

Chapter 4.

Priority setting, steering and policy learning in education

Central to policy making in complex education systems is the question of what kinds of governance mechanisms are effective for sustainable change. In this context the policy process is approached as a cycle comprising priority setting, policy steering and policy learning while acknowledging the fluidity between the stages. The chapter examines challenges as well as drivers for successful policy design and implementation. It pays special attention to the role of knowledge in defining priorities and designing interventions, and the need for matching support and pressure to secure aligned action and common direction at the implementation stage. Equally central, the chapter highlights policy monitoring and evaluation as tools to improve education policies and eventually shape a sustainable culture of learning within our education systems.

Introduction

How do policy processes lead to effective reform in complex education systems? Using examples from six case studies conducted in Flanders (Belgium), Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland and Sweden, the chapter identifies drivers of and barriers to successful policy making, and argues that applying both pressure and support and coherently aligning them can improve policy steering.

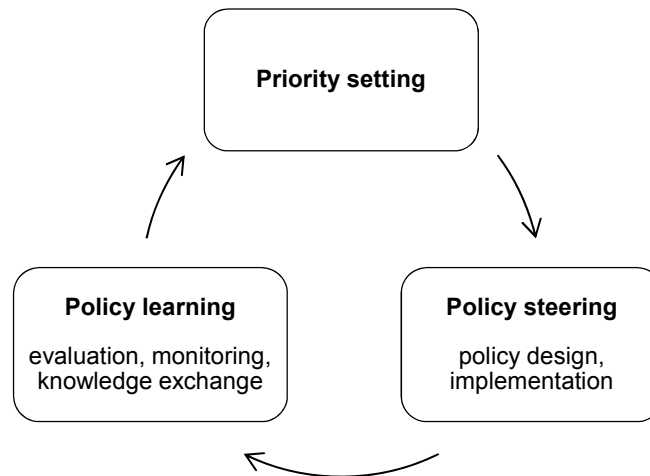
Policy making is often conceptualised as a cycle. It has been broken down in different ways (e.g. Hallsworth et al., 2011; OECD, 2009; Bovens, Hart and Kuipers, 2006) and with varying numbers of stages. It is commonly held, however, that the cycle includes (1) setting priorities, (2) selecting and implementing policy instruments, and (3) evaluating and monitoring policy and outcomes. Conceptualising policy processes as a cycle acknowledges both the iterative nature of the process and the origin of many policies, which tend to emerge from existing policies rather than developing entirely anew. The cyclic view also serves as a reminder that there is no specific start or end point to the process (Hallsworth et al., 2011).

This chapter's first section discusses the three main elements of the policy process and how complexity affects policy making. Taking the GCES case studies as empirical examples, the second section develops an argument for aligning support and pressure in governance and for using "soft" governance approaches to cope with complexity.

Challenges of governing complexity across the policy cycle

It has rightly been argued that a simplistic policy cycle as described above does not represent the reality of policy making (e.g. Clay and Schaffer, 1984). The reality is that "policy making does not take place in distinct stages" (Hallsworth et al., 2011: 38). For example, policy evaluation often does not feed straightforwardly into new initiatives. Likewise, design and implementation are not necessarily preceded by priority setting but, rather, can constitute an immediate reaction to external events (OECD, 2009; Hall and Hupe, 2009; Nakamura, 1987). Also, "even policies which have the semblance of proceeding in stages actually consist of a series of reversals and repetition" (Hallsworth et al., 2011: 38).

The three-stage cyclic model of policy making, as depicted in Figure 4.1, can be considered a heuristic to guide analysis rather than a fully representative model of policy processes (Hall and Hupe, 2009). The arrows in Figure 4.1 illustrate the direction of the cycle, with policy learning feeding back into priority setting and improved policies. This section discusses in turn the policy cycle's stages priority setting, policy steering and policy learning.

Figure 4.1. Policy Cycle

Priority setting

Determining to which issues to respond is both a policy matter and a political matter (see also Burns and Fazekas, 2016). Actors who have influence over which issues make their way onto the policy agenda wield great power: as Tsebilis and Rasch (2011) describe, “agenda setting is of paramount importance in politics, because the agenda setter selects among the many possible alternatives the one that (s)he prefers the most” (p. 3). Importantly, there is rarely only one agenda setter in a political system; rather, agenda setting depends on both the “institutional features of a political system (e.g., who can ask questions and who is prevented from doing so) [and] the ideological positions and the cohesion of different actors” (ibid. p. 2). Considering the multitude of actors and factors in the priority setting process, the selected issue might then not be a “best” option but one that the greatest number of actors can agree on (OECD, 2009).

The role of complexity in priority setting

There are forces outside of the formal political process that wield influence over the process of setting priorities. Stakeholders play an increasingly active role, as does the general public, often through social media. New communication technologies are powerful forces shaping priorities in policy making and have made the political response to pressing topics more immediate and fluid (Wilkożewski and Sundby, 2014; Fazekas and Burns, 2012; Castells, 2007).

As the OECD argued elsewhere, today “[e]ven extremely powerful leaders need to develop or capitalise on a common sense of urgency from other stakeholders and key actors in the system in order to set the agenda” (OECD, 2009: 221). While a sense of urgency can facilitate planned change, external events can generate a sense of urgency among actors and stakeholders that results in rapidly shifting priorities. In this, events in the public focus can emphasise the urgent over the important. Confronted with pressure to approach urgent issues, the government may further feel compelled to announce immediate actions involving policies with still unclear effects or insufficient time to design them properly. Even when a coherent overarching strategy guides policy, current events can easily overturn such strategic thinking.¹

The role of knowledge in priority setting

Reliable knowledge mediation plays an increasingly important role in helping governance actors to define priorities proactively rather than reactively (OECD, 2007). In setting priorities, there are two aspects of knowledge that play important roles. First, knowledge is a resource that can improve evidence-informed decision making through mechanisms such as “technical assistance, short/long-term training, and specialist inputs (e.g. computer systems)” (OECD, 2002). Second, an effective flow of knowledge between actors ensures that adequate knowledge is available to make informed decisions and set appropriate priorities.

A successful policy process should thus facilitate knowledge flows across all governance levels and improve the capacity at each level to process information adequately. The priority setting process must accommodate the potentially conflicting goals of policy makers and the political discourse, including public opinion and media attention (Lassnigg, 2016; Fazekas and Burns, 2012; Hallsworth et al., 2011; OECD, 2009). For effective governance, Pierre and Peters (2005) highlight the state’s need to stay in close contact with actors in society and “utilize social information openly and accurately” (p. 46).

Policy steering: designing and implementing policy

Steering policy involves the design and implementation of policy instruments as well as the mobilisation of resources. Supporting implementation with adequate resources, including both financial resources and human capital, is vital. The mobilisation of resources also pertains to legitimacy. In decentralised systems with many stakeholders, successful implementation depends on the efforts of stakeholders, whose co-operation depends on their belief in the legitimacy of the policy. Legitimacy is thus an important resource that must also be mobilised (Pierre and Peters, 2005; Wilkoszewski and Sundby, 2014).

Legitimacy of governance, including legitimate accountability mechanisms, can increase and reinforce trust. Trust is a main ingredient in governing modern education systems effectively and efficiently, as it facilitates collaboration and knowledge sharing (Cerna, 2014; OECD, 2013a). Importantly, trust, collaboration and knowledge sharing are mutually reinforcing: trust allows for collaboration and knowledge sharing, which generate further trust, as long as individuals display trustworthy behaviour, such as adhering to agreements and sharing knowledge freely (OECD 2013a; Cerna, 2014). In complex systems with little hierarchical enforcement, the sustainability of governance arrangements requires legitimacy and trust among actors and stakeholders who take ownership of the policy processes and goals (OECD, 2012; OECD, 2009; Kleiman and Teles, 2006; Christensen, 2006).

An additional challenge in policy design is that “policies need to be designed not just conceived” (Hallsworth et al., 2011: 42). Using the example of the United Kingdom, the authors describe that in the busy environment of political discourse, policies may be conceived by politicians without adequate counselling of the civil service and its policy professionals for proper design. Policy design should address a policy problem with a clear goal and should not follow preconceived solutions (Hallsworth et al., 2011).

Designing who is accountable to whom and for what

Policy steering also includes accountability mechanisms. Establishing who is accountable to whom and for what is an important element of policy steering. Importantly, accountability does not refer exclusively to reporting to the central level, but can take horizontal forms in which stakeholders hold other actors accountable for their practice; for example, the community holding schools accountable or teachers holding their peers accountable (Köster, forthcoming; Hooge et al., 2012). Chapter 5 takes a detailed look at issues related to accountability, such as monitoring, trust and autonomy while discussing new approaches and empirical examples.

Evaluation and monitoring for policy learning

Evaluation is indispensable for policy learning in that it is meant to identify elements that contribute to a policy's successes and failures and to inform future policy making. On the level of implementation, evaluation depends crucially on ownership and legitimacy. The process of identifying factors that contribute to failure can be interpreted as the figurative pointing of fingers (Burns and Blanchenay, 2016; Bovens, Hart and Kuipers, 2006). The evaluation process must be perceived as legitimate for those involved in order to move beyond the perception of blame and see the value of identifying the factors behind both successes and failures. Evaluation is unlikely to be useful in improving policy if it is not ingrained in the policy-making culture, or if evaluation results are not available in a timely manner (Hallsworth et al., 2011).

Policy makers do not normally have the possibility or time to design and implement policy in a disturbance-free environment where the effects of a policy are clearly attributable. This makes evaluation – particularly the attribution of causes and effects - challenging (see also Blanchenay and Burns, 2016). As a consequence, evaluations may produce findings only considerable time after the formal end of a policy and in turn may not readily translate into new or revised policies (Hallsworth et al., 2011; OECD, 2009).

Monitoring as a tool for accountability and policy learning

In decentralised systems, the central government faces the dilemma of being responsible for the performance of public policy at the same time as it has (in many countries) devolved decision-making powers to lower levels by increasing the autonomy of schools and districts. One approach that allows central government to deliver on their national goals in devolved systems is for central governments to monitor local education outcomes. Modern education monitoring relies on indicators for the purpose of providing information regarding where to direct attention and improvement efforts on the one hand, and as a means of holding actors accountable for their actions on the other (OECD, 2013b).

In recent years, monitoring has evolved from the simple use of student assessment to evaluate the education systems to the use of broad sets of integrated elements, including “external school evaluations, appraisal of teachers and school leaders, and expanded performance data” (OECD 2013b: 13). Monitoring informs decision-making at various levels and is increasingly used to measure processes and outcomes against educational standards revolving around “what students should know and what they should be able to do at different stages of the learning process” (ibid.).

Moving beyond hierarchical governance to cope with complexity

Work on complexity offers a helpful perspective on education governance by taking a step back and looking at the system as a whole. It directs attention to the connections among a system's elements, which create dynamics that cannot be anticipated by looking at the elements in isolation (Mason, 2016; Burns and Köster, 2016). Resolving the challenges related to the complexity of modern education systems – governing across multiple levels, accommodating a wide range of stakeholders, and using a variety of different sources of knowledge – requires governance mechanisms that move beyond hierarchical steering approaches utilising knowledge exchange and local autonomy in implementation (see also Chapter 1).

Challenges of complexity for policy making

Additional to complexity stemming from the multilevel character of many modern governance systems, challenges regarding the policy process revolve, first, around accommodating various stakeholders with different motivations, interests and time horizons. Education policy faces strong *a priori* beliefs, tied both to identity and personal experience. Stakeholders have often formed robust subjective sentiments about good and bad practices in education, and these opinions may not be aligned with research findings (Burns and Köster, 2016). For successful policy implementation, it is vital that all involved stakeholders assume ownership and perceive the policy as legitimate, both in the short- and the long-term (Christensen, 2006; Donahue and Zeckhauser, 2006).

Second, in complex multilevel systems involving various stakeholders, information is abundant and is produced by various actors in numerous locations and forms across the entire system. The exchange of information across levels and stakeholders is vital (Blanchenay and Burns, 2016; Blanchenay, Burns and Köster, 2014; Hopfenbeck et al., 2013; Pierre and Peters, 2005). As Pierre and Peters (2005) describe, “the state must be in close contact with society and utilize social information openly and accurately when governing” (p. 46). This is to accommodate, first, the issues of stakeholder involvement and, second, the interpretation of findings as well as attribution of causes and effects in complex systems (Blanchenay and Burns, 2016; Mason, 2016; see also Chapter 1).

Local evaluation to improve policy learning in complex systems

To improve the state's capacity to gather and process information (Pierre and Peters, 2005), Hallsworth (2011) proposes a shift in evaluation away from formal large-scale evaluations and moving evaluation closer to the local level. Monitoring should then move away from a predominant accountability function to putting greater emphasis on gathering and disseminating knowledge for learning:

Central government is likely to have a more active role in learning and innovation than it will in monitoring. Greater adaptation and experimentation by those realising policies could lead to much greater information about what works. Central government could act as a repository of the evidence and ideas that these activities generate, or enable connections between actors - without mandating a particular approach. This vision depends on a more flexible, inquiring and independent breed of evaluation. Given the speed at which changes can occur in a complex system, the tactic of multi-year pilots followed by formal evaluation is unlikely to fit the bill. (Hallsworth, 2011: 42)

For such an approach to work – where local actors engage in continuous evaluation and policy learning – legitimacy, ownership, capacity and prudent accountability mechanisms are vital (Burns and Köster, 2016; Blanchenay and Burns, 2016; Cordingley, 2016; Köster, forthcoming; OECD, 2013b). Given a reduced role of constant monitoring as means of accountability, Hooge and colleagues (2012) argue that integrating stakeholders into accountability relationships – in addition to performance-based accountability to the centre – can improve both accountability and the integration of varied forms of knowledge.

Opening up governance to multiple sources of knowledge and integrating varied knowledge in decision-making processes contributes to the vital “*information gathering and processing capacity of the state*”, as Pierre and Peters (2005: 46, emphasis in original) describe. The integration of stakeholders in accountability processes “takes into account different stakeholders’ varying perceptions of the quality, effectiveness and efficiency of schooling. It can complement school performance accountability by looking beyond the numbers and also defining schooling in professional and democratic terms” (ibid. p. 18).

Soft modes of governance and ensuring common direction

Moving towards greater integration of the diverse stakeholders present in education systems, it is worthwhile to consider new approaches to governance, particularly “soft” governance. Soft approaches involve shifting towards less coercive and less tightly controlled, audited and sanctioned governance mechanisms (Hood and Margretts, 2009; Wilkoszewski and Sundby, 2012; Vabo, 2012; Radaelli, 2003; Windzio et al., 2005). These include for example lump-sum funding and “indirect tools such as policy programmes that provide a framework and enable the local policy makers to independently organise implementation (Wilkoszewski and Sundby, 2014: 11). Soft modes of governance cater to the gathering and processing of information (Pierre and Peters, 2005) and offer a number of advantages over traditional “hard” approaches to governance.² They can yield advantages in the accommodation of diverse stakeholders, facilitate exchange of knowledge, local experimentation and evaluation, and generate greater legitimacy by being non-threatening to existing governance arrangements (Abbott and Snidal, 2000: 423; also Lassnigg, 2016).

However, balancing open information gathering and processing – for example, by moving towards soft modes of governance and encouraging local evaluation – with “the *authority of the state*, meaning [...] the capacity of the state to make and enforce binding decisions” (Pierre and Peters, 2005: 46, emphasis in original) is crucial for delivering desired results. While soft modes of governance have distinct advantages, they require greater attention to accountability mechanisms to ensure common direction and ample support for those exercising increased local autonomy. Catering to the state’s ability to enforce binding decisions and ensure common direction (Pierre and Peters, 2005), soft modes of governance should be aligned with mechanisms applying careful pressure to nudge implementation in desired directions.

In relying on soft governance and aligning support and pressure, legitimacy of the policy again plays an important role: A policy that is considered legitimate allows for the application of softer forms of pressure, such as incentives, instead of direct forms of pressure, such as regulations and sanctions (Hooge et al., 2012).

Governance mechanisms in action across the policy cycle: The GCES case studies

The previous section laid out the challenges of policy making in complex systems and argued that aligning pressure and support, utilising soft modes of governance, and investing in dynamic knowledge exchange between actors can contribute to the success of policies in complex environments. This section explores what can be learned about pressure, support and soft governance across the policy cycle from the GCES case studies.

While the case studies face unique contexts, all six case studies analyse strengths, weaknesses and challenges involved in governing educational reform in highly decentralised systems. Table 4.1 presents an overview over the GCES case studies, looking at scope, focus, and the general subject of each study.

Table 4.1. Case study overview

Case study	Scope	Focus	Subject
Flanders (Belgium)	Comprehensive	System level targets for schools	Implementation of revised attainment targets as minimum goals for student learning.
Germany	Targeted	Municipalities	Support development of local governance networks and educational monitoring via capacity-building measures and ear-marked funding.
The Netherlands	Targeted	Schools	Targeted interventions to improve schools labelled as (very) weak by inspectorate.
Norway	Comprehensive	Schools	Introduction of new formative assessment system “Assessment for Learning”.
Poland	Comprehensive	Regional school inspectorates, schools	Reform of regionally diverse school supervision system to increase policy coherence and school improvement focus.
Sweden	Comprehensive	Municipalities	Decentralisation of virtually all education decisions to municipal level to increase responsiveness of education to local demands and improve education.

Sources: GCES case studies, Flanders (Belgium): Rouw et al. (2016), “United in diversity –A complexity perspective on the role of attainment targets in quality assurance in Flanders: A GCES case study of Flanders (Belgium)”, *OECD Education Working Papers* No. 139; Germany: Busemeyer and Vossiek (2015), *OECD Education Working Papers*, No. 113, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/5js6bhl2mxjg-en>; The Netherlands: van Twist et al. (2013), *OECD Education Working Papers*, No. 98, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/5k3txnpnhld7-en>; Norway: Hopfenbeck et al. (2013), *OECD Education Working Papers*, No. 97, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/5k3txnpqlsnn-en>; Poland: Mazurkiewicz, Walczak and Jewdokimow (2014), *OECD Education Working Papers*, No. 111, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/5jxrlrxg6b-en>; and Sweden: Blanchenay, Burns and Köster (2014), *OECD Education Working Papers*, No. 104, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/5jz2jg1rqrd7-en>.

The policy reforms in the case studies range from system-wide to targeted policies; from direct interventions in Dutch schools to radical decentralisation of the Swedish education system to capacity- building measures in German municipalities. Each case and each reform faces unique conditions pertaining to governance environment and policy goals, and timing and cultural context shape policy priorities as well as policy options. For example, the Netherlands demonstrates that legitimacy depends largely on the current public discourse (van Twist et al., 2013). A window of opportunity, for example created through a common sense of urgency, can legitimise an atypical intervention otherwise

likely to be unacceptable to relevant stakeholders at a different point in time. The scope, focus and subject of a policy shape the potential options of policy makers to ensure successful implementation. In the case of Germany, the targeted focus of the policy opened the unique opportunity to take advantage of self-selected participation: Municipalities voluntarily competed over ear-marked grants tied to prerequisites of capacity and strategic vision for the implementation (Busemeyer and Vossiek, 2015).

The preceding discussion dealt with the challenges of policy making in complex environments and identified a number of elements with regard to the policy process that should receive particular attention. Table 4.2 summarises the discussion and serves as the framework for the comparison of the GCES case studies over the following sections. Annex 4.A1 provides a full description of elements relevant to the policy cycle for each case study.

Table 4.2. Policy cycle and elements of analysis

Stage of the policy cycle	Elements of analysis
Priority setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actors Which actors were involved in the reform's formulation? Did they have competing priorities? Who decided finally on priorities? • Drivers Which drivers of the reform can be identified: Was there a sense of urgency; a window of opportunity? Knowledge as a lever for change: Was the driving force proactive or reactionary?
Policy steering (design and implementation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instruments (pressure, support) Which instruments were in place to advance the policy goals and which were in place to support the implementation? Did support and pressure match each other, or was one element dominant? • Legitimacy and ownership Which steps were undertaken to ensure legitimacy? Did stakeholders show ownership? • Accountability Who is accountable for what and to whom? • Sustainability Which elements increased the sustainability of the reform's impact?
Policy learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring and evaluation Are the reform's processes and outcomes monitored and evaluated? Were the results used as intended? • Feedback and knowledge processes What knowledge exchange processes are in place? How is feedback incorporated into the governance process?

Source: Adapted from the GCES case study framework (OECD, 2015)

Priority setting in the GCES case studies

What can be learned from the GCES case studies in terms of priority setting? As Hallsworth and colleagues (2011) describe, events have the potential to overthrow well considered strategies, leading to policies that may be ill-conceived and of symbolic character rather than thoughtfully designed. The capacity of the state to cope with external pressures at each level of governance is to a great extent dependent on knowledge processes, which allow following and adapting strategic vision pro-actively to cope with potentially conflicting goals (see Table 4.3).

Table 4.3. Elements of analysis: priority setting

Element of analysis	Details
Actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which actors were involved in the reform's formulation? • Did they have competing priorities? • Who decided finally on priorities?
Drivers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which drivers of the reform can be identified: Was there a sense of urgency; a window of opportunity? • Knowledge as a lever for change: Was the driving force pro-active or reactionary?

Source: Based on Table 4.2.

Public pressure as a driving force of change

In the GCES case studies, public pressure was one of the main drivers for change: In Norway and the Netherlands, perceived crises in education drove change while in Sweden and Poland international discourse shaped priorities of the central level.

The Dutch case study describes an example of coping successfully with the influence of an external actor (here, the public) on the priority setting process. After a political decision to publicise the results of school inspection results – and thus creating the possibility for the public to identify underperforming schools – public pressure shifted the central level's approach from primarily safeguarding local autonomy towards exerting greater pressure to address agreed-upon priorities and to initiate comparatively hard interventions in underperforming schools. Drawing legitimacy from the public's sense of urgency, the central level successfully accommodated stakeholder pressure to change the school inspection policy to include more direct intervention in underperforming schools. As is discussed further in the following section, the central level managed to uphold the commitment to safeguarding school autonomy.

Windows of opportunity and knowledge processes

A window of opportunity and a sense of urgency can present major barriers to successful priority setting (OECD, 2009). Overemphasising political opportunities for reform can topple the strategic vision for the system and lead to changes that do not adequately consider the system's context, culture and process legacies – the case study of Sweden exemplifies this dynamic. The unsatisfactory outcome of the reform studied in Sweden is an example of preconceived notions shaping policy (see Hallsworth et al., 2011): The international and national political climate opened a window of opportunity for the newly elected government, which, in favour of free-market policies, pursued wide-ranging decentralisation and liberalisation policies throughout the 1990s. Given their long tradition of centralisation and social-democratic pursuit of equity, the liberalisation of education policy appears mal-adapted to the Swedish context (Blanchenay et al., 2014).

The Norwegian case serves as an example of national and international public discourse and knowledge mediation that created a window of opportunity for policy reform (the Assessment for Learning policy in Norway [Hopfenbeck et al., 2013]). The disappointing performance of Norwegian 15-year-olds in international tests created a sense of urgency (OECD, 2009; Hallsworth et al., 2011) for the introduction of quality assurance in schools. Much like Germany at that time (Busemeyer and Vossiek, 2015), Norway perceived – without any tangible evidence – that its schools were very good. The school system was highly trusted by politicians and the public and tight accountability was not considered necessary. Public debate in the 1980s and 1990s

revolving around the quality of education and measuring progress set the stage for decentralisation and increased the focus on education performance. The international comparison in OECD's PISA 2000 then marked the tipping point towards a national assessment programme (Hopfenbeck et al., 2013).

In the absence of knowledge exchange processes across schools and governance levels that could have brought together various sources of information, PISA came as a surprise to the Norwegian public, politicians and researchers. Knowledge exchange is as important in priority setting as it is for each of the other stages in the policy cycle. Developed knowledge processes can deliver early indications of issues such as insufficient performance in certain areas of the education system – instead of coming as a surprise as it did in the Norwegian case. This is not limited to international comparison through large scale assessments but can likewise pertain to broader feedback from all levels of governance. With suitable knowledge processes in place, knowledge can be a lever for strategic change and reduce the risk of reactionary responses to external pressures.

Improving policy steering by aligning governance mechanisms

The main focus of policy steering is the selection of appropriate instruments and their adequate implementation. Policy steering includes supporting implementation by mobilising financial resources, human capital and legitimacy. Establishing accountability relations is likewise part of policy steering. Aligning support for implementation with careful pressure to ensure common direction is crucial in policy design (see Table 4.4).

Table 4.4. Elements of analysis: policy steering

Element of analysis	Details
Instruments (support and pressure)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which instruments were in place to advance the policy goals and which were intended to support the implementation? • Did support and pressure match each other, or was one element dominant?
Legitimacy and ownership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which steps were undertaken to ensure legitimacy? • Did stakeholders show ownership?
Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who is accountable for what and to whom?
Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which elements increased the sustainability of the reform's impact?

Source: Based on Table 4.2.

Matching support and pressure

As direct hierarchical steering to achieve policy goals becomes less viable in complex systems, modern education systems require matching a policy's instruments that exert careful pressure with mechanisms that support the policy's implementation.

The German reform (Busemeyer and Vossiek, 2015) exemplifies how competition over financial resources can enable the central level to ensure common direction while at the same time facilitating implementation and adaptation to local context. By communicating the extent of funding available, ear-marked funding creates a guideline for expenditure and reliable expectations at both the central level and among the potential recipients.

Clear communication of the goals of the policy and what is expected of the policy recipients as well as ensuring suitable capacity set the stage for successful implementation: In the German case, a limited number of municipalities competed over ear-marked grants with proposals on how to implement the policy. A list of mandatory elements to implement – with their specific implementation left at the discretion of the applying municipality – and guidelines for the policy’s implementation ensured a common direction across participating municipalities.³ The pressure exerted by the proposal’s requirements screened out municipalities with inadequate capacity. The municipalities that were able to secure the programme’s grant had a minimum level of capacity to effectively implement the full policy programme. Despite high baseline capacity, success in the German case was still to some extent dependent on previous experiences⁴, highlighting the crucial importance of capacity building in implementation (see Chapter 6).

In today’s education systems shortcomings in capacity are largely unavoidable due to the diversity of local circumstances, making implementation guidelines to exert pressure and capacity building to support implementation indispensable. A lack of capacity further risks failure to take ownership and responsibility for the implementation of the policy. In the Swedish case, many municipalities were overwhelmed and did not have the capacity to implement their new and radically different responsibilities. The resulting lack of ownership for the policy led many municipalities to set priorities across their responsibilities along traditional lines, sometimes at the expense of education⁵ (Blanchenay et al., 2014).

While lump-sum funding provides municipalities with the autonomy to spend funds received from the central level across their budgeting responsibilities, its benefits depend substantially on capacity and political commitment to set priorities adequately. In a context of limited political commitment and shortcomings in capacity, ear-marking funds can provide suitable guidelines to ensure common direction while allowing local governance actors to consider local context in the policy’s implementation. This observation moreover exemplifies the fluid character of the policy process across multiple levels: here, policy steering (implementation) on the central level influenced the priority setting process on a lower level of governance.

Aligning instruments

Supporting implementation has a further dimension in that aligning instruments can improve effectiveness and efficiency of a reform, as instruments may rely on the implementation of other instruments in reaching their full potential.

In Flanders (Belgium), attainment targets were introduced based on a political decision to exert prudent pressure over a highly decentralised system. Since their introduction attainment targets have been accompanied by changing political discourses around the nature and character of the attainment targets. The various discourses are based on the different values and interests of the various stakeholders (Rouw et al., 2016).

As the case study finds, attainment targets are unable to unfold their full potential in ensuring common direction as they are not matched by supporting instruments – one example being the comparability of performance across schools in relation to attainment targets. Networks and individual schools measure their students’ performance through self-developed measures of success and corresponding tests and the Inspectorate in turn holds schools accountable for reaching attainment targets based on information provided by the respective school. While the Flemish Ministry of Education developed validated

tests for schools to increase the comparability of school evaluations and system level achievement of attainment targets, for political reasons schools are not mandated use these tests. While aligning instruments with supporting instruments on a system-level have the potential to increase the effectiveness of policies, the decision to introduce such measures can be a decidedly political matter.

Mobilising legitimacy for policy design and implementation

In complex systems with a diverse range of stakeholders and greater involvement of the public, discourses tend to have a political dimension as multiple convictions and interests meet. Many issues are genuinely political in that they are concerned with core values and no hard evidence exists regarding their solution (so-called “wicked issues”, see for example Vermaak, 2009). Outside such issues, trust, communication and stakeholder involvement, particularly in priority setting and policy design, can help mobilising legitimacy of policy steering processes. If actors understand and value the goals of the policy, they are more inclined to assume responsibility for its implementation, which can greatly help the policy to succeed. During the policy design and implementation phases, actors and stakeholders should be collaboratively engaged in adjusting the policy. This can facilitate implementation and capitalise on the knowledge created in the implementation phase to adapt policy in subsequent iterations.

The Flemish case study provides an example for stakeholder involvement in deliberation processes to build legitimacy at the beginning of a policy as well as in subsequent revision of the policy. The introduction of attainment targets applicable to all schools was hotly debated when first suggested as it was perceived to interfere with the guiding principle of freedom of education in Flemish education. To mobilise legitimacy, the design phase of the attainment targets included broad stakeholder consultation and expert input. As a further key measure to mobilise legitimacy against the background of the freedom of education principle, attainment targets were designed as minimum goals to reduce their impact on the autonomy of education providers to shape education (Rouw et al., 2016).

While soft forms of governance are generally meant to build acceptance, the legitimacy of a policy is often context-dependent (Donahue and Zeckhauser, 2006). A policy may be accepted as reasonable by stakeholders and even driven by them when a sense of urgency is widely shared, while it would not be considered appropriate under less pressing circumstances.

In an example from the Netherlands, the public pressure to reduce the number of underperforming schools opened a window of opportunity and lent legitimacy to an otherwise unacceptable policy approach. While the reform exerted great pressure on underperforming schools, the central level’s approach was legitimised by public pressure and by the continued non-intervention in schools that were performing well. To increase legitimacy among school governing bodies, the Council of Primary schools was granted a role in the improvement of schools. Nevertheless, while exerting high pressure on underperforming schools – potentially leading to school closure – the policy never directly prescribed measures, safeguarding schoolboards’ ultimate autonomy in decisions regarding school issues, thus ensuring legitimacy also among underperforming schools (van Twist et al., 2013).

Enforcing adequate implementation through careful accountability mechanisms

As described earlier, when deploying a soft governance approach to cope with complexity, some pressure to ensure common direction is nevertheless necessary, particularly through constructive accountability mechanisms (see also Chapter 5). In Norway, the education system put enormous trust in teachers with few accountability mechanisms in place. While trust facilitates the introduction of reform in complex systems, the authors of the case study found that “when the system relies wholly on trust and thus has few incentives (or sanctions) for the actors, long-term implementation in the face of resistance becomes problematic” (Hopfenbeck et al., 2013).

While to some extent mitigated by comprehensive communication of the policy’s principles and goals, a substantial challenge in the policy implementation in Norway remained reform fatigue among teachers. As individual teachers were not held accountable for conforming to the established guidelines, teachers experiencing reform fatigue had little incentive to engage with the reform’s principles and potential benefits. A major success factor for system-wide policies is a cultural shift in day-to-day practices, which relies on all stakeholders moving in a common direction. Here, an accountability system – potentially with horizontal elements (see Box 4.1) – is required to ensure implementation in the face of individual resistance to culture change.

Box 4.1. Horizontal accountability for common direction and capacity building in Germany

Accountability, discussed in greater depth in Chapter 5, does not necessarily mean a strictly hierarchical relationship where lower governance levels deliver an account of their practices and implementation of policy to the central level (Hooge et al., 2012). In the German case, the central level mandated the involvement of philanthropic foundations experienced in education monitoring and network governance. The involvement of these foundations and the creation of monitoring processes created a network of actors holding municipalities and other involved actors accountable.

The involvement of external civil society actors to help build capacity and hold local actors accountable is a very promising approach. A weakness in the approach is that the effectiveness of such horizontal governance networks is strongly dependent on governance culture and, if not already present, the political will to integrate this approach to governance in local decision making processes. For example, the German case study found that the role of the civil society foundations remained unclear in a number of municipalities. Government actors and the foundations themselves had different expectations regarding the foundations’ involvement, creating some tension between the actor groups. Some municipalities did not integrate the foundations in actual decision-making, thus limiting the accountability function of civil society. Inclusion of civil society actors, particularly if intended to hold government actors accountable, requires clarity of roles.

Source: Busemeyer and Vossiek (2015), “Reforming education governance through local capacity-building: A case study of the ‘learning locally’ programme in Germany” *OECD Education Working Papers*, No. 113, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/5js6bhl2mxjg-en>.

The importance of carefully enforcing implementation guidelines is exemplified by the reform of the Polish school supervision system, which faced some initial resistance. The policy reformed school supervision and inspection in Poland to foster formative assessment and stakeholder involvement. The traditional perception of supervision as an

instrument of scrutiny and accountability, rather than a method for improvement, contributed to the anxiety and resistance to change provoked by the new policy. This was particularly true for actors with no prior experience in formative evaluation. Notably, once schools and other actors had experienced the new system of evaluation, anxieties and suspicion regarding the intentions of the reform were largely alleviated.

Both the reform fatigue observed in Norway and the anxiety and suspicion observed in Poland could not be overcome by support alone. Applying careful pressure by holding governance actors accountable for policy implementation within set guidelines can contribute to a change in culture by engaging all actors in working towards common processes.

Achieving a change in culture: sustainability

Deliberate efforts to ensure sustainability are crucial to successful policy implementation in the long term. Strategically important measures to actively ensure policy sustainability – beyond the formal engagement of the central level – was the weakest element across the case studies. Only Germany explicitly included a sustainability element. Here, reform was targeted to selected municipalities which competed for ear-marked grants over a fixed time-frame. The policy required grant proposals to include a plan to sustain the reforms beyond the active funding period. Despite this requirement, only the commitment of the municipal leadership sustained the reforms beyond the duration of the programme (Busemeyer and Vossiek, 2015). This raises important questions about sustainability. Can commitment to a sustainability plan ensure that reforms will be sustained in the long-term? Can long-term culture change be achieved without long-term incentives? (see also Chapter 5 and 6).

Policy learning

Regarding policy learning, it is important to consider how the reform was evaluated and monitored and how actors interact in terms of knowledge exchange and learning (Table 4.5).

Table 4.5. Elements of analysis: policy learning

Element of analysis	Details
Monitoring and evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are the reform's processes and outcomes monitored and evaluated? • Were the results used as intended?
Feedback and knowledge processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What knowledge exchange processes are in place? • How is feedback incorporated into the governance process?

Source: Based on Table 4.2.

Monitoring and evaluation

Much of the adaptive capacity in policy making depends on the ability of the state to incorporate knowledge into the policy-making process (Pierre and Peters, 2005). Ideally, feedback from the policy is not only gathered during the evaluation stage, but is solicited throughout the entire course of the policy. As reported elsewhere by the OECD, evaluation and continuous monitoring are often the weakest elements in the policy process (OECD, 2009).

While all GCES case studies included some element of evaluation, the rigour with which evaluations were fed back into a policy learning process varied. Ongoing evaluations can steer policy during the implementation phase and adjust policy design as necessary to improve implementation. However, the impact of such evaluations depends on how well governance actors are able to integrate evaluations into policy steering and long term strategy. For instance in Sweden, a number of independent external evaluations identified shortcomings in the implementation early on, particularly in terms of actors' understanding of the policy and their new responsibilities. While these findings triggered efforts to address the problems – for example the central level “published a pamphlet [...] intended to help municipal politicians understand and manage their new educational responsibilities” (Blanchenay et al., 2014: 16) – there was no change in the overall strategy guiding the reform, thus leaving the fundamental lack of capacity at the municipal level unaddressed. Importantly, shortcomings identified in evaluations only very slowly led to changes in policy design.

The case studies reveal that some policy designs suffered from a flawed approach to evaluation, limiting the usefulness of evaluation before any evaluation can be carried out. For example in Norway, despite an extensive four-year evaluation, the design of the policy made it difficult to assess impact as no baseline targets of effectiveness were set out during the design of the policy.

Feedback and knowledge processes

The dynamic exchange of knowledge between policy design and policy implementation is particularly important. When feedback is solicited from various governance levels, agencies and societal actors, the central level must manage this feedback and incorporate it into the governance process, particularly in adapting the design of instruments to the realities experienced in local implementation (Pierre and Peters, 2005). A positive example of iterative improvement of a policy integrating feedback from stakeholders is exemplified in the Flemish case study. The development and revision of attainment targets relies on deliberation in the framework and design committees consisting of stakeholder representatives. Additionally, attainment targets are discussed in the Flemish Education Council which comprises key stakeholders in education and is to be consulted before every legislative decision.

Successful knowledge management and dissemination which guided policy adjustments on an ongoing basis was observed in the German case study. The German LvO policy was conceptualised as a “learning programme”. Different from the Flemish case study, where iterations of the policy are carried out periodically, in the German case an independent research institution “constantly monitored the evolution of LvO and gave feedback to localities and the central level” (Busemeyer and Vossiek, 2015: 36). This allowed the central level to gather information and incorporate feedback to improve policy design, while the municipal level had access to information beyond their local context and best practices from other municipalities. Integrating an institution bound by scientific rigour facilitated its role as a knowledge mediator. Municipalities acknowledged the institution's role in facilitating the exchange of knowledge rather than regarding it as an enforcement mechanism.

Monitoring via indicators without the support of flexible knowledge mediation between the central and local levels of government may not capture the complexities and nuances of the system (Hooge et al., 2012). This is exemplified by the Netherlands. Here, the policy to label underperforming schools based on hard output indicators was intended

to pressure schools to improve. For many schools the label of (very) weak assigned by the inspectorate came as a surprise (van Twist et al., 2013). This indicates that schools, while aware of the sanctions when not meeting performance standards, were unaware of the standards for adequate performance. This in turn highlights the need for dynamic and ongoing knowledge exchange and capacity building. Similar challenges were observed in Flanders (Belgium), where schools and particularly teachers were not always sure on which basis the inspectorate would evaluate the school, whether the inspectorate would focus on the more centrally set attainment targets or on the learning plans specific to a network of schools.

Building a culture of evaluation

Integrating knowledge mediation and exchange in governance processes is a cornerstone of governing complex systems. Systems that incorporate diverse knowledge in their governance processes and use knowledge for meaningful policy learning fare better in terms of successful implementation than those that do not. For example, in Germany and Norway local actors that engaged in knowledge sharing with local experts and peers were more successful in implementing reforms. Similarly, in Poland, schools that had previous experience in formative assessment and self-evaluation showed greater commitment to the reform than those who were traditionally exposed to less involved evaluation. All three cases revolved around building a culture of evaluation and improvement firmly resting on educational monitoring, a holistic view of knowledge and stakeholder involvement.

In building a culture of evaluation, the baseline cultural context plays an important role in determining the time and effort required to achieve a change in culture. In Poland, the implementation of a new policy raised anxiety about the benevolence of the new inspection system. Supervision and school inspection were in the past perceived as intrusive and a tool of potentially harmful scrutiny. In the context of limited trust in the central level, the intended culture change required more time and effort devoted to all the elements of support outlined above to reduce anxiety: communication, stakeholder involvement, and guided collaboration and knowledge exchange.

Conclusion and recommendations

This chapter argued that in pursuit of successful policy outcomes, the central level needs to balance the pressure it exerts to steer the policy with the support it provides to local governance levels in implementation and adaptation to improve policies. This includes facilitating the production and use of knowledge as well as managing information flows across all levels of governance and among all societal actors. Among the key enablers is an organisation of governance processes to be loose enough to enable actors to act according to local needs, but tight enough to ensure a coherent policy. Three broad themes for successful policy implementation can be identified from the synthesis of the GCES case studies.

Firstly, successful reforms established firm guidelines regarding goals and outcomes within which the local level was able to exert broad discretionary powers. By ensuring consistency of approaches, careful accountability mechanisms can improve implementation, for example, in the face of reform fatigue. Secondly, extensive capacity building and mobilising legitimacy and ownership support the exercise of local autonomy during policy implementation. Both knowledge exchange and collaboration for improvement across governance levels are important. Thirdly, a culture of evaluation

across all levels and across the policy cycle is vital for policy learning. Only when knowledge is produced and exchanged and consistently fed back into the policy process can genuine policy learning be achieved. The following section provides a series of recommendations derived from this chapter's analysis of the GCES case studies.

Establishing and aligning guidelines and supporting local self-sufficiency in implementation

The value of establishing firm guidelines and expectations is demonstrated by Germany and Norway. In Germany, a voluntary competition for ear-marked grants established the rules for the policy, as the grant proposals were required to include detailed plans for implementation. In Norway, the particular implementation of the reform was left to local actors. Supported by guidelines and principles, schools were required to report how they planned to ensure implementation and sustainability. That is, the guidelines were designed to be tight enough to ensure common direction and loose enough to adapt to local circumstances. In the Netherlands, the central level offered a variety of support mechanisms available on request from schools. While the policy increased the pressure on underperforming schools, these schools nevertheless remained at liberty to decide on the degree and type of support.

Recommendations

- Provide actors with adequate resources to enable them to focus on implementation adequate to local contexts.
- Build local capacity for self-governance. Disseminate support documents and examples of good practice to facilitate the effective and efficient organisation of governance processes at the local level.
- Guide and assist processes of local priority setting; provide guidance particularly to actors with a weaker starting point in terms of capacity to prevent overload and inefficiencies.
- Align programmes and initiatives to avoid competing priorities. Prioritise objectives and clarify how different policies work together to advance national goals and strategy.
- Align goal setting and knowledge production and use through clear lines of responsibility. Accountability processes need to match roles and responsibilities and rely on a rounded picture of performance.

Communication and capacity building to mobilise legitimacy and inspire ownership

Clarification of the purpose and goals of the policy through dialogue and communication played the most important role in inspiring ownership and mobilising legitimacy, though capacity building, horizontal knowledge exchange and stakeholder involvement were also important.

Legitimacy and ownership are key ingredients of successful implementation. The case of Norway demonstrated that overall approaches focusing on dialogue and communication promoted ownership and responsibility for the adoption of the policy's practices on the school level. In the Netherlands, the inspectorate's label of (very) weak assigned to a school was found to be more likely to trigger a virtuous cycle in cases where

the school's community took ownership and accepted a shared responsibility to improve the school. In this, the school's communication of the improvement efforts and processes were key factors. The Swedish case study identified insufficient communication of the policy's purpose and goals, but also insufficient assistance for collaboration and knowledge exchange as barriers to the success of the policy.

In Flanders (Belgium), the active involvement of so-called networks – which represent schools with the same mission (for example based on religious denomination) – in the design and revision of attainment targets was found to be a key factor in fostering understanding, ownership and legitimacy. However, despite these efforts on an intermediate level of governance, local stakeholders such as teachers and school leaders were less involved in communication efforts and participatory governance processes, and were found to lack a clear understanding and ownership of the policy.

Beyond these approaches to inspire ownership and legitimacy, implementation should be supported by careful accountability mechanisms, with respect to the sustainability of the policy, beyond the programme's formal duration. For example, the German case study revealed that implementation of the policy was largely dependent on political will at the local level with some municipalities failing to show continued commitment and ownership in the longer term.

Recommendations

- Facilitate collaboration and exchange of best practices by establishing fora for knowledge exchange, encourage use of existing platforms and promote networks of well-performing local actors and actors who struggle with the implementation of collaborative practices and knowledge exchange.
- Create knowledge exchange agencies – such as centres with expertise on assessment evaluation – to build system-level capacity. These agencies can work closely with practitioners to identify needs for capacity building and ways to integrate stakeholders in capacity-building processes (see also Cordingley, 2016; OECD, 2007).
- Promote exchange between schools and municipalities that already have experience with inclusive governance structures and less experienced local communities.

Creating a sustainable culture of evaluation

Sustained improvement depends crucially on a change in culture. This can involve overcoming legacies in evaluation and accountability traditions. In the Polish case, despite strengthening self-evaluation, school supervision reform was met with resistance as schools traditionally perceived inspection and evaluation as potentially disruptive to the school's work. In Germany, local stakeholders were accustomed to hierarchical accountability and local actors anticipated closer scrutiny as part of the new educational monitoring and horizontal accountability mechanisms. Overcoming these legacies takes time, direction and lasting incentives.

Recommendations

- Emphasise the development of tools and procedures for evaluation; create networks and mentoring relationships.

- Provide specific capacity building regarding the adequate use of achievement and assessment data.
- Change in the institutional culture needs to follow strategic vision and allow sufficient time to consolidate; support stakeholders in cultural change beyond the formal end of a policy, for example by nurturing new stakeholder coalitions.
- Combine quantitative data, education research and practitioner knowledge to utilise a broad base of knowledge. Support the development of a usage culture for quantitative data; link the contribution of evidence-based policy-making and monitoring to local dialogue about education reform.

Notes

1. Giving an example from the health sector in the United Kingdom, Hallsworth et al. (2011) describe a case where a guiding strategy of economic soundness of health policy was overturned in an influenza epidemic in 1999 to 2000. Numerous hospitals were financially overstretched, prompting politicians to promise to “significantly increase real investment in the Health Service” (p. 44). However, as a former government minister described, “we ended up giving this extra money to the Health Service over a three or four year period without any real view about how you would spend it” (p. 44).
2. On the continuum between “hard” and “soft” approaches to governance, Wilkoszewski and Sundby (2014) list the following as hard mechanisms: binding regulations, direct intervention by the central level, ear-marked financing and an approach to governance where ideas are uncontested.
3. While municipalities were free to decide the specific implementation, these strategies had to be described in the proposal and were subject to a jury evaluating the feasibility and potential effectiveness before funding was granted (Busemeyer and Vossiek, 2015).
4. Contributing to the policy’s success, the central level provided workshops and knowledge exchange measures to improve policy implementation at the local level beyond the starting level of capacity. Nevertheless, previous experience in education monitoring – one of the main goals of the policy programme – proved to be a substantial facilitator of success in implementing the analysed policy (Busemeyer and Vossiek, 2015).
5. Education funds were merged into lump-sum funding based on a redistribution scheme to account for the economic circumstances of municipalities.

Annex 4.A1: case studies' full descriptions across policy cycle

Table 4.A1.1 Case Study: Flanders (Belgium)

Stages of the policy cycle	Elements of analysis
Priority setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actors The revision of attainment targets is a political process with diverse stakeholders involved in multiple forums throughout the priority setting process. • Drivers Against the background of the freedom of every (legal) person to provide education based on individual educational approaches and teaching methods as well as free school choice (freedom of education), the government is mandated to ensure that “all children in the Flemish community have access to high-quality education regardless the part of the region they live in or the school they attend” (Rouw et al., 2016: 11); prompting the government to install attainment targets as minimum educational goals.
Policy steering (design and implementation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instruments (pressure, support) Soft forms of governance are dominant. The ratification of attainment targets rests with the Flemish parliament to avoid partisan influence through changing majorities in government. The Inspectorate oversees the quality of education, resting its evaluation of school performance on information provided by the schools. • Legitimacy and ownership The development and revision of attainment targets relies on deliberation in framework and design committees and in the Flemish Education Council, where key stakeholders in education engage in discussion; consultation is mandatory before every legislative decision. • Accountability The Inspectorate oversees the quality of education, resting its evaluation of school performance on information provided by the schools. Faced with parents' free choice of schools, schools are intended to take responsibility for improvement and self-assessment, and make use of their autonomy to improve their processes. Local stakeholder involvement in various councils is mandatory under certain conditions and generally common. However, substantial involvement may remain limited in practice, particularly regarding students. • Sustainability The freedom of education principle and responsibility of schools to improve are ingrained in the Flemish governance culture. Attainment targets are in process of recurring revision in order to adjust them to the reality of changing demands to education. However, gaps in capacity of schools to engage in self-directed assessment and improvement in relation to the attainment targets impedes sustained implementation of attainment targets in teaching practice.
Policy learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring and evaluation Due to the freedom of education principle, which safeguards the autonomy of schools and networks, the Flemish system is characterised by diverse national standardised and individual local approaches to monitoring, which remain uncoordinated. • Feedback and knowledge processes The attainment targets are intended to be revised based on implementation experiences in processes involving a broad range of stakeholders. Pedagogical advisory services as a part of network organisations help schools to develop learning plans based on attainment targets and are closely involved in the revision of attainment targets themselves.

Source: Rouw et al. (2016), “United in diversity – A complexity perspective on the role of attainment targets in quality assurance in Flanders: A GCES case study of Flanders (Belgium)”, *OECD Education Working Papers*, No. 139.

Table 4.A1.2 Case Study: Germany

Stages of the policy cycle	Elements of analysis
Priority setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actors Central level • Drivers Continuing efforts to promote governance through local networks. The relatively small amount of funds involved together with the small scope (selected municipalities) contributed to broad support.
Policy steering (design and implementation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instruments (pressure, support) Ear-marked grants were offered to a limited number of municipalities. Municipalities competed over funds based on a list of preconditions to ensure direction of the policy. Successful claimants were offered capacity building workshops and ongoing dialogue over the course of implementation. • Legitimacy and ownership Philanthropic foundations with expertise on educational monitoring and network based education governance were included and contributed to legitimacy. The policy “aimed at mobilising the political support of [...] local government by allowing only local governments to submit proposals (and not other local institutions) with the aim of ensuring the sustainability of programme elements beyond the end of the official funding period” (Busemeyer and Vossiek, 2015: 10). • Accountability “The programme did not change the formal distribution of competencies between different levels of government, although it has supported reforms of structures within local administrations” (Busemeyer and Vossiek, 2015: 51). • Sustainability The “voluntary and bottom-up approach exemplified by LvO can be an effective policy instrument to promote change at the local level. Given the legal limitations and the limited budget of the programme, its effects on local governance structures are impressive.” (Busemeyer and Vossiek, 2015: 8). The “bottom-up strategy of creating and supporting [...] role models [...] and then promoting the transfer of best practice models to other local governments is likely to be more successful and sustainable in the long run compared to hierarchical top-down approaches [...] in the context of decentralised education systems” (Busemeyer and Vossiek, 2015: 51).
Policy learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring and evaluation A “significant scientific evaluation component [...] constantly monitored the evolution [of the policy], and gave feedback to localities and the central level” (Busemeyer and Vossiek, 2015: 29). “The implementation [of the policy] was accompanied by a large-scale scientific evaluation of its effectiveness; and there was a feedback process between the academics [...] and the policy-makers” (Busemeyer and Vossiek, 2015: 51f). • Feedback and knowledge processes Philanthropic foundations with expertise on educational monitoring and network based education governance were included and contributed to knowledge exchange. Feedback process between the academics in charge and the policy-makers. The programme was flexible and adjustable enough to take in new insights” (Busemeyer and Vossiek, 2015: 51f).

Source: Busemeyer and Vossiek (2015), “Reforming education governance through local capacity-building: A case study of the 'learning locally' programme in Germany” *OECD Education Working Papers*, No. 113, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/5js6bhl2mxjg-en>.

Table 4.A1.3 Case Study: The Netherlands

Stages of the policy cycle	Elements of analysis
Priority setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actors Central level, media, public discourse. • Drivers The assessment of schools with the labels “normal”, “weak” and “very weak” was initially intended for the school inspectorate only. After a political decision was made to publicise the results, media and public pressure created a sense of urgency for the central level to initiate interventions on weak/very weak schools.
Policy steering (design and implementation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instruments (pressure, support) The policy “to assess and improve (very) weak schools is uncharacteristically top-down for the Netherlands” (van Twist et al., 2013: 22). Primary instruments are Inspectorate personnel assessing the school; ear-marked grants for improvement and school monitoring exert pressure. Support measures are available by a ‘Flying Brigade’ (external to the Inspectorate to improve legitimacy) and need to be requested by respective school. • Legitimacy and ownership The reform’s legitimacy is addressed by limiting the reform’s interventions to underperforming schools. To the same end, support measures to help schools improve are not mandated but subject to the school boards’ request. They are designed as recommendations to be adapted to the schools specificities. • Accountability and enforcement Schools are held accountable based on output indicators. Persistent underperformance measured by indicators leads to flagging as a “weak school” and ultimately closure if performance does not improve within fixed time-frame. • Sustainability The policy can be considered successful as the majority of schools return to being labelled as “normal” in most cases after the set recovery period of two years and the total number of schools labelled (very) weak has been reduced.
Policy learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring and evaluation The inspectorate’s mandate is limited to supervision to not interfere with school autonomy and as such has to refrain from recommendations and collaboration. The policy has been evaluated externally. • Feedback and knowledge processes The policy uses a fixed time-frame to re-evaluate the schools’ labelling. As the label of “weak school” is tightly linked to close supervision measures affecting all activities of the school, student learning is reduced: “Even if the school improves well before the two-year time limit, children remain exposed to very poor levels of education for an extensive period of time” (van Twist et al., 2013:11).

Source: van Twist et al. (2013), “Coping with very weak primary schools: Towards smart interventions in Dutch education policy”, *OECD Education Working Papers* No. 98, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/5k3txnpnhd7-en>.

Table 4.A1.4 Case Study: Norway

Stages of the policy cycle	Elements of analysis
Priority setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actors Central level, public discourse • Drivers Public discourse over perceived crisis in education and the publication of the first iteration of OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) led to a sense of urgency to reform.
Policy steering (design and implementation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instruments (pressure, support) "Within the framework of the Assessment for Learning programme, a set of tools was developed that included an online platform where teachers and school leaders could access information on best practices. Smaller municipalities in particular reported that this tool helped them to implement the programme goals" (Hopfenbeck et al., 2013: 9). • Legitimacy and ownership "The programme was developed by the Directorate of Education and Training (DET) with a heavy emphasis on participation and dialogue, a strategy which can be seen as part of the Norwegian philosophy where all participants need to feel a sense of ownership of the approach to implementation for this to work in practice" (Hopfenbeck et al., 2013: 11). • Accountability The "system relies wholly on trust and thus has few incentives (or sanctions) for the actors [so that] long-term implementation in the face of resistance becomes problematic. School leaders must involve the teachers in the process of developing school cultures based on a real understanding of the intentions and principles of AfL. [...] There is still a lack of understanding regarding the government's intentions and teachers have not developed a common understanding [of the policy]" (Hopfenbeck et al., 2013: 61). • Sustainability While the policy can be considered successful there is room for improvement particularly in terms of capacity (particularly regarding internal evaluation) and with respect to enforcement when facing resistance.
Policy learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring and evaluation While the programme sought to introduce internal evaluation as means for improvement, external evaluations showed "that the evaluation capacity of school owners needs to be strengthened so that evaluation can be used as a tool for quality improvement" (Hopfenbeck et al., 2013: 26). • Feedback and knowledge processes "The establishment of learning networks between schools aided the exchange of knowledge and provided peer support in the implementation process" (Hopfenbeck et al., 2013: 9).

Source: Hopfenbeck et al. (2013), "Balancing trust and accountability?", The assessment for learning programme in Norway: A governing complex education systems case study", *OECD Education Working Paper* No. 97, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/5k3txnpqlsnn-en>.

Table 4.A1.5 Case Study: Poland

Stages of the policy cycle	Elements of analysis
Priority setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actors Independent education experts, the Supreme Chamber of Control (Supreme Audit Institution of Poland) and international organisations (e.g. OECD). • Drivers Public discourse between independent education experts, the Supreme Chamber of Control (Supreme Audit Institution of Poland) and international organisations such as the OECD.
Policy steering (design and implementation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instruments (pressure, support) The main instruments in the reform were regulations to ensure intended implementation: “the reform encouraged teamwork, democratisation and transparency, exemplified by the evaluation method and inclusion of different groups. [...] Usually [...] changes concerned the administrative or legal regulatory level [...] and were sometimes focused on work organisation. [...] the reform forced the introduction of data-based decision-making procedures into the schools’ daily reality (Mazurkiewicz et al., 2014: 8). Inspectors underwent capacity building to implement the policy. • Legitimacy and ownership While schools sometimes voiced concerns about the new supervision policy (particularly those with little experience in internal evaluation, which was one of the core principles of the policy), reservations mostly subsided after the respective school had had experienced the new supervision mode. However, the chief inspectors lacked ownership: “one possible explanation for the discrepancies reported in the perceptions of chief inspectors from those of the headmasters and inspectors might be that they [the chief inspectors] were not given the possibility for feedback in the early stages of the reform, and so thus felt less ownership of its initial design and aims” (Mazurkiewicz et al., 2014: 24). • Accountability “Transparency and comparability were guiding themes for the implementation of the reform. New processes of evaluation and their results were [...] communicated to the stakeholders who were directly involved, such as headmasters, inspectors and teachers, but also to other actors in the school community (parents and students) and the general public and media. Thus, the reform introduced a new element of public accountability and social oversight to the system” (Mazurkiewicz et al., 2014: 37). • Sustainability The reform can be considered successful in that it triggered substantive changes in the intended direction. After initial reluctance among stakeholders, most schools perceive the new inspection scheme as fair and improved. However, the intended change in culture is still at its beginning.
Policy learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring and evaluation Central to the policy was “creating a nationwide system of monitoring the quality of the education system”. • Feedback and knowledge processes Implementation of the new policy was accompanied by scientific institutions (Jagiellonian University in Krakow and Centre for Education Development). The chief inspectors “were not given the possibility for feedback in the early stages of the reform” (Mazurkiewicz et al., 2014: 24).

Source: Mazurkiewicz, Walczak and Jewdokimow (2014), “Implementation of a new school supervision system in Poland” *OECD Education Working Papers* No. 111, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/5jxrlrxgc6b-en>.

Table 4.A1.6 Case Study: Sweden

Stages of the policy cycle	Elements of analysis
Priority setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actors The central level initiated a decentralisation to the municipal level. • Drivers A change in government opened a window of opportunity for reform.
Policy steering (design and implementation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instruments (pressure, support) Instruments are focused on support: Block-grants are distributed based on need to all municipalities. Lump-sum funds are to be freely distributed by municipalities across their responsibilities. The central level decided not to engage in capacity building to allow full autonomy of municipalities in handling their new responsibilities. Although school choice was introduced to exert pressure on municipalities to improve their education systems, it did not have the intended impact; parental school choice was predominantly based on factors other than performance. • Legitimacy and ownership Acknowledging the strong egalitarian traditions in Norwegian society, legitimacy of the decentralisation reform was ensured by foregoing sanctions if educational goals were not met by municipalities. Municipalities were found without taking ownership of their new responsibilities: “The decentralisation took place too quickly and without enough support from the central authorities. [...] The lack of internal discussion within municipalities resulted in some ambiguity among municipal leaders as to what the new responsibilities really entailed, and how they would be divided internally among the various municipal stakeholders” (Blanchenay et al., 2014:12). • Accountability While municipalities were formally accountable for the achievement of educational goals, this accountability was not enforced to safeguard autonomy. • Sustainability The policy did not have the envisioned success; rather, education quality has further deteriorated.
Policy learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring and evaluation Lack of capacity and ownership resulted in underdeveloped monitoring systems in most municipalities (particularly smaller ones), who resorted to using truncated indicators. While national standardised tests are widely and frequently employed, they are underused as tool for comparison and improvement. • Feedback and knowledge processes Municipalities were intended to develop their own monitoring and evaluations systems and make use of other input to improve their local education systems. However, municipalities engaged in ad-hoc governance processes unsuited for knowledge exchange processes and peer learning across municipalities. Regarding knowledge processes on municipal level, “important decisions are often taken at the higher level of the municipal hierarchy [...] with little input from head teachers and education experts, who may have a more appropriate knowledge of education in general and of the local conditions of the municipalities’ schools” (Blanchenay et al., 2014: 35).

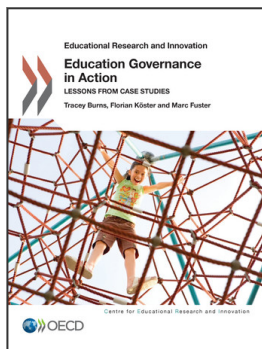
Source: Blanchenay, Burns and Köster (2014), “Shifting responsibilities – 20 years of education evolution in Sweden: A governing complex education systems case study”, *OECD Education Working Papers* No. 104, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/5jz2jg1rqrd7-en>.

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