ISLAND SCHOOLS

Policy briefings for island schools

22/05/2023 | based on the stakeholder meeting results of all project partners

Call for more flexibility and power to the pupils/ schools

There is a demand for **more power to the schools, pupils and the local communities–** asking for more **equity** and decision power. The role of the pupils themselves should be strengthened and more local/ 'on the ground' discussions should be held.

- More flexibility for schools is wanted, for example regarding funds to fight poverty among pupils and in general to facilitate more **custom work**
- In regards to that, **inspection** and **assessment procedures** should **acknowledge** the **special situation** of island schools and the learners, for example the definition of success may differ.

An example is that **teachers** who are **not completely qualified yet** can already teach or that teachers can also **teach older pupils** as long as the results are fine. The final responsibility for that lays with the head teacher. Another example mentioned is the possibility to let the best swimmer available teach swimming lessons **instead of focusing too much on the 'right' certificates** and papers.

However, the **question is how the need for an exception is determined.**

Call for place-based and adaptive policies

- **Island policy proofing** like already practiced on Scotland (see best practice example in box below) is perceived as a relevant policy mechanism to take special circumstances of island schools into account
- Each island (school) has to be regarded in its own context, circumstances of island schools can still be very different from place to place; therefore place-specific conditions should be heard and considered

Best practice example: Island policy proofing

Scotland is unique in having an island focused legislation:
Islands (Scotland) Act 2018
This gives voice to islanders in the national policy

One of main instruments:
Island Communities Impact Assessments (ICIAs):

The government & other public bodies have to carry out ICIA for any policy or legislation with (possible) impact on an Island Community
This applies to new and already existing policy
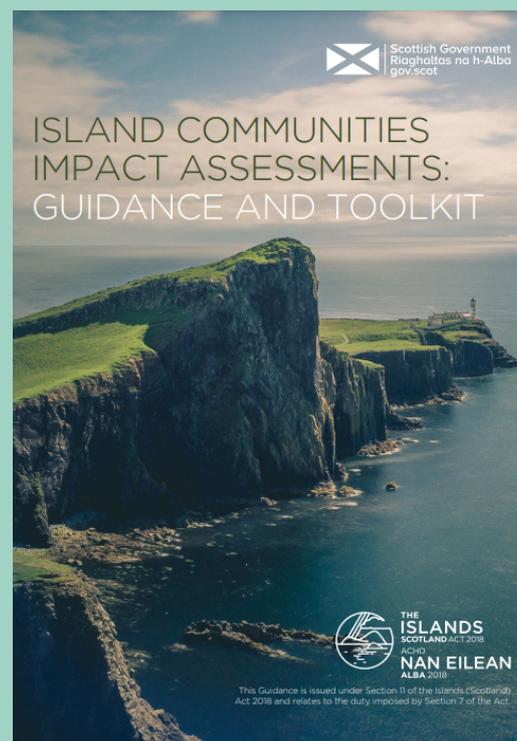
Islander's voices and concerns are taken into account, therefore this is an effective instrument to empower island communities, also in governance of education

It is strongly advised to include communities and consult stakeholders for an impact assessment, which shows that the voice of island communities is valued
Also see: https://www.gov.scot/publications/island-communities-impact-assessments-guidance-toolkit-2/

Call for more exchange and collaboration

- In general, there is a wish and vision for **more collaboration among (island) schools, schools on the mainland and related stakeholders.** The exchange can also be improved on an **international level**
- (Regional) collaborations for fostering exchange **among teachers**, schools and best practices can also provide more **influential power**. If direct connections to other islands may be difficult like in the Greek case, **meetings** can also take place **online**
- There is a **demand for exchange not only among island schools,** but also beyond since for example **remote and rural schools** on the mainland may face **similar issues**

Specific teaching and community needs

- **Step away from a problem-focused perspective:** Rather, positive developments, initiatives and benefits of island schools should be recognized and appreciated, for example regarding inclusivity and diversity. Sharing this experience with other schools is highly recommended.
- **Accept online learning as a chance for island schools and pupils:** For example, online learning can also be used for talent classes or to make use of staff resources outside the island. However, the option for online learning is sometimes still hindered
- **More attention to and collaboration regarding sustainability aspects in teaching:** Students and schools can play a vital role in that on the islands
- **Acknowledge the wider (potential) role of schools for communities:** For example, schools can serve as community hubs and in general, the schools provide a place to meet. Such extra functionality does not necessarily need to be organised by and depend on the school itself. Nice examples for such activities mentioned were a reading contest for which also elderly were invited and afterschool activities offered in schools.
- **Ferry connections are crucial:** These can change the whole dynamism among the island communities, so better connectivity therefore has both, advantages and disadvantages. For example, pupils have better access to education offers on the mainland/ on other islands. Yet, it can also further erode island schools and pupils might miss out on island community.

Country-/island-specific policy recommendations

Greece:

For Greece, the school (gymnasium) on the island of Astypalea, together with their partner organisation IDEC was in the lead of organising a stakeholder meeting for the development of policy recommendations.

Some relevant facts about Astypalea:

There is one nursery school, one elementary school and one secondary school to be found on the island. In total, there are about 160 pupils and 26 teachers. The island has around 1300 inhabitants, the recent population growth has been around 7%, and the median age on the island is 43. The main economic activities on the island are related to tourism, construction and farming/ fishing. Astypalea is reachable by ferry and plane. In summer, there are more ferry and plane connections than in winter time.

Findings:

In general, there is call for **better transport connections** of the islands, **better internet connections** and to **solve** ongoing **administration issues** (especially when several schools are involved). Moreover, a **lack of cultural or social offers** was mentioned as a reason for parents to move away from the islands.

Regarding teaching on the islands, there is **demand for more school-oriented policies,** for example to **attract people and investments to the islands.** To profit from online communication, schools require the respective **ICT skills first**. Moreover, **soft/ social skills** were mentioned as important to foster among pupils.

More ideas are to foster **citizen science** on islands, to include **ocean literacy** into teaching on island schools and the option for **customized curricula** (e.g. regarding sustainability and ecology). **Collaborations with hubs and labs** could be formed as well

Iceland:

For Iceland, the school on the island of Hrísey, together with the University of Akureyri, was in the lead of organising a stakeholder meeting for the development of policy recommendations.

Some relevant facts about Hrísey:

There is one school in Hrísey, combining nursery and primary school on the island. In total, there are 21 pupils on Hrísey and 3 teachers. The 10 students participating in the project were in classes 6 – 10 (11-16y). The island has around 100 inhabitants with an average age of 38 and a population growth of 1.3% in 2022. The main economic activities are related to fishing and tourism. Hrísey can be reached by ferry (every 2 hours, the trip to the mainland takes 15 min). However, with bad weather, the connection may be disrupted. There is a very active social life in Hrísey but due to the short travel to the mainland the inhabitants attend cultural activities in Akureyri as well. There is a sports club on the island and a social centre for teenagers but a few of them go to soccer- and dance practices in Akureyri. Some of the inhabitants take the ferry each day to go to work on the mainland. The main challenges are the lack of housing and jobs on the island, and because of that families, who wish to move to the island cannot do so.

Findings:

There is a need for more **wholistic** and **environmental policy** for smaller and more vulnerable places, such as Hrísey that is a part of a bigger community (Akureyri municipality). **Conversation** between the island and the whole municipality could also be increased and a **coherent transport** improved between Hrísey and Akureyri. For example, there are several ferry tours between Hrísey and the mainland each day but there is just **one bus** tour from the mainland to Akureyri and that route is in the early morning.

Therefore, is **not useful** for afternoon **recreation** for students that is usually in the afternoon. Furthermore, the bus stops two km from the ferry place, on the **highway** without a bus shelter. That makes it difficult for young children and people without car to take advantage of that service.

Other issue that was strongly emphasised was the need to inform and educate inhabitants and tourists **regularly** about **sustainability** and **garbage sorting** in the island and **follow up** on existing policies concerning that. Participants asked for more **environmental courses** on all school levels. **Schools** could be **role models** regarding that.

To zoom it up, the participants emphasised a need for **more focus, respective policies** and **coordination** for promoting and taking action for **sustainability.**

Netherlands:

For the Netherlands, the school De Jutter on the island of Vlieland, together with the University of Groningen, was in the lead of organising a stakeholder meeting for the development of policy recommendations.

Some relevant facts about Vlieland:

There is one school on Vlieland, combining nursery, primary and secondary school on the island. In total, there are around 70 (around 90 when including nursery) pupils on the island and around 26 teachers and supporting staff. The island has around 1200 inhabitants with an average age of 43 and a population growth of around 4%. The main economic activities are related to tourism and healthcare. Vlieland can be reached by ferry with three connections a day. In the summertime, a fast service is available as well.

Findings:

Housing policies are seen as important steering mechanisms, for example by offering **housing for temporary/ flexible staff.** For pupils, **experiencing different school cultures** can also be a nice chance, so both the city and island experience are valuable. Further, it was mentioned that **belonging** can also be **created with the 'boat group'** of pupils travelling to and from the islands. Thus, in the end it is a **choice between transport and housing** regarding policies. What matters in this regard is more **consistency** to provide some planning security in place. In the end, the **needs of children** should always stand central.

Clearly, **without schools,** it will be even **more challenging for islands to find staff,** something which is already difficult at the moment, for example to fill in all vacancies related to tourism. **Depopulation** and disappearance of local services and institutions do **not only affect liveability on the islands,** but has encompassing consequences policies need to address. An idea can be to **foster vocational training** (partly) taking place **on the islands.**

Regarding teaching, here is further demand for less structured teaching, so to rather work with projects and different topics. For example, to cover all Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in lessons was brought up as an idea. Teachers should get the opportunity to be more flexible in providing their lessons. There should also be more options to apply theory in practice. More island and regional knowledge creation was suggested as well, for which it can be worked together with other adults. The island schools are seen as good testing grounds since for example, no special education can be provided- all kids are accepted. This experience is of value for other schools. To get more permanent staff to the islands, more cooperation in that regard with the Universities was suggested, so teachers starting their career can experience the differences in teaching on the islands. Further, it can sometimes be difficult for island schools to **apply for subsidies** since they are seen as **too small.** The Dutch system for **financing** schools is seen as in **favour of big schools, calculations** made should be **clearer** and **easier accessible.** Similarly, **school assessment** can **disadvantage small schools** before their special situation is acknowledged, which leads -unnecessarily- to negative connotations. Moreover, there is a wish for **better contact** and **reachability** with the respective education **ministry and ministers.**

It was concluded that a **'Wadden' assessment for education legislation** should be created. One example for that is to provide a certain **flexibility** for people with **other professions** to teach their expertise on an island. Moreover, the possibility should be provided that **primary school teachers** can teach in secondary school and vice versa. This has been possible already in the scope of a pilot project, but the wish is to provide such opportunities permanently.

Scotland:

For Scotland, the community school on the island of Barra, together with the University of Strathclyde, was in the lead of organising a stakeholder meeting for the development of policy recommendations.

Some relevant facts about Barra:

There are two schools on Barra, a 3-18 year old community school and an additional elementary school. The community school offers a combination of pre-school, primary and secondary education. In total, there are 250 pupils on the island and 30 teachers. The island has around 1300 inhabitants with an annual population growth of 2.2%. The main economic activities are related to tourism and the public sector. Moreover, there is a fish factory and some other manufacturers such as a toffee factory to be found on the island. Barra can be reached by ferry or by airplane.

Findings:

There is no **need for new policies**, but it was suggested to further **develop the 'island proofing' for schools from urban, rural and remote Scotland** as well to increase the **mutual understanding** of the respective situations of schools.
Moreover, the wish exists to **integrate practitioners from islands/ rural schools** in teacher education.
While schools in Scotland have already a lot of **autonomy,** it is important to **make use of it** and to **consider the local circumstances** in joint leaderships.
Further, a **central platform for island schools to share** their success stories etc. was suggested.

Spain:

The University of Valencia was responsible for organising the stakeholder meeting for the development of policy recommendations and laid more focus on rural schools with similar challenges and interests as island schools.

Some relevant facts about Valencia:

The region of Valencia does not have any school located in islands. However rural schools are very common. This rural environment has many similarities with the island ecosystem in terms of contexts, climate challenges and the urgency to work on it. Rural schools also have the same educational organization as island schools, combining in the same space students from different towns and ages. Plastics and contamination in forests, sustainable tourism and transport, are topics which are crucial for these schools.

Findings:

The schools involved in the stakeholder meeting showed a common interested in **more possibilities to share practices and form networks** to facilitate exchange opportunities. Especially remote schools can feel isolated and are limited by mobility options and costs. Moreover, **changing staff** further limits options for sustainable networks. In general, there is a wish for **support to retain staff at schools** for a longer period of time. Moreover, **training for trainers in new technologies/methodologies** should be **promoted** in rural areas. The **uptake of methodologies** such as developed in the island schools project should be further **facilitated** since teachers **lack tools and examples** to use **adapted teaching methods.**

The schools in rural areas are in social contexts and have very similar environmental challenges to the islands, so sharing the objectives, methodology and results of the project with different agents has been very interesting and has generated a lot of interest among the participants. In addition, synergies and networks have started to be generated between different schools and also with the different universities in the area.
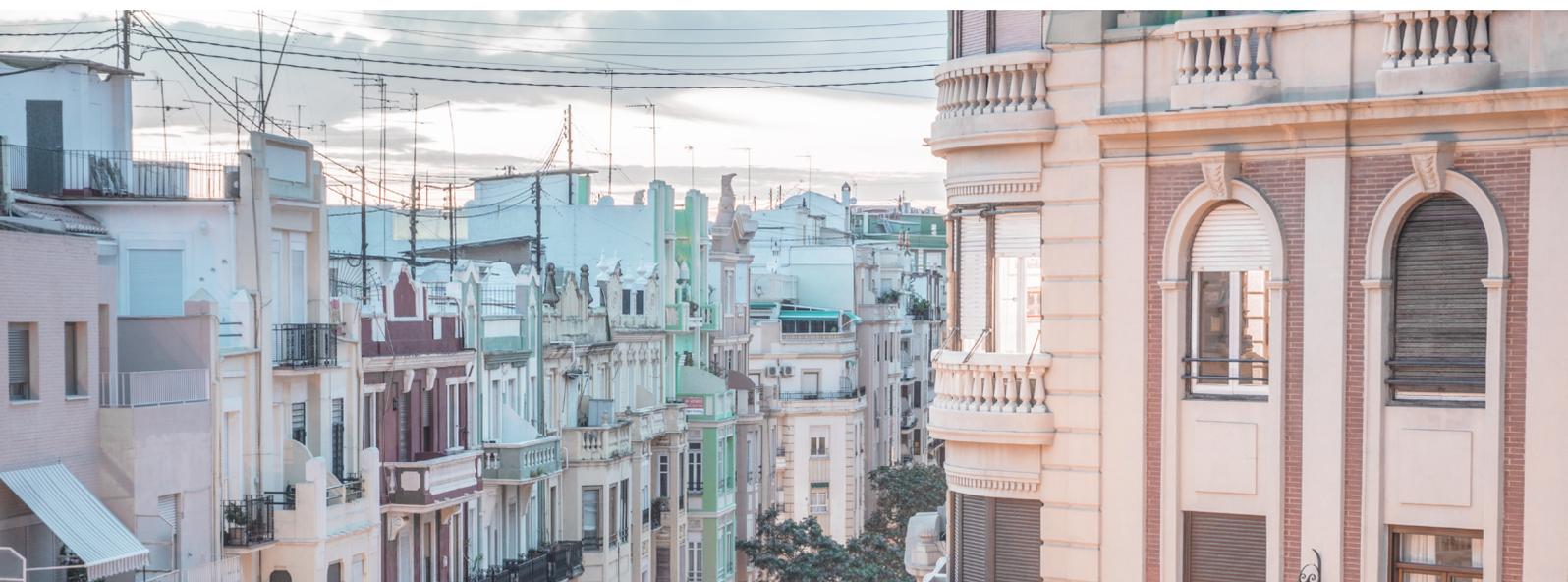
More information from the project partners and links relatable to the findings presented:

More information about the **Global network for education on sustainable development (RCE):**
https://www.rcenetwork.org/portal/rces-worldwide

Here, you can find more information about the **Daphne network for sustainable islands:**
https://dafninetwork.gr/en/

Here, you can find more information about the **Volkswagen investment on the island of Astypalea:**
https://www.volkswagenag.com/en/news/2022/06/volkswagen-starts-mobility-services-on-astypalea--marking-next-s.html