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RATIONALE

Complexity in education systems is on the rise due to a number of intersecting trends. Parents in OECD countries have become more diverse, individualistic and highly educated. As evidence about school and student achievement has become more readily available, stakeholders have also become more demanding, pushing schools to cater for the individual needs of their children.

One of the most important responses to this increasing complexity has been decentralisation: allowing local authorities, school boards and schools a greater degree of freedom to respond to diverse and local demands. In fact decentralisation may be too limited a term for what has happened. In many countries tasks have not been simply devolved to regional, local or school levels, although that has certainly happened. Lump sum funding, strengthening of stakeholders, horizontal accountability and holding local authorities and schools accountable through performance indicators has changed the nature of the relationship between the central, regional and local levels, moving away from a hierarchical relationship to a division of labour and more mutual independence and self-regulation. Education systems are now characterised by multi-level governance where the links between (multiple actors operating at) different levels are to a certain extent fluid and open to negotiation.

At the same time, ministries of education remain responsible for ensuring high quality, efficient, equitable and innovative education. One of the crucial questions for OECD countries is, therefore, how to achieve national objectives for education systems under the condition of increasing complexity. The Governing Complex Education Systems (GCES) project focuses on this issue by targeting two key elements: governance mechanisms and knowledge options.
PROJECT GOALS

This project will begin with an analytical analysis of the following two questions:

1) What models of governance are effective in complex education systems in nature?
2) What knowledge system is necessary to support the effective governance of complex education systems?

The GCES project aims to:

- Establish the state of the research and evidence base in these areas.
- Explore current practices in OECD member countries through a series of thematic workshops, working papers, and case studies.
- Build an international network of policy makers and researchers with expertise in this area.

CALENDAR OF ACTIVITIES

2011: ANALYTICAL PHASE

- GCES Project Launch Meeting (Oslo, 28-29 March 2011)
- Advisory group meeting (Paris, 22-23 June 2011)
- Call for case studies (ongoing)
- First Thematic Conference: *Effective Governance from the Centre* (The Hague, 21-22 November 2011)
2012: ANALYTICAL/EMPIRICAL PHASE

- Publication of GCES Working Paper: Exploring the Complex Interaction between Governance and Knowledge in Education
- GCES Case Study framework finalised; Call for case studies (ongoing)
- Second Thematic Conference: Effective Governance on the Local Level (Warsaw, 16-17 April 2012)
- Publication and dissemination of case studies: The Netherlands, Poland, Norway
- Third Thematic Conference: Effective Multilevel Governance (Location TBA)

OUTPUTS 2012

- A series of working papers exploring the research base on key topics
- Case studies (The Netherlands, Poland, Norway confirmed; discussions underway with multiple others)
- Preparation of analytical volume, which explores the evidence base and key issues in governance and knowledge in education. Accountability, capacity building, and steering mechanisms will be central issues which will underpin discussions on research, policy, and current challenges for governments will be explored.

NEXT PHASE PLANNING (2013-14)

The GCES project has submitted a proposal for a second phase to the CERI Governing Board, which would build on the explorative work from 2011-12 and focus on the key issues that have been identified by participating countries as their biggest priorities in this domain. The key issues are:

- Accountability
- Capacity building
• Strategic and long-term thinking on systems level

We have proposed to end phase two with the publication of a volume synthesizing the findings from the case studies, concentrated on central themes. Current case studies all, for example, concentrate on elements of introducing new evaluation structures and mechanisms into the system. This final publication would combine these, other key themes emerging from other case studies, and the outcomes of the first phase of the project to develop a series of policy implications relevant to governance of complex education systems.

The confirmation that this second phase has been approved by the CERI Governing Board will be received early in Q2 2012.

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ANNEX: THE ANALYTIC FRAMEWORK

The effectiveness of governance can be defined as the extent to which the system as a whole is capable of setting priorities, steering towards them, producing outcomes and ensuring accountability.

The first phase of this project will focus on these three elements (i.e. setting priorities, steering the system towards those priorities and being held accountable for those two processes), all necessary ingredients for effective governance in multi-level governance systems.

Figure 1 provides a basic schematic for this analytical framework:

**Figure 1. Schematic rendering of governance and knowledge**
The figure highlights the components of governance and knowledge without making assumptions about the choice for a particular governance model. It is simply an analytical tool to specify which elements are important when talking about governance and knowledge, and how some of these elements are interrelated. It is important to note that priority setting, steering, accountability, and the production and use of knowledge are not simple, linear processes. In all these processes dialogue and negotiation play an important role, as different stakeholders pursue their own (or their organisation’s) interests and try to push for collective decisions that are most in line with them. Moreover in all these processes more irrational elements like symbols, emotions and public opinions play an important role.

The model helps to specify some of the basic questions to be asked when talking about governance and knowledge. The following questions can be specified:

1. How are the functions of priority setting, steering and accountability organised in complex education systems?
   - Which actors are involved in the different components of governance?
   - What is the structure and culture within which these actors together govern the system?
   - How is collective decision making on governance issues organised?

2. What knowledge systems are used to govern complex education systems?
   - What types of knowledge do actors involved in governance use?
   - Where are these types of knowledge produced?
   - How are the flows of knowledge organised?
   - How are actors using the knowledge to govern the system?

3. What are the effects of these different governance and knowledge systems in terms of key outcomes such as effectiveness, efficiency, coherence, inclusiveness, adaptability and accountability?

This type of conceptualisation allows us to ask more precise questions about the elements that make up governance models and knowledge systems.