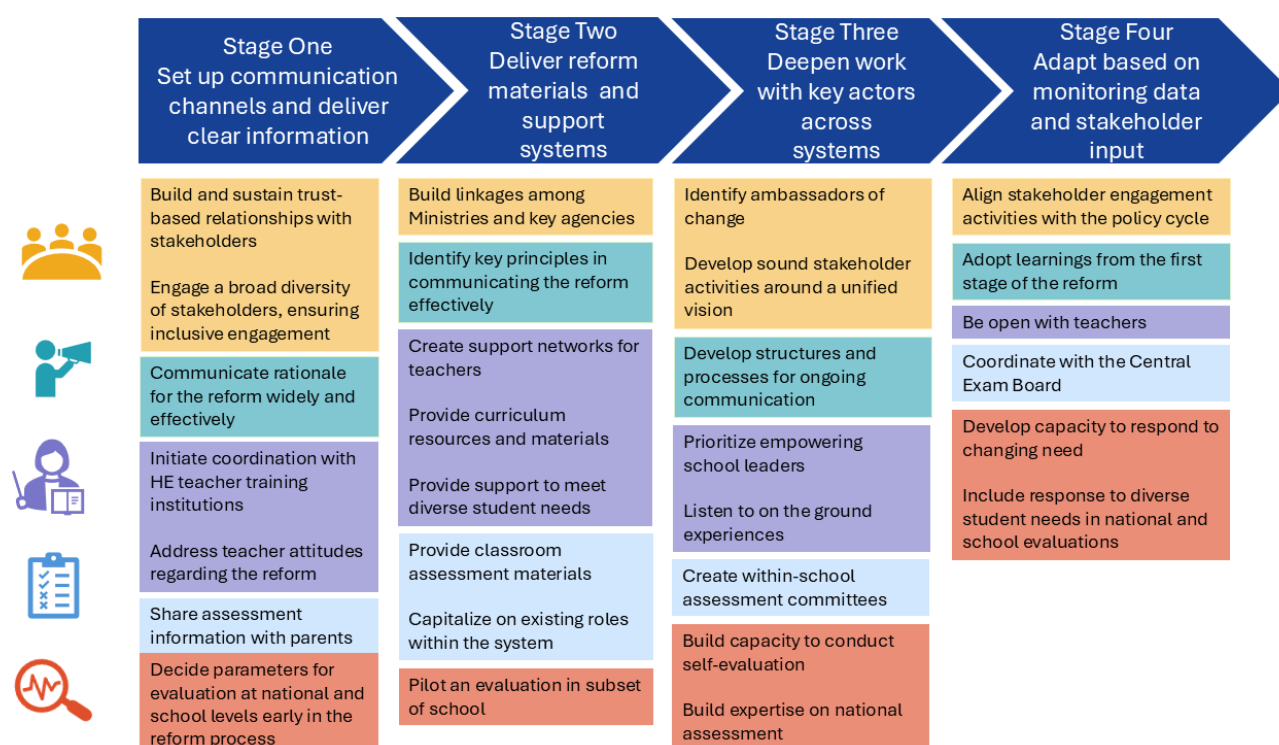
Ireland

A multi-level approach was taken to formative evaluation during the implementation phase. The Department of Education and Skills created strong links with schools in their self-evaluation, and information was fed back to the department, the NCCA and the JCT, which could then address any of the key challenges being reported. An extensive longitudinal study exploring the implementation, enactment and impact of the 'Framework for Junior Cycle' is currently under way (McGarr et al., 2022; 2023; 2024). The study is capturing the opportunities and challenges presented by the 'Framework for Junior Cycle' by enabling schools and teachers to tell their stories of engagement with this curriculum change. Students' perspectives and experiences are also being sought and presented in reports. An open and exploratory approach is being adopted for the case studies, providing space for students, teachers, special needs assistants, curriculum leads, principals and parents to highlight their views. So far, this evaluation has reported that the professional development provided by the JCT was seen as a positive form of support; students favour student-centred learning experiences such as group work, active learning and inquiry-based 'real life' learning; parents value the shift towards an emphasis on skills and valued the project-based learning that was introduced as part of the students' classroom-based assessment work (McGarr et al., 2023, p. 146). This evaluation will contribute to future changes to the 'Framework for Junior Cycle'.

Conclusion

This report sets out recommendations to support a reform of the Polish educational curriculum to enhance key competences based on a peer counselling process organised in 2024. The peer counselling brought together peers from the national administrations of Ireland, Portugal and the Netherlands, international experts and Polish authorities to share experiences and discuss solutions that can advise Poland in the process of curriculum reform. This was complemented by empirical evidence and policies gathered on a wider range of national education reforms. The competence-based curriculum reform, targeting cognitive, social, agency and value development, aims to create a more modern, equitable and future-ready education system in Poland.

The recommendations draw on available evidence, studies and the discussions during the peer counselling workshop. They are specific to the Polish context but can be adapted and used for educational policy reform across other national contexts. To ensure the success and sustainability of the curriculum reform, several dimensions must be addressed simultaneously, following a sequencing framework. These include stakeholder engagement, effective communication, teacher support, student assessment and policy evaluation (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Overview of recommendations across all topics and stages of the reform

Stage One Set up communication channels and deliver clear information	Stage Two Deliver reform materials and support systems	Stage Three Deepen work with key actors across systems	Stage Four Adapt based on monitoring data and stakeholder input
Build and sustain trust-based relationships with stakeholders	Build linkages among Ministries and key agencies	Identify ambassadors of change	Align stakeholder engagement activities with the policy cycle
Engage a broad diversity of stakeholders, ensuring inclusive engagement	Identify key principles in communicating the reform effectively	Develop sound stakeholder activities around a unified vision	Adopt learnings from the first stage of the reform
Communicate rationale for the reform widely and effectively	Create support networks for teachers	Develop structures and processes for ongoing communication	Be open with teachers
Initiate coordination with HE teacher training institutions	Provide curriculum resources and materials	Prioritize empowering school leaders	Coordinate with the Central Exam Board
Address teacher attitudes regarding the reform	Provide support to meet diverse student needs	Listen to on the ground experiences	Develop capacity to respond to changing need
Share assessment information with parents	Provide classroom assessment materials	Create within-school assessment committees	Include response to diverse student needs in national and school evaluations
Decide parameters for evaluation at national and school levels early in the reform process	Capitalize on existing roles within the system	Build capacity to conduct self-evaluation	
	Pilot an evaluation in subset of school	Build expertise on national assessment	

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Appendix

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Peer counselling – Poland
Modernising the Curriculum to Enhance Key Competences
9–10 December 2024, Warsaw

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Topics and issues discussed
World café: a strategic framework for building sustainable implementation capacities for a curriculum reform • Mapping policy dimensions/areas linked to introducing competence-based curricula (a stage-based approach)
Ireland: Supporting planning for implementation and stakeholder engagement
Breakout Session I: Designing Reform – *Effective Stakeholder Engagement* *Key questions:* 1. *What are the potential challenges for stakeholder engagement in Poland? How can risks be identified and mitigated?* 2. *Which groups of stakeholders to involve and at what stages of the process? How to reach the stakeholders who are not willing to cooperate (ref. research on influence strategies)?* 3. *What are effective solutions to keep stakeholders actively engaged throughout the reform process? Key elements of an effective communication strategy?* 4. *When to involve which stakeholder group? Is this a parallel process or a succeeding one?*
Breakout Session II: Designing reform – *Introductory phase (first two subjects in September 2025) and preparing for the full roll-out (all subjects in September 2026)* *Key questions:* 1. *How to design the introductory phase (competence-based civic and health education), and use its outcomes for the full roll-out of all subjects?* 2. *What are the key issues to consider when developing guidance for implementation?* 3. *How to evaluate the introductory phase and identify areas for improvement?* 4. *How to plan for evaluation already at the design stage? How to ensure implementation and evaluation capacity – the key challenges in most countries?*
Portugal: Working with and supporting teachers – principles of pedagogical assessment and related initiatives
Breakout Session III: Supporting teachers in implementing key competence curricula *Key questions***:** 1. *How to ensure that teachers and school leaders receive comprehensive professional development opportunities and support related to the new curriculum (e.g. courses, coaching, bespoke training, in-school/ between-school collaboration, MOOCs, etc.)? What is the role of higher education institutions in this process?* 2. *How to ensure that teacher professional competence frameworks are aligned with competences they are expected to teach? How to evaluate this and steer when necessary?* 3. *How to influence strategies to reach school leaders and teachers who are critical of competence-based approaches?* 4. *How to balance school and teacher autonomy and accountability (e.g. internal and external school evaluation)? What are the risks and benefits of increased autonomy?*

Netherlands: Examination and school-based assessment in a key competence perspective

Breakout Session IV: Assessment methods and practices

Key questions:

1. *What are the challenges to building teachers' competences for formative assessments and how might they be addressed?*
2. *How to ensure the quality of assessments and tests while promoting teachers' autonomy?*
3. *How to align the examination system with the curricula? What are the challenges to the design and scoring of external examinations measuring students' knowledge, skills and attitudes?*
4. *How can we construct a pedagogical assessment that promotes better learning and inclusive schools, also taking into account students with special educational needs (disabilities)?*

Portugal: Evaluation of the reform in Portugal

Breakout Session V: Embedding evaluation in reform

Key questions:

1. *What are effective mechanisms to monitor and ensure the quality of curriculum implementation at the school and system levels?*
2. *How to keep the curriculum reform a continuum of learning and improving?*
3. *How to keep the various stakeholders involved and engaged throughout the reform process?*
4. *How to implement school-level and macro-level evaluations, including the stakeholder involvement in school self-evaluation processes, community engagement (parents, community members)?*
5. *What structures and mechanisms are needed to enable lessons from the evaluation to inform ongoing implementation (formative evaluation)?*