Designing and conducting policy-research partnerships: Public committees, expert groups and other forms of policy-research collaboration

Background document to the Learning Seminar organised within the Strengthening the Impact of Education Research project

11-12 October, Oslo, Norway

OECD

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Introduction

Across the OECD, enormous effort and investment has aimed to reinforce the quality, production and use of education research in policy and practice. Despite this, strengthening the impact of research in education policy making and practice remains a challenge for many countries and systems. The OECD/CERI launched the *Strengthening the Impact of Education Research* project in 2021. Two learning seminars were held in 2022 in the Netherlands and Belgium (Flanders). This paper provides the background for a third learning seminar in Norway, where the discussion will delve into the following theme: **Designing and conducting policy-research partnerships: Public committees, expert groups and other forms of policy-research collaboration**.

This background document is laid out as follows. The first section describes the scope of the Norway seminar and briefly presents the theme of policy advisory systems, research commissioning processes and forms of co-production. Section two provides data from the project's policy survey, exploring Ministries' responses in relation to barriers around research use; organisational culture and mindset within policy organisations around research use; and education research production. Section three discusses briefly some features of the Norwegian "knowledge infrastructure" in education and presents the case that will be discussed during the seminar.

Part I. Scope of the seminar

Introduction

The seminar in Oslo will explore routes of research to policy. Such routes can include proactive (long-term, anticipatory) and reactive (short-term, more crisis-driven) initiatives (Howlett, 2019[1]). The seminar will investigate policy makers' initiatives to engage researchers in research for policy making focusing on:

- Researchers' involvement in public committees and expert groups;
- Co-production and other forms of collaborative research in policy-research partnerships.

Participants would explore what the concept of thoughtfully engaging with evidence means across different actors in these processes.

Policy advisory systems and public committees

Policy advisory systems, understood as the "interlocking set of actors […] who provide information, knowledge and recommendations for actions to policy makers" (Hustedt and Veit, 2017, p. 42[2]) play a crucial role in providing governments with evidence-informed analysis throughout the policy cycle. They can take diverse forms, differing in lifespan, structure, mandate and institutional setting [see Figure 1 and OECD (2017[3])]. Each country and jurisdiction has its own system consisting of different actors, such as ministerial policy units, councils, commissions, state-financed research institutes, think tanks and consulting organisations (Hustedt and Veit, 2017[2]).

Figure 1. Features of policy advisory systems
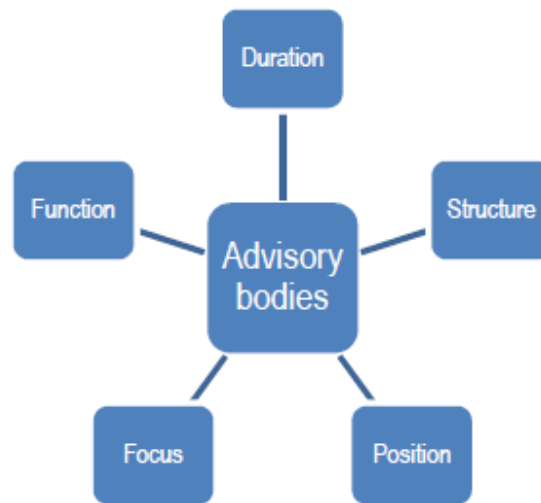
Source: OECD (2017[3]), *Policy Advisory Systems: Supporting Good Governance and Sound Public Decision Making.*

Figure 1 represents the key distinguishing features of policy advisory bodies.

- **Duration.** Permanent advisory bodies tend to monitor policies, provide trend analyses and collect data for future analysis. *Ad hoc* bodies provide governments with more tailored advice and are usually used to gather evidence-informed answers to particular questions. Some countries, such as the Netherlands, have undergone a shift from permanent institutionalised advisory councils to *ad hoc* committees (van den Berg, 2017[4]).
- **Structure.** Permanent bodies are typically constituted of councils and research institutes. Ad hoc bodies feature committees, commissions, working groups, panels and/or boards.
- **Position.** Advisory bodies have a predefined legal and managerial level of autonomy. Advisory bodies, while being connected with the government, require independence from government to obtain trustworthy outcomes from the process. A transparent process helps to ensure this trustiness, assuring a clear demarcation between the work of policy advisors and politicians, before, during and after the policy advice process (OECD, 2017[3]).
- **Focus.** The focus of the advisory body can be specific or broad.
- **Function.** Advisory bodies serve different functions, such as strategic foresight, conducting evaluations or creating evidence.

Co-production and other forms of collaborative research

Setting up a public committee is only one form of policy-research partnerships/collaboration. The seminar would explore what forms of collaborative research production exist, and their respective benefits and challenges. The seminar would investigate what *forms* of involvement and collaborative research are appropriate for what *purpose* from the policy makers' and researchers' perspectives.

# Part II. Policy context: Data from the OECD policy survey

The OECD Strengthening the Impact of Education Research policy survey – conducted from June to September 2021 – collected data on the strategies and challenges in producing education research and facilitating its use in policy and practice. Overall, 37 systems representing 29 countries responded to the survey.

Barriers to and mechanisms facilitating the use of research in policy

The policy survey asked ministries about the different types of barriers they perceive to using research in educational policy (see Table 1). Overall, the lack of willingness of policy makers to use research is not considered one of the main challenges, with only 8% of respondent systems reporting this as a barrier. However, a third of respondents consider the lack of a broader political will to use research to be a barrier. This may point to more of a system-level or institutional issue.

Table 1. Barriers to the use of research in policy

Rank assigned to barriers to research use in policy by systems and their average reported presence, 2021.

	Norway	Sweden	Denmark	Netherlands	Belgium (Flemish Comm.)	UK (England)	Average (Systems)
Lack of relevant research for policy needs	5th	1st				6th	50%
Low accessibility of research in appropriate formats for policy	3rd			5th		3rd	50%
The **conflicting timeframes** of policy and research	4th		4th	6th	1st	1st	61%
Lack of broader political will to use research				1st	3rd		33%
Lack of willingness of policy makers to use research							8%

Note: Columns 2 to 7 show the relative rank (from 1st to 6th) assigned by each system to the given barrier to increasing and improving the use of education research in policy making. Last column shows the average of respondent systems reporting the presence of the given barrier, independently of its ranking. Data collected at a national and sub-national level. "Flemish Comm." refers to the Flemish Community of Belgium. N = 36.
Source: OECD *Strengthening the Impact of Education Research* policy survey data.

Half of respondent systems perceive low accessibility and low relevance of research to be one of the main barriers to its use in policy. This indicates that current research may not be addressing current policy needs and/or the research and policy making cycles are disconnected.

The survey also asked ministries about the presence of mechanisms facilitating the use of research in educational policy (see Table 2). 62% of respondent systems reported that they systematically commission

research to address policy needs. However, 30% of these systems do not systematically identify policy makers' needs, while 35% do not systematically identify research gaps.

This inconsistency may result in commissioned research being of low relevance and poorly aligned with current policy debates, ultimately affecting research impact. This raises the question of the functioning of research commissioning processes: Are they fulfilling their purpose? What is missing or malfunctioning in the process? It is worth exploring how policy-research collaboration can be improved to address concerns around accessibility and relevance of research.

Table 2. Mechanisms facilitating research use in policy

Reported presence of mechanisms facilitating research use in policy by systems, 2021.

	Norway	Sweden	Denmark	Netherlands	Belgium (Flemish Comm.)	UK (England)	Average (Systems)
Systematically **identifying policy makers' needs** in terms of research knowledge	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	51%
Systematically **identifying research gaps** that are relevant for policy	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	49%
Systematically **commissioning research** to address policy needs	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	62%
Providing **targeted funding** for research on specific topics (calls for research)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	70%

Note: Columns 2 to 7 show the reported presence of the given mechanism facilitating the use of education research in policy making. Last column shows the average of respondent systems reporting the presence of the given mechanism. Data collected at a national and sub-national level. "Flemish Comm." refers to the Flemish Community of Belgium. N = 37.
Source: OECD *Strengthening the Impact of Education Research* policy survey data.

This finding is of particular relevance when considering that 78% of respondent systems reported that their policy makers access education research through commissioning research. This goes up to 91% among the systems that reported commissioning research as a mechanism to facilitate research use. Nevertheless, the main reported means of access to education research for policy makers are advice obtained from external or in-house experts; and attending conferences and workshops.

Culture and mindset

The survey asked the extent to which ministries agreed with nine statements on the topic of research engagement culture, summarised in Table 3.

The motivation to use research is, overall, present: A vast majority of respondent systems (96%) agree that using research is important for policy makers. However, this does not mean there is an expectation (i.e. political or institutional pressure) to use education research: only 73% agree that they are actually expected to use it.

Willingness is slightly weaker: 62% of respondent systems agree that there is a strong political will to use research in policy making and just half of systems agree that policy makers are willing to use it to question their ideas and preconceptions. This can be a major barrier to thoughtful engagement with research.

Among those systems that report a political will to use research in policy, the proportion of systems perceiving policy makers as willing to use it rises to 63%. Among those systems reporting little political will to use research, the proportion falls to 30%. These statistically significant differences may point to the potential influence of system-level efforts on shaping individual behaviours.

The weakest link is the quality aspect of relationships: trust in research among policy makers, trust between policy makers and researchers and a shared understanding of research. While a well-functioning policy-research partnership can improve this aspect with time, these are also necessary conditions for partnerships to work effectively. It's therefore important to think about how to purposefully develop trust and a shared understanding.

Table 3. Research engagement culture in respondent systems

Systems' level of agreement with statements related to research engagement culture, 2021.

		Norway	Sweden	Denmark	Netherlands	Belgium (Flemish Comm.)	UK (England)	% of systems (strongly) agreeing
MOTIVATION	Using research in the policy process (design, decision making) is important for policy makers	Strongly agree	Agree	Information not provided	Agree	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	96%
	Policy makers are expected to use research in the policy process	Strongly agree	Agree		Neither agree, nor disagree	Neither agree, nor disagree	Strongly agree	73%
	There is a strong political will to use research in policy	Agree	Agree		Neither agree, nor disagree	Disagree	Agree	62%
WILLINGNESS	Policy makers are willing to try new ways to integrate research into policy making	Strongly agree	Agree		Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree, nor disagree	62%
	Policy makers are willing to learn new skills for using research	Strongly agree	Neither agree, nor disagree		Neither agree, nor disagree	Disagree	Neither agree, nor disagree	62%
	Policy makers are willing to use research to question their ideas and preconceptions	Agree	Neither agree, nor disagree		Disagree	Disagree	Agree	50%
RELATIONSHIPS	There is a high level of trust in research amongst policy makers	Agree	Agree		Agree	Disagree	Agree	54%
	There is a high level of trust between policy makers and researchers	Strongly agree	Agree		Agree	Disagree	Strongly agree	52%
	Policy makers and researchers have a shared understanding of research and its use	Neither agree, nor disagree	Agree		Disagree	Disagree	Agree	46%

Notes: Columns 2 to 7 show the system's level of agreement with the given statement, whereas column 8 shows the percentage of respondent systems agreeing or strongly agreeing with the given statement. Statements are grouped based on the dimensions of research engagement culture: Motivation, Willingness and Relationships. Data collected at a national and sub-national level. N = 26.
Statements are ranked within each dimension in descending order of the percentage of systems agreeing or strongly agreeing with them.
Source: OECD *Strengthening the Impact of Education Research* policy survey data.

Research production: Involvement and incentives

The policy survey shows a broad range of actors participating in producing research, although at varying degrees of activeness. Academic and government researchers are perceived as the most active in research production: 88% and 70% of respondent systems, respectively, reported them as "Active" or "Very active". This is relatively unsurprising as generating research is central to the profession.

In contrast, only a third of respondent systems perceive that policy makers are actively involved in research production. This raises questions: should policy makers be much more involved in research production (and is this feasible)? Would their greater involvement help to ensure more systematic use of research in policy, and to increase the relevance of research to policy?

The *Strengthening the Impact of Education Research* policy survey asked about ministries' perception of different stakeholders' involvement in seven stages of research production (see Table 4) and about incentives for such involvement (see Table 5).

Table 4. Policy makers' and government researchers' involvement in research production

Perceived involvement of government researchers and policy makers in research production cycle, 2021.

Stage	Norway (Gov)	Norway (Policy)	Sweden	Denmark	Netherlands (Gov)	Netherlands (Policy)	Belgium (Flemish Community) (Gov)	Belgium (Flemish Community) (Policy)	United Kingdom (England) (Gov)	United Kingdom (England) (Policy)	Government researchers	Policy makers
In formulating the research questions	No*	Yes	Information not provided	Information not provided	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	85%	95%
In designing the research	No*	Yes			Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	70%	40%
In coordinating the research (e.g. outreach, ethics, liaison)	No*	Yes			Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	80%	50%
In collecting the data	No*	No			Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	65%	25%
In analysing and interpreting the data	No*	No			Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	80%	45%
In communicating research results (e.g. drafting papers, briefs, presenting in conferences)	No*	Yes			Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	85%	80%
In evaluating the research results (e.g. in terms of quality, relevance)	No*	Yes			Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	75%	70%

Notes: Data show in which stages of research production the given systems reported the involvement of government researchers and policy makers. The last two columns show the percentage of respondent systems that reported government researchers' and policy makers' involvement in the given stage of research production. Data collected at a national and sub-national level. N = 19.

(*) The role of "government researcher", following the definition in the footnote below, does not seem to exist in Norway.

Source: OECD *Strengthening the Impact of Education Research* policy survey data.

In most respondent systems, policy makers are involved in formulating research questions and communicating and evaluating results (see Table 4). They tend to be involved at the "ends" of the research production cycle and not at the central stages, such as designing and coordinating the research and collecting, analysing and interpreting the data. In contrast, government researchers[1] tend to be perceived as being steadily involved across different stages of research production. The Norwegian survey response on the involvement of government researchers can be clarified as follows: in Norway, *academic* researchers are present at all stages. Researchers participating in committees in Norway are still perceived as *academic* researchers, and not *government*. Ministry employees with research background and skills are primarily perceived as *policy makers*, and not government researchers*.*

It remains to be seen though how policy makers and government researchers collaborate in the different research production stages and if they are indeed successful in coordinating their efforts. Genuine partnerships of research production often remain more of an aspiration in many systems than a reality. Some of the key challenges include power relations when different types of actors collaborate in research production, incentives for actors to be involved and institutional support for academics in their engagement. Research or advisory commissions are a key mechanism of collaborative research production in many systems, where the successful outcome of such a commission is also tied to the ability of its members to work in genuine partnership.

The low involvement of policy makers in research production may be linked to the lack of adequate incentives to be involved in it. The survey shows that respondent systems perceive policy makers' involvement in research production to be driven primarily by intrinsic incentives. Unsurprisingly, the strongest incentive is being able to support decision making (see Table 5). In contrast, extrinsic incentives do not appear to be very present in many systems. Even if involvement in research production is part of a policy maker's job description – as reported by one third of the respondent systems –, it does not necessarily go hand in hand with specific time allocated for research use and/or a salary supplement.

Table 5. Policy makers' incentives to be involved in research production

Perceived incentives of policy makers to be involved in research production, 2021.

	Norway	Sweden	Denmark	Netherlands	Belgium (Flemish Comm.)	UK (England)	*Average (Systems)*
... is part of their **job description**	Information not provided	Information not provided	Information not provided	No	Yes	Yes	**32%**
EXTRINSIC ... implies a **salary supplement**	Information not provided	Information not provided	Information not provided	No	No	No	**0%**
... implies **time allocation** (e.g. a certain number of hours per week)	Information not provided	Information not provided	Information not provided	Yes	No	No	**21%**
... is part of their **performance evaluation criteria** (e.g. for promotion, tenure)	Information not provided	Information not provided	Information not provided	No	Yes	No	**16%**

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[1] Government researchers are defined as professionals working for government institutions engaged in the conception or creation of new knowledge, products, processes, methods and systems and in the management of the projects concerned (OECD, 2023[19]). Nevertheless, the term was not clearly defined in the policy survey and therefore data needs to be interpreted with caution.

	Norway	Sweden	Denmark	Netherlands	Belgium (Flemish Comm.)	UK (England)	Average (Systems)
... implies **informal recognition** (e.g. from their peers, hierarchy)				No	No	No	**26%**
... allows them to **support decision making**				Yes	Yes	Yes	**95%**
... allows them to **improve practices and processes**				Yes	No	Yes	**63%**
... gives them a **sense of participation in national debate**				Yes	No	Yes	**53%**

Notes: Data show which incentives to be involved in research production the given systems reported regarding policy makers. The last column shows the percentage of respondent systems that reported the given incentive for policy makers. Data collected at a national and sub-national level. N = 20.

Source: OECD *Strengthening the Impact of Education Research* policy survey data.

Finally, whether policy makers should be much more involved than they currently are, and what roles should they be playing, are still open questions. Systems that systematically commission research to address policy needs seem to provide more incentives, both extrinsic and intrinsic, for policy makers to be involved in research production. Systems that do not commission research do not report any type of extrinsic incentive to policy makers to be involved in research production, except a minority (17%) reporting that it is part of a policy maker's job description. The presence of a structured and continually consulted policy advisory system may push for the presence of incentives for policy makers to be involved in research production.

Part III. The knowledge infrastructure for evidence-informed policies in Norway

This section describes the Norwegian knowledge infrastructure for education and the role of policy advisory committees in informing policy making in Norway. It then examines the specific case of a public committee that was appointed to support decision making on curriculum renewal.

Actors in education research and knowledge mobilisation

The figure below depicts the landscape of education research stakeholders in Norway, both within the ministry and beyond. It also shows the ministry's currently active strategies for education research.

Figure 2. The education research landscape: Stakeholders and strategies
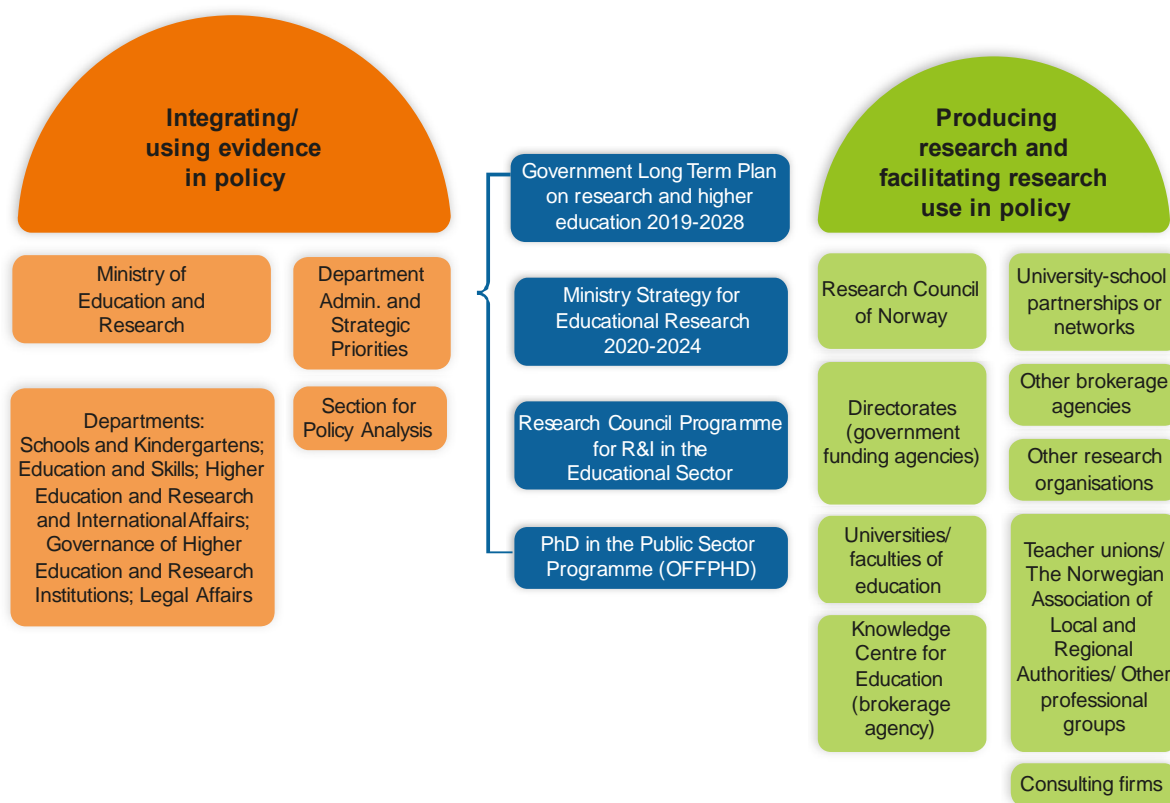
Note: R&I: research and innovation.
Source: Developed by the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2022.

Policy advisory committees in Norway

In Norway and in other Nordic countries, the ministries play an important role in facilitating knowledge production and the state apparatus relies on internal expertise through a professional civil service, as well as external expertise. The Norwegian government makes extensive use of external expertise by commissioning research from a strong research institute sector and funnelling economic resources into the research sector through the Norwegian Research Council. In addition, it relies on input from consultancy firms, interest groups and think tanks.

Committees[2] are considered a cornerstone in the Nordic knowledge regimes and an especially important channel for advice (Christensen and Holst, 2017[5]). Committees have traditionally enabled Norwegian governments to broker compromise with interest groups and civil society and to gather expertise and evidence from prominent experts and existing research. In 1972, the committee system as we know it today – *Norges Offentlige Utredninger* (NOU, or Norwegian Public Committee, in English) – was introduced. Since then, Norwegian governments have set up ad hoc committees, in order to prepare major and minor policy initiatives, law propositions, white papers, reforms and public debate. Norway is interested

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[2] "Committee" and "commission" are commonly used interchangeably in Norway. On some occasions, "commission" may refer specifically to the investigation by experts of an event of a particular kind, although this usage is not entirely consistent. For the sake of this document, the term "committee" is used.

in understanding how public committees, and other routes of research to policy commonly used in other systems, can play a role in developing a systematic and quality use of research in policy making. Depending upon the theme and topic of the committee, the Government appoints researchers, experts and/or representatives from other groups of interests (e.g. trade unions, employer organisation). When there are only researchers or experts involved, the committee may be called an "expert group".

Figure 3. Norwegian public committees: from green to white papers (ad-hoc committees)

The advice provided by committees primarily contributes to the policy formulation stage of the decision-making process, which occurs **before** the government proposes concrete policies (Christensen and Holst, 2017[5]). This differs from advisory bodies whose role is to assess already formulated government proposals, such as permanent advisory councils in Belgium (Fobé et al., 2013[6]).

Committees work autonomously for a designated amount of time and submit an advisory report to the incumbent government. Upon submission of the report, the committee is then dissolved. The committee report (green paper) may be discussed in parliament and/or form the basis for propositions to parliament or white papers. Figure 3 outlines the process from appointing the public committee to policy making. The majority of committees in Norway are **ad hoc**, but other types of committees include permanent ones (such as *Teknisk Beregningsutvalg* and *Banklovkommisjonen*) and crisis inquiry commissions, that investigate high-profile accidents, scandals and crises (e.g. 22. Juli-kommisjonen, Koronakommisjonen).

The extensive involvement of government officials has been argued to distinguish Nordic committees from the more independent commissions in countries like the UK [Heclo, 1974, cited by Hesstvedt (2020[7])]. Government officials may participate in committees as committee members, secretaries and very occasionally as chairmen. Committee secretaries are usually recruited among Ministries or public agencies and directorates – the exception is when establishing an evidence base is part of the commission's mandate, where this role is then frequently appointed to researchers and statisticians.

In recent years, studies from Denmark and Sweden have suggested that government control over committees have tightened. Dahlström, Lundberg and Pronin (2020[8]) for instance found that the government gives more detailed and longer mandates to committees and that these are given less time to draft their reports.

Research has also indicated a growing reliance on academic knowledge in committee work. Norway has experienced a marked increase in the proportion of committee members who are affiliated with universities

and research institutions. They now outnumber other actors in Norwegian public committees, such as those affiliated with interest groups, the private sector or the political sphere (Christensen and Hesstvedt, 2018, p. 95[9]). The total volume of citations in committee reports has increased exponentially, indicating more thorough literature reviews and an ambition of building a solid evidence base (Christensen and Holst, 2017[5]), possibly as a result of greater integration of academic knowledge and practices in committees. Committees are therefore an important avenue through which policy makers engage with research, and researchers engage with policy making.

The literature on research committees in Nordic countries has often conceptualised committees as a mechanism that brings organised interests (e.g. business owners, workers) into the policy-making process through their routine consultation and participation in advisory boards, committees and councils. This facilitates consensus building and negotiations in the early stages of the policy process and eases policy development and implementation in later stages. This is conceptualised as an "exchange" relationship: interest groups gain access to policy making in exchange for providing political support for the implementation of policy.

A recent topic of debate in Norway is whether the extensive involvement of academics in such committees results in academic knowledge primarily defining policy problems and solutions, and, if so, if this limits the potential for other legitimate political interests to define these.

Part IV. Case study: Evidence use in policy making in Norway: Curriculum reform from green paper to policy implementation

This section has been developed by the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research.

Background: Curriculum renewal (or reform) in Norway – A short history

The Norwegian curriculum reform enacted in August 2020 builds on, and confirms, the previous curriculum reform of 2006, headlined "Knowledge Promotion". The 2020 reform preserved the main principles that were introduced during the previous reform - which represented a shift, moving from an input to an outcome orientation (Steiner-Khamsi, Karseth and Baek, 2019[10]). The official name "Knowledge Promotion 2020" (in Norwegian, LK20) reflects its connections to the previous curriculum reform. The "Knowledge Promotion 2020" consists of a new core curriculum and the different subjects' curricula.

In April 2016, the Ministry of Education and Research presented a white paper proposing a curriculum reform of primary and secondary education, *Report to Parliament No. 28 (2015-16) Subjects – in-depth studies – understanding: Renewal of the Knowledge Promotion Reform* (*Fag—fordypning—forståelse. En fornyelse av Kunnskapsløftet)* The White Paper was discussed by Parliament in October 2016.

The backdrop of the renewal of subjects taught in schools in Norway, as it is described in the preceding White Paper (Ministry of Education and Research of Norway, 2016[11]), refers mainly to two kinds of circumstances:

1. Societal changes: concerned with the future competence needs in working life and society.
2. Specific needs for changes to the curriculum itself: the need to establish a better connection between the different parts of the curriculum, including a new "Core curriculum".

There were also concerns regarding the well-known problem of curriculum overload. Curriculum overload happens when new themes and new competences are brought into education and training without removing any of the content that is already there.

The new core curriculum clarifies the importance of schools' common value base by elaborating on the objectives clause in the Education Act amended in 2008. *The core curriculum – values and principles for primary and secondary education and training* (Government of Norway, n.d.[12]).

"Knowledge Promotion 2020" is a consensus-based reform with both broad political support and school involvement (see Box 1).

Box 1. What's new in Knowledge Promotion 2020?

- The new curriculum is more adjusted to the needs of the future. Generic competences like critical thinking and problem solving are integrated in the subject curricula. There is a stronger connection between the core values and principles of education and subject curricula. More subjects have become more practical and exploratory.

- The focus is on students' ability to reflect, explore and to be creative. Participation, democracy and citizenship are underlined as important in supporting a more active student role.

- More time for in-depth learning and greater emphasis on progression in learning

- Five basic skills are still part of the curriculum: reading, writing, numeracy, oral skills and digital skills. The basic skills are incorporated in all the subjects, but the subjects have different roles in the development of the five skills.

- Three interdisciplinary topics are given priority. These are "democracy and citizenship", "sustainable development", "health and life skills". All three topics originate in societal challenges which demand involvement and effort from individuals and local communities, nationally and globally.

Initial steps toward curriculum reform were made in Report to the Storting No. 20 (2012–2013) *On the right path – Quality and diversity in a school for all*. Here the need for reviewing the subjects and content of primary and secondary education in light of new developments in society and future competence needs was signaled. The report includes the following measure:

> *The Government will appoint a public commission whose mandate will be to describe future competence needs and which competences, skills and qualifications they believe are important for participation in further education, society and working life (p.13)*

The overall timeline of curriculum reform is depicted below (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Timeline of curriculum renewal

Date	Event
2006	•**Knowledge Promotion** •Previous curriculum reform
2008	•Amendment of the Education Act
2013	•Report to Parliament No. 20 (2012-13) •Previous White Paper
2013 June	•**Appointment of Committee**
2014	•NOU 2014:7 •Committee's interim report
2015	•NOU 2015:8 •Committee's final report (**Green Paper**)
2015-16	•Public consultations of Green Paper
2016 April	•Report to Parliament No. 28 (2015-16) •**White Paper**
2016 October	•Discussion of White Paper by the Parliament
2020 August	•**Knowledge Promotion 2020** (KL2020) •Enactment of curriculum reform
2019-25	•Evaluation programme for the curriculum renewal

It is with this public commission that we will start our case.

Public Commission

On 21 June 2013, the Government appointed a committee to assess the degree to which the content of school covers the competences pupils will need in the society of the future and its working life. The Committee's mandate was to submit two reports:

An interim report providing a knowledge base and an analysis of:

- the historical development of the subjects in primary and secondary education and training over time;
- the subjects in primary and secondary education and training compared to countries it is natural to compare Norway with, including structure, grouping and content;
- reports and recommendations from national and international stakeholders on the future competence requirements which are relevant for primary and secondary education and training.

In light of the knowledge base presented in the interim report, the Committee defines "competence" broadly (see Box 2).

A final report (green paper) with assessment of

   a) the degree to which today's subject content covers the competences and the basic skills required in the society of the future and its working life,

   b) the changes that need to be made if these competences and skills are to be incorporated within the content of the education,

   c) whether today's structure of subjects should continue to form the basis of the education programmes, or whether the content of the programmes should be structured differently, and

   d) whether the content of the mission statement for primary and secondary education and training adequately reflects the education and training's subject content.

The Committee, chaired by Professor Sten Ludvigsen, was composed of 12 members *including 5 academic researchers*, whereas the rest of the committee consisted of civil servants (22%), members of interest groups (25%) and other (14%).

In order to reach a broad target group, both in the school sector and other sectors of society, the Committee established the blog *The School of the Future*[3]. It contains, among other things, documents from all Committee meetings, as well as blog posts from Committee members, researchers, school stakeholders, organisations and others. The Committee also invited a number of organisations and research institutions to meetings and asked for input on key issues of its work.

Green papers

In its final report, NOU 2015:8 "*The School of the Future: Renewal of Subjects and Competences*" (NOU, 2015[13]), the Committee makes it clear that the content that is taught in schools should be developed with reference to a strong knowledge base. This base, for the Committee, is presented and analysed in its interim report, NOU 2014:7 *"Pupils' learning in the school of the future"* (NOU, 2014[14]) - which is 130 pages followed by a rich list of references.

In the Committee's work special focus was given to results from research on learning and subject didactics and didactics research. Other key premises for the assessments and recommendations in the main report are based on analyses of trends in societal developments, knowledge from different research fields and schools' social responsibilities. In addition, various international organisations, education authorities in a number of countries, and comprehensive research and report projects contributed in different ways, broadening perspectives on what competences will be especially important in the future.

Public consultations

NOU 2015:8 *The School of the Future* was the subject of broad public consultation, including two consultation conferences. In total, about 200 formal comments were received before the hearing deadline. The consultative bodies largely supported the broad concept of competence outlined by the Committee. However, they were divided on whether social and emotional aspects of learning should be included in the competencies described as desired learning outcomes for the subjects.

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[3] https://blogg.regjeringen.no/fremtidensskole/

For example, Union of Education Norway[4] wrote that social and emotional competences are so important for students that they should be integrated into the subjects, as prerequisites for learning, and be included as an integral part of the mid-term assessment. But several other consultative bodies had objections to integrating social and emotional competence into subjects' goals. The concerns were that schools would adopt an instrumental approach to stimulating the pupils' emotional and social development, and that the broad concept of competence could contribute to not conveying how important it is for the pupils to acquire knowledge in the subjects.

White Paper

The next step towards curriculum renewal was Report to Parliament No. 28 (2015-16) *Subjects – in-depth studies – understanding: Renewal of the Knowledge Promotion Reform* (Ministry of Education and Research of Norway, 2016[11])*.*

It has been argued that the white paper proposes a narrower concept of competence than what was described in the green paper *The School of the Future* (see Box 2). The proposed definition of competence is meant to be the basis for formulating competence goals in school subjects.

Considerations that led to the definition of competence proposed by the Ministry show that this has been done with both knowledge and recognition of the research on learning from the green paper, but that it was also based on other considerations.

Clear recognition is expressed in the white paper of recent research that shows that:

> *"social and emotional skills, as for example perseverance, ability to cooperate, curiosity and the ability to work purposefully and cope with adversity, are important for professional learning and for success in social and working life".*

And that "such characteristics and skills can be developed and learned".

Furthermore, the white paper says that schools shall stimulate pupils' social competence and other non-cognitive skills. This happens to a large extent in the work with the subjects. However, the Ministry does not wish to include social and emotional skills in the competence goals for the subjects because the competence goals are the basis for assessment.

The Ministry emphasises that some aspects of the social and emotional skills are not suitable as a part of assessment of the pupil's competence in school subjects. There are also ethical dilemmas associated with assessment of social and emotional aspects of the pupils' learning and development. Nevertheless, the white paper acknowledges that social and emotional skills can play a central role by being anchored in other parts of the curriculum.

Box 2. The evolution of the definition of competence from the green paper to the white paper

Green paper

The Committee provides a broad concept of competence "which involves both cognitive and practical skills and social and emotional learning and development". (p. 9)

> *Competence means being able to master challenges and solve tasks in various contexts, and comprises cognitive, practical, social and emotional learning and development, including attitudes, values and ethical*

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[4] Union of Education Norway is Norway's largest trade union for teaching personnel.

> *assessments. Competence can be learnt and developed and is expressed through what a person does in different activities and situations.*
>
> *Knowledge, skills, attitudes and ethical assessments are requirements for and parts of developing competence. To demonstrate competence, pupils must often apply various knowledge, skills and attitudes together. (p.20)*

The need for the broad competence concept is due to the complexity of the challenges the pupils will encounter in school and later in life, and this idea is also supported by research on learning. Emphasis is placed on recent research on what creates favourable conditions for learning, research showing that "learning occurs in an interaction between cognitive, social and emotional aspects of pupils learning" (p. 21).

White paper

The definition of competence proposed by the Ministry of Education and Research was as follows:

> *Competence is acquiring and applying knowledge and skills to master challenges and solve tasks in known and unknown contexts and situations. Competence means understanding and having the ability to reflect and think critically.*

The concept of competence in the curriculum renewal does not encompass social and emotional skills. Furthermore, values and attitudes are less clearly described than in the green paper definition.

As also explained in the white paper, the definition does not include the full scope of the pupil's learning and development in school and outside the school, but is limited to learning outcomes in school subjects.

For reflection:

- Is research used *well* in this case? Research referred to in the knowledge base provided in the green paper is acknowledged in the white paper. However, the Ministry comes to other conclusions than the Committee.

We will now narrow down our approach even further, and account for some of the findings from the research undertaken on (precisely) the evidence use in the curriculum process.

Research on evidence use in policy

The research project "Policy Knowledge and Lesson Drawing in Nordic School Reform in an Era of International Comparisons" (POLNET) provides knowledge about evidence use in the curriculum renewal process (Karseth, Sivesind and Steiner-Khamsi, 2022[15])[5].

Three out of ten key findings as presented in "The use of evidence and expertise in Norwegian school reform" (University of Oslo, 2022[16]) are as follows:

Different types of sources are used in the green and white papers

For the preparation of the 2020 reform, the Ministry of Education and Research and the NOUs use different kind of information to back up their assertions (see Figure 5). The Ministry significantly relies on policy

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[5] Research questions in the project are: • How the use of evidence in policy reviews and policy decisions has changed over time, • Who uses what sources of information as evidence, • Which features of the evidence-based policy process in Norway are similar, or different, respectively as compared with the other four Nordic countries Denmark, Finland, Iceland, and Sweden

research and includes commissioned research produced by the institute sector as well as the reports published by international organizations (e.g., OECD). By contrast, the NOUs draws more from academic research.

Figure 5. Type of knowledge sources in white papers and green papers
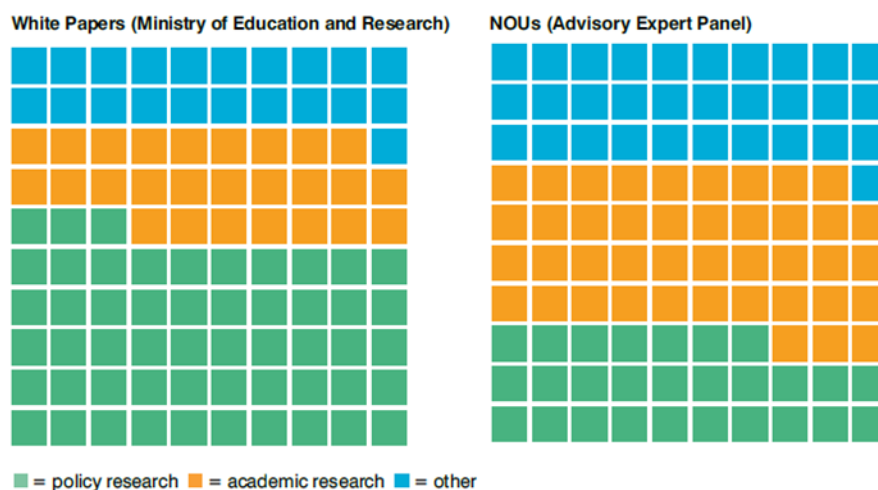
Source: University of Oslo (2022[16])

Shared knowledge sources are scarce

Both the Ministry of Education and Research and the public committees produce in-depth reports and include many references to back up their review and recommendations (green papers) or their policy decisions (Ministry of Education and Research), respectively. With the exception of a few references that constitute "shared knowledge" (mostly documents listed in OECD reports), the two entities use entirely different sources of information to back up their assertions.

Figure 6 below shows the small percentage of shared knowledge between the NOUs and the Ministry for the 2020 school reform.

This is <u>not</u> to say that the committee behind the NOUs worked to no purpose. In fact, the NOUs analysed in the study are the ones explicitly mentioned in the white paper. This means that the committee reports have been influential. The 2014 and 2015 NOUs are referred to 47 times in different forms and contexts throughout the white paper. However, the sources of evidence amassed by the NOUs are typically not directly cited in the higher policy level document. The Ministry tends to produce its own reports with its own complementary sources of information.

It can, however, be argued that it is not necessarily vital to refer in a white paper to the exact same knowledge base and research which is presented in the preceding green paper. The white paper refers extensively to the green papers as a source of knowledge, as well as to other research, including commissioned research. Based on lists of works cited it may seem that in the present case the white paper and the green paper make use of different sources; however, this may not quite be the case considering the extensive use of the green paper as a source in the Ministry white paper.

Figure 6. NOUs and white papers – common citations

96% of the references collected by the NOUs were not shared by the White Papers
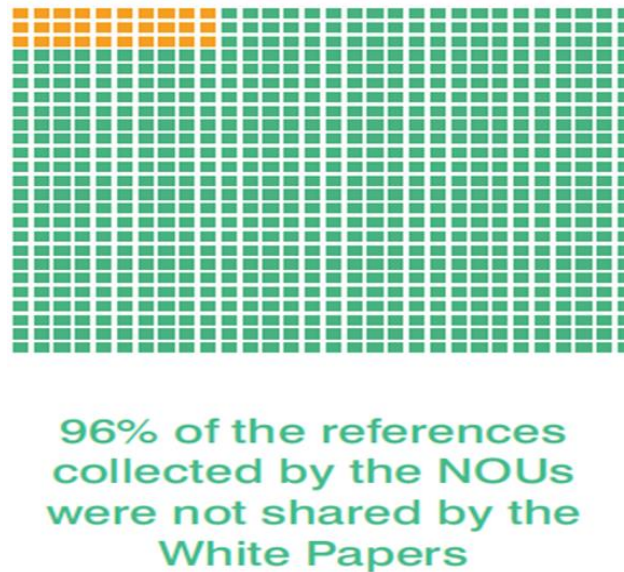
Source: University of Oslo (2022[16])

Nordic comparison: Norway relies more on commissioned sector research

Compared to Sweden and Finland, Norway's policy makers use a greater number of sector research reports to back up their decisions (Figure 7). One-third of all references made in Norwegian white and green papers constitute references to technical reports or commissioned sector research. Finland is at the opposite end in terms of using evidence from sector research publications.

Government-issued documents are also frequently referenced in school-reform related documents: Sweden takes the lead (61% of all references in Swedish white and green papers are references to government-issued publications). In comparison, the NOUs and the Ministry of Education and Research are less self-referential; only roughly one-quarter of the references (26%) are references to government-issued publications.

Figure 7. Types of knowledge sources in the Nordic countries
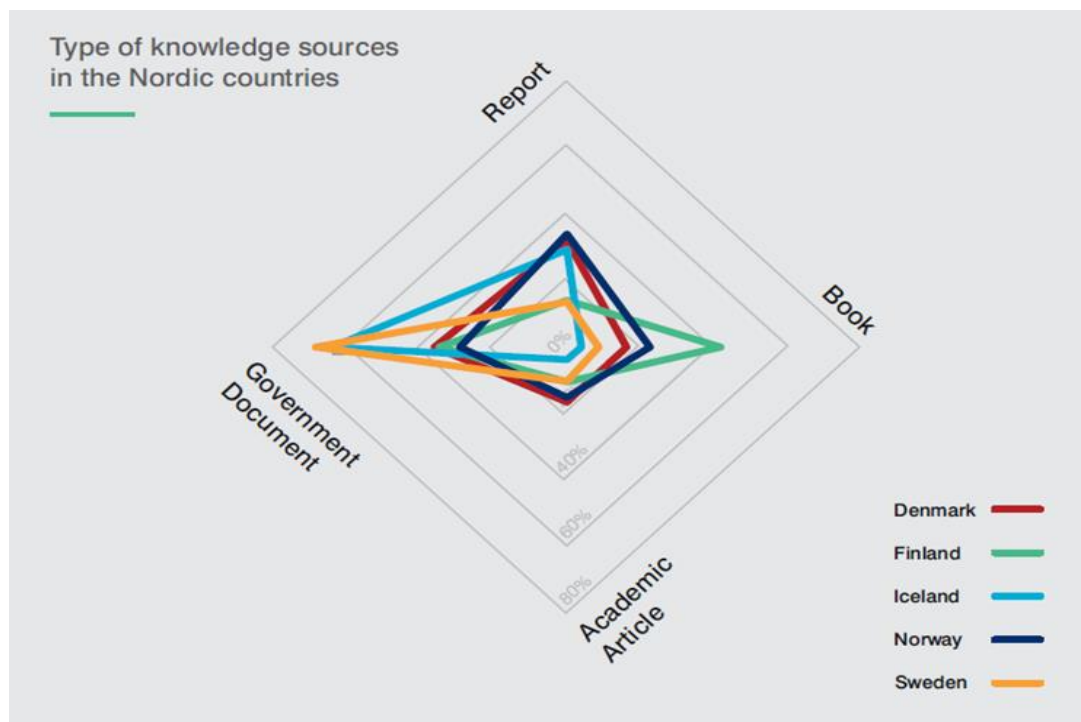
Source: University of Oslo (2022[16])

For reflection:

- What does the finding that only a small part of references collected by NOUs are shared by the white paper tell us? Is there an expectation that what constitutes the knowledge base provided in the green paper will also find a place in the white paper? What is it that references don't tell us about evidence use?
- How are NOUs used by stakeholders beyond the Ministry of Education / policy makers?
- What kind of research can give us a solid knowledge base for reflection and further development of good practices in the Ministry's work? How can this type of research be promoted?

Evaluation of the implementation of "Knowledge Promotion 2020"

Another type of approach that gives us an indication of what knowledge base is used in the white paper compared to the green paper is the evaluation of the curriculum renewal.

The evaluation programme for the curriculum renewal is organised as an extensive research programme (2019-2025). The evaluation programme shall provide knowledge that is useful for the process of developing and implementing new curricula. It consists of both policy document analysis and reports on school practice and classroom observations. The evaluation serves as a simultaneous adjustment to the curriculum renewal and as a basis for future policy development.

In the first report from the evaluation programme "The Norwegian Curriculum Renewal: Political Intentions, Processes, and Content", the chapter "Curriculum renewal in extension of and unlike NOU 2015" explores this relationship (Karseth, Kvamme and Ottesen, 2020[17]). The main conclusion is that many issues

introduced in the green paper such as in-depth learning, subject concentration, emphasis on progress and the introduction of interdisciplinary topics have left their mark on the curriculum renewal in its final form. At the same time researchers explore the aspects of the curriculum renewal which take a different direction from the green paper – as is the case with the definition of competence.

We will not describe here the outcome of their analyses. We can only mention that they show that the definition of competence, as a starting point for curriculum development, should be seen in relation to other decisions which are taken in this process.

Discussion/conclusion

We invite participating countries to explore and reflect on their practices of research commissioning, collaborative research production and coordination and policy-research partnerships. The following discussion questions are intended to guide this broader reflection.

Box.3. Discussion questions

The case study presented above raises a range of questions that can provoke reflection on how to reinforce evidence use in policy making. Some initial prompts are below.

The role of researchers and research in committees and other research-policy partnerships

- How do researchers perceive their role in committees (or other research-policy partnerships)? What role do they perceive in developing equitable and evidence-based education policies?

- It has been argued that committees are increasingly focused on bringing expertise into policy decisions rather than bringing in diverse interest group perspectives. How do different stakeholders perceive the increasing "expertisation" of scientific advice for policy? How is this perceived in the public sphere? How are expertisation of policy advice trends reflected in other countries?

- How do committees, advisory councils, etc. compare or differ between systems and countries in terms of their membership, ways of working, and their role in governance systems?

Developing and defining the scope of research-policy partnerships

- How are human and financial resources, and time, allocated to support the development of effective research-policy partnerships?

- How do policy makers make decisions on forming public committees? How are these interests conveyed to research communities?

- What are important qualities of research-policy partnerships that encourage a culture of thoughtful research engagement? How is stakeholder diversity e.g. in an ad-hoc public committee effectively managed?

Evidence use in research-policy partnerships and in subsequent policy decisions

- How is evidence sourced and used in research-policy partnerships? To what extent and degree is research evidence incorporated in research-policy partnership outputs (e.g. green papers

and white papers)? What are robust ways to measure the use of research and evidence in public committees?

- Why and to what extent do policy makers follow advice produced by public committees? What are the forces at play? What is the research use 'journey' from green paper to white paper?

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Annex A. Knowledge infrastructure in peer countries

Netherlands: Cyclical process of the knowledge infrastructure

Knowledge Junction between regional and national level
Via tasks and activities, and boundary crossers

Knowledge utilisation
Support with implementation, advisory schools, exchange of practical experiences, deployment of academic teachers

Knowledge development
Research

Regional hubs, networks and schools

National knowledge center

Demand articulation
From practice question to research question

Knowledge sharing
Dissemination, toolkits, guidelines, practice maps, advisory schools, facilitating knowledge exchange

Netherlands: Knowledge landscape in education

Inspectorate of Education

Ministry of Education *Culture and science*

CvTE

Temporary scientific curriculum committee

Policy units Primary and secondary education

Producing research & facilitating research use in policy

NRO *Research funding and dissemination*

Curriculum unit

Integrating/using research in policy

The knowledge landscape of the Netherlands

Education Council

Other policy and legal units

SLO *Curriculum development and research*

Knowledge Unit

CITO

Teacher unions

Universities, faculties of education

Teacher subject organisations

Education consulting firms

Flanders (Belgium)

Flemish Parliament

Integrating / using evidence

Flemish Ministry of Education and Training

Minister of Education + advisors

Flemish Education Council

Department Education & Training (policy support)

AGODI (personel)

AHOVOKS (curriculum & qualitifaction)

Educational Inspectorate

Strategy and Knowledge Division (incl. research and data analysis team) Aims at:
- Identifying knowledge needs
- Development of knowledge
- Disseminate and communicate knowledge

Research initiated by the institutions and funded with own /external resources

*Own funding of institutions , European funding, collaboration with externals, …
*no intervention by educ ministry on content, process or output/ limited overview

Research initiated by the institutions and funded by the government

*e.g. funding for Practice oriented research by University colleges / funding by general funds for research
*no intervention by educ ministry on content, process or output/limited overview

Research initiated and funded by the government

*Annual educational policy and practice oriented program
*Ad hoc R&D tenders
*Participation in international research (PISA, …)
*Student assessment; "Flemish tests"

Research initiated and executed by the government

*e.g. specific evaluations on policy measures / analysis of administrative data/ commission of experts to evaluate or prepare policy , …
*Intervention by educ ministry on content and process

Producing research and facilitating research use

Academic or research associations or networks

Universities / Faculties of education

Professional development providers for educational practitioners

Teacher education institutions

Teacher unions/ Other professional groups

Media

Education consulting firms

Knowledge centre "Leerpunt"

Pedagogical advisory services

Denmark

Integrating / using evidence in policy

Ministry of Higher Education and Science

Responsible for the following areas: Science, Innovation and Higher Education

Ministry of Children and Education

Departments: Day Care and Primary and Lower Secondary Education; Vocational and Adult Education; Analysis, Legal Affairs and Communication; Finance and Management.

National Agency for Education and Quality

Policy and practice development, quality insurance and practice, analysis,

National Agency for IT and Learning

Digitalization in eduation, development of it-systems, collection and distribution of data, IT security

Danish Evaluation Institute (EVA)

Research and evaluations on own initiative and request from ministries, local authorities and educational institutions.

Examples of three knowledge mobilization projects/collaborations:

Co-financing by the Ministry of the implementation in Denmark of the IEA-studies (PIRLS, TIMSS, ICCS, ICILS)

- Studies conducted by the Danish School for Education at Aarhus .
Intended to
- Ensure the implementation of these studies in Denmark
- Contribute to capacity build regarding a research environment on assessment and quantitative educational research.

Research unit for quantitative research on children and education
- Collaboration between the Ministry and the University of Copenhagen
- Strengthen quantitative research into children and education.
- Act as a sparring partner in connection with the ministry's own analyses and knowledge work, and it will organize a series of conferences, courses and network activities.

Center for Knowledge on vocational education and training.
- Collaboration between universities, university colleges and a think tank.
- A framework to further research into vocational education and increase insure this research in practice.

Producing research and facilitating research use in policy

Academic or research organisations, institutions or networks

Statistics Denmark

Danish Centre for Social Science Research (VIVE)

Universities / Faculties of education

- Education and/or pedagogy departments at universities.
- Especially Danish School of Education (DPU) at Aarhus University

Initial Teacher Education institutions

- Six University Colleges

Professional development providers for educational practitioners

Teacher unions / Other professional groups

- Trade unions for primary and secondary school teachers, pedagogues etc.
- School Leaders' Association
- Local Government Denmark

Education consulting firms

Various philanthropic foundations

- E.g.: HRH´Crownprincess Mary's Foundation, The A.P. Moller Foundation, Novo Nordisk Foundation

Sweden

Integrating / using evidence in policy

Ministry of Education and Research

The Ministry of Education and Research is responsible for the Government's education and research policies. The Ministry works on issues including school performance, conditions for teachers and study financing.

School agencies

The Swedish National Agency for Education
Central administrative authority for the public school system, publicly organised preschooling, school-age childcare and for adult education.

School Inspectorate
Government agency which scrutinises schools and assesses applications to run an independent school.

The National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools
Government agency with the objective to ensure that children, young people and adults – regardless of functional ability – have adequate conditions to reach their educational goals.

The Swedish Institute for Educational Research
Government agency with the objective to produce research summaries and funds practice-based research.

The Sami Education Board
Government agency with responsibility for education in the Sami school.

Municipality level – public schools and independent schools

Governmental research funding (examples)
- Swedish Research council
- Vinova
- Forte
- RJ
- Formas
- The Swedish Institute for Educational Research

Producing research and facilitating research use in policy

Academic/research organisations, institutions or networks

Universities / Faculties of education

Professional development providers for educational practitioners

Initial Teacher Education institutions

There are approximately 50 higher education institutions (universities and university colleges) in Sweden.

Teacher unions / Other professional groups

Education consulting firms

Policy networks

- Swedish Teachers' Union
- The Swedish Association of School Leaders

England

Department for Education

CARD
Central Analysis & Research

Main actors of the UK "knowledge infrastructure"; participants communicate but operate independently.

Department for Education:
1. Internal analysis
2. Commissioned research
3. From 2023/24 – programme of systematic research engagement.

Independent research organisations:
Provide research services under commercial contract, examples include Ipsos, IFF Research, IFS, IES, NatCen, NFER.)

National Academies:
Include Royal Society, British Academy, Royal Academy of Engineering and Academy of Medical Sciences – provide strategic advice and influence.

UK Data Services:
Do not conduct research but provide access to governmental data. Include UK Data Archive, Secure Anonymised Information Linkage (SAIL), and JISC.

Academic Bodies:
Include UCL – CEPEO & IoE ,Cambridge, Oxford, Reading, Nottingham, Durham, Imperial College London, UK Longitudinal Linkage Collaboration, Edinburgh, King's College London, Bristol, Glasgow.

Governmental bodies:
Ofsted and Ofqual are both regulatory bodies having independent research programmes. Other bodies include; UCAS, Office for National Statistics, Social Mobility Commission, Children's Commissioner for England.

Think tanks:
independent organisations providing analysis and policy thought, these include the Resolution Foundation and Higher Education Policy Institute.

What Works Centres:
Include Education Endowment Foundation*, WW for Early Intervention and Childrens' Social Care, Transforming Access and Student Outcomes (TASO), Youth Endowment Fund.

Research Funders:
Includes UKRI (ESRC, AHRC, ADR UK), Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Nuffield Foundation, Wellcome Trust, Sutton Trust.

Other Organisations:
Some sector research stakeholders are 'users' rather than producers –
• Unions
• Charities and
• Representative organisations

*EEF manage a Research Schools Network –this is focused on "evidence to improve teaching practice", the audience being teachers and practitioners rather than national policy development