Governing better through evidence-informed policy making

Agenda
Context

There is a growing demand for high quality inclusive public services as well as increased public scrutiny of government spending. Decision makers are facing the need to reach timely decisions in an increasingly volatile, uncertain and complex environment. Policy making nowadays involves the entanglement of formal and informal actors. As a result there are multiple pathways for evidence to feed into the policy and decision making processes. However, there is a need to ensure that quality evidence can effectively feed into policy and decision making processes, which contributes to the effectiveness of public interventions, achieving inclusive growth, and to rebuild trust in public institutions and science.

In some areas, evidence gaps remain where further investment in understanding what works is necessary. In other areas, evidence exists, but is poorly used, insufficiently shared or not systematically organised. There is great potential to mobilise an Evidence Driven approach, drawing on the ‘What Works’ experience, to strengthen knowledge management and improve science brokerage. The goal is to ensure better governance through evidence-informed policy making. This requires leveraging large bodies of evidence, systematically reviewing the information, enabling networks, fostering innovative methods, facilitating the actual use and uptake of evidence, and closely cooperating with decision makers to understand their needs.

Evidence-based policy is at the heart of the OECD’s mission and represents a critical step towards better public governance. Over 2014-2016, the OECD undertook steps to develop analytical work on policy advisory systems, and has been developing a toolkit for policy making as part of its contribution to evidence-informed policy. Previous to this, an OECD Public Governance Symposium in 2012 discussed strengthening the evidence base on governance for more effective policymaking. In the 2015 OECD Public Governance Ministerial Meeting, Ministers again recognised the need for a continuous effort to develop policy-relevant evidence on government performance that is robust and comparable. The ‘Daejeon Declaration on Science, Technology, and Innovation Policies for the Global and Digital Age’, further to the OECD 2015 Ministerial on Science Innovation and Policy, recognises that science is important to inform policies and decision making in a range of areas, such as public welfare, long-term environmental issues and crisis management of disasters. In addition, the OECD is also conducting work to analyse policy evaluation in general, with an upcoming survey aimed at assessing whole-of-government evaluation practices that foster robust evidence-based policy making.

Goal of the meeting

The meeting will offer a unique opportunity to promote a dialogue on evidence-informed policy. It should help identify how governments can systematically include high-quality evidence in policy and decision making, and establish a culture of using evidence in practice. The meeting is intended to result in an action plan for the OECD to take this agenda forward.

Participants will have the unique opportunity to discuss many different aspects of evidence-informed policy making in informal group sessions, to share best practices and to network on an international scale. A better understanding of how evidence can be used in a timely and effective way by governments is necessary to promote the uptake of evidence. Connecting evidence and policy is complex, but also necessary to make sure that policies work for citizens.

Participation

Participation is open to government representatives in the public governance arena, experts from public think tanks, agencies, NGOs and academia interested in public sector reform and bringing evidence and science to bear on decision making. They are invited to discuss the challenges they face in connecting evidence to policy, to share expertise and best-practices and to collaborate in promoting a culture of evidence-informed policy making.

This meeting is organised by the OECD Public Governance Directorate, in cooperation with the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission, the Campbell Collaboration and the International Network for Government Science Advice.

Reference documents

The documentation will include an OECD project proposal to advance this agenda.
8:45 Welcome coffee

9:00 – 9:30 Opening remarks

- **Rolf Alter**, Director for Public Governance, OECD
- **Charlina Vitcheva**, Deputy Director General of DG JRC, European Commission

9:30 – 10:00 Evidence and politics: feeding evidence into political decision making

This session will discuss how to increase the demand and uptake of evidence in political decision making. The erosion of trust in public institutions, in experts, and in the science community is resulting in new challenges for policy making, with implications for both the demand and supply of evidence. The successful uptake of high-quality, unbiased evidence at the political level requires key institutional features which need to be better understood. Installing checks and balances can ensure that decisions are based on the best available evidence and limit the cherry-picking of convenient information.

In the area of regulatory policy, ex ante regulatory impact assessments (RIA) complemented by ex post assessment offers a first step in feeding evidence into cabinet and high-level political discussion, and in ensuring a framework for political accountability. However, despite positive intentions, practice often lags far behind.

The panel will address the challenges that still stand in the way of ensuring the uptake of evidence at the political level, and will discuss the needs of decision makers as well as the different approaches and types of organisations improving the effective use and impact of evidence in political decision making.

**Keynote Speakers**

- **Olli-Pekka Heinonen**, Director General, Finnish National Agency for Education, Former State Secretary, Finnish Ministry of Finance
- **Philip Rycroft**, Second Permanent Secretary and Head of the UK Governance Group, Cabinet Office
10:00 – 11:30  
**Group discussions**  
**How to ensure the uptake of evidence at the political level?**

Supporting evidence-informed decision-making at the political level requires a better understanding of the enablers. This session will offer participants the opportunity to discuss in smaller groups the different techniques to communicate and to enhance the demand for evidence at the political level.

**Format:** Participants will divide into smaller groups to discuss what is needed to grow the demand for evidence in government, particularly at the political level. This will include the different institutional processes, capacities, and methods governments can invest in to improve the use evidence at the political level. They will discuss *inter alia* the following questions:

- **Necessity of evidence:** What are the benefits of using evidence in decision making at the political level? Are there any obstacles – perceived or otherwise?

- **Meeting demand:** What tools and communication techniques could be used to better meet the demand of evidence by political decision makers?

- **Evidence mismatch:** What is the difference between supply and demand of evidence at the political level? How to create a convincing narrative when facing complex and partial results?

- **Institutional set-up:** What kind of institutional and process changes are needed to ensure the uptake of evidence?

Following the group discussions, the results will be brought back in the plenary.

11:30 – 11:45  
**Coffee break**

11:45 – 13:00  
**Interactive session**  
**Using evidence in practice: engaging with decision makers**

Decision makers will need evidence at the right time and in the right format to be able to use it to make well-informed decisions. The way in which evidence is presented is an important part of the ‘what works’ approach.

This session will discuss how to ensure decision makers have access to and effectively use evidence. Discussion will focus on how evidence can be produced and presented, taking into account decision-makers’ needs, in an aim to stimulate its uptake.

The session will start with short presentations from experts in supplying and presenting evidence for practical use, and from decision makers that have experience in using evidence.

**Kick-off Speaker**

- **Steve Martin**, Director, Public Policy Institute for Wales
- **Kenichi Tsukahara**, Professor, Kyushu University
Participants will then divide into small groups to work on identifying specific hallmarks of mobilisation of evidence by decision makers. These discussions will be based on the following questions:

- **Decision makers’ needs:** What kind of evidence is important for decision making? How can we prepare timely evidence that is context specific and can address needs of decision makers?
- **Presentation:** How should evidence be presented to ensure its uptake?
- **Priority features:** What are the most important features of evidence that should be highlighted to facilitate more and quicker uptake by decision makers?

13:00 – 14:15 **Lunch break**

14:15 – 15:15 **International cooperation on evidence-informed policy making**

Access to evidence can be enhanced through international cooperation. Harnessing, sharing, promoting, and diffusing evidence will benefit from international networks. However, linking the supply of evidence on an international scale has its challenges. When networks share results, it is important to understand how these can be applied in the local context in order to mobilise evidence effectively when needed.

In the academic arena, the Campbell and Cochrane Libraries are examples of evidence databases that conduct systematic reviews on an international scale. They work with researchers and policymakers around the world and publish information openly online. By scaling up the supply of evidence, the information becomes more robust and efficient. While these networks connect analysts and researchers, closing the final loop to involve policymakers and decision makers often remains a challenge.

The International Government Science Network (INGSA) provides a forum for policy makers, practitioners, and academics to share experience, build capacity and develop theoretical and practical approaches to the use of scientific evidence in informing policy at all levels of government.

This session will discuss how to better leverage and connect the existing international networks that exist – either in the natural sciences, economic and social sciences, development policy or behavioural insights – to improve their effectiveness and diffuse their results. The discussion will address the following aspects:

- **Barriers to sharing evidence:** What is preventing the sharing of evidence on a global scale? What are the opportunities of Open Science?
- **National relevance:** How can international networks for evidence create results that are relevant at the local level?
- **Synergies:** How can we best define the respective roles and synergies among existing international networks in facilitating access to evidence and spreading its use, particularly within government?
- **Diffusion:** How can we create improved and more systematic diffusion channels, including web-based repository and search systems, so that evidence can be more easily accessible?
- **Facilitating role:** What can be the role of the OECD in this arena as an international network or facilitator of networks on evidence?
Chair: Sir John Elvidge, Chair, Carnegie UK Trust

Panellists
- Howard White, Chief Executive Officer, Campbell Collaboration
- James Wilsdon, Vice President of INGSA, Professor, University of Sheffield

15:15 – 15:30 Coffee break

15:30 – 17:30 Thematic interactive sessions

In the proposed thematic breakout sessions, participants will identify how and what kind of evidence is necessary to inform policy and practice in the areas of early childhood intervention, access to justice, well-being and risk and crisis management.

The breakouts will follow a common structure. They will start with introductory presentations by experts in the policy field, who will share their experience and the role that evidence plays in it. Afterwards, the various sessions will engage in an interactive discussion in a workshop style by subgroups. These sessions are designed to identify linkages, common challenges, as well as the unique features of evidence in the different fields.

Each discussion will be shaped around the following set of questions:

- **Demand and supply of evidence**: what kind of information is missing (evidence gaps) to inform better policies in this area?
- **Presenting evidence**: how should the evidence that is available be transformed to fit the needs of evidence users?
- **Using and linking data**: what are the opportunities for expanding the “data frontier”, through open data and through improved use of administrative data? What are the challenges in using and linking data to improve the quality of evidence?
- **Role of the OECD**: what can the OECD do to facilitate better production and distribution of evidence in this area?
- **Impact assessment**: what kind of evidence is needed to be able to prove whether a policy intervention actually made a difference?

The policy areas that will be discussed are:

1. Early childhood intervention (Room D)

Far too many children do not get the best possible start in life, which has important consequences for the rest of their life. Differences in access to quality formal education, as well as pre-school education and care in particular mean that there is no equality of opportunity across children.

Early life interventions are critical to build cognitive, non-cognitive (which include personality traits, preferences, etc.) and social skills and therefore to promote equal opportunities across children. However, policy solutions can only be effective if they also reflect the changing family and social environments where children grow and develop.
Using an evidence-informed approach is vital on this topic. With knowledge on the root causes and warning signs, small interventions early on can help prevent inequalities that emerge early in life – which is much more cost-effective than trying to solve the after-effects.

To achieve an evidence-informed approach to early childhood intervention, the right kind of questions need to be asked. Furthermore, the right kind of information and data needs to be gathered to form a robust evidence base.

Panellists

- **Robyn Mildon**, Executive Director, Centre for Evidence and Implementation, Australia
- **Tom McBride**, Director of Evidence, Early Intervention Foundation, United Kingdom
- **Majella McCloskey**, Centre for Effective Services, Ireland/Northern Ireland

This session will be moderated by Olivier Thevenon and Monika Queisser (OECD).

2. Access to justice (Room CC24)

The OECD is actively seeking to better understand, track and help to improve effective access to justice for all citizens. People-focused legal and justice services aim to intervene at an early stage of legal problems and to facilitate prevention of legal problems. This requires a shift away from formal mechanisms toward earlier identification of legal problems of individuals for timely assistance. Such early interventions can prevent legal problems from escalating which can become a drag for individuals and economies.

An evidence-based approach to this topic involves looking for the early signs of potential legal problems and the barriers to accessing justice. Effective early and “timely” interventions require, among others, pre-planning and needs analyses, including the possibility of reaching out to clients who otherwise would not have received legal assistance and linking with them. As individuals may face a range of social problems, linking interventions across policy areas (health, social care, welfare, housing) may benefit from data sharing and identifying the data linkages. This requires asking the right questions and developing careful evidence-based strategies to identify the right moment for “intervention” and the ways to maximise their impact.

Panellists

- **Cris Coxon**, Head of Civil and Administrative Justice Research, Ministry of Justice, United Kingdom
- **Aristotelis Gavriliadis**, DG Justice and Consumers, European Commission
- **Christopher L. Griffin**, Research Director, Access to Justice Lab, Harvard Law School

This session will be moderated by Tatyana Teplova (OECD).

3. Well-being (Room CC12)

Putting people at the centre of public policy also means putting people at the centre of the evidence used to guide policy decisions. Well-being is about the outcomes that shape people’s lives: it includes material conditions (such as income and wealth, jobs and earnings, and housing) and quality of life (such as health, education, work-life balance, environment, social connections, civic engagement, safety, and subjective well-being).
The past decade has seen significant progress in the measurement of well-being, particularly within national statistics. The OECD Better Life Initiative has also played a leading role through work to develop better metrics, as well as regular reporting and analysis of well-being outcomes. Collectively, this activity is providing a richer picture of the conditions that people live in, and how they experience their lives — including how this varies across communities within countries. But better data alone cannot produce better policies. While important data gaps remain, there is also a need for more comprehensive work on the drivers of well-being, and a strengthening of the uptake of well-being evidence throughout government. This will be a crucial part of delivering more inclusive growth, contributing to the 2030 Sustainable Development Goal Agenda, and improving the overall quality of people’s lives.

Panellists

- **Nancy Hey**, Director What Works Centre for Wellbeing, United Kingdom
- **Roger Halliday**, Chief Statistician, Scottish Government, United Kingdom
- **Michaela Saisana**, Senior Scientific Officer Leader of the European Commission’s Competence Centre on Composite Indicators and Scoreboards (COIN), DG JRC, European Commission
- **Jennifer Wallace**, Head of Policy, Carnegie Trust, United Kingdom

This session will be moderated by Carrie Exton (OECD).

### 4. Risk and crisis management of disasters (Room E)

Evidence and science play a key role for risk and crisis management, as highlighted through the work of the OECD High Level Risk Forum and the Science and Technology activities of the United Nations Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR). The Global Science Forum has also embarked on a project on science advice in crisis. In Europe, the Joint Research Centre (JRC) of the European Commission carries out tremendous work in the field of risk and crisis management of natural disasters. Science and technology produce vital evidence which is necessary to find solutions to improve disaster risk reduction, as well as anticipation and response to disasters.

Panellists

- **Ian Clark**, Head of Unit, Disaster Risk Management, Joint Research Centre, European Commission
- **Satoru Nishikawa**, Executive Director, Japan Center for Area Development Research (JCADR)
- **Virginia Murray**, Consultant in Global Disaster Risk Reduction, Public Health England

This session will be moderated by Jack Radisch and Charles Baubion (OECD).

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<th>17:30 – 18:00</th>
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The participants will be invited to discuss the results and key takeaways in each of the relevant topic areas. They will also be invited to discuss the opportunities and realities of promoting an evidence-driven approach across government and beyond.

| 18:00 | Networking cocktail |
8:45 – 9:15  Keynote address: The realities of providing Science Advice

- Sir Peter Gluckman, Chief Science Advisor to the New Zealand Prime Minister, President of the International Network for Government Science Advice (INGSA)

The keynote will address the multiple dimensions of providing science advice at the highest levels of government. It will address the art of confronting the expectations and standards of science driven analysis with the needs of reaching timely decisions in the practical realm of policy making.

9:15– 10:15  Changing minds: assessing the impact of evidence on policy and practice

This session will focus on how evidence can make a real difference in citizens’ lives and for society, and what action can be taken for evidence to positively influence the mind-set. The session will first start by contextualising the discussion, as the evidence driven agenda is also facing the emergence of a post-truth environment that creates a very challenging policy context, particularly coupled with the impact of social media.

The discussions will follow by pinpointing cases where evidence has made a significant impact, to discuss how this can be assessed and what the best approaches are to foster it. Invited experts will present practical examples of where and how evidence fostered real improvement in policy and practice, in turn creating more inclusive and sustainable outcomes for citizens.

Panellists

- Matthew d’Ancona, Journalist, Visiting research fellow at Queen Mary University of London, Author: The New War on Truth and How to Fight Back
- Molly Irwin, Chief Evaluation Officer, U.S. Department of Labor
- Clara Richards, Senior Programme Manager, Evidence-Informed Policy Making, INASP
- Nick Carroll, Economic Counsellor, Permanent Delegation to the OECD, New Zealand
Breakout sessions
Key elements for evidence-informed policy making

This breakout session will address key elements that are needed to make sure that evidence-informed policy making works, and what this means in practical terms for decision makers, knowledge brokers, scientists and analysts. Which skills, tools, networks, methods, and guidelines are needed to make evidence work?

Participants will address different parts of this question in small, moderated group discussions and will identify the necessary elements to support evidence ecosystems.

There will be four different sessions on:

1. **Guidelines and standards for evidence (Room CC24)**

   In order to be able to leverage large bodies of research on an international scale, a quality standard is vital to ensure the comparability of evidence. The Campbell Collaboration has experience with producing systematic reviews and other evidence syntheses for evidence-informed policy and practice. By setting high standards for evidence inputs in these reviews, the quality and reliability of the results can be ensured. High standards can also hamper the production of evidence, as it requires more skills, time and resources. Hence, guidelines and standards for evidence need to facilitate the right kind of balance between quality, format and timeliness of research delivery. The International Network for Government Science Advice (INGSA) has also been working towards developing a universal set of operating principles and guidelines for science advice.

   During this breakout session participants will discuss the needs of those making or using evidence and how guidelines and standards can be defined to ensure quality and comparability of evidence, without constricting the evidence base.

   **Panellists**
   - **Stephen Fraser**, Director International Partnerships, The Education Endowment Foundation, United Kingdom
   - **Paul Cairney**, Professor of Politics and Public Policy, Division of History and Politics, University of Stirling, United Kingdom
   - **James Wilsdon**, Vice President of INGSA, Professor, University of Sheffield
   - **David Gough**, Director, EPPI-Centre, UCL Institute of Education

   *This session will be moderated by Stephane Jacobzone (OECD).*

2. **Diffusing innovations and experimentation (Room CC12)**

   This breakout session will benefit from synergies with the OECD Observatory for Public Sector Innovation and the European Commission Join Research Centre. One of the main challenges of evidence-based policy making is how to make decisions under conditions of unpredictability, uncertainty, and complexity. In a context of highly uncertain events, how can decision making be transformed to cope with uncertainty and avoid paralysis?

   Experimentation as an iterative form of feedback – testing uncertain solutions before launching and upscaling – has been said to address this problem to some degree. It is as a way to reflect and produce evidence “in action” and thus, it has become more and more popular in the public sector with some countries – e.g., Finland and
Canada, who have formalised policies and directives to support introduction of experimentation at the national level.

Experimentation should be seen more than just formal RCTs or A/B testing, but a broader shift in the way of working, making decisions and producing evidence to back them up. This requires both open exploration and new forms of engagement from the government. Governments need to strike a balance between rapid experimentation to test innovative solutions – exploration – and the evaluation of evidence in practise to support idea diffusion and scaling – exploitation. This is not always easy and therefore, experimental government is not a magic wand to solve all problems: there are also many limitations and challenges in using experiments in the public sector.

This breakout session will, thus, discuss the nexus between evidence-innovation-experimentation with the attention how evidence through experimentation can be produced within an innovation process. Both opportunities and challenges to the approach will be highlighted during the interactive sessions.

Panellists

- **Camille Laporte**, Project Manager, Secrétariat général pour la modernisation de l'action publique (SGMAP), France
- **Kaisa Lähteenmäki-Smith**, Science Specialist, Policy Analysis Unit, Prime Minister's Office, Finland
- **Xavier Troussard**, Joint Research Centre, Policy Lab

*This session will be moderated by Piret Tonurist (OECD).*

3. **Skills for policy makers and scientists (Room E)**

As more knowledge and data become available, the need for effective knowledge management and sense-making becomes more urgent. The research community and public service need the right skillset to produce and make sense of different kinds of information. Still, the evolution towards more evidence-informed policy making cannot be a one-sided process. Any skill that is strengthened on the evidence side has to be accompanied by similar developments on the policy side, adapting to better use of evidence.

Participants will work together to identify such skills during this breakout session, which is in collaboration with the European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC).

Panellists

- **Sharon Smit**, Director Sustainable Society, Coordinator Horizon 2020 ACCOMPLISSH, University of Groningen, Netherlands
- **David Mair**, Head of Unit, Knowledge Management, DG JRC, European Commission

*This session will be moderated by Milena Raykovska (JRC).*

4. **Using behavioural insights to inform policy and practice (Room D)**

"Behavioural insights" – lessons derived from the behavioural and social sciences, including decision making, psychology, cognitive science, neuroscience, organisational and group behaviour – are being applied by governments to gain better evidence on how human beings actually behave (vs. how they are assumed to rationally behave) with the aim of making public policies work better. The use of behavioural insights has moved beyond a trend and is now firmly established in the processes of government. However, they still appear to be used mostly in the late
policy design and implementation phases of the policy cycle. More work needs to be done to incorporate these insights in the diagnosis and evaluation stages. Also, there is potential to explore ways to apply behavioural insights to more meso- and macro-level policy issues, including to issues related to global sustainable development as well as influencing the behavioural of organisations.

In this session, participants will hear from leading practitioners in the field of behavioural science that will provide insights on how different institutional models for applying behavioural insights exist, as well as how knowledge can be aggregated and disseminated so that others can learn and apply evidence in to related policy problems, including through the use of international networks.

Panellists

- **Nicolò Di Gaetano**, Senior Advisor, Regulatory Authority for Electricity, Gas and Water (AGEESI), Italy
- **Daniel Shephard**, Co-Founder and President, The Implementation Science & Communication Strategies Group and former member of the White House Social and Behavioural Sciences Team, United States
- **Mariam Chammat**, Chief Behavioural Officer, Secretariat General pour la modernisation de l’action publique (SGMAP), France

*James Drummond (OECD) will introduce the session, which will be moderated by Mariam Chammat (SGMAP).*

11:45 – 13:00  Identifying actionable next steps  Room CC12

Driven by the mandate to foster a culture of evidence-informed policy making, the OECD is committed to continue its efforts in taking the agenda on evidence-informed policy forward. During this closing session, the Secretariat will present a proposal on areas where the OECD can add value, and how this work can be taken forward. This will include work in the relevant areas addressed through the various breakout sessions, such as early intervention, justice, in addition to more general aspects of supporting evidence-based policy making as well as whole of government evaluation practices. The project will be enriched by the discussion with countries, experts, and partner organisations. Practical next steps and the implications in terms of resources and information sharing will also be discussed in relation to this proposal.

Panellists

- **Stephane Jacobzone**, Deputy Head of Division, Reform of the Public Sector, Directorate for Public Governance, OECD
- **David Mair**, Head of Unit, Knowledge Management, DG JRC, European Commission
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