

Education Scotland core strategies

Strategic objective 3:

Building the capacity of education providers to improve their performance continuously



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1: What is this strategy trying to do?

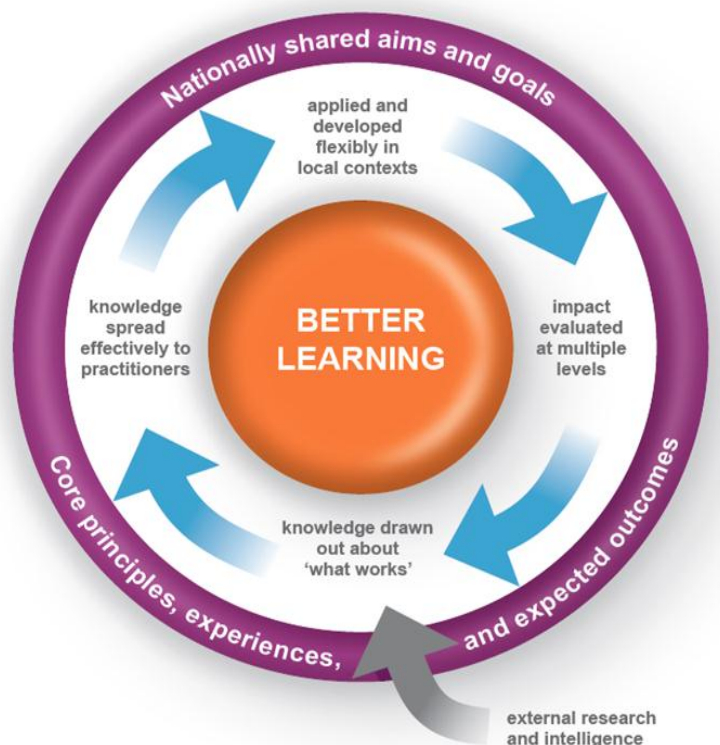
This strategy is designed to support the implementation of Education Scotland's third strategic objective, which aims to 'build the capacity of education providers to improve their performance continuously'. It should be viewed within the overall context of the corporate plan and is one of a suite of strategies which will be developed for each strategic objective.

Each strategy exists to help all Education Scotland staff and our key stakeholders align their work to make the biggest possible impact. When planning and delivering our work, we should use these strategies to ask ourselves whether what we are doing, or the way we are doing it, can be further improved to have even more impact.

What do we say in the corporate plan about strategic objective 3?

The corporate plan contains clear commitments and measures for each of Education Scotland's strategic objectives. Evidence suggests that the education system in Scotland is 'good' but with the help of our partners we want it to become a 'great' system. We want to ensure this happens as soon as possible and have designed an approach to accelerate this process. We want to build and support a learning system in which the strong collective engagement of a highly professional workforce creates a virtuous cycle of improvement. This learning system has learners at the centre and relies on a high-quality professional workforce to make it work. Our approach within this strategy is underpinned by this cycle.

'The virtuous cycle of improvement', Education Scotland



In talking about this objective, the corporate plan says:

We will:

- work with partners, national and international, to explore new and innovative approaches for building capacity with a focus on improving outcomes through new partnering arrangements that use the education system's collective expertise, knowledge and skills to maximum impact. This will include the development of school improvement partnerships;
- ensure that the approaches and tools we promote for the purposes of self-evaluation are reviewed regularly and updated to ensure they are fit for purpose;
- develop new, more coherent systems to give education providers ready access to innovative and effective practice, analysis and data to inform their self-improvement activities and provide specific professional learning to help them use data effectively to improve performance;
- develop new, more integrated approaches to improvement and self-evaluation in partnership with other scrutiny organisations, to ensure that approaches are aligned as effectively as possible;
- enhance the ability of local authorities and community planning partnerships to drive their own improvement in partnership with other scrutiny organisations with particular support to the Early Years Collaborative;
- provide new, more customised and formalised support, for education providers to improve learning outcomes based on effective planning and identified need. This includes local partnership agreements between ourselves and local authorities;
- provide a clear focus on improving life chances for our most vulnerable learners, including delivering career-long professional learning in preventative work;
- give particular priority to training providers in methodologies designed to help them anticipate long-term challenges and plan effectively for the changes that will be required over time, helping them have a clear view of learners' future needs; and
- work with partners and providers to develop and deliver inspections and reviews that build further on self-evaluation and international best practice, and increase further the focus on improvement and effective change.

How will we know if we are succeeding?

Some of the key activities which will provide evidence of success include:

- learner outcomes will improve and become increasingly more equitable as measured through the use of relevant senior phase benchmarking information and other national and international benchmarking indicators;
- providers will make progress in building their own capacity for self-improvement as monitored through inspection and other evaluative activities, for example at a strategic level through the Shared Risk Assessment (SRA) process;

- feedback from practitioners, providers and our partners will confirm that they feel we are working more effectively and collaboratively with our partners to bring about improvement;
- the quality and rigour of self-evaluation will have improved particularly at practitioner level and in community planning partnerships as evidenced through feedback from providers, inspection and other evaluative activity; and
- our stakeholders will confirm that we have increased the proportion of our work which focuses on stimulating innovation and brokering knowledge across all sectors and learning communities.

What is this strategy trying to achieve?

This strategy builds on a range of international approaches to improvement that we know make a difference. It builds on educational research and incorporates the best blend of approaches that will support and act as a catalyst for continuous improvement. It is designed to be flexible and responsive and to provide a coherent framework that will guide the work of all staff across Education Scotland in the range of work they do to build capacity for continuous improvement.

What does this strategy commit our staff to?

Our staff will:

- use the approaches set out within this strategy to work closely with providers and partners to enhance their capacity for self-improvement;
- ensure that they, working individually and collectively in teams, have a clear understanding of the approaches set out in this strategy and that they use the approaches consistently to underpin their work;
- develop our support materials, future frameworks and tools for improvement using the approaches outlined within the strategy;
- continue to work alongside the Scottish Government and others to seek ways to align and complement other approaches to building capacity for improvement; and
- evaluate the impact of this strategy across all aspects of our work to ensure that we are building capacity for improvement at all levels and ensure that our work has a positive impact.

2: What do we believe about building capacity for improvement?

The continuous improvement process is one that builds the capacity of an organisation or service to understand its local context better and review its own effectiveness in driving improved outcomes. It is about building the capacity of the workforce to carry out effective self-evaluation, understand and reflect on research and best practice and find creative and innovative approaches to bring about sustained improvement. This process relies on the need to consider each of these elements as part of an integrated process and not as separate or distinct activities.

Improvement occurs when providers give opportunities for learning in context, deliver the changes themselves and commit to a cycle of continuous improvement. This improvement framework is based on an organisational learning system. To realise the full potential for improvement it is important that a number of key components are in place.

The culture for self-improvement

Fundamental to the delivery of an excellent education system is a culture where all involved aim for the highest standard of service delivery possible. An embedded culture of self-improvement is the basis for progress towards excellence in provision.

‘There is a direct relationship between culture and organisational effectiveness.’¹

The key components:

- 1. Looking inwards:** to evaluate performance at every level and use the information gathered to decide on what needs to be done to improve (self-evaluation).
- 2. Looking outwards:** to learn from research, others and best practice and use this to facilitate innovation and creativity and inform improvement actions.
- 3. Looking forwards:** to explore what the future might bring and use this information to anticipate what change is required to ensure the education system is responsive to the future needs of all learners (transformational change).

¹ Peter Senge and the Learning Organisation, in *infed*, 29 May, 2012.



What do these mean?

Looking inwards (self-evaluation)

‘Self-evaluation is a process of reflection on practice, made systematic and transparent, with the aim of improving pupil, professional and organisational learning.’²

A well-established improvement culture uses the outcomes of ongoing high-quality self-evaluation to plan for improvement. It is important that the direction for future improvement comes from within the provision and its partners. The process of self-evaluation supports the provider in making improvements where required, facilitating innovation and celebrating best practice. It is a process based on professional reflection, collaboration and enquiry, support and challenge among professionals and stakeholders. Self-evaluation should be ongoing at all levels within an organisation. The self-evaluation process uses the triangulation of evidence-based information and data, people’s views and direct observation of practice to inform outcomes and measure impact on learners. Involving and including all professionals, stakeholders and delivery partners in the process leads to a shared assessment of risk and increasing confidence in planning for improvement.

‘Sharply focused monitoring, based on clear indicators, can help measure the extent to which practice is effective or not.’³

The effectiveness of the self-evaluation process has a direct impact on the success of strategic planning and transformational change.

² MacBeath, J, School inspection and self-evaluation: working with the new relationship, Routledge, London, 2006.

³ Chapman, C, Sammons,P, School self-evaluation for school improvement: what works and why?, CfBT Education Trust, 2012.

External support for self-evaluation supports the provider's own work in facilitating innovative practice and leading change and improvement. It also enhances the provider's ability to make more precise and valid judgments on the quality and effectiveness of their own work and allows for access to a wider range of skills, knowledge and information.

Looking outwards – learning from others and what happens elsewhere

'Creativity and innovation are key elements which propel organisations to the top.'⁴

The identification and affirmation of innovative practice is essential to support the national education system and for educational provision to continue to improve. It provides a useful benchmark for others in key areas of development as well as generating new ideas and new ways of thinking. Where a well-established and highly effective improvement culture exists, practitioners are proactive in looking to others for new ideas that challenges their practice and supports the continuous improvement process. Learning from 'best problems' should also be part of this approach. The ability to critically evaluate and look at issues and new solutions where improvement has been more challenging is just as important as learning from what has worked well.

Learning from educational research is vitally important to ensure that key improvements are based on evidence of what works. Key national developments in teacher education are encouraging greater use of research in initial teacher education, career-long professional learning and in leadership development. We know that practitioners do not always have access to high-quality educational research and that they would benefit from new ways of taking the key messages from research and sharing these in meaningful ways where they can make the biggest difference.

Looking forwards (transformational change) – exploring what the future might hold for today's learners

Transformational change is the process whereby positive change and developments are achieved and sustained. Sometimes improvement can be achieved through small, incremental steps, whereas more radical and creative approaches at system level are sometimes required to bring about the best possible impact. Both require strong leadership, effective partnership working and an aspirational vision for the future. The change that is required is informed through the outcomes of self-evaluation and learns from best and innovative practice from elsewhere, driving continuous learning and improved results.

⁴ What is transformational change? In (XMOFEDIT, 2010).

‘Transformational change is grounded in positive vision and focussing on what we want to create.’⁵

The Scottish Government has introduced a Three Step Improvement Framework for Scotland’s public services in key areas of its work such as the Early Years Collaborative. It has been developed to help unlock and channel the collective knowledge and energy of staff towards a common goal of real and lasting improvement across public services. The framework is designed to prompt self-reflection, self-assessment and debate. It is about getting started and creating conditions for implementing improvements that will make a difference.

The following cycle can be used to turn ideas into action and connect action to learning so that the right changes can be developed and spread to maximise improvement.



The Improvement Guide, Langley et al, 2009, 2nd edition

This approach is one amongst many that are proven to be effective in certain circumstances. To be effective, the change for improvement process must place an emphasis on:

- individual and organisational leadership;
- professional learning;
- process; and
- improved outcomes and measurable impact.

Having a toolkit of different approaches is important to match most appropriately to specific circumstances. What needs to be done should be informed by providers’ self-evaluation activity and other available performance information.

⁵ ‘The Futures of School Reform’ In Harvard Graduate School of Education 21 March, 2013.

What are the building blocks needed to ensure that this approach makes the biggest difference?

Embedding the inwards, outwards, forwards approach in the education system requires the right conditions to ensure they make the biggest difference. Supporting practitioners and providers in how they establish and embed these will be a key focus for Education Scotland, both through this strategy and in other key areas of our work. It will be essential that our staff have a depth of understanding about what these mean in the context of their own work and also for the education system as a whole.

1. Ensuring a drive and ambition which is focused on improving outcomes for all.

Essential to the improvement process is ensuring a clear purpose and ambition for what is to be achieved. We should encourage and support a relentless focus on capacity building in this area and particularly focus on issues of inequity. This element is critical as improving outcomes should be at the core of all that we are trying to achieve.

2. Embedding a culture of self-improvement.

We need to ensure a more flexible, impact-focused, collegiate culture where staff readily seek to work together to make a difference for learners. All staff will be fully engaged and understand their role in the improvement process. Having a culture where staff see this as their core business is essential and this needs to be underpinned by ensuring staff feel able to identify what is not working and to seek support and strategies to make improvements.

3. Ensuring high quality learning and leadership for staff at all levels (strategic objective 2)

High-quality learning and leadership development will underpin the extent to which practitioners and the system are able to improve. Developing all staff as leaders and enquiring professionals who are able to critically evaluate and improve their work is a core component. This is a complex process that we will require to understand and support fully.

4. Taking a partnership approach to building capacity for improvement.

We expect that staff from across the education sectors will seek new and innovative ways to work together to bring about improvements. This should include working together on self-evaluation, joint planning and sharing expertise and good practice. We will be required to work in similar ways across Education Scotland to fully understand how improvements can be made in other areas.

3: What are the key features of implementation?

This section provides an overview of the key aspects of implementing this strategy. The detailed actions are held within the associated action plan.

We will:

- develop an action plan which will drive the successful implementation of the strategy. This plan will provide detail of professional learning for staff, how the key features of the strategy will be taken forward across all aspects of Education Scotland and how this will impact on our engagement with external providers and partners;
- provide professional learning for all staff on the key elements of the strategy and set clear expectations about how this should influence our work going forward. We will also seek opportunities to use the approaches in planning our work through the business planning process and signal in our plans how we will know these are making a difference;
- set up a strategic group that will oversee how the strategy is being used and implemented across all aspects of Education Scotland's work. This group will consider key issues relating to improvement and provide an appropriate stimulus and catalyst for new approaches as required. This group will also act as the 'guardian' for the development of Education Scotland materials such as improvement frameworks to ensure that they are developed in line with the strategy;
- develop a set of guiding principles which will be used in the development of new frameworks and tools for improvement. These principles will include a requirement for all new frameworks and tools to be focused on improvement with inwards, outwards and forwards as core elements;
- work closely with teams from across Education Scotland to ensure that their engagement with external providers and partners reflects the key elements of the strategy. Key groups will include Area Lead Officers and their work with education authorities through the partnership agreements and Senior Education Officers who will be engaging directly with educators on how to bring about improvement;
- use the strategy in our engagement with key stakeholder groups and seek ways to emphasise its key messages with stakeholders as appropriate; and
- ensure transparency and openness by placing the strategy on our website as part of our suite of approaches for improvement.

4: How will we evaluate the impact of this strategy?

We will work with teams across Education Scotland to evaluate the impact of the strategy. An Assistant Director will work with teams to determine the best approach to gathering evidence of impact and to provide appropriate support and challenge as required. We will introduce systems that allow us to evaluate the impact of this strategy through:

- establishing rigorous and systematic approaches for teams to self-evaluate their work against the key components of the strategy and the extent to which they are making a difference;
- seeking feedback from our staff on how the strategy is impacting on their work;
- establishing systems to gather feedback from stakeholders on how the use of the virtuous cycle and the inwards, outwards, forwards approaches have impacted on their own improvement work; and
- carrying out an annual impact assessment on a small number of priority areas to be identified through the business planning process. This will include using approaches such as impact assessments and ongoing self-evaluation carried out by each team. Teams will be required to report on the impact of the strategy on an annual basis to the strategy group and through this to provide evidence to the Strategic Impact Board.

T +44 (0)141 282 5000
E enquiries@educationscotland.gov.uk
W www.educationscotland.gov.uk

Education Scotland, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Almondvale Way,
Livingston, EH54 6GA

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