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Comparisons of nation's curricula and research development England as an outlier – summary tables

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

Comparison of nations in curricula development – Summary from EPI report

	Finland Type 1	South Korea Type 2	New Zealand Type 1	Japan Type 2	Scotland Type 1	England Type 2
Timing and Pace if Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Every 10 Years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Change in Government but “reform without change” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Very slow” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Every ten years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ten years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Every five to six years *
Actors and Institutions	<p><u>WIDE</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Agency (EDUFI) Advisory group 30 Working groups 	<p><u>WIDE</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ministry of Education and Korean Institute for Curriculum and Evaluations (KICE) Advisory committee 	<p><u>WIDE</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ministry of Education Advisory panel Writing panels 	<p><u>WIDE</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Central Council for Education Special Committee for Promotion of Education Council for Education Rebuilding (ERC) Advisory Body 	<p><u>WIDE</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scottish Qualification Agency Learning and Teaching Scotland HMIE 	<p><u>NARROW</u> *</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Ministry of Education” - DfE
Process	<p><u>EXTENSIVE</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Objectives Consultation Surveys Research Evidence Feedback 	<p><u>TOP DOWN</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agenda Research University Participation Stakeholder Participation 	<p><u>EXTENSIVE</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plan Expert Reference Group * Consultation Feedback 	<p><u>TOP DOWN</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ERC Advised by 20 person body Varying background CLE recommend actions 	<p><u>EXTENSIVE</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Objectives Consultation Teacher Engagement Feedback 	<p><u>TOP DOWN</u> **</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plan - No Multiple Institutions – No Advisory Committee – Ad Hoc Wide Consultation – Ad Hoc
Use of evidence and expertise	<p><u>HIGH</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finnish Education Evaluation Centre Research, Evaluation Surveys 	<p><u>MEDIUM?</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> KICE Research Monitoring and Evaluation of Policies 	<p><u>MEDIUM</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> International Surveys Teacher Surveys International Critiques Evidence Synthesis 	<p><u>MEDIUM</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Assessment of Academic Ability National Institute for Education Policy Research 	<p><u>LOW/MEDIUM</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Criticised for Low Usage 2017 Research Strategy 	<p><u>LOW</u></p>
Status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advisory / Voluntary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mandatory 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mandatory 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mandatory?

* Including Teachers and Unions

** Multiple Government and/or Arms Length Bodies

Comparison of curriculum development: England and other countries

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Background

The EPI has recently reviewed curriculum development in Finland, New Zealand, Japan, Scotland and South Korea (*How leading Education Nations develop and reform their curriculum systems - Nov 2020*). At the same time, edpol has written a review covering thirty years of change in curriculum and assessment in England. This paper is a short comparison of practices in all these countries - with particular regard to England.

Overview

It is important to note, that with the increase in international comparisons through PISA, all countries have been exercising more control over national curriculum, with a greater emphasis on “standards”. That said, there are a range of approaches to curriculum development and England is clearly an outlier. In contrast to England’s increasingly centralised and ad-hoc approach, all other countries operate within a longer-term vision or plan, engage with many formal institutions, use advisory boards and consider evidence. The majority only change their curriculum every ten years (or longer) and consult widely.

Consensual countries

The six countries can be broken into two groups: “consensual” or “top down”. Finland, New Zealand and Scotland are in the first group. Curriculum reform takes place every ten years, or even more slowly. Reform is based on a long-term plan, road map or vision. The participation of actors is wide, including multiple national agencies, advisory groups, teachers and other stakeholders. The process starts with a statement of objectives, followed by consultation, surveys, research and feedback. Apart from Scotland (who have since modified their initial approach), there is wide use of research and evidence.

Comparison of curriculum development (cont.)

Top down

“Top down” countries include South Korea, Japan and England. Notably these are the larger countries. Curriculum change takes place every five to six years in England and South Korea but is planned every ten years in Japan. The Ministry of Education or equivalent takes the lead in initiating the process and consultation is generally weaker. That said, the ad hoc and frequent change of curriculum in England is certainly a unique case. Unlike England, Japan and South Korea have been wrestling with fundamental issues in their curricula*. Further, the contributing actors and institutions are far wider than England, including multiple government institutions and research bodies, the latter acting with independence. In contrast England has unusually narrow participation and plans, consultation and advisory committees change with Ministers. England's negligible use of research and evidence for curriculum development is also a singular characteristic.

Measures of success

The EPI paper loosely used a selection of success criteria to evaluate the different countries. Applying these to England, change is frequent and disruptive; professional buy-in to policy has been low and there have been pressing issues related to workload. The one other criterion is improvement in attainment according to PISA rankings or national statistics, where conclusions are harder to draw, especially as curricula change take five to fifteen years to work through the system.

*Japan and South Korea have endeavoured to correct fundamental weaknesses in their curriculum and schooling. The upheaval in Korea is due to a commitment to introduce competency framework to broaden the knowledge-based curriculum and to address the issue of unhappy children. Similarly, Japan has wrestled with this question, having corrected for this earlier in the century, then concerned that their system has become too relaxed or “yutori”

Comparison of nations in use of education research – Summary from EPI report*

Other jurisdictions have national institutions to support both policy makers and practitioners with evidence. These are large, standing organisations. Excluding EEF for practitioners, England offers little to policy makers in comparison.

	Finland	Singapore	Australia	Japan	Scotland	England***
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Commissions research	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	x
Priorities	Set centrally	✓	✓ x	✓	✓	x
	Vis a national plan	✓	✓	x	✓	x
Existed > 20 years	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	x
Long term perspective	✓	✓	✓	✓	?	x
Examining evidence from other jurisdictions	?	✓	✓	✓	✓	x

Insight:

- Excluding England, in other nations large, national institutions exist to provide rigorous research and evidence
- Different categories of evidence are used to advise a) policy makers and b) practitioners
- Institutions are well established with long-term perspective
- Typically research is directed in accordance with a national plan
- In all cases, institutions exist to objectively understand policy and to improve outcomes
- Funding is typically through government and research integrity is protected
- Evidence is sought from other jurisdiction

*Based on EPI/edpol research "How leading nations organise, focus and fund educational research; December 2020

** At very least pursue unrestrained methodological research *** For policy makers and excludes NFER/IOE – having no comprehensive plans with government for policy makers

Comparison of curriculum development: England and other countries

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Collaborative countries

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