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Education Policy Knowledge Centre (EPKC)
- underlying research and structure

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The principal purpose of the Education Policy Knowledge Centre (EPKC) is to bridge the gap between education policy making and helpful research. To compensate for short term policy making cycles, lack of systematic evidence and the failure of institutional memory, the EKPC needs to be comprehensive, up to date, accessible and actionable.

The macro-policy levers that ministers (and others) might be interested in are understood: curriculum, assessment, accountability, school organisation, funding, intervention, focus on disadvantage, teacher professionalism and implementation¹. Therefore, from the top down, the EPKC should drive exhaustive reviews of available evidence in all these areas, each structured around generic policy options. For example, accountability might be explored through the range of options: regulatory (central to local accountability); market based (competitive high stakes to minimum standards); transparency (public classification to confidential school assistance) and performance (whole system test data to sampling data)

Critical to bridging the gap between policy making and research is the presentation layer. It must be simple to use, easily accessible and navigable. Here, the toolkits of the EEF and YEF provide a strong template. The presentation layer is designed with the user in mind. Applying this approach to the EPKC, the presentation layer would be designed around each policy lever, highlighting options, summarising findings, evaluating evidence, and indicating impact and cost. There is also the opportunity to show the extent to which each lever interacts with others.

Behind the presentation layer should be summaries of the policy options. These will highlight the pros and cons of different approaches, explore outcomes and unintended consequences and identify the most relevant contextual variables. Below the summary and reporting layer is the third level, linking to the original source material.

The EPKC source material and method of aggregation will materially differ from EEF/YEF/Campbell Corporation approach. RCTs might only make up 5 to 10% of the evidence

¹ At the outset the EPKC works within the existing paradigm of policy making. This is not to say that this might changes over time, e.g. becomes less centralised.

base. System policy change doesn't lend itself to this method. Rather, there will be systematic mixed method reviews of other jurisdictions, from policy change case studies, through to experimentation.

Wherever possible, evaluations will be evidenced, e.g. cross sectional and longitudinal studies. But there will also be a need to include the evaluation and review of non-experimental design, such as sample surveys, case reports and expert opinion. These methods are not at the upper end of scientific method scale, but ultimately, the EPKC is to support decision makers with directional understanding and hypothesis formulation.

Much of the EPKC work will be comparative analysis, exploring variations in specific policy levers across different jurisdiction. For example, how the skills agenda has been managed in different jurisdictions with reference to curriculum, assessment and accountability. In these instances, it is essential to thoroughly explore counter factuals and to research context including social, cultural and economic differences, as well as the history of education policy development.

Typically, there would be a technical appendix for each section, explaining what methods have been used to create the summary findings and reports. Significantly, as the evidence base moves away from the less contestable areas of RCT and meta-analysis, it is especially important for the EPKC to establish explicit and transparent methods of systematic review including standard stages, replication methods, updating processes etc. [There may also be exploration of "realist evaluations" with context, mechanism and outcomes structures if these can be shown to be robust]. The next stage of EPKC scoping will explore mixed method approaches in domestic universities, as well as international organisations such as the IEA, 3ie and ICSEI.

Initially, it will not be possible to gain adequate coverage for all policy option strands. There will be evidence gaps and weakness in the empirical data. A Campbell Collaboration style gap map will be required, and the weaker areas would be augmented over time.

Assembling and synthesising the available research in system policy areas will allow for multiple meta-analyses, exploring how policy levers interact and influence the workings of the education system. This would include system interdependencies, coherence and dynamics - with the possibility to create simple models of instrument interaction.

In the longer term, EPKC would develop sufficient expertise to appreciate how contextual factors influence the impact of policy levers in different settings. Similarly, how the structures for planning, implementation and governance effect the outcomes of system change itself, for example, the extent to which the perceived legitimacy of change and the support it has can influence adoption, or whether the policy framework promotes or reduces the motivation of teachers and lecturers.

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