

**A Brief Summary of Preliminary Findings:**  
**Review of the “Project for Autonomy and Flexibility”**

*Portugal is encouraged to continue its efforts to prepare future-ready schools, teachers and students.*

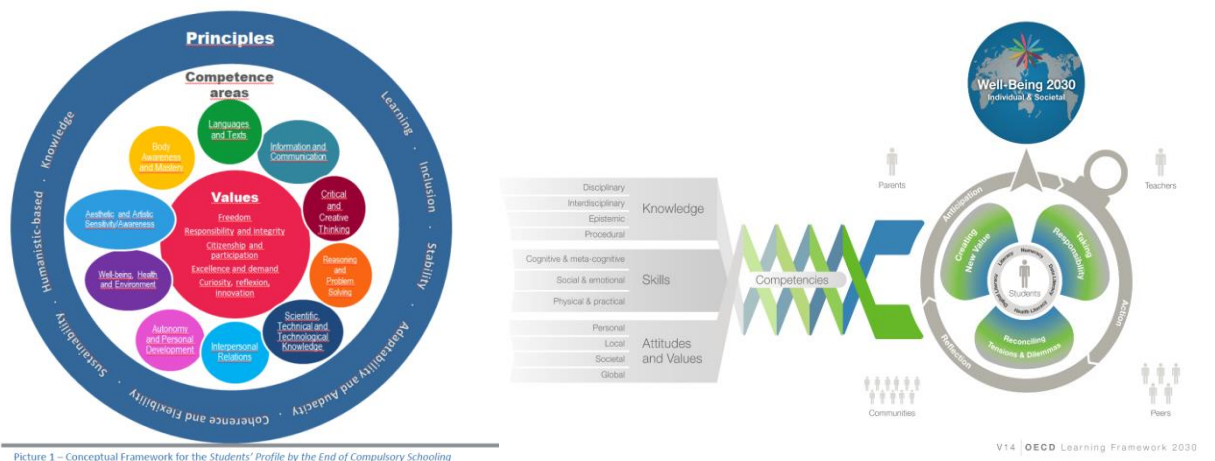
Andreas Schleicher, Director of the Directorate for Education and Skills, the OECD, launched the preliminary findings of the OECD review of the current Ministry's initiative **“Project for Autonomy and Flexibility”** on 9 February 2018. The OECD review team conducted a field study 15-19 January 2018 and set out their preliminary findings on strengths, challenges and considerations for next steps. The preliminary findings are presented on 9 February 2018 by The international review was led by Miho Taguma (project manager of the OECD Education 2030), Lars Barteit (Analyst, the OECD), Connie Chung (consultant in education, the United States of America), Sietske Waslander (Professor, Tilburg University, the Netherlands), Valerie Hannon (consultant in education and innovation, the United Kingdom), Luis Garciade Brigard (consultant, Columbia, France).

*Andreas Schleicher welcomes the initiative as a way to allow and encourage schools and teachers to find local solutions and innovations.*

The initiative is in line with one of the OECD recommendations for OECD's Skills Strategy Diagnosis for Portugal, i.e. "adjusting decision-making power to meet local needs". The Portuguese economy is recovering but raising competency levels of today children is essential for a better future for Portugal. We cannot predict the future, but we need to be open and ready for it. Today's Portuguese children will create future of Portuguese future economy and society. They need to seize opportunities and find solutions to challenges that have not yet been anticipated. What kind of competencies do today's students need to create a new future of Portugal?

*Underlying concepts of the Portuguese Student Profile is in line with the OECD Learning Framework 2030.*

Students who are best prepared for the future are change agents. They can have a positive impact on their surroundings, influence the future, understand others' intentions, actions and feelings, and anticipate the short and long-term consequences of what they do. The OECD Learning Framework 2030 acknowledges that the concept of "competency" implies more than just the acquisition of knowledge and skills; it involves the mobilisation of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values to meet complex demands.



Picture 1 – Conceptual Framework for the Students' Profile by the End of Compulsory Schooling

V14 | OECD Learning Framework 2030

Other initiatives launched by the Ministry are also in line with the efforts which other countries are also making to improve both excellence and equity in their education systems. Such initiatives include:

- **National Program for Promoting School Success**
- **National Education Strategy for Citizenship**
- **Essential Core curriculum**
- **Curriculum Orientations for Pre-school**
- **In-service training**
- **New law for inclusion**
- **Changes in assessments (promoting formative assessment and diversity of instruments)**
- **InCode 2030**
- **National Reading Plan and network of school libraries**

The OECD experts reviewed strengths and challenges of the pilot, and suggested considerations for next steps in three areas: 1) overall strategy, 2) curriculum design and 3) curriculum implementation.

### 1. The overall strategy matters for a sustainable change.

*The OECD review team highly highlights the importance of alignment between the Student Profile, curriculum, pedagogies, assessments, teacher education and professional development, and school leaders' training.*

The Project is in line with the OECD review on the National Skills Strategy towards improving quality and equity in education by setting enabling conditions, such as adjusting decision-making power to meet local needs, and building capacity and partnerships for evidence-based skills policy. Furthermore, the review team identified the followings:

#### Strengths

- Strategic thinking: there is a clear Theory of Action” for a change.
- “Student profile” with broadened outcomes as well as a strong sense of ownership

- Strategic approach to communications, e.g. ‘Student Profile Day’ on 15 January 2018
- The ‘openness for reflections’ of the Ministry in respect of the pilot.

#### Challenges

- Conflict with associated assessments/ articulation between different types of assessment (internal/external)
- Misunderstanding that “greater flexibility in the curriculum” and “essential learning lead to “lowering learning standards”
- Conflict with dominant model of high centralization: inherent conflicts between the learning model implicit in the pilot project and the existing highly prescribed, centralized system
- Culture clash: students experience of participative, relevant, competency-based approaches in the flexible curriculum, in comparison with deeply dissatisfied with the ‘traditional’ offer in schools
- Further engagement of non-pilot schools into national initiatives e.g. student profile.

#### Considerations for next steps

- Intensify collecting evidence of impact of the pilot
  - evidence of improved student engagement and outcomes;
  - evidence of improved teacher well-being;
  - evidence of good practice at all levels.
- Priorities investment in capacity building to develop teacher and leadership skills.
- Launch a debate on entrance to university to align it with Student Profile
- Fulfil the promise to extend the project to all schools in 2018/19, making clear the voluntary nature.
- Prepared for expected/ unexpected consequences
- Ensure continuity of this change with a long time frame to ensure real effects.

## **2) Curriculum design can be everyone's business, not limited to the national authority.**

*The OECD review team has seen how schools and teachers take part in designing curriculum, avoiding "curriculum overload" and "outdated curriculum". When schools and teachers design curriculum, it not only helps students to attain better outcomes but also students enjoy learning processes. Furthermore, it supports teachers' professional development and they feel empowered.*

The curriculum autonomy and flexibility project provides great opportunities to tackle key curriculum design issues that are identified as common challenges across OECD countries. One is "**curriculum overload**"; confronted with new demands from parents, universities and employers, schools are dealing with curriculum overload. As a result, students often lack sufficient time to master key disciplinary concepts or, in the interests of a balanced life, to nurture friendships, to sleep and to exercise. It is time to shift the focus of our students from "more hours for learning" to "quality learning time". Another is "**managing time lags**"; curricula reforms suffer from time lags between recognition, decision making, implementation and impact. The gap between the intent of the curriculum and learning outcome is generally too wide.

Flexibility and autonomy are likely to support schools and teachers to find local solutions to address the issue of curriculum overload and time lags. The review team found the following in the pilot schools:

### Strengths

- The process involved hearing headmaster, teacher societies, Unions, the National Council for Education, researchers, social partners, parent representatives, students; and thus, stakeholders understood the broader vision for the purposes of education as outlined by the pilot project and the Student Profile.
- The pilot project (not compulsory) gives legal space for all schools to spontaneously and progressively adhere to the possibilities for curriculum design, especially, exemplar schools justification for experimental pedagogies, e.g. project-based learning and formative assessment.
- The pilot enabled teachers to design and experience meaningful in-school professional development.
- The pilot project enabled teachers to experience and value diversity in curriculum for inclusion and equity.
- The pilot project enabled students to experience and value the following elements of curriculum design to strengthen the design principle of “authenticity”.
  - Opportunity to learn how to work and learn together with peers (sometimes across different grades)
  - Opportunity to build positive relationships with teachers
  - Opportunity to make choices that reflects their interests
  - Opportunity to present their work that went beyond the teacher, into the community, for purposes other than grades, such as presenting at science fairs and using relevant knowledge and skills to solve school and community issues
  - Relevance to future (university work, professional work, becoming a citizen)
  - Opportunity to connect schools with professionals in the community
  - Diversity of learning methods (e.g. active learning)

### Challenges

- Dilemma between two worlds when designing curriculum: teaching for the national exam vs. active learning, formative assessment, etc.
- Technical complexities e.g. structure school time, arranging inter-disciplinary learning when designing curriculum flexibility
- Scaling and sustainability: e.g.
  - Prioritizing student learning and engagement
  - A culture of learning, trust, creativity, thoughtful risk taking,
  - Regular practice of faculty collaboration; students collaboration, reflection and action to improve practice; engaging and building partnerships with community and other stakeholders
- Managing differences between school practices.

### Considerations for next steps

- Continue to gather feedback from teachers on the pilot experiences, research on different models of curriculum design and share them with all schools to ensure equity
- Identify “lighthouse schools” so other schools can visit and see the successful pilot projects, student profile, and policy in action – but keep resistance to “standardise”.
- Continue to ensure that the pilot project spreads within schools, to ensure equity and equal access to all students

- Build clarity about competence to be attained by students with ICT to support better flexible curriculum design

### **3) Continuity, scaling and capacity building are keys to effective curriculum implementation.**

*The OECD review team found the voluntary nature of the project gave legal space to innovative teachers to experiment their educational innovations and also gave reassuring space to teachers who need more time to make changes at their own pace.*

#### Strengths

- The voluntary nature of the flexibility ensures incremental change for school leaders and teachers.
- The pilot helped to identify enthusiastic school leaders and teachers, as a source holder of good practices e.g. teachers working together
- The pilot empowered exemplar teachers by legitimising and endorsing good practices
- The pilot gathered emerging and existing evidence of teacher innovation, leadership, and creativity as well as teacher well-being.

#### Challenges

- The cultural shift for school leaders and teachers: from preparing for the national exam to more collaborative form of working, different role of teachers, valuing student agency and co-agency
- Networking and professional exchange: It is arranged rather ad hoc or informally. The degree and relevance is up to school leaders.
- Teaching workforce structure and status: older than the OECD average, status of teaching profession.
- Different degree of curriculum innovation within and across schools.

#### Considerations for next steps

- Ensure continuity from past, now, and future
- Prioritize school leadership training
- Use the pilot as an opportunity to cultivate/ change a culture of teacher feedback
- Create a new path to teaching profession (as part of the preparation of retirement of a large teaching workforce) e.g. pedagogical support qualifications e.g. ICT, project management
- Collect exemplars e.g. specific features of good practices, emerging models of “interdisciplinary subjects”, different assessment practices;
- Capitalise on the existing channels e.g. school clusters, network of libraries, association of professional subjects to share good practices