



# Yes Minister, Yes Evidence: Structures and skills for better evidence use in education policy

Engaging with research, and ensuring research evidence is used well, is key to professionalising education policy making processes, and ultimately to improving educational outcomes. But the systematic use of evidence in policy making faces many challenges.

This policy brief draws on evidence from the OECD Strengthening the Impact of Education Research project's country learning seminars, as well as the project's policy survey that collected responses from ministries of education in 37 education systems from 29 countries. The project is based in the OECD's Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI). This brief presents a set of case studies on two questions:

- What **human resource strategies** can build individual and collective civil service professionalism?
- What **stable structures and mechanisms** can contribute to the systematic and thoughtful use of evidence in policy processes?

## Introduction: What is missing for civil servants to better engage with education research?

Across the OECD, enormous efforts and investments have been made to reinforce the quality, production and use of education research in policy making. Despite this, strengthening the impact of research in education policy making remains a challenge for many countries and systems.

Policy makers and politicians often make anecdotal or fragmented use of research, using certain experiences and case-stories to underpin policies as needed. They may also use evidence selectively to confirm their own beliefs or support political agendas. The systematic use of evidence in policy making faces such challenges as politicised public debate on education topics and changes in the political and economic landscape. The lack of a long-term strategy for knowledge use in ministries can also impede timely and thoughtful engagement with evidence (OECD, 2023<sup>[1]</sup>).

Strengthening the individual and collective capacity of civil servants to use research evidence is an important first step forward. Professional skills are core building blocks of an independent and capable civil service, with evidence-informed problem solving being a strategic skill (OECD, 2017<sup>[2]</sup>). Civil servants need a range of skills to engage with research. They often commission research to answer to a particular policy need, and are increasingly working to articulate their priorities and needs to the research community. Defining terms of references and criteria for evaluating calls requires an understanding of the nature of research: what questions it can answer, what methodologies are suited. Policy makers also need to know where to access evidence, how to assess its quality, how to interpret findings and how to translate these for decision making. All civil servants may not need all these skills, but policy organisations, such as ministries and executive agencies need a collective capacity to engage with research and generate evidence.

However, people's skills and the policy organisation's research capacity will not automatically ensure systematic and good use of research. Structures that remain stable across political cycles while also enabling processes that feed research evidence systematically into decision making in all policy stages are also necessary.

This Policy Perspective presents country cases that emerged from two learning seminars (see Box 1) organised by the CERI Strengthening the Impact of Education Research project related to these two aspects:

1. What **human resource (HR) strategies** can build individual and collective civil service professionalism?
2. What **stable structures and mechanisms** can contribute to the systematic and thoughtful use of evidence in policy processes?

### Box 1. OECD Strengthening the Impact of Education Research learning seminars

The OECD organised two learning seminars in 2022, hosted by the Netherlands and the Flemish community of Belgium (henceforth Flanders) respectively. They focused on empowering civil servants and policy organisations to use research systematically and well in policy. Participants included officials from the ministries of education and related government agencies from the Netherlands, Flanders (Belgium), Finland, Ireland and Norway.

#### Learning seminar methods

- *Evidence use journeys in policy making*: The host country carried out a self-reflective analysis of evidence use in a specific policy process using a research-based analytical framework (Netherlands in the curriculum renewal process; Flanders in the introduction of standardised tests). A national stakeholder panel and participating countries' constructive feedback enhanced the understanding of drivers and barriers of evidence use in policy making.
- *Country case studies*: Each peer country presented a practice related to the seminar themes.
- *Research-informed design thinking*: Participants collectively designed initial strategies, tools, structures to improve evidence use in policy along the topics of the seminar themes.

The Policy Perspective starts with a short section on evidence use in complex policy environments based on literature and data from the Strengthening the Impact of Education Research policy survey conducted in 2021. It then presents case studies of public sector initiatives from five countries (see overview in Table 1). Finally, the Policy Perspective ends with reflections on the two questions on human resource strategies and stable structures and mechanisms and the way forward.

**Table 1. Strategies and structures for research engagement in five systems: An overview of the case studies**

Country / system	Initiative	Actor(s) concerned	Description
<b>Finland</b>	FINEEC evaluation approach <sup>1</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC)</li> <li>• Ministry of Education and Culture</li> <li>• National Agency for Education</li> <li>• Municipalities</li> <li>• Educational institutions</li> <li>• Student organisations</li> </ul>	<p>A four-year National Plan for Education Evaluations guides the work of FINEEC.</p> <p>A centralised whole-of-government research planning and production strategy helps encourage synergies with the four-year plan and across broader Finnish knowledge infrastructure.</p>
	Guidelines to develop policy makers' competences	The Department for Higher Education and Science Policy in the Ministry of Education and Culture	Department strategy aimed at developing competences through recruitment, training and job rotation. Strategy guided by an initial mapping of the skills and knowledge needed for working in the department.
	Policy networks and working groups to improve accessibility of research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ministry of Education and Culture</li> <li>• National Education Agency</li> <li>• FINEEC</li> </ul>	<p>Involvement in stakeholder (policy) networks focused primarily on improving the accessibility of research.</p> <p>Internal working groups within the Ministry to ensure efficient and coordinated exchange of information and facilitating access to recently published research.</p>
<b>Belgium (Flanders)</b>	Administrative restructuring	Flemish Department of Education	<p>The restructuring of the Department of Education as an opportunity to improve evidence use in policy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthening the Strategic Policy Support unit;</li> <li>• Rethinking civil servants' profiles and required competences</li> </ul>
<b>Ireland</b>	New national research and innovation (R&I) strategy - Impact 2030	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Government of Ireland</li> <li>• Various other stakeholders</li> </ul>	<p>Strategy that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improves agency structures, merging two research funding agencies;</li> <li>• Incentivises policy-oriented research through dedicated funding;</li> <li>• Established Evidence for Policy Unit within the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS)</li> </ul>
	Research for policy engagement (implementing Impact 2030)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DFHERIS (Lead)</li> <li>• Government Departments</li> <li>• Research community</li> </ul>	<p>DFHERIS aims to embed engagement with research in the public policy environment by building civil servants' skills and capacity to engage with research.</p> <p>It is exploring potential mobility opportunities for both researchers and civil servants, and aims to broaden policy-research networks (forge partnerships with new researchers).</p> <p>It has conducted an initial mapping of research/policy structures, activities and needs.</p>
	Evidence for Policy Unit (implementing Impact 2030) <sup>2</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DFHERIS</li> <li>• Research community</li> </ul>	<p>The Unit's activities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Publishing policy maker research priorities</li> <li>• Developing a framework for policy engagement with the research community</li> <li>• Hosting a forum to share good practice in research/policy engagement across departments (Civil Service Research Network)</li> <li>• Promoting research-policy links and creating networking opportunities</li> </ul>
<b>The Netherlands</b>	Behavioural research study conducted within Ministry in 2022	Ministry of Education, Culture and Science	Study conducted among civil servants within the Ministry examining the behavioural factors that either support or obstruct a culture of research use.
	Science 4 Policy initiative (launched 2023)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dutch ministries</li> <li>• Scientific partner institutions</li> <li>• Various other stakeholders</li> </ul>	<p>Cross-sectoral project that conducts research and mapping activities.</p> <p>The project aims to develop well-functioning networks between science and policy actors; to inform processes of selecting scientific experts for delivering research input to policy; and to develop models for interactions and meetings between researchers and policy makers.</p>

<sup>1</sup> Evaluated through: Individual evaluations and national plan for education evaluations.

<sup>2</sup> The Department intends to evaluate the Evidence for Policy Unit's activities.

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Country / system	Initiative	Actor(s) concerned	Description
Norway	Section for Policy Analysis within Ministry	Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research	Section within the Ministry that provides analytical, research-based support for policy making in all Ministry departments. The section the development of the education research base and facilitates its quality and relevance to policy and practice. The section hosts dialogue platforms between policy and research communities as well as a database of synthesised research.

Source: Authors' elaboration.

### Scoping: Evidence use in complex policy environments

A common complaint among researchers is that policy makers often cherry pick research to underpin their predetermined agendas, while policy makers indicate that they often struggle to find answers from research when they need them. For many policy questions, there is just not enough research. Even in areas where there is an abundance of available research it is rarely available in synthesised formats which would allow it to be used systematically. In addition, research results are sometimes contradictory and/or inconclusive, often do not suggest a single course of action, and are unlikely to translate directly into a policy proposal. Collaboration between research, practice and policy making to enhance engagement with research evidence in policy is also a challenge. Researchers often lack the competences and/or incentives to translate their findings into a language that resonates with policy makers, and to draw out the policy implications of their research. These tensions have been well established, and continue to be discussed widely (OECD, 2007<sup>[3]</sup>; Burns and Schuller, 2007<sup>[4]</sup>; Oliver and Cairney, 2019<sup>[5]</sup>; Gluckman, 2014<sup>[6]</sup>).

The discussion around evidence use in policy has in recent years sought to highlight the complexity of the policy environment, and how this influences evidence uptake in policy processes. This marks an important shift away from a linear, overly rational conceptualisation of how evidence is implemented and integrated into policy. A linear understanding of evidence uptake is often based on the notion that policy making functions as a cycle with clearly delineated and orderly phases (for example, agenda setting, policy formulation, legitimisation, implementation and evaluation) (Cairney, 2019<sup>[7]</sup>). Contemporary policy studies have stressed that this does not represent the everyday reality of policy making, which is a far less orderly process (Cairney, 2019<sup>[7]</sup>; Sabatier and Weible, 2014<sup>[8]</sup>). The evidence eco-system is also a complex system with multiple actors interacting in the generation, mobilisation and use of evidence (Boaz and Nutley, 2019<sup>[9]</sup>; Burns and Köster, 2016<sup>[10]</sup>). It is increasingly acknowledged that research evidence competes with other forms of knowledge that each have an influence on the policy process, even while it continues to be recognised that research evidence should hold a privileged place among these different types of knowledge (Gluckman, 2014<sup>[6]</sup>; Nutley et al., 2019<sup>[11]</sup>). There may be limits to organisational action when there are potentially conflicting interests or strong stakeholder opposition, and policy makers inevitably consider how implementing a recommendation or an action may have particular implications (Backs et al., 2023<sup>[12]</sup>). However, using evidence well in policy processes is important in order to deliver equitable and evidence-informed education policies, and to avoid ineffective decision-making which in itself can entail considerable financial or human costs (Belgian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, 2024<sup>[13]</sup>).

Linear understandings of integrating evidence use in policy are still common. Yet, some initiatives now seek to promote a “whole systems” approach to promoting evidence use in policy (Boaz et al., 2019, p. 8<sup>[14]</sup>; Boaz and Nutley, 2019<sup>[9]</sup>) whereby they simultaneously address multiple challenges to evidence use within organisations. These are founded on an understanding that wicked problems and their policy responses are complex and multifaceted, requiring both intra and inter-organisational action (Boaz et al., 2019<sup>[14]</sup>). This policy brief understands key elements of knowledge governance at the system level to include the promotion of the production of high quality and relevant-to-policy research and evidence; the mobilisation of this evidence for policy makers' use; a supportive culture of evidence use in organisations; and the

nurturing of evidence-related capacities [for more details, see Shewbridge and Köster (2019<sup>[15]</sup>)]. The complexity of education systems typically means that a systems approach for evidence-informed decision-making, such as developed by Best and Holmes (2010<sup>[16]</sup>), is a more promising means of achieving evidence-informed and effective decision-making practices.

Throughout the 2022 OECD learning seminars, two broad cross-cutting themes emerged as foundational for establishing both an organisational and system-level policy culture of research engagement and uptake. Firstly, effective integration of research evidence in organisations of policy and practice requires the development or honing of certain **competences**, including skills (Cordingley, 2016<sup>[17]</sup>). This includes individual skills, but also collective ones. Secondly, to create a culture of research use in policy organisations and systems, it is necessary to have **structures and processes** that support the development (or transformation) of such a culture (Mouthaan and Révai, 2023<sup>[18]</sup>). Developing HR strategies and at the same time creating structures and processes that support an organisational culture of research use in policy making is an example of a systems approach: increasing research engagement is a trigger of change across several organisational areas and these are developed in parallel. These themes were explored in depth in the seminars, and are detailed below.

### ***Skills: Human resource strategies for research engagement***

Systematic and thoughtful engagement with research in policy requires ensuring the right skills, in the right measures, within and across policy organisations. Professional learning is therefore a building block of a strong and dynamic research use culture (Révai and Mouthaan, 2023<sup>[19]</sup>). Human resource strategies to build these required skills focus on developing individual and team competences within a ministry or other policy organisation to systematically and thoughtfully engage with research. Human resource strategies can stress the collective aspect of civil service professionalism, and its links to the skills and capacity of other stakeholders, such as researchers and knowledge brokers (organisations or individuals that facilitate research use in policy or practice).

There are an increasing number of efforts, frameworks and other tools and strategies that seek to build the skills and capacity of policy makers to use research in decision making. A good understanding of research can equip civil servants to articulate the type of research they need, or how to apply existing research to serve their needs. Examples of such human resource tools and strategies include competence frameworks for policy makers and researchers such as the European Commission's competence framework (Schwendinger, Topp and Kovacs, 2022<sup>[20]</sup>), learning or training programmes for policy makers to develop their research literacy or research engagement skills, and professional standards for civil servants that define the range of skills expected at different levels (Pino-Yancovic et al., 2023<sup>[21]</sup>).

This Policy Perspective aims to provide a better understanding of the complex *skillset* required of civil servants (and how such a skillset can be defined in e.g. competence frameworks and professional standards, performance evaluation mechanisms) and *professional learning opportunities* (e.g. training, mentoring, induction programmes). It puts a strong emphasis on collective forms of learning and knowledge sharing that allow for developing organisational capacity. It also reflects on how certain practices *shape mindsets* (e.g. awareness raising), which in turn can help to *develop relevant and quality relationships* with other relevant actors.

### ***Stable structures and processes for a strong culture of research engagement***

To support policy makers' research engagement, specific arrangements such as structures and processes are needed at an organisational and system level. Research from the health sector has suggested that this includes a supportive regulatory environment, governance and organisational structures, and concrete arrangements that allow for the necessary systems, tools, resources and time (Slade, Philip and Morris, 2018<sup>[22]</sup>). It is better for these structures and processes to be stable and long-term, so that they are resistant to organisational changes, staff turnover and political shifts that may occur in policy contexts (Mouthaan and Révai, 2023<sup>[18]</sup>). Structures and processes are necessary to support the development of the successful

human resource strategies described above, and to enable the necessary partnership-building between policy and research communities that would help to shape research production and build a cumulative knowledge base in education that is relevant and accessible to policy. These structures enable processes that feed research evidence systematically into decision making.

This Policy Perspective discusses how policy organisations can adopt structures and processes such as: *allocating resources*, creating internal *coordination units* through administrative and structural (re)arrangements, and establishing *processes* and *schedules* that support research use and are able to address key challenges, such as conflicting timeframes between research and policy.

## Policy context: Findings from the OECD policy survey

This section draws on data from the OECD Strengthening the Impact of Education Research Policy Survey (see Box 2). Specifically, it discusses the extent to which policy makers use research in different policy processes, how they access and evaluate the research they use and how satisfied ministries are with this use. It also outlines how ministries perceive the level of resources that support research use in their system and the prevalence of skills and mindsets that can support research engagement among policy makers.

### Box 2. The Policy Survey

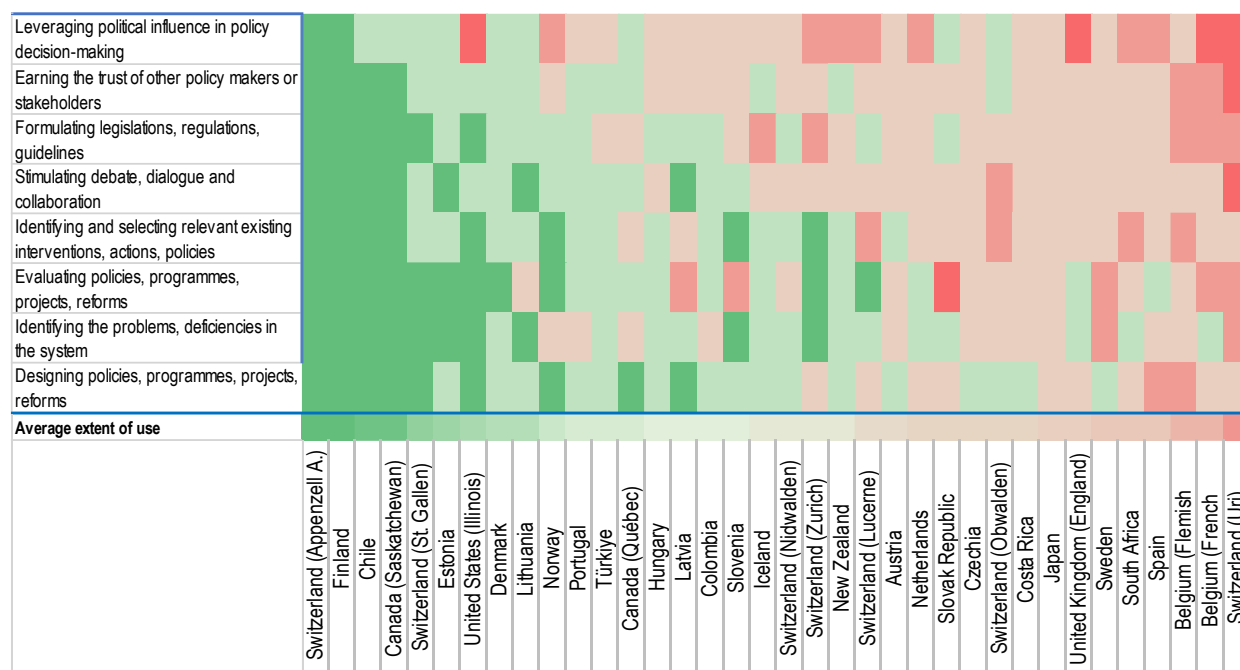
The OECD *Strengthening the Impact of Education Research* policy survey – conducted from June to September 2021 – collected data on the mechanisms used to facilitate research use in countries/systems. Overall, 37 education systems from 29 countries responded to the survey. The survey focused on the actors, mechanisms and relationships that facilitate the use of research in policy making and in practice; drivers of and barriers to research use; and actors / mechanisms of research production.

The policy survey targeted the highest level of decision making in education (ministry/department of education). Responses represent the perspective of ministries of education at the national or sub-national (state, province, canton, etc.) level. Naturally, this most likely hides a significant degree of individual heterogeneity within systems. Results and comparative conclusions therefore need to be interpreted with caution.

### **Research use in policy processes**

The survey asked ministries' perceptions of the extent to which policy makers use research in eight concrete policy processes (Figure 1). There is a wide variety of responses across systems with some reporting extensive use and others rarely reporting use of research by policy makers.

Figure 1. Extent of research use in policy processes

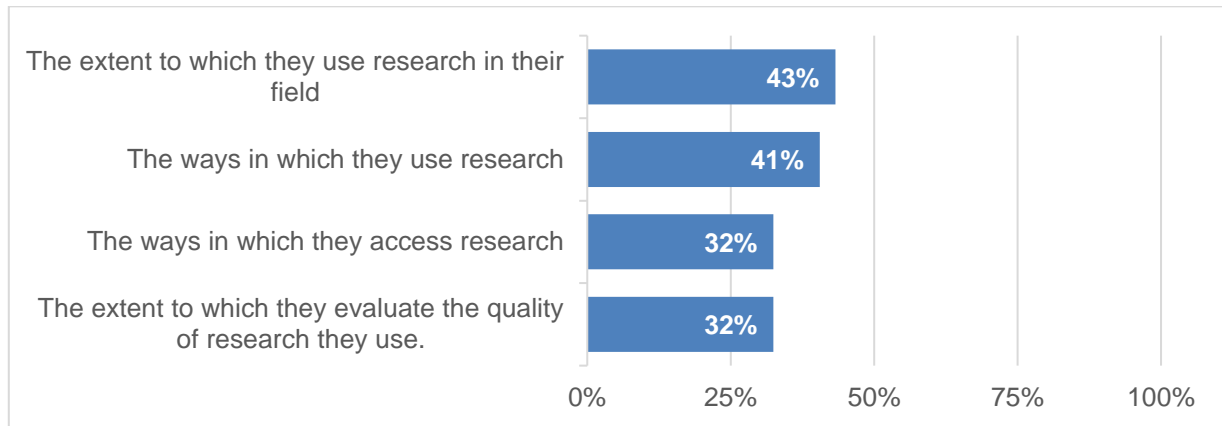


Note: Data show the extent to which ministries reported that policy makers use education research for each phase in the policy process. The survey measured these perceptions on a 1-5-point Likert scale, ranging from “Never/not at all” (dark red) to “Systematically” (dark green). Systems are ranked in ascending order on their average reported extent of use of research in all phases. Phases are ranked in ascending order by the average reported.

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

The survey also asked ministries how satisfied they are with policy makers engagement with research across four themes (Figure 2). Overall, levels of satisfaction were low in the majority of systems. In particular, systems were often dissatisfied with the ways in which policy makers access research and the extent to which they evaluate the quality of the research they use. For some policy processes, ministries reporting higher levels of research use also generally report that policy makers use research in a satisfactory way. Ministries that were most satisfied with both the extent and the ways in which policy makers use research tended to report more extensive research use in two policy processes in particular: formulating legislation, guidelines and regulations; and designing policies, programmes, projects and reforms. It could be that ministries that are more satisfied perceive policy makers to be comfortable or skillful accessing, using and evaluating research for these specific policy processes, or that these are the processes where research use is most visible and thus considered satisfactory.

Figure 2. What percentage of ministries are mostly satisfied with policy makers' research use?



Note: Data show the percentage of ministries who were “quite satisfied” and “highly satisfied” satisfied with four aspects of policy makers' engagement with education research. The survey measured these perceptions on a 1-5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1. “Not at all satisfied” to 5. “Highly satisfied” for each statement. Data collected at the national and sub-national levels.  
Source: OECD Strengthening the Impact of Education Research policy survey data.

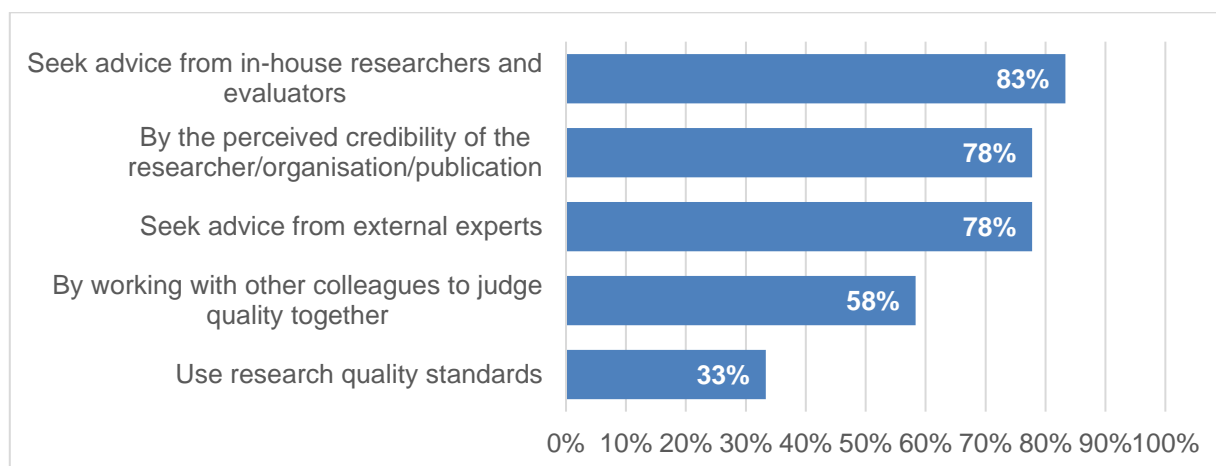
### ***Policy makers' access to research and evaluation of its quality***

The methods policy makers use to access research and evaluate its quality are key indicators of thoughtful and high-quality research engagement. Earlier analysis of the survey results indicated that relationships with external experts and in-house researchers are the primary methods policy makers use to accessing research (OECD, 2022<sup>[23]</sup>). This suggests that policy makers do have relationships with individuals who can support the use of education research in the policy process. However, since most ministries were not satisfied with how policy makers access research and evaluate its quality, these relationships might not function as well as they could. They may also not be diverse enough to access a broad range of different types of knowledge. Research has found that it is problematic if policy makers always consult the same individuals to access evidence, and that there are potential policy maker biases when it comes to considering senior researchers, certain disciplines and methodological approaches as more authoritative (Boswell, Smith and Davies, 2022<sup>[24]</sup>).

More than three quarters of ministries reported that policy makers most commonly use three processes when evaluating the quality of research: getting advice from in-house experts; evaluating the credibility of the source; or asking external experts (Figure 3). Using research quality standards was the least commonly reported overall and far more often reported by ministries who also report high levels of satisfaction with the extent to which policy makers evaluate the quality of research.



**Figure 3. How do ministries report policy makers to evaluate the quality of the research they use?**



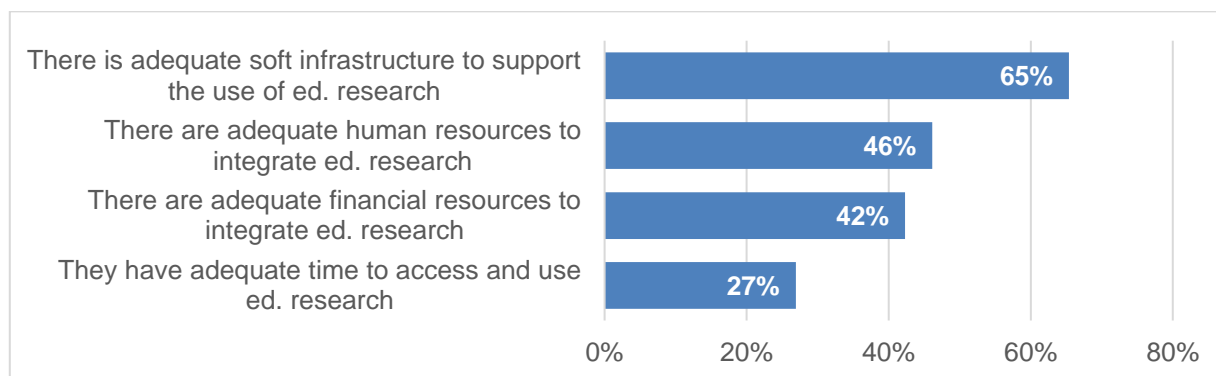
Note: Percentages indicates the systems reporting that policy makers evaluate education research for a given process. Data collected at a national and at a sub-national level.

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

### ***Human resources for policy making***

Having enough individuals within and across organisations who can use research well and support others to engage thoughtfully with research is a crucial determinant of a system’s capacity to make evidence-informed decisions. Yet, less than half of ministries report that they have adequate human and financial resources to effectively integrate education research in policy processes (Figure 4).

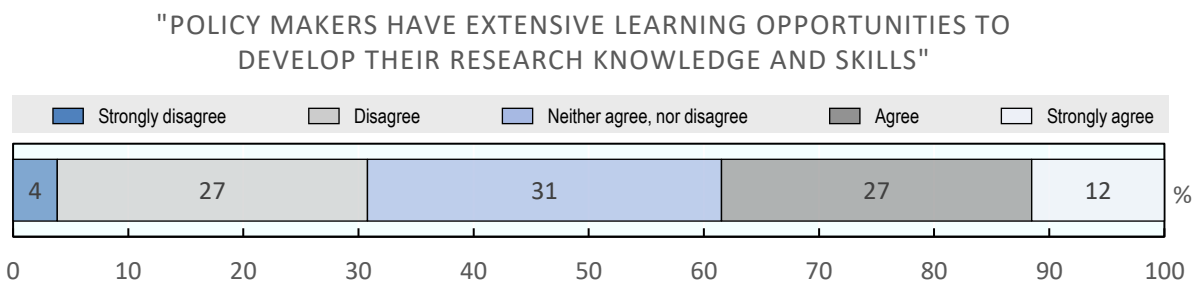
**Figure 4. What percentage of ministries agree that there are adequate resources for using research in policy making?**



Note: Data show the percentage of respondent systems agreeing or strongly agreeing with the given statement, for either policy makers or practitioners in their education system. Data collected at a national and sub-national level. Statements are ranked 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.

Figure 5. Do ministries agree that policy makers have extensive learning opportunities?

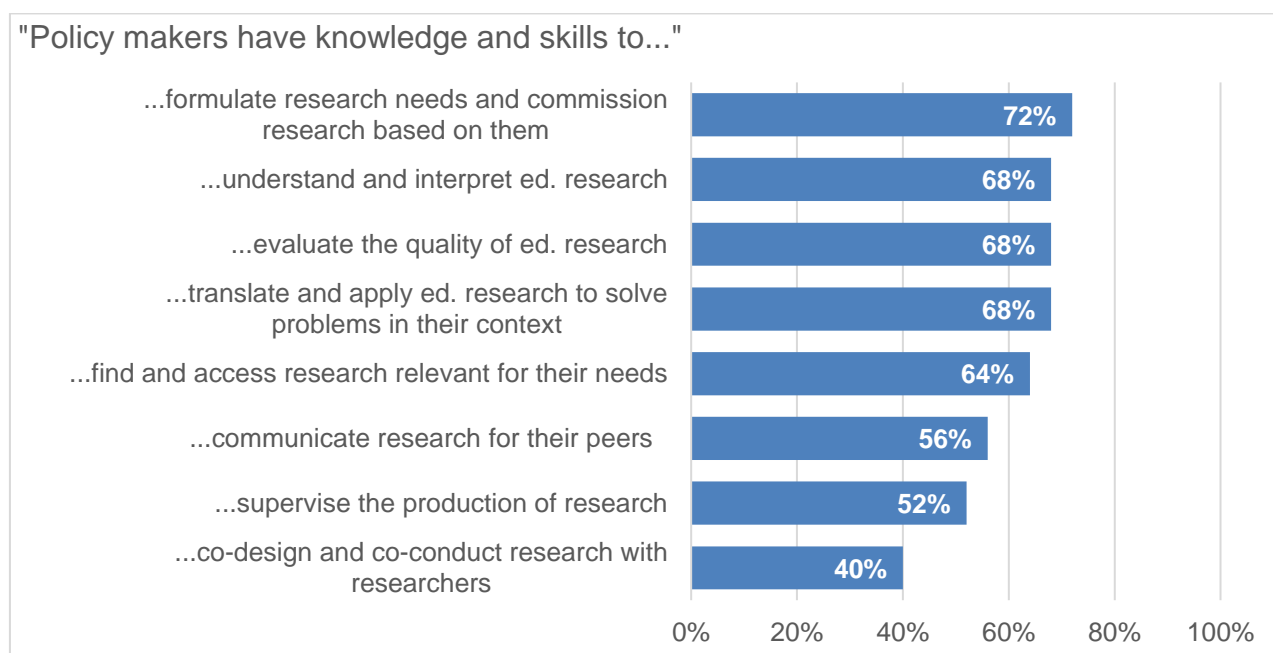


Note: Percentage indicates the number of systems reporting a given level agreement with the statement. Data collected at a national and at a sub-national level.

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

The survey also asked systems the extent to which they felt that policy makers had access to extensive learning opportunities to use research (Figure 5). Counter-intuitively, ministries that report more adequate human resources do not generally report more extensive learning opportunities for policy makers. This begs the question of how they define “adequate” human resources in the first place, or indeed how they go about ensuring adequacy. When it comes to acquiring the knowledge and skills required to use research well in policy processes, many ministries may rely on externally sourcing individuals by recruiting new staff who already have these capacities, rather than upskilling existing staff.

Figure 6. What competences do ministries report policy makers have to use research?



Note: Data show the percentage of respondent systems agreeing or strongly agreeing with the given statement. Data collected at a national and sub-national level. Statements are ranked in descending order of the percentage of systems agreeing or strongly agreeing with them.

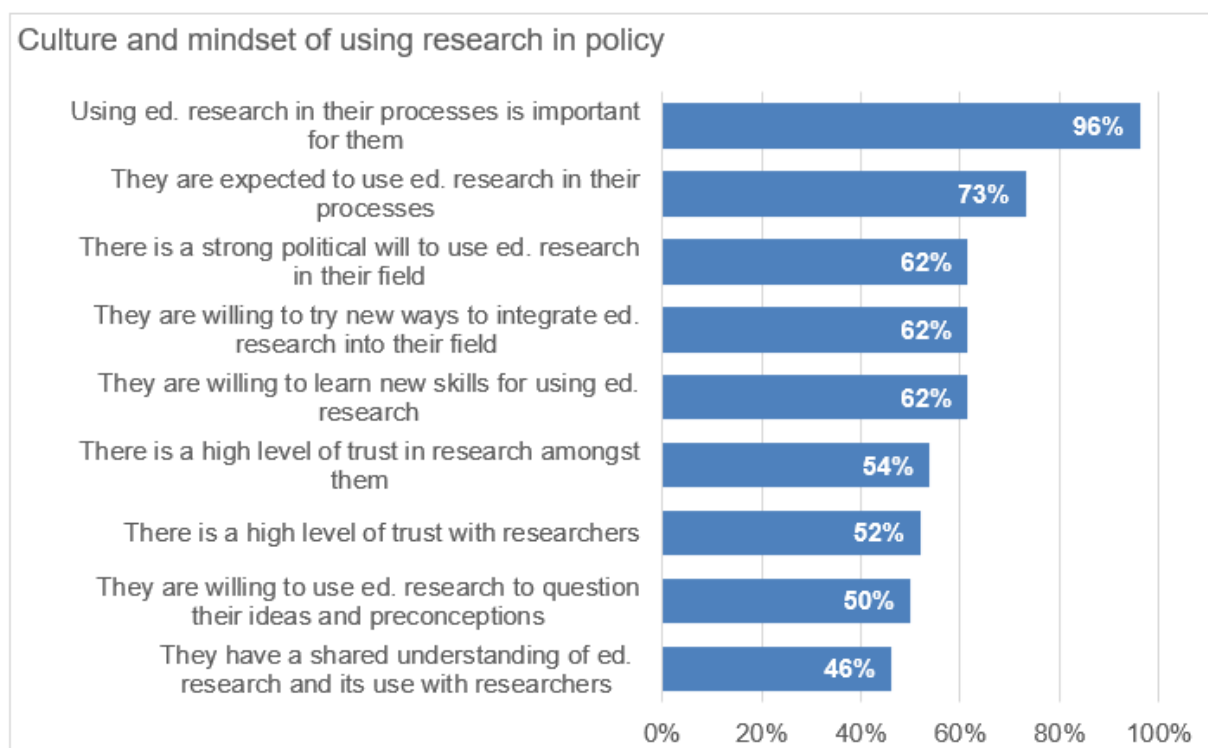
Source: OECD Strengthening the Impact of Education Research policy survey data.

The question of adequate human resources is inherently tied to the skills, knowledge, culture and mindset of policy makers. The policy survey asked the extent to which ministries agreed with eight statements

explicitly linked to research use skills and knowledge (Figure 6). Just under 15% of ministries reported that many or most policy makers possess all eight of the skills statements in the survey. Skills related to producing research outside of established research commissioning processes and skills related to communicating research to colleagues were comparatively rare compared to those that relate to accessing and understanding research (OECD, 2023<sup>[1]</sup>).

When it comes to policy makers’ culture and mindset, around 16% of respondents agreed that many or most policy makers have the culture and mindset described in all nine statements. Across the set of responses, ministries most commonly agreed with statements suggesting that policy makers were motivated to use research. However, there is a gap when it comes to applying this motivation to use research in a way that questions ideas and preconceptions (Figure 7). Furthermore, policy makers often lack high-quality relationships centred on trust in research and researchers, which are of vital importance when comes to engaging with research thoughtfully and well (OECD, 2023<sup>[1]</sup>; OECD, 2022<sup>[23]</sup>).

**Figure 7. How do ministries perceive policy makers’ research use culture?**



Note: Data show the percentage of respondent systems agreeing or strongly agreeing with the given statement. Data collected at a national and sub-national level. Statements are ranked 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.

The following sections draw on input provided by country representatives that participated in the OECD’s 2022 learning seminars (see Box 1).

### **Finland: Improving policy makers’ competences through evaluation, strategies and networks**

There has been growing support for evidence-informed policy making in Finland, with several political parties adopting it as a goal in their manifestos and the governments of Antti Rinne (2019) and Sanna

Marin (2019–2023) making it a guiding principle of their policy making (Aula, 2023<sup>[25]</sup>). Several structures exist in the Finnish education system to build civil service capacity to engage with research in support of this goal. Robust and respected education quality evaluation, civil service competence guidelines and policy networks combine human resource strategies and mechanisms to enhance the systematic and thoughtful use of evidence in policy processes.

### ***Evaluation to build system capacity***

In Finland, most policy projects and reforms include extensive research work. Much of this research is carried out both at universities' educational institutions and at the Finnish Institute for Educational Research. The Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC) contributes to this knowledge by undertaking education policy evaluations related to the quality of the education system. FINEEC is therefore part of a human resource strategy to build and maintain the skills and capacities required to conduct and use research within the civil service, which allows the public administration to benefit from knowledge accumulated over a long period of time.

A four-year National Plan for Education Evaluations guides the work of FINEEC. The evaluation plan covers all levels from early childhood education and care to higher education. In addition to individual evaluations and their schedules, the evaluation plan identifies key societal themes. For the plan period 2020–2023, the focus areas of the evaluation activities are as follows:

- learning and competence development
- promoting equity
- improving the effectiveness of the education system
- supporting continuous improvement.

A centralised whole-of-government research planning and production strategy helps encourage synergies with the four-year plan and across broader Finnish knowledge infrastructure. The government, through a specialised unit, works together with ministries, FINEEC, the Strategic Research Council and research agencies to design a yearly plan that funds research projects in alignment with the government programme or other plans (See Finland in Annex A). If additional research is required, the ministry launches a public call for tender via its website and private consultancies can then bid for these contracts.

FINEEC is an organisation of 50 people, most of whom have a master's or PhD and have worked at a university, the national education agency or school level prior to joining. FINEEC conducts both scheduled and *ad hoc* evaluations and has a dedicated budget.

### *Assessments of learning outcomes*

FINEEC operates within a well-established division of labour, being directly responsible for evaluations pertaining to the quality of the education system. By contrast, participation in international assessments of learning outcomes falls outside the scope of FINEEC and is organised by the Ministry of Education and Culture and implemented in universities. For instance, measurement of learning outcomes through participation in the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) as well as different International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) assessments of learning outcomes (PIRLS, TIMSS, ICCS etc.) is coordinated by the Ministry and arranged through project-specific research structures involving major Finnish universities. Most often these projects include the Finnish Institute for Educational Research in the University of Jyväskylä and the Centre for Educational Assessment in the University of Helsinki.

### *Enhancement-led evaluation*

Although FINEEC prepares a yearly report that is an important source of information for policy development in Finland, the bulk of its resources are spent on carrying out 'enhancement-led evaluation' (Box 3). The purpose is to support the development of activities and promote evidence-informed change by focusing on building high quality relationships with, and between, actors. This creates diverse opportunities for various stakeholders to build their skills, knowledge and capacity by participating in both knowledge generation and research use. Depending on the theme of the evaluation and planning of the tasks, which is itself determined in collaboration with stakeholders, different actors can be involved across the process.

#### **Box 3. Stakeholder research engagement through evaluation**

Enhancement-led evaluation is an operating principle of FINEEC and carried out through evaluation activities centred on impact, interaction, group engagement and collective learning. This takes place in a context of positivity, mutual respect, appreciation and trust.

Although some topics (e.g. learning outcomes) have specific evaluation methodologies, approaches to thematic or system evaluations (e.g. of the [reform of upper secondary](#)) depend on the topic. For instance, the evaluation of the upper secondary reform required the evaluation team to go very deeply into the history of the reform to develop a set of research questions. The evaluation team also looked into the evidence base for the reform and assessed the political context of the policy. These factors are useful for gauging if a window of opportunity exists for promoting evidence-based decision making, and how large it may be. Although the precise approach may be highly tailored, enhancement-led evaluation often combines the following aspects:

- **Planning.** The depth of the background research in the planning phase varies from evaluation to evaluation. Based on the background research, questions and methodology are proposed, discussed with stakeholders and adapted if necessary. For example, whether the evaluation team should conduct interviews, what kind of literature and statistics already exist and who in the education system has information that could support the evaluation varies.
- **Role allocation.** Each evaluation is centred on a core FINEEC team and an external larger team of up to eight experts who are remunerated for their work and selected because they can provide thematic knowledge. These experts can be researchers, practitioners or anyone with relevant knowledge. Depending on the methodology, research and analysis tasks can be shared across FINEEC, experts and stakeholders.
- **Outputs.** Each evaluation produces a long report of maximum 100 pages, which is intended for researchers or those working in analytical units within ministries. Alongside the main report, additional outputs are adapted to needs. For example, during COVID-19, evaluations were needed quickly and results were presented as slides, instead of a long-report. Findings can also be presented as posters, blogs, podcasts, webinars and policy briefs, which are more accessible to teachers, ministers and schools.
- **Meaning-making.** When an evaluation concludes, the team organises a launch party to get stakeholders together and discuss evaluation results. In addition to these launch parties, FINEEC organises thematic events with stakeholders, which gather the results of several evaluations together to discuss the implications for education.
- **Impact.** After each evaluation, stakeholders are invited to provide feedback to FINEEC via a survey. These results are collated and discussed at an annual meeting to make adjustments to the methods or ways of working. Furthermore, every two years an external consultancy is contracted to consult stakeholders on their views.

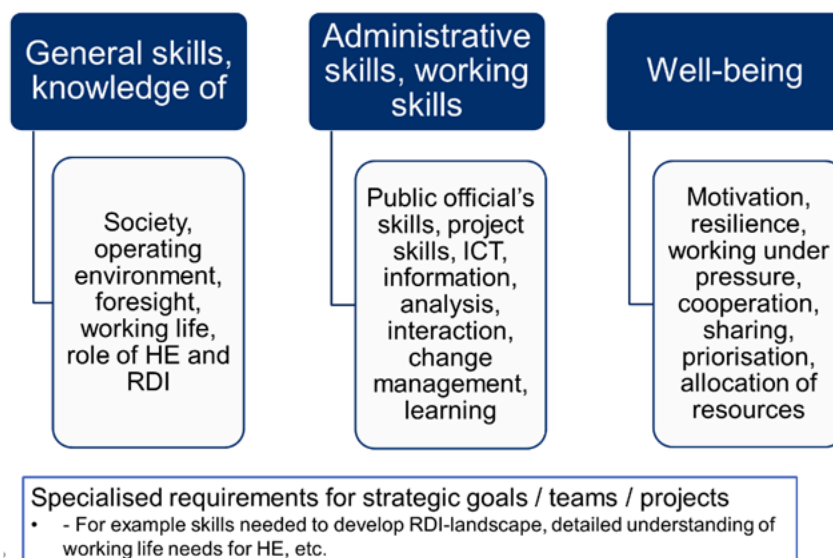
Key stakeholders include the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Finnish National Agency for Education, education providers (municipal policy makers), educational institutions, student organisations and labour market representatives. This approach facilitates a shared understanding of education topics and relevant knowledge. An intentional impact of the approach is that it triggers professional reflection on different education questions through its methods, for example the process of answering a survey or responding to a self-evaluation. Although it is difficult to assess the impact of evaluations on policy making, besides anecdotal information, stakeholders often report that they learned a lot, developed their skills and improved their processes. Two key conditions for effectiveness are stakeholder trust and expertise. For example, teachers in Finland are required to have a master’s degree and the approach relies on their capacity to combine multiple sources of evidence including their professional knowledge and effectively communicate this to policy makers when provided with a safe and respectful environment.

### **Guidelines to develop policy makers’ competences**

The Department for Higher Education and Science Policy in the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture has set strategic goals for developing its capacities and working methods. Their strategy aims at enhancing their team model and developing competences through recruitment, training and job rotation. For this, it has conducted a mapping of the skills and knowledge needed for working in the department, considering a scale of five dimensions of expertise: knowing, understanding, applying, analysing and developing. Through a team model approach, the mapping suggested that all staff should have some basic skills, attitudes and knowledge in general, and some specialisation depending on the team’s needs (Figure 8).

Priorities identified by the Department for Higher Education and Science Policy to develop its capacities include the internationalisation of staff, digitalisation of processes, and enhanced research and development. Moving forward, the ministry is working on a more compact list of competences needed by prioritising core capabilities, and identifying recruitment and training needs for the future.

**Figure 8. Knowledge, skills and attitudes required for civil servants in Finland**



Source: Developed by Finland’s Ministry of Education and Culture for the OECD Learning seminar, 2-3 June 2022.

### **Policy networks to enhance research accessibility**

To promote engagement with research, the Ministry of Education and Culture, the National Agency for Education and FINEEC coordinate networks involving different actors and stakeholders to facilitate access

to research outputs. For example, the Agency coordinates a network of upper secondary education where different school districts meet to discuss policy, practice and relevant research and data.

The work of these networks focuses mainly on improving the accessibility of research, with less systematic training on actual use. As such, the use of research is mainly limited to interested individuals who already have some familiarity with research methods. The national statistics agency, Statistics Finland, offers in-person training on statistics. However, this is mainly targeted at public officials who already have a research background and have a high level of research literacy.

In addition to stakeholder networks, the departments and units within the Ministry have several different internal working groups. These play an important part in ensuring that the exchange of information is efficient and coordinated and facilitate access to the latest research results from diverse sources.

The Indicator Working Group is formed of 18 members and includes all departments within the Ministry of Education along with the National Agency for Education, Statistics Finland and one representative from Ministry of Foreign Affairs (OECD/UNESCO office). The head of the group is drawn from within the Ministry of Education and Culture. The main task is to interpret UNESCO/OECD/EUROSTAT data and other statistics from the field of education.

The OECD Coordination Group is composed of 15 members, with all departments from the Ministry of Education represented plus one member from the Financial Unit and one from Communication Unit of the Ministry. The additional members are from the National Agency for Education, Statistics Finland and one from the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment (MEAE) and the OECD/UNESCO office respectively. The main task of this group is to interpret OECD data.

In addition, there are other informal groups set up for specific purposes. In general, they are composed of one representative from each department. They have close co-operation with FINEEC and universities. These informal groups do not have pre-determined outputs. Some produce minutes or short reports that are then circulated within the ministry of relevant agencies and stakeholders.

Beyond the Ministry of Education and Culture, the government working group for the coordination of research, foresight and assessment activities is a joint steering group of *all* ministries that coordinates topical research projects. It has a representative from each ministry. This activity is currently being reassessed.

### **Next steps**

The Ministry of Education and Culture intends to continue its approach of knowledge-based management in tried and tested ways. Given that Finland's statistical ecosystem is the highest performer internationally, according to a recent World Bank assessment (World Bank, 2024<sup>[26]</sup>), high quality indicator production must be seen as a clear strength. However, data collection alone is not enough; these data must also be analysed and their use must be ensured through careful organisation.

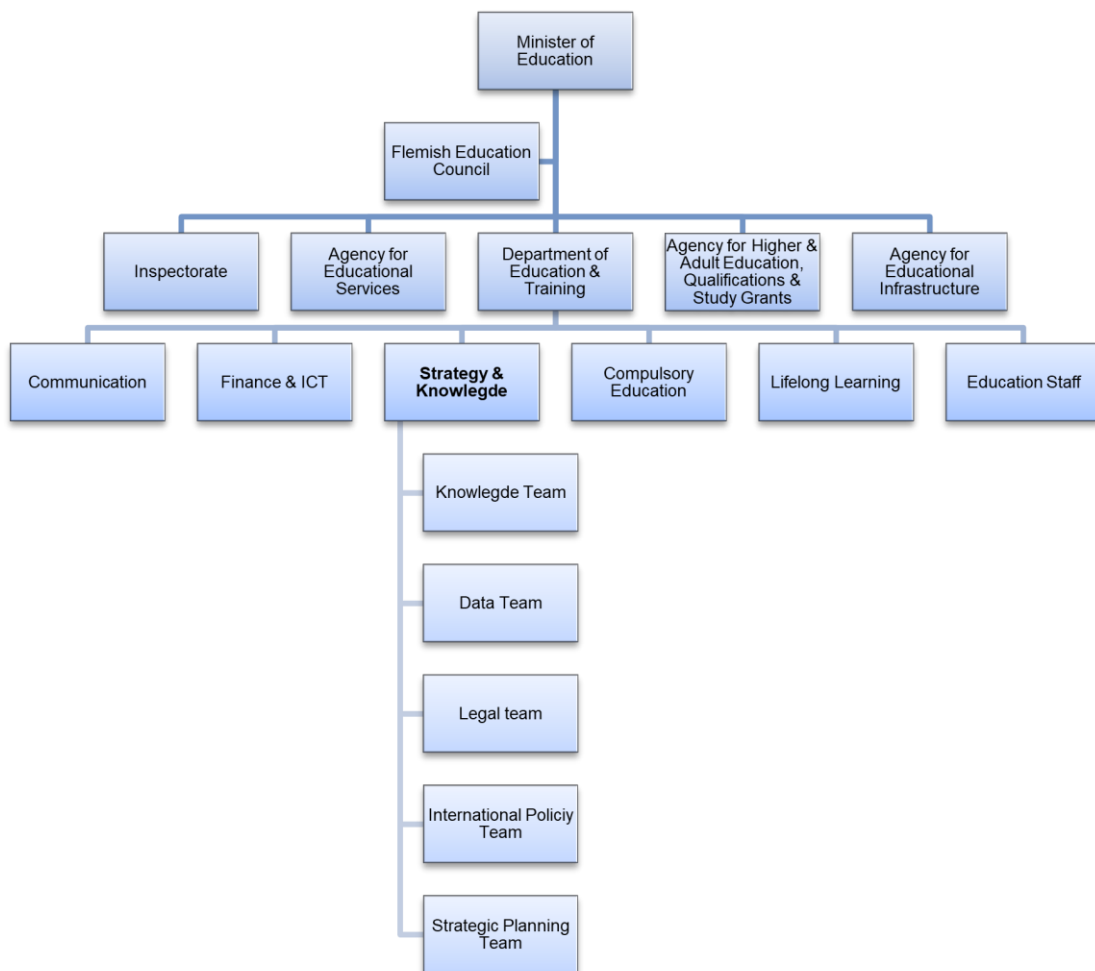
The Ministry launched a development project titled “Educational and Cultural Administration 2030” on 13 October 2021 that encompasses all agencies within the Ministry’s governance. The project is tasked with ensuring the effectiveness, quality and service capacity of all future educational and cultural activities. The project has prepared a common intent and a programme for developing the Ministry’s administrative structures governing education and culture.

Finland will also continue its stakeholder work with research institutes, universities, international organisations (e.g. OECD and EU) and private data producers.

### Flanders (Belgium): Administrative restructuring as an opportunity for improving evidence use

The Flemish Ministry of Education and Training consists of four sub-bodies of which the Department of Education and Training is responsible for designing and implementing policies for all school levels from primary to higher and adult education in Flanders. The Department consists of specialised units that focus on compulsory education, educational personnel and lifelong learning and horizontal units that support policies for all levels and the general functioning of the Department (see Figure 9). Starting in 2022, the Department has been restructured. This created an opportunity to take initiatives to better support policy making. One of the subgoals was to support a better research and evidence use among Flemish civil servants.

Figure 9. The structure of the Department of Education: From the minister to evidence



#### Opportunities and challenges: Using evidence in policy

The drive to use evidence systematically has been gaining momentum in the Flemish Ministry for Education, creating opportunities to strengthen the use of evidence in decision making but also highlighting a number of challenges.



First, there are challenges concerning **the role of evidence in the policy making process in general**. An important constraint is that there is rarely enough time to establish robust evidence and use it thoughtfully. A challenge specific to Flanders is the fact that political agendas can often override long term goals. For example, the advisors to the minister change with every new legislature, and there is a tendency for advisors to prioritise the political agenda over long-term, evidence-informed policies.

The various challenges are compounded with **issues of research production**. Given that Flanders is a small education system, there is a low level of research capacity and the perception is that few researchers are interested in conducting policy research. There is a more limited number of researchers (and research groups) working on these topics than one would see in larger systems. This affects the diversity of academic voices/opinion in Flemish education policy research.

Finally, some challenges relate to **the role of evidence in the work of the civil servants in the Department**. Employees of the Department often rely on the Research and Evaluation team when they need evidence on a certain topic. However, staff in the Department sometimes lack confidence, time and research literacy to adequately interpret data and statistics, and to assess the quality and robustness of evidence that they are presented with. As a result, the nature and extent of evidence use is very diverse across the Department.

### ***Restructuring the Department of Education and Training – A momentum for improving evidence use***

The Department has been restructured to align with key policy processes such as policy planning, legislation and implementation, rather than mirroring the structure of the education field in Flanders (as was previously the case). One of the steps in this process involves the re-structuring of the Strategic Policy Support (SPS) unit, which was among others extended with a data team bringing together all data analysts that previously worked in different units. This has led to a strengthened cooperation between the research team and the data team.

One of the intended outcomes of this restructuring is for policy advisors to be topic generalists (i.e. able to work in different sub-fields such as primary, secondary or higher education), while retaining specialisation with regard to core processes. It is hoped that this will encourage a mindset of openness to new ideas, and that civil servants will broaden their expertise and become accustomed to working flexibly across different domains of education. However, it also might have some perils. For example, this change may carry the risk of increased fragmentation and a lack of alignment of processes. A continuous reflection on the opportunities and challenges is therefore needed.

The activities of the SPS unit are greatly valued by the Department of Education and Training.

In the past the exact role of SPS in the policy process was sometimes unclear. While the provision of evidence input to policy units is part of their regular activity and mission, sometimes SPS teams were solicited to assist policy units in using that input in the development of policies. This raised questions about team members' professional identity (are they policy makers or researchers?). It also had implications for their recruitment and training. In addition, the function of SPS teams and the professional identity of its members is closely linked to that of other departments. Should civil servants in policy units also be research-engaged, and if so, what does this mean for their training and identity?

In the context of the reorganisation, the Department took steps to ensure that the processes and services were described and communicated in detail. During this exercise, the Strategy and Knowledge Division mapped for each service what can and cannot be expected of the division and what is expected of the policy officers from the policy department. While a comprehensive evaluation of the reorganisation has not yet taken place, it seems that policy officers find their way to the research team more quickly due to the greater clarity about the role of this team. Formulating mutual expectations should also avoid one-way traffic in terms of evidence use.

It is considered important that every civil servant in the department has both policy making competences and a research-oriented attitude. This was not the case in the past. The balance will differ according to the role the civil servant has. However, there need to be a minimum of both orientations (policy making and evidence use). This evolution also produces some insecurity (at least in the short term), with civil servants perceiving there is a degree of lack of clarity about their role.

In this process of change, the Department of Education is interested in exploring how the restructuring can be used as a momentum to create a culture of evidence use in policy making and to mitigate risks. The Strategic Policy Support unit considers that the change process should involve:

- raising the awareness of the importance of evidence-informed policy making during the entire policy process
- creating time and space for using evidence
- supporting the professional development of civil servants as part of a general human resource strategy
- looking for new ways of collaboration in the Department to foster evidence-informed policy making (e.g. working in project teams)
- developing strategies for valorising research towards the entire Department
- reflecting on the consequences of the structural changes in the Department such as the impact of “specialised” policy makers.

### ***Next steps***

To realise these objectives, the first step is to map and understand the current landscape of evidence use in the political context and among educational actors (e.g. educational networks, unions, schools and teachers) more broadly. What role does evidence play in their daily work and decisions? This mapping has started with initial discussions with stakeholders to better understand their needs and questions. While researchers can play an important role in improving the use of evidence in policy making, the quality and relevance of evidence to the Flemish context are not yet satisfying. It is thus necessary to better understand how researchers engage with educational policy making and practice, and how their knowledge of policy and practice influences their interest and agenda. To this end, in the contribution to the coalition agreement ahead of the elections in June 2024, the administration has also included use of evidence in policy as a key objective for the next coalition period.

### **Ireland: New strategies and administrative units to maximise the impact of research in education policy development**

In Ireland, there is a strong political will to strengthen the impact of research on public services. Several recent strategic documents – Civil Service (CS) Renewal 2030, Programme for Government, Impact 2030 – have all included research-informed policy as a key objective. There is also a commitment to improve engagement with the research sector and strengthen strategic forecasting (OECD/OPSI, 2022<sup>[27]</sup>; Government of Ireland, 2021<sup>[28]</sup>). The Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS) is leading the development of a system-level approach to embed engagement with research in the public policy environment across all sectors (see Ireland in Annex A for a simplified overview).

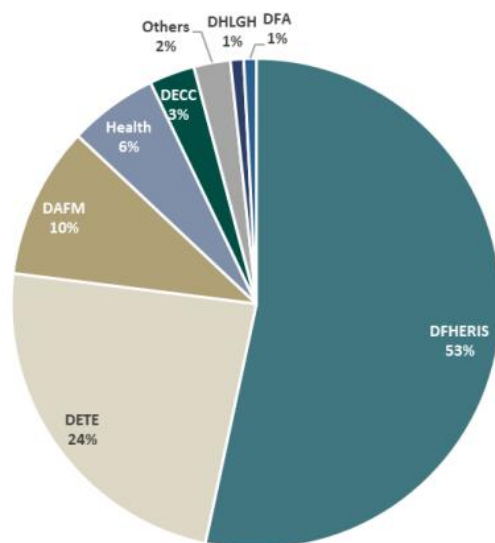
### ***A new research and innovation (R&I) strategy***

The new national R&I strategy, Impact 2030 (Government of Ireland, 2022<sup>[29]</sup>), has five main pillars. Pillar 1 focuses on maximising the impact of R&I on the economy, society and the environment (Government of Ireland, 2022<sup>[29]</sup>), with the following key objectives:

- Improve agency structures via establishing a single national agency that merges two research funding agencies: Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) (STEM funder) and the Irish Research Council (which funds all disciplines including arts, humanities and social sciences). This new national agency will be called Taighde Éireann (Research Ireland) (Government of Ireland, 2023<sup>[30]</sup>).
- Tackle major societal issues under a National Grand Challenges programme – also run by SFI – offering funding for mission-oriented challenges to incentivise researchers to deliver tangible impacts for society.
- Create a dedicated Evidence for Policy function in DFHERIS to strengthen the impact of the public research system on policy making. DFHERIS will drive coordination and cohesion of the national R&I agenda, working with all stakeholders.

Figure 10 shows the breakdown of Government Budget Allocations for Research and Development (GBARD) by Government Department. The three largest funding Departments account for 87% of all Government investment in research and development. The distribution of funding reflects the specific remits of these departments and the presence of dedicated research-active support agencies.

**Figure 10. Spending on R&I across government departments in Ireland**



Note: DFHERIS: Department of Further and Higher Education, Research Innovation and Science / DETE: Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment / DAFM: Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine / D/Health: Department of Health / DECC: Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications/DHLGH: Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage/ DFA: Department of Foreign Affairs.

Source: DFHERIS (2024, p. 21<sup>[31]</sup>): Government Budget Allocations for R&D (GBARD) estimated at EUR 1,075 million for 2023.

## **The role and activities of DFHERIS**

### *Research for policy engagement*

DFHERIS's efforts in the area of supporting policy-oriented research include developing baseline research activity needed for informed policy making, supporting increased collaboration, and building skills and capacity to engage in and with research across the research and policy sectors.

DFHERIS has engaged a wide range of stakeholders within the system – including civil servants and government agencies, researchers and key tertiary sector agencies – to help build trust and consensus and develop an initial mapping of research/policy structures, activities and needs (see Box 4).

#### **Box 4. Engagement / consultation and mapping of research engagement in policy**

Findings from the informal mapping of activities and needs through stakeholder consultation indicate that:

- There is a need for clear leadership and a coherent approach that aligns existing activities and builds consensus and engagement from the HE Research Sector.
- Existing pockets of activity predominantly focus on the supply side (HE) engagement, through capacity building and science advocacy and some two-way capacity building (e.g. Campus Engage, CÚRAM White Paper on Science Advocacy, SFI Public Service Fellowships, Royal Irish Academy (RIA) shadowing scheme).
- There is a need to improve system level recognition mechanisms in higher education institutions to encourage researchers to consider the policy impact of their research and to promote engagement with policy makers.
- On the policy development (demand) side, research support structures and levels of engagement vary across government departments.
- There are disparate approaches across departments with some work underway (e.g. Civil Service Renewal; policy toolkit OECD project in collaboration with the Department of the Taoiseach and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform).
- Leveraging pre-existing relationships is important but there is a need to widen the scope to give other researchers, including early-stage researchers, an opportunity to engage.

### *Evidence for Policy Unit*

An Evidence for Policy Unit was established within DFHERIS in January 2022 which seeks to support more effective interaction and improved communication between the policy community and the publicly funded research sector. The unit is engaging with higher education (HE) partners and colleagues across government departments to develop a strategy which will:

- improve the articulation of public policy needs to the research community so that researchers can engage proactively and creatively on this shared agenda (see Box 5)
- increase research, evaluation and data accessibility for policy making relating to the activities of the Department across tertiary education and research
- increase the use of research in policy development across government
- support capacity building across the civil service and higher education research sectors
- enhance engagement and understanding across the public policy and public research sectors (see Box 6).

### Box 5. Publishing DFHERIS' 2023-2024 research priorities

In July 2023, the Evidence for Policy Unit published a statement highlighting DFHERIS research intent and priorities, including research funding calls, ongoing activity and research publications. The statement also details research and evaluation activities delivered in 2022. By sharing its research priorities with the research community, it is intended that this will enhance transparency of existing research and evaluation activity across the tertiary education sector and contribute to a cumulative and robust evidence base; and encourage research production and engagement in areas of interest and relevance to the policy community.

Source: DFHERIS (2023<sub>[32]</sub>)

The Evidence for Policy unit in DFHERIS will help build long term connections between policy makers and the HE research system. It aims to make policy development more robust and help ensure legitimacy and public trust in institutions through embedding engagement with research in the policy development process across the civil service. It will support this with a stringent evaluation process, grounded in data, evidence and insights.

The Evidence for Policy unit in DFHERIS is taking a sectoral approach to developing a framework for engagement. The framework will consider:

- active and passive mechanisms to support engagement (networking opportunities, a system for communicating research expertise against policy priorities)
- measures to support capacity building across both sectors, including opportunities for upskilling and engagement
- engagement and brokering mechanisms: to provide opportunities for both established and early-career researchers to engage and impact on policy development
- potential mobility opportunities for both researchers and civil servants.

The Evidence for Policy unit continues to consult with stakeholders.

To date, a Civil Service Research Network (CSRN), comprised of research leads across Government Departments, was established in January 2023. The network offers a forum for all Departments to share best practice across government side evidence support systems, including experience engaging with research activity and expertise.

In tandem, work is progressing with the HE research sector. The Evidence for Policy unit established a HE Research for Policy group to share existing and planned initiatives to support policy impact in HE research, and to bring together this activity into a coherent programme of work.

An open consultation was launched by DFHERIS in 2023 inviting researchers in higher education institutions and other research centres to share information on their current practices of policy engagement (See Box 6).

### Box 6. Consultation on researcher experience of policy engagement

Following its commitment under Impact 2030 to strengthen links between research and policy communities in Ireland, DFHERIS launched a public consultation (July-September 2023). This aimed to collect experiential evidence from researchers in the Higher Education system, Research Centres, HEIs and research performing organisations on previous and existing interactions with policy practitioners, why researchers do not engage with policy development/policy practitioners, and potential remedies to bridge the gap between policymaking and academia.

Feedback from the open consultation informed further engagement opportunities with stakeholders from both the research and policy development communities. In November 2023, a panel discussion on research-policy interactions was held at the national Research Summit, jointly hosted by the Irish Research Council (IRC) and Science Foundations Ireland (SFI). In February 2024, the Evidence for Policy unit held two co-design workshops, bringing together participants from the research and policy sectors to explore workable solutions for more effective engagement under key themes of capacity building and structural supports.

Sources: DFHERIS (2023<sup>[33]</sup>); Summit 2023 (<sup>[34]</sup>).

#### *Sourcing of science advice*

**DFHERIS** is working to improve policy makers' access to up-to-date and timely science advice. DFHERIS has undertaken a review of science advisory structures and secured Government approval to appoint a Government Science Advisor, supported by a newly established National Science Advice Forum, in March 2023. The Government Science Advisor will be based in DFHERIS and, with the support of forum experts, will provide cross-sectoral and multidisciplinary science advice, helping inform responses to complex and challenging policy issues to Ministers and Government departments.

#### *Other technical support for evidence-informed decision making*

There have been efforts to improve data availability and its use for policy with the help of the Irish Government Economic Evaluation units (IGEES) and the Irish Government Statistical Service (IGSS).

Strengthening policy development and strategic foresight through a joint project of the Department of the Taoiseach, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, and the OECD. The Evidence for Policy unit is supporting this work as required.

#### **Challenges and next steps**

The process of building an engagement strategy has revealed several challenges arising from stakeholders' differing views and different constraints on the research and policy side.

First, as in most countries, the challenge of the different timeframes of research and policy poses a major challenge. This has to be addressed by **communicating policy makers' research needs in a timely and effective way** along with making key policy timelines clear to researchers.

Second, a closer research-policy link raises questions around **research integrity**: research should be independent, but at the same time respond to demand.

Third, there is a challenge in **incentivising and generating interest among researchers**. Currently, the main academic incentive is publishing and obtaining funding. Instruments that encourage a system of

recognition for policy related work need to be developed. For example, a review of researcher career frameworks could incorporate recognition of impact on policy – which is increasingly recognised in university rankings via work on sustainable development goals. Policy impact could also be included as a performance indicator in annual system performance reviews in the research sector.

Fourth, the value of research that does not immediately translate into policy needs to be recognised. At the same time, research approaches should aim at simple, workable, scalable solutions to policy issues. Science communication and advocacy within HE institutions helps **better prepare researchers for policy engagement**.

## The Netherlands: Using behavioural insights to understand and promote evidence-use within the Ministry

### *Examining behavioural insights to promote evidence-use*

One of the main challenges of the Knowledge Department of the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (MoE) is to stimulate and facilitate the systematic use of knowledge as an integral part of a strategic policy cycle. To tackle the challenge, the Ministry recruited a research company (D&B) to undertake a behavioural science study with the aim of better understanding the barriers that staff within the policy departments experience in using evidence systematically, and identifying the types of behaviour that contribute to more evidence informed policy making (see Box 7).

#### Box 7. Methods and research questions

The Ministry commissioned a study to address the following questions:

- What are the reasons policy makers, including policy advisors, do not use evidence in their work?
- What are – from a behavioural science perspective – promising options to stimulate evidence informed policy making?
- Can the Ministry better position the instruments that have already been implemented with the goal of stimulating evidence-informed policy making? If so, how?

D&B conducted desk research and held sessions with experts within the Ministry. Based on this information, a diagram mapping all the actors, relationships, tasks/roles and behavioural hurdles concerning evidence use was developed. Next, semi-structured interviews were held with target groups (policy advisors, research coordinators, managers) within the MoE's different directorates in the spring and summer of 2022, to test the causal diagram and to make any important additions.

D&B defined a few key principles of behaviour associated with good use of evidence in decision making among policy makers:

- The policy maker knows how to undertake problem analysis, how to build a policy theory, and actively looks for different and alternative policy options.
- The policy maker is given space and time for reflection from management.
- The policy maker maintains a strong network with key contacts, such as knowledge institutions.
- The policy maker reviews different policy options and perspectives by consulting research, colleagues, and experts.

## Findings

The study uncovered that policy advisors, experts and managers considered evidence informed policy making to be important, but also felt that they did not do this enough. Several reasons were given by participants:

- **Time.** Policy makers generally perceive that they often have limited time for policy making, and not enough time to do it in an evidence-informed way.
- **Lack of incentives.** Policy makers perceived that excelling in evidence informed policy making was poorly rewarded by their managers in comparison to short term policy making approaches. As a result, some interviewees perceived that building a career in the ministry required focusing on reactive, short-term policy making at the expense of proactive, evidence informed policy making.
- **A reactive system.** It was felt that while a proactive attitude and approach is needed, the system remains largely reactive.
- **A rigid organisational culture.** Policy makers felt relatively unable to change the culture within the ministry to create more possibilities for evidence informed policy making.

The study found several psychological mechanisms to be relevant in stimulating, countering or constraining evidence informed policy making (see Box 8).

### Box 8. Psychological mechanisms linked to Evidence Informed Policy making (EIP)

Mechanisms stimulating EIP:

- sense of meaning (“I am intrinsically motivated to do EIP as it adds to the goals I already have in my work”)
- sense of urgency (“EIP is needed and it is needed now”)
- sense of responsibility (“I should be the one to do EIP”)
- self-efficacy, i.e. an individual's belief in their capacity to act in the ways necessary to reach specific goals (“I am able to do EIP”)
- injunctive norms, i.e. how an individual thinks other people feel about a certain behaviour (“Me doing EIP is stimulated by those around me”)
- descriptive norms, i.e. a description that shows how an individual thinks other people behave (“I see others in my surrounding doing EIP”).

Constraining mechanisms:

- scepticism (“EIP does not help me in my work”)
- resistance (“You don't get to tell me how to do my job”)
- inertia (“EIP requires effort. I want to do it, but I didn't, because....”).

The interview and group sessions analysis showed that policy makers do feel a sense of meaning, responsibility and urgency, but they do not always report high self-efficacy, stimulating injunctive norms or descriptive norms. Some do show scepticism and inertia too, reporting for instance that “EIP is not helpful if I want to get promoted at work” or “I wanted to do it, but I don't have the time or space in my current assignment”. The latter statement was described by the researchers as indicative of “learned helplessness”.



The recommendations of D&B are focused on the psychological mechanisms that could further help promote EIP among policy makers.

Source: Groot, S., Slob, G. and Severijnen, F. (2022<sup>[35]</sup>). Gedragsonderzoek evidentie onderbouwd beleid maken. D&B onderzoek (research in Dutch).

The research provided food for thought within the MoE and produced several recommendations, which would ideally be implemented in combination in order to be effective:

- It is important to reward the right types of behaviour both formally and informally. At present, evidence informed policy making is not considered to be rewarded enough in comparison to other types of policy making.
- Establish long-term policy research agendas.
- Facilitate desired behaviours by facilitating a new working method focussed on creating time and attention to evidence-informed policy making. A new working method could be adopted to incentivise the ideal behaviours identified by D&B. Such a method would include group work on important (but not urgent) policy themes and setting aside time to work in “sprints” in multidisciplinary teams with the aim of co-creation of policy in a learning-oriented environment. A resulting output of this kind of group work could be a policy paper with evidence-based options.
- Start a process of change using a bottom-up approach. This would involve starting with members of staff within the Ministry who are highly motivated to learn how to best use evidence in decision making. These early “adaptors” could then act as ambassadors in a wider learning process.

### **Next steps**

Going forward, the MoE aims to incorporate the recommendations from the behavioural science study to implement an action plan on evidence informed policy making. This will involve connecting the various efforts within the Ministry that are focused on a new culture of governance; creating a learning environment; ensuring policy advisors, teams and managers have the right skills, mindset and tools to use and manage knowledge; and defining ambitions for a stable and accessible knowledge base.

## **The Netherlands: Using policy-science interfaces to improve science advice processes**

The context of the COVID-19 pandemic generated opportunities for lesson-learning about the role of science advice in policy making. In particular, it highlighted the need for platforms of interaction between researchers and policy makers that enable the delivery of quick and dynamic advice. It also pointed to a need for advice from a multidisciplinary perspective. The COVID-19 context and the subsequent lessons learnt for science-to-policy avenues informed the creation of the Science4Policy project in the Netherlands. In addition, the Minister for Education, Culture and Science Policy in the Netherlands articulated a vision that emphasises ensuring policies are built on scientific evidence and keeping a clear distinction between science and policy.

The Netherlands has structured and formal processes for feeding research into policy such as planning bureaus, advisory councils and scientific advisory committees. However, these existing structures do not adequately address the challenges identified above. Therefore, new processes are being trialled in the Netherlands where the aim is for these to be structured, systematic and professional.

## Science4Policy

The Science4Policy project was launched in the beginning of 2023. It builds on several key assumptions and contextual factors:

- The science-for-policy landscape in the Netherlands can be described as **rich** and **highly developed**.
- **Careful experimentation** and **adaptation** are more appropriate than sweeping reforms when transforming highly developed and complex systems.
- Governments typically want intervention studies and fast feedback. However, to address complex issues, science for policy needs to move beyond linear relationships between science and policy communities and must instead be characterised by explorative, **continuous interactions** and **co-creation**.
- Many issues that governments face require a **transdisciplinary** approach.

One of the project's first ambitions is to produce a collation of promising practices in bringing science and policy closer. It aims to do this by collaborating within and across public sector organisations (civil service) and the world of science (research).

Two of the project's strands are detailed below.

### *Strand 1 – Example projects*

Strand 1 focuses on exploring issues with policy makers; mapping the field of experts (see Box 9); building sustainable structures; and designing models of interaction. This approach is implemented by collaborating with scientific organisations and through example projects.

#### **Box 9. Mapping fields of experts in the Netherlands**

To allow relationships and a shared understanding between science and policy actors to develop, the project's first strand aims to develop and describe structures and methods that can identify all the key actors and thereby develop an overview of relevant scientists and scientific networks in the Netherlands for specific policy issues. Having an overview will enable well-functioning networks to be developed where such relationships between science and policy actors will become systematic.

This mapping work is being undertaken in collaboration with key scientific partner institutions including the Royal Academy of Sciences, the Dutch Research Council, the Association of Universities, and the Network of Deans in Social Sciences and Humanities.

Strand 1 has produced some lessons. Firstly, fostering connections between science and policy takes time – this can be for practical reasons (schedules and job changes, staff turnover) but also because it takes time to develop relationships of trust. Secondly, scientific organisations are not always able to provide fast feedback or quick responses to policy makers. Thirdly, a systematic process for mapping and selecting scientific experts is often lacking both within ministries and across the civil service.

### *Strand 2 – Collating and describing models that map the interactions between policy and research*

Strand 2 of the project was developed to address the following challenges:

- Often, the **methods used** for **mapping** and **selecting** researchers when sourcing research input or advice for policy are simply not described or reported. This raises the question of how

systematically such mapping and selection is done. Furthermore, for the interaction with the world of policy, there need to be criteria for selecting researchers. Beyond the criteria of scientific excellence, other criteria may need to include the communication skills and social skills of recruited researchers and their openness to other fields.

- Models for **interactions** and **meetings** between researchers and policy makers are infrequently described nor reported.

The Science4Policy project experiments with a multidisciplinary approach to mapping and selecting experts by examining existing models of policy-research interaction. The project's ambition is to propose mechanisms to map and select multidisciplinary teams (rather than selecting individual scientists), by ultimately having a menu of options that policy makers can choose from when designing interactions between researchers and policy makers. So far, the project team has examined several models of policy-research interaction. Two examples of such models, Science Sparring and Evidence Appraisal, are detailed below (see Box 10). The process and steps of Science Sparring as a model are clearly described in the literature, however this is not the case for Evidence Appraisal, which builds on various deliberative engagement methods used in other sectors.

### Box 10. Existing models of policy-research interaction

#### Science Sparring

Science sparring is a dialogue method well suited to supporting system change where there is a lot of uncertainty. It is also well suited to addressing policy questions or issues that bridge several disciplines or domains.

Science Sparring is a dialogue-based method that brings the expertise of policy makers together with scientific perspectives. It was designed to deal with complex phenomena that benefit from the co-design of questions and solutions between policy makers and researchers.

Sparring aims to develop an extensive understanding of given issues by facilitating close cooperation between researchers and decision makers. The method of science sparring was developed by Sofi – Science Advice Initiative of Finland (2019-2021). The Sofi initiative was funded by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture and led to the design and piloting of several new approaches to science advice for policy in collaboration with science academies and the government. In science sparring researchers review and comment on draft policy documents that are put forward by policy makers.

Science sparring consists of three key steps:

1. Identification of frames of dialogue (general frames around which dialogues are organised rather than clearly delineated questions); general frames could be provided by reviews of key concepts, ex ante impact assessments, scanning of uncertainties and evidence gaps.
2. Use of draft policy documents as boundary objects.
3. Testing of hypotheses and claims (researchers provide feedback on evidence-related issues, assumptions and evidence gaps in the document, and may provide suggestions for improvement of the document).

The dialogue sessions are facilitated by knowledge-brokering experts and teams of researchers and policy makers are often multi-disciplinary.

### Evidence Appraisal

Evidence Appraisal is a collaborative process which examines the research questions and underlying values of one or more evidence pieces to identify its suitability for a given policy context. Participants in this process are decision makers/policy makers, researchers, and facilitators who can skilfully guide the appraisal and subsequent discussions. This method aims to build a collective evidence base that can be applied to a given question. An important part of the Evidence Appraisal method involves examining whether the available research evidence is appropriate, robust and useful when addressing the policy question(s). Although various models exist, this type of policy-research dialogue can be structured in three broad phases:

1. A **scoping phase**, where participants reflect and discuss the policy question(s) in relation to their own values. They determine what sort of evidence would be the most appropriate in answering the question(s).
2. An **appraisal phase**. Expert researchers present the evidence pieces (can be individual studies or a body of knowledge) in accessible language. Using an evidence appraisal framework, participants then conduct an analysis of the available evidence and determine how it can be used to formulate recommendations.
3. In the **final phase**, policy makers participate in a round table discussion and make decisions based on all the evidence that they have been presented with during the process.

Source: Jaakko Kuosmanen & Tommi Kärkkäinen (n.d.<sup>[36]</sup>); Gough (2021<sup>[37]</sup>); Oortwijn, Jansen and Baltussen (2021<sup>[38]</sup>); Culyer (2019<sup>[39]</sup>).

### Next steps

Going forward, the Science4Policy project will establish a “booster team” which will:

- Set up policy-science interfaces on a transdisciplinary basis. The team will continue the example projects mentioned above, as well as acquire new policy initiatives. The aim is to further explore whether a booster team provides added value to the existing structures and mechanisms.
- Promote the strengthening of knowledge mobilisation functions both within ministries and scientific organisations. Amongst other activities, the team will explore whether further government-wide arrangements for the knowledge function within ministries will be helpful to increase the use of research knowledge in decision-making.
- Promote learning and building a knowledge base on methods for mapping and selecting scientists as well as policy-research interaction.

It is intended that this team should include both policy makers as well as representatives of research organisations.

### Norway: Creating a culture and capacity for research use within the policy analysis unit

The Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research has organised its work on analysis and research in a Section for Policy Analysis (ARK) to strengthen the work in this domain. The section provides analytical, research-based support for policy making in all departments at the Ministry, facilitates strategic discussions in the field of educational research, and works to promote educational research in the long term.

The official mandate of the unit is to support policy development based on a relevant and reliable knowledge base. The section is housed within the Department for Administration and Strategic Priorities

in the Ministry. It is responsible for navigating boundaries and mobilising research horizontally between departments and vertically to the Secretary General and two ministers. It uses both formal and informal channels to achieve this.

### ***How the section works to strengthen the use of research in the Ministry***

The section has two broad workstreams: proactive and reactive. On the proactive side, the section finds research, studies and statistics and extracts their policy relevance. On the reactive side, the section responds to requests for evidence from within the Ministry. These requests require the section to shed light on key issues, challenges and questions in policy making with evidence and analyses. In essence, they act as a kind of internal consulting service for the Ministry.

To fulfil its mandate, the ARK section takes an evidence-informed approach to its own activities. It draws on the research in the field of knowledge mobilisation to guide its strategic focus in five key areas.

#### *Area 1: Awareness*

The section works to normalise a culture of using research within the ministry and in daily working life, which also means colleagues are encouraged to remind each other that an evidence-based approach is a cornerstone of professionalism.

#### *Area 2: Agreement*

This dimension seeks to coordinate the research landscape with various Ministry partners. For example, the section collaborates with the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, the Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills and the Research Council of Norway (NRC) to monitor and plan strategic research areas and discuss further development of the research in education.

The section also coordinates the Ministry's collaborations with Statistics Norway, the Knowledge Centre for Education, and educational researchers/research institutions in general. Coordination involves communicating research needs, feedback and ideas regarding statistics and research initiatives.

The aim of this dimension is to uncover what is already known, what research questions need to be addressed in the future and what resources are needed to answer them. To promote this, the section drafts strategic documents such as the Strategy for Educational Research to develop research and facilitate high scientific quality and relevance in education research.

#### *Area 3: Interaction*

ARK facilitates meetings and dialogues so that civil service, politicians and researchers can gain a common understanding of the relevant research topics and questions. This includes a series of round table discussions between the senior policy makers, politicians and educational researchers – where the researchers play the role of the expert, and the politicians are the enquirers but also convey their knowledge needs.

One further initiative is “Meeting Ground R&D”. ARK periodically invites researchers and statisticians to present their research to Ministry staff. A topic is generally permitted if it is of interest to at least two departments in the Ministry. Staff within ARK and across the departments in the Ministry can suggest or request topics.

#### *Area 4: Access*

Access and dissemination also necessitate the translation of research into a relevant format so it can be understood and used by ministry staff. At the passive level, ARK curates a database of policy research

that contains commissioned research and summaries on various topics. These are tagged with metadata which is easily searchable.

More proactively, every working week of the year a different member of the ARK team writes a one-page synthesis of key messages from research findings (called “Research says...”). This one-pager presents new research on topics relevant to the Ministry and the Minister’s political projects. By rotating authorship of the one-pager, evidence synthesis skills are built evenly across the team. This is emailed directly to politicians and senior Ministry officials and published on the Ministry intranet, which is accessible to all employees. ARK also drafts longer summary documents, which it periodically disseminates to politicians, senior Ministry officials and employees in relevant departments within the Ministry.

#### *Area 5: Skills*

Using research in decision-making processes requires a certain level of methodological knowledge and understanding of the potential but also the limitations of research. Creating ARK has meant that the Ministry has a dedicated unit which emphasises research skills in recruitment and actively hires individuals with both PhDs and research experience, who can guide and support the rest of the Ministry in using research.

#### **Challenges and next steps**

ARK faces several challenges. Analysts in each Ministry department are ARK’s main counterparts, responsible for disseminating the information with their department and helping with the identification of research questions. However, their capacities are limited, and ARK must also balance its resources with regards to proactive and reactive tasks. In practice, this means that proactive work is reduced in response to a heavy workload. This exacerbates a further challenge: To have and maintain an overview of the wide range of research that already exists and to avoid inefficient production of research that has already been carried out.

It is also a challenge to find the right civil servants with research competencies to employ within ARK. They need to be content experts with a degree of policy making understanding, who are also comfortable with directly influencing policy and spending a majority of their time on policy analysis tasks, such as meetings to discuss research findings, and comparatively less time on traditional academic research activities.

### **Conclusions: A systems approach to improving research engagement in policy organisations**

Despite (sometimes significant) variations in systems’ characteristics, there are strong similarities in the challenges they face in relation to research use. Many of the challenges originate from the complexity of policy environments, the competing sources of knowledge used in policy processes and the nature of evidence itself (unavailable, not synthesised for policy purposes, inconclusive, not directly translatable into a course of action). However, some are linked to the inadequate structures of policy organisations (e.g. ministries), insufficient processes to generate meaningful interaction among civil servants, policy advisors, researchers, decision makers, and the lack of individual skills of policy makers and collective capacity within policy organisations. The case studies presented in previous sections provide examples of systems’ recent efforts to address these latter set of challenges to reinforce the quality, production and use of education research in policy making.

Modern evidence use literature calls for a systems approach to trigger change (Best and Holmes, 2010<sup>[16]</sup>; Boaz et al., 2019<sup>[14]</sup>; Mason, 2016<sup>[40]</sup>). While such an approach may not have been deliberate in all of the case studies, we can observe instances of this in all of them. In fact, the case studies demonstrate that the two themes laid out in the introduction – human resource strategies and stable structures and mechanisms – are hardly separable in the strategies countries apply to improve evidence use. Therefore,

rather than discussing the two questions separately, this conclusion highlights some overall features of the practices presented above.

### ***Understanding the system: Establishing the baseline***

We need a good understanding of the problem in the first place. For example, the connections – or lack thereof – between actors and the specific challenges associated to them.

In the Dutch case, the commissioned behavioural science study aimed at revealing the barriers ministry staff are facing in using evidence. The entry point here was a focus on people (staff members) from a perspective of understanding their behaviour. However, the conclusions of the study were not limited to individual attributes but included organisational barriers. Similarly, the Science 4 Policy initiative started with exploring issues and mapping the field of experts – both aiming at a good understanding of where the field currently stands. The Irish initiative to improving evidence use in policy also started with extensive mapping that included a range of stakeholders within and outside government agencies.

### ***Influencing actors and the nature of interactions between them***

Actors are at the core of evidence use. They include individuals – e.g. civil servants, advisors, researchers, brokers of research (e.g. consultants), high-level decision makers – and structures – organisations such as a ministry or agency, units within these organisations, informal structures such as working groups or networks with members representing different formal structures.

A systems approach can shape actors and their roles directly. For example, the creation of units within ministries in the Flanders, Ireland and Norway cases aimed at adding an element that is directly responsible for improving evidence use and act as a coordinator to connect other elements and develop or improve interactions between them. The Dutch Science 4 Policy initiative is an informal, not necessarily permanent structure that was created to generate system change.

However, it is the nature of interactions between actors that determines to a large extent the quality and extent of evidence use in policy.

A complete lack of connection between researchers and research institutions on the one hand and policy makers and policy organisations on the other will likely negatively influence evidence use. Therefore, the first step is establishing relationships or mapping and strengthening indirect connections, such as through brokerage organisations or brokerage roles (embedded researcher in a ministry, external research consultant). However, interactions can vary in terms of frequency, intensity and quality. They can be influenced by many different factors:

- attributes of individuals and structures: people's mindset, knowledge and skills related to research and policy making, collective skillset and capacity of teams and units
- processes: knowledge generation for policy and the nature of questions that are put to the research community
- tools and methods: a national education research strategy, methods of generating dialogue
- the overall culture around evidence use.

All cases presented in this paper identified the quality of interactions as one of the key pieces to improve and acted (or plan to act) on all of the above factors. The Flemish, Dutch, Irish and Finnish action plans all involve building individual and team skills through a comprehensive HR strategy that includes rethinking recruitment and professional learning. There is a strong emphasis in the Finnish case on processes, particularly on knowledge generation through evaluations, and mechanisms to foster interactions is also part of the Flemish case (e.g. cross-unit projects), the Dutch Science 4 Policy initiative and the Irish action

plan. The Dutch Science 4 Policy is also experimenting with concrete tools and methods (science sparring, evidence appraisal).

What is common across all case studies is that they all target multiple elements of the system and put in place multiple strategies to influence interactions between them. Furthermore, the strategies (and their effectiveness) are intricately connected to the general culture around evidence use, and the politics of policy making (e.g. relationships between civil servants and the minister).

### ***Monitoring feedback loops and adjusting actions***

To achieve a particular outcome (new behaviour), which in this case is the systematic and thoughtful use of evidence in all policy processes, the reactions of the system to various initiatives need to be constantly monitored. When negative feedback is created, it needs to be understood and remedied, while positive feedback can be reinforced.

Most case studies presented in this paper are relatively recent initiatives, are still in exploration phases, and are not yet monitoring impact in a systematic way.

## **Policy recommendations**

A culture is not created in a vacuum, and changing a culture is more difficult than creating a new one. The case studies presented in this paper highlight some key drivers of a culture change for better evidence use in policy. In all cases, several of these drivers are combined and applied together.

### ***Build research infrastructure for cumulative knowledge for policy***

A culture of evidence use starts with evidence itself. Structures and processes are necessary to build a knowledge base of research evidence that is relevant for policy questions. Structures can be for example dedicated agencies (like FINEEC) and units within ministries or agencies (like in several of the case studies). Processes can involve for example the systematic mapping of research interests in policy (like in the Irish case) and incentives to generate research that responds to these. The systematic evaluation of policies and the regular generation of evidence syntheses (like in Finland) are important. Researchers and knowledge brokers must also recognise the importance of framing, quality-controlling, synthesising and communicating research to increase policy impact. To note, however, that not all research needs to be directly relevant to policy (or practice). Blue skies research is also fundamental for the long-term advancement of our collective knowledge base in education.

### ***Develop individual skills and collective capacity in civil service***

An explicit focus on building skills and capacity for research use in the human resource strategy of ministries supports a culture of evidence use. A multi-layered approach that considers the individual, the team and the organisation contributes to collective civil service professionalism. This includes:

- awareness of required and available competences
- a recruitment strategy that ensures an appropriate balance of profiles and competences, including the strategic distribution of people across teams and units
- professional development opportunities to build competences based on needs
- appropriate formal and informal rewards for using and disseminating research, and meaningful career paths for policy makers in civil service with strong research skills
- involvement of outside expertise that complements internal capacity.



The broader debate around the skills needed in a modern civil service has emphasised the need for reforms that would enable the public sector to deliver fast responses to policy challenges that can be complex, volatile and unpredictable (OECD, 2017, p. 110<sup>[2]</sup>). This inevitably places a difficult expectation on human resource strategy development in the civil service. Civil service professionals are increasingly expected to deliver analysis in a quicker and more agile way to respond to the short-term and urgent needs of politicians for solutions – but to balance these needs with the values-based requirement to adopt evidence-informed approaches and systematically integrate research evidence into policy processes. Competence frameworks such as the one developed by the European Commission (Schwendinger, Topp and Kovacs, 2022<sup>[20]</sup>) and the OECD Public Governance Directorate (OECD, 2017, p. 31<sup>[2]</sup>) can help inform human resource strategies that will in turn equip civil servants to navigate this complex decision making environment. Crucially, competences should not only be ensured for individuals, but should be considered in terms of collective capacity as well.

### ***Foster relationships and structured interactions***

A systems approach to improving evidence use in policy requires the strategic development of relationships and investment in generating quality interactions among actors. These can pertain to people within a ministry, e.g. building stronger bridges between “brokerage units” and policy units, and between those with a robust knowledge of research evidence and policy advisors and high-level decision makers. Relationships with high-quality interactions should also be facilitated between policy actors within ministries/agencies and other stakeholders, including researchers, consultants, school leaders, teachers etc.

While a range of platforms are possible to strengthen relationships: expert working groups, national forum, dialogue series and others. However, the emphasis needs to be on how interactions can support the thoughtful use of evidence. Several tools exist for this – such as evidence appraisal and science sparring – that can be explored and tested. Interactions can centre on various aspects of evidence generation and use:

- identification of short- and long-term research needs in terms of topics and types of evidence
- appraisal of evidence for specific policy questions in terms of quality, relevance and applicability
- translation of research findings into actionable insights, incorporating other sources of knowledge (e.g. professional/contextual knowledge, values).

In addition to one-way research communication strategies, the focus needs to be on generating engagement through dialogue. And crucially, as both the Irish and Dutch case studies highlight, research input into policy needs to be independent while the ways that research-policy interactions are established and carried out need to be described in a systematic and transparent way. This can help ensure that a broad range of research(ers') perspectives, diverse research evidence and a variety of disciplines are integrated into the policy process.

### ***Develop and sustain structures and processes***

Dedicated structures, such as units within ministries, can support a culture change for better evidence use if their status in this respect is well-established and accepted, and if their teams understand what it takes to apply a systems approach to evidence production and use. Such structures can take on responsibility for mapping the state of play and developing a long-term strategy. In addition to stable, long-term structures, shorter-term or more flexible ones (e.g. the Dutch Science 4 Policy group and the Finnish policy networks) can support the development of appropriate processes through experimentation and evaluation.

Stable structures need to manage the common tension between reactive and proactive policy making (Belgian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, 2024<sup>[13]</sup>). They need to be prepared to respond to ad-hoc, rapid demands, while also maintaining a long-term perspective of generating and synthesising

evidence. A formal, long-term research production strategy can support the generation of policy-relevant research in the long-term. However, it is also necessary to build research engagement in this strategy to ensure that research evidence and data is made accessible and to support various actors' engagement with it.

## Yes Minister, Yes Evidence: Structures and Skills for Better Evidence Use in Education Policy



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The OECD *Strengthening the Impact of Education Research* project supports countries in understanding how to use education research in policy and practice, systematically and at scale.

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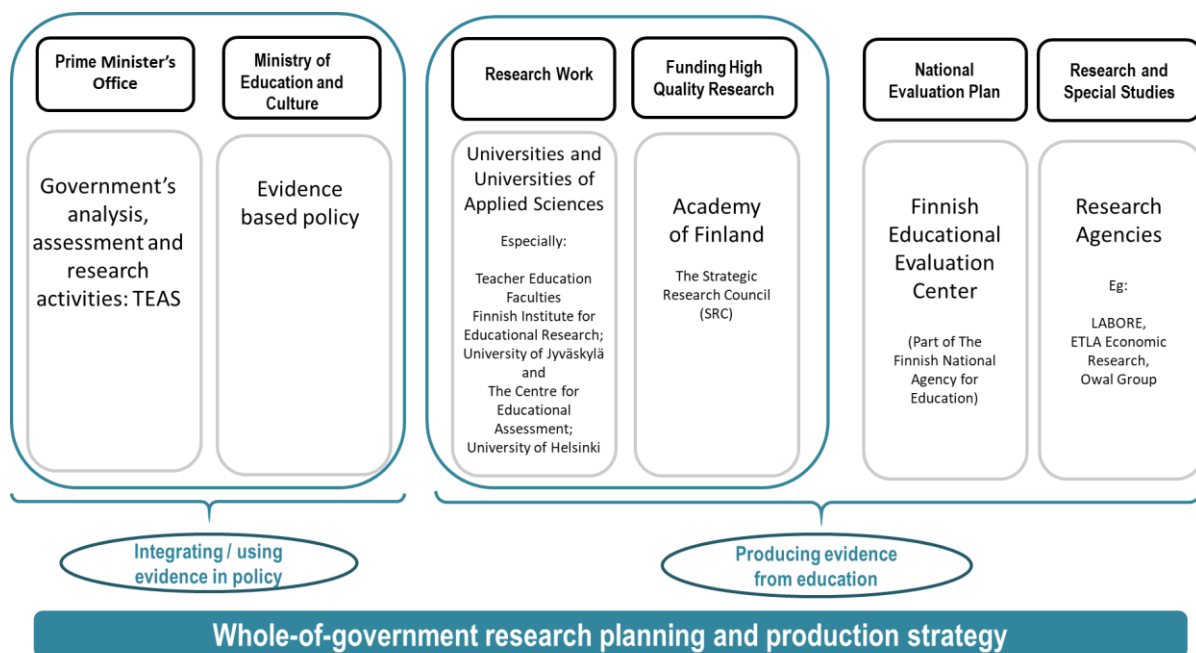
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[https://stacybri.github.io/SPI\\_country\\_pages/country\\_reports/reports/Finland.html](https://stacybri.github.io/SPI_country_pages/country_reports/reports/Finland.html)  
(accessed on 15 March 2024).

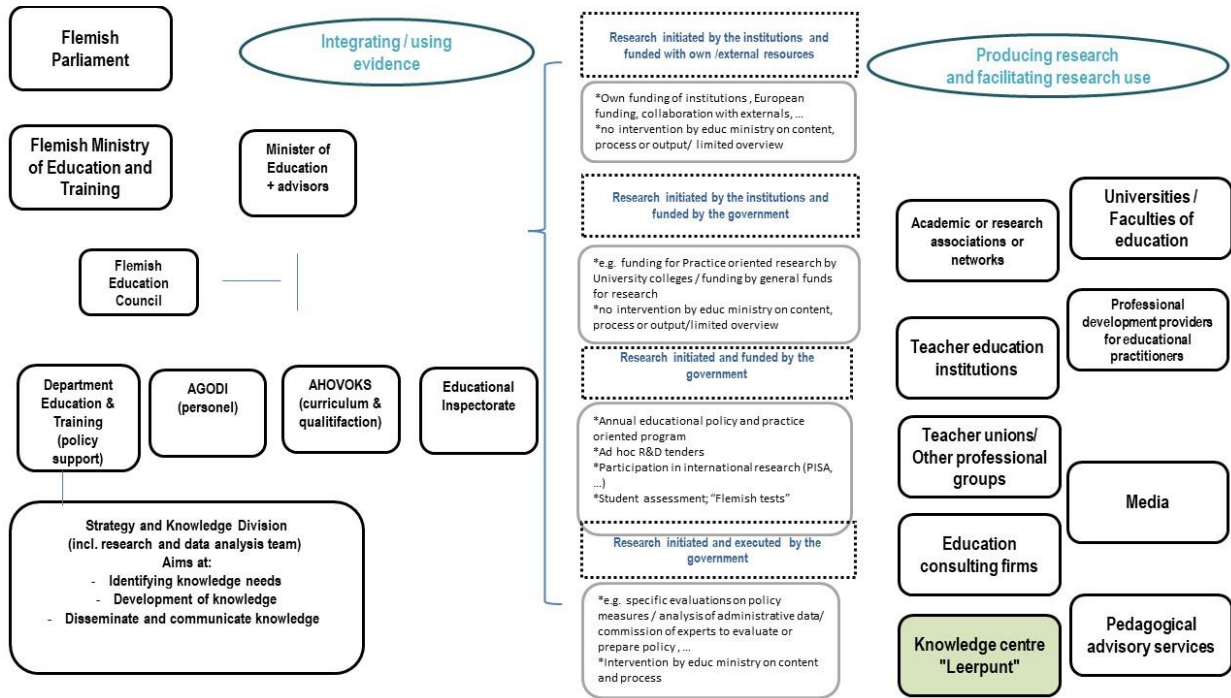
# Annex A. Annex: Knowledge infrastructure in participant countries

Figure A A.1. Finland



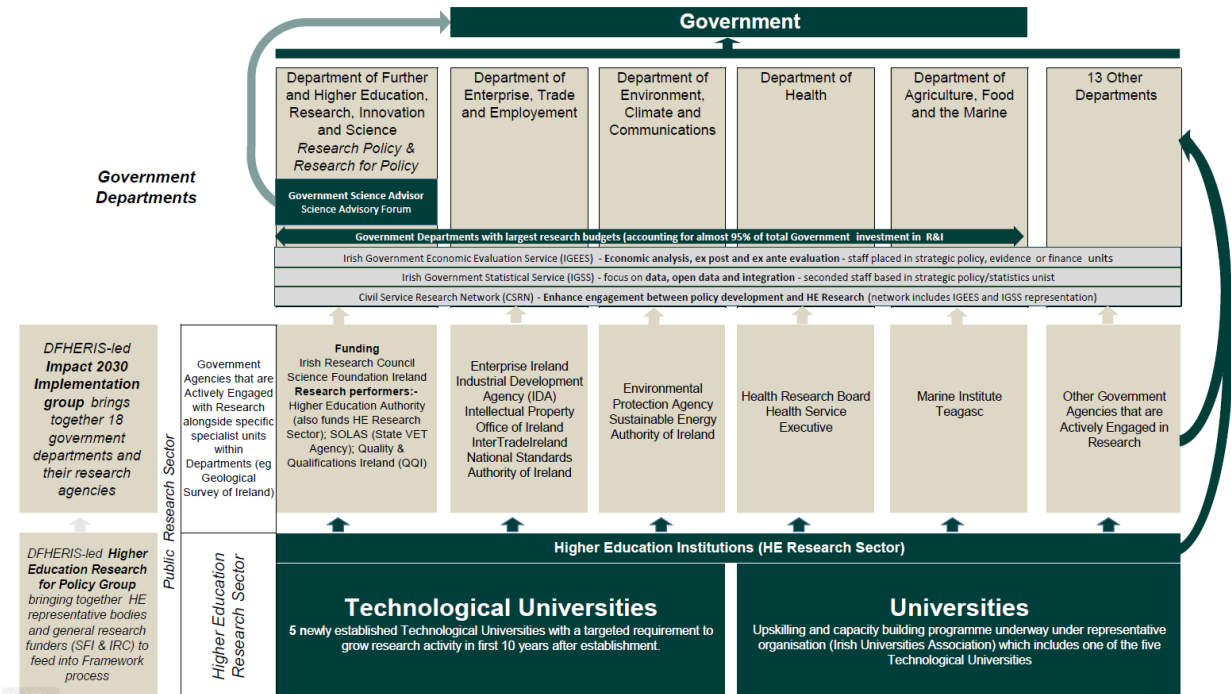
Source: Developed by Finland's Ministry of Education and Culture for the OECD Learning seminar, 2-3 June 2022.

Figure A A.2. Flanders (Belgium)



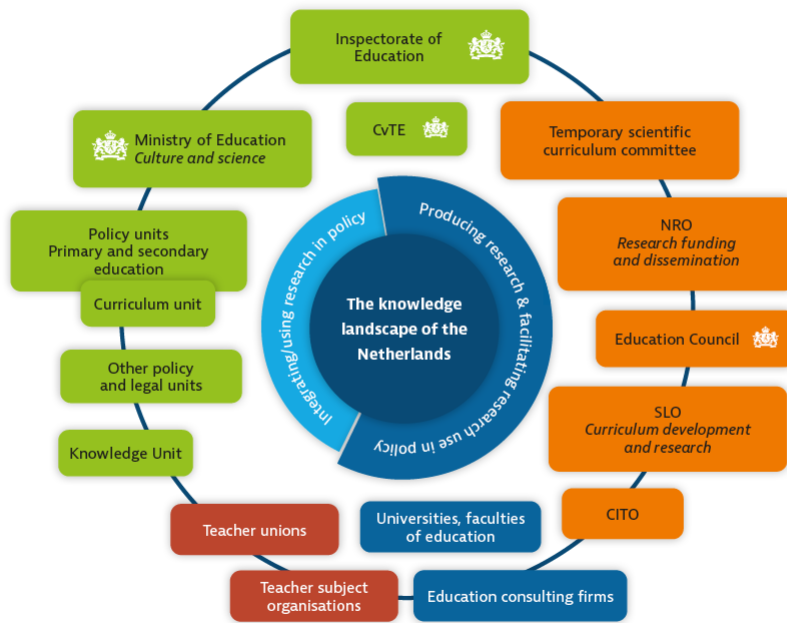
Source: Developed by the Department of Education and Training, Flanders, 2023.

Figure A A.3. Ireland



Source: Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science of Ireland

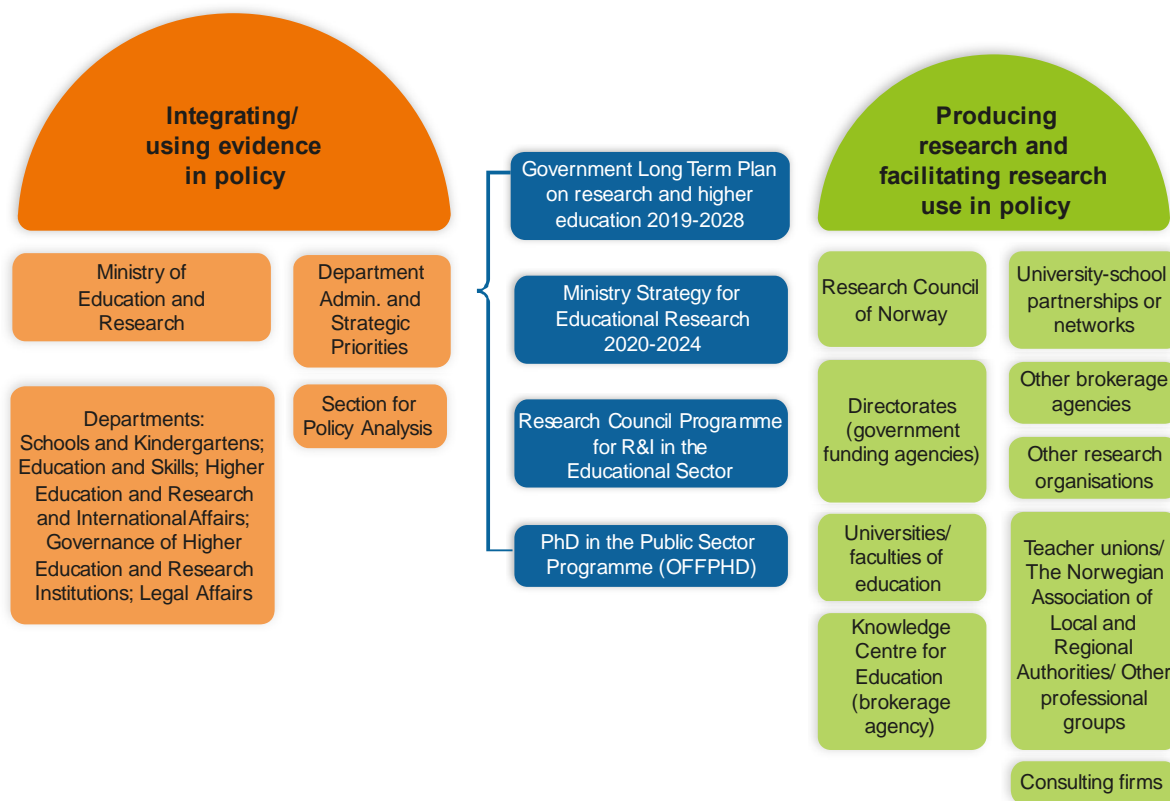
Figure A A.4. Netherlands



Source: Developed by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science of the Netherlands, 2023.



Figure A A.5. Norway



Note: R&I: research and innovation.

Source: Developed by the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2022.

This Education Policy Perspective has been authorised by Andreas Schleicher, Director of the Directorate for Education and Skills, OECD.

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