Findings

- Given the right conditions, nearly all governance structures – centralised, decentralised, or somewhere in between – can be successful in education. **Rather than focussing on structures, it is more fruitful to focus on processes.**

- Effective governance is a balancing act. **Systems must find a balance** between accountability and trust, innovation and risk-avoidance, and consensus building and making difficult choices.

- Even in decentralised systems, **the national or state level remains important** in triggering and steering education reform, and providing strategic vision.

- Accountability is at the heart of today's educational challenges. With new technologies and instant feedback, expectations rise faster than performance. It is therefore critical to **align the immediate lessons from rankings with a long-term view on improving educational performance**.

All publications of the GCES project can be found at www.oecd.org/edu/ceri/gces.

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GOVERNING COMPLEX EDUCATION SYSTEMS

**A Project at the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI)**

Project context

Education governance is a complex endeavour:

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 – both in terms of demographics of students, teachers, and communities, as well as the values and identities we expect them to deliver.
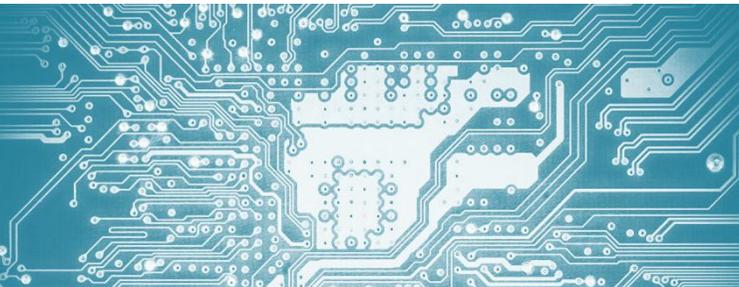
These trends have increased the complexity of education systems, leaving decision makers on all governance levels with the question of how to successfully manoeuvre in this highly dynamic policy area.

Approach

The Governing Complex Education Systems (GCES) project focuses on two key elements: **governance mechanisms** and **knowledge options**.

The key questions of the project are:

- **What models of governance are effective in complex education systems?**
- **What knowledge system is necessary to support the effective governance of complex education systems?**

What do we offer to OECD countries?

The GCES project offers a range of tailor-made outputs to OECD countries that are interested in seeking answers to the question of how successfully govern complex education systems.

These include analytical work in the form of
- **in-depth country case studies** on specific education policy reforms and
- **working papers** on core themes.

We also organise a series of **thematic conferences and workshops** that bring together the expertise of our growing GCES network, comprised of decision-makers, researchers, and practitioners.

Core themes

The analytical work of the GCES project as well as its collaboration with OECD member countries is built around a set of core themes.

In its first phase, GCES looked at three main issues:

- **Accountability systems**, including issues of evaluation and assessment, stakeholder uptake and implementation, the possible tension between accountability and innovation, and levels of trust in the system.

- **Capacity building**, focussing on identifying gaps, needs, and dynamics of capacity building on the individual, institutional, and system level.

- **Strategic thinking**, looking at key elements related to multi-level governance including communication, coordination and the question of how to sustain and scale up effective local practice.

Ongoing and future work of GCES explores these themes through a number of additional intersections, **including complexity, modes of governance, trust, policy experimentation and use of data.**