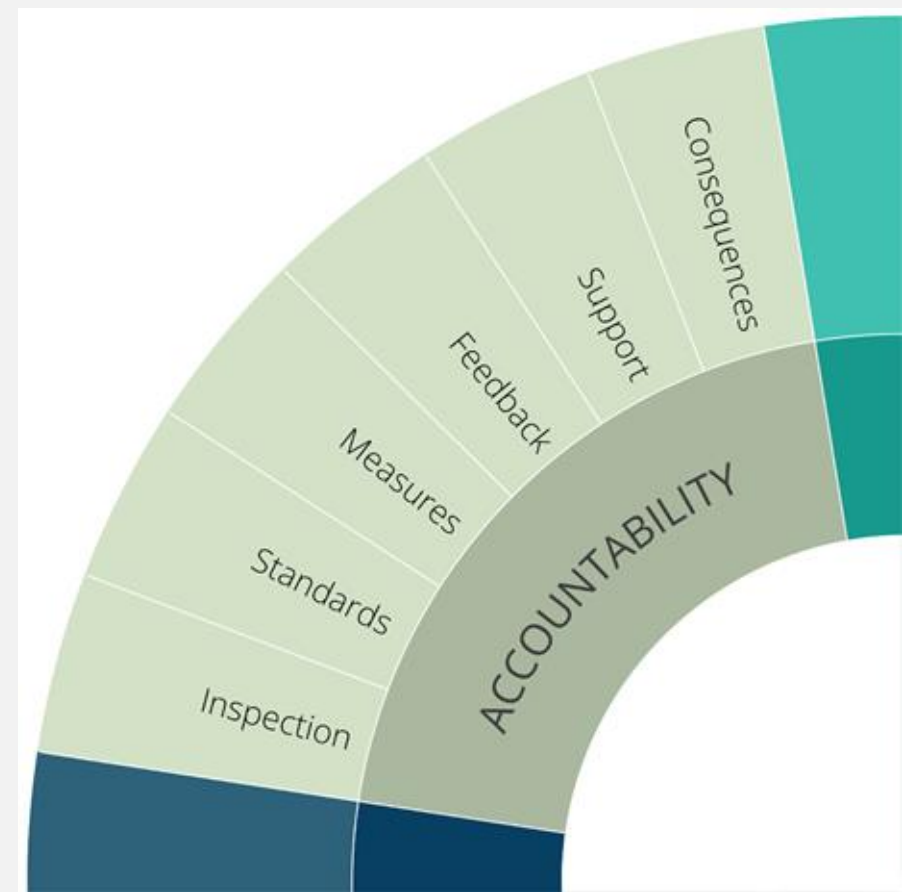


ACCOUNTABILITY POLICY

Purpose and structure

Loic Menzies et al, December 2025, v1.0





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RQ1 | What is the purpose of accountability?

Academic classification

Research questions explore policy aims and priorities as stated in official documentation ...

a) What are the stated aims of accountability?

b) Are there particular values (for example 'fairness' / 'excellence' / 'meritocracy') associated with accountability?






c) What, if any shifts in priorities can be found in official communications and documentation?

...revealing how jurisdictions frame the purpose and priorities of accountability


PURPOSE | WHAT IS ACCOUNTABILITY POLICY DESIGNED TO ACHIEVE?

TRENDS | HOW DO PRIORITIES CHANGE OVER TIME?

Purpose | Accountability policies are generally designed to realise a combination of 6 core aims

		 Aim to promote	 Definition <i>(Accountability policies are designed to..)</i>
 Fairness and inclusion	Equity & Inclusion	Promote fair access for all learners, regardless of background or ability <i>(e.g., Mandating anti-racism measures, support for special education needs etc.)</i>	
	Wellbeing	Support the emotional, social, and physical welfare of students and staff <i>(e.g., Reporting on measures related to student engagement, mental health etc)</i>	
	Cultural identity & affirmation	Reflect and protect customs and local identities <i>(e.g., Requiring instruction in national or minority languages)</i>	
 Governance & Transparency	Transparency	Enable decision making and promote public confidence by making results open and publicly available <i>(e.g., Publishing evaluation results for public access to stakeholders)</i>	
	Compliance	Ensure consistency across schools by monitoring adherence to education laws and requirements <i>(e.g., Inspections assessing compliance with statutory requirements, with non-compliance potentially triggering sanctions)</i>	
 Outcomes & Performance	Educational improvement/excellence	Drive improvements in teaching /learning outcomes <i>(e.g., Reporting on indicators related to academic attainment e.g., GCSE results)</i>	

Deep Dive | Local history and culture can have significant influence in shaping national priorities

	History and culture	Resulting aims and priorities
 Singapore	Meritocracy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Belief that success is – <u>and should be</u> determined by individual effort and performance, <i>even if</i> this involves <u>unequal outcomes</u>. Strong societal interest in school performance and academic achievement. 	Outcomes & Performance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus on measuring achievement and identifying ‘potential’. Professional accountability system (EPMS) used to enhance quality of educators: requires teachers to document targets and achievements, rewards and penalises based on performance. Influences/linked to teachers’ strong sense of responsibility and pressure to maintain high standards.
 New Zealand	Biculturalism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Key aspect of New Zealand identity, reflecting the partnership between Māori (Indigenous people) and NZ of European descent established under the Treaty of Waitangi. Treaty principles underpin expectations that institutions recognise cultural difference and promote equitable outcomes. 	Equity and inclusion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aims centred on equity and inclusion. Education Review Office (ERO) emphasises ensuring equitable outcomes for Māori learners and the evaluation of services which aim to lift Māori achievement. ERO’s reviews are intended to support kura (schools) in valuing, affirming, and strengthening Māori identity, language, and culture.
 Estonia	Post-Soviet nation-building <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Post-Soviet independence has driven a strong emphasis on state-building, transparency, and clear institutional authority. Education plays a central role in nation-building through the consolidation of Estonian as the language of instruction. Accountability mechanisms reflect the goal of integrating Russian-speaking minorities while maintaining national standards. 	Civic development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aims emphasise civic development and participation. Focus on developing competencies that create added value to society align with national security and provide essential public services (e.g., teachers, health professionals, internal security staff, tech). New compliance requirements around teaching in Estonian.

Goals | Accountability systems pursue different types of improvement goals

Basic standards and safety nets

Improvement for everyone



England

“Inspection provides assurance to the public and to government that **minimum standards of education**, skills and childcare are being met”

“The primary purpose of inspection under this framework is to bring about **improvement in education provision.**”



The Netherlands

“We ensure that the **basic quality is in order.**”

“We encourage school governing boards and schools to pursue their own specific ambitions and to **achieve improvements above and beyond the basic standard of quality** that is required”

These two functions are often linked to different aspects of the accountability system...

Trends | Review of policy documents indicate 11 trends across 4 topics shaping emerging priorities

A

Wellbeing and inclusion

- 1 Expanding accountability to include workforce sustainability
- 2 Increased use of well-being measures or school climate and engagement metrics
- 3 Increased focus on DEI measures

E.g., England, Northern Ireland, Ontario

B

Collaboration over coercion

- 4 Evaluations increasingly designed to provide actionable feedback
- 5 Inspections described as tools to support learning not performance outcomes
- 6 Greater emphasis on empowering schools and stakeholders

E.g., Wales, Finland, Scotland, Ontario

C

Emphasis on Strategic/ National goals

- 7 Enforcing language policies relating to minority populations
- 8 Increased focus on using technology in reporting systems

E.g., Scotland, Singapore, Estonia, Ontario

D

based/differentiated systems

- 9 Focus on ensuring minimum standards vs. improvement across the board
- 10 Smarter/data-driven accountability systems
- 11 Desire to promote school or professional autonomy

E.g., England, Poland, The Netherlands, Estonia, Singapore, Northern Ireland

RQ2 | How is the accountability system structured?

Existing typologies

Who (actor) is held accountable by whom (forum) ?



Participants:

- Actor based typologies: *'who is accountable'?*²
- Forum based typologies: *focusing on 'to whom are they accountable'?*²
- Is the **relationship** internal/external, vertical/horizontal, or multi-directional?³

What is measured?



Quality concept: i.e., what is measured.

Includes the degree of emphasis on:

- Inputs, norms and regulations
- Processes
- Outputs

With what consequences?



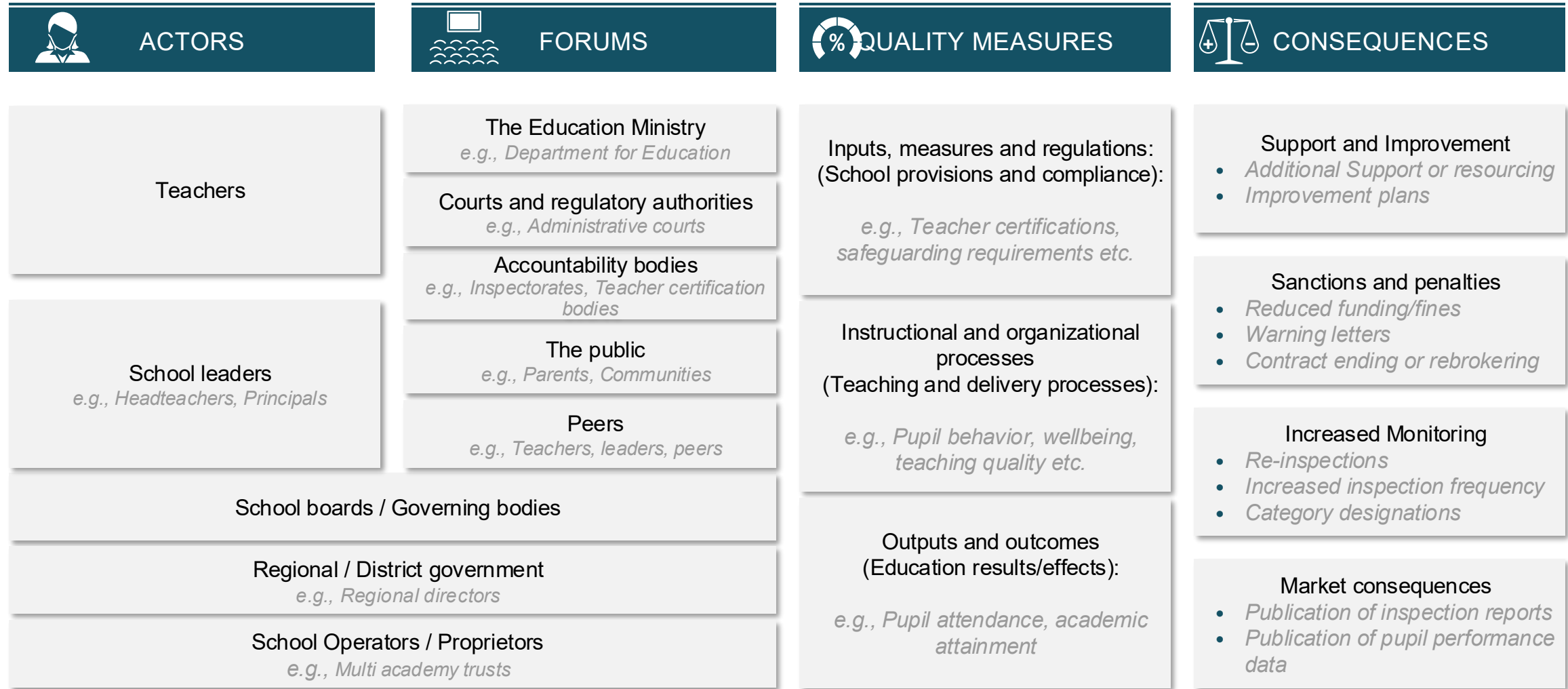
Consequences: both supportive and punitive

Types combining the above dimensions (*participants, relationships and consequences*) to describe overarching approaches to holding actors to account (e.g., *hierarchical, market, participatory*)

Underlying ideologies (such as *'neoliberalism' or 'new public management'*)

RQ2 | Accountability systems can be defined by four key dimensions

Non-exhaustive



Types | West. et al define seven accountability ‘types’ which bring together common features of accountability systems

Non-exhaustive

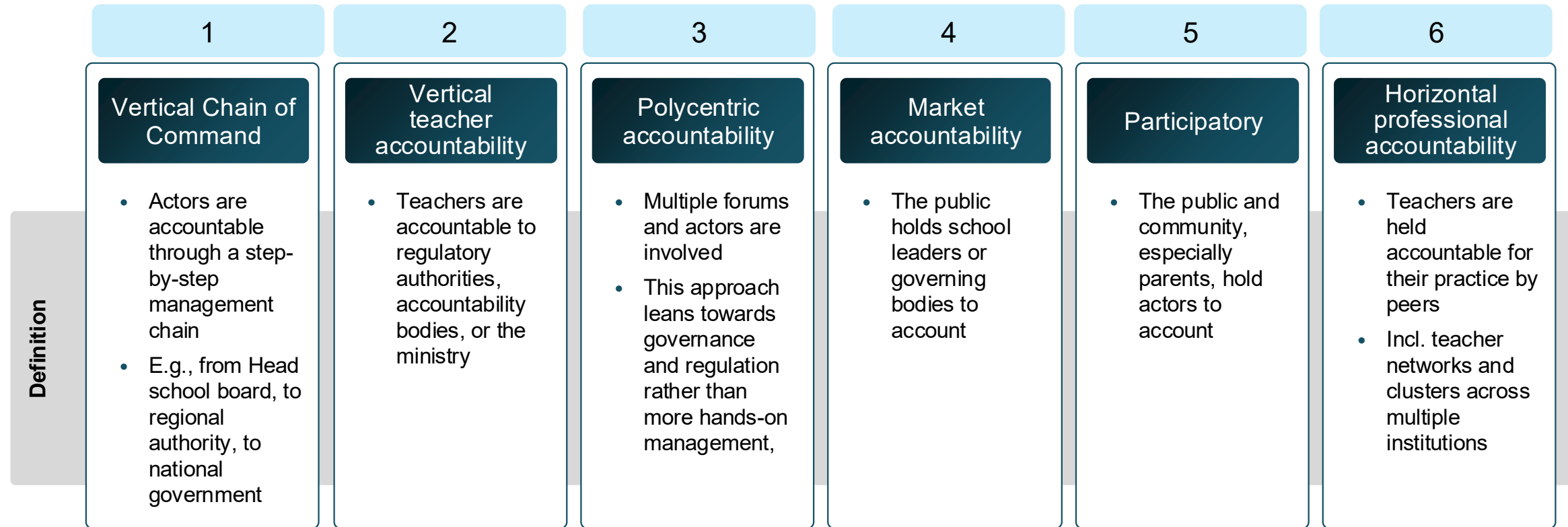
TYPE	DEFINITION	ACTOR	FORUM	CONSEQUENCES
A Hierarchical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schools are accountable upwards to bodies like a local authority, the ministry, inspectorate etc. for performance targets, financial management, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School leaders Governing body 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local authority The ministry Accountability bodies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leadership changes School closure Heightened scrutiny Additional support
B Market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schools are accountable to parents through methods like published inspection reports and exam results (league tables) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School leaders School board/ Governing body 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The public (parents) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reputational damage Loss of funding (potentially closure)
C Contractual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accountability is contractual, schools are held to account through performance contracts and formal agreements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School board/ Governing body 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regional & District body 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contract withdrawal Threat of closure Management change
D Legal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schools are held accountable through the legal system for duties, incl. staffing, financial management, SEND, and health and safety 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers School board/ Governing body 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Courts and regulatory authority The ministry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Financial penalties Criminal sanctions
E Professional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers are accountable to their peers and professional bodies for their conduct, competence, and adherence to standards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers School leaders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Peers Professional bodies Teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Warnings Suspensions Teaching bans
F Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schools are accountable through partnerships with formally independent groups, schools or individuals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School leaders Teachers School board/ Governing body 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School leaders Teachers Peers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Constructive dialogue Exclusions from network benefits
G Participative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schools are accountable to parents, pupils, and communities through dialogue, governing bodies, school councils 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers School leaders School board/ Governing body 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The public (parents) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Few formal sanctions beyond loss of stakeholder support

Back-up | Each jurisdiction contains elements of most accountability types to varying degrees

TYPE	England	Wales	NI	Scotland	ROI	Ontario	NZ	Sing.	Finland	Estonia	Japan	Poland	Neth.	France
Hierarchical Accountability	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	Low	Low	High	High	High	High
Market Accountability	High	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	High	Low
Contract Accountability	High	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low
Legal Accountability	Low	Low	High	Low	Low	High	High	Low	Low	High	High	High	High	Low
Professional Accountability	Low	Low	Low	High	Low	High	High	High	High	Low	Low	High	Low	High
Network Accountability	Low	Low	Low	High	Low	Low	Low	High	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low
Participative Accountability	Low	Low	Low	High	High	High	High	Low	Low	High	High	High	Low	High

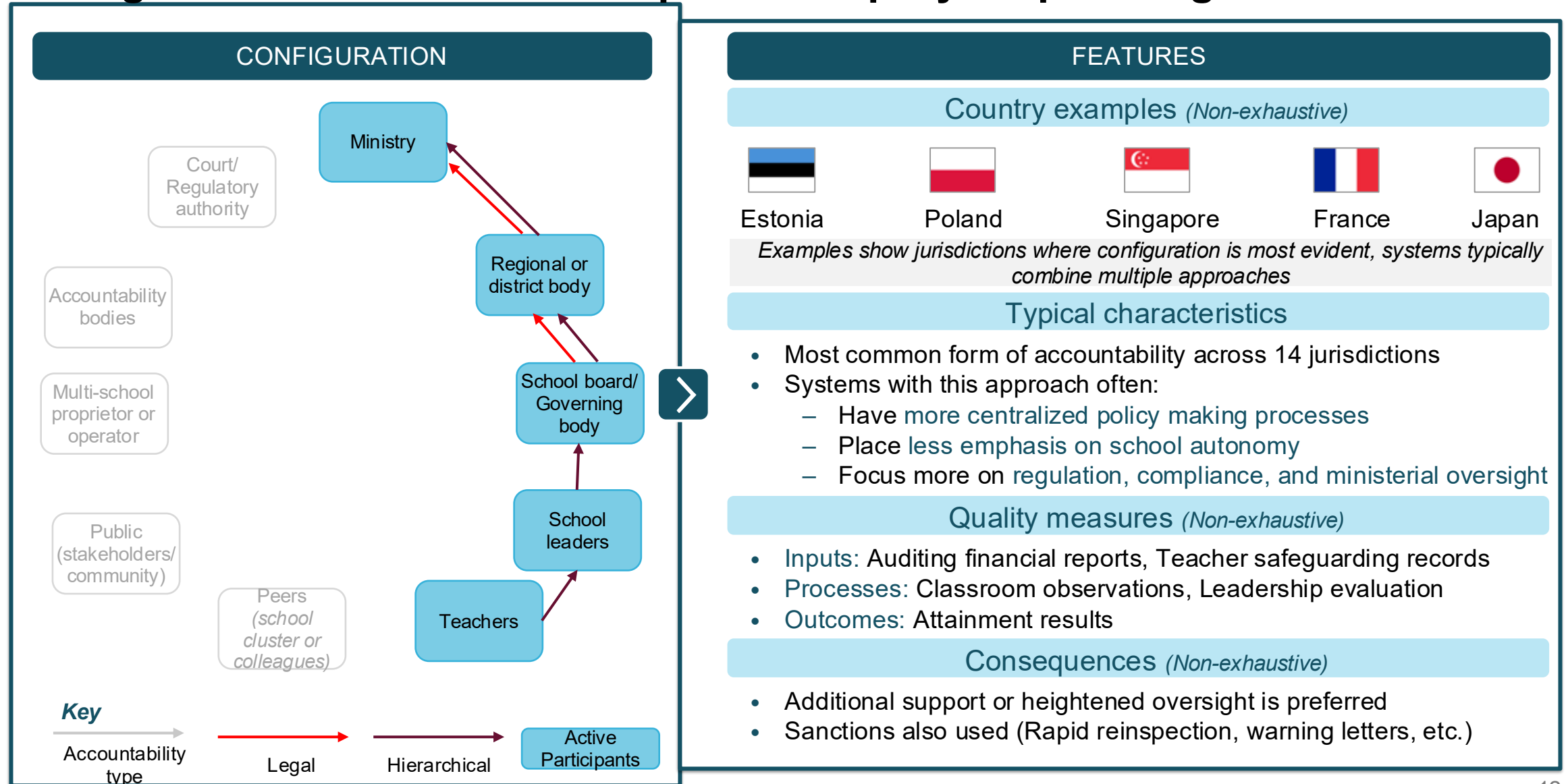
- Most jurisdictions combine multiple accountability types, with hierarchical accountability remaining a core feature in many systems
- England and the Netherlands make greater use of market mechanisms, including parental choice and the publication of performance information
- Ontario and New Zealand are characterised by more polycentric arrangements, combining hierarchical, professional, and participatory elements
- France and Singapore retain more centralised approaches, with accountability primarily operating through hierarchical and legal mechanisms

Common Configurations | Reviewing accountability approaches across jurisdictions reveals a set of common approaches

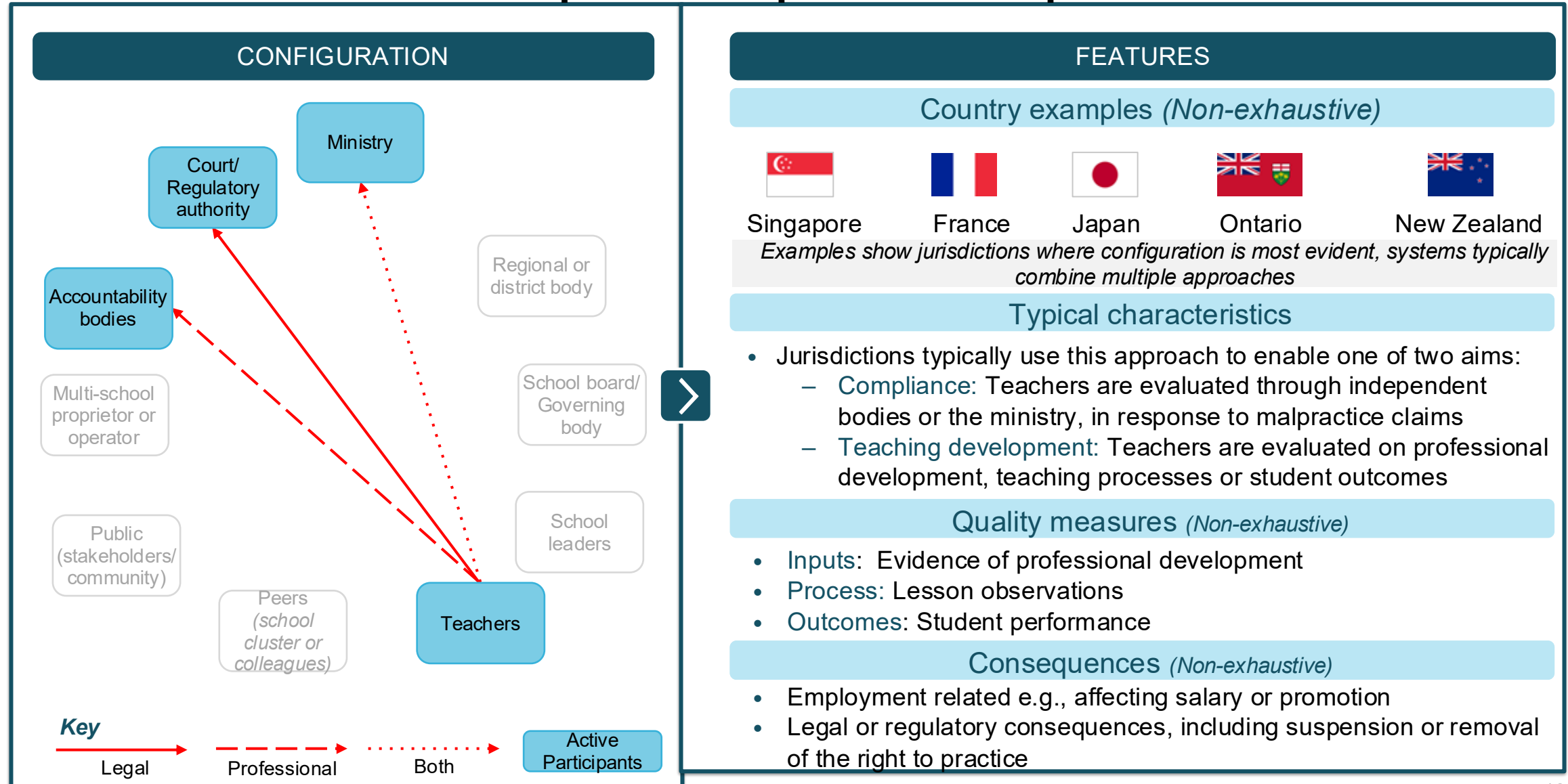


In some jurisdictions, accountability is increasingly framed at a system level, with collective responsibility for outcomes. This tendency does not align neatly with narrower definitions of accountability.

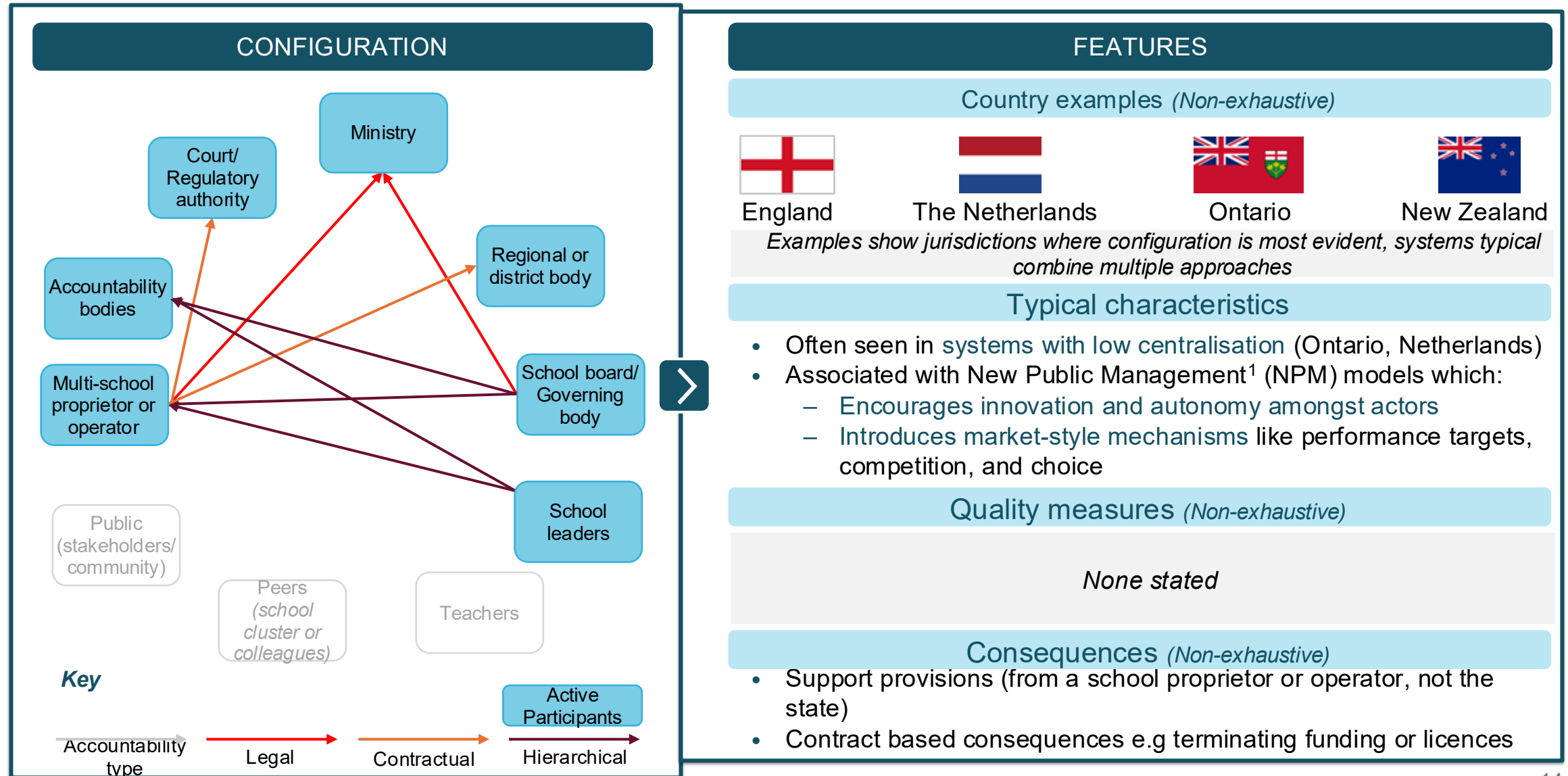
Vertical chain of command | Actors are held accountable through hierarchical relationships in a step-by-step management chain



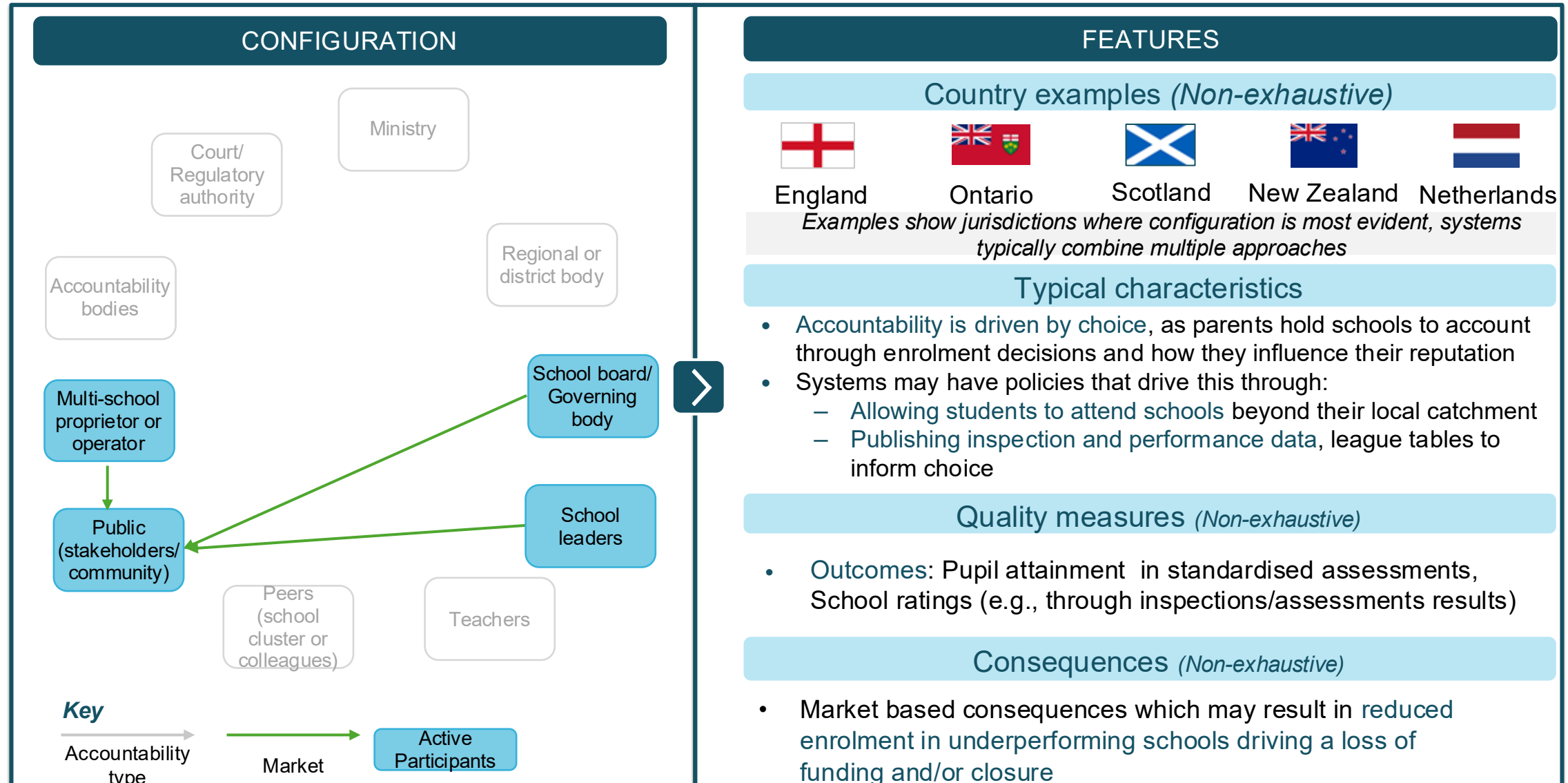
Vertical teacher accountability | Teachers are accountable to external forums for compliance or professional practice



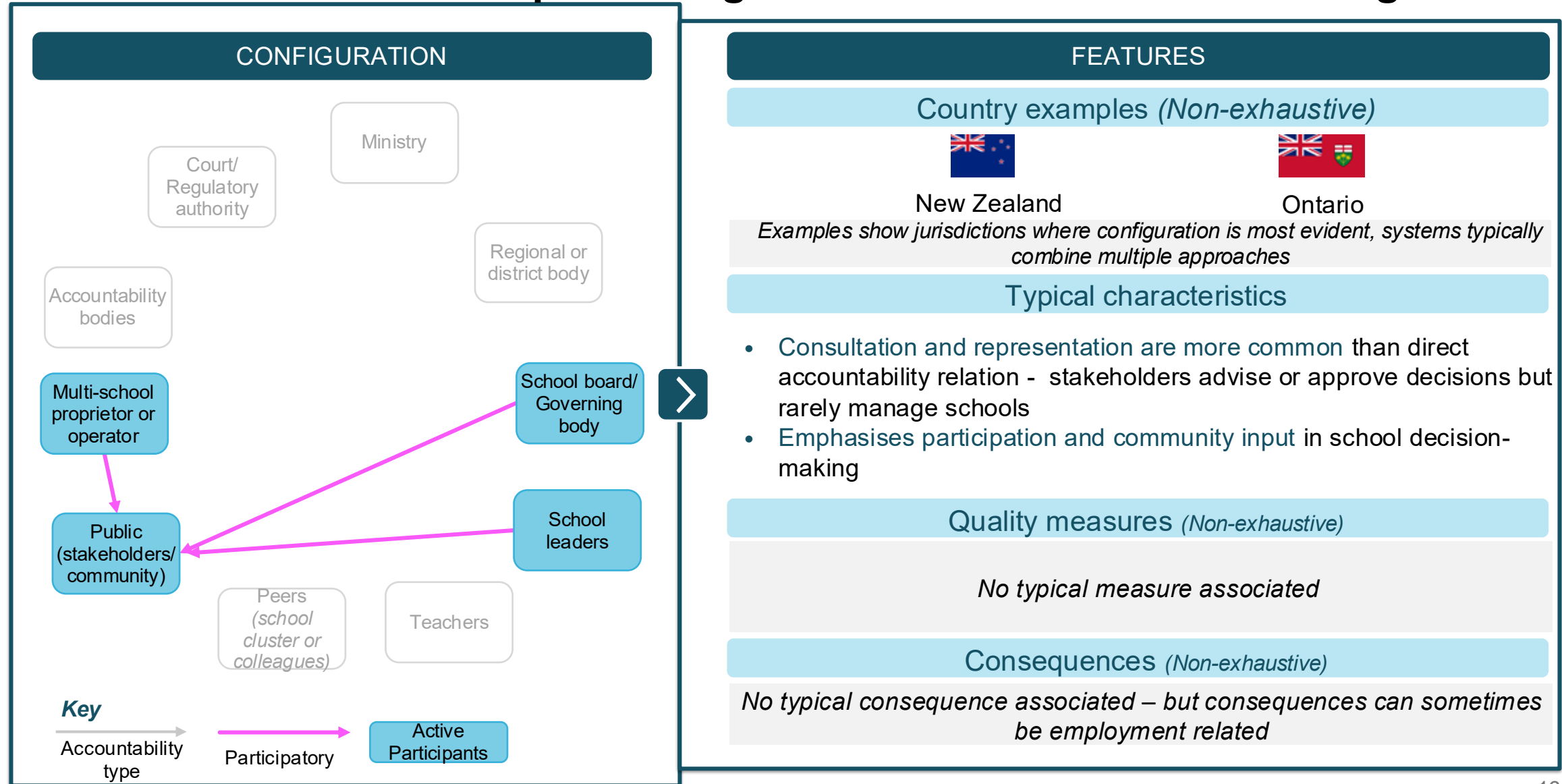
Polycentric accountability | Accountability involves multiple actors and forums in 'diagonal' relations



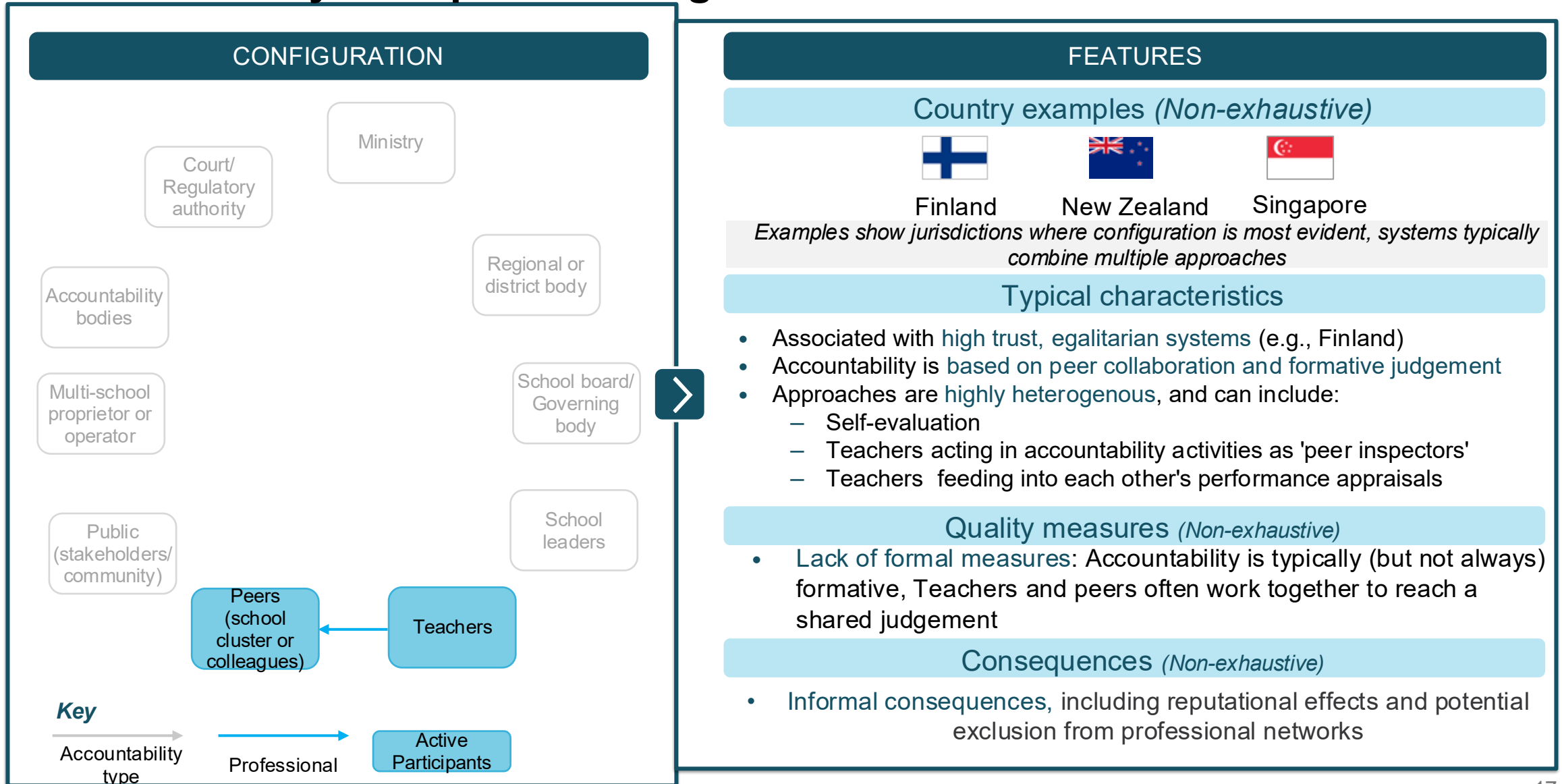
Market accountability | School leaders and governing bodies are accountable to the public through choice and competition



Participatory accountability | Actors are held accountable through direct involvement of the public in governance and decision making



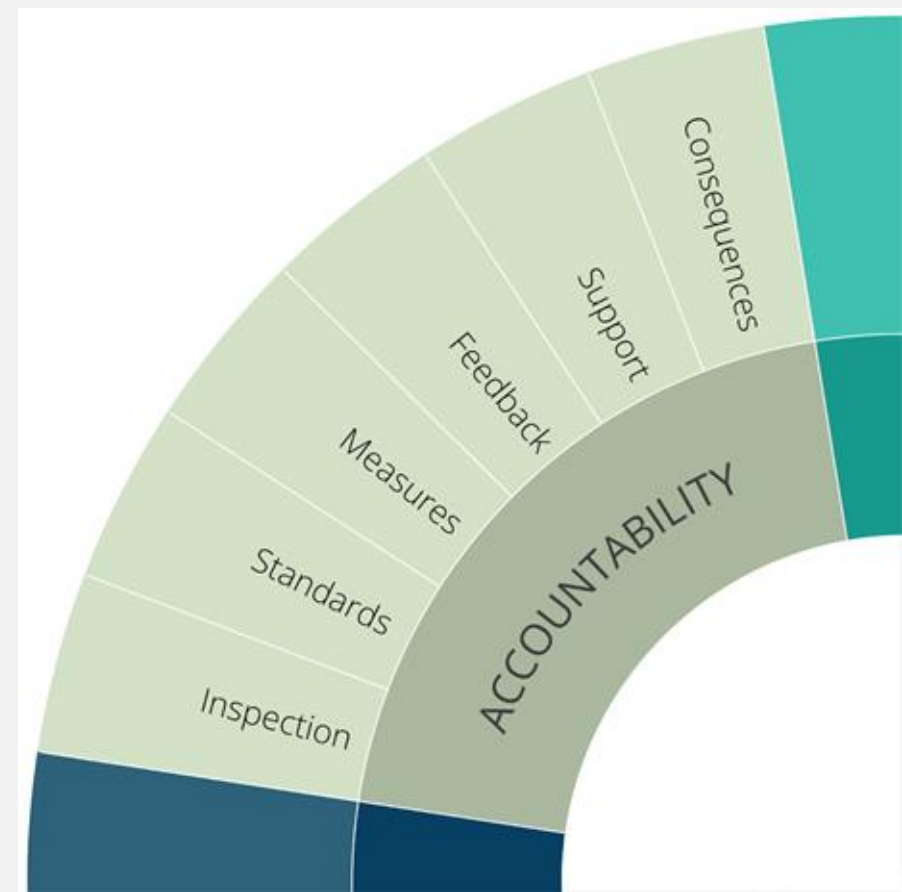
Horizontal professional accountability | Teachers are held accountable by their peers through formative measures



ACCOUNTABILITY POLICY

Development and evaluation

Loic Menzies et al, December 2025, v1.0



RQ3 | How is accountability policy made and introduced?

Sub questions explore how policy is designed and operationalised

a) What is the process for managing change in accountability policy and which, if any, bodies exist to manage this process?

- How is the body with responsibility for accountability policy constituted, appointed, and governed (if applicable)?
- Who else is normally involved and why?
- How often is change/review (major and minor) planned to take place?
- Are all forms of accountability considered together?

b) How was the most recent accountability reform designed and implemented, and who was involved?

- What process and stages took place? (What precipitated the reforms? Were changes/reforms pilot tested before full implementation? If so, did piloting lead to revisions?)
- Which groups of stakeholders and experts or what research were consulted and how much input did they have? What was the rationale behind this? What happened as a result?
- Did the process follow a standardised process and do reviews happen on a specified timescale (e.g. is there a set date for the next review?)

... Revealing key design levers that distinguish system approaches

FORMALITY | WHAT IS THE PROCESS FOR MANAGING CHANGES?

DELEGATION | WHO DESIGNS AND DELIVERS POLICY?

CONSULTATION | WHICH GROUPS OF STAKEHOLDERS ARE CONSULTED?

Deep-dive | Widespread patterns and considerations seen across systems

Accountability authorities, working in concert with schools, are generally responsible for implementation.

- In Ontario and the Netherlands, middle tier structures play a mediating role and this can provide space for school-board representation
- This approach aligns with Ontario's characteristically devolved approach, and with the Netherlands' constitutionally enshrined principle of school autonomy

All countries consult widely as they develop their policy, but it is impossible to know how meaningful, deep or impactful this is simply on the basis of policy documentation.

- Academics are widely consulted group amongst countries: In Singapore, there are close links between the National Institute of Education (NIE) and the ministry; Academic involvement is also prioritised in Estonia and France
- Ontario and New Zealand are notable in consulting with indigenous groups - keeping with their cultural and demographic context

Approaches to reform may vary more *within* a country than *between* countries.

- Small, incremental changes to accountability tend to emanate from a ministry or government authority
- More significant 'punctuation' events can require major legislation or political leadership and follow from specific triggers

Development | Accountability policy is rarely developed as a single coherent policy area

Key finding

- Across jurisdictions, accountability policy typically develops through **separate processes** (e.g. inspection, teacher regulation, assessment, governance), rather than as a unified policy domain
- As a result, **some elements of accountability policy are more visible and documented** than others, with inspection design often the clearest example
- Overall accountability arrangements **reflect wider school governance and system structures** (e.g. employment models, school autonomy, middle-tier design), rather than deliberate end-to-end policy design

Illustrative examples



England

Accountability reforms are most clearly articulated through inspection policy, while other elements (e.g. teacher regulation, assessment, governance) are developed and reviewed separately



The Netherlands

Accountability arrangements reflect constitutional principles of school autonomy and delegated authority, rather than a single, unified accountability policy process



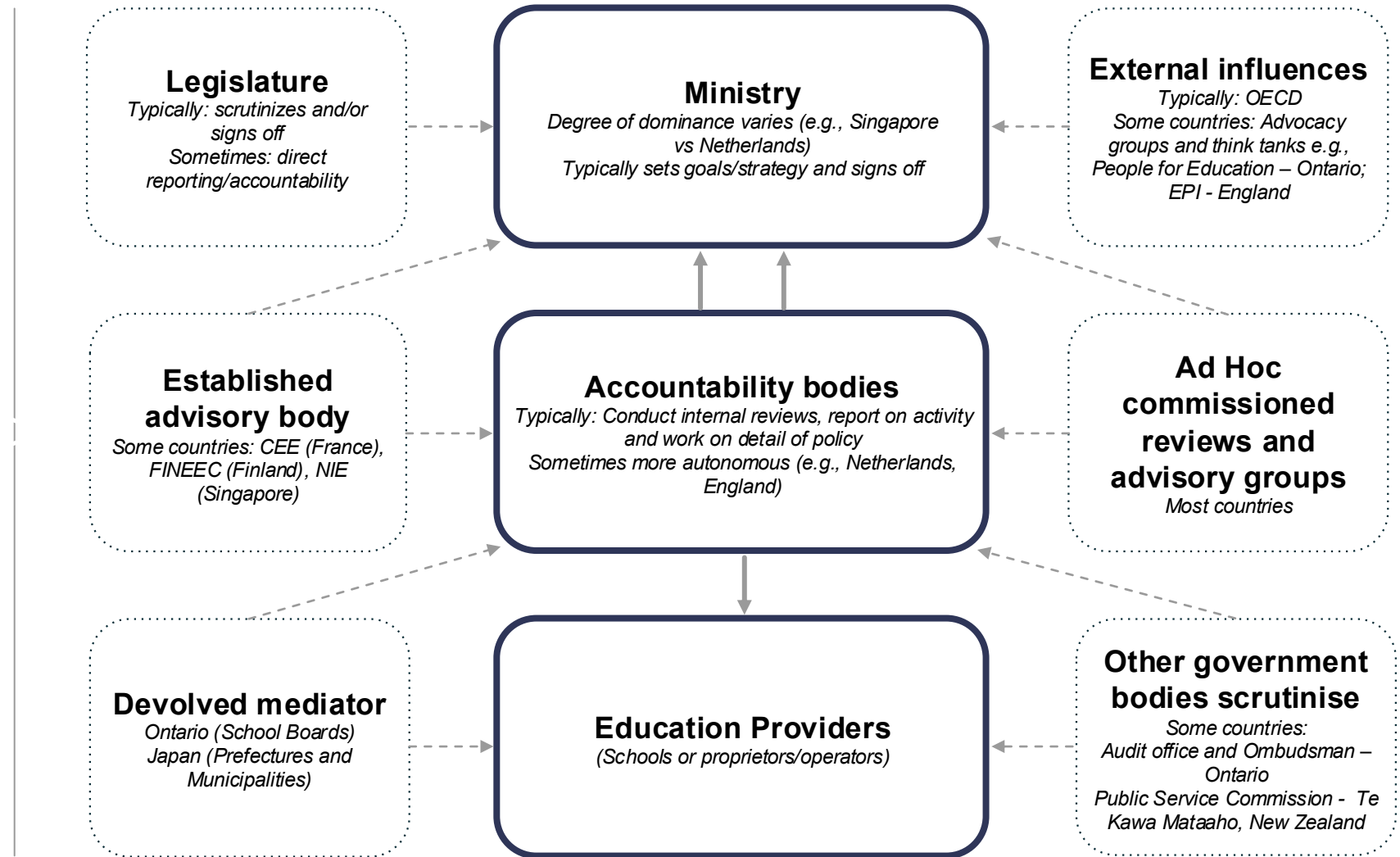
Ontario

Accountability design is shaped by a devolved governance model, with middle-tier bodies mediating between policy intent and school-level practice

Deep-Dive | Policy management models typically involve the ministry and accountability bodies, some countries also convene advisory groups

Common arrangements and country exemplars

Arrangements typically relate to specific elements of accountability (e.g., inspection or evaluation), rather than to accountability as a single, unified domain.



Deep-dive | Who design and delivers different elements of accountability policy?

In most jurisdictions, the ministry and accountability authorities work together on the detail of reforms

- In some cases, the process appears ministry-led (e.g., Japan and Singapore)
- In other countries (England, Finland), accountability bodies appear to have a degree of independence, even if this is combined with ministry oversight, guidance or sign-off.
- In France, the Netherlands and Scotland, authorities appear to operate somewhat more independently. For example, in the Netherlands the ministry delegates much of its power to the inspectorate and an advisory council.
- In Scotland, ministers set strategic objectives and then hold the chief executive of Education Scotland accountable for delivering these.

Most countries bring together advisory groups to develop accountability policies but the degree to which these are formalised or permanent varies.

- The Netherlands is unusual in having a standing advisory council to develop its policies on accountability
- Japan has an established process for appointing working groups.
- France has a Council for School Evaluation (CSE) and this council's composition is highly specified.
- Other countries (e.g., England) also convene working groups, but they tend to do so in a more ad hoc manner

Seven main intended ways of generating improvement...

- 1. Deterring malpractice:**
 - Requires clear expectations with a credible possibility of sanctioning.
 - Primarily suited to ensuring compliance with minimum standards.
- 2. Prompting support that builds expertise and capacity:**
 - Requires school-improvement infrastructure + high quality input in right conditions.
- 3. Encouraging professional reflection and solution generation:**
 - Depends on high-trust environment with skilled professionals.
- 4. Driving pupils towards better performing schools:**
 - Depends on availability of alternatives
 - Requires parents to make informed choices based on accurate/meaningful/accessible information.
 - Risk of inequitable outcomes + struggling schools finding it harder to improve.
- 5. Prompting changes of management:**
 - Depends on availability of effective managers + conditions to lead effectively.
- 6. Directing additional effort and attention towards government priorities:**
 - Depends on incentives and pressures aligning with policy priorities.
 - Professionals need capacity to direct towards priorities
 - May mean other goals are neglected/innovation inhibited.
- 7. Creating system alignment and coherence:**
 - Requires shared priorities and professional learning across the system.
 - Depends on professionals having opportunities and capacity to interact.

Seven choices...

- 1. What is the underlying theory of improvement?**
- 2. On whom should accountability pressures fall, and how much pressure is acceptable or desired?**
- 3. What is the preferred, or existing approach to system governance (e.g., degree of centralisation), and how will the accountability system fit with this?**
- 4. Should responsiveness be built into accountability through electoral, market-based, or participatory means?**
- 5. What guardrails are needed to protect against unintended but predictable consequences like pupil exclusion?**
- 6. What should schools and professionals be incentivised to focus on, and how much capacity do they have to respond in intended ways?**
- 7. How coherent is the accountability web?**