



Evidence Informed Policymaking in Education in Europe

EIPEE Final Project Report Summary

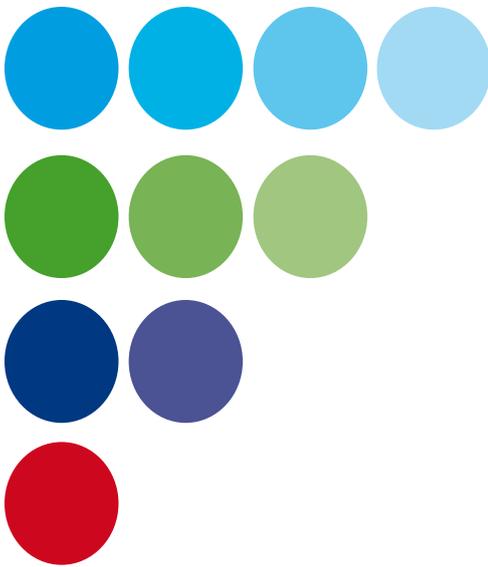
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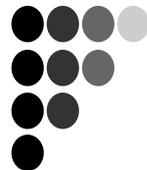


Project components

This is the final report of a thirteen-month project 'Evidence Informed Policy in Education in Europe' (EIPEE) funded by the European Commission Directorate for Education and Culture (grant agreement number 2009-11932). The objective of the call for proposals was to develop knowledge brokerage mechanisms in the field of education and training and to strengthen the links between research, policy and practice.

The EIPEE project contributed to this objective through discovering and exchanging information on the different types of brokerage activities and mechanisms that are used to link research evidence to policy in Europe and provided concrete tools to assist with the discussion and analysis of such information. The project's broad aims were to raise awareness of evidence informed policy in education, create a network of those working in the area, and encourage the adaptation and testing out of new approaches and ideas in evidence informed policymaking in education. The project had five main work packages:

1. **Project planning and management:** to develop the project collaboratively with partners; to establish a broad-based European network of those working in the field;
2. **Data collection and analysis:** to develop and share knowledge of (a) activities used to link research evidence and policy in education in Europe, and (b) relevant empirical research; to design an appropriate analytical framework;
3. **Training curriculum and course:** to develop capacity in this field;
4. **International seminar:** to further develop a network; to discuss and share information and ideas;
5. **Website:** to enable the sharing of information collected and developed by the project; to facilitate continuing discussion on this issue; to enable further networking.



Project outcomes

The EIPEE project represents a further stage in the development of cross-European work in this area, building on other investments by the European Commission, and by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and others internationally. The project's main outcomes and recommendations are listed below.

1. Networks

The project has developed a broad-based European network of those interested and/or working in evidence-to-policy links in education. The 18 project partners based in 11 countries worked collaboratively to develop the project. Communication took place by telephone, email and two planning meetings (25–26 March and 24 September 2010). This core network was further broadened by individuals and organisations engaging in the survey, and by participation of 61 delegates from 20 countries in an international seminar (22–23 September 2010), including representatives from 10 ministries of education. Networking has been further developed through the discussion forum on the EIPEE project website (www.eipee.eu). Towards the end of the project, the original project partners were joined by additional partners to engage in further work funded by the European Commission, resulting in a core membership on this new project of 35 partners in 23 countries across Europe, plus seven affiliate partners from four countries outside Europe.

The success of the networking strategy of the EIPEE project suggests that not only is there considerable interest in this issue, but many are willing to commit time and resources to move it forward. The number and breadth of partners involved in the new project funded by the European Commission indicates that there is significant interest in further work in this area.

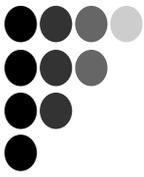
2. Analytical framework

Building on the work of others, we developed a framework to analyse the results of a survey of activities linking research evidence-to-policy in education in Europe. This consisted of a simple model of an evidence production-to-use system and a typology of 27 types of activity and nine mechanisms used to enable the link between research evidence and policy.

This analytical framework provided us with a language to help understand the nature and range of linking activities taking place across Europe. Moreover, in helping to systematise current thinking and understanding about these issues, the framework serves as a conceptual/practical tool that may be adopted/used by others to enable the future identification, analysis and discussion of activities, and, in time, the development of new activities and research in this area.

3. Research evidence-to-policy linking activities identified across Europe

A survey was conducted to provide an overview of the range and nature of activities and the mechanisms they use to enable evidence informed decision-making in education. The survey was not exhaustive and so frequencies of different activities are only indicative and should not be used as



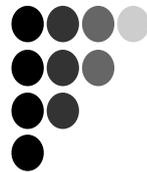
an exact measure of the extent of activity for individual countries. The survey identified 269 examples of linking activities in education in 30 of the 32 target countries in Europe. Some of this activity is achieved through explicit formal processes and some informally. Most of the activities were set up in the last 20 years (many within the last decade). The majority were set up and managed by national governments and/or government-related agencies. The most common activities were those predominantly concerned with producing or communicating research (67%). In comparison, 19% focused predominantly on the use of research. Only 10% of the activities we identified functioned at the intermediary or mediation level and 4% focused on making changes to the entire evidence-to-policy system.

The findings from the survey suggest a high level of activity across Europe and demonstrate that a wide variety of approaches has been taken to try to improve the use of research evidence in policy settings. However, there appears to have been relatively little collaboration and coordination of this work at a trans-European level. Activities are largely at a national rather than international level. Furthermore, much of this commitment is being driven by national governments and government agencies, suggesting that while there has been significant 'buy in' from policymakers, there remains enormous scope for action by other non-governmental bodies in this area. For those who are considering setting up similar schemes in their own organisation/country, the findings from the survey and the many examples of activities can be used to promote discussion and ideas about the development of new activities and mechanisms for linking research evidence with policy.

4. Map of research

As part of the project, a systematic search was conducted to identify the empirical research that has examined the nature, process and/or efficacy of activities used to link research evidence to educational policymaking in Europe. Although there is a great deal of discussion on this issue and opinion pieces are not hard to find, very little empirical research was identified.

At present, therefore, while there is lots of activity taking place in this area, as suggested by the survey, the existing evidence base cannot demonstrate which ones are effective in which contexts. Although this is a disappointing finding, it demonstrates a clear need for research investment in this area. The focus of future research can be informed by the work of the EIPEE project, firstly, through consideration of the data that the project has collected on the type of activities being used to link research evidence and policy in education in Europe, and secondly, through consideration of the research on evidence to policy in fields other than education and in countries outside Europe. Much of the available evidence about the effectiveness of strategies to increase the use of research comes from the healthcare field. Although having few clear messages, this literature suggests that passive dissemination of research is largely ineffective and that multi-faceted interventions show the most promise in enhancing the use of research evidence in policymaking. However, even in healthcare, there is a lack of robust evidence about 'what works' to improve evidence use in the policy arena. Existing research is generally characterised by methodologically weak evaluation designs and a lack of independent objective measures used in assessing outcomes. Although we need to be cautious in applying the results of the healthcare literature to education, the current concentration of investment in activities that are primarily concerned with the production and/or communication of research, as suggested by our survey, may be misplaced.



5. Capacity building

The project increased capacity in several ways:

- It developed knowledge and understanding of different activities going on across Europe for linking research and policy in education;
- It developed knowledge and skills for finding, using and interpreting research;
- It provided a framework to assist people in describing, analysing and developing activities;
- It developed a growing network of people who are interested in and/or working on these issues.

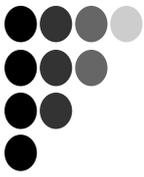
The work done by the project in building capacity in the area of evidence informed policy in education demonstrates that there is a both an appetite and a demand for such efforts across Europe. It also suggests that while our framework represents a significant step in developing a more advanced theoretical framework for understanding the links between research and decision-making and therefore building capacity in this area, it is only a first step and requires further joint enterprise amongst the growing network of people brought together by the project.

6. Ongoing resources

The project website provides access to information and products collected and developed by the project:

- contact details and other information about the project partners/organisations;
- details of the analytical framework and typology;
- a searchable database containing information on the activities identified across Europe for linking research and policy in education;
- a reference list detailing the studies included in the map;
- a fully planned programme structure and slides for future training in this area;
- a list of additional resources, including publications, organisations and other initiatives;
- a publicly accessible discussion forum.

In ensuring that a number of resources are publicly available for those interested in advancing evidence informed policy in education in Europe, the EIPEE project website provides a continuing source of capacity building and networking opportunities. The website also provides sustainability for the project beyond the end of its funding.



7. Dissemination

There were five main ways that the project sought to disseminate its findings (more information is provided in Appendix 8).

- Project staff set up meetings and held discussions with key specialists in the area.
- The website enables the sharing of information collected and developed by the project and facilitates continuing discussion on this issue, thus enabling further networking. Parts of the website have been translated into a further three European languages (French, German and Spanish) to aid dissemination.
- The project engaged with a wider group of people and started to develop a wider network that went beyond the 18 partners included in the EIPEE consortium.
- Project staff have presented findings from the EIPEE project at a number of conferences, including the international seminar organised as part of the EIPEE project. There will also be a symposium event at the European Conference on Educational Research organised by the European Educational Research Association (to be held in Berlin in September 2011).
- The project has produced several publications designed to disseminate the findings, including this project final report and a policy brief. The policy brief has been translated into the European languages of French, German and Spanish to aid dissemination.

Project recommendations

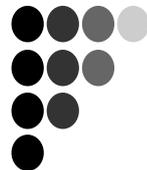
The project has identified a considerable amount of interest within Europe on the issue of evidence informed policy in education. It has been successful in identifying aspects of the current situation and progressing some key parts of this, particularly in relation to networking, developing an analytical model and building capacity in a number of areas. We believe, however, that there is considerable further scope for increasing the use of research in policymaking, and make the following suggestions for helping to achieve this aim using the findings and resources of the current project.

1. Enabling links between research evidence and policy

Efforts should be made to increase the use of activities (including structures and systems) to link research and decision-making. The analytical framework and database of current linking activities identified by the project across Europe can be used to inform the analysis, design, development and implementation of similar or novel linking activities.

2. Increasing quality, relevance and availability of research for informing policy

Efforts should be made to ensure that primary research is 'fit for purpose' in terms of quality, relevance and availability for informing policy. This could include: (i) involving policymakers' perspectives in driving research agendas to ensure relevance of research; and (ii) increasing the use of systematic reviews of research to ensure complete, relevant, quality assured and accessible research evidence.



3. Knowledge, awareness and skills capacity building in all parts of the research evidence production-to-use system

Efforts should be made to increase understanding and skills in relation to the use of research in policymaking in education in each part of the evidence-to-policy system. This could include: (i) participation in networks on this topic; (ii) providing tailored training for individuals and organisations to develop skills and understanding of the different parts of the system; and (iii) providing opportunities to share skills and knowledge through secondments, internships or other working/employment arrangements.

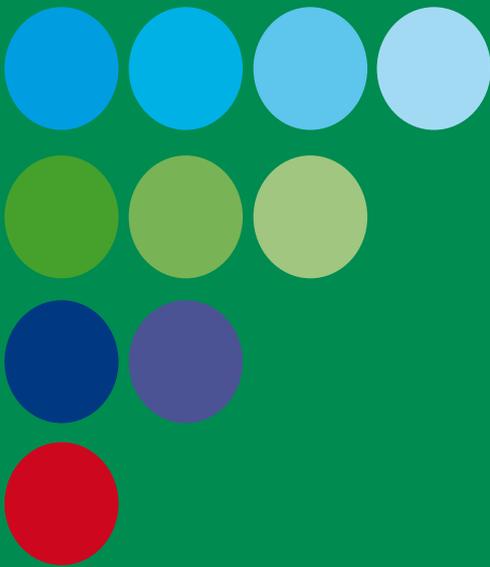
4. Policy decisions to develop evidence informed policy in education

Efforts should be made, at national, regional and local levels, to increase the political and financial commitment to evidence informed education policy and to take the practical steps by which this commitment could have effect in the short, medium and long terms. This could include: (i) acting on the recommendations listed here; (ii) developing systems and programmes of work, including cross-national European initiatives; and (iii) drawing up priorities and targets for achieving evidence informed policy in education.

5. Increasing capacity in research on research generation and use

Efforts should be made to develop evidence informed policymaking as a field of study in order to produce research results to inform the choice of activities for linking research to its use in education in Europe. This could include: (i) building on existing research in education conducted outside Europe and research in other areas of social policy within and outside Europe; and (ii) incorporating the evaluation of implementation and outcomes into all new linking activities.

Some aspects of these recommendations have been built into another project co-financed by the European Commission (grant number EAC-2010-1395).



This study was financed with the support of the European Commission. The opinions expressed in the study are those of the author and do not represent the official position of the Commission. All errors and omissions remain those of the authors. Further information on the project including a policy brief is available on the EIPEE project website.

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