GOVERNING COMPLEX EDUCATION SYSTEMS

FRAMEWORK FOR CASE STUDIES

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PART I

THE GCES CASE STUDIES SERIES

The GCES case studies provide important insights to cutting-edge questions of today’s education governance, in particular the question of how to implement education reform successfully. The case studies focus on a particular reform in a specific education system and analyse the entire reform process, from the genesis of the idea and goals to implementation and evaluation.

Case study results offer valuable insights for OECD member countries as they provide an objective and careful view of the successes and challenges involved in governing educational reform. Moreover, the case studies serve as excellent sources of knowledge to compare education systems and find commonalities as well as describe differences in their approaches to reform, their system characteristics and strengths and weaknesses in core processes of policy-making.

This Case Study Framework was exclusively developed for the GCES project. By setting formal analytical guidelines, it allows for comparability between the selected cases and allows for country comparison and peer learning. At the same time, the framework is designed to give participating countries the flexibility in focus and choice of reform to suit their needs and priorities.

Some practical advantages:

- GCES case studies offer 50-100 pages of in-depth analysis, including system context. The case studies follow an analytical-empirical approach and employ a range of primary and secondary research techniques.

- Countries identify cases together with the OECD Secretariat and provide feedback as the study develops.

- A case study is delivered in 6-7 months from the start of the work, with fieldwork taking about 3 months of that time.

- Research is conducted by external experts with an unbiased perspective on the reform in question. While adhering to the OECD tender process, the country is encouraged to suggest relevant researchers/experts; the GCES team ensures the quality and timeliness of the research.

- For countries with financial constraints, GCES offers the opportunity of a “light” case study based predominantly on secondary analysis of existing documents and programme evaluations.
**PROCESS**

- Interested OECD countries consult with the OECD Secretariat to identify suitable cases and national experts to carry out the case study based on this framework. Funding is in the form of a voluntary contribution from the country to the GCES project.

- The national expert(s) will be contracted by the OECD Secretariat in accordance with the internal tender and review process.

- The national expert(s), the representatives of the respective country and the OECD Secretariat will work together over the course of the case study to ensure that the goals of this framework are being met.

- In collaboration with the national expert(s), the OECD Secretariat will adapt the final work to the needs of the international OECD policy audience as necessary.

**RESOURCES**

Resources are discussed individually with each participating country based on study design. A full-size case study offers 50-100 pages in-depth analysis at an approximate cost of 85-100 KEUR.

For countries with limited resources, GCES offers the opportunity to choose a “lighter” version of the case study, at an approximate cost of 50 KEUR.

Further information on both of these options is provided in the following sections. Interested countries are invited to contact the OECD Secretariat for further discussion.
The following table presents the main stages and timing in the development of the case studies. The exact dates and timing for each case study will be agreed individually.

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<th>Time Frame</th>
<th>Activities</th>
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<tr>
<td>4 months before draft delivery</td>
<td>• Abstract of proposed case study provided by the country and agreed with OECD</td>
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<td>• National expert(s) selected by country, in consultation with OECD Secretariat and in accordance with the OECD tender process</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• National expert(s) contracted by OECD Secretariat</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 months before draft delivery</td>
<td>• Detailed outline of case study and plan for data collection (including list of names of proposed interviewees) sent to OECD Secretariat for feedback</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 month before draft delivery</td>
<td>• Preliminary results of the analysis sent to OECD Secretariat for feedback</td>
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<tr>
<td>Delivery of draft</td>
<td>• First draft to OECD Secretariat and Ministry</td>
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<td>• Meeting (Skype or in person): National expert(s), ministry representatives and OECD</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 weeks after discussion of draft</td>
<td>• Revised draft sent to OECD Secretariat for internal peer review</td>
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<td>5 weeks after delivery of first draft</td>
<td>• Feedback from peer review sent to authors; national expert(s) revise case study</td>
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<td>7-9 weeks after delivery of first draft</td>
<td>• Final draft sent to OECD Secretariat; sign off by Ministry* and OECD, preparation for publication</td>
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<td>* Should minor issues remain, the ministry can exceptionally suggest further revisions at this stage. This process should not exceed 2 weeks; comments are considered final.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10-12 weeks after delivery of first draft</td>
<td>• Publication and launch of case study: OECD website, Ministry, other dissemination outlets</td>
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The OECD’s Governing Complex Systems project looks at education governance as a complex system. In the past decades, many countries have transitioned from more centralised to more decentralised structures, giving more autonomy to local or school levels. Some countries are now seeking to reverse this trend and refer some competences back to the national level.

In all systems an increasing number of stakeholders (teachers, parents, students, unions, companies etc.) has been involved in deciding how education should be designed, delivered and monitored. Reflecting our societies, education systems are increasingly diverse –in terms of demographics of students, teachers and communities, as well as the values and identities we expect them to deliver.

These trends have increased the complexity of education systems, leaving decision makers on all governance levels with the question of how to manoeuvre successfully in this highly dynamic policy area. The Governing Complex Education Systems (GCES) project focuses on this issue by targeting two key elements: governance mechanisms and knowledge options (see Figure 1).

The three critical elements of governance – priority setting, steering and accountability – are interdependent and connected by non-linear processes. Despite simplifying their relationships, the framework warrants this distinction between the three elements for analytical reasons.

In this project, we distinguish the concepts of “central” and “decentralised” levels from the concepts of “national”, “regional” and “local” levels. With this distinction in mind, the multi-layered education systems in different countries involved in our project can be described more appropriately. The central level refers to the level directly above the most decentralised level (i.e. local governments and/or school...
boards). In some countries, the regional or state government is the central level (e.g. the Spanish Regions, the German Länder, and the US-American states or Canadian provinces). In other countries, the national government forms the central level of the educational system (e.g. in Finland or The Netherlands).

At all levels, different established and emerging stakeholders in education can be identified. The case studies will take into account the role and position of these stakeholders when looking at steering education on different levels. Examples of such stakeholders are teacher unions, parent or citizen councils and committees, inspectorates, educational institutions other than schools, healthcare and social care agencies, police and justice departments and other bodies relevant in the field.

While there is an abundance of conceptual research on governance, few studies are based on empirical data. The GCES case studies thus allow for a concrete look at how multilevel governance works in particular contexts, and shed light on the mechanisms and processes at play.

To do so, the case studies address the following research questions:

- **Organisation and steering:** How does the central level design, organise and steer education systems across complex multilevel governance arrangements?

- **Stakeholders and implementation:** Who are the stakeholders? How do they implement education policies in a complex environment and how are they supported in this process?

- **Interaction and dialogue:** In governing educational systems, how do the central and the decentralised levels interact and communicate? How does this affect trust, cooperation and negotiation of conflicts?

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### CASE IDENTIFICATION

Within this framework, cases are defined as education policies/policy programmes that have been implemented (and preferably evaluated) in multilevel governance systems. For the case study, countries will select one policy programme that meets the following criteria:

- The policy programme has been introduced within the past decade and implemented for at least three years.

- The policy programme has aimed at improving the quality of primary or secondary education.

- Ideally, the policy programme has already been assessed. In case of a case study of smaller scope, this is mandatory, as it relies more strongly on secondary analysis.
The case should be suitable for tracing the processes of priority-setting, steering and accountability, with a special focus on steering the implementation of the programme.

The case should provide insights into the resources used and/or necessary to design, implement and assess the policy programme. This includes the basic questions of time, information/knowledge, budgeting and staffing.

The case should provide insights into what kind of knowledge (research results, indicators, experiences on the local level) was produced and used at the various stages of the programme. This includes monitoring and evaluation strategies, and the use of such results in fine-tuning or further adapting the policy programme.

CASE STUDY STRUCTURE

Each case study should include the following elements:

1. **Executive summary**
   about two standard pages, summarising the key findings and recommendations of the study, based on OECD guidelines and format.

2. **Introduction and relevant background**
   of the research questions and the policy programme, including important contextual information (political background, e.g. governmental system; cultural context; historical factors), time line and phases of the reform, main actors involved, and contents of the policies (motivation, goals, and resources).

3. **Short section on methods and data**
   including list of sources, interviewees, and further data used as well as the methods applied to analyse them.

4. **Detailed analysis and results**
   based on the general guidelines described above.

5. **Conclusions**
   including a personal assessment by the author(s) of the study with regard to the success of the policy programme, provision of resources, efficiency of the policy process, sustainability, coherence between goals and outcomes, and transferability from/to other systems.
METHODS AND DATA

The primary aim of the case studies is to provide an in-depth analysis of the governance of multilevel/complex education systems. The studies apply an empirical–analytical approach rather than a theoretical–conceptual one. The following research techniques are key to the process, and can be complemented by more in-depth quantitative analysis when appropriate:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Research technique</th>
<th>Data</th>
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| Text analysis of relevant primary documents               | - Parliamentary/governmental documents and documents produced on the local level  
- Official press briefings and statements  
- Official evaluations of policies and programmes  
- National and international research |
| Secondary analysis                                        | - Quantitative and/or qualitative studies assessing the outcomes of the policy programme (if available) |
| Semi-structured interviews with single key stakeholders   | - Leading governmental and parliamentary policy makers on various levels and across relevant policy fields  
- Representatives of school authorities  
- Representatives of social partners  
- Representatives of relevant NGOs  
- Leading opinion makers and policy brokers in the field |
| Focus groups with groups of key stakeholders              | - Heads of schools  
- Teachers  
- Students  
- Parents |
| Discourse analysis                                        | - Social media  
- Major newspapers  
- Magazines  
- Press statements |

For countries with financial constraints, GCES offers the opportunity of a “light” case study. These case studies are based predominantly on secondary analysis of existing documents and programme evaluations. Conducted by the OECD Secretariat, “light” case studies offer valuable insight revisiting existing research and evaluations through the lens of the GCES framework and main themes. Where appropriate, a limited number of interviews might be included in this design.
MAIN RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In order to facilitate a systematic comparison across country case studies, a common set of main research questions are used. They look at two intertwined dimensions:

1. The three dimensions of governance (priority setting, steering, accountability), with a focus on the programme’s implementation; and

2. the use of knowledge and weights among types of knowledge (e.g., research evidence, practitioner’s knowledge, tacit knowledge, media) in decision-making at the various stages of the process.

The studies should reconstruct the origin of the programme, its design, and implementation as well as the outcomes and the way in which the accountability of those outcomes was organised.

The main research questions for the case studies are presented in the following table. This is not to be seen as a compulsory “checklist” but as a set of thematic guidelines. As these elements are necessarily interrelated, there is some overlap among sections.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Research Dimension</th>
<th>Questions</th>
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<tr>
<td>Description of policy programme</td>
<td>- What did the policy programme entail?</td>
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<td>- What were its goals?</td>
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<td>- How were the goals communicated?</td>
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<td>- Was there a conflict between the various goals in the programme (and if so, how)?</td>
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<td>- Did the goals evoke any conflict with the local level or with other stakeholders?</td>
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<td>- Did the goals indicate a change in the steering/power relation between central and local level?</td>
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<td>- Who were policy objects/target groups?</td>
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<td>- Were these involved as co-policy makers in the decision-making process? If so, how?</td>
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- What were the instruments by which these goals were supposed to be achieved and at which level (national, regional, local) were they located?

- What role did various forms of knowledge (e.g. research results, indicators, practitioner experience) play in the various phases of the programme?

**Drivers and processes**

- Where did the programme originate?

- Was the initiative based on research or another kind of knowledge (e.g. professional, public opinion, etc.)?

- Was the initiative triggered by some kind of perceived “crisis” in the education field?

- Was the programme based on regulatory changes?

- Were there conflicts in the political process? If so, what was the essence of these conflicts, and how did they manifest in the various phases of the process?

- To what extent was knowledge/evidence or political strategy driving the political process in its various phases?

**Governance actors and levels**

- Who were the main stakeholders involved in steering/implementing/assessing the programme?

- Did the network of stakeholders involved change over time and, if so, why?

- How many levels and stakeholders were involved altogether and at which stages of the process?

- Were there new stakeholders included in the course of the programme? If so, why and at which stage?

- What were the positions of the actors and to what degree did they diverge and/or overlap?
What steps were taken to communicate not only the goals, but the reasons and intentions behind the policy programme and what was expected of the different actors?

**Governance resources**

- Which resources (time, information/knowledge, budgeting, staffing, resources beyond classical government resources) were allocated to the policy programme during its various phases?
- Which allocation mechanisms were applied?
- Who decided on these and on which governance level?
- Who did the decision-makers consult with to determine the scope and manner of allocations?
- How did the question of resources influence the design and scope of the policy programme?
- What was the reasoning behind the allocation of resources (e.g. performance-based allocation, investment in efficiency, long-term budget-cuts)?
- Was this reasoning made transparent to the stakeholders involved and/or affected by the policy programme?
- Were the decisions revised and, if so, why?

**Evaluation**

- Which assessment tools were used to evaluate the policy programme?
- Which kind of knowledge (research, indicators, local experience) was used for this assessment and why?
- Who was responsible for conducting the evaluation?
- Was the evaluation contested by any group of stakeholders?
- What was the result of the assessment of the policy programme?
Results: perception/impact

- What were the expected results of the programme and how do they compare to those actually achieved?
- To whom were the results communicated, how, and when?
- What were the perceptions of different stakeholders with regard to the process and the final setup of the policy programme/its implementation/its outcomes?
- Was there a redefinition of goals and to what extent was it based on undesired outcomes of the policy programme?
- Did the results of the programme have an impact on education policy at large (short, medium or longer term)?
- Was there a follow-up to the policy programme?
- To what extent did it differ from the original policy?