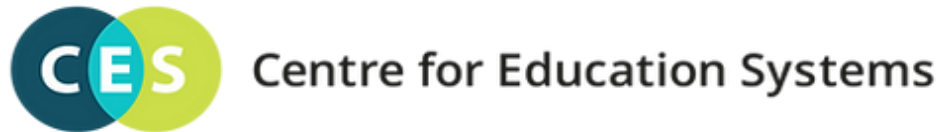


**ScopeSEND
&
CES**
SEND Policy Insights across 17 jurisdictions

14.4.2026



The projects - ScopeSEND

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ScopeSEND Goal

Comprehensive examination of policies regulating provision for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) across jurisdictions of interest

Process of country selection – decision tree and CES partnership

First pool: UK, Ireland, Australia (QLD, VIC, NSW), Switzerland, Finland, Belgium (Flanders)

Extended Pool: New Zealand, Singapore, Japan, Ontario, France, Poland, Estonia, Netherlands

Research Questions: Context, perceptions, success and patterns

ScopeSEND

- 1: How do the jurisdictions **compare** in terms of content of policies for SEND? (descriptive)
- 2: How are the different country policies reflected in current **SEND outcomes** within each country? (descriptive)
- 3: How do the jurisdictions compare in terms of stakeholders' perceptions of the **success** of their SEND system, across indicators? (descriptive)
- 4: To what extent may perceived elements of best practice in SEND policy and implementation identified in the cross-country analysis be context-specific and/or **applicable across countries**? (explanatory)

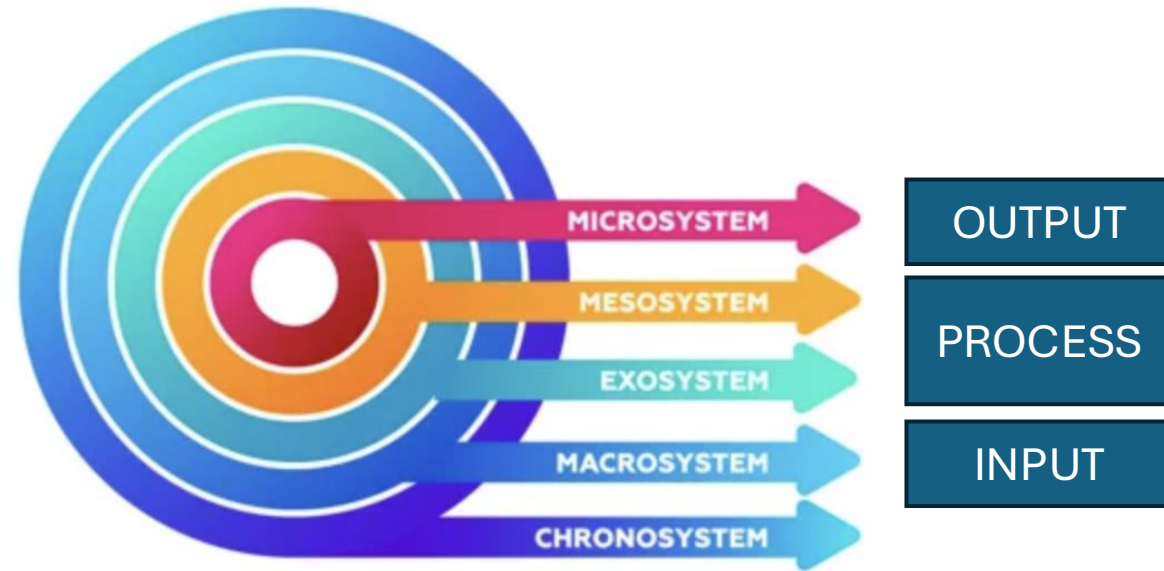
CES

- 1: What is the **purpose** of SEND policy?
- 2: What is the **structure** of SEND policy?
- 3: How is SEND policy **made** and introduced?
- 4: How is SEND policy **evaluated**?
- 5: How does **context** shape SEND policy and reform?
- 6: What is the evidence about the **effects** of the SEND system?

Indicators of interest

- How is SEND or equivalent defined:
 - Eligibility process and benchmarks;
 - Assessment for SEND support services;
 - Statutory and support plans;
- Early Childhood Intervention and/or Early Childhood Education and Care
 - Cross-sector provision;
- Specific policy initiatives (e.g. mental health, bullying, etc.);
 - Inclusion Policy or guidance;
- Workforce training and preparedness;
- Others - Data records; Inspections; Appeals systems.

How theory guided interpretation



Available country data
and stakeholder
interviews

Document analysis,
stakeholder interviews
systematic review

Document analysis
and policy interviews

Bioecological theory of Human Development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005); Transactional theory of human development (Sameroff, 2009); Developmental Systems theory (Gruralnick, 2019); From medical through social and to biopsychosocial models of disability (Simeonsson, 2006); Intersectionality **IS REAL** (Strand, 2023).

How theory guided interpretation: *How is SEND defined, what is more inclusive?*

- Inclusion as more than placement in mainstream school settings:
 - Inclusion as placement, level of belonging and arenas/contexts (Qvuortrop & Qvuortrop, 2018);
 - Evidence of lack of a sense of belonging in mainstream settings (Goodall, 2020);
- Inclusion is more than providing services to children who have a label...

How theory guided interpretation: *How is SEND defined, what is more inclusive?*

- A focus on **Inclusive Systems**, processes serving all children and young people, and on their lived experiences rather than on inclusive education alone;
- Inclusion as a systemic **process** of supporting **all** children and young people to **equitably** access and actively **engage in everyday life opportunities**, in ways that lead to outcomes of **belonging and overall flourishing**, accounting for the **intersection** between individual neurobiological, psychological and physical profiles and their unique environmental contexts, over **time** (Castro-Kemp, *forthcoming*).

Findings – Context and Compare

Content analysis of policy documents

Belgium (Flanders)
France
Japan
Poland

Singapore

Australia

England
New Zealand
Northern Ireland
Netherlands
Ontario

Estonia
Finland
Ireland
Scotland
Switzerland
Wales



Medical model at *input* level
(potential for less inclusive
processes and systems)

Biopsychosocial model at *input* level
(potential for more inclusive *processes*
and systems)



International Comparative Reviews - Select Area

CES reviews are available in summary, sections and full report format

Curriculum	Summary	Purpose and structure	Development and evaluation	Context and effects	Overarching findings	Full report
Accountability	Summary	Purpose and structure	Development and evaluation	Context and effects	Overarching findings	Full report
SEND	Summary and Briefings	Purpose and structure	Development and evaluation	Context and effects	Overarching findings	Full report
Intersectional	Summary					
Academic library	Research question reviews	Other partner reviews	Comparative tables	Methodologies	Other comparative literature	



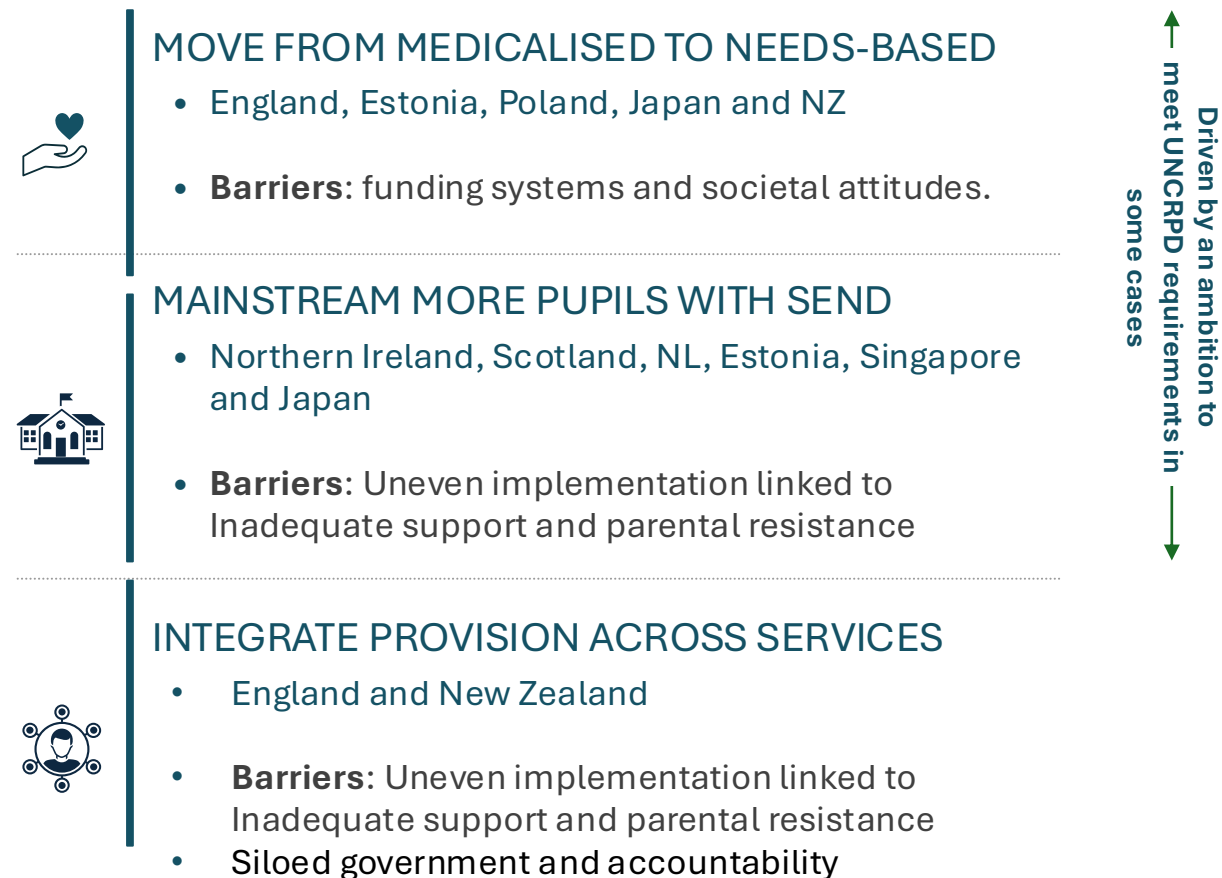
Purpose

- Goals
- Trends
- Values

Purpose | Stated purposes in policy documents emphasise a combination of 3 aims



Trends | Emerging priorities show how aims are realized in practice



Findings – Context and Compare

- Statistical analysis of policy corpus supports clear differences in language reflecting a more medical model versus a more biopsychosocial oriented approach of statistical significance.
- Reference example: **Singapore uses more diagnostic related words than all other nations, with large effects.**

Singapore

school_readiness	↑ *** 1.367	↑ *** 1.762	↑ *** 1.528	↑ *** 1.534	↑ *** 0.979	↑ *** 1.613	↑ *** 1.612	↑ *** 1.355
diagnosis	↑ *** 1.116	↑ *** 1.802	↑ *** 0.659	↑ *** 1.425	↑ *** 1.241	↑ *** 0.681	↑ *** 1.820	↑ *** 1.524
deficit	↑ *** 1.378	↑ *** 1.360	↑ *** 0.958	↑ *** 1.100	↑ *** 1.257	↑ *** 0.776	↑ *** 1.602	↑ *** 0.552
autism	↑ *** 1.480	↑ *** 1.467	↑ *** 0.189	↑ *** 1.334	↑ *** 1.336	↓ 0.050	↑ *** 1.697	↑ *** 0.688
adhd	↑ *** 1.142	↑ *** 1.948	↑ *** 0.438	↑ *** 1.642	↑ *** 1.308	↑ *** 1.328	↑ *** 1.915	↑ *** 1.616
	Australia	England	Ireland	New Zealand	Northern Ireland	Ontario	Scotland	Wales

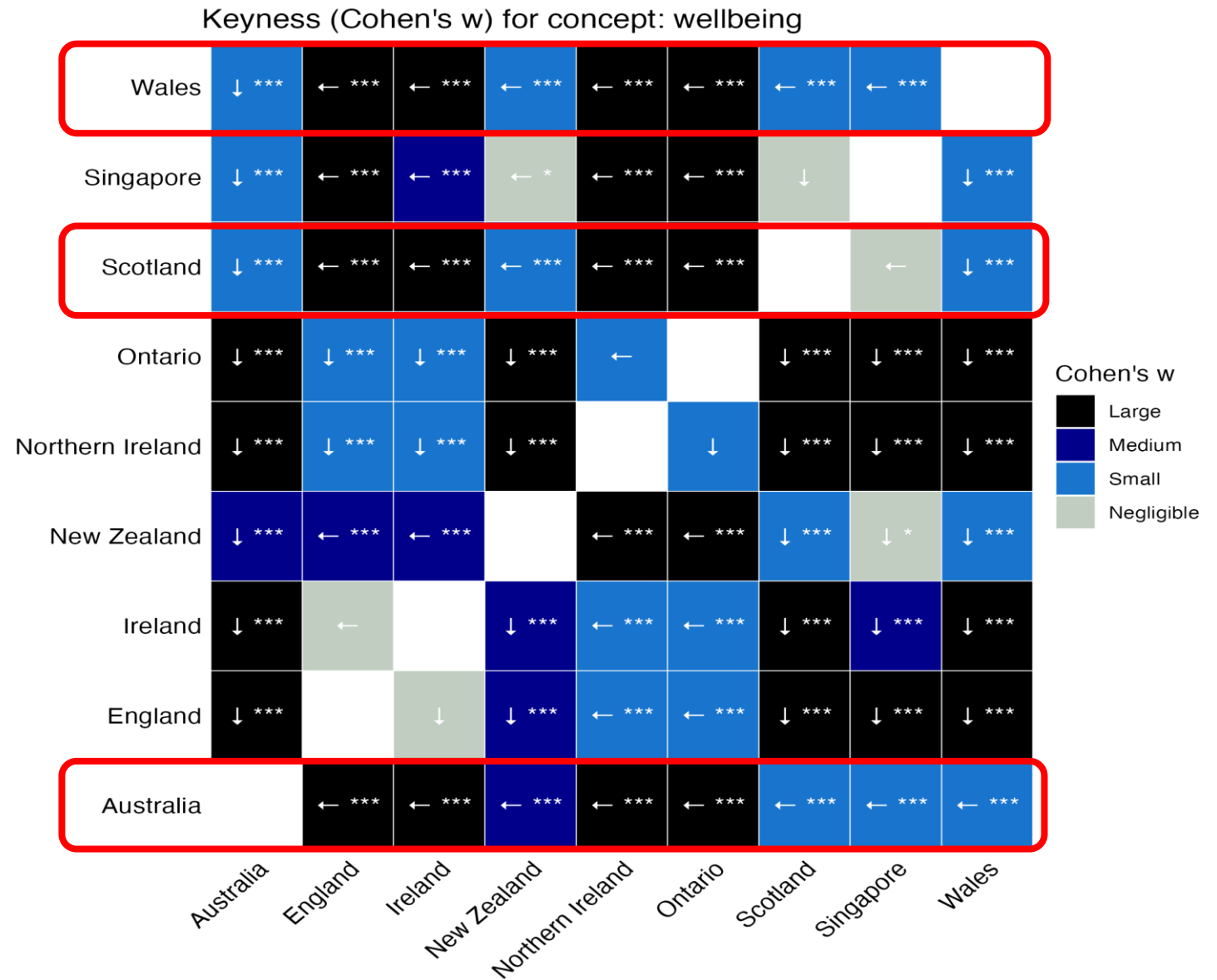
Cohen's w

- ~
- Large
- Medium
- Small

Wellbeing

↑ Australia, followed by
Wales and Scotland;

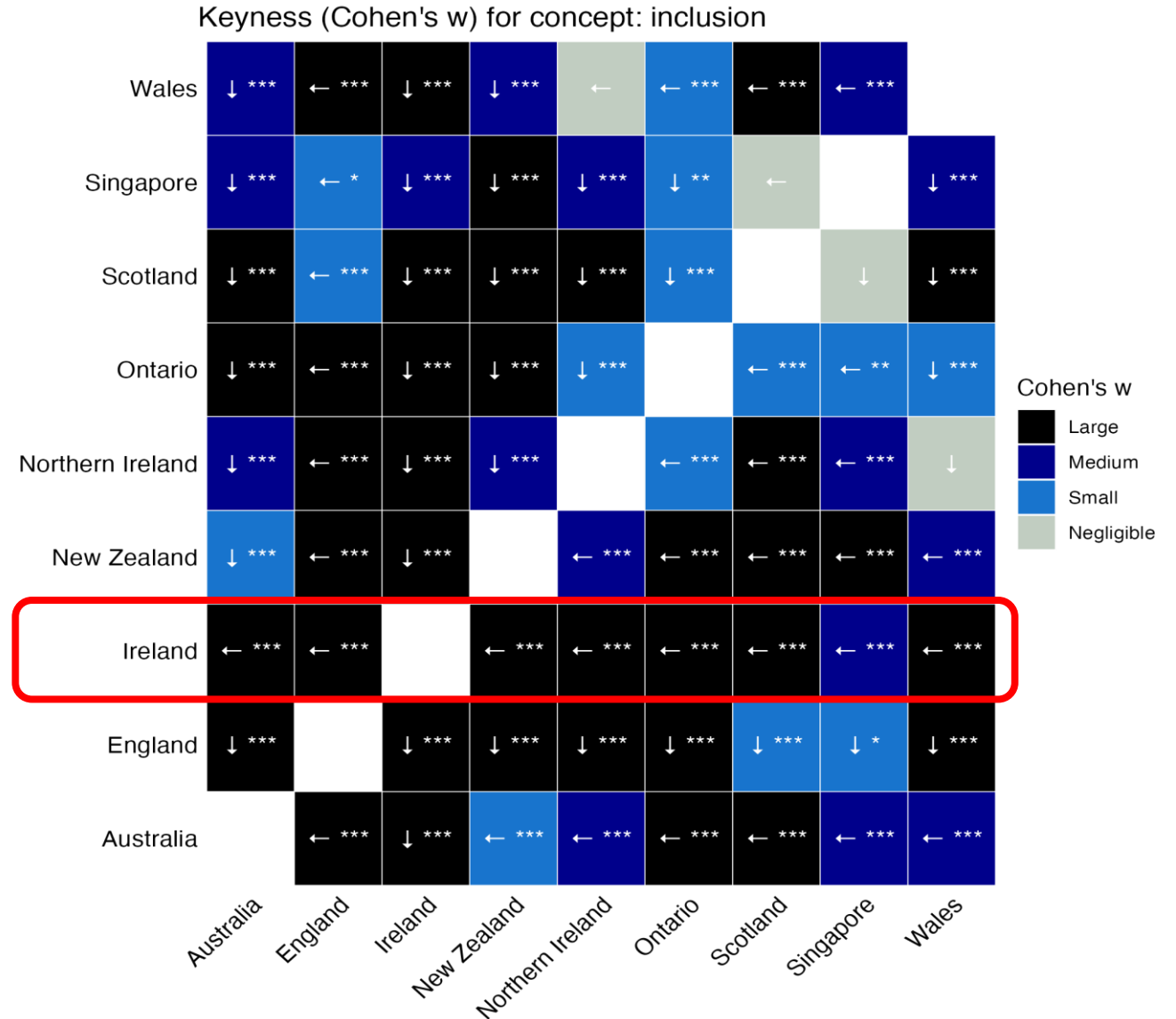
↓ England less than
others except NI,
Ontario and Ireland;



Inclusion

↑ Ireland;

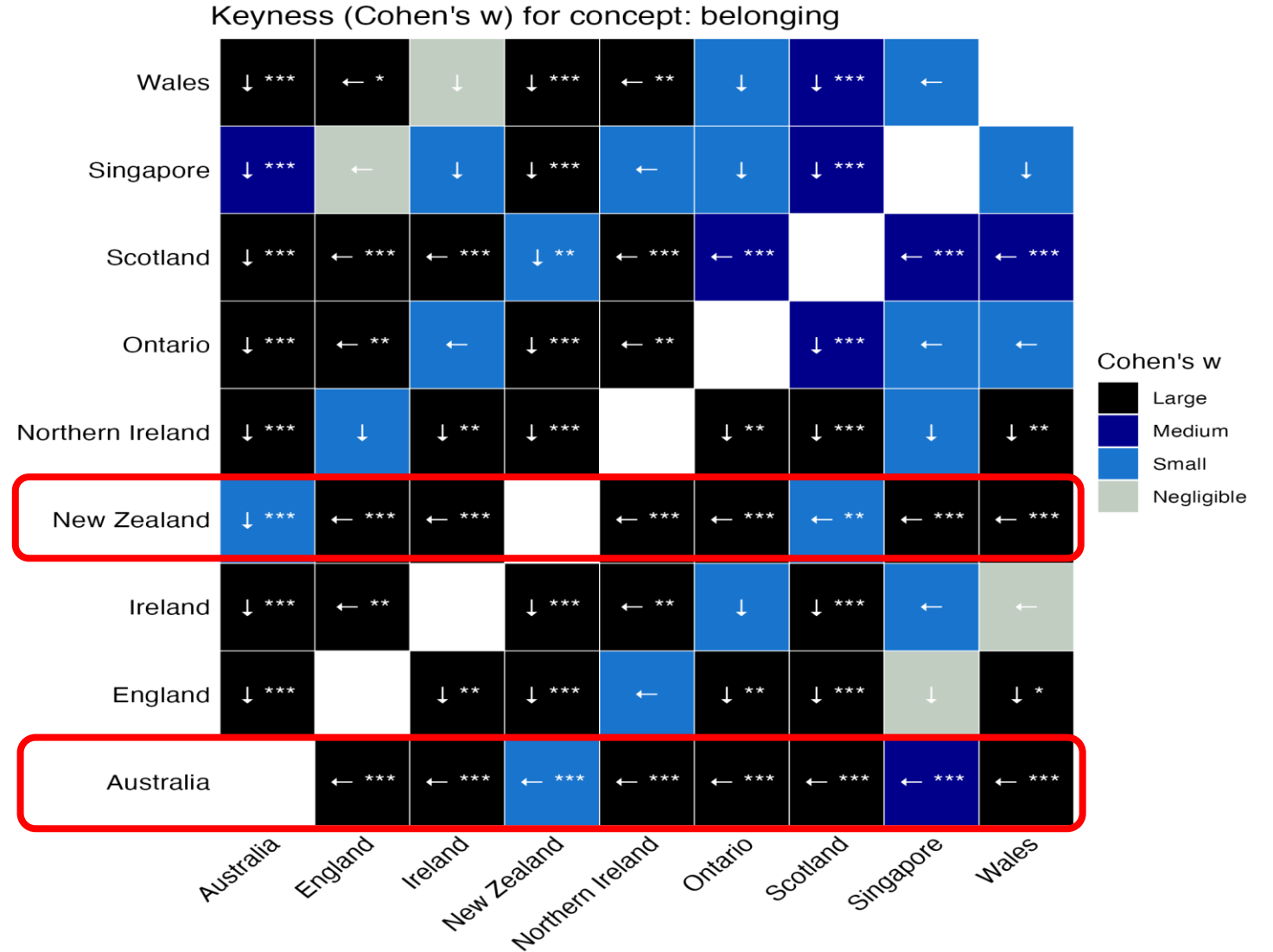
↓ in England less than all others.



Belonging

↑ Australia and New Zealand;

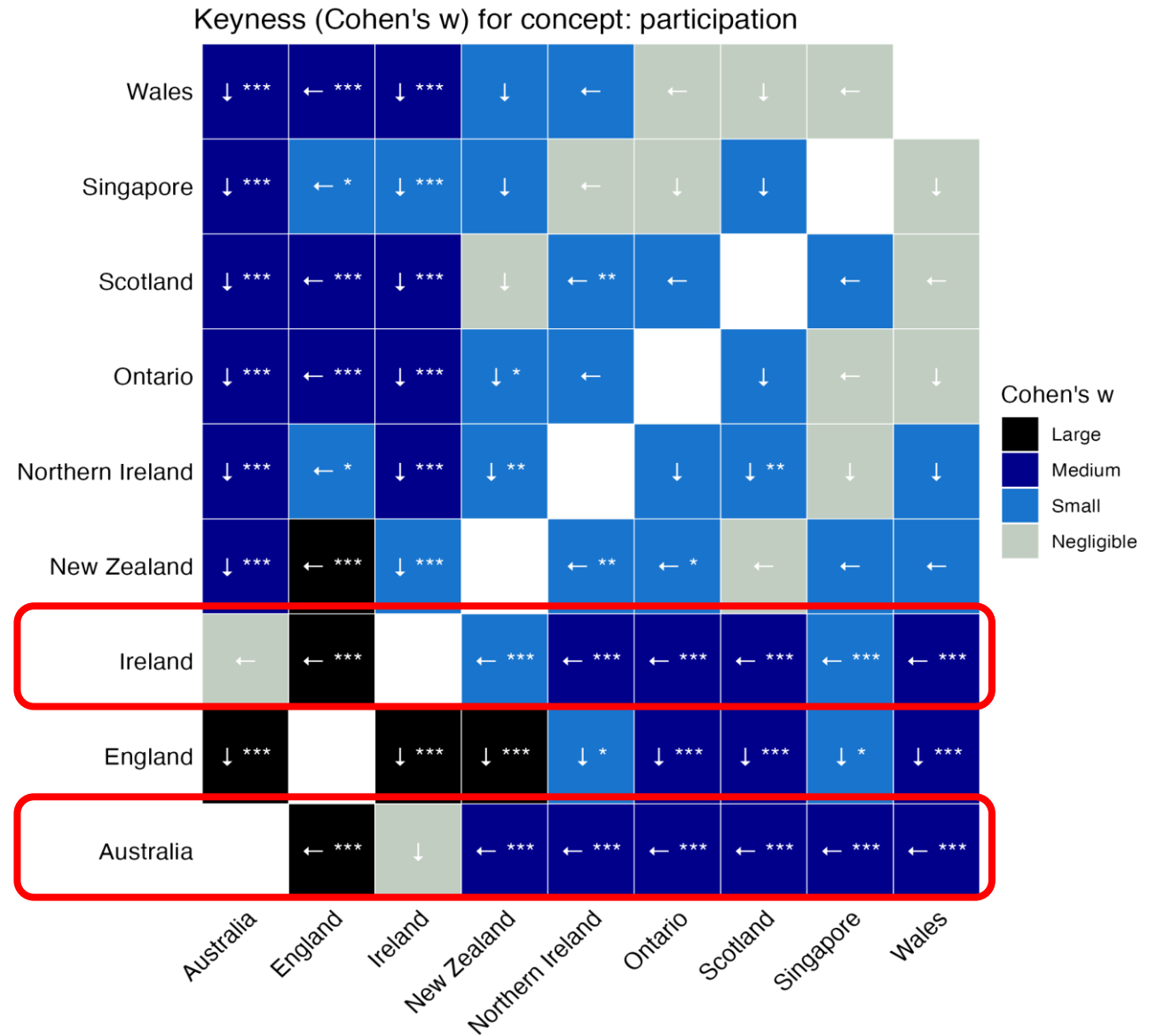
↓ England less than others except NI and Singapore.



Participation

↑ Australia and Ireland;

↓ England less than all others

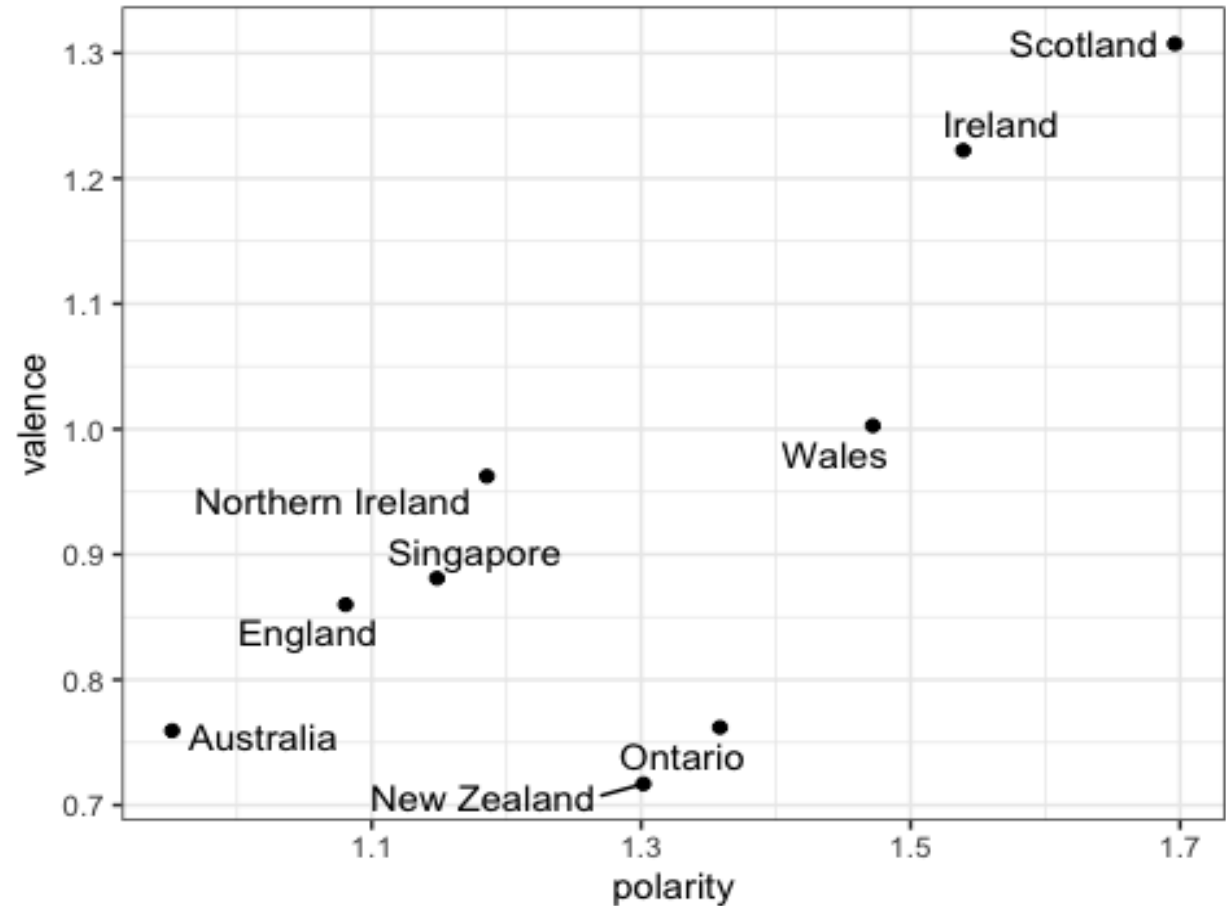


Sentiment

Scotland appears as the most positive jurisdiction in both measures;

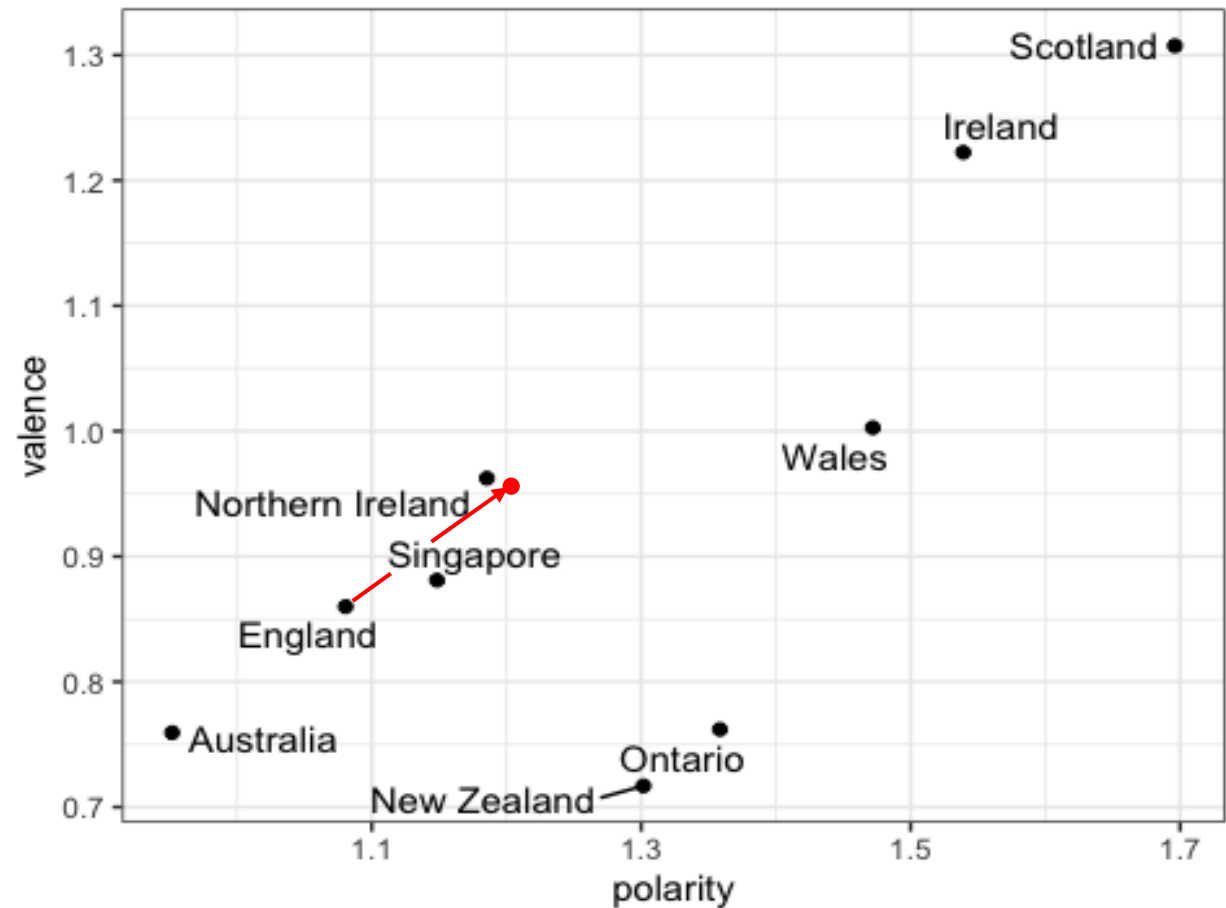
England one of the least positive in both measures;

All policies are mostly positive.



Sentiment

- **Sentiment** of policies in England before and after the February 2026 Policy announcements:
 - White Paper Every Child Achieving and Thriving
 - Consultation document
 - NTFG report



Structure

Four main components define SEND policy architecture

1.

ASSESSMENT AND IDENTIFICATION | HOW ARE PUPILS WITH SEND IDENTIFIED?

2.

LEARNER SUPPORT | WHAT SETTING IS EDUCATION PROVIDED IN, AND WHAT SUPPORTS ARE AVAILABLE?

3.

ACCOUNTABILITY | WHAT TOOLS ARE USED FOR TRACKING AND REPORTING?

4.

FUNDING | HOW IS FUNDING FOR SUPPORT SERVICES ALLOCATED?

RQ2 Policy Structure | Assessment



Triggers:

Medical advice/Diagnosis

England, Japan

Teacher/School concern

Ontario, NZ, Japan, Finland, Estonia, Poland

Academic performance

England, Scotland, The Netherlands

Parental concern

England, Scot, France, Ontario, Poland



Assessor

SENCo (or equivalents)

England, New Zealand

External specialists

Scotland, Singapore, Estonia, NI



High-tier

Medicalised

Poland, Japan

Needs-based

Finland, Estonia, Ireland, New Zealand (multi-agency threshold- Scotland)

Hybrid

England, Wales, NI Ontario, The Netherlands



Support model:

Tiered support:

Scotland, NZ, Wales, Singapore, Finland, Estonia, NI, ROI

Non-tiered support:

Japan: *(but in practice, students placed in mainstream; 'resource rooms', or special schools)*

RQ2 Policy Structure | Support

Setting	MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS		SPECIALIST SCHOOLS
Specific interventions	<p>SPECIALIST INPUT help learners remain in the classroom</p> <p><i>Ireland: Visiting Teacher Service for blind and deaf pupils</i></p>	<p>CURRICULUM & PEDAGOGY SUPPORTS adapted curricula or flexible schooling</p> <p><i>Estonia: Learning outcomes can be adjusted for SEND learners</i></p>	<p>ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY</p> <p><i>New Zealand: Ongoing Resourcing Scheme</i></p>
Common Support	<p>ADAPTED INSTRUCTION of the curriculum</p>	<p>TEACHING ASSISTANTS or learning support staff working alongside pupils</p>	<p>EXAM ADJUSTMENTS (extra time, rest breaks, read-aloud/writing support etc.)</p>
Teacher training	<p>INITIAL V. CONTINUING</p> <p><i>Singapore: All trainee teachers must complete compulsory SEN related modules (~36 hours of training)</i></p>	<p>CONDITION SPECIFIC V. TRANS-DIAGNOSTIC</p> <p><i>England: Whole School SEND/NASEN video suite</i></p>	<p>UNIVERSAL V. SPECIALIST</p> <p><i>The Netherlands: Teachers can undertake a 2-year part time supplementary training</i></p>

Three main types of measures

Inputs:

England: SEND information report / Local Authority report on 'local offer'. Governed by regulation

Processes:

Ontario: expectation that school climate surveys should measure ongoing SEND provision by including questions on equity and inclusive education

Outcomes:

Scotland: attendance data for pupils with SEND grouped by local authority

Frequent focus on regional bodies and whole systems

The Netherlands: inspection framework for inter-institutional partnerships/networks for inclusive education

New Zealand: Education Review Office system-wide evaluations

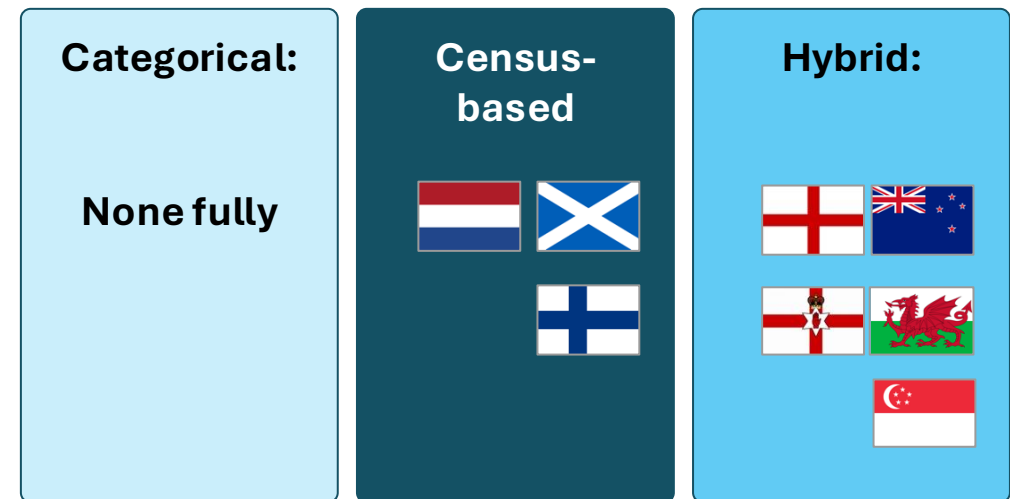
Inputs and process based accountability dominates

RQ2 Policy Structure | Funding

WHO PROVIDES AND DETERMINES ALLOCATION OF FUNDS?

		ALLOCATION	
		Central government	Local government
PROVISION	Local government		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finland Japan
	Central government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ireland New Zealand Singapore 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> England Wales Northern Ireland Scotland Ontario Estonia Poland Netherlands France

HOW IS MAINSTREAM SEND FUNDING ALLOCATED?



ASSESSMENT & IDENTIFICATION	LEARNER SUPPORT	ACCOUNTABILITY	FUNDING
<p>Triggers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medical diagnosis / advice • Academic performance • Parental concern 	<p>Setting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mainstream • Specialist 	<p>Metrics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inputs • Processes • Outcomes 	<p>Provider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central government • Local government
<p>Assessor:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SENCOs • Teachers • External Specialists 	<p>Common support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching assistants • Adapted instruction • Small-group support • Exam adjustments 	<p>Tools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compliance reporting • Inspection • Self-evaluation • Surveys • Outcomes attainment / pathways) 	<p>Allocator:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central government • Local government
<p>Higher-tier assessment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Needs-based • Clinical • Multi-agency threshold 	<p>Differentiated support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-school specialists • Curriculum adaptation • Assistive technology 	<p>Levels:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual schools • School groups • Local authorities • System-wide 	<p>Type:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Census-based • Categorical
<p>Support models:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tiering 	<p>Teacher training:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ITT v. CPD • Condition v. transdiagnostic • Universal v. specialist 		

Stakeholders' perceptions - **SEND outcomes and success** (systematic review)

Similarities between countries on **OUTPUT**:

Navigating the SEND System	Practitioner training and CPD	Inclusion and support coordination	Relationships and communication
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• System is bureaucratic, complex, and difficult to navigate• Difficulty finding resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gap in SEND content in ITT and opportunities for CPD• SEND knowledge affects provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Difficulty supporting SEND in mainstream contexts• Variance in quality, effectiveness, and consistency of support	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Importance of collaboration between schools, families, and specialists

Stakeholders' perceptions – **SEND outcomes and success** (Systematic Review)

Variation between countries on **OUTPUT**:

Positive versus Negative Views

- Finland and Scotland -> most balanced between positive and negative views
- England -> most negative

Child-First Language

England spoke most about meeting the individual needs of the child, followed by Australia. Other countries tended to focus more on the actual system and provision rather than within the context of children's needs.

Mental Health and Stigma

Most prevalent in Australia -> parents and educators often spoke about their own mental health. Parents discussed 'fitting-in' with their communities and navigating stigma.

Stakeholders' perspectives – Key points / patterns (additional interviews n=181 to date)

Key challenges across jurisdictions	Key facilitators across jurisdictions
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Navigating complex systems to access support2. Diagnosis is a gateway to support, but not always aligned with need3. Some children are overlooked by threshold-based identification systems4. Inconsistent multi-agency coordination5. Variability in staff knowledge and expertise	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Clear pathways to support and guidance for families2. Coordinated multi-agency working3. Strong school – family partnerships with well-informed and positive educators willing to be flexible4. Specialist provision (in some cases)

Stakeholders' perspectives

Country	Key Facilitators	Key Barriers
Australia (n = 5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State funding can increase access to interdisciplinary care and reduces financial burden 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support plans are becoming administrative rather than functional • Relatively weak early identification systems
England (n = 49)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledgeable and proactive parents who can navigate systems • Individual staff (e.g. SENCOs, TAs) who are responsive and committed • Statutory support plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to support often contingent on diagnosis rather than need • Delays, gatekeeping, and reliance on tribunals to secure provision • Inconsistent multi-agency working and limited workforce capacity
Finland (n = 3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tiered levels of support • Strong coordination with multi-professional teams • Special needs education in ITT programmes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parental resistance to child's support • More special needs teachers needed to meet increased demand

Stakeholders' perspectives

Country	Key Facilitators	Key Barriers
Northern Ireland (n = 16)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexible and understanding individual teachers • Key individuals such as parents who advocate and teachers or school leaders who prioritise inclusion at school level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited guidance and poor communication from schools • Heavy reliance on parents to navigate systems and fund private assessment • Support plans perceived as compliance driven rather than functional
Republic of Ireland (n = 11)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structured placement within teacher training that includes time spent in specialist school settings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long wait lists for support
Scotland (n = 13)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experiences of more inclusive ethos from peers and educators • Moderately strong multi-agency coordination and services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delayed identification that is reactive rather than proactive • Absence of a consistent enforceable statutory plan

Stakeholders' perspectives

Country	Key Facilitators	Key Barriers
Switzerland (n = 25)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong early childhood intervention and multi-service engagement • Access to multiple professionals (health, social care, education) • Key coordinators and structured multi-agency meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diagnosis driven access to school-based support • Often inconsistent or unclear criteria for provision of support • Sometimes weak coordination between health and education sectors
Wales (n = 15)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy reform (Additional Learning Needs system) aiming for equity and continuity • Extended entitlement to support (up to age 25) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Postcode lottery” in access to support across local authorities • Shift to a universal provision model that in practice dilutes entitlement and enables withdrawal of support • Gaps in diagnostic pathways and post diagnosis support dependent on local interpretation of policy

Five takeaways...

- 1. SEND identification is rising around the world, and many jurisdictions are facing growing funding pressures..**
- 2. All jurisdictions aspire to educate more of their students with SEND within mainstream settings.**
- 3. Finite public budgets drive a need for funding prioritisation.**
- 4. Early selection and tracking in education systems are a barrier to inclusion.**
- 5. Devolved funding/decision-making systems can allow for local tailoring and greater responsiveness but can lead to inconsistency and inequity.**

Eight choices...

1. **Needs-based or medicalised?** Overarching theme – but aspiration and reality diverge.
2. **How should SEND assessment processes be organised?** In-school (cheaper, earlier, more responsive/flexible); expert (consistent, 'fair', defensible)
3. **To what extent should SEND funding follow individual students?** Categorical (entitlement) v. census (responsiveness/needs-based)
4. **Mainstream - specialist balance?** Integration and inclusiveness v. specialist / bespoke.
5. **Type of training?** Initial v. ongoing; condition-specific v. 'trans-diagnostic'; universal/mandatory v. specialist
6. **Which transition structures?** Increased labour market participation but resource heavy, and implications for multi-agency planning and data sharing
7. **What is the best approach to engaging stakeholders in policymaking?** Broad based v. via representative bodies
8. **What steps will be taken to overcome the silos between SEND policy and other areas of education and public policy?** Institutional arrangements or individual champions?