Centre for Educational Research and Innovation

Strategic Education Governance Policy Toolkit

Design

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OECD
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This document reflects current development of the Strategic Education Governance (SEG) Policy Toolkit. It replaces earlier versions.

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1. Introduction

In today’s education systems decision-making powers often rest with schools and local authorities to enable flexibility to accommodate citizens’ needs, whereas central education ministries are nonetheless responsible for equitable and effective education. Education governance is challenged to maintain a focus on system goals, gainfully integrating growing numbers of increasingly diverse and vocal stakeholders, and making evidence-informed decisions to improve education – all while coping with the volatile properties of system complexity and financial constraints (Burns and Küster, 2016[1]).

The Strategic Education Governance policy toolkit helps education policy-makers focus attention on the most relevant elements regarding how policy and reform processes are most effectively realised in complex contexts (OECD, 2019[2]). The challenge in developing discrete elements to this end is to integrate the analytical strength of the complexity paradigm (Box 1), underlying all SEG’s work, with the need for clear, communicable and actionable items.

This document presents the architecture of the Strategic Education Governance Policy Toolkit. As of June 2019, the Policy Toolkit focuses on promoting the systematic consideration of evidence in decision-making at all levels of governance as crucial to effective Knowledge Governance. This first module is offered to countries through case study work with stakeholder reflection workshops. Work has started on accountability as the second module.

Box 1. OECD work on complexity for Strategic Education Governance

Strategic Education Governance (SEG) addresses the need to develop flexible and adaptive governance processes for more effective and lasting reform in today’s complex education systems.

The SEG project builds on the empirical and conceptual work carried out during CERI’s Governing Complex Education Systems (GCES) project, which ran from 2011-2016 (OECD, 2016[3]). The GCES project highlighted the increasingly complex nature of the systems in which governance processes are embedded, and analysed the implications of such complexity on the effectiveness of existing governance arrangements (OECD, 2016[3]).

Complexity theory conceptualises complex systems as defined by the relationships between their constituent elements. As such, systems exhibit characteristics that emerge from their components interacting dynamically with each other. This leads to emergent properties of systems that cannot be anticipated by analysing the system’s elements in isolation – in turn, giving rise, for example, to self-reinforcing dynamics, tipping points and inertia that needs to be overcome to engender lasting change (Mason, 2016[4]; Snyder, 2013[5]; Burns and Küster, 2016[1]; Burns, Küster and Fuster, 2016[6]).

The SEG policy toolkit builds on a modular architecture. Central to modules are aspirational questionnaires informed by empirical research, refined and prioritised by the OECD together with countries.

Questionnaire items follow the principle of facilitating stakeholder engagement in the diagnostic process. They encourage reflection on processes and expand knowledge by inviting information about local practices and approaches.
A questionnaire is the central pillar of a given policy toolkit module. Using the policy toolkit in specific contexts is flanked by a diagnostic approach and tailored support for in-country learning offered by the Strategic Education Governance project team. The three pillars are decided and adapted for use together with countries (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Adapting the Strategic Education Governance Policy Toolkit for specific use

Using the policy toolkit in specific contexts relies on three elements: one or multiple questionnaires underpinning diagnosis, selecting a diagnostic approach, and opting for one or more support possibilities.

Note: As of June 2019, the Knowledge Governance module is available to counties, and work on the Accountability module under way. In-country self-assessment as main diagnostic approach is in development.

Source: Strategic Education Governance Policy Toolkit Design (OECD, 2019[7]).

2. Modules and generic questionnaires

The toolkit is intended to eventually comprise six modules, following the domains and concepts of the SEG organisational framework (Figure 2). Each module is stand-alone, with systems flexibly participating in individual or multiple modules when available. While stand-alone, the toolkit’s modules incorporate items of other modules/domains, reflecting the overlapping nature of challenges and areas of activity and the underlying complexity of strategic governance.

The approach reduces costs for systems participating in multiple modules, due to shorter questionnaires and avoiding redundant data collection. The modular organisation integrates the complexity paradigm with the ability to demarcate themes based on manageability and priorities. Stakeholders can be engaged according to respective domains without overburdening them.
A generic questionnaire underpins each module. Questionnaires interrogate whether particular efforts are carried out within an organisation. The questionnaire also collects information about how efforts materialise as practices in specific contexts and identifies approaches worth sharing across peer contexts (Figure 3).

The questionnaire is adapted at the item level depending on where it is applied. Depending on the decided scope and focus, items capture efforts and practices in one or multiple organisations and the organisational divisions within them. Items refer to efforts a) carried
out under the responsibility of the respondents, or b) of which the respondents have detailed first-hand knowledge.

The toolkit focuses on in-country learning. Through its questionnaires, the toolkit takes stock of desirable efforts and enables sharing of local practices and adapting them to peer contexts. This enables countries and stakeholders to find out how they are doing against aspirational items in a thematic domain. Beyond gathering such information, the toolkit provides intrinsic value from its use, by

- Promoting common language for stakeholder dialogue across varied contexts;
- Guiding stakeholders’ independent reflection and dialogue concerning governance processes; and
- Nurturing support for improving governance processes through comprehension and engagement.

3. Diagnostic approach and support of in-country learning

The OECD team develops approaches and offers direct support to help countries engage stakeholders in reflecting substantively on processes in their organisation.

The case study format uniquely allows to flexibly discuss findings embedded in system context. Case studies also advance the development of the generic questionnaire. They provide insights into which stakeholders to engage and how to collect, consolidate and report insights gained from the questionnaire. This will support the further development of the Policy Toolkit for use as an in-country self-assessment tool.

Box 2. Strategic Education Governance Learning Seminars approach

The Strategic Education Governance (SEG) Learning Seminars are anchored in the SEG organisational framework. This provides feedback to the development of the SEG Policy Toolkit. Equally, research carried out by the OECD team for domain modules of the Policy Toolkit directly benefits discussions in the Learning Seminars on related topics.

The Learning Seminars are small-scale gatherings of countries/systems designed as an engaging learning environment. In each seminar, participants focus on a specific policy of the given host-system to draw lessons for governance practice. Learning Seminars are inspired by both case methodology and policy design. They are highly interactive, with participants actively engaging in discussion and explicit reflection. They comprise a small group of actors and explicitly engage key stakeholders.

Participants learn about effective or innovative policy practices in other countries and about context-specific barriers and enablers, and identify governance options and possible trajectories (next practice) for future action. SEG Learning Seminars generate new knowledge of the “how to” of policy implementation and make tacit knowledge explicit by investigating design and implications of implementation strategies.

Questionnaire-led case studies are carried out by the Strategic Education Governance team. Each participating system will nominate a “system coordinator” who will act as the official contact for the Secretariat. Collaboratively, the system coordinator and the OECD team determine the **scope** and **focus** of analysis within the case study.

Decisions about **scope** pertain to which organisations should respond to the questionnaire. The **focus of analysis** may materialise in terms of the questionnaire being carried out to investigate specific processes or functional areas within organisations. The case studies follow an analytical-empirical approach and include primary and secondary research. The main method of data collection are interviews with organisations’ delegations conducted by the OECD team. Depending on the agreed scope, the team will conduct 1-2 weeks of field work, resulting in an analytical report (ca. 60-80 pages).

A case study starts with a mapping of key stakeholders. Stakeholders may be internal as well as external to an organisation, depending on the agreed scope of the case study. This is determined collaboratively with the Secretariat during a short preliminary visit (1-2 day).

An important feature of a case study is the **stakeholder reflection seminar** (1 day) building on the methodology developed for the Strategic Education Governance Learning Seminars (Box 2). Once the Secretariat has drafted an analytical report presenting insights from the case study, the reflection seminar brings together key stakeholders to collectively reflect on, refine and add to the presented analysis. This is designed to engage a broader set of stakeholders and to heighten the collective learning from the case study.

Carrying out the case study is subject to discussion and agreement between the Secretariat and each interested education system on country needs and context to maximise learning value. Table 1 presents an indicative process. Overall costs and the timing of each phase are subject of discussion.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Steps</th>
<th>Who</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Defining scope</td>
<td>Discussion and agreement on scope/ focus of case study</td>
<td>OECD, System coordinator</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Developing abstract of proposed case study</td>
<td>OECD</td>
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<td>2. Preparation/ data collection</td>
<td>Developing detailed outline of case study and plan for data collection, stakeholder mapping (1-2 days visit)</td>
<td>OECD, System coordinator</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Fieldwork: Interviews with responding organisations (1-2 weeks)</td>
<td>OECD</td>
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<td>3. Review and revision</td>
<td>First draft for factual check with the system coordinator</td>
<td>System coordinator</td>
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<td></td>
<td>OECD team corrects any identified factual errors</td>
<td>OECD</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Reflection seminar with stakeholders</td>
<td>OECD, System coordinator</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Stakeholder reflect on, refine and add to analysis</td>
<td>OECD, System coordinator</td>
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<td>Second draft: Integrating feedback from the reflection seminars</td>
<td>OECD, System coordinator</td>
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<td>Final factual check with the system coordinator</td>
<td>OECD</td>
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<td>Internal OECD peer review</td>
<td>OECD</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Final draft and publication</td>
<td>Final draft with OECD; sign-off by system coordinator* and OECD, preparation for publication</td>
<td>OECD, System coordinator</td>
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<td>* Should minor issues remain, the system coordinator can exceptionally suggest further revisions at this stage. This process should not exceed 2 weeks; comments are considered final.</td>
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<td>Publication of case study on OECD website, Ministry, other dissemination outlets</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Optional: launch event with stakeholders</td>
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4. Outlook: the policy toolkit as in-country instrument

The Strategic Education Governance team continues developing the policy toolkit for use as in-country instrument by country administration and stakeholders with SEG supporting the diagnostic process and analysis. Design foundations were developed in discussions at an SEG advisory group meeting 5-6 June 2018 with countries/ systems and experts. Discussions focused on providing value for in-country and cross-country learning, as well as managing administrative burden for participating countries.

Using the SEG Policy Toolkit as instrument for in-country diagnosis aims to support the ministry/ agency to assess the state of governance processes against the toolkit’s items and promote dialogue around strategic education governance. Its approaches centrally focus on offering a starting point for in-country reflection of governance practices and creating a space for dialogue focusing on improvement.

The Toolkit’s application as in-country mechanism uniquely allows engaging stakeholders in data collection. Stakeholder agency in respective processes helps comprehensively assessing the state of governance approaches – including interrogating information not readily available otherwise – and supports stakeholders’ self-reflection and dialogue within the system.
References


