Iceland Education Policy 2030 and its implementation

Education Policy 2030 (hereafter referred to as EP2030) is a ten-year education strategy document that establishes Iceland's objective to achieve a dynamic and flexible education system to drive economic and social change. It aims to contribute to shape the nation's future, give everyone the opportunity to develop, and increase their competencies (Ministry of Education, 2020[1]). It has the high-level vision 'to accomplish high quality education through life', underpinned by the values of resilience, courage, knowledge and happiness. The strategy document includes five pillars to attain this vision: equity, teaching, skills for the future, well-being and education system quality, under which further objectives and key issues are delineated.

The OECD analysed EP2030 and consulted key stakeholders to provide recommendations to strengthen the implementability of EP2030. For Iceland to move from the EP2030 strategy document to a long term actionable implementation strategy, the OECD recommends to:

- **Review the design of EP2030 to make it actionable**: The EP2030 is a high level, mid-term strategic document, with a clear and well articulated vision aligned to the challenges reflected by Iceland. To translate the design into an action plan Iceland should justify and operationalise the vision; review and refine key issues; develop specific policy actions and align resources.

- **Consider the approach to the engagement of stakeholders throughout EP2030:** While Iceland has engaged a broad range of stakeholders in the development of EP2030 and these stakeholders demonstrate a high-level of trust and willingness to work together, it should explore different engagement structures and approaches around EP2030; make roles and responsibilities transparent in relation to the strategy; and develop a clear communication strategy around it.

- **Fit implementation of EP2030 for its decentralised context**: The implementation of EP2030 offers Iceland the opportunity to think how best to reshape institutions or ways of working to best allow implementation of large-scale, long-term policy change to take place. Iceland can reflect and specify the institutional approach to implementation; enhance system capacity for change; and bring policy coherence around EP2030.

- **Define an actionable implementation strategy**: The processes of creating an implementation strategy will encourage Iceland to weave together various elements related to policy design, stakeholder engagement, and institutional features. It should bring together the different dimensions required for action; develop knowledge to monitor implementation; and establish it in an initial document that lays out the strategy.

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1. Introduction and methodology

A thriving, future-focused education system is one that allows all students, regardless of their socioeconomic background, the opportunity to develop to their fullest potential and prepare them for their future. For governments, it is paramount to attend to the quality and equity of their education system, as a key avenue to strengthen society's capacity for economic prosperity, equity, and social well-being. Iceland is a country that has heeded this call. It is in the process of developing its Education Policy 2030 (hereafter referred to as EP2030), as it seeks to achieve a dynamic and flexible education system that helps the country shape its future as a nation, gives everyone the opportunity to develop, and increase their competencies (Ministry of Education, 2020[1]).

EP2030 introduces as its high-level vision 'to accomplish high quality education through life', underpinned by the values of resilience, courage, knowledge and happiness (in the original Icelandic terms, these are: *þrautseigja*, *hugrekki*, *þekking* and *hamingja*). It includes five policy pillars to attain the vision that focus on equity, teaching, and skills for the future, well-being and quality.

It has been developed in Iceland following a set of Ministry organised national consultations. These consultations involved a series of meetings throughout 2018 and 2019 with representatives from municipalities, parents, students, teachers, school administrators, various interest groups, and the business community. A draft was put to online public consultation in the first quarter of 2020. Currently, EP2030 has been presented as a Motion for Parliamentary Resolution in the form of a high-level strategy document. EP2030 stipulates that a strategic action plan will be presented within six months of the Resolution passing. Implementation will take place in three phases over the course of ten years and each phase will have its own action plan, with specific policy tools, resourcing, and performance indicators.

Iceland invited the OECD to provide guidance on the development of EP2030 and the strengthening of its implementability to accomplish its vision. In Iceland, EP2030 is described as a 'policy' (in Icelandic stefnu). The OECD understand the term policy to mean the decisions or actions an organisation takes to influence, change, or frame a problem. EP2030 establishes core pillars, with focus areas and key issues, that future implementation plans will need to address and the values it will need to bring to life, through specification of policies. Thus, the OECD understands EP2030 as a 'strategy document' that Iceland can use to guide the selection of particular policy options as it develops its implementation strategy.

This distinction between 'policy' and 'strategy document' is important to note upfront, as it related to how the OECD undertook its assessment of EP2030. It focuses on the coherence of the pillars and the focus areas and key issues of EP2030 in relation to reported challenges, the perceptions stakeholders had of the key issues the strategy document outlined, as well as their perceptions of potential barriers to their effective implementation. This focus allowed the OECD assessment to situate the EP2030 in the context of Iceland's key educational and economic challenges, develop an understanding of Icelandic education

implementation approach and propose recommendations on how to move towards the implementation strategy of EP2030. The creation of the first implementation plan is planned within six months of the parliamentary approval of EP2030.

The OECD has drawn upon its experience undertaking country and education policy implementation reviews, as well as its analytical work across substantive policy areas such as curriculum, equity, evaluation, assessment, leadership, and teacher professional development to undertake this assessment and provide strategic advice on the considerations Iceland should take into account when planning implementation.

More concretely, an OECD team (Annex A) assessed EP2030 following a tailored methodology order to provide strategic advice on to support its implementation. Using a mixed methods approach, the team undertook desk-based research, group interviews with key stakeholders (Annex B) and reviewed a background questionnaire document containing data and information related to the strategy provided by Iceland. This approach ensured a balance between leveraging insights from external reviews of Iceland, international case studies and good practice, alongside the system insights derived from local knowledge.

The analysis builds on OECD's Implementing Education Policies framework (OECD, 2020[2]). This framework examines dimensions pivotal to policy making, so that a policy can make its way from a static government document to tangible change within the education system, felt in the lives of schools and learners (Figure 1). The framework comprises four dimensions that need to be considered coherently to accomplish education change:

- **Smart policy design**: Smart policy design comprises a clear vision to orient the policy and ensure the specificity of its objectives, the nomination of specific policy tools or levers to accomplish the vision and the specification of the resources implementation requires being successful.

- **Inclusive stakeholder engagement**: Inclusive stakeholder engagement entails timely and effective communication with a variety of stakeholders, a variety of avenues for stakeholders to be meaningfully involved in shaping the policy, and the transparency of roles and responsibilities (with concomitant ways of monitoring each) to foster trust, as well as efficacy, in the implementation process.

- **Conducive environment**: Conducive environment includes the governance arrangements, rules, norms, behaviours, and strategies that influence implementation. It also involves the capability of implementers to carry out the required change and the capacity of the system at different levels to shape, monitor, and adapt implementation as it occurs, and the process of policy alignment to ensure coherence and complementarity of the proposed change with other policies.

- **Actionable implementation strategy**: The implementation strategy brings together the different dimensions in a coherent and actionable approach, by providing responses to who, what, where, when, how, as well as providing the metrics to understand progress with the strategy. The strategy itself, or the plans or communications arising from it, should be available publicly so each stakeholder group understands the implementation process and their role in it. The strategy is likely to evolve, as implementation progresses.

Figure 1. A framework for effective education policy implementation
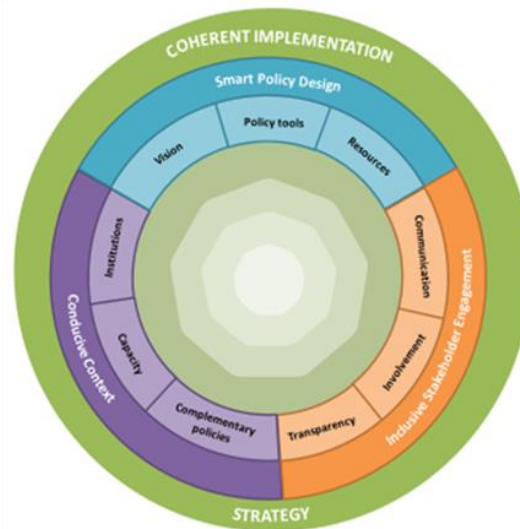
Source: (OECD, 2020[2])

Building on the framework and its methodology, this report analyses EP2030 and makes recommendations to aid its implementation. Following this introduction, the next chapter reviews the design of EP2030, to understand the pillars, focus areas, and key issues in relation to the reported educational challenges Iceland faces and the internal coherence of the document. It continues with a review of Iceland's approach to stakeholder engagement as well as to the institutional environment to understand how best to prepare for the implementation of EP2030. The final chapter proposes considerations for Iceland to support the implementation planning process, in the short term, and to strengthen Iceland's education policymaking and implementation approach.

2. A description of Education Policy 2030

Iceland's Ministry of Education, Science and Culture developed the EP2030 from analysis and insights following multiple consultation processes with stakeholders nation-wide between 2018 and 2020. It draws upon research and reflection on international developments in education, including those committed to children's rights and sustainable development. This strategy document is included in full in Appendix 1. The OECD assessed EP2030 as having five main components:

- **Vision**: The overarching goal EP2030 seeks to achieve
- **Values**: The high-level values that underpin the vision
- **Pillars**: Thematic areas, phrased as aspirations or outcomes, under which specific focus areas are organised
- **Focus areas**: Policy areas that Iceland seeks to emphasise under each pillar
- **Key issues**: Various normative ideals and current or possible future actions associated with each focus area.

Figure 2 introduces the EP2030 in a diagram, presenting the values, vision and the five pillars that comprise this 10 year education strategy:

   A. Equal access to education for all
   B. Developing superior teaching
   C. Emphasising skills for the future
   D. Placing well-being first in education
   E. Foregrounding quality.

Iceland sees these pillars forming the base of a stronger Icelandic society. EP2030 recognises that Iceland's future prospects depend on having highly educated citizens capable of creativity and critical thinking, command of Icelandic and other languages to tackle global challenges, and to stimulate the resilience of individuals and societies. As part of this, it prioritises individuals' agency in their lifelong learning.

Figure 2. Education Policy 2030
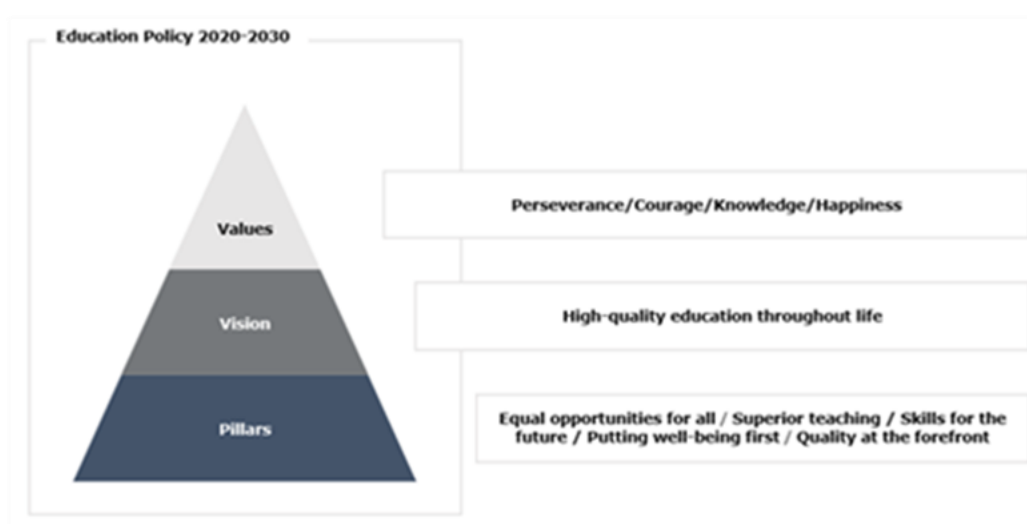
Source: (Icelandic Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture, 2020[3])

Table 1 presents the pillars and their associated focus areas. The first pillar focuses on equity, including focus areas related to catering to the needs of all students, the geographical distribution of education provision, diversity, and early learning opportunities. The second pillar focuses on superior teaching, including focus areas related to the teaching profession, teachers' competence development, innovation, and working conditions, and includes the development of knowledge and courage in students. The third pillar focuses on skills for the future, including focus areas related to developing a range of skills that are highlighted as important for the future of Iceland, including literacy, Icelandic proficiency, science, technical education, arts, creativity, digitalisation and lifelong learning. The fourth pillar focuses on well-being, including focus areas related to looking to enhance student mental health and well-being as well as student agency. The fifth pillar focuses on strengthening quality assurance across the education system, including focus areas related to reinforcing student assessments and accountability, providing student and parental expectations, and the efficient use of resources.

Table 1. Education Policy 2030 pillars and their focus areas

Equal opportunities for all	Superior teaching	Skills for the future	Putting well-being first	Quality at the forefront
1. Education for all	1. Teacher education and recruitment	1. Reading literacy	1. Health promotion	1. Accountability and co-ordination in service systems
2. Education throughout the country	2. Knowledge and courage	2. The advancement of Icelandic	2. Mental health	2. National Curriculum Guides as factors supporting the Education Policy
3. A diverse educational community	3. Competence development of educational professionals	3. Science and research	3. Prevention	3. Assessment
4. Early support	4. The legal framework governing education	4. Vocational, trade and technical education	4. School counselling	4. Expectations for students
	5. Variety	5. Art and crafts	5. Students' voices	5. Expectations for parents
		6. Creativity and critical thinking	6. Everyone's well-being	6. Continuous improvement and quality assurance
		7. Digital living		7. Efficient use of funds
		8. Lifelong education		

Source: (Icelandic Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture, 2020[3])

3. The design of EP2030 and its future implementation

Focusing EP2030's vision and using it to plan implementation

A coherent, clearly articulated vision is crucial to good policy design. A vision is a clear aspiration for what the education reform sets out to achieve and. helps people to answer the question "what do we want to see or have after undertaking reform?". It is foregrounded in a document's introduction, to ensure clarity, agreement, and engagement from the onset. Clear policy goals are the objectives that need to be met in order for a vision to be realised, providing the clarity against which tangible progress can be measured (OECD, 2020[2]). The purpose of a vision is to:

- Articulate the overarching aspirations for the reform
- Orient chosen policy tools within a broader strategy
- Guide decisions and actions
- Align approaches
- Maintain engagement and collaboration of multiple stakeholders and actors across a policy system.

EP2030 establishes a high-level, long-term vision for education change, 'high-quality education throughout life', and nominates core values to be developed: 'resilience'; 'courage'; 'knowledge'; and 'happiness'. Iceland has developed a concise vision with five underpinning policy pillars. However, while the clear articulation of a vision is important in and of itself, its articulation alone is not enough to ensure effective implementation or policy success. Iceland may want to consider including a justification of this vision (over all possible others) and what its 'theory-of-change' is, is similarly important in its first implementation plan. It will be important that this description is included in the documentation and is broadly understood and supported by the stakeholders who will play a role in implementation.

As already highlighted, EP2030 responds to issues significant to Iceland and the motivational vision tying them together, at first review, seems suitable. Yet, it is not clear what this vision would allow Iceland to do better or differently than what it was doing before. Some stakeholders in Iceland reflected that while the

vision appears sound, it seems largely to bring together and consolidate a number of different existing education policies. Examples of this include the National Curriculum Guides; teacher recruitment; the Teaching Council; the professional development of teachers and school leaders; education for all; the concerns of students whose native language is not Icelandic; the funding of higher education institutions; the regulatory environment of upper secondary education; various evaluation reports; and the development of standardised tests and educational materials.

It is also unclear how this vision will inform or guide, in a practical sense, the pillars, focus areas, and the key issues. Establishing this function is crucial, as this is the purpose of a strategy document vis-à-vis an implementation plan. The OECD encourages Iceland to deepen engagement with the vision to elaborate on why it was chosen, why having this vision would make a difference to motivate the actions of those who will be engaged, and how this vision will be operationalised to guide policy development and implementation across all policy domains included in this overarching strategy. A review and evaluation of the White Paper on Education Reform 2016 and its actions and accomplishments could support this process. It could also be helpful to reflect on some broader questions related to Iceland's education policymaking and implementation capacity, such as:

- What processes does Iceland have in place to assess current and emerging issues and challenges? How does it decide which ones to focus on?

- What processes does Iceland have in place to develop an overarching vision that best responds to these and how will it know when it has done this effectively?

- How does Iceland plan to use the vision to inform policy making and implementation in this ten-year period (from 'soft' measures like ensuring communication about the vision to 'hard' measures like evaluation/ accountability, for example)?

More generally, Iceland could consider exploring approaches to frame education challenges so that the policies it chooses to use to bring the vision to life become drivers of change. With the implementation planning process forthcoming, Iceland should select approaches that are suited to its policymaking and implementation culture. It may be useful to consider 'problem framing'. Problem framing is a way to unpick and work around dilemmas and paradoxes that have historically prevented change from occurring within a system. Problem frames link the desired outcome with a definition of how a solution might be organised and, in doing so, mark the territory in which action will be taken to achieve a desired outcome. It is a dynamic process. Those engaged in it explore and increasingly refine various understandings of an issue, the context in which the issue exists and what outcomes are possible and desirable (OECD, 2017[4]). Another approach can be 'backward mapping', where Iceland seeks to understand the discrepancy between actual and desired practice or outcomes, as they are encoded in each pillar's key issues, and works backwards to ask what would require changing to affect the outcome that is the target of the policy (Elmore, 1980[5]).

A clearly articulated vision is an excellent start but these broader questions are worthy of consideration if Iceland wants to make the vision real in schools and in student learning. A possible way forward is to establish what this vision will concretely accomplish. in 2030, what would a high quality system for all look like? How would Iceland embed these values in the education system? When it comes to enhancing the implementability of EP2030, articulating the vision so that it responds to well identified problems or needs will make it more actionable, making the subsequent task of developing an action plan easier. Answering these questions with specific descriptions, to work back from to determine the specific policy actions that would bring them into fruition, would also form the basis of the thinking required to produce a set of indicators to measure implementation progress. Defining tangible indicators that relate to the vision and progress in accomplishing across pillars would also support its development and make it more tangible.

Furthermore, this clarity would also engender deeper support for it, as people more readily identify with something when they understand how it will work. In practical terms, Iceland may consider bringing together different stakeholders to develop and interpret what the vision would mean in practice for schools, educational institutions, and ultimately for students.

Assessing the design of EP2030's pillars to key challenges in Iceland

The EP2030 is a strategic document that brings together different policies with the objective of improving the quality and outcomes of the education system to enhance economic and social development in Iceland for the 21st century. It organises key issues under pillars to form the basis of future policy development and implementation. The EP2030 vision, pillars, focus areas, and key issues resonate with the challenges identified by the OECD and Iceland in previous collaborative work with this country (Minister Lilja Alfreðsdóttir, 2020[6]). Iceland assessed its own system performance against the policy areas of the education policy outlook ((OECD, 2015[7]):

- Improving overall student performance. Giving particular attention to boys' performance (and girls' decline in performance), promoting excellence at the top of the student performance distribution, and ensuring schools develop strategies to address individual learning needs of students.

- Preparing students for the future. Focusing on improving completion of upper secondary education to build a skilled labour force by reducing dropout rates in upper secondary education, making VET more attractive to promote completion of studies, and providing incentives for students to complete their studies on time.

- School Improvement through teaching quality. Targeting professional development to strengthen practice of the ageing teaching workforce, making the profession more attractive to strong candidates, and reviewing the use of time by teachers.

- Evaluation and Assessment for improvement and accountability. Using student assessment and school evaluation to improve learning outcomes.

- Governance aligned to the local level. Promoting a governance system focused on proximity support and capacity building to assist individual schools and municipalities in the management of teaching and learning processes; managing the school network to ensure educational aspirations are not lower in remote and rural areas.

- Availability of funding. Ensuring high public funding for the education sector, mainly for compulsory education guaranteeing effective allocation and use of funding to respond to the needs of students and schools.

Overall, these align to the range of policies that considered coherently can contribute to the improvement of an education system in the 21st century, according to international research (OECD, 2015[7]; Schleicher, 2018[8]) (OECD, 2020[9]). Of particular relevance are policies related to equity and excellence, the quality of the teaching profession and leadership, the development of knowledge and 21st century skills, student well-being and lifelong learning opportunities. The pillars align with the challenges OECD research has identified as important for Iceland to tackle, such as equity, diversity, improvingliteracy, the teaching profession or improving the quality of vocational education and training (VET).

- According to PISA, the mean performance of 15 year olds in all three subjects declined over Iceland's participation in PISA by about five score points per three year period, on average (Figure 3). In mathematics, mean performance in 2018 was higher than in 2015, but not in reading or science. Performance in reading declined amongst the country's lowest-achieving students (OECD, 2019[10]).

- While in all countries and economies participating in PISA 2018, girls outperformed boys in reading (by 30 score points on average), in Iceland the gender gap in reading (41 score points) was higher than the average (OECD, 2019[10]).

- The teacher's perception of the value of the teaching profession in society is among the lowest across those countries participating in the TALIS survey, at 17.5%, with the highest country at 66.5% (OECD, 2019[11]). The teaching workforce, especially in primary, is mostly female.

- The completion rate for upper secondary education (within the theoretical duration of the programme) is considerably lower than the OECD average, especially among students enrolled in vocational programmes (41%) than among those in general ones (65%) (OECD, 2020[12]).

In relation to the development of education and skills for economic resilience and social development, the OECD Economic Survey for Iceland highlights the following issues (OECD, 2019[13]):

- Young people should leave compulsory education with the skills needed for further development and lifelong learning. This requires reducing the large share of students with low proficiency levels in literacy and numeracy, according to PISA findings, and equipping young people with a broader set of skills including, for instance, creativity and collaborative skills.

- Skills and qualifications of the labour force need to align better with the country's demand for different skills (which, in turn, will also evolve alongside technological advancement).

- Many occupations requiring high skills face shortages, while many workers are over-qualified for the jobs they do (implying that they are not meeting their productive potential).

- Using existing skills effectively is as crucial as developing them. Immigrants have filled some of the skills shortages, although they are not always well integrated in the labour market.

Figure 3. Trends in performance in reading, mathematics and science
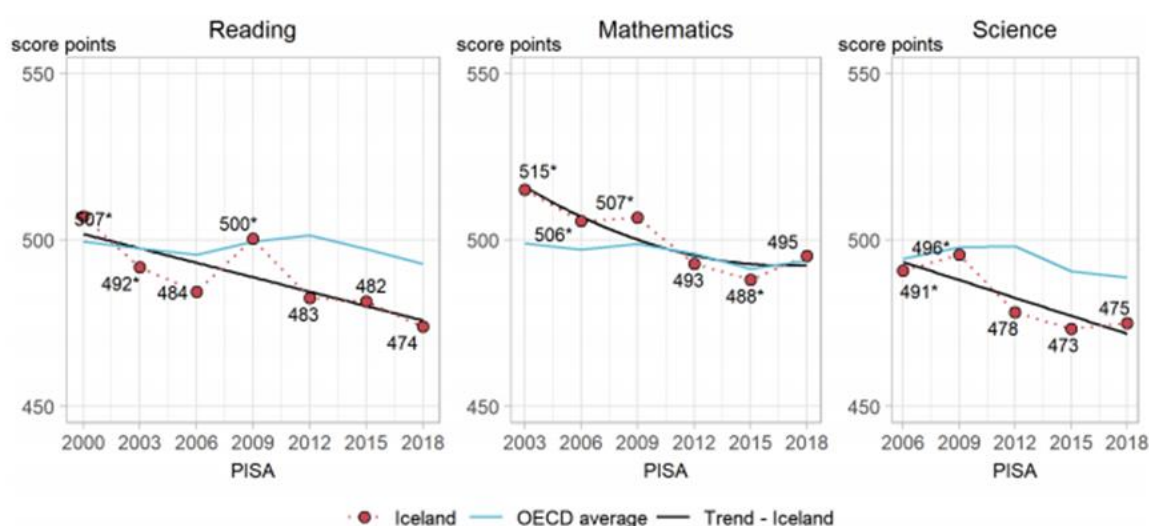
Source: (OECD, 2019[10])

EP2030 is a strategy document that focuses on most of the major issues that Iceland has defined as important for the country. However, the challenge of drop outs from upper secondary schooling is an important issue for Iceland, that is not directly covered in this document and has been highlighted by OECD previously (OECD, 2012). Equally importantly, EP2030 goes beyond these to include a strong focus on student well-being and to enhance a range of skills that can contribute to preparing students to shape Iceland's future, including Icelandic, arts and crafts. COVID has also brought to bear a number of issues across education systems internationally that could be reviewed along with the strategy. The need to integrate technology more coherently into education systems could be considered among them.

The document provides the vision and also refers to its subsequent plan for implementation in the next 10 years. As Iceland is now planning its implementation plan, it will be important to ensure that the link between vision, pillars and focus areas and the problems or challenges Iceland faces are more explicit, so that the action plan can follow a causal logic.

Evidence shows that the design of a policy can influence the success in its implementation. If the policy is clear, based on evidence that aligns to the education system challenges, has a clear policy approach, and is well understood by those who have to implement it, it has higher probabilities of being implemented and reaching its objectives (Viennet and Pont, 2017[14]). The next sections assesses EP2030 in relation to core elements crucial to policy design success: its vision, the policies or tools that are included to develop it and resources allocated to it.

Focus areas and key issues in EP2030

EP2030 has five pillars, under which there are a series of focus areas, each with their own associated key issues. The OECD considers the pillars and focus areas in line with what international research has shown to contribute to high quality and equitable education systems, with Iceland's focus on student well-being being especially relevant during the current COVID-19 global pandemic. Enhancing the teaching profession, developing a range of basic and technical skills and enhancing system accountability is important in Iceland. In addition, Iceland has integrated focus areas that could prove to be valuable learning cases for the international community such as highlighting arts and crafts and scientific knowledge and research. To aid future implementation planning, the key issues included in the individual focus areas of each pillar can be analysed in more depth.

Under each pillar's individual focus areas, Iceland presents a series of key issues, rendering them in various ways. For example, some are presented as value statements, such as 'people's educational opportunities must not be determined by where they live'. Some read as directives, such as 'it must be ensured that competence and knowledge development is defined as an integral part of teachers' and school leaders' work at all school levels'. Others delineate specific courses of action, such as 'external reviews are to be conducted at regular intervals, and are to be followed up by targeted reform support in cooperation between central and local government and other education providers'. EP2030 does not clarify which focus areas reflect existing policy or would require the creation of new policy.

To support the development of the EP2030 from a strategy document into implementation, the OECD has analysed the different pillars by extracting the key issues from the strategy text and rephrasing them as action statements. This makes the key issues more overt and allows to assess how they are aligned to address the challenges of each pillar's focus areas. Also, phrasing them as action statements can support future implementation planning, as it can help to distinguish existing from proposed policy, show what further actions may be required, and support a prioritisation process to make EP2030 actionable in its forthcoming implementation. Iceland should consider the need to sort these values/ directives/ implied policy actions, prioritise them, define the specific policy actions to develop them, and note which are existing versus new. This will also help to understand which require evaluation or updating versus which requires new policy actions. These are analysed in the next section.

Pillar 1: Equal opportunities for all

Pillar 1 refers to equity and shows Iceland's commitment to equity in education, by targeting diversity, student welfare, bridging the urban-rural divide and strengthening early childhood education and care (ECEC) and vocational education and training (VET) (Table 2). This pillar and its key issues aim to respond to Iceland's strong performance on equity as well as addressing a range of challenges: a decline in student performance, a gender gap, a recent increase in the immigrant population, a rural urban divide, a mismatch in the skills of adults in the labour market and drop out.

Table 2. Equal opportunities for all

Summary of focus areas and key issues

Focus areas	Key issues
A.1 Education for all	Schools and other educational institutions to consider the needs, abilities and aptitudes of each student and base their work on each individual's strengths and interests. Society to safeguard the welfare of children and young people and ensure all can thrive in education.
A.2 Education throughout the country	Educational offerings outside main urban centres to be delivered through improvements in transport and technology. Expansion of vocational and technical training.
A.3 A diverse educational community	School system to welcome diversity and expand efforts to evaluate the education of immigrants and refugees so that they can use their knowledge for their own benefit and for that of society.
A.4 Early support	Strengthen preschools. Improve interdisciplinary cooperation for flexible support, directed to either students or the environment, for vulnerable individuals and groups.

Source: (Ministry of Education, 2020[1])

While Iceland already has a strong focus on equity and well-being in its education system, there are some issues that require action:

- Iceland's results for 15 year olds show that the system is more equitable that the OECD average. The latest results from PISA show that socio-economic status explains only 7% of the variance in reading performance in the country against an average of 12% in the whole of the OECD. Furthermore, the average difference between advantaged and disadvantaged students in reading is 72 points, lower when compared to an average of 89 in OECD countries (OECD, 2019[15]).

- There has been an increase in the influx of foreign population, moving from 6.8% in 2010 to 13.5% in 2020 (National Statistical Institute of Iceland, 2020[16]). The subsequent increase diversity will represent new challenges to schools and teachers, which are looking for ways to serve the needs of this student population better and to close the performance gaps between immigrant and non-immigrant students, according to PISA. While only some 6% of students in Iceland had an immigrant background in 2018, about three in seven were socio-economically disadvantaged, and had a larger performance gap than non-immigrant students.

- Although enrolment in early childhood education and care is among the highest across OECD, with 60% of children under 3 years of age enrolled, including for those aged one and two with 1% of GDP spent on all children aged 3 to 5 enrolled in early childhood education and care (ISCED 0) and primary (OECD, 2020[12]), Iceland has chosen to prioritise it to increase quality.

Figure 4. Differences in performance related to personal characteristics
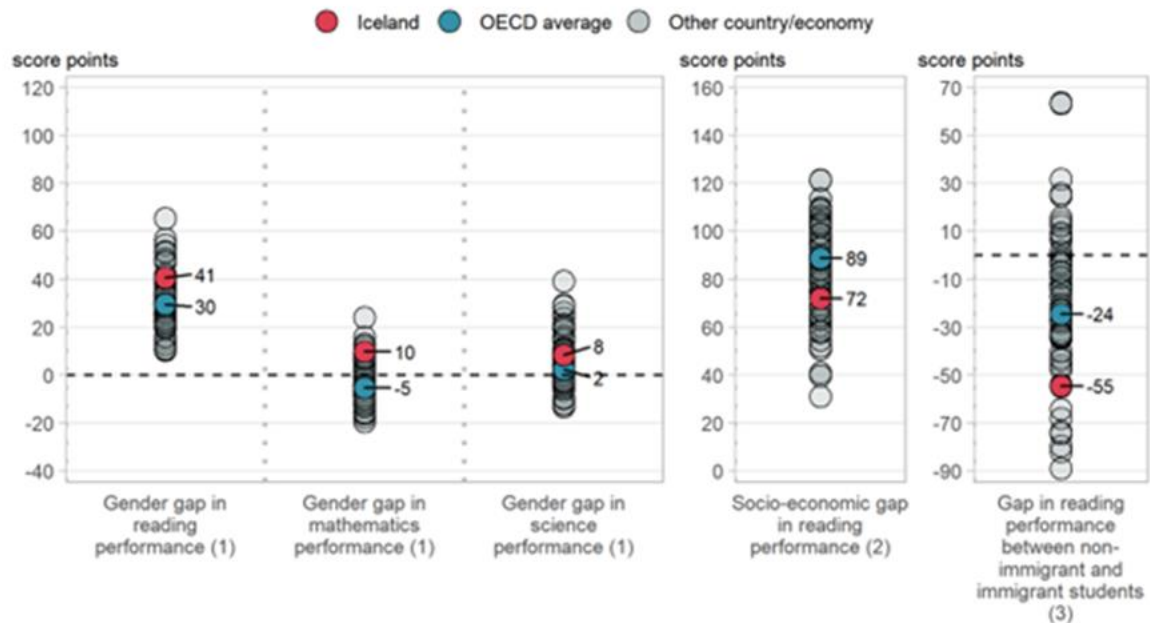
These issues are covered in the first pillar *equal opportunities for all*, which is focused on actions to serve multicultural school populations and differentiate teaching and support and increase flexibility to better take into account the needs of diverse students, as shown in Table 2.

However, particular challenges that Iceland faces, such as the gender gap in reading, mathematics, and science performance shown in Figure 4 above and the potential need to reduce the long duration towards completion of upper secondary education, as recommended by OECD in a number of reports (OECD, 2012; (OECD, 2019[13])) are not highlighted in this equity section. They also target issues where high investment already exists, such as ECEC, where the focus may be more on quality than coverage. Iceland could consider where priorities lie within the different policy areas to accomplish the EP 2030 vision.

Stakeholder interviews yielded some insights that Iceland can consider when shifting toward implementation planning:

- **Fostering diversity and inclusion is a transversal issue**: Stakeholders especially welcomed the focus area on diverse education and potential expanded efforts to support the education of immigrants in the Icelandic education system. There was broad agreement that efforts to foster a stronger sense of inclusion, value, and belonging were important and they affirmed that the education system played an important role in helping Iceland navigate the culture shifts increased immigration brings. In particular, they emphasised the importance of explicitly pursuing policy development approaches that involve a range of actors from within and across the education sector, as 'diversity' and 'inclusion' are multi-faceted concepts with multiple avenues of influence.

Pillar 2: Superior teaching

Table 3 outlines this pillar's focus areas and key issues, which contend with improving teaching, including issues that relate to strengthening the profession and increasing the supply of teachers to prevent shortages and on workforce professionalisation through investments in professionals' competence development. Research has shown that both can contribute to improvement in job satisfaction and, hence, retention.

Table 3. Superior teaching

Summary of the focus areas and key issues

Focus areas	Key issues
B.1 Teacher education and recruitment	Teacher education should take account of society's needs. Raise the status of the teaching profession. Strengthen teachers' professional autonomy. Explore ways to prevent teacher shortages, including through recruitment.
B.2 Knowledge and courage	Enable students to gain new knowledge and skills and apply it. Raise awareness on the importance of creativity and other higher order thinking skills.
B.3 Competence development of educational professionals	Define competence development at the heart of teacher and school leaders' work to promote skills updating. Develop links between educational professionals' basic education, training and competence development.
B.4 The legal framework governing education	Ensure the effective implementation of the Act on the education, competency and recruitment of teachers and school leaders of preschools, compulsory schools and upper secondary schools.
B.5 Variety	Promote cooperation and the involvement of specialists.

Source: (Ministry of Education, 2020[1])

Selected data points to challenges related to this area in Iceland:

- In Iceland, the average age for teachers in lower secondary education is 44.6 years, slightly higher than 44 years old across the OECD and across all countries and economies participating in TALIS 2018. Currently, 38% of the teachers are aged 50 and above (the OECD average is 34%) and less than 5% are younger than 30 years old, as shown in Figure 5. This means that Iceland will have to renew about two out of five members of its teaching body over the next decade or so, but there is a very limited number of new teachers coming into the profession (OECD, 2019[13]).

- While more than 95% teachers report overall satisfaction with their job, only 17% believe that teaching is a highly valued profession in society.

- There is low uptake of induction for new teachers in Iceland, according to TALIS data.

Figure 5. Share of teachers less than 30 years old, by level of education (2017)
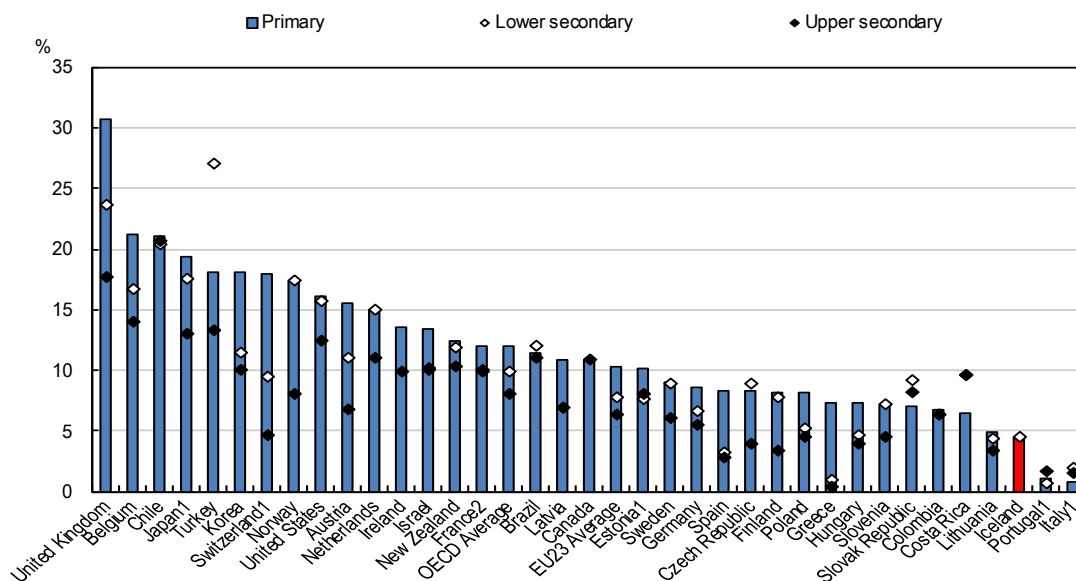
Note 1: Upper secondary includes programmes from other levels of education. 2. Public and government-dependent private institutions only.
Source: (OECD, 2019[18])

Enhancing the quality of the teaching profession is at the core of educational success. There are different approaches to accomplish this, which depend on the status of the teaching profession and the context of the country. Raising the status of the teaching profession is a multifaceted policy that can require reviewing initial entry requirements, the quality of initial teacher education, contractual arrangements, the availability of professional development opportunities, the existence of support networks, possibilities for professional progression along the career, as well as the quality of leadership.

Raising the value of the teaching profession can enhance the prestige and attractiveness of teaching careers, which can boost recruitment of high-calibre candidates who may have high intrinsic motivation for this career. Iceland can take this into consideration when considering what policy approaches may suit the Icelandic context, given that teaching was the first choice career for 62% of teachers (below the OECD average of 67%). Yet, when asked why they joined the profession, 79% of teachers in Iceland cite the opportunity to influence children's development or contribute to society as a major motivation (OECD, 2019[11]).

Reflecting on additional actions to attract and retain qualified candidates into the teaching profession and into less advantaged or geographically isolated schools is key. Disadvantaged schools (i.e. those at the bottom quarter of school socio-economic profile) and rural schools in Iceland tend to have relatively more teacher resources compared to their counterparts, based on 2015 PISA results, and are better equipped. Such schools, however, are more likely to suffer, according to principals' reports, from teacher shortages and absenteeism, and inadequate and poor quality staff (OECD, 2019[13]). Box 1 includes a short case study from Sweden that shows how this country is improving teacher recruitment by enhancing the attractiveness of the teaching profession.

> ### Box 1. Enhancing the prestige and attractiveness of the teaching profession in Sweden
>
> According to the Swedish National Agency for Education (Skolverket), upcoming recruitment needs will be difficult to meet, which suggests a future shortage of teachers. In 2014, the Swedish government introduced the National Gathering for the Teaching Profession, which contained measures to avoid this situation and boost the attractiveness of the profession. This legislation included financial incentives in the form of salary increases and more rapid wage progression for teachers, linked to their competences and development. In 2016, this was followed by the Teacher Salary Boost initiative (Lärarlönelyftet), which rewarded teachers after they completed professional development programmes. A second axis of the government strategy was to facilitate and encourage entry to the profession by promoting alternative pathways to teaching and increasing government grants for new teachers. Grants were also implemented to improve working conditions and career possibilities, targeting dropout among teachers. These measures were complemented by an information campaign entitled Pass it On (För det vidare), which was designed to attract more people to teaching, encourage retention of those already in the system and boost the social prestige of the profession. This media-based operation, in the form of a website, contains general information on the teaching profession, presents existing opportunities for teaching professionals and promotes entry to the profession through original materials.
>
> Notes: Ministry of Finance (2015[36]), Budgetpropositionen för 2015: Prop. 2014/15:1 [Budget bill for 2015], http://www.regeringen.se/rattsdokument/proposition/2014/10/prop.-2014151/; Swedish National Agency for Education (2015[37]), An Assessment of the Situation in the Swedish School System 2015: Summary of Report 421, https://www.skolverket.se/download/18.6bfaca41169863e6a65bba5/1553966393937/pdf3551.pdf.
> Source: (OECD, 2020[19])

Enhancing teacher autonomy by itself may not necessarily lead to better results, but in alignment with enhancing professional development to identified needs (and using it to drive engagement and retention) it has potential for improvement. Teachers in Iceland already have high participation in professional development and the country has made efforts to increase the level of educational attainment of incoming teachers. Since 2012, pre-primary, compulsory and upper-secondary teachers are required to have a master's degree in education or in their field of study, as well as Teacher Certification Studies. They are expected to spend time on in-service training, preparation, and other duties in addition to their presence in schools (OECD, 2016[20]). Policies that will allow Iceland to continue in this path can enhance the teaching profession and the quality of teaching, as access to professional development is a major driver in improving the quality of teaching practice and staff satisfaction that, in turn, encourages teachers to remain in the profession.

International research shows that teachers say that the most impactful professional development programmes are those based on strong subject and curriculum content and involve collaborative approaches to instruction, as well as the incorporation of active learning. Paradoxically, this most impactful kind of professional development does not enjoy the highest participation across the OECD. The forms of professional development with the highest participation are courses or seminars attended in person (76% of teachers across the OECD) and reading professional literature (72%). Participation is also lower for more collaborative forms of professional development, with only 44% of teachers participating in training based on peer/self-observation and coaching, learning and networking (Schleicher, 2020[21]).

On that basis, Iceland will need to think not only about what mechanisms it will put in place to ensure professional development is targeted to priority issues, how it will conceptualise and measure 'impact' in its own context, and how best incentivise teachers to take up the kind of professional development that is of the most impactful nature.

Given the low differences in wage in Iceland throughout the teaching career, reviewing the conditions for employment, so they include opportunities for career progression and for collaboration with peers and colleagues can also be considered (OECD, 2020[19]).

Lastly, the focus area related to 'knowledge and courage' requires clearer definition, as it may be out of place in this pillar. If it relates to supporting teachers to better foster these soft skills in students, it can remain here. If it relates purely to the student experience, then it may be more appropriately located in the pillar related to 'skills for the future'.

Stakeholder interviews yielded some insights that Iceland could take into account when shifting toward implementation planning:

- **Teacher recruitment and training was a priority to stakeholders:** Stakeholders reserved their stronger reactions to the focus area related to teacher recruitment and education in this pillar. There is strong support in any future efforts to find more innovative ways of delivering training and ongoing professional development, in service of fostering greater teacher autonomy may be especially welcome. Stakeholders expressed interest in being involved in developing initiatives arising from this focus area.

Pillar 3: Skills for the future

Table 4 outlines this pillar's focus areas and key issues, which focus on enhancing a set of skills that are considered important for the 'Fourth Industrial Revolution', including issues related to reading, Icelandic, science, creativity and critical thinking, digital literacy, as well as enhancing VET and lifelong education.

Table 4. Skills for the future

Summary of proposed policy focus areas and key issues

Focus areas	Key issues
C.1 Reading literacy	Measures to emphasise language and reading comprehension, communication, writing and listening, as well as to help those with reading difficulties. Engage everyone in improving literacy: homes, libraries, authors and media outlets.
C.2 The advancement of Icelandic	Promote the use of Icelandic and Icelandic sign language in all areas of society; strengthen Icelandic teaching at all school levels. Safeguard the future of the Icelandic language in a digital world.
C.3 Science and research	Promote the effective communication of scientific knowledge.
C.4 Vocational, trade and technical education	Strengthen VET to ensure that the development of skills matches society's needs and the challenges of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Provide VET and technical education to young people, whatever their gender, at the upper-secondary level and systematically introduce available programmes and discuss job opportunities opened by those programs.
C.5 Art and crafts	Value and promote the role of arts and crafts education to develop mental and physical skills through solution-based tasks and innovative thinking.
C.6 Creativity and critical thinking	Emphasise the role of creativity and critical thinking to develop students' values and promote their capacity to engage in societal debate. Provide learning environments that promotes initiative, independence and creative thinking in all areas.
C.7 Digital living	Offer training to improve digital literacy in order to better navigate online environments, improve familiarity with aspects of technology, and practically apply technology.
C.8 Lifelong education	Give access to education at all ages as a way of ensuring adaptive responses to economic change and associated need for mobility in the labour market.

Source: (Ministry of Education, 2020[1])

The focus of this pillar and its focus areas is to address Iceland's challenges of decreasing levels of reading literacy and skills mismatch, by providing students with the skills required for the future, in the labour market, and also more broadly for Iceland as a country.

Iceland can invest in raising the share of students with low proficiency levels in literacy and numeracy, as the basis for further knowledge and skills development. In reading literacy and science in PISA, the performance of students in Iceland is, on average, below their OECD peers and, in the three domains covered (reading literacy, mathematics and science), girls outperform boys. In detail:

- In reading literacy, the main topic of PISA 2018, 15-year-olds in Iceland score 474 points compared to an average of 487 points in OECD countries. Girls perform better than boys do with a statistically significant difference of 41 points (OECD average: 30 points higher for girls).

- In mathematics, 15-year-olds in Iceland score 495 points on average compared to an average of 489 points in OECD countries. Girls perform better than boys do with a statistically significant difference of 10 points (OECD average: 5 points higher for boys).

- In science, the average performance of 15-year-olds in Iceland is 475 points, compared to an average of 489 points in OECD countries. Girls perform better than boys do with a statistically significant difference of 8 points (OECD average: 2 points higher for girls) (OECD, 2019[15]).

This focus area related to strengthening literacy is targeted to this challenge. However, Iceland needs to ensure it has a robust way of identifying and appraising the specific causes of declining student performance and ensure that the policy actions focus well on reading, numeracy, the gender divide, and are fine-tuned in a way that makes sense for Iceland's context.

In addition, an important highlighted challenge is the skills mismatch in the labour market. Such a mismatch may hamper Iceland's economic productivity. In Iceland, many occupations requiring high skills are facing shortages, while many workers are over-qualified for the jobs they do, not meeting their productive potential. Using existing skills effectively is as crucial as developing them. Immigrants have filled some of the skills shortages but this too has come with issues, as they are not always well integrated in the labour market (OECD, 2019). Iceland needs to find better ways of aligning skills and qualifications with market demands and ensuring workers are well integrated into the labour market so that they can reach their potential. Longer term, (as technology and industries develop) find a more responsive and adaptable way of keeping pace with skills needs as they arise (OECD, 2019[13]).

While this pillar's focus on improving uptake of VET courses, through increased familiarisation with them, is a step in the right direction, it is a policy intent that only addresses one possible factor (lack of familiarity) for skills shortages (inadequate uptake of VET). In addition to driving uptake of VET courses, Iceland also needs a more systematic approach to identifying skill shortages and planning educational pathways (of which VET may be a part) to ameliorate, or avoid, them (OECD, 2019[13]).

The Ministry has noted the call to move away from ad hoc forecasting and analysis of industry skill-needs and has established a committee to focus on the organisation, scope and requirements for a regular monitoring of skills demands and the necessary legal changes for this to happen. Despite this, further emphasis or detail about the operation of this committee, or the policy strands it should seek to draw together to identify, and produce easily understood data on, skills mismatches and develop reliable long-term projections for the skills demanded, is absent from this pillar.

Figure 6. Skills mismatch across OECD countries, 2016

A. Components of skills mismatch, 2016

B. Field-of-study mismatch, 2016
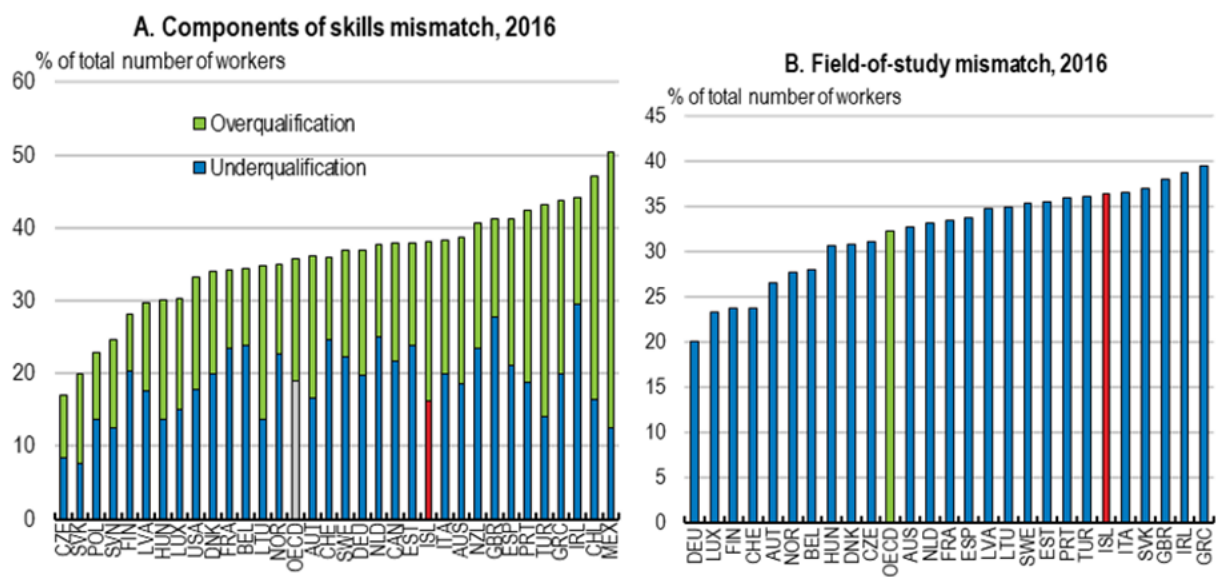
Note: Qualification mismatch describes a situation for which a worker has qualifications that exceed (overqualified) or does not meet (under-qualified) the ones generally required for the job. Field-of-study mismatch arises when workers are employed in a different field from what they have specialised during their education.
Source: (OECD, 2019[13])

EP2030 refers to a range of skills that are directly related to the curriculum (such as literacy, Icelandic literacy, arts and crafts, creativity and critical thinking, and digital living). At present, Iceland has already undertaken reform to its curriculum, and it would be required to determine whether these skills should be included or prioritised in the current curriculum. Currently, EP2030 does not provide a link to the current curriculum reform. Thinking about the scope of these on curriculum change is also worth further explanation, as well as detailing what implications that this possible curriculum change could have on teaching practice.

Stakeholder interviews yielded some insights that Iceland could take into account when shifting toward implementation planning:

- **Be aware of potential curriculum reform fatigue**: While stakeholders demonstrated general support for the focus areas and key issues of this pillar, they raised concerns about how these would be integrated into existing curriculum or require and in what timeframe, and what support will be given to school leaders and teachers to implement change at the school level. Stakeholders reported that implementation of the most recent curriculum reform is still uneven across municipalities and that introducing new changes, even if worthwhile, may compound this problem and incur the risk of fatigue.

Overall, there is a range of issues to consider in relation to this pillar. Further consideration as to whether some of these domains could be prioritised and as to how these could be integrated in the current curriculum would be important, how teachers and students could understand them, and how they could be measured. In terms of lifelong learning, broadening provision for learners of all ages is an important policy that requires further development to understand what can be the focus, who can provide learning opportunities, and how to control their quality, or whether there can be recognition of informal and non formal learning, for example.

Pillar 4: Putting well-being first

Table 5 outlines this pillar's focus areas and key issues, which focus on integrating a holistic approach to student well-being. Addressing this in a networked way is important, as barriers to effective learning (the basis of high student performance) include the lack of supportive learning environments, lack of remedial support offered early on, targeted support for disadvantaged students, negative gender stereotypes, and the lack of involvement of parents and local communities (OECD, 2016[22]).

Table 5. Shared responsibility for the provision and quality of schooling

Summary of focus areas and key issues

Focus areas	Key issues
D.1 Health promotion	Facilitate health promotion at all school levels to ensure that students are not at risk of becoming victims of psychological, physical, gender-based or sexual violence, harassment or bullying.
D.2 Mental health	Prioritise mental health from a young age.
D.3 Prevention	Create instruction and training in behavioural, social and emotional skills to prevent the establishment of unhealthy interaction patterns and violent behaviour.
D.4 School counselling	Provide educational and vocational guidance by qualified specialists at all school levels irrespective of the individual's age and place of residence.
D.5 Students' voices	Ensure students of all ages have the possibility to express their views and that their opinions are given due weight in accordance with their age and level of maturity. Provide students with opportunities to participate in the creation of a positive school atmosphere and social rules. Students to take responsibility for their own learning, that they form sound working habits, develop a growth mind-set, and understand how to set their own goals.
D.6 Everyone's well-being	Education, sports and youth activities to strengthen tolerance and human rights and democratic awareness.

Source: (Ministry of Education, 2020[1])

The focus areas of this pillar attend to the multi-faceted nature of health and well-being, as this pillar focuses on how to positive socio-emotional behaviours and prevent the increase of bullying, which 17% of students report as happening to them at least a few times a month, compared to 23% on average across OECD countries. At the same time, 88% of students in Iceland (the same as the average across OECD countries) agreed or strongly agreed that it is a good thing to help students who cannot defend themselves (OECD, 2019[23]).

Overall, the school environment appears to be positive in Iceland. Relations between students and teachers are positive and a high percentage of teachers (98%) agree that students and teachers get along well. Only 2% of principals report regular acts of intimidation or bullying among their students, which is far lower than the OECD average (14%) (OECD, 2019[11]). In addition, PISA data points that 78% of students reported that their schoolmates co-operate with each other, above the OECD average of 62%. However, some 17% of students in Iceland agreed or strongly agreed that they feel lonely at school, slightly above the OECD average of 16%. This is an area where Iceland can take international leadership and demonstrate the extent to which its focus on well-being and equity yields positive outcomes.

The policy focus areas proposed imply wider engagement of other public institutions working with youth, health and welfare to tackle these complex social problems, of which education is one interconnected part. When planning for implementation, Iceland will need to carefully define the role educational institutions should play in the provision of these types of integrated services as well the role they should play in ensuring ongoing organisational alignment in service design and delivery.

EP2030 focuses on strengthening student agency and ensure students assume responsibility for their own learning, to develop a growth mind-set, and understand how to set their own goals. Fostering student agency, the capacity to set a goal, reflect and act responsibly to effect change (OECD, 2020[9]), is important as students are more likely to assume responsibilities when they have the opportunity to choose their own

tasks and make decisions about their learning in a way that renders it meaningful to them (Ministry of Education, 2020[1]).

According to OECD evidence, Iceland is particularly well positioned to promote student agency, as more than 70% of the students (a comparatively high figure in relation to other OECD countries) believe that intelligence is mutable (an important belief, as thinking intelligence is something you can change, then it is something that you can improve through different, self-directed actions).

Figure 7. Percentage of students who reported, "Your intelligence is something about you that you can't change very much"

Percentage of students who responded, "Strongly disagree" and "disagree
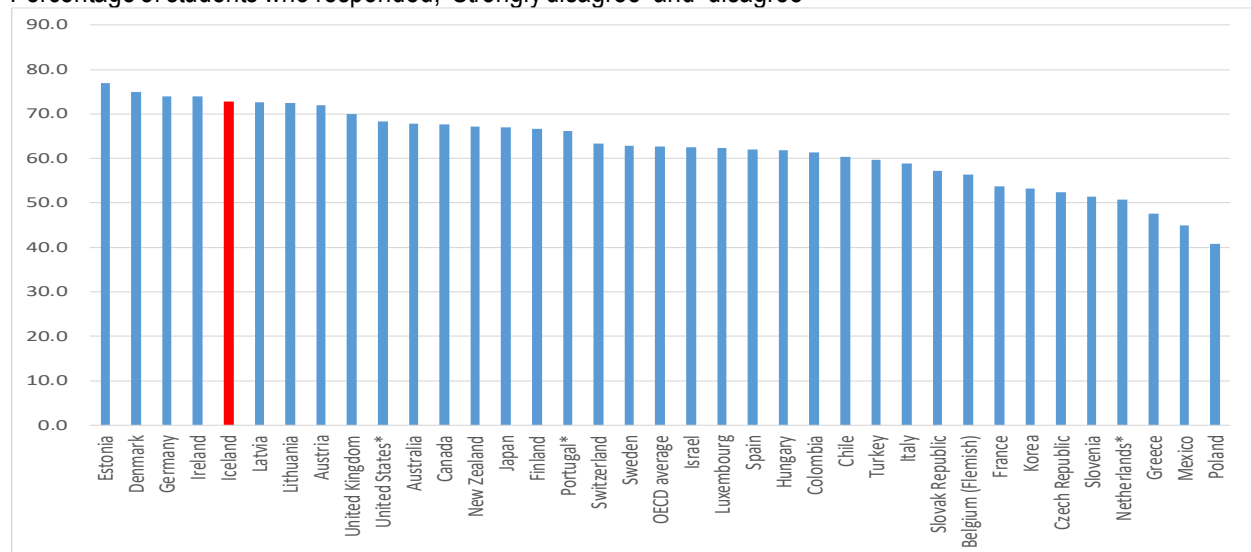
Note: Information regarding the proportion of the sample covered is show (OECD, 2019[24])n next to the standard error. No symbol means at least 75% of the population was covered; one dagger (†) means at least 50% but less than 75%; and one double dagger (‡) means less than 50% was covered. For comparisons across cycles, the coverage information corresponds to the cycle with the lowest sample coverage.
Source: (OECD, 2019[23])

EP2030 implicitly calls for the synergies between education, sports, and youth activities to produce public values such as tolerance and respect. Strengthening participation in socio-cultural activities as a means of improving well-being is increasingly included in many OECD countries (OECD, 2019[24]). Broadening the link between education and socio-cultural life is already practiced in Iceland. As shown below, in Iceland, participation in cultural or sports activities is among the highest across OECD and the differences in participation between people with different levels of education attainment is not very high in relation to other OECD countries. While efforts should be continued to maintain high performance, they should not detract from other areas that may require more attention. On this front, it will be important to define how this differentiates from the promotion of lifelong learning, who would be in charge of these actions, and how Iceland can resource and promote them more widely.

Figure 8. Participation in cultural or sporting activities in the last 12 months, by educational attainment, 2015/2017
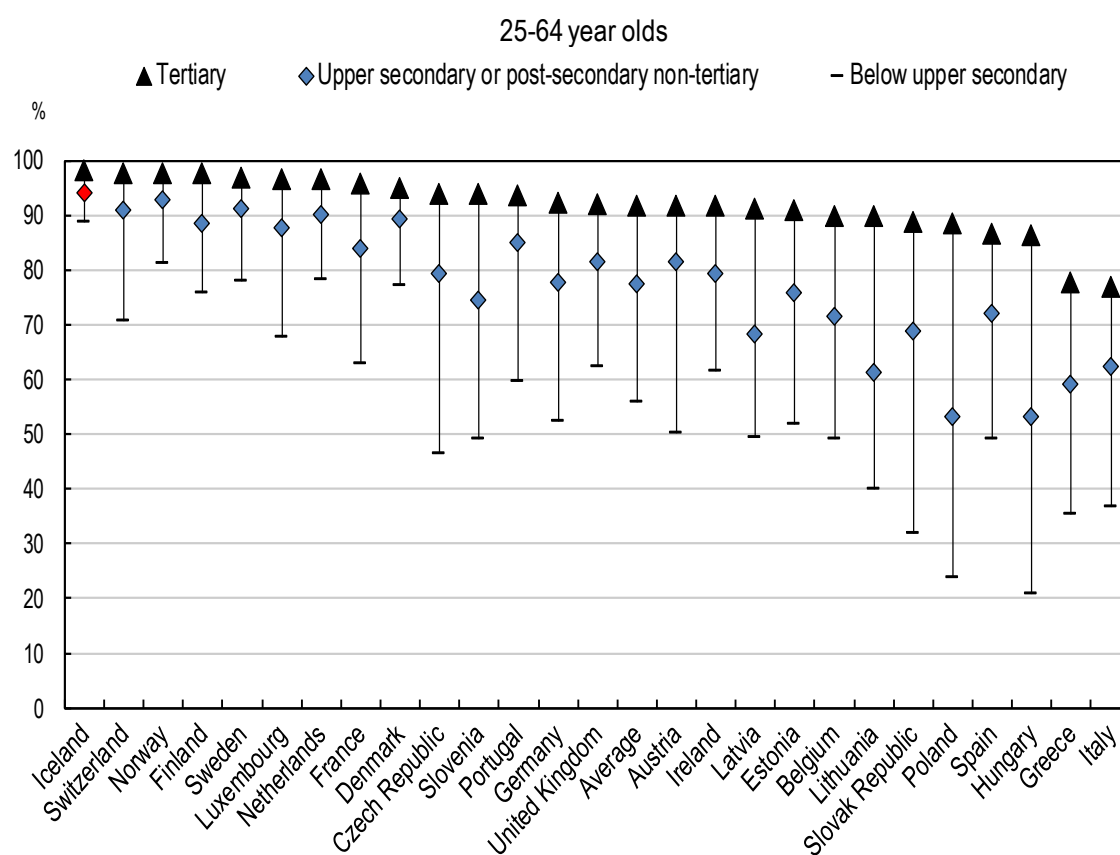
Note: The distribution of educational attainment varies by 10-15 percentage points compared to data published in Indicator A1.
Sources: OECD (2019), Table A6.1. Based on European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC-2015) and International Social Survey Programme (ISSP-2017); (OECD, 2019[18]).

Stakeholder interviews yielded some insights that Iceland should take into account when shifting toward implementation planning:

- **Stakeholders welcome the focus on well-being**: Stakeholders expressed particular support for this focus area and reported concern that previous initiatives in this area did not result in high success. Increased stakeholder attention on this should encourage Iceland to undertake evaluations of previous policies associated with this focus area and ensure particularly robust engagement methods to include diverse stakeholders in the implementation planning process for forthcoming plans, to understand and mitigate negative perceptions.

- **Build awareness of how stakeholders can contribute to transversal policy making and implementation**: More than other pillars, this pillar's focus areas and key issues require transversal design and delivery mechanisms in order to achieve desired change in complex focus areas, such as mental health and well-being. While stakeholders could easily describe processes and fora associated with consultation within the Icelandic education system, they found it harder to specify those that may relate to collaboration (and associated activities such as co-creation/ co-design/ co-delivery), especially with organisations and actors outside the sector.

Pillar 5: Quality at the forefront

Table 6 outlines this pillar's focus areas and key issues, which focus on building a professional education system, with issues relating to approaches to accountability, the use of evidence, transparency, curriculum and effective funding mechanisms to ensure high quality.

Table 6. Quality at the forefront

Summary of focus areas and key issues

Focus areas	Key issues
E.1 Accountability and co-ordination in service systems	Focused management, professional leadership, efficient cooperation, clear accountability and integration within and between institutions within the education system. Schools should be a place of integrated services that engages many stakeholders in their design and delivery.
E.2 National Curriculum Guides as factors supporting the Education Policy	Review the National Curriculum Guides in line with EP2030 and international obligations. Provide access to a broad range of learning resources, in various formats, to serve diverse student populations.
E.3 Assessment	Define and clarify the purpose of student assessment and responding to student diverse needs and ensure results are holistic, clear, and provided regularly. Seeks alignment and common understanding of assessment with National Curriculum Guides.
E.4 Expectations for students	Calls for flexibility and support for students in learning and play. Call for non-native speakers of Icelandic to have opportunities to deepen understanding of their own language while also building proficiency in Icelandic.
E.5 Expectations for parents	Prioritise well-functioning cooperation between homes and schools, based on mutual respect and trust.
E.6 Continuous improvement and quality assurance	Regular internal and external school reviews to inform targeted reform, reform, student self-assessment, and learning and enacted in cooperation with between central and local government and other education providers.
E.7 Efficient use of funds	Efficient and adequate financing to achieve the aims of EP2030.

Source: (Ministry of Education, 2020[1])

The first focus area refers to actions that can lead to a more professionally-led education system based on leadership, accountability, and co-ordination and coherence in the design and delivery of education. This is at the heart of many high performing school systems and requires investments and clear actions to design the support structures to accomplish it. As Iceland moves toward creating implementation plans, further detail about what is meant by the term and practice 'accountability' in the Icelandic context would be useful, to have a clearer idea of its role in the governance of institutions. Iceland's education and accountability is is underpinned by a trust based accountability system informed through the existence of informal networks of cooperation that embedded actions their day-to-day education activities. Close consideration of this focus area is especially important, given that stakeholder interviews revealed poor perceptions of current accountability approaches, deemed as lacking in implementation leading to incomplete or haphazard processes. It will be important to define accountability in the Icelandic context and its role in the governance of institutions and the implementation strategy should articulate its components and objectives and make them operational.

The focus area on curriculum guides refers to the need to incorporate the vision promoted in EP2030 into the curriculum and to respond to equity by developing appropriate resources for diverse students. Indeed, OECD analysis has shown that for success in implementation, there is a need to have alignment between curriculum and the broader vision, and the need to integrate it in guidance that is delivered to schools and education professionals (Gouedard et al., 2020[25]).

This pillar has a considerable focus on student assessment. One of the focus areas refers to the need to reach a common understanding of student assessment and its purposes, so that it is provided at all school levels. It also recognises the need to align student assessment to the National Curriculum guide and to provide results periodically and use them to drive improvement. Focusing on the challenge of improvement

the quality of student assessment can help guide the system and its professionals to understand its strengths and challenges in relation to the learning outcomes of each student. Student assessment is essential to measure the learning progress of individual students and inform further steps in their teaching and learning, as well as to provide school and system level information to support decision-making at different levels.

In Iceland, evaluation and assessment activities are used for summative purposes at the central level and for formative purposes in schools. However, it is important to adapt the assessments to the curriculum and to the broader aims of EP2030, and that they provide information on equity, excellence, well-being, and a range of knowledge and skills that this strategy document prioritises. This requires considering what types of assessments will be more suitable to gauge student progress at the school level and to provide quality information for accomplishing EP2030 objectives. Schools themselves can balance formative and summative assessments to be able to offer all the students valuable feedback and motivation to improve their learning process, while also giving the education system insight into issues, challenges, or barriers worthy of further, future attention. To aid implementation planning, Iceland should consider more closely how it will balance different assessment types, and more explicitly link the capability requirement teachers might need to assess and use their results to inform teaching practice more explicitly in Pillar B: Superior Teaching. Similarly, Iceland could also consider elaborating on the types of assessment it will need to capture new skills included in the strategy, linking the content of this pillar to that of Pillar C: Skills for the future. Depending on the nature of th detail, there is also scope to consider whether this focus area should be moved to Pillar C, for the sake of coherence.

Further, this pillar's key issues emphasise the importance of disseminating assessment results periodically, to reflect practice and progress. This has heavy implications for the system's capacity to administer, interpret, and communicate results as well as teacher capability and data literacy in interpreting their importance and making specific teaching interventions to their teaching practice. More detail about how Iceland will manage this is needed.

There is also the challenge of needing to optimise funding. Among OECD countries, Iceland has among the highest expenditures (as a percentage of GDP) on:

- Education institutions (for all educational levels combined)
- Primary through tertiary educational institutions (5.8 %, ranking 9/36 in 2017)
- Primary to tertiary education from final source of funds (5.5 %, ranking 3/42 in 2017)
- Early childhood and care educational (ECEC) institutions (1.7 %, ranking 3/29 in 2017) (OECD Education GPS, 2020[25])

Currently, public expenditure on educational institutions in Iceland as a percentage of GDP on primary to tertiary education is relatively high (Figure 7 below). This number is 0.8% more than the average OECD country, as compulsory education (primary and lower secondary education) is almost exclusively publicly funded in line with Iceland's "inclusive school" policy that stipulates that all students, regardless of whether they are differently abled, can access mainstream schooling (OECD, 2019[18]).

Figure 9. Total expenditure on educational institutions as a percentage of GDP (2016)
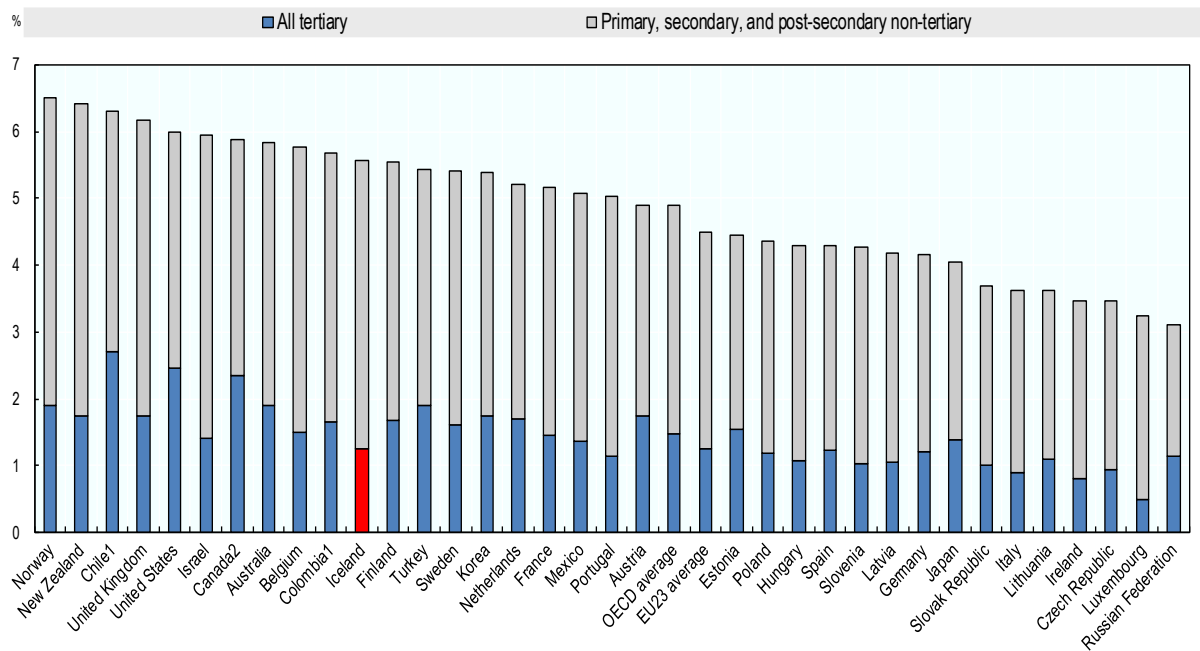
Note: Year of reference 2017. 2. Primary education includes pre-primary programmes.
Source: OECD/UIS/Eurostat (2019), Table C2.1 (OECD, 2019[18]).

Despite high spending levels, the educational outcomes as measured by PISA are not satisfactory. PISA results show that, on average, student in Iceland perform below their OECD peers in both reading literacy and science and that, in the three domains of the test (reading literacy, mathematics and science), girls outperform boys in the country (OECD, 2019[15]). The issue for Iceland is not a lack of public funding for education but an approach to consider how to optimise funding, using it effectively to accomplish its objectives. More simply, what funding strategies *make* a difference?

In this context, the OECD considers that this pillar's focus on revising rules and criteria relating to the funding of preschools, compulsory schools and music schools and on the system's ability to operate based on equity and cost-effectiveness through support and prevention aligns to the vision and its equity priority.

The focus of increased transparency in the way funds are allocated in an inclusive education system will allow Iceland to have better ways of assessing the influence of the 'funding variable' on policy outcomes, if the flow and breakdown of funding is clearer to begin with.

In terms of resources such as funding, equipment and facilities, and time available for supporting implementation and the sustainability of the policy, it will be important to clarify these:

- **Funding**: the different financial resources that are, or will be, available.
- **Equipment and facilities**: the material input that supports the educational policy. This might include computers, textbooks, and internet access or classroom spaces.
- **Time**: the amount of time allowed for the policy to be fully implemented and to start generating results. (OECD, 2020[2]).

Seemingly, Iceland's approach to funding within the education system uses a 'block grant' model within a decentralised system. Iceland transfers funding to municipalities in the form of a block grant for compulsory education and for upper secondary education the bulk of the central transfer is in the form of a block grant direct to schools (the central authorities are responsible for operating upper secondary schools). These

lower level authorities are required to use for current expenditure in pre-school or school education. This model generally allows for a high degree of discretion over the proportion of the grant that will be allocated to different categories of current expenditure (OECD, 2017[26]). Understanding this approach provides useful context for the feedback received from stakeholders. Stakeholder interviews yielded some insights that Iceland can consider when shifting toward implementation planning:

- **Decentralised funding may exacerbate inequity**: Resourcing depends on the wealth and capacity of individual municipalities and the different ways they may distribute grants, which has implications for equity.

- **Current funding appears to favour a project-based approach to funding education change that may curtail coherence and stymie innovation**: Stakeholders described education funding through on a project-based approach that is challenging for a longer term perspective. Inherent to the application process is a one-way, curtailed style of interaction (project proposal and proposal review). Outside of this, stakeholders claimed that there were no systemic way for them to tell the Ministry what forms of funding or implementation support is most useful to them. Further, funding was perceived to flow to more conservative approaches, stymieing innovation.

- **Stakeholders report having little understanding of how funding works**: Addressing how best to fund education change may be the most salient issue Iceland needs to address, yet its corollary is how best to communicate the operation of funding mechanisms to stakeholders to ensure they have a shared understanding. Confusion due to the lack of transparency around arrangements can fuel negative perceptions and limit the way stakeholders' access and use funding to implement.

Overall, Iceland is advised to have a holistic overview of its funding arrangements for the implementation of EP2030, as it has a large number of policy actions. This should be done once the policy actions have been prioritised, and ensure there is sufficient funding to support all the actions with a long-term perspective to best support mid-term strategies and phased implementation. As Iceland prepares for implementation planning, more information will be required on current funding mechanisms or formulae, the level of control schools have in access and directing funding to support implementation, and the optimal way of involving stakeholders in decision making about funding allocation. Moving from key issues to policy actions. Iceland may want to consider reviewing and refining each pillar's key issues prior to developing the implementation plan. These key issues were originally written in such a way that enmeshed normative values, existing policy, and possible new policy without distinguishing differences among them. In order to preform an assessment, the OECD extracted these key issues from the paragraphs and rephrased them as actions. It may be useful to Iceland to review these possible actions, separating which reflect historic policy (and therefore require justification of ongoing inclusion) and which would require new policy to be created, and prioritising them in accordance to the phased implementation approach. A preliminary analysis of the spread of these key issues shows that they fall into three main reform categories:

- **Possible actions to enhance**: Actions focus on raising awareness, increased accessibility to/ increased uptake of, preserving, or strengthening existing policies.

- **Possible actions to adapt**: Actions call for the interventions into or improvement of learning (for example, what is learned, how it is learned, and characteristics of learning environments). Some also refer to proposed interventions for teaching (for example, the provision and content of professional development, the differentiation of teaching practices, changed recruitment practices); with the purpose of ensuring education is better adapted to social changes (such as immigration, multiculturalism, declining desirability of the teaching profession).

- **Possible actions for institutional reform**: Actions touch on adapting elements to improve collaboration, information sharing, or operation and behaviour of the education system itself, and the institutions within it, to better respond to the need for more networked approaches to policy delivery.

This preliminary categorisation shows the level and nature of reform the Iceland education system not only deems desirable and possible to achieve its vision but also what it believes itself currently capable of delivering. To prepare for implementation planning, Iceland may want to consider reflecting on whether weighting reform efforts to actions that only enhance or adapt potentially already existing approaches or interventions are sufficient in bringing about the kind of change required to achieve the vision or if different kinds of innovation, that may help Iceland move beyond incrementalism, may be required.

Finally, as part its preparation for implementation planning, Iceland should make explicit *how* they want stakeholders involved in the creation of implementation plans to use the strategy document in this process. For example, if key issues are to be reviewed and refined in order to understand which refer to existing policy and which require new should stakeholders directly select from only these possible policy options to create implementation plans? Does the strategy document serve more as high-level guidance? If the vision and the values are to be instantiated through implementing policy, does that require the creation of institutions, reporting or evaluation structures based on these or are they only for inspiration? It is these kinds of questions, among others, that Iceland would be wise to seek answers to as it prepares to move to implementation planning. Ultimately, the advent of EP2030 offers Iceland the opportunity to invigorate or, where necessary, create institutional structures, processes, and ways of working that foster a stronger implementation culture within the education system. Box 2 outlines two short case studies on how Japan and Finland have approached using high-level strategies in implementation planning.

Box 2. Country approaches to using strategies to inform implementation

Japan's 'trickle-down' implementation planning approach

In Japan, the 'Basic Act on Education' stipulates that the government shall formulate a 'Basic Plan for the Promotion of Education', to advance policies to promote education comprehensively and systematically. According to the Basic Act, the national government formulates and implements educational and to maintain and increase educational standards. In general, the Basic Plan first assesses the status of education in Japan and the challenges facing the education system. It then offers different policy directions and diverse measures to be implemented for each of them, with provision for unexpected circumstances. The Act requires local governments (47 prefectures and their respective municipalities) to formulate and implement their own educational measures corresponding to their regional context.

Overall, Japan uses the Basic Plan to drive policy development and implementation planning from the centre by presenting strategic objectives as national standards, formulating the framework of the education systems, and maintaining the infrastructure while also allowing for local contextualisation. At the local level, governments are expected to take action respecting the national guidelines in order to deliver education. A potential advantage of this approach is that stakeholders at the local level have a clear understanding of how to use the Basic Plan in the implementation planning process, as it functions to present standards they have to plan to reach and offers those options from which to select contextually relevant options.

Source: (OECD, 2018[27])

Finland's 'steering system' implementation planning approach

In contrast, in Finland, the Parliament decides on educational legislation and the Ministry of Education and Culture prepares education policy. Every four years, the government adopts an Education and Research Development Plan that outlines education policy priorities. A subordinate body to the Ministry is the National Board, which is responsible for the development of pre-primary, basic, general upper secondary, vocational upper secondary and adult education. Through consultation and discussion, and with the support of educational research, the National Board

provides a "steering system" for educational policies. This is undertaken through small funding, evaluation, and curriculum content, for example. Within the education system, the state steers but a significant level of authority and responsibility is given to the local level. The state does not prescribe in detail the national policies, such as those pertaining to curriculum, and relies on co-creation with relevant stakeholders to develop it (for example, teachers write much of the curriculum together at the level of the municipality). There is also strategic thinking and planning at the district level. Districts can set their own vision, with benchmarks, and schools within that district discuss what the vision along with desired objectives might mean for them and uses methods such as "balanced scorecards" to ensure the inclusion of different participants and assessment perspectives. In a way that fits the Finnish cultural context, adherence to vision and goals is often implicit and shared through daily cooperation, rather than explicitly developed through a strategic plan.

Source: (Andrew Hargreaves, 2007[28]) (OECD, 2013[29])

Issues for consideration on the coherence of EP2030

- EP2030 is a high level, mid-term strategy document that Iceland aims to build on to develop the detailed policy actions that will be included in its forthcoming implementation. For the implementation strategy, Iceland may consider developing a rationale for this vision, to present a clear argument for why this vision is necessary and why it was selected over all possible others, to guide the selection of policy actions and their prioritisation. Iceland could also consider making clear to stakeholders involved how they can best use the vision to guide their actions. Closer consideration of these aspects associated with the vision may help Iceland better operationalise the contents of the strategy document in the implementation planning process.

- EP2030 includes five pillars, each with their focus areas. In turn, each focus areas has a series of key issues. The pillars are generally aligned with the main issues and challenges assessed by Iceland. There are some areas however, that may need to be considered additionally, such as drop out or the use of technology across education systems, especially in light of COVID. In addition, in the document, the proposed policy issues are high level and are at some point not clear in terms of the actions that would need to be taken to accomplish these and who would be taking these on board.

- Overall, as Iceland sets itself to prepare the implementation strategy, it would be valuable to review the key issues and policy focus areas against the most pressing challenges, prioritise, refine these and then develop the implementation plan with the policy actions that can be adopted to accomplish them and target resources appropriately. Reviewing progress made with the previous White Paper on Education Reform 2016 could also help in the further development of the EP2030.

4. Developing EP2030 with education stakeholders

Inclusive stakeholder engagement is crucial to policy implementation success (OECD, 2020[2]). EP2030 is an overarching policy strategy that aims to cover a 10-year period for the whole education system. Given the breadth of its scope, it involves many diverse groups of stakeholders, from students, schools, teachers, central government, municipalities, higher, tertiary, and VET education sectors, industry and business, assessment agencies etc. These groups are described below.

Figure 10. Key stakeholders for the development and implementation of EP2030

Source: OECD.

Table 7. Key stakeholders for the development and implementation of EP2030

Stakeholders	
The Icelandic parliament	The 'Althingi' is legally and politically responsible for the education system. The Parliament determines the basic objectives and administrative framework of the educational system.
Ministry of Education, Science and Culture	Implements all educational laws and regulations related to four education levels in Iceland: Pre-primary, compulsory (single structure: primary and lower secondary education), upper secondary and higher education.
National agencies	The Directorate of Education is focused on implementing national policies and providing evaluation and assessment. Schools or specific aspects of school activities at all educational levels may be subject to an external evaluation organised by the Ministry and conducted through evaluators from the Directorate. These evaluations focus on pre-primary schools and compulsory schools and from 2014 cover upper secondary schools.
Municipal authorities	Municipalities are responsible for the operation of pre-primary and compulsory schools, whereas the operation of upper secondary schools and higher education institutions is the responsibility of the state. The Icelandic Association of Local Authorities is the forum for co-operation between the local authorities and all local authorities in the country are members of the association. The role of the local authorities has also changed recently to include embracing primary schools and social services (Samband, 2020[31]).
Higher education	Higher education in Iceland comes under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. The Universities Act of 1997 was the first legal framework for the higher education system. The higher education system is characterised by one large public institution and several specialised public and private institutions (OECD, 2005[32]). The Quality Board is an independent, international body, established in 2010 to design and implement the "Quality Enhancement Framework" (QEF). QEF's mission is to safeguard the standards and enhance the quality of Icelandic higher education and the management of research activities. The Quality Board is also regularly commissioned to conduct special reviews in focused areas of higher education and research (Quality Board for Higher Education in Iceland, 2020[30]).
Vocational education and training	A wide variety of post-secondary schooling vocational education and training (VET) options are available to people, with a higher concentration around the capital. VET can also take place within schools. The Upper secondary school Act

	92/2008 (6) covers upper secondary general education and VET, including apprenticeship training, for young people and adults, delivered by both public and private institutions. Overall national policy development for VET falls within the purview of the Ministry of Education and Culture (Jónsson, 2018[33]).
Industry	Iceland has various ways to connect to industry stakeholders. Lifelong learning centres provide adult education, offering various courses, some of which can attract funding from business or unions (Vefur Island, 2020[34]). There are consultations with industry representative bodies or business associations. The Federation of Icelandic Industries takes part in planning vocational and technical education along with educational authorities and various organisations. The federation has a representative on the board of the educational organisations of industry which organise continuing education (The Federation of Icelandic Industries, 2020[36]) The Confederation of Icelandic Enterprise negotiates collective agreements with unions on wages and working conditions, and undertakes advocacy for internationally competitive legal and regulatory environment, (SA Confederation of Icelandic Enterprise, 2020[35]). Within government, there is a Prime Ministerial committee on the Fourth Industrial Revolution with the aim of exploring implications for Iceland, especially in relation to the impact of automation on the Icelandic labour market (Government of Iceland Prime Minister's Office, 2019[36]).
Students and their unions	The National Union of Icelandic Students is the umbrella organisation for all of the eight student unions in Iceland and is run by a board that consists of two representatives from each member organisation along with the chairperson and an international officer (European Students' Union, 2020[38]). The Icelandic Upper Secondary Student Union is an interest group that includes associations of all 31 upper-secondary schools and bridges the gap between these stuents and those in VET. Its main activities include holding annual general assemblies and meetings with student representatives, commenting on proposals for new legislative and parliamentary resolutions, events with counterparts, assisting students and student associations, and handling projects to improve the standing of students in upper-secondary schools (The Icelandic Upper Secondary Student Union, 2020[37]).
Teachers and their unions	The Icelandic Teachers' Union is a joint organisation that comprises associations for all teachers, head teachers, deputy head teachers, in preschools, primary schools, secondary schools, and music schools – with the exception of head teachers in secondary schools. It also includes student counsellors. Its remit is to negotiate wage contracts for their own members and defend rights and interests that are common to all members, such as pensions, sick leave and parental leave (Icelandic Teachers' Association, 2020[39]). For EP2030, stakeholders drew from the Icelandic Teachers' Union, the Association of Teachers in Pre-Primary schools, and the Association of Teachers in Primary, the Association of Teachers in Upper Secondary Schools, the Association of Teachers and Music Schools.
Parents	Parents are represented through the National Parents Association, which is a nongovernmental organisation that has parents and legal guardians as members, and other parties as supporting members. Its purpose is to advise and support parents and other associations on issues related to upbringing, education, parental cooperation and host activities such as internet safety programs (Home and School, 2020[40]) and other associations, such as the Association on Bilingualism, which offers instruction for multilingual children and youth (Móðurmál, 2020[41]).
Schools and school leaders	Schools are represented through their individual associations, which affiliate to the overarching Teachers' Union, and through associations that relate to their specific schools type (such as the Association for Independent Schools, which cover privately owned pre-primary and primary schools).

Involving stakeholders purposefully

Iceland developed EP2030 through analysis and the work of education stakeholders in Iceland. Led by the Minister, there have been a series of 23 meetings with around 1800 stakeholders from within the education community on the topic 'Education for all', held all over the country in 2018. These discussions broadly focused on challenges experienced at the municipal level, issues related to formal cooperation between education and health systems, skills shortages, staff support, and services for children (especially those of diverse backgrounds). In addition, meetings on the same topic were held in the Autumn of 2019 in the context of six regional music school conferences, as well as in cooperation with parents, children and young people, businesses, and other stakeholders. It then compiled and consolidated preceding policies and underwent broad consultation with stakeholders, including through the Consultation Portal (Samráðsgátt) that resulted in 38 sets of commentary. From this, the Ministry took on board many suggestions (Icelandic Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture, 2020[3]).

Stakeholder interviews provided the OECD an opportunity to explore how participants felt about the adequacy of consultation and engagement for the finalisation of EP2030 draft. Stakeholders indicated that the process to create EP2030 was certainly consultative. Yet, this broad consultation and propensity to include rather than exclude ideas may have yielded something eminently agreeable but resulted in a lack of policy prioritisation and a clear rationale that argued *why* these specific policies *now*.

These interviews also gave the OECD the opportunity to ask stakeholders their opinion of the efficacy of the stakeholder engagement approaches, more generally. Interviewees painted a picture of status quo

stakeholder engagement structures and approaches. Typically, Iceland undertakes stakeholder engagement via a committee or platform, to which people are invited (often based on their historic relationship to the topic). A paper or already formed proposal is tabled and discussed. The main means of engagement is a consultation model (providing feedback on something already somewhat developed). Interviewees reported that the follow-up post consultation was not conducive to stakeholders feeling like they understood their role or the next steps. Stakeholders consulted noted that it was easy to gather people in the form of an ad hoc committee as their traditional approach; perhaps defaulting to tradition may be stymieing more innovative approaches to engage and work together across the system that may yield better insights and stronger results. The lack of varied and effective institutional mechanisms to facilitate the co-ordination of reform initiatives in complex systems, and lack of opportunity to fundamentally question the choice of policy problem and the associated policy responses (only tinker at the edges of them, through ad hoc consultation) can lead to resistance to change or ineffective, piecemeal change (Torfing, 2009[42]). Iceland should spell out what their current consultation approach is and consider whether a different approach could be useful to gather engagement of different people in the shaping, implementation and evaluation of progress of EP2030.

Stakeholders consulted shared that communication hubs exist, but could be further promoted or leveraged to plan implementation and encourage more bottom-up approaches to policy making and implementation within the education system. Specifically, the Education Plaza (Menntamiðja) that the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, University of Iceland's School of Education, the City of Reykjavík's Department of Education, the Icelandic Teachers' Union, and the Icelandic Association of Local Authorities support could be one promising avenue. The Plaza is a collection of grassroots teacher communities-of-practice that makes use of social media to disseminate information, share experiences, and foster innovation in teaching (Thayer, 2020[43]).

This current model for stakeholder engagement may also be contributing to the substantial gap between the hierarchy at the Ministry and school level initiatives and between municipalities and schools. Seemingly, there are pockets of foresight, anticipation, and innovation occurring within the Icelandic education system, most obviously in the ways that teachers communicate and collaborate with each other inside and between schools, but there do not appear to be systemic mechanisms or organisational processes to tap into them, leveraging their insights to inform policy design and implementation or disseminate practice.

Given that the pillars of EP2030 focus heavily on policies relating to teaching and learning, communications activity aimed at planning the phased implementation should consider these hubs and any others that are like them as useful sites of engagement. Better using them for dissemination and engagement ('meeting stakeholders where they are') to plan implementation may be one useful way of connecting and talking with schools and municipalities in ways and formats that best leverage their input (in addition to, or perhaps even beyond, a formal Ministerial committee, for example). Additionally, EP2030 will require work with actors/ bodies that are not educational institutions. Networked governance and associated engagement approaches need to be developed and responsibility to engage these stakeholders well and to align inter-sectoral policies. Further, Iceland should clarify how they plan to continue to engage stakeholders in the implementation planning and be proactive in establishing appropriate organisational processes to support this, leveraging this political moment well.

This includes thinking about formats of engagement, as mentioned above, and how best to prepare them for engagement (in terms of their information and capability needs). It also requires thinking about what constitutes 'high quality' engagement (to start to develop some standards, even if they are high-level or informal, that might go some way to enriching policy development and implementation culture). Box 3 includes a case study from Finland to show how other countries have approached innovative stakeholder engagement to serve bottom-up approaches to policy making and implementation in an education system.

> ### Box 3. The Finnish Education Experimentation Lab
>
> **Finnish schools and education government explore complexity together**
>
> The Innovation Centre at the Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI) has launched a year-long, facilitated process, called The Experimentation Lab, to support teachers, school leaders and local education administrators to engage and work with one another differently in order to experiment and co-create local policy solutions to address challenges in education.
>
> The Lab's creation responded to a need to find a way to create the open, dynamic and strategic governance systems necessary for governing complex systems by developing a vehicle for improving interaction among diverse stakeholders and building feedback loops between national level steering and local level implementation. In its first iteration, the Lab recruited participants to form 12 cohorts from different Finnish to work on a wide range of local challenges, from developing approaches to foster pupils' well-being or social emotional skills, to teaching digital capabilities through playful adventures, to leveraging AI to increase pupils' physical activity. These cohorts aimed to:
>
> - Build capacity (skills, competencies, mind-sets) among teachers and school leaders to develop teaching and learning through experimenting, trialling and co-creating solutions at the local level.
> - Explore, test and develop new approaches to enhance interaction, dialogue, and shared understanding between national level steering and local level implementation to better respond to the complexity of challenges in education.
>
> The model for the Lab was built together with Demos Helsinki, a Nordic think tank, with prior experience in using experiments to inform national governance. It drew on network of government innovation/experimentation organisations in Finland to provide benchmarking and peer support: network of government innovation/experimentation organisations in Finland and it took a multi perspective approach to evaluate the experiments: developed together with researchers from VTT Technical Research Centre of Finland and Finnish Institute of Occupational Health, using Inforglobe's digital tools.
>
> This is initiative shows a way government can facilitate new forms of interaction and engagement among stakeholders and leverage them to bolster bottom-up approach to policy making through experimentation. Through this, Finland was also able to create new ways information circulates within the education system and how policy actors build and share practice, and use these new ways to drive system change.
>
> Source: (OECD Observatory for Public Sector Innovation, 2019[44])

Articulating roles and responsibilities transparently

Transparency of responsibilities refers to a set of measures that enable multiple stakeholders involved in the implementation process to know what everyone's role is, and to be able to track their own and others' progress throughout the implementation period. A transparent process fosters trust among stakeholders, is collective and involves stakeholders in defining their roles and monitoring their performance (OECD, 2020[2]). The governance system in Iceland has not yet struck the right balance between support and monitoring activities between central and municipal authorities. Responsibilities are fragmented and poorly defined. Iceland should take a more considered approach to developing a model of system stewardship and education change leadership models that can drive and ensure the success of policy implementation. Tactically speaking, after having ascertained which policy focus areas associated with each of EP2030's

pillars draw upon current policy and which require new policy, and how they will be prioritised in phased implementation, Iceland should elaborate what the implications are for each stakeholder group. Iceland should use such an elaboration process to engage these people in planning, or even co-designing, the roll-out.

Part of defining the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders is trusting that they will carry them out well. Iceland is in a good position to start, in that regard. Leveraging trust to inform policy development and implementation is crucial. It relies on two main aspects:

- The inclusiveness of the information available to decision makers, to ensure that it facilitates participation and representation of all the actors with a stake in the policy problem at hand; and
- The quality of the information available to decision makers, associated with mechanisms such as evaluation, and performance management (OECD, 2013[45]).

Stakeholders cumulatively gave the strong impression that they trust one another, enjoy a level of good will, and are willing to work with another (and find creative ways to do so). Iceland should not take high-trust and goodwill for granted and design engagement processes that nurture these qualities in the system. The Ministry should think carefully about how it can best continue to engage stakeholders proactively in the development of the EP2030. While engagement is one aspect, fully defining roles and responsibilities through the 10-year EP2030 in an environment of trust will be very important. Many of the policies place responsibilities in different people or institutions, such as schools, teachers, or for example society. These will need to be cleared, confirmed, and allocated with time and resources to undertake the expected tasks.

Lastly, the preparation of stakeholders to understand the value of their contribution and to play new roles is as important as the clear allocation of roles. If Iceland creates new institutional mechanisms that encourage different kinds of stakeholders to come together in new ways, beyond ad hoc consultation, to collaborate then it will be important to communicate the value of collaboration, the expectations for its outputs, and to prepare stakeholders well to work in new ways together.

Communicating clearly with stakeholders

Communication is important for building mutual agreement between stakeholders, gaining public support, and fostering ownership of the policy. At a minimum, communication activity should cover the vision and rationale supporting the reform, the expected outcomes for different groups of stakeholders, the dissemination of evidence that the policy tools selected contribute to achieve the reform objectives, the new allocation of responsibilities among stakeholders, and the planned timing. (OECD, 2020[2]). In interviewing stakeholders, the OECD had a good sense of the ease with which people communicate in Iceland, due to the country's small size. Stakeholders gave the impression that there were no major barriers or cultural issues that prevented people from speaking freely with one another in a relatively non-hierarchical way. While there is a place for simplicity and informality, effective implementation for EP2030 requires a clear, strategic approach to convene discussions and dissemination of important messages to stakeholders. This is especially important in relation to communicating the vision of EP2030, the specific challenges it responds to, and its theory-of-change.

In reflecting on the communication activities that have supported the development of EP2030 so far, stakeholders gave the impression that Ministerial communication activity tends to be 'front loaded'. Meaning, that there was a lot of consultation and communication activity at the early stages of the development but little to no strategic follow-up to keep groups updated and engaged in the ongoing process. There was also the feeling that the public consultation on the online portal on EP2030 was somewhat short, as it only had a two-week window that unfortunately coincided with a holiday period. While the consultation process surrounding the advent of EP2030 is legitimate, these comments offer Iceland some pause for consideration to think strategically about how best to structure communication activities and build a communication approach for the EP2030. The *nature* and the *timing* of activities do *affect the perception* of what is being communicated, regardless of how good the content of what is being

communicated is. This is important to bear in mind, when managing the planned large-scale education change across sequential phases.

> ***Issues for consideration on stakeholder engagement in implementing EP2030***
>
> - Iceland has engaged a broad range of stakeholders in the development of EP2030 and these stakeholders demonstrate a high-level of trust and willingness to work together. This is a good base from which to start to plan the phased implementation. However, the process has been more ad hoc, resulting in some stakeholders perceiving the process as lacking in timeliness, consistency, and follow-through. In addition, the EP2030 strategy refers to many different stakeholders taking up responsibilities for different policy focus areas, but there does not appear to be a process to define these and allocate the time required to them. Communicating in different ways for the initial stages of the strategy has been more 'front loaded' with less strategic follow up to inform and engage in all steps of the EP2030.
> - To strengthen Iceland's inclusive stakeholder engagement for EP2030 and beyond, Iceland should consider developing its approach more strategically. First, it should appraise its existing stakeholder engagement approaches, structures/ formats, timing, and follow-up to understand strengths and opportunities for change. This will aid consideration of what modes might better serve complex implementation projects such as this ten-year strategy. Second, it should explicitly articulate the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders groups in the implementation of EP2030's proposed policies.

5. Institutional factors matter for EP2030

Many factors influence how a policy unfolds on the ground. An effective policy implementation process takes into account exogenous contextual elements, such as the demographics, the socio-economic context surrounding the education system, and international trends in education. It also factors in environmental elements within education that, despite being fixed to some extent in the short-term, may be reshaped by the implementation strategy in the medium term. Therefore, the implementation process may require, on one hand, to rely initially on the existing educational governance and institutional settings, the available capacity, and the current policy environment. On the other hand, the implementation process may progressively shape these elements to reach the reform objectives (OECD, 2020[2]). Iceland should take the dynamism of the implementation process into account, leveraging it toward useful ends.

Tailoring policy making and implementation approaches to a decentralised system

Iceland's education system is highly decentralised as shown in Figure 11. The role of the local authorities is increasingly complex, as it includes primary schools and social services as part of their remit (Samband Iceland, 2020[46]). Pre-primary and compulsory education is the responsibility of municipalities and are governed by the Local Government Act, No. 138/2011. Compulsory education is organised in a single structure system and is governed by the the Compulsory School Act No 91/2008. Central government is responsible for the operation of upper secondary schools and higher education institutions, functioning under the Upper Secondary School Act No 92/2008 (Government of Iceland, 2019[48]).

Figure 11. Governance: Decision making in education

■ School ☐ Local ■ Regional or Sub-regional ■ Central or State ☐ Multiple levels
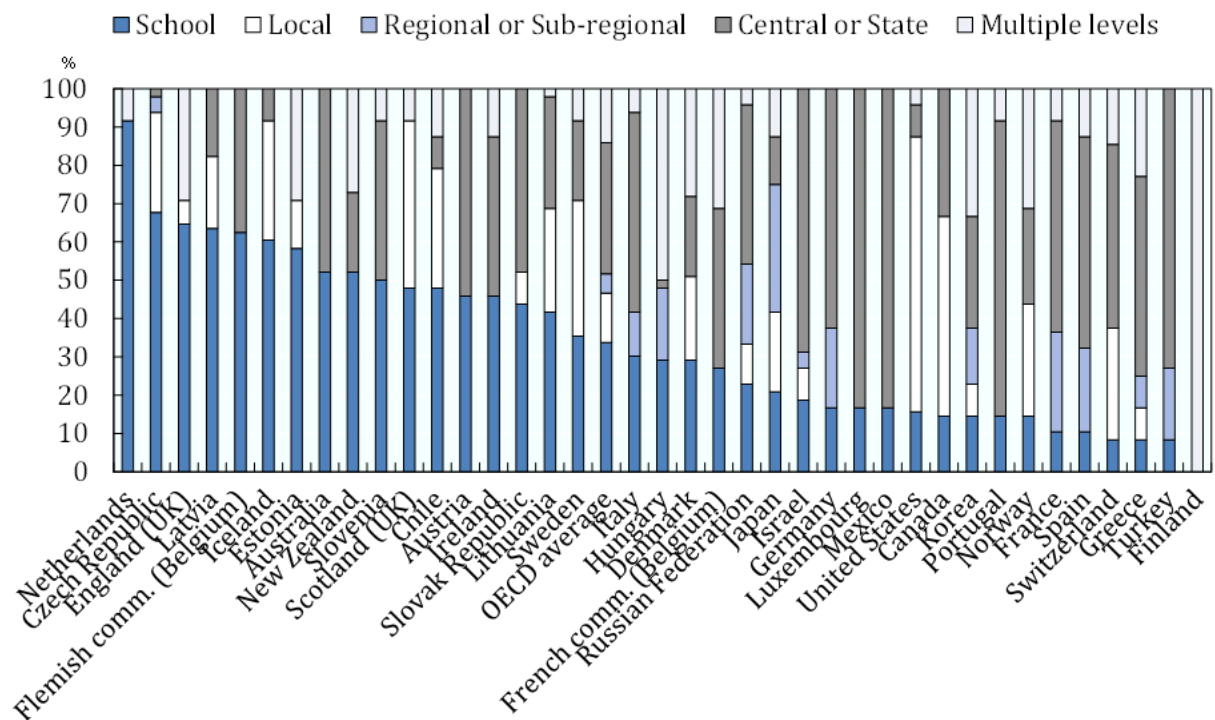
Source: (OECD, 2012[47])

As compared to other OECD countries, when it comes to the percentage of decisions about organisation of instruction taken at each level of government, Iceland is highly decentralised. Centralisation versus decentralisation is neither good nor bad, but careful consideration about how a country undertakes policy making and implementation in this context, and what processes work best in this governance model, is crucial for education change success. Institutions include the rules, norms and strategies, explicit or implicit that affect individual behaviours and decision making in the educational setting (OECD, 2020[2]). Iceland's institutional norms and strategies allow for flexibility and local adaptation, in its decentralised approach and strong trust culture.

The EP2030 it needs an implementation strategy that is based on institutional processes that work for a decentralised model. Interviewed stakeholders uniformly expressed that Iceland was not as deliberate and strong as it should be when it comes to effective education policy implementation. Stakeholders reported feeling that there was no transparent approach to it, yet there seems to be expectation that implementation will happen with the faith that people will understand what to do, despite not having very clear guidance on how. This issue is not issue for Iceland, as recent reports have been consistently highlighting this lack of clarity in implementation as an area of future improvement. For example, this was already highlighted in the previous White Paper on Education Reform 2016 (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2016[48]) in which it was noted that the work carried out in the education system has often been incoherent and insufficiently monitored. Similarly, the Education for all in Iceland: External Audit of the Icelandic System for Inclusive Education 2017 report (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2017[49]) notes that the governance and quality assurance mechanisms that oversee the co-ordination and effective implementation of policy are not as effective as they ought to be. In the context of that report, stakeholders at national and local levels suggest that current governance mechanisms do not effectively support their work. Stakeholders at school level suggest that current quality assurance mechanisms do not always inform their work in a way that promotes school development and improvement. When asked to describe

how implementation happens, stakeholders broadly recall situations wherein the national government defines a policy area or intent, the local level then takes it up, and from there, then the school. Each level generally consults with their own stakeholders on how to 'do' their part. De-facto, OECD termed this is a 'cascade model' approach to intervention, without a great deal of trialling, piloting, or interim reviewing to potentially course correct along the way. Communication channels 'up and down the chain' are undefined. Due to funding cycles lasting, in general, one year this 'cascade' is compressed into a relatively short time frame while still aspiring to achieve complex education change and significant results. Stakeholders told the OECD that they needed more detail and prescription (but not so much detail that innovation in delivery is curtailed). They did not fully understand its intent, desired outcomes, or how success will be measured. Similarly, they also expressed a desire for the Ministry to play the role of co-ordinator, striking a balance between central support and local choice. Iceland could consider more proactively turning this de facto implementation approach to a more deliberate approach, ensuring stakeholders are aware of it, and understand their place in it.

Approaches to policy making and implementation require careful consideration, aligned to the decentralised governance. Implementation in a decentralised context requires institutional set up, role and responsibility definition, support, accountability, and a high-quality leadership and teaching workforce so that each institution and actor can play their part for a high performing system. Iceland should consider what institutions and processes could allow it to define policy and implementation strategies and how these components should evolve, in response to new challenges (Viennet and Pont, 2017[14]). A decentralised system can perform when schools have discretion over their curriculum and funding, among other factors, and they have support and accountability structures and networks aligned to their needs. Strategies for monitoring the progress and outcomes of different student groups aligned to the curriculum and the long-term vision and established objectives.

Purposively building capacity across the system

As individuals implement policies, capacity refers to the human resources that could either make or break the policy objectives for the education system. More specifically, capacity encompasses the skills, knowledge and competencies implementers require carrying out the new policy at the different levels of the system. In an education context, it focuses mostly on teachers and principals' capacity to turn the policy into reality at the school level, to monitor and adapt to changing situations, as they are the forefront implementers of most of the educational policies. In addition to teachers' and school leaders' professionalism, the capacity of stakeholders at different levels of governance will factor. This refers to system leadership, or those leading the system at different levels (OECD, 2020[2]).

TALIS data shows that the proportion of teachers in Iceland that received education on subject content, pedagogy and classroom practice in some or all of their subjects taught was lower than the OECD average (Figure 12). In addition, less than half of the school principals completed a principal training course (45% in school administration and 63% an instructional leadership training programme), before taking up their position as principal. School leaders and teachers play an important role in the implementation of education reforms and their capacity to engage with change in their schools is crucial for implementation success in such a decentralised environment. Data shows that Icelandic teachers and school leaders are generally well placed to contribute to implementation but there may be scope to explore what capability could be built in addition to ensure they have a solid basis for change. The capacity of school leaders to engage with change in their schools is vital, as they need to interpret and make sense of it for their school for the changes to be effective. They can lead make sense and interpret the vision at school level, the processes, and direct the collective work of schools required will be at the heart of success of the changes (Pont, 2020[50]).

In addition, local level leadership at the municipality level requires systemic capacity across the country. At the national level, institutional capacity can be developed targeted on policy implementation, also building on the prevailing institutional capacity and knowledge.

Figure 12. Education professionals training and professional development, TALIS 2018
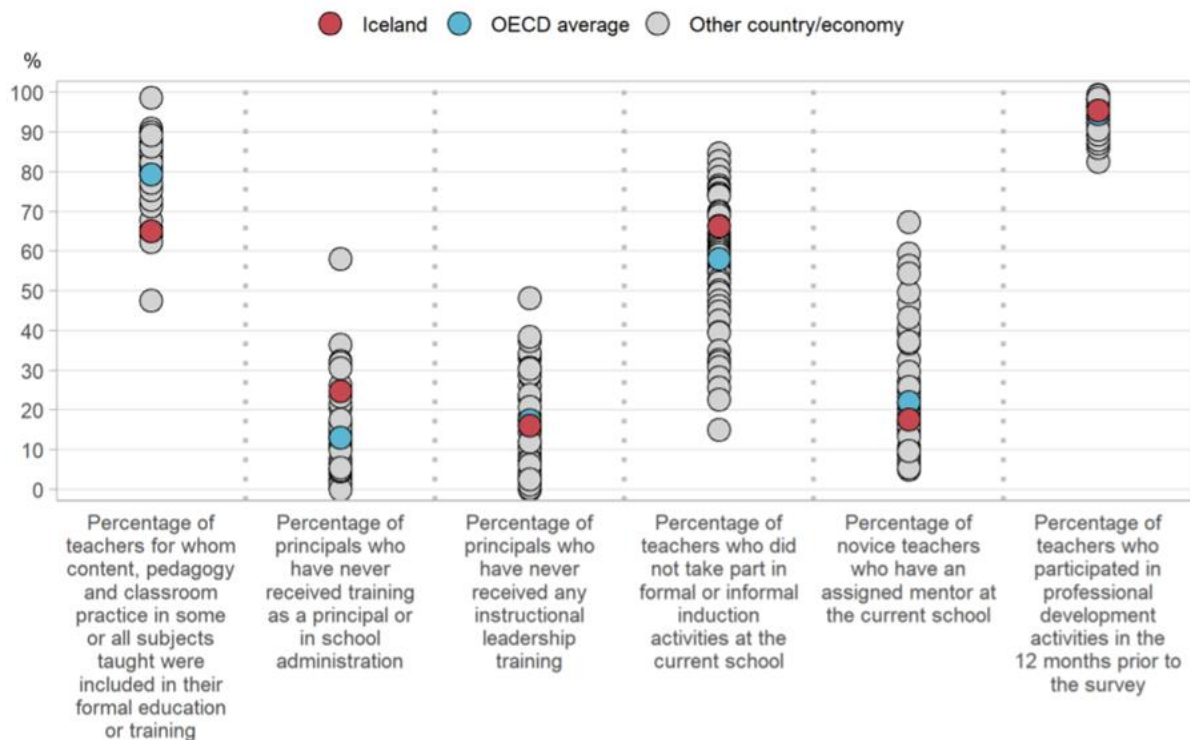
Source: (OECD, 2019[11]).

A lack of understanding of what capacity is, and a lack of focus on capacity for the planned changes across the system means that reform can result in little success. As EP2030 is still a high level, document, it may be challenging to clearly specify, resource, and build the kinds of capabilities most crucial to its implementation success, across different parts of the education system. Interviewed stakeholders reflected that oftentimes school leaders and teachers are not prepared to implement, which slows implementation down considerably. As a result, implementation is inadvertently staggered across the country, as some schools are better able (for a variety of reasons) to implement quicker and better than others. In turn, this has a potential effect on equity outcomes. This can also vary depending on the size and capacity of each municipality.

Aligning policies within, and across the education system

The breadth of this strategy and its blend of old and new policies requires Iceland to be active with its approach to policy alignment. Policies should be positioned in context, articulating the policies that compose the EP2030 with others around them (OECD, 2020[2]). This is important for the sake of promoting the harmonisation and complementarity of policies related to education, which could otherwise result in lack of alignment or take up. This is also the case with the policies that have multiple touchpoints across Ministries.

There are a range of policies that are presently implemented by the Directorate for Education, which refer to evaluation and assessment, others related to equity and inclusion that require alignment. If the evaluation of schools for example were not adapted to the priorities of the strategy, schools and their leaders and teachers would not have incentives to take it up. As the EP2030 covers student assessment directly, this will provide the incentives for change, but other assessment processes, such as school,

teacher, or school leadership evaluation, or municipality quality control, would need to be adapted. Another consideration could be the alignment of research capacity and research to the objectives of the strategy.

In addition, EP2030 includes some policies that require a networked approach to deliver, requiring the Ministry to work at the intersection of health, well-being, and education to achieve some initiatives. Iceland's decision to take a holistic view of these and pursue integrated services is well chosen. This is the case of the new draft bill on the integration of many service systems. They provide services that are important for a child's well-being, including education, health services, social services and law enforcement. The Bill notes that services will be phased into three service levels according to harmonised criteria. The detailed implementation will be in the hands of the ministers who deal with the relevant issues. It is proposed to ensure that all children have access to a contact at a health centre, pre-school, primary or secondary school or at municipal social services. It provides guidance and assistance to children and parents in first-level services. If requested, the contact person obtains information from others who provide services to the child and can plan and monitor the integration of the services (Icelandic Government, 2020[51]).

Integrated services refer to joined-up social services for the benefit of providers and users and can be either vertical or horizontal in integration. Iceland's policy proposals make a case for horizontal integration to bring together previously separated services, professions and organisations across different sectors to better serve service users with multiple disadvantages and complex needs (Mundy, 2007[52]). This requires collaboration, with agencies working together through information sharing and training, and creating a network of agencies to improve service user experience. All of this requires the kind of cooperation where professionals communicate and work together on a service users' cases (OECD, 2015[53]). Iceland has already evidenced a strong commitment to holistic approaches and alignment activity, and the OECD encourages Iceland to continue exploring how it will sustain the systemic processes it may have already started to ensure alignment, foster intra and inter-education system networks, and plan implementation in a collaborative way.

Issues for consideration on governance and institutions for implementation

- The ambition and holistic approaches to complex policy problems encoded within EP2030 offers Iceland an opportunity to think strategically and deliberately about its own institutional context, structures, and ways of working within and across the education system. Among them is the consideration that Iceland's policymaking and implementation approach appears to be weakly linked to its needs in a decentralised environment for such a large-scale policy change. In addition, in times of change, there needs to be explicit recognition of the capacity of education professionals and those who are part of policy making to engage with the change in their own context. For EP2030, which has many objectives and has a 10-year horizon, and more generally, leadership for change does not appear to be prioritised to be able to deliver the strategy, especially at the school level. Finally, the EP2030 does not operate in a vacuum, but is part of wider education and public policy context that will require careful alignment and efforts to make coherent.

6. Recommendations for implementing EP2030 to reach its objectives

EP2030 is a wide reaching strategy that aims to respond to challenges facing the education system and contribute to the economic, social and personal development of Iceland in the fourth industrial revolution. The strategy has laid the foundation of the key policy areas and objectives it aims to accomplish, developed in the Motion for the Parliamentary Resolution. The breadth of the stakeholder engagement process to support its development has laid a solid foundation of trust, interest, and willingness to find ways to deepen

engagement processes, practices, and structures as they relate to the forthcoming implementation. The context appears to be supportive for the strategy, in terms of the political timing, the trust, capacity and engagement of many stakeholders in the education change process.

The implementation of EP2030 is planned to take place over the course of ten years, in three phases. Each phase should have its implementation plan, associated actions, and indicators/measures of performance within the broader 10-year framework. The first plan will need to be developed within six months of the Icelandic Parliament passing the Motion for the Parliamentary Resolution, in which this strategy is detailed.

For the EP2030 to accomplish its stated vision and objectives, it now needs to move into the next stages of establishing an actionable and tangible plan that different people can be engaged with and motivated towards in schools, and at the local, regional and national level. The OECD's analysis of EP2030 concludes with a full suite of considerations to aid the creation of such an action plan, elaborating on the considerations already provided in each of this report's individual chapters' conclusions.

Review the design of EP2030 to make it actionable

The EP2030 is a high level, mid-term strategic document that provides a vision and five policy pillars, each with their objectives and proposed policy focus areas. Overall, the vision is clear and well articulated and the pillars are generally in tune with the challenges reflected by Iceland for EP2030 and international research. There are some areas however, that may need to be considered additionally, such as drop out or the use of technology across education systems, especially in light of the global COVID-19 pandemic.

While the responsibility to produce an action plan for each phase of the implementation sits within the Ministry, it should involve stakeholders meaningfully and in an ongoing way. This will give them a stronger sense of ownership of why, and how, these policy focus areas need to be accomplished. Iceland can consider the following:

1. **Justify and operationalise the vision**: A more direct justification of this vision is missing. Iceland could think about what theory-of-change is inherent to it and how it wants to use it to inform policy making and implementation. If this reflection has already taken place, then encapsulating it in EP2030 in a succinct way to motivate stakeholders to support the policy focus areas it includes would be help the development of an implementation plan. Considering aligning it with more indicators that are tangible once it has been reviewed can also guide its overarching actions and assessment of progress.

2. **Review key issues to translate into policy actions**: EP includes numerous focus areas and key issues, which which combine values, existing, and potential future policy actions. In the next steps, Iceland can review the policy areas from an implementation perspective. This review process could:

   a. **Reflect on focus areas and key issues**: Iceland needs to reflect on the kinds of policy proposals it makes in EP2030, the challenges they connect to, and how these coud be made actionable, and the organisational structures it has (or does not have) to discern these and decide upon their inclusion.

   b. **Clarify what is old and what is new**: The OECD understands that EP2030 amalgamates ongoing policies and introduces new ones. Analysing the impact of existing ones in coherence with the planned new policies to also provide a rationale for the inclusion of older policies and what needs to happen with them (is it continuation of implementation, amendments or upgrades, post implementation review and lesson sharing etc.).

   c. **Prioritise and bring coherence to the proposed policy focus areas**: The breadth of the EP2030 means that its current format can be quite large. Iceland may consider

prioritising key issues and consider how to present implementation plans so that they appear achievable.

    d. **Policy move focus areas to accomplish the vision**: More specific detail about the proposed policy focus areas will require considering what incentives could be provided for the change to happen, the definition of roles and responsibilities, and the appropriate institutional structures and engagement and communications methods required to instantiate them. Crucially, this will also require the development of indicators to measure progress with implementation.

3. **Align resources to the final set of policy focus areas**: This should include references to institutional structures, staffing arrangement, funding, and incentives.

Consider the approach to the engagement of stakeholders throughout EP2030

Iceland is starting this ten-year strategy with a major asset. Already, there is a high trust culture, with a strong sense of collegiality, and the will to find new ways to improve as a system. Iceland can build on stakeholders' general enthusiasm to find better ways of working together to implement EP2030.

1. **Explore different engagement structures and approaches**: Stakeholders revealed that the dominant engagement model is the ad hoc committee or platform structure (where stakeholders provide feedback on concepts or ideas that have already been formed). While these structures do have merit in an environment of trust, more permanent formats of engagement, such as consultation committees or other, regarding purpose and approach, could be developed for EP2030 to be implemented consistently during its 10 years.

2. **Make roles and responsibilities transparent**: After having ascertained which policies are new, which are old, and how they will be prioritised in phased implementation, Iceland should elaborate what the implications are for each stakeholder group and what their specific roles and responsibilities will be in implementation, using this process of reflection to engage people in planning the delivery.

3. **Develop a clear communication strategy**: Iceland should develop a clear communications strategy to communicate the existence of EP2030 to all stakeholders and target audiences. While the tools and products such a strategy will need to produce can be for Iceland to decide, communications activity needs to ensure that stakeholders and audiences understand EP2030, its theory-of-change, their specific role and tasks in its implementation, how they will be supported to implement, and how implementation will be measured.

Align implementation of EP2030 for its decentralised context

The ambition and holistic approaches to complex policy problems that EP2030 aims to target, offers Iceland an opportunity to think strategically about its own institutional context, structures, capacity and ways of working within and across the education system. A de facto 'cascade' implementation model seems to exist in Iceland but it may not be up to the task of realising EP2030 large-scale strategic reform that aims to shape Iceland's future. To this end, OECD proposes to consider the following in relation to how to the current contextual factors can support the development of EP2030:

1. **Reflect and specify the institutional approach to implementation**: Iceland should specify how EP2030 will inform implementation planning, and develop an implementation approach that fits to its decentralised system. For the EP2030 it could consider establishing (or updating existing) institutional structures that will allow those involved to come together to design, plan the EP2030, and evaluate its progress and potential adaptations and for the articulation of actions along the decentralised continuum: schools, local municipalities, regional boards and national to have direct and transparent alignment. Iceland should

consider what kind of institutional structures or instruments (such as a committee or task force or standard or accountability measure) might best drive the development of robust and consistent policies.

2. **Enhance system capacity for change**: After having defined the roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder group in policy development and implementation processes for EP2030, Iceland could undertake a capacity assessment. It could identify the core capabilities required for the policies and their co-ordination, where those capabilities sit within the system, what is missing, and what kind of capacity building is required to get Iceland ready to implement. Teachers and their leaders will have responsibility for implementing a considerable amount of policies in EP2030. What is the status quo with their level of decision-making authority at their level of n implementation? What support do they currently need to implement and where are there gaps? How will Iceland identify future support needs in a systemic and systematic way? If decentralisation is best served by discretion coupled with robust evaluation and accountability, then Iceland should seek to optimise this as part of implementation planning.

3. **Bring about policy coherence**: As the EP2030 is part of wider education and public policy context it will require alignment and coherence. This is important to promote the harmonisation and complementarity of policy related to education and to other services such as child welfare, well being or employment. It will be particularly important to align the EP2030 with curriculum and with evaluation and assessment practices to the pillars of the strategy and its indicators; on inclusive education, and to create structures or networks that allow for cross ministry or agency collaboration to deliver on some of the more transversal goals.

Define an actionable implementation strategy

Iceland should reflect on these considerations as part of the preparation of a coherent action plan. An implementation strategy weaves together the design of the policy, the engagement of different education stakeholders throughout the process, and the institutions, governance and policy alignment that surround the policy in a way that is actionable (OECD, 2020[2]). Taking these considerations on board is a great opportunity to 'learn by doing', assessing the system and designing interventions to respond to these identified issues, generating data and putting in place the decision making approaches, communication channels, and implementation resourcing and support, to realise the goals of this strategy.

1. **Bring together the different dimensions required for action:** This requires considering the policies and actions, timeframes, responsibilities, and available resources to move forward with EP2030. The unit or structure that is defined to provide oversight for the strategy and its implementation can work first on this task.

2. **Develop knowledge to understand progress:** In order to monitor implementation, understand progress and avoid potential pitfalls. As the EP2030 is refined in terms of policy objectives and actions, it will be important to define indicators to measure progress with the implementation of the individual pillars of the strategy and to consider enhancing research and evaluation to enrich the knowledge of the actions that work and disseminate this across the country. This will enhance credibility of the strategy and has the potential to improve system capacity overall.

3. **Establish an initial document:** With the aim to communicate the strategy document, the implementation plans, This document can be referred to, reviewed and updated as the strategy progresses. It can be developed into a visual, a website or other for coherence and consistency.

Table 8. Planning the next steps for implementing the EP2030

Implementation levers	Progress indicators	Who is in charge?	Resources	When?
Review the EP2030 to make it actionable				
1. Justify and operationalise the vision				
2. Review the proposed policy focus areas				
3. Align resources to the proposed set of policy focus areas				
4. Consider the approach to the engagement of stakeholders throughout EP2030				
5. Explore different engagement approaches				
6. Define roles and responsibilities transparently				
7. Define and pursue a clear communication strategy				
Align implementation of EP2030 for its decentralised context				
8. Reflect on the implementation approaches it wants to pursue				
9. Assess and develop leadership for change capacity				
10. Build policy alignment within education and across transversal policies				
Define an actionable implementation strategy				
11. Bring together different dimensions: what policies and tools, timeframes responsibilities, and available resources.				
12. Develop knowledge and indicators to monitor implementation, understand progress and avoid potential pitfalls.				
13. Establish an initial document that communicates the strategy				
12. Develop knowledge and indicators to monitor implementation, understand progress and avoid potential pitfalls				
13. Establish an initial document that communicates the strategy, its planned course of action and roles and responsibilities to reach different audiences.				

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Note 1: Education Policy 2030

Motion for a parliamentary resolution on an Education Policy for the period 2020 to 2030 from the Minister of Education, Science and Culture

The Althing resolves that work to further the education of the Icelandic nation is to proceed in accordance with the Education Policy outlined herein.

I.   Vision, values and pillars of the Education Policy

The vision of the Education Policy 2020 to 2030 is High-quality education throughout life. The vision is underpinned by the values of the policy: perseverance, courage, knowledge, and happiness.

The Education Policy rests on five pillars that support the vision and its values, under which there are a series of objectives delineating areas of emphasis, and associated key issues. The five pillars are:

- A.   Equal opportunities for all
- B.   Superior teaching
- C.   Skills for the future
- D.   Putting well-being first
- E.   Quality at the forefront

Implementation of the Education Policy

Implementation will take place in three phases. Each phase will be preceded by the presentation of an implementation plan and associated actions and measures of performance. The Minister will present the first plan within six months after the passing of the parliamentary resolution. A successful implementation will be achieved through strong cooperation between the education system and society as a whole. There needs to be agreement on the vision for the Education Policy and the systematic utilisation of the most recent research findings applying to progress and achievement in education.
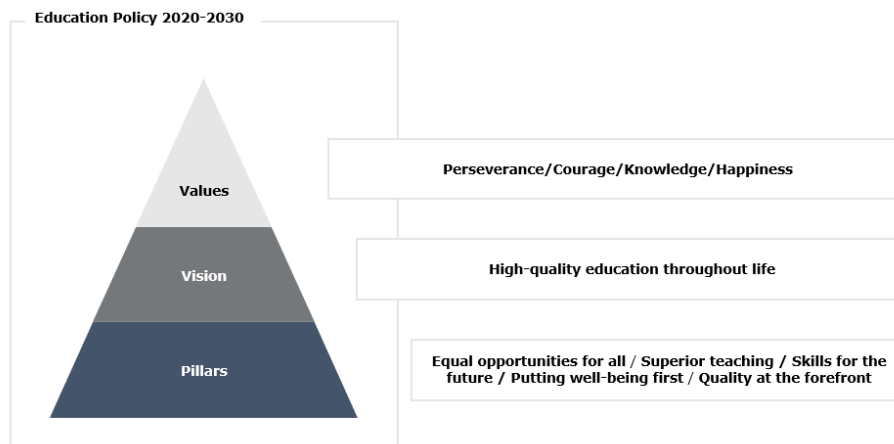
Explanatory Notes

Introduction

Education is the key to future opportunities and one of the prime movers of societies and human prosperity. In times of unprecedented transformation, uncertainty and rapid technological change, the world's nations must prepare for increased volatility and challenges of ever-increasing complexity. The future prospects of the Icelandic nation are predicated upon the competitiveness and sustainability of the Icelandic education system. Its success is dependent on having highly educated citizens who are capable of creative and critical thinking and have the social skills and the command of Icelandic and other languages necessary to tackle global challenges.

Education strengthens, maintains and stimulates the resilience of individuals and societies. Emphasis will be placed on improving Icelanders' attitudes to their own education, using the idea of a growth mindset as a guiding principle. The quest for knowledge never ends, and education—whether formal or informal—is a lifelong process.

Schools and other educational institutions have to be attractive workplaces and teaching must be an interesting career, considering that it is among the most important of all professions.

A strong and flexible education system should contribute to equal opportunity in education, given that everyone can learn and everyone matters. All individuals should have the opportunity to develop their potential and increase their competence.

Education Policy 2020-2030

Values	Perseverance/Courage/Knowledge/Happiness
Vision	High-quality education throughout life
Pillars	Equal opportunities for all / Superior teaching / Skills for the future / Putting well-being first / Quality at the forefront

The aim of the Education Policy is to provide excellent education in an environment where everyone can learn and everyone matters. Accordingly, the guiding values of the Education Policy, which are intended to support the vision, are: perseverance, courage, knowledge and happiness.

A clear policy on the priorities to be made in the interests of education and knowledge creation will lead to increased quality of life and added value. Through it, the foundations of a stronger society are laid.

This Education Policy was elaborated in broad consultation with stakeholders, including through the Consultation Portal (Samráðsgátt). A total of 38 sets of generally positive comments were received. The comments contained a number of useful suggestions which were taken into account.

Box 4 sets out the pillars and focus areas of Education Policy 2030.

Box 4. Education Policy 2030: Individual pillars and focus areas

A: Equal opportunities for all

A.1. Education for all: Schools and other educational institutions must consider the needs, abilities and aptitudes of each student and base their work on each individual's strengths and interest. Society has an obligation to safeguard the welfare of children and young people to the extent possible, and to ensure that all students have the opportunity to thrive and prosper on their own terms within the education system. It is important to ensure that everyone feels at home in the education system, and to work to make it a place of equal rights.

A.2. Education throughout the country: People's educational opportunities must not be determined by where they live. Improvements in the transport system and technological advancements are to be used to provide everyone with access to education regardless of place of residence, thereby increasing the viability of successful knowledge communities in sparsely populated regions. Educational offerings outside of the main urban centres are to be improved, including through the expansion of vocational and technical training throughout the country, based on the consideration that education available locally plays a decisive role in the educational choices that young people make after they complete compulsory school.

A.3. A diverse educational community: Iceland is a multicultural society that takes advantage of the resources inherent in a multicultural school environment, welcomes the diversity of the students, and harnesses that diversity for the benefit of society. It is important to expand efforts to evaluate the education of immigrants and refugees so that their knowledge can be put to use both for their own benefit and for that of society.

A.4. Early support: Children and young people must receive appropriate help and support as early as possible in their schooling, and assistance must be provided before any problems become

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significant. Special attention must be given to strengthening preschools. Support can be directed to the students themselves or to their environment, and it is important to adapt it to the needs of vulnerable individuals and groups. This requires interdisciplinary cooperation.

B: Superior teaching

B.1. Teacher education and recruitment: The content of teacher education must take account of society's needs and support the Education Policy. An effort will be made to raise the status of the teaching profession and strengthen teachers' professional independence. Ways to prevent teacher shortages will be explored, including by ensuring adequate recruitment.

B.2. Knowledge and courage: Students will be enabled to gain new knowledge and skills, and to use and apply the knowledge acquired. Students will be made aware of the importance of being creative and responsible when searching for knowledge, reflecting upon it and formulating arguments, and of not being afraid to try new things.

B.3. Competence development of educational professionals: It must be ensured that competence and knowledge development is defined as an integral part of teachers' and school leaders' work at all school levels, so as to ensure that their skill levels remain consistent with changing needs and their professional independence. Emphasis will be placed on the link between educational professionals' basic education, vocational training and competence development to enable everyone to grow professionally and systematically increase their knowledge and skills, keep abreast of professional trends and increase their collaboration with each other.

B.4. The legal framework governing education: In order to make the best use of the available human resources and safeguard the quality of the working conditions and the work environment, the effective implementation of the Act on the education, competency and recruitment of teachers and school leaders of preschools, compulsory schools and upper secondary schools must be ensured.

B.5. Variety: The education system of the future will be dependent on increased innovation and close cooperation. The involvement of people with varied specialist knowledge is required for its development.

C. Skills for the future

C.1. Reading literacy: Part of our national culture is that everyone is able to read for purpose and pleasure. Reading skills are a key to a higher quality of life and reflect people's ability to take in and interpret their surroundings, the natural environment and society in a critical way, enabling them to actively participate in the shaping of those surroundings. Reading is the most potent tool to acquire knowledge available to students, and the ability to communicate verbally and in writing is a prerequisite for participation in a democratic society. Therefore, the Education Policy places particular emphasis on language comprehension, reading comprehension, communication, writing and listening, as well as measures to help those with reading difficulties. Every effort will be made to engage all of society in improving reading literacy, and in particular to involve homes, libraries, authors and media outlets.

C.2. The advancement of Icelandic: We seek to maintain and nurture interest in the language and culture of Iceland among all generations. We must promote the use of Icelandic and Icelandic sign language in all areas of society, strengthen Icelandic teaching at all school levels, and safeguard the future of the Icelandic language in a digital world.

C.3. Science and research: Science and research are the foundations of a strong knowledge society that fosters education, innovation, culture, welfare, democracy and human rights. The unfettered search for knowledge, grounded in the interest, curiosity and innovative spirit of scientists, is a key factor of progress, besides being the basis of societal change. The effective communication of scientific knowledge to people of all ages must be promoted.

C.4. Vocational, trade and technical education: The innovation-driven society of the future necessitates an increased emphasis on vocational, trade and technical education. These types of

education will be strengthened with a view to ensuring that the development of skills matches society's needs and the challenges of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Young people, whatever their gender, are to be offered appropriate vocational training, and instruction in trade and technical subjects should be made available in compulsory schools. Students are to be made familiar with the many types of vocational, trade and technical training at the upper-secondary level and systematically introduced to the programmes available and the job opportunities opened by those programmes.

C.5. Art and crafts: Arts and crafts education provides opportunities to develop mental and physical skills through solution based tasks and innovative thinking. Artistic creation in education and an increased emphasis on practical subjects support the practical application of knowledge, and positively influence students' future environment.

C.6. Creativity and critical thinking: Everyone is capable of rational thinking, reflection and creative courage. Emphasis is to be placed on creativity in all aspects of schooling in order to promote personal development, initiative and innovation. The interaction of critical and creative thinking is to be exploited to develop students' independent values, strengthen their ability to see the context in which different outcomes exist, and promote their capacity to engage in societal debate. In order to activate and sustain students' creative ability and courage, they must be provided with a learning environment that promotes initiative, independence and creative thinking in all areas.

C.7. Digital living: Students must have an understanding of both the opportunities and the challenges of digital living. Students should receive training in information, media and technology literacy. In addition to the practical application of digital technology, students should be given opportunities to increase their familiarity with data protection and information management and analysis. Attention will be given to students' use of social media and they will be taught about responsible online behaviour and the principles of safe digital communication.

C.8. Lifelong education: High-quality, diverse education at all school levels and the ability of people of all ages to access education are the prerequisites for ensuring that the inhabitants of Iceland have the knowledge and skills to explore new paths and create new opportunities. Lifelong education enhances society's capacity to react to the rapid and constant changes occurring in the economy, and ensures professional development and mobility in the labour market.

D. Putting well-being first

D.1. Health promotion: It is important to monitor the well-being of all students and take appropriate action quickly, in close co operation with homes, schools and other experts, in response to any signs of distress among students or of violent behaviour of any kind. It is important to uphold principles of equality and to ensure that students are not at risk of becoming victims of psychological, physical, gender-based or sexual violence, harassment or bullying. In that context the importance of sex education is reaffirmed. Ways will be sought to facilitate health promotion at all school levels.

D.2. Mental health: Efforts must be made to safeguard the emotional and social health of students and to create an environment for their daily lives that promotes their well-being. The best opportunity to strengthen people's mental health is when they are young, and it must therefore be a priority during that period to reinforce those protective factors that are of greatest importance for mental health.

D.3. Prevention: Emphasis will be placed on prevention at all school levels, in every type of school and in after-school activities, including by empowering students through instruction and training in behavioural, social and emotional skills. This simultaneously lays the foundations for preventing the establishment of unhealthy interaction patterns and violent behaviour.

D.4. School counselling: A successful education presupposes that students make informed and considered decisions about their education based on their own fields of interest, strengths and values. Educational and vocational guidance supports both individuals' continuous professional

development throughout their careers and their ability to chart their own educational and professional paths in light of economic and societal changes. Priority is placed on ensuring that all persons are able to find productive uses for their competence and a purpose with their education, an approach which can help to reduce early school leaving and support participation in the labour market. Educational and vocational guidance should be made available at all school levels irrespective of the individual's age and place of residence, and should be provided by qualified specialists.

D.5. Students' voices: Students must be given the chance to have their voices heard from the outset, and they should have the opportunity to influence their learning environment. Care will be taken to ensure that students of all ages have the possibility to express their views and that their opinions are given due weight in accordance with their age and level of maturity. The implementation at the level of schooling of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities makes it possible to systematically harness children's increased participation in all aspects of decision-making and student democracy. Students should have the opportunity to participate in the creation of a positive school atmosphere and social rules. It is a priority to ensure that students know how to take responsibility for their own learning, that they form sound working habits, develop a growth mindset, and understand how to set their own goals. This priority applies both within schools and in the work of after-school centres, youth centres, and other types of organised sports and youth activities, considering that a democratic approach is the foundation of all work with young people.

D.6. Everyone's well-being: Everyone's happiness and well-being must be put first. To ensure that no one is left out, emphasis must be placed on equality, shared responsibility, solidarity, recognition of different opinions, and respect for students' diversity and varied cultural background. Work is ongoing in schools and in sports and youth activities to strengthen tolerance and human rights and democratic awareness.

E. Quality at the forefront

E.1. Accountability and co-ordination in service systems: Co-operation, clear accountability and integration within and between systems is a common thread running through the Education Policy. At all school levels the focus will be on integrated school services with an emphasis on shared responsibility, multilevel learning support, and support for parents and school staff. In connection with all support and intervention it is of importance that society's support systems serve students in a unified way and intervene where needed to ensure continuity in the services of different responsible parties and professional groups. Focused management and professional leadership, and efficient cooperation within the education system, are crucial.

E.2. National Curriculum Guides as factors supporting the Education Policy: The National Curriculum Guides must reflect the aims of the Education Policy and promote the development of future competencies. They will be re-evaluated with this objective in mind and to ensure that they align with international obligations undertaken by Iceland. There will be an emphasis on providing access to a broad range of learning resources that take advantage of the potential of digital communication and respect the diversity of the student population.

E.3. Assessment: Student assessment should evaluate students' competencies in a transparent and guiding manner, while taking into account the different competencies of each individual. Special attention must be paid to the equal rights of students with disabilities and to those of students with learning or social difficulties. It is important to develop a common understanding of the main priorities of student assessment and ensure that they are in line with the priorities laid down in the National Curriculum Guides. Assessment must be designed to provide, at regular intervals, clear information about the learning progress, including a varied evaluation of the student's learning, well-being and welfare.

E.4. Expectations for students: Students will be under increased expectations to succeed academically, demonstrate perseverance, and progress in their learning, subject to needs and circumstances. The education system must offer a certain amount of flexibility to those students who need it, and provide appropriate support for all students in their learning and play. The development of a sense of responsibility, social skills and community and environmental awareness among students is to be emphasised. There must be a requirement for both children and adults whose native language is not Icelandic to improve their proficiency in Icelandic, and for students to be given opportunities to further advance their knowledge of their native languages along with that of Icelandic.

E.5. Expectations for parents: Parents are important allies of the education system who are in possession of inestimable knowledge that must be put to use for the benefit of students. Priority is placed on well-functioning cooperation between homes and schools, based on mutual respect and trust. There is a lot to be gained from promoting academic achievement and fostering students' knowledge, perseverance and happiness. Parents of children who are still minors are responsible for their children's upbringing and education, even as the students take responsibility for their own learning in accordance with their age and level of maturity.

E.6. Continuous improvement and quality assurance: External and internal reviews of schools and educational work must be strengthened taking account of the Education Policy and standardised measures of performance. Reviews must be based on clear and well supported criteria and must involve the systematic gathering, analysis and interpretation of relevant data. Clear responsibilities as regards the provision and quality of school and education activities are essential. Internal reviews are the responsibility of the educational institutions themselves, while external reviews are conducted by the Ministry and local authorities. External reviews are to be conducted at regular intervals, and are to be followed up by targeted reform support in cooperation between central and local government and other education providers. The Ministry gathers information about schools and educational settings, including through participation in international surveys of academic achievement. It is a priority to use the results of external and internal reviews for the purposes of reform, student self-assessment, and learning. Key benchmarks must be defined, published at regular intervals and scrutinised for improvement.

E.7. Efficient use of funds: Iceland places the highest priority on investments in education and insists on the efficient use of those investments, the attainment of the aims of the Education Policy and the development of an education system that meets society's needs. This means that the education system must be adequately financed and appropriations must be clearly defined and decided on having due regard to the needs of the sector as revealed by an efficient analysis.

Note 2: Iceland group interviews with OECD team

The OECD chose the group interview format because it allowed for breadth of engagement of stakeholders across Iceland's education system and the exploration of a range of views. Following a brief from the OECD, Iceland undertook purposive sampling to recruit participants based on the role they occupy within the Icelandic governance structure, finding individuals who could best illuminate issues related to EP2030 and to effective policy implementation. As the focus of the project was to strengthen the implementability of EP2030, selection of participants was based on whether they could or should have a role in further refining the high-level strategy or translating it into action. Participants drew from the following groups:

- **Central government**: Participants were the policy directors or managers who are responsible for policy development and would take responsibility for the particular aspects of policy implementation.

- **Municipalities**: Participants were from local authorities who have jurisdiction over resource allocation, curriculum, and assessment.

- **School improvement**: Participants work on issues of school improvement, quality, or the management of certification.
- **Schooling**: Participants were principals, teachers, and their union representatives.
- **Post-secondary education**: Participants drew from the higher-education sector, industry, and specialists on vocational, education.

The groups comprised between four to six participants and had three OECD interviewers, each taking turns to ask pre-prepared questions or direct conversation to explore interesting themes or issues, as they arose in conversation.

Table 9. Participants of group interviews

Meeting	Groups from which participants drew
Meeting n. 1: Ministry officials	Directors General, the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture and senior specialists
Meeting n. 2: Local authorities	The Icelandic Association of Local Authorities Association of Education Directors at the Primary School level City of Reykjavik school and leisure department Borgarbyggð Municipality
Meeting n. 3: Implementers at national level	Directorate for Education Quality Board for Higher education Home and School – the National Parents Association Youth Work Iceland (Samfés) University of Iceland, School of Education
Meeting n. 4: Stakeholder representatives	The Association of heads of Upper Secondary Schools Icelandic Teachers' Union (umbrella organisation of all teacher unions) Móðurmál – The Association on Bilingualism (parent association) The Icelandic Upper Secondary Student Union Association of independent schools (privately owned Pre-Primary and Primary Schools)
Meeting n. 5: Teacher Unions	The Association of Teachers in Primary/Elementary Schools The Association of Principals in Primary/Elementary Schools The Associaton of Principals in Pre-Primary Schools The Association of Teachers in Pre-Primary schools The Association of Teachers in Upper Secondary Schools The Association of Teachers and Principal in Music Schools
Meeting n. 6: Lifelong Learning	The Natioanl Rectors conference Working group on the task agenda on the fourth industrial revolution Kvasir, the Association of Educational and lifelong learning centres The National Union of Icelandic Students The Confederation of Icelandic Enterprise

Group interview questions

Discussion with groups of stakeholders revolved around their perspective on issues related to the content and future implementation of the Education Policy 2030. These questions relate to specific dimensions of the OECD Implementing Education Policy Framework.

	Questions
Orientation questions	• What is your position? • What parts of the strategy are/ will be relevant to your work?
Smart policy design	• What specific policies, policy tools, programs, or initiatives in the strategy can best bring the vision to life? What needs to be done, pragmatically, to achieve this vision?
Inclusive stakeholder engagement	• What would you consider your specific roles and responsibilities to implement this strategy? How will you work with others to do so? Are there existing processes/ forums for interaction/ protocols in place or will new ones need to be created to work with others to implement? • What kinds of communication would you need/ your team need to aid you with your role in implementing part of the strategy?

Conducive context	• Thinking about the part of the strategy that you know you will have a role in implementing: • What other policy areas would this affect? • What needs to be done to bring about alignment? • Currently, do you think you/ your team have the right skills or capabilities to play a role in implementing the strategy?

Moving an education strategy into action in Iceland: next steps

Iceland's Education Policy 2030 (EP2030) is an education strategy document that outlines aims to achieve a dynamic and flexible education system to drive economic and social change. Its vision is 'to accomplish high quality education through life', underpinned by the values of resilience, courage, knowledge and happiness. It has five pillars to attain this vision: equity, teaching, skills for the future, well-being, and education system quality. To strengthen the implementability of this document and use it effectively to inform action planning, Iceland should review its design to make it actionable, more closely consider stakeholder engagement approaches, fit implementation to Iceland's decentralised context, and define a clear implementation strategy. Through this, Iceland will be better positioned to transition from strategy to action, over the course of the next ten years and accomplish its objectives.

Implementing Policies: supporting change in education

This document was prepared by the Implementing Education Policies team at the OECD.

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

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