

National Education Consultation Report 2022 Technical Annex

A Blueprint For A Long-term
Strategy and Planning Framework



Introduction

This annex to the main FED national Education Consultation Report 2022 is a preliminary blueprint for a long-term strategic planning framework for education. It serves as a starting point for further consultation, and has been drawn together through wide-ranging discussions with experts and professionals. The FED will further develop this in the year to come.

At the outset it is important to emphasise that long-term planning will never generate a comprehensive and highly prescriptive detailed plan for education. However, long-term planning can enable our country to solve 'big' challenges more effectively and efficiently and therefore produce better outcomes. This in turn will lead to a more productive economy and society.

The development of a strategic long-term planning framework for education is intended as a process to assist government in long-term thinking and implementation – one that all stakeholders across our consultation highlighted as a missing 'golden' thread in our education system.

This blueprint explores the structures and governance of a long-term strategic planning framework, including its potential scope, mechanisms for policy development, processes and approaches.

The scope of the blueprint is wide. The exploration of the where and the how is only helpful if it fully recognises governmental primacy and political reality. It recognises the "messy nature" of some policy-making and the inevitable pressure on governments to deliver.

During the next stage of development, the FED will deepen its understanding of strategic long-term planning through a range of analysis, roundtables and research. This will include consideration of long-term strategy and planning in other government departments; drawing on the approaches of other sectors and through research on practice in other jurisdictions. The blueprint will also be stress tested running through it one or more "intractable problems", or ambitious goals.

This blueprint for long-term planning recognises that the education system is complex and long-term by nature. To generate viable policy options that tackle intractable problems, solutions must be worked upon in a consistent manner over many years. If the process is transparent, rational, rigorous and inclusive, there is greater likelihood that options and solutions will be successfully implemented. The blueprint for long-term strategic planning is the starting point for such a process.

A long-term policy making blueprint proposal - overview

An emerging perspective

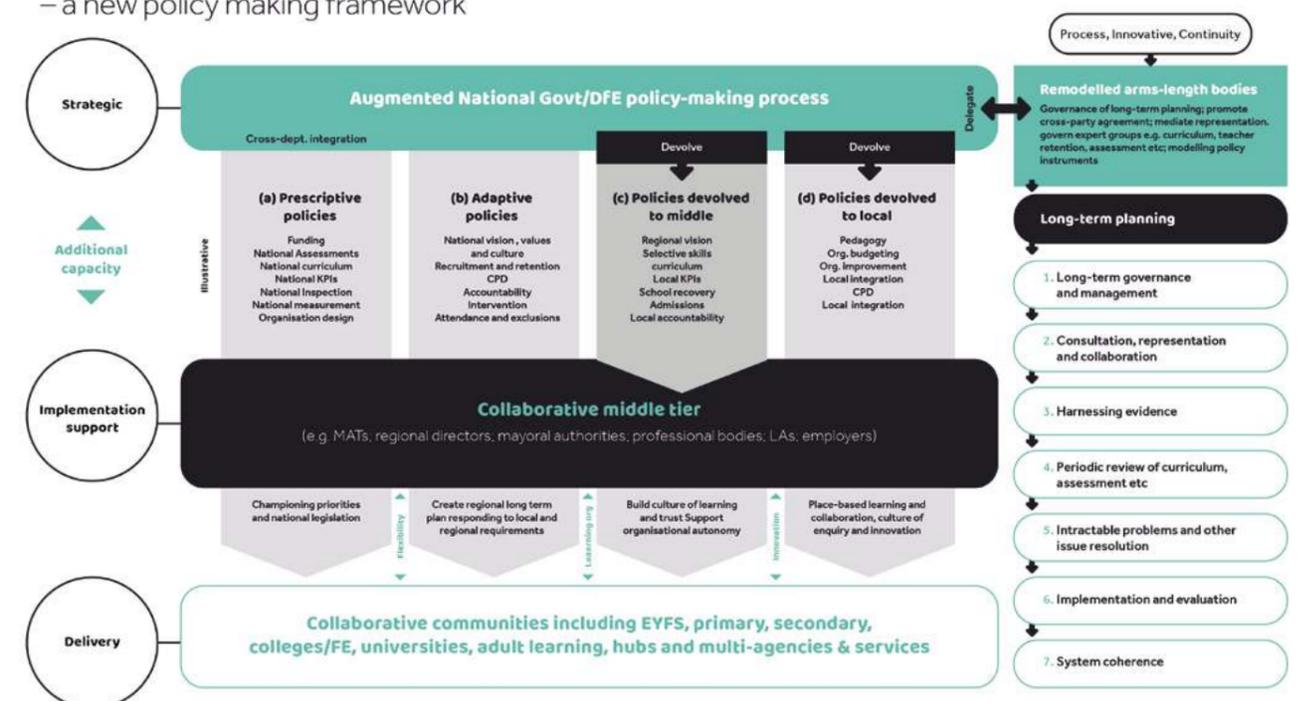
The schematic overview below addresses some of the key features of the long-term strategic planning framework. In the main body of the diagram, the framework identifies the potential to introduce greater devolution and collaboration, i.e. a re-examination of where policy might be made. The right-hand side of the diagram summarises opportunities to delegate elements of the planning process i.e. how planning can be undertaken in a longer-term framework.

With reference to where policy is made, prescribed policies (a) are those which are mandatory and implemented without exception. Potential examples are funding formulae, national assessment and curriculum etc. With a greater emphasis on devolution, policies which are currently centralised, could fall to other devolved categories, e.g. adaptive, (b) where regional or local changes are anticipated, (c) are devolved to some form of collaborative middle tier (d) or devolved to local organisations such as the nursery, school, college or community.

Since England is particularly centralised compared with many other jurisdictions, critical to this policy framework is a conscious and thorough long-term consideration of where authority best resides between the different levels of the hierarchy, in order to achieve efficiency, highest productivity and best outcomes.

A pathway to meet present and future needs

– a new policy making framework



On the right hand side of the framework, one or more intermediary bodies are proposed (possibly remodelled arms-length bodies). Responsibilities that could be assumed (through central government delegation of authority) could be the governance and management of long-term planning, creating representative forums for policy participation and importantly, expert bodies for the development of major policy instruments such as curriculum, assessment and structures. These bodies could be advising or recommending. The seven elements of long-term planning are expanded below.

1a. The management of long-term strategic planning and delegation

Building new resources to assist the Department for Education

The development of the policy blueprint requires one or more intermediary bodies to assist government in areas such as the management of a long-term strategic planning process, the governance of expert groups (that periodically review curriculum or assessment), or to act as a conduit and mediator for representation. Ideally, existing arms-length bodies could be adapted to provide this support, but the DfE has less support in this area than other departments

Low external support for the Department for Education

In comparison with other departments, the DfE is not as adequately supported by arms-length or wholly delegated bodies. For example, the DfE has only two advisory non-departmental bodies, compared to 8 in Defence and 8 in Health. Similarly, across all advisory and non-departmental bodies, the DfE is relatively less supported than similar size departments

Delegation and formal advice by government departments

Amongst the three largest government departments (by employees), the degree of formal delegation and advice is greater in the NHS and Defence. All but the smallest departments have more advisory non-departmental public bodies than the Department of Education

	Cabinet Office	Foreign and Cmth	Business Energy & Industry Strategy	Defence	Home Office	Communities and Local Govt.	Justice	Digital, Media, Culture and Sport	Education	Treasury	Env. Food and Rural Affairs	Transport	Work and Pensions	Health	Trade
Non-Ministerial Department			3					1	2	1	2/4	1			1
Executive Agency	1	2	5	4		2	5	1	3	2	4	4		2	4
Executive Non-Departmental Public Body	1	4	17	4	5	5	6	31	8	1	9	6	5	11	6
Advisory Non-Departmental Public Body	8		9	8	7	1	11	4	2	1	4	1	3	8	1
Public Corporation		1		1		1	3					2	2		2
Other	4	1	8	12	12	1	10	3	2		13	4	1	6	4
Total¹	16¹	9	42	29	24	11	32	43	17	7	33	18	13	27	19

1. Total includes all categories, some excluded from table rows. 2. Two ministerial departments

Characteristics of delegated bodies

Delegated bodies need to be credible and not prone to short-term change. For this they need cross-party support, and where relevant fair political representation and respected stakeholder inclusion. (NHS policy is aided by The King's Fund, The Health Foundation, REAL, Cochrane, NIHR and the Long-term planning Assembly.)

Cross-party agreement

Any new delegated bodies should be established through cross-party agreement, to ensure buy-in. There is a need to position delegated bodies in the minds of the public through clear, transparent terms of references (see Bank of England and MPC mandate letters)

Political representation

If the management of delegated bodies have direct political representation, a formula must be established to balance opinions of parties. This could relate to governmental years in office or share of vote (also see restrictions on Monetary Committee membership)

Stakeholder inclusion

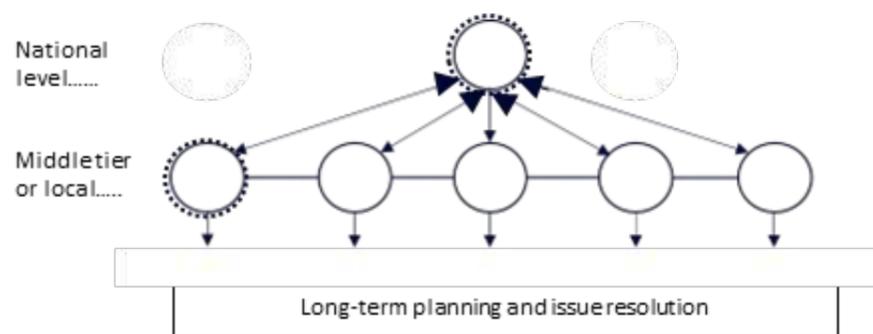
The representation of practitioners, professional and sector bodies, trade union and other stakeholders (business and public sector) should be considered. These could be appointed, through an open and transparent process, as and when they are vacated

1b. The governance of long-term strategic planning

Focus of governance and its relationship to the decision making structure

Long-term planning requires careful oversight, consistency and abundant institutional memory. With the additional challenges of stakeholder collaboration, greater use of evidence and a complex adaptive system, there is an even greater need for unreproachable and trusted governance.

The scope of governance should mirror the newly delegated and devolved structures. For example, if delegated national bodies and regional level bodies are further empowered, governance should reflect this (dotted circles below). The make-up of governing organisations should be consistent with political interests, alongside stakeholder representation.



Those tasked with governance must protect policy planning processes, once they have been authorised by government, to ensure these are embedded and maintained. Governors should also review the effectiveness of the planning process and bring forward recommendations to improve.

Characteristics of governance for long term planning

Governance must be transparent, durable and independent. There are strong precedent for transparency in organisation such as the Food Standards Authority, Monetary Policy Committee, and OFCOM. These and the Office for Budget Responsibility illustrate mechanisms to ensure independence. Durability, the ability to withstand short-term change, including disbandment, is more difficult to guarantee and relies on significant investment to maintain cross-party support.

Governing authorities must also be carefully constituted and share this imperative with delegated bodies.

Precedents for delegation: Transparency and durability

	Precedent
Transparency	<p>Food Standards Agency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The FSA maintains a high degree of transparency towards the public, including live webcasting every decision-making board meeting <p>Bank of England</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Every remit letter sent to the Bank of England by the Chancellor is published <p>Monetary Policy Committee (Bank of England)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All minutes and votes are published <p>Office of Communications (OFCOM)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> OFCOM publishes consultation documents on its website, including a plain English version. Ten weeks are given to gather responses from the public, which are then also published
Durability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Due to parliamentary sovereignty, durability can only be assured through building and subsequent constant repair of political consensus: e.g. the NHS, the Bank of England The FSA is a case in point. Since its inception, it has become gradually less autonomous, more at risk of regulatory capture, and less powerful. This is due, in part, to a lack of consensus between Labour and the Conservatives as to the role of the FSA

Precedents for delegation: Independence and constitution

	Precedent
Independence	<p>Food Standards Agency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consumer and public interest nominees on the commission were originally meant to be in the minority <p>Monetary Policy Committee</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No committee member is allowed to accept a paid party-political post or hold a high-profile role in a party, and any political activity must be sanctioned by the Secretary If a Committee member wishes to engage in a political activity at any level, consent must be obtained from the Secretary of the Bank, who will consult the Governors of the Chairman of Court as necessary
Constitution	<p>Food Standards Agency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The FSA is a statutory Non-Departmental Public Body with executive powers, reporting to Parliament through Health Ministers <p>Bank of England</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The bank's affairs are managed by the court of directors, except for the formulation of monetary policy, which is a separate activity <p>BBC</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Board has fourteen members: a non-executive Chair, a designated non-executive member for each of the Nations of the UK, five other non-executive members and four executive members. The Chair and four Nations members are appointed by The Queen-in-Council. The other members are appointed by the BBC Board <p>Industrial Strategy Council</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Senior individuals from business, academia and civil society make up the Individual Strategy Council, led by the Chief Economist of the Bank of England

2a. Consultation, representation and collaboration (current situation)

Current competition for representation

A routine survey of formal organisations identified over 300 that specifically wish to influence government policy. This includes think tanks, research organisations, professional bodies, trade unions, academy trusts, accreditation and assessment bodies, academic organisations, charities, other pressure groups and service providers.

The majority are focused on the DfE, including ministers and advisors – because this is where so much policy management resides.

A number of serious issues can arise:

- Consultation is often ad-hoc and can be bias confirming
- The most prominent voices are not necessarily the most representative (or best informed)
- Those with lived experience (including students and parents) are not necessarily consulted
- Evidence can be squeezed to the margins
- Most are caught up in the same short-term policy making cycle

All of these influencers bear in on a narrow policy making centre that is under enormous pressure to deliver quickly. This does not necessarily mean that consultation is representative or long-term in its perspective.

Over 300 organisations wish to influence government education policy



Source: edpol.net

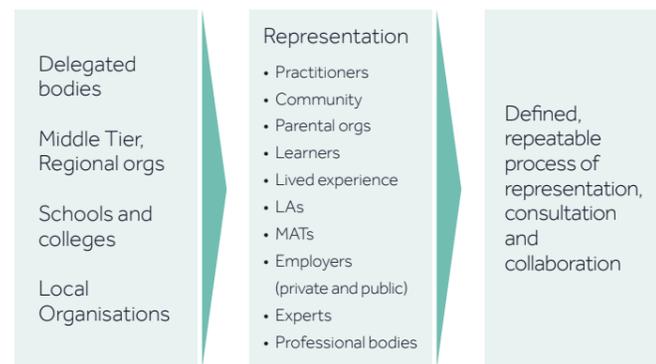
2b. Consultation, representation and collaboration (proposed)

A defined and repeatable process

A defined process for representation and consultation is a critical part of long-term strategic planning. It would allow all stakeholders to find better ways to engage and share views. This would build greater trust and a shared understanding of the policy agenda, why it matters and how it might best be enacted.

Critically, the government should indicate that challenging issues are taken out of “the normal course of business” for deeper, long-term consideration.

Varying representation and different forums are appropriate according to the policy issues in question. The following table is purely illustrative to emphasise that a one-size fits all approval is not appropriate. Engagement with stakeholders, experts and indeed the wider public should vary - this is currently managed in an ad-hoc and constantly changing way. Consistency is needed and effectiveness should be expected to grow over time.



At a local level, it is necessary to enable the key stakeholders to shape the policy in a way that works for their context and their reality. This can make it messy and time-consuming, but there are many tools that can be used to help structure the work – for example from Improvement Science, championed by the Carnegie Foundation for Teaching and Learning in the US (see Bryk, 2016).

Short-term	Longer-term		Fundamental
Sector/prof bodies, students and parents, community <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CPD • School-day length • Setting up hubs • Learning orgs. 	...plus employers, self employed, other stakeholders <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding • Qualifications • Parental choice 	Regional Forums <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skills agenda • Adult education 	Policy Boards <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum • Assessment • Teacher retention
		Citizens assemblies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Values • Vision • Structures 	

3. Harnessing evidence

Current shortcomings in evidence to support education policy making

When policy making is caught in a short-term cycle, it is extremely difficult for the DfE civil service to respond to requests for evidence-based advice. Six weeks is often provided for a policy review period. Given evidence constraints (below) this makes a thorough response difficult.

There is a wider issue – objective and unbiased evidence for policy making is often not readily available. For example, high profile organisations including many think tanks, professional bodies and the OECD can display bias. Independent research is constrained by financing restrictions so that it is unavailable in important decision making areas. Academic research is respected in many areas, but by and large focuses on education practice rather than policy. Neither is there popular mediation for policy research i.e. nothing like the EEF for practitioner research.



The need for institution building

Evidence for policy makers would be greatly assisted with institution building. Examination of practices overseas (see the EPI/edpol research below), illustrates that many countries have developed national institutions to close the “evidence gap”. There is a need for stronger comparative reviews covering other jurisdictions’ policy making, with greater synthesis to fully understand which other experiences are truly relevant for England (and the UK). There is also a need for an accessible and simple interface for policy research and reviews.

Strong evidence support for policy in other jurisdictions

Other jurisdictions have long-standing organisations to support policy makers

	Finland	Singapore	Australia	Japan
National Institutions	✓	✓	✓	✓
-for practice evidence	✓	✓	✓	✓
-for policy evidence	✓	✓	✓	✓
Government Funded	✓	✓	✗	✓
Operates with independence**	✓	✓	✓	✓
Commissions research	✓	✓	✓	✓
Priorities Set centrally	✓	✓	✗	✓
Vis a national plan	✓	✓	✗	✓
Existed > 20 years	✓	✓	✓	✓
Long term perspective	✓	✓	✓	✓
Examining evidence from other jurisdictions	?	✓	✓	✓

*Based on EPI/edpol research **How leading nations organise, focus and fund educational research, December 2020
 ** At very least pursue unrestrained methodological research

4. Periodic review of curriculum, assessment, etc

Considering how others make policy changes to major instruments

The OECD estimates large policy instruments (curriculum, assessment, structures) take 4 to 8 years to implement. Over the last 30 years, secondary curriculum has changed on average every 5 years and more frequently in FE colleges. This is in contrast to many other respected jurisdictions in education. In these countries, change is more likely to take place every ten years.

Preparation is extensive and consultation exhaustive, not least to get the buy-in from those who are likely to be affected by the change. Government is typically supported by long-established advisory and research bodies. Even countries which take a more top-down approach, like South Korea and Japan are very cautious in their approach.

Comparison of nations in curricula development - summary from EPI report 2021

	Finland Type 1	South Korea Type 2	New Zealand Type 1	Japan Type 2	Scotland Type 1	England Type 2
Timing and pace of change	• Every ten years	• Change in Government but "reform without change"	• "Very slow"	• Every ten years	• Every ten years	• Every five to six years
Actors and institutions	WIDE • National Agency (EDUFI) • Advisory group • 30 working groups	WIDE • Ministry of Education and Korean Institute for Curriculum and Evaluations (KICE) • Advisory committee	WIDE • Ministry of Education • Advisory panel • Writing panels	WIDE • Central Council for Education • Special Committee for Promotion of Education • Council for Education Rebuilding (ERC) • Advisory Body	WIDE • Scottish Qualification Agency • Learning & Teaching Scotland • HMIE	NARROW • Scottish Qualification Agency • Learning & Teaching Scotland • HMIE
Process	EXTENSIVE • Objectives • Consultation • Surveys • Research evidence • Feedback	TOP-DOWN • ERC • Research • University participation • Stakeholder participation	EXTENSIVE • "Expert reference group" • Consultation • Feedback	TOP-DOWN • ERC advisory by 20 person body • Varying background • CLE recommend actions	EXTENSIVE • Objectives • Consultation • Teacher engagement • Feedback	TOP-DOWN • "Plan - no" • Multiple Institutions - no • Advisory committee - ad hoc
Use of evidence and expertise	HIGH • Finnish education Evaluation centre • Research, evaluation surveys	MEDIUM • KICE Research • Monitoring and evaluation of policies	MEDIUM • International surveys • Teacher surveys • International Critiques • Evidence synthesis	MEDIUM • National Assessment of Academic Ability • National Institute for Education Policy Research	LOW / MEDIUM • Criticised for low usage • 2017 research strategy	LOW

* Including teachers and unions. ** Multiple government and/or arms length bodies.

Timing of periodic reviews

A large and experienced group discussed curriculum change at an Education Policy Institute (EPI) roundtable in November 2020. With slight dissent, it was agreed that curriculum review would best take place every ten years, with safeguards for specific and essential changes.

Periodic curriculum review (Extract, EPI Roundtable, November 2020)

- Where curriculum change is necessary, it should be made on a consistent periodic basis. Once every ten years is a good candidate for consideration, with formal approval needed to introduce intra-period change (see report for rolling, incremental review and refinement)
- This would need cross party agreement (after the event there were two absenters from this conclusion: one that there should be a review every five years and one that there would be no need for a review, unless there was a change in subject matter evidence)

Political representation

In a limited number of subjects there are political interests in curricula (e.g. History and English Literature). Respected and fair representation can be addressed through a revolving group of experts, where management and governance is balanced according to political party representation in the House of Commons, or with nominations from parties and changing with election success, as per the Supreme Court in the USA.

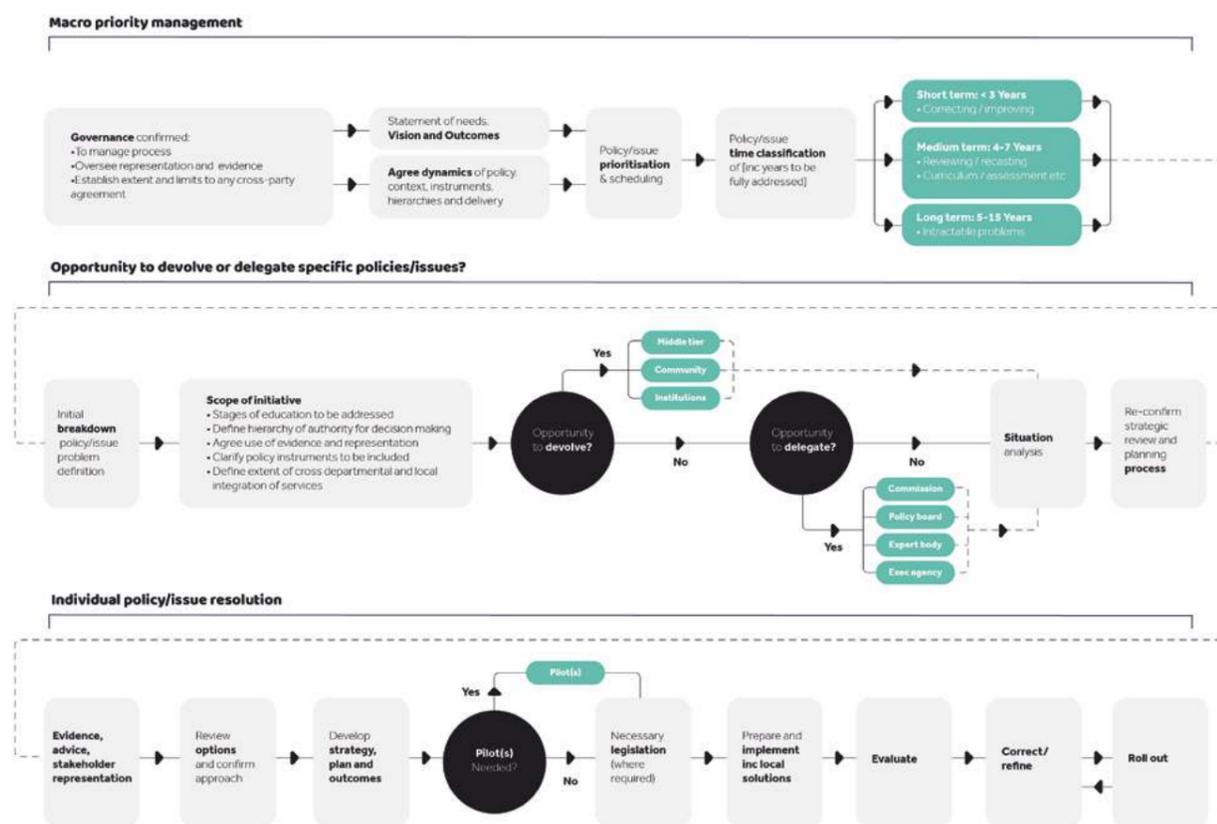
5. Intractable problems and other issue resolution

Policy issue resolution and planning

Some form of long-standing, respected and repeatable process would help to tackle challenges in education. Therefore, an issue resolution process has to sit at the heart of a long-term planning architecture.

Education is deceptively complex. Breaking down the constituents of policy making (policy instruments), understanding how they interact and then trying to resolve issues – this all involves many threads, and many players. It can only be managed within a defined process.

Policy/issue resolution and planning



Overview of the process diagram

At the outset, policy must be set within a broader vision, then categorised as possibly short-, medium- or long-term in nature. Then, it is possible to consider where a policy or issue is best resolved: by the central government or elsewhere? Perhaps through delegated or devolved power? These are macro considerations and there is an opportunity to give more consideration to these matters before moving to the solution stage.

Thereafter, there are clear and well established steps to disaggregate and examine individual policy issues: to understand where the shortfalls are and, how objectives might be achieved. Critically, these processes take time, in order to allow for appropriate consultation and gather suitable evidence. Even then of course, there are challenges of implementation and coherence.

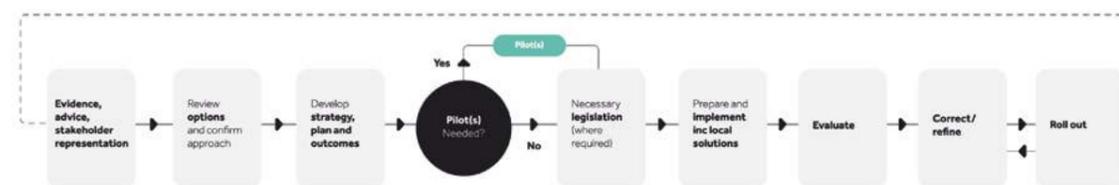
6. Implementation and evaluation

The importance of policy implementation

All seasoned experts in education emphasise the importance of implementation. It must take into account the need to gain buy-in, to take account of local circumstances and to allow policy development. From a fundamental point of view, it is important because those who deliver at the front line must feel they have agency; it is vital to protect and promote their intrinsic motivation.

Policy formation as part of implementation

Consultation is a necessary part of education policy development, in part to ensure experts and stakeholders are listened to, but also to ensure that those who are effected have buy-in to the policy development process, and hence the outcomes. Evidence from piloting, full evaluation and course correction not only increases the efficacy of a policy, it also increases confidence and cooperation in the policy.



Allowing for local circumstances

With a wide variation in local circumstances, a significant proportion of policies will not be optimal if they do not provide the conditions to allow local adaptation. Wise policy-making, with a balance across many policy levers, should recognise when there is a productive need for local discretion. This autonomy obviously has to be supported by the correct accountability and external measurements.

Implementation, experimentation and innovation

Much of the language of innovation is tied to the act of "doing unto others". Again, a long-term planning process should identify which policy areas are best managed at a local level, especially where there is a need for integration of various services. Further, which policy areas are best progressed bottom-up through innovation and experimentation? Here the policy development is part of the implementation process.

Capacity to absorb

Long-term strategic planning, by prioritising initiatives and considering education changes in the round, should take account of the capacity to change. That is the capacity for educational institutions and practitioners to absorb more change. Circumstances where policy initiatives are overlaying each other, or fighting against each other, are obviously best avoided.

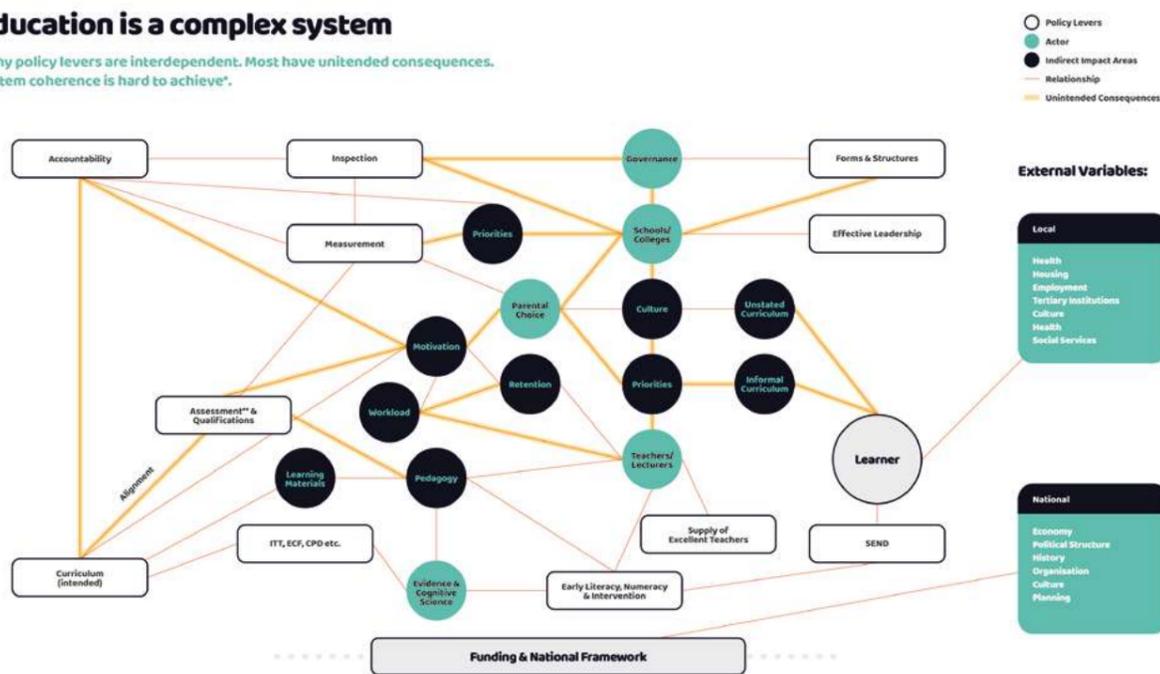
7. Developing system coherence (issue)

Complex Adjusting System

Education policy is particularly challenging because policy instruments are inter-dependent. Consequently, a movement of one lever can easily have unintended consequences. For example, prescriptive exams and public league tables encourages teaching to the test, measuring EBacc compliance narrows subject offerings, changes to the OFSTED key judgments frequently refocuses school efforts. Because of the reliance on intrinsic motivation, this can affect teacher retention, known to be one of the most important contributors to outcomes (another unintended consequence).

Education is a complex system

Many policy levers are interdependent. Most have unintended consequences. System coherence is hard to achieve.



Source: edpol.net

The above schematic draws on Cambridge Assessment's 2017 paper that considers system coherence and unintended consequences of moving policy instruments in isolation. In a similar vein, the OECD groups policy areas that have the most immediate impact on each other.

In the above diagram, the origin, impact and intensity of unintended policy changes are represented by "x" marks. These have a cumulative impact on governors, schools, colleges and learners.

7. Developing system coherence (resolution)

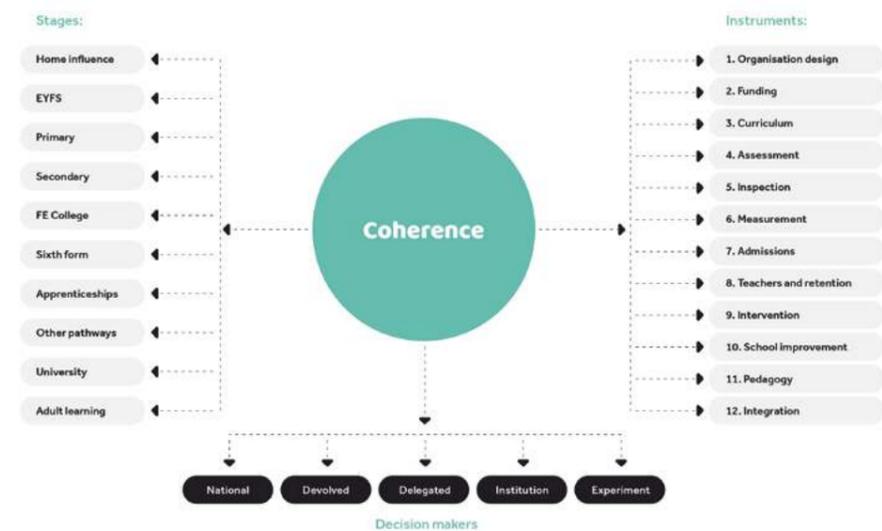
The quest for system coherence

Building system coherence is an important goal of long-term strategic education planning. System coherence achieves the best interplay between all aspects of the education eco-system. For example, central government and parents achieve the accountability and transparency that they desire; parents and students are provided with the subject and curriculum choice that they wish for; teachers and leaders are inspired and motivated; business and public employers believe we are building the necessary knowledge and skills for the future – and so on.

The optimal balance of these interests and the coherence in the eco-system to delivery it requires a deeper understanding of policy instruments and their dynamics, a better understanding of policy practice elsewhere and a richer appreciation of local circumstances and the efficacy of implementation.

All components contribute to system coherence

All components contribute to system coherence



To take on these challenges requires a longer-term mind set, a maturing architecture for policy-making and a new blueprint for policy planning and strategy. It will require more resource to assist policy making, most likely through delegation and devolution, a stronger process to resolve intractable issues, greater commitment to consultation and better use of available and improving evidence.

This Technical Annex builds upon the work of the FED's Workstream 2, with additional support from:

Patrick Wall
Loic Menzies
Professor Toby Greany

and material from edpol.net

Who are The FED?

The Foundation for Education Development (The FED) is a community interest company established to promote the benefits of a long-term vision and plan for education in England.

Founded in December 2019, it is an independent, non-political, and cross-sector body.

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