



EUNEC

Education councils in Europe

Going beyond the tensions



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Introduction

Manuel Miguéns
President of EUNEC

Mia Douterlungne
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INTRODUCTION

The European Network of Education Councils – EUNEC – was founded in Lisbon, in the year 2000. These have been twenty years of structured, informed, independent and participative cooperation, sharing views and perspectives, reflecting, debating and disseminating good practices of expert and participatory advice in education.

The first talks to set up the network were initiated back in 1998, involving Louis Van Beneden, Jacques Perquy (Vlor, Belgium) and Teresa Ambrósio (CNE, Portugal), and led to a comprehensive comparative study of education councils in the Member States of the European Union, carried out by Willy Wielemans and Roos Herpelinck - *Education Councils at National and Regional level in the Member States of the European Union*. Wielemans and Herpelinck (2000) claim that the internationalization of education led to an increasing internationalization of education policy making processes, particularly in the European Union. Education councils are directly involved in education policy, which impacts the way in which they operate and exert their influence on policy players in other countries. Fulfilling such a demanding task requires education councils to have the knowledge and understanding of the structures, practices and procedures in other countries of the Union.

This study was presented during the European Conference of Education Councils, held in Lisbon in March 2000. The Conference was organized with a clear and specific purpose: to create the European Network of European Councils. The 50 participants included Presidents and Secretary Generals of Education Councils from the EU, representatives of educational structures from candidate countries to join the EU, and representatives from the Portuguese Government and the European Commission. Teresa Ambrósio (CNE, Portugal), Louis Van Beneden (Vlor, Belgium), Willy Wielemans (KULeuven), Olivier Brunet (European Commission), Dominic Lenarduzzi (DGEC, European Commission), Juan Piñero Permuy (CEE, Spain), Augusto Santos Silva (Secretary of State, Portugal), Sérgio Machado dos Santos (CNE, Portugal) and Jacques Perquy (Vlor, Belgium) were the main contributors

to the discussions about the role, mission, statutes and action plan for the network.

The EUNEC action plan approved at the Conference in 2000 quotes St. Exupéry – *'si je diffère de toi, loin de te léser, je t'augmente'* to praise the diversity that is capable of awaking *'a soul for Europe'*, as claimed by Robert Schuman. Just like the motto of the European Union, diversity of countries, diversity of councils, diversity of education systems, diversity of perspectives, but unity in shared purposes and common values, contributing to a united Europe also through education. Moreover, the EUNEC 2000 action plan assumes that education has a central role in constructing a space of European Citizenship, as anticipated by Jean Monnet – *'si j'étais à refaire, je recommencerais par l'éducation (ou par la culture)'*. Following the objectives of the EU Agenda 2000, the first EUNEC action plan proposed lifelong learning, citizenship education and mobility as priority areas to reflect on.

Teresa Ambrósio (CNE, Portugal) was then elected the first President of EUNEC and was succeeded by Louis Van Beneden (Vlor, Belgium), Fons Van Wieringen (Onderwijsraad, The Netherlands), Simone Barthel (CEF, Belgium), and Adrie van der Rest (Onderwijsraad, The Netherlands). Jacques Perquy was confirmed as the first Secretary General of EUNEC. Wim Vansteenkiste (until 2008) and Carine De Smet (from 2008), in charge of the secretariat in Brussels, have provided reliable administrative support to the organization.

During the past 20 years, EUNEC has developed regular activities and a balanced membership, involving organizations with slightly different roles and objectives from many European countries. EUNEC has been able to maintain its pursuits and promote cooperation, even during times of financial constraints. The network has nowadays members from Estonia, Wales, Greece, Czechia, Romania, Spain, Hungary, Ireland, Malta, Belgium, the Netherlands, Lithuania, France, Cyprus, and Portugal. Recently the network was extended outside Europe integrating education councils from Morocco and Quebec – Canada.

EUNEC's main activities include yearly seminars and conferences, the publication of statements - a common text agreed on by the participants, usually as a result of the reflections, discussions and conclusions of such initiatives - and the participation in events organized by EUNEC members, by the European Commission and by European Union Member States. In the last 20 years, EUNEC has organized more than 30 seminars and conferences, in more than ten different European countries. The events gather policy makers, academics and stakeholders, and cover a diversity of topics related to the European and national agendas in the field of education and training. These include, for example, education councils and stakeholders participation, the European Education Area, inclusive education, early school leaving, excellence in education, *Bildung*, new skills for new jobs, guidance, migration and education and evidence-based education policy making. The organizing council also typically complements the conference agenda with school visits, allowing all the participants to gain knowledge of the local education system and in many cases to discuss with teachers and other stakeholders about relevant education issues.

In 2010, when celebrating its tenth anniversary, EUNEC published the study 'Education councils in Europe: Balancing expertise, societal input and political control in the production of policy advice' (Brans, M. et. al., 2010). This study was presented during an international conference on 'Participation and stakeholder involvement in education policy making' and gained particular relevance by bringing European education councils and EUNEC to light, emerging from the shadows of the education policy making process.

In this relevant study the research team led by Professor Marleen Brans gathered data on several education councils in Europe and conducted in-depth case studies on six councils. The organization and institutionalization of education councils was analyzed in terms of administrative support, legal and social status, membership, role, degree of autonomy and different modes of institutionalization. When trying to devise a typology of councils Brans et. al. *'discovered the sheer uniqueness of each council, although, on the surface, many councils do appear similar in membership and role, no two council are truly alike'*. The study also points out *'the need for a council to*

justify its continued budget' and suggests that *'such bodies need to constantly assert their value'*. These seem to be clear explanations for the diversity of institutions that constitute EUNEC membership, as well as for the changes in membership experienced by the network since its foundation.

A set of recommendations was put forward to the councils in this study, and it is worthy to recall some of them here, bearing in mind their pertinence, relevance and possible applicability to EUNEC itself:

- Ensure sufficient funding and means to the advisory council as an organization;
- Grant the advisory council a status in law;
- Raise the number of principals, for instance by including Parliament as a client of the council's advice;
- Allow for the inclusion of different communities;
- Invest in benchmarking, monitoring, evaluation and research;
- Adopt strategies and tools for combining civil society input and expertise, next to what is settled in their membership structure;
- Adopt different advisory tracks. Next to a more standardized procedural track, also fast track advice;
- Adopt conscious and diversified dissemination strategies, in order to communicate with their different principals;
- Make use of the best available evidence in their advisory process and products;
- Develop conscious strategies to train staff and leaders as boundary workers.

Simone Barthel, President of EUNEC at that time, and Mia Douterlungne, Secretary General, wrote in the preface of the publication that this study *'can be seen as a basis for looking to the future and for further improvement of the network and of education councils. EUNEC is convinced that all those involved in education (the European Commission, the governments of the Member States, the education councils, the stakeholders and all European citizens) can benefit from a European platform where major reforms in educational systems can be discussed thoroughly and prepared for a successful implementation.'*

Following a similar vein, José Manuel Durão Barroso, President of the European Commission who wrote an opening note on the study, stated that *'EUNEC will continue to contribute to the work of the European Union over the next decade; you will be a valuable partner and link with the national implementation of Europe 2020 and our strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training.'*

Both J. M. Barroso and the EUNEC leadership demonstrated clear confidence in the future of the network and its role in contributing to better education in Europe and to European cooperation.

The present publication on the added value of advisory bodies in education policy making was conceived to celebrate the 20th anniversary of EUNEC and includes a number of papers by authors representing some of the most active members of the network. Most of the papers aim to characterize the different institutions and to describe their unique features, their modes of work to face challenges and to accomplish missions.

Professor Marleen Brans was invited to revisit the 2010 study, to look at the papers being published here and to elaborate further. In her article – *'Education councils: Critical boundary actors bridging the worlds of policy, science, practice and society'* written with Ellen Fobé, education councils, their staff and membership are depicted as boundary actors, working in the common space of different but intersected worlds. That space is the territory where they bridge those worlds, holding a unique and privileged position to strengthen the capacity to produce advice on education policies. Brans and Fobé highlight, among many other aspects, the wide representativeness of councils, either integrating a range of stakeholders in their composition, or complementing their analysis with actors outside the organization. As the authors refer *'The quest for the 'participative performance' of education councils, (...) is certainly high on the agenda in many countries, even when there are diverse ways of balancing expertise, practical experiences, and stakeholder input.'* In this way, they ensure public access and the participation of various stakeholders in the educational field and build up bridges between the worlds of science, the state, practice and society, aiming at participatory and

democratic debate and the best possible evidence for informed advice and recommendation.

The Cyprus Ministry of Education, Prodromos Prodromou, discusses the way in which advisory bodies and stakeholders have contributed to the policy making process of the implementation of the Cyprus education system reform. He states that the *'policy making process in the educational system of Cyprus is implemented within a framework which envisages evidence-based decision-making with enhanced participation and dialogue among various stakeholders (advisory bodies, expert committees, confederations of school parents, teacher unions, pupil official organizations)'* which could be regarded as a possible description of the composition of a future education council.

Mia Douterlungne and Roos Herpelinck from the Vlor in Belgium highlight the democratic value of participation of civil society in preparing the education policy and the importance of the Vlor as a strategic advisory council with a legal status. They also underline the absolute added value of the representation model (in comparison with a sheer expert model), which structurally gives organized civil society a say in the advisory process. Douterlungne and Herpelinck illustrate such perspectives using different statements by teachers' unions, academics, parents associations and a former President of EUNEC, Louis Van Beneden, who said that *'the Vlor is a successful consultation platform for representatives of the member organizations. A platform where structural, ideological, pedagogical and societal differences can be bridged. The fact that the Vlor closely follows international developments, through intense international cooperation, deserves respect.'*

Nathalie Mons, Jean-François Chesné and Alice Gatinot, Director, Executive Manager and Project Manager at Cnesco - The French Centre for Education Studies, present this national centre for education public policy evaluation, analysis and support, that aims to improve the knowledge of French and foreign school systems and their levers, in order to create dynamics of change through an original scientific and participatory method. According to the authors, *'Cnesco has developed as a bridge between the world of research, communities of practice and policy makers'* by modelling and

developing an original method based on two main axes: a scientific and participatory evaluation. Through interactions between research, communities of practice and education policy makers, the model involves a multiplicity of activity formats: reports, consensus conferences, international comparisons conferences and interactive virtual conferences, and is reported to have relevant results. A possible move towards scientific, participatory and formative evaluation is identified by the authors as one of the major challenges now faced by Cnesco.

Tomás Ó Ruairc and Carmel Kearns from the Teaching Council, Ireland, describe in their own words, the innovative, comprehensive and multi-layered processes by which the Teaching Council consulted with teachers and other stakeholders in planning for and developing the national framework for teachers' learning. They emphasize the relevance of having *'learned about the need to carefully scaffold the gap between theory, research, policy and practice, and how this process cannot be rushed'*.

In the text on the Lithuanian Council of Education, Saule Maciukaite-Zviniene and Aiste Kairiene highlight the importance of engaging the various stakeholders to enable education quality. However, they consider that it is still necessary to understand *'the different types of social engagement procedures suitable for the education sector, their systemic and contextual requirements and the real value for decision-making in the education sector'* and emphasize that *'For this purpose, councils of education in different countries contribute to an increased understanding and value of engagement tools in solving educational challenges'*.

Rahma Bourqia and Rabéa Naciri give an account of the educational reform in Morocco and the many economic, cultural and demographic changes in the last three decades. In this context, The Higher Council for Education, Training and Scientific Research *'is called to play a catalyst role in favour of the renewal of school in a context marked by an increasing social demand for a quality education and a deep reconsideration of the very essence of school by the different components of society'*. To that extent, the article reflects on how the role of the Council can be redirected

to think about the process of implementation of the 2015-2030 Strategic Vision, in a challenging context.

Renée van Schoonhoven, Professor of Education Law at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, wrote the contribution from Onderwijsraad, the Dutch Education Council that *'has fulfilled an essential function'* for more than a hundred years now. She considers that the Education Council is literally and figuratively unavoidable in the Dutch educational system. In her essay Professor van Schoonhoven elaborates on the need of agility and flexibility for an education council to establish important connections and operate successfully in the education system. She remembers the words by a former President of EUNEC Fons van Wieringen, who *'remarked that the advisory reports of the Education Council are so good because they are taken seriously, adding in the same breath (...) that they are taken seriously because they are so good'*. In Professor van Schoonhoven's own words, the bar is high but the *'ambitions can be met if the Council strives to be sufficiently agile in the coming period in the ever more fluid world of education, in which variable governance mixes abound and – just as in society in general – there appears to be no clearly identifiable 'we'. It will be key not to start from the traditional presumption that we (can) know everything and that we will ultimately reach a consensus, but above all to engage in interactive dialogue with all manner of bodies and stakeholders involved in education policy.'*

Ercília Faria, member of CNE Technical and Scientific Staff and Manuel Miguéns, Secretary-General of CNE, authored the paper about the Conselho Nacional de Educação. They remember CNE's mission - to provide the participation of the various scientific, social, cultural and economic forces, in the search for broad consensus regarding education policies, and emphasize the distinctive features of the Portuguese Council, namely its independence and stakeholder representation, the combination of stakeholders' views with expertise and the best evidence available, the right of initiative and a President elected by the Parliament. They conclude the paper in support of the structured, participatory and institutional consultation provided by education councils: *'In current*

times of 'online everything', where the political temptation to use open and public consultation from the internet or social media is paramount, it is crucial to show the merits and added value of the organized, informed, institutionalized, debated, reflexive, pondered, evidence-based and scientifically grounded consultation provided by education councils'.

Maryse Lassonde, Christina Vigna and Marina St-Louis tell us the history of The Conseil Supérieur de l'Éducation (Quebec) from its origins, highlighting the changes that occurred since 2000 that made it the *'modernized and revitalized council that it is today'*. They point out the Council's three complementary but interrelated functions - political, democratic and educational - and remarked that in its advisory role *'the Conseil takes into consideration the available scientific data and the practical experience of its members'*.

The contribution from the Consejo Escolar del Estado, Spain, comes in the form of an interview with its President, Enrique Roca. In addition to describing the Council's role and features, Enrique Roca asserts that the Consejo Escolar del Estado *'assures the greatest representation of the education community in the country's democratic institutions'*. He recognizes that it is not a simple or easy task to demonstrate how the work of the Council influences policy decision-making, because the Council's advice is not formally binding, but the intrinsic value of this advice is a democratic input in the policy process.

A recent Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament (COM625 final, September 2020) on achieving the European Education Area by 2025, reminds us that, back in the year 2000, EUNEC founders were right. Then as now, education is regarded as the foundation for personal fulfilment and development, active and responsible citizenship, social inclusion and employment, and is essential to the vitality of the European society and economy.

Educational policies were then considered as an indispensable contribution to achieving the strategic objective of making the European Union a dynamic and competitive area based on innovation and knowledge, through the achievement of a higher level of economic development, with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion. The objectives of education and training policies would be to create a European space for lifelong learning constituting a 'Learning Society' with opportunities for all. However, without an 'educational society', the shift to a knowledge-based economy will cause new disruptions and new forms of social exclusion (EUNEC Action Plan 2000).

According to Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, *'the European Education Area aims to bring to the education and training communities the support they need to fulfil their fundamental mission, in challenging and exciting times.'* As stated in the EEA-factsheet, September 2020, *'Establishing the European Education Area will improve access to quality education and training, enable learners to move easily between education systems in different countries and help create a culture of lifelong learning.'*

The European Commission sets out a vision to achieve the European Education Area by 2025 and proposes to consolidating ongoing efforts and further developing the European Education Area along six dimensions:

1. Quality - Lifting quality in education;
2. Inclusion and gender equality - Making education and training more inclusive and gender sensitive;
3. Green and digital transitions - Supporting the green and digital transitions in and through education and training;
4. Teachers and trainers - Enhancing competence and motivation in the education profession;
5. Higher education - Reinforcing European higher education institutions; and
6. Geopolitical dimension - Education as part of a stronger Europe in the world.

Nonetheless, a new challenge must be added to the agenda. The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted the education and training systems in Europe, affecting the ways of learning, teaching and communicating. The September 2020 Communication from Commission to the European Parliament also mentioned that *'It is essential to prevent the health crisis from becoming a structural barrier to learning and skills development impacting on young people's employment prospects, earnings, as well as equality and inclusion for the whole of the society'*. The EU and Member States took emergency measures attempting to overcome the situation and to build cooperatively stronger and resilient education systems. In this context, investing in education and training will be crucial to support a complete recovery and to promote prosperity in Europe.

Those six key dimensions may shape European and Member States education policies in the near future. Education councils and EUNEC should then be prepared to assume important roles in the education policy decision-making process at all levels.

Education councils have an important role to play in education policy making, by allowing stakeholders participation and representativeness, and providing Government and Parliament with independent, informed, structured, and evidence-based policy advice, bridging the worlds of science, policy and society. Similarly, EUNEC has an important role to fulfil, by promoting European cooperation and reflection on paramount education issues and challenges, and by networking, collaborating, sharing and disseminating best practices, to contribute to the construction of the European Education Area. Even so, Member States, Governments and Parliaments, as well as EU institutions must exercise the needed 'eloquent listening', by consulting and providing the necessary support.





Education councils:

Critical boundary
actors bridging the
worlds of policy,
science, practice
and society

Prof. dr. Marleen Brans
Dr. Ellen Fobé
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The European Network of Education Councils EUNEC celebrates its 20 years of existence with the publication of 10 essays that capture the variety and commonalities of education councils in Europe, Québec and Morocco. The contributions in this celebratory issue demonstrate how education councils produce advice, how they interact with stakeholders, and how they create transparency in the policy process. These education councils are clear examples of institutionalized advisory bodies that aim to strengthen the policy analytical capacity of governments. At the same time, education councils are institutionalized bodies for policy advice which ensure public participation and empower civil society actors. The policy advice that the councils bring to the table is in many cases based on consultation and participation of a variety of stakeholders within the educational field. In this way, education councils function as critical boundary actors that bridge the worlds of policy, science, practice and society. Many education councils have even managed to establish and maintain themselves as relevant and influential actors in the field of education. This is certainly not self-evident in a competitive and dynamic policy advisory system. In what follows, we will reflect in more detail on the comparative context, role, positioning and functioning of education councils and we will ground the discussion in recent insights on the policy advisory system and the nature and sources of policy advice to governments.

Policy advisory systems

The notion of the 'policy advisory system' refers to a configuration of a complex set of actors that provide policy advice to policy makers. Policy advice is understood as information, knowledge and recommendations for future courses of action (Halligan 1995). During the past three decades, the composition of the policy advisory system, as well as the nature, sources, and characteristics of policy advice have been extensively investigated by the scholarly community (Peters and Barker 1993; Halligan 1995; Prasser 2006; Craft & Howlett 2013; Crowley & Head 2017; Howlett 2019). Researchers have also investigated the reasons why governments establish and nurture policy advisory systems. Receiving policy advice enables policy makers 'to make the right decisions' and helps governments in their quest for more open and democratic policy processes (Peters & Barker 1993).

In view of increasingly complex policy problems, policy advisory systems strengthen the policy analytical capacity of governments, while at the same time ensuring public participation and enabling the empowerment of civil society actors (Brans & Vancoppenolle 2005; OECD 2017).

The policy advisory system comprises a unique configuration of actors which differs at the sectoral level as well as between jurisdictions. Blum & Brans (2017) outline three different arenas to locate policy advisory actors in the policy advisory system: the internal government arena, the academic arena and the external lay arena. The three arenas are depicted in figure 1.

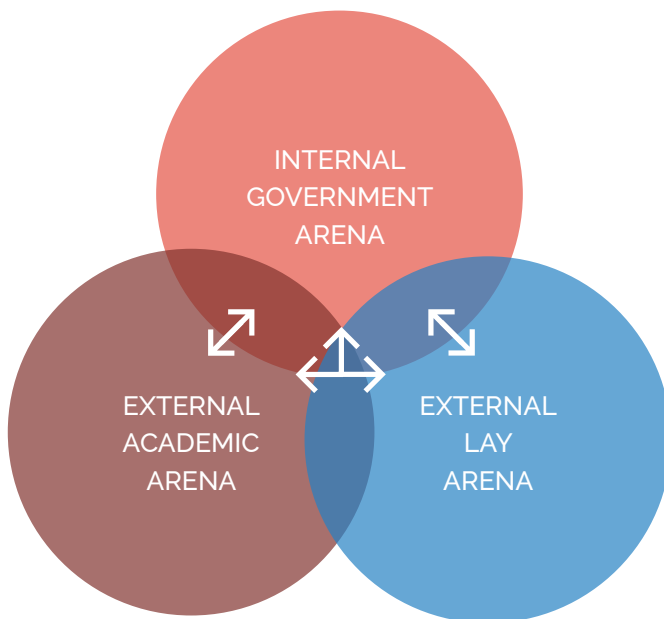


Figure 1 - Actors and arenas in the policy advisory system (Blum & Brans 2017)

Research shows that the policy advisory system has become more complex over time and that the advisory arena has both pluralized and externalized. This implies that the traditional monopoly of bureaucratic advisers in the internal government arena has been challenged (Vesely 2013; Howlett 2019) - in particular by an increasing number of external advisory actors such as think-tanks, interest groups, research institutes, private consultants, business associations, labor organizations, non-governmental organizations, citizens' groups and even individual citizens (see Brans, Geva-May & Howlett, 2017). Politicization is another such trend, signaling an articulation of political primacy at the expense of neutral or consensus-based advice.

In many countries, the policy advisory system includes numerous 'institutionalized advisory bodies'. Institutionalized advisory bodies are generally viewed as traditional advisory actors because they have persisted for an extensive period of time. The dynamics of pluralization and externalization of policy advice imply that these traditional mechanisms for policy advice now tend to compete more extensively with the myriad of actors in the policy advisory system in order to influence public policies. When coupled with politicization, these trends also induce cherry-picking tendencies in the political uptake of advice (OECD, 2017; Crowley & Head 2017; Pattyn et al. 2019).

The role and position of institutionalized advisory bodies

Institutionalized advisory bodies can be distinguished from other actors in the policy advisory system. These advisory councils are essentially independent from partisan or ideological interests because they may include among their body of members a wide range of actors with different social, political and/or academic affiliations (Brans, Van Damme & Gaskell 2010; Bressers et al. 2018). Institutionalized advisory bodies variably operate at the intersections between government, academia and/or society. They are considered 'boundary organizations' (Guston 2000).

The boundary position of institutionalized advisory bodies is not only the result of their particular membership composition, but also the outcome

of their internal processes for advice production. Typically, institutionalized advisory bodies incorporate different types of evidence while at the same time relying strongly on consultations with a wide range of members and other stakeholders. In that sense, institutionalized advisory bodies are pressured by different challenges. There is the challenge to contribute to evidence-informed policies, the need to establish policy support, and the need to advise without limiting the discretion of policy makers to decide upon policies themselves (Van Damme, Brans & Fobé 2011; OECD 2017).

Institutionalized advisory bodies bridge two or more arenas in the policy advisory system. We can discern different types of advisory bodies, depicted by the arrows in figure 1 above.

At the interface between the internal government arena and the academic arena are situated expert advisory bodies, while *representative* advisory bodies are found between the government and the lay arena in the policy advisory system. Furthermore, *mixed* advisory bodies are active where the academic, lay and government arenas meet (Blum & Brans 2017). The specific set-up of advisory bodies is considered to reflect the institutional legacies and traditions of the political system. Institutionalized councils for advice in countries with neo-corporatist traditions, for instance, may be predominantly made up of societal representatives (Van Damme, Brans & Fobé 2011; Pattyn et al. 2019). The set-up of advisory bodies can also differ between sectors within the same jurisdiction. For example, in federal Belgium, the national labour council is representative in nature, while the high council on health is made up of scientific experts (Fobé et al. 2017; Bressers et al. 2018).

Institutionalized advisory bodies are classified according to a number of characteristics, in addition to their membership composition. Researchers have observed differences and similarities between institutionalized advisory bodies with regard to their *official position* and *role in the policy process*, as well as regarding the *type of policy advice* they produce. Firstly, institutionalized advisory bodies are positioned at arm's length of the government and established on a semi-permanent or permanent basis.

They are funded through public means and officially mandated to provide advice on issues within a given policy area (Brans, Van Damme & Gaskell, 2010; Crowley & Head 2017).

Secondly, institutionalized advisory bodies are clearly embedded into the policy making process. They take up a formal or informal role at the agenda-setting and the design stage, while also being involved in matters of policy implementation and ex post evaluation (Brans, Van Damme & Gaskell, 2010; Craft & Howlett 2013; OECD 2017; Fobé et al. 2017; Bressers et al. 2018).

The variegating roles of advisory bodies in the policy process are presented in figure 2. At the agenda-setting stage, advisory councils may create awareness for certain policy problems in a policy field. Their legacy and longstanding position as experts in their policy field often enables them to identify strategic problems early-on. At the design stage of the policy process, institutionalized advisory bodies advise policy makers on policy options. The advice provided by advisory bodies is often based on the processing of different types of evidence of what works, namely on scientific insights, but also on technical information from stakeholders, as well as normative views on the support for policy alternatives (Tenbenschel, 2006). In the implementation phase, advisory bodies can provide frameworks for implementation and evidence on the feasibility of policies. They can also create stakeholder support for policies at the implementation stage, to increase the legitimacy of policy interventions. At the evaluation stage, institutionalized advisory bodies can be mandated to conduct ex post assessments of public policies. Alternatively, they may conduct policy evaluations on their own initiative. At this stage, institutionalized advisory bodies are able to establish critical feedback and learning processes in their field by engaging with multiple actors such as stakeholders and policy makers (Van Damme, Brans & Fobé 2011; Fobé et al. 2013; OECD 2017).

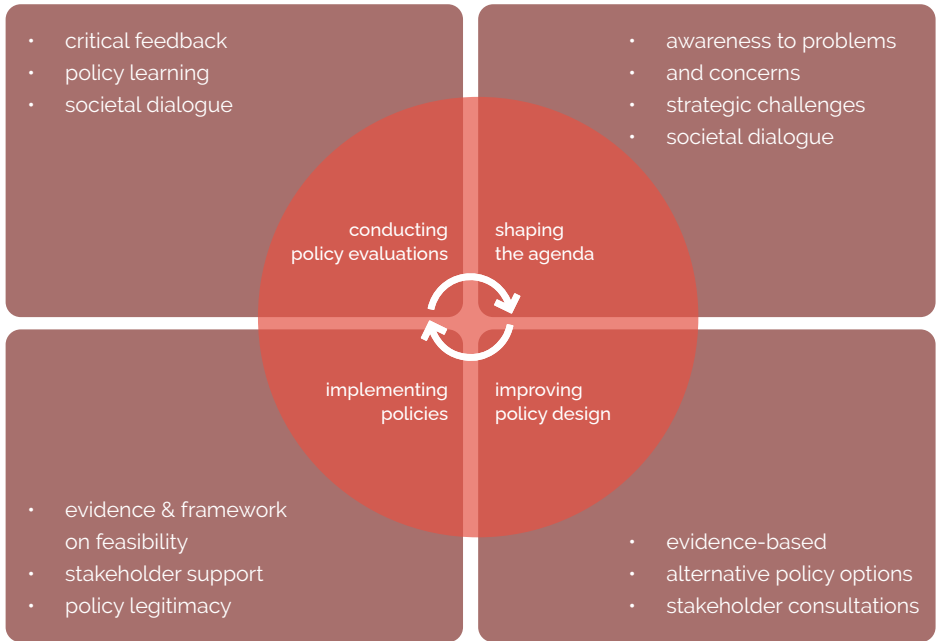


Figure 2 – Institutionalized advisory bodies in the policy process (based on OECD 2017)

Thirdly, institutionalized advisory bodies can provide different types of advice. The dimensions of policy advice are presented in figure 3. These dimensions relate to the temporal focus of advice, as well as to the nature of influence on the policy process.

Concerning the time-frame of policy advice, institutionalized advisory bodies can cover short-term policy challenges, or their advice can be orientated towards policy issues with a long-term strategic horizon. Short-term advice is considered reactive in nature and labeled as 'hot' advice, whereas a long-term focus is anticipatory and labeled as 'cold' advice. A further difference is whether advisory bodies provide substantive advice or enhance process legitimacy and democratic support. The former is based on the expertise and evidence that advisory bodies consult and produce so as to improve the decisions made by policy makers. The latter is the result

of the consultation of and participation with stakeholders in order to arrive at shared understandings of policy interventions among a wide range of actors (Peters & Barker 1993; Prasser 2006; Brans, Van Damme & Gaskell 2010; Craft & Howlett, 2013; Bressers et al. 2018; Howlett 2019).

The position of institutionalized advisory bodies is assumed to have shifted along the two dimensions of advice depicted in the figure, although the scholarly field lacks clear longitudinal data to assess the degree to which this has been the case. It is argued that this change in type and nature of policy advice has occurred in response to a changing policy context and altered expectations for policy advice (Howlett 2019).

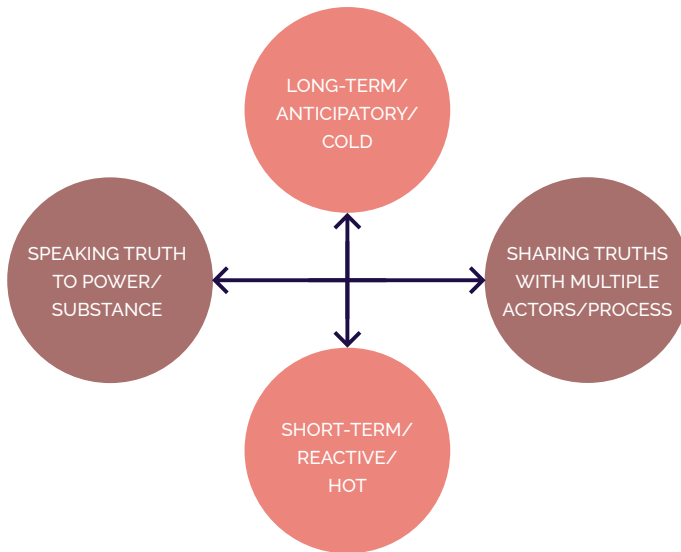


Figure 3 – Dimensions of policy advice (Howlett 2019)

The modifications to the context and expectations for policy advice, in turn, relate to the shift from a hierarchical state-societal relationship towards a governance relationship between decision-makers and stakeholders. Similarly, these changes are the outcome of declining state-authority and simultaneously growing calls for responsiveness towards and interaction

with citizens and stakeholders. The shift along the horizontal dimension in the figure 3 is arguably crucial to the legitimacy of institutionalized advisory bodies. After all, the councils not only provide stakeholders with a point of access to the policy making process, but the process of advice production also adheres to certain norms deemed crucial for providing authoritative, quality advice such as transparency, fairness, and deliberation (Van Damme, Brans, Fobé 2011; Crowley & Head 2017; Howlett 2019).

A comparative view on education councils in Europe, Québec and Morocco

The features and characteristics of institutionalized advisory systems provide the framework for reflecting on education councils in Europe, Québec and Morocco presented in this celebratory volume. Looking at the ten contributions, we discuss the variegating roles and positions of these councils as institutionalized mechanisms for policy advice within the policy advisory system in the field of education. Before we do so, it is prudent to briefly highlight the particularities of education as policy field.

Education as a policy field

Education policy is not just one among many policy fields. While all fields will make claims to relevance, that of education stands out for a good number of reasons. First, there are few policy fields that have such high government spending and touch upon the present and future lives of population at large in the way education does. People of all ages benefit from educational and vocational programs, and each year the EU27 spends total of more than EUR 600 billion on education (Eurostat). Second, many education problems are intractable. Their complexity and interconnectedness often creates social problems that appear beyond the reach of policy makers, scientists and stakeholders. The relationships between policy interventions and educational successes are not easily evidenced without sound scientific research and practical experience. Third, the education field is marked by a rather great number of stakeholders, ranging from providers to teachers, to pupils, to parents, to all kinds of NGOs, religious associations, and other civil society actors. Few policy fields are as dependent on all of these actors for the successful implementation of government interventions, as education

is. Fourth, education creates valuable human capital and thereby serves societal goals that surpass narrow pedagogical ambitions. Education policies are transversal carriers of policy goals of other domains such as labor market policies, environmental policies, health prevention and more. Fifth, the educational field is dynamically challenged by global developments, including financial, migration, and health crises. Education policies need continuous adaptation and resilience.

Given the above characteristics, education is a potentially contentious field. It is traditionally marked by ideological and pedagogical disagreement as well as incongruent interests. Debates over democratic access, literacy, personal development, as well as tensions between such values as equity, equality, quality and efficiency are rife in the field and thus potentially divisive. To be successful, education policies need not only be evidence-informed, but also deemed legitimate and feasible.

Education councils as institutions

'Education as a field is a potential site of conflict and disagreement over ideology and priorities. One way out of conflict and contention is dialogue and compromise, that is clearly the explicit perspective of many education councils.'

PRODROMOU, THIS VOLUME, ON CYPRUS

Indeed, many educational councils featured in this volume have institutionalized potential conflict to make it manageable. The membership rules of the councils have placed them in variably independent positions at a distance from direct government control. Often, the councils boast a strong legal foundation which ensures their internal continuity and funding. Some education councils in this celebratory volume are composed of government actors and education providers only, but these are rather the exception. And even when they are government-heavy in composition, stakeholder input is sourced in ways alternative to council membership. In Cyprus for instance, the Symvoulío Paideias is composed of government

officials and education providers. Specialist expertise is mobilized through ad hoc expert committees, and civil society associations follow separate advisory routes to government policies when new legislation is drafted.

Most educational councils can be considered representative advisory bodies and mixed advisory bodies (Blum & Brans 2017), depending upon the intersections of the advisory arenas in which they are active. The education councils in this volume also vary as to whether their members sit on the council in their own right, or have a mandate from the organizations they represent. The Flemish and Dutch councils, for instance, find themselves at opposite ends in this classification. While the Flemish council Vlor prides itself as being a genuine representative organization, where a large number of members come with a mandate to represent the broadest set of stakeholders, the Dutch education council has a smaller number of members, predominantly scientific experts who moreover are self-representative. For the Vlor, so the essay in this volume describes, these strict representational mandates are true to the constitutional principle of freedom of education. The advice produced by the Flemish education council is only considered legitimate when accounting for the diversity in the field. Also the Dutch council was originally representative in nature, as van Schoonhoven (this volume) writes. In the last decade of the 20th century, its authority shifted from representation to expertise. Echoing the international movement to evidence-informed policy making as well as the restoration of politics as opposed to organized interests in the policy formulation process, the council now takes pride primarily in the quality of its advice and the quality of the analyses upon which the advice is based.

Other councils have chosen a mix of representative members and expert members. This is for instance the case in the Moroccan, Lithuanian and Portuguese council, which have the most comprehensive membership formula. Faria & Miguéns of the Portuguese Conselho Nacional de Educação (CNE) underscore the advantages of a broad set of members and state that the variegating 'knowledge, experience and expertise (...) allow the production of advice combining the views of stakeholders with those perspectives supported by [scientific] evidence'.

Other councils show a slightly different profile. The *Quebec Commission on College Education and Research* is broadly representative of the educational and societal field. It has, however, secularized its leadership and members carry no mandate. The Québec council has no academic experts on the board though. Neither does the Spanish or Flemish education council. But does this mean that academic expertise is considered unimportant as compared with practical experience and diverse interests? And can a pure expert body go about without input from society? Clearly not. Education councils have developed various ways in which societal input is balanced with scientific expertise.

The Flemish representative council relies on its secretariat's strong policy analytical capacity and on special purpose conferences as a means to garner academic expert perspectives. The Dutch council equally has a strong academically-oriented secretariat and uses surveys and consultation with societal actors outside the council to complement the expert analysis of its members. The Irish Teaching Council, which is predominantly made up of members from the teaching profession, experts from practice that is, uses novel ways of 'consulting with' stakeholders in society. The Irish council's consultative innovations, such as for instance BEACONS, signals an important transformation from a linear consultation of societal actors to more deliberative participative practices at both the national and local level. Also other councils have introduced innovative ways to integrate expertise with organized interests. While not strictly organized as an advisory council, the French Centre for Education Policy Evaluation *Cnesco* is a state-of-the-art boundary organization that seeks to improve knowledge on education and leverage educational change. It uses scientific and participative methods to have the different worlds of research, practice and policy speak to each other, and to co-produce recommendations for policy makers. The quest for the 'participative performance' of education councils, as the *Lithuanian Council of Education* calls it, is certainly high on the agenda in many countries, even when there are diverse ways of balancing expertise, practical experiences, and stakeholder input. As critical boundary organizations, the education councils in this volume

are in a unique and privileged position to strengthen the policy advisory capacity of education policies. At the same time the education councils are mechanisms for dialogue, and they assure public access and participation of a variety of stakeholders within the educational field. They have managed to establish and maintain themselves as relevant and influential actors in the field of education. This is certainly not self-evident in a competitive and dynamic policy advisory system. The role performance of education councils is crucial in perpetuating their influence. It is to these roles we now turn.

Education councils in the policy process

The contributions in this volume demonstrate the scope of roles of education councils throughout the policy process: shaping the agenda, improving policy design, supporting policy implementation and conducting policy evaluation.

Providing advice for policy formulation and design is clearly not the only role, yet it remains one of the most important tasks in the constitution of education councils. In some cases, providing advice on draft regulations in education is highly formalized in that new legislation in the field cannot proceed without the council's advice. This does not mean that there is direct take-up of recommendations. Policy advice remains intrinsically non-binding. But at least, policy makers are held to account for non-take up as government feedback to the advice is required. This is for instance the case in Flemish and Spanish education policy. While for some countries, the provision of advice on draft legislation is formally required, in others advice can be requested on some policies, but not on others.

Most advisory bodies do also offer recommendations at their own initiative, which is considered key to their independent position in the policy process. In the cases where advice is sought on draft regulations, advice is sought after a draft is designed. The Irish Teaching Council is a special case though, since it is itself a regulatory body. Interesting to note is that recently, the Irish council has reconsidered the sourcing of stakeholder input before the draft of its regulations, rather than ex-post.

Next to providing 'hot' advice (Prasser 2006) on policies in the making, education councils play a key role in fostering support for the implementation of policies. These roles are of course not completely separate. To the extent that draft legislation is adapted to meet stakeholders' concerns about feasibility and content, the conditions for successful implementation are already addressed in the policy development stage. This having been said, many education councils were instituted in the wake of important educational reforms. They were seen as crucial change and reform agents. Through participatory processes, consultation and dissemination activities, the Moroccan council provides an excellent example of how such an advisory body becomes key in mobilizing broad professional and societal support for equal access to quality education. Other important reform agendas in which education councils play(ed) a crucial role concern the educational curriculum (Cyprus, Spain), the teacher profession and teaching qualifications (Ireland), access to high-quality education (Lithuania).

In the last two decades, policy evaluation is gaining importance. Some countries' policy making styles have a long evaluation tradition, particularly in the field of education. Most countries discussed in this volume caught the second wave of evaluation that swept across the world around the turn of the millennium. The evidence-based policy making movement put evaluation at the heart of professional policy making, while the New Public Management paradigm promoted policy evaluation as an accountability tool. Also diffusion of evaluation practices by international organizations such as the OECD and the European Union served as a catalyst for change (Pattyn and Brans 2014). The evaluation movement has certainly also caught on in the activities of advisory bodies in education in this volume. Cnesco in France has the evaluation of education policy in its core mission; in fact the need for evaluating French education was originally its *raison d'être*. For the Moroccan council too, evaluation is one of its main assets. After all, the National Authority for Evaluation is the council's proper evaluation organ. Other councils such as the Flemish or Spanish one engage in regular evaluations in different ways. Some councils publish annual reports on the state of education in the country. The Portuguese 'State of Education' is

such a product. It contains crucial indicators for evaluating and developing education policy. The education councils produce of course many types of evaluation, some very formal and others less so. They also apply different perspectives on evaluation, particularly as to how much evaluations should rely on sound scientific evidence and how much they should be the result of participatory exercises, where scientific evaluation evidence is held against stakeholders knowledge, experience and judgements. Particularly Cnesco has a strong reputation in this regard.

As boundary organizations, it seems again, that education advisory bodies, are among the best placed actors to critically reflect on past policies, and draw lessons based on the best available evidence held against the practical experiences of professionals and appreciations of civil society actors. Evaluation then becomes a process of learning across the different communities of scientific expertise, professional experience, and target groups.

Last but not least, educational councils perform a role of agenda-setters. With antennae in the field and connections with science and practice, they are amongst the first to pick up on new problems and challenges. Several of the councils in this volume have in a timely manner launched projects on the accommodation of particular pupils, for instance those with an immigration background, or with special needs. Other issues are the avoidance of repetition, extension of pre-school education, avoidance of school drop-out. The Spanish annual 'Education Magazine' is a vehicle with which to pull policy makers' and stakeholders' attention to specific issues. (figure 4: see next page)

As agenda-setters, education councils thus direct the attention of policy makers and society to immediate policy challenges. The agenda-setting role of the education councils in this volume may also be more strategic. The councils often produce 'cold advice', which implies that they contribute a strategic, long-term direction to education policies by developing perspectives on how to deal early-on with emerging challenges such as interconnectivity and artificial intelligence. Such an agenda-setting role is not only embedded in the councils' relationships with stakeholders

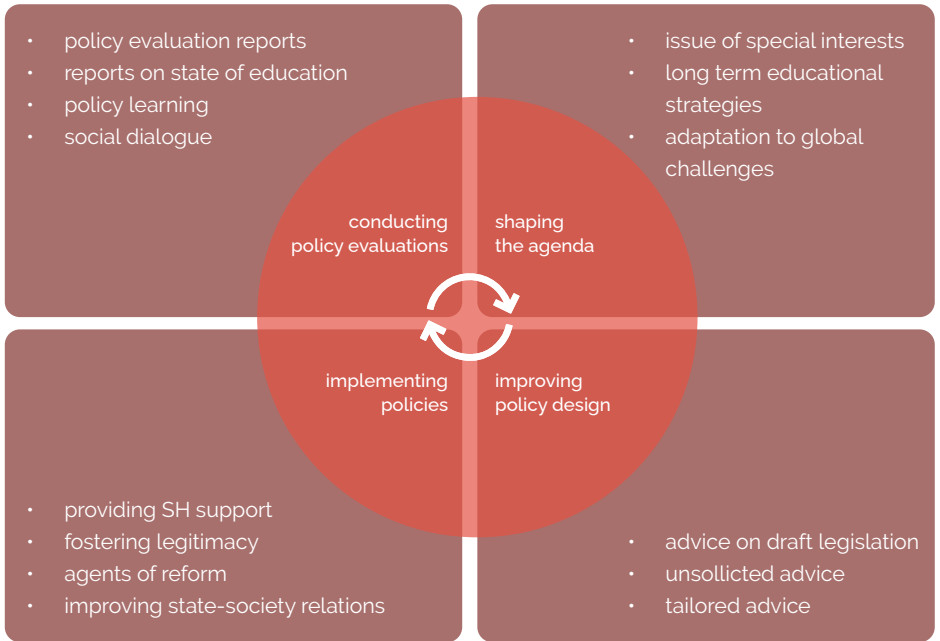


Figure 4 – Education councils in the policy process (adapted from OECD 2017)

and civil society actors, but it is also increasingly fed by a trend towards internationalization in the educational field.

The education councils in this celebratory issue seem to increasingly learn from their international peers. That is certainly the case within associations like EUNEC itself, but international learning also takes place through the establishment of partnerships and bilateral exchanges between councils, or by relying on international standards. This includes, for instance, OECD best-practice recommendations (Spain), or UNESCO programs and the EU open method of co-ordination (Flanders). Also *Cnesco* has ties with the education councils of Chile, Québec and England; and it seeks to extend its reach in African countries. Several of the contributors to this volume point to the importance of internationalization. International comparative research is another such international learning resource. It is mentioned in the Spanish

contribution, for instance, where the council has developed a ten-country study on the success of education. In sum, internationalization is clearly an agenda-setting resource for the councils on substance issues in education. It also offers platforms through which the councils can draw lessons from each other's advisory and participatory practices, as the Lithuanian contribution highlights. Lastly, internationalization stimulates learning processes on the conditions of how to best tailor advisory processes to specific conditions and challenges.

Education councils' performance and influence

Policy advice is not binding to policy makers, as Lassonde, Vigna & St-Louis from the Conseil Supérieur de l'Éducation, Québec note. Nonetheless, this celebratory volume includes a variety of key successes of the education councils in Europe, Québec and Morocco. In several cases, the education councils were able to truly gain access to the policy making process and create a direct influence on policies. Also from the above, it is clear that education councils can successfully perform roles throughout the policy cycle, providing inputs to policy agendas, developing policy proposals, fostering the conditions for implementation success, and policy learning.

When judged against the standards of direct instrumental uptake of advice by policy makers, however, many a council may overall remain somewhat disappointed. Public policy design still is the prerogative of government. The political minds and mood of policy makers may not be immediately ready to adapt policies to the councils' recommendations. At least, the education councils in this volume will have worked towards offering the best possible evidence for informed decisions. The Moroccan council, Cnesco, Vlor and several others underscore in their contributions the importance of this factor to the influence they will be able to generate. Providing high quality and highly relevant advice based on state-of-the-art scientific evidence helps the councils establish and maintain a high status, which in turn may foster the uptake of their advice by policy makers. Achieving a position as a 'deeply rooted and respected' (Portuguese CNE) council that is 'unavoidable' (Dutch education council) in the education

system is also based on the broad advisory and consultation processes that the councils rely on.

When judged against the standards of cognitive learning and long-term changes, the education councils provide at the minimum middle and long-term perspectives on how to develop quality education in their jurisdictions. The actual uptake of long-term perspectives in policy making is, however, notoriously difficult to measure. Moreover, measuring uptake should not be restricted to the impact on policy makers (Fobé et al. 2013). Education councils have managed to create awareness in the face of emerging societal challenges beyond policy makers alone. In the Lithuanian contribution to this volume, Maciukaite-Zviniene & Kairiene stress that creating awareness on challenges among society at large is critical to effectively respond to them. The influence and impact of education councils should therefore also be considered in view of the uptake of their activities and products by the many stakeholders in the educational field, such as education providers, teachers, pupils and parents, or civil society organizations. Roca of the Spanish *State School Council* refers in this context to the 'enrichment' of stakeholders and society.

When judged against the substantive value of democratic participation and deliberation, many a council has contributed to building state-society relationships through its membership and advisory processes. The empowerment of stakeholders is one of the key features of the education councils in this volume. They pay strong attention to dynamic and innovative consultation processes. The Cosán and BEACONS programs in Ireland are cases in point. Several councils also systematically evaluate the success of their contribution to social learning and inclusion. The Flemish council Vlor, for instance, monitors and reports annually on the short-term and long-term impact of its advice. In the field of education, these are also key intrinsic values.

Final reflections

Policy advisory systems strengthen the policy analytical capacity of governments, while at the same time ensuring public participation. The

dynamics of pluralization and externalization in the advisory system have increased the competition among different advisory actors. The education councils in this volume have nonetheless proven particularly resilient and flexible institutions for providing policy advice.

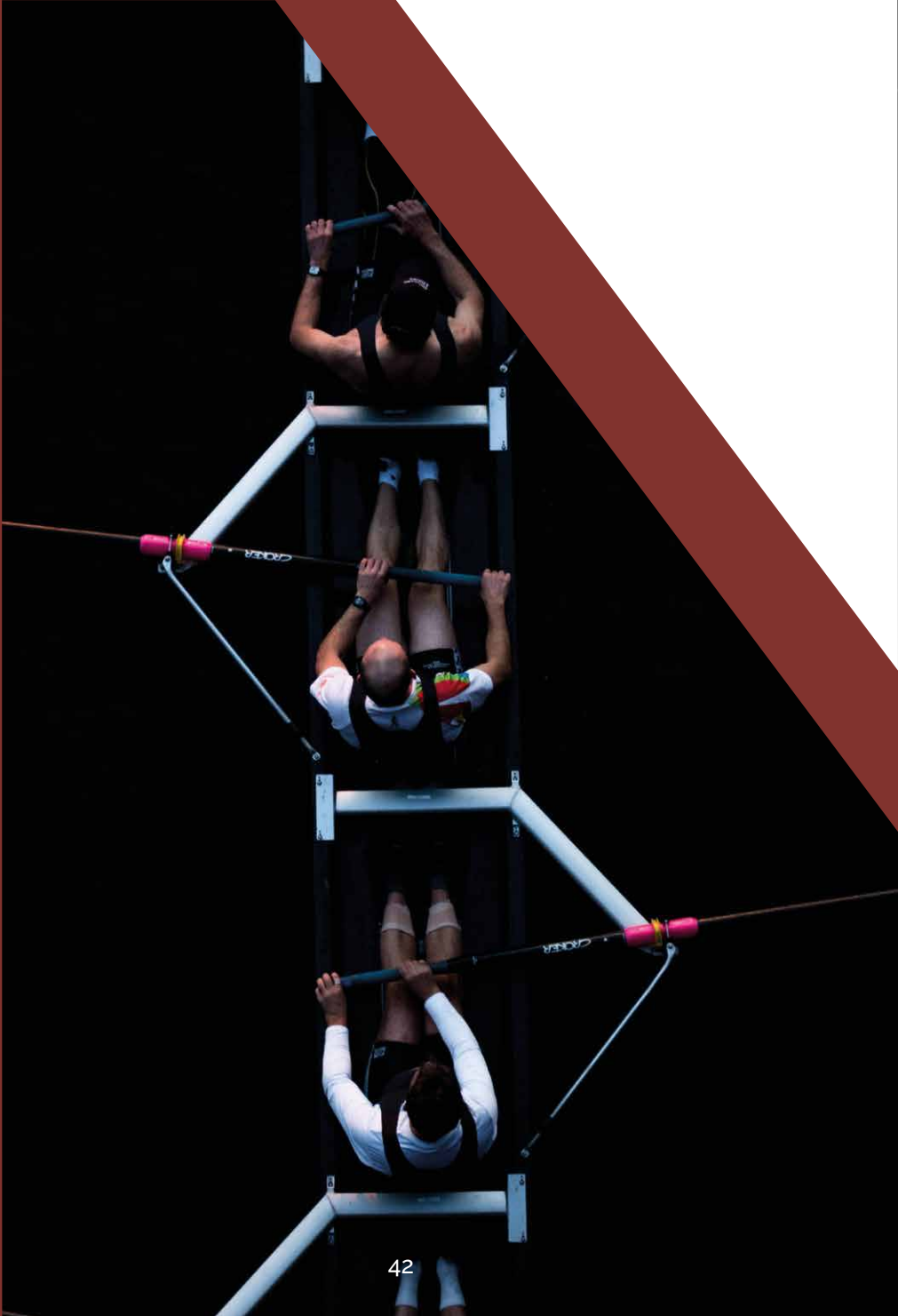
Firstly, the councils have developed a number of strategies to maximize their relevance in a competitive policy environment. This includes strengthening the evidence-base of their advice, making their consultation process more innovative or inclusive, moving from 'hot' instrumental advice towards 'cold' strategic advice, advising early-on in the decision-making process, and setting up and shaping the conversation on education in addition to advising. Secondly, the councils have managed to remain relevant in a competitive and changing policy advice environment by improving dissemination strategies. The diversity of the publication and convocation activities employed by the education councils in this volume is impressive. Councils have, for instance, organized consensus conferences, webinars and teachers' conversations. They have also set up social pacts, published annual education reports and educational magazines, and they have created training, learning and support programs for teachers or other stakeholders such as local authorities to implement policies. Moreover, digital advancements have created opportunities to advance the use of (new) forms of public consultation with citizens and stakeholders.

In sum, the impact of advisory bodies is not derived from insulation from their principals but by being accountable and responsive to these actors (Guston 2000). The education councils in this volume clearly realize the unique position they are in. They are very aware of the necessity to bridge the worlds of science, state, practice and society, and to tailor to the needs of different actors or principals. Transparency is the linchpin to all of these activities. It is embedded in the clarity of rules and the availability of advice to politics, parliament and society. As a result, the education councils have attained a key position in the advisory system in the field of education. Their success is determined by the principals on all sides of the boundary.

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Contributions by EUNEC members



Ministry of Education, Culture,
Sports and Youth, Cyprus

Reform of the Cyprus education system and the contributions of advisory bodies and stakeholders in the policy making process

Prodromos Prodromou

The Cyprus Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport and Youth's vision is the formation of literate citizens with skills, responsibility, democratic ethos, historical identity as well as respect for diversity. In order to achieve that, all the Departments and Services of the Ministry work towards this aim. At the same time, advisory bodies, such as Symvoulío Paideias (Education Council) and expert committees contribute to this effort.

Mr Prodromos Prodromou was appointed Minister of Education, Culture, Sport and Youth on 3 December 2019. He had previously served as Government Spokesman from March 2018 until December 2019, as well as a member of the House of Representatives in 1996-2006 and, again, in 2013-2016. He holds degrees in Economics, Sociology and Political Sciences from the University of Paris (Université de Paris-X-Nanterre). He also holds post-graduate diplomas in Economic Science (Université de Paris-X-Nanterre), Sociology (Université de Paris-X-Nanterre and Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales) and Political Science (Université de Paris-X-Nanterre).

By following a strategic plan that aims to provide equal learning opportunities for all pupils, through the implementation of an education policy that is governed by the values of equality, inclusion, creativity and innovation, education in Cyprus has been under reform for more than a decade. The emphasis of the reform has been in the areas of educational content (new curricula and timetables), teachers (teacher professional learning, school and teacher evaluation system, teacher appointment system). The following five strands are the priorities of the Cyprus Ministry of Education for the 2019-2021 period: student assessment system, school and teacher assessment system, prevention of violence and delinquency, educational needs of pupils with a migrant background and special needs/inclusive education. The policy making process in the educational system of Cyprus is implemented within a framework which envisages evidence-based decision making with enhanced participation and dialogue among various stakeholders (advisory bodies, expert committees, confederations of school parents, teacher unions, pupil official organizations) so as to gain and maintain the maximum possible consensus and support of the initiatives undertaken.

Introduction

Education is by all means important for every nation, since it is fundamental to its development and growth. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and Youth (MOECSY)'s mission is the continuous upgrade of education in order to ensure the provision of learning opportunities to all learners, through the implementation of an educational policy which embodies the values of equality, inclusivity, creativeness and innovation, aiming at a lifelong, balanced and wholesome development, while, in parallel, strengthening culture and supporting cultural creativity.

Having this in mind the MOECSY's vision is the formation of literate citizens with skills, responsibility, democratic ethos, historical identity as well as respect for diversity. Citizens with a wholesome personality, capable to creatively contribute to the development of society and to cope with the challenges of the future, as well as to the improvement of citizens' quality of life through education and culture

MOECSY STRATEGIC PLAN, 2017

We recognize that no organization has a more crucial role to play in the significant changes coming, than school, which has the potential to impact how a society evolves over time. How we educate our children forms the future, because they will be the ones who will create that future (Fullan, 2010). Our main goal is to ensure that all students, not just the most privileged, acquire the knowledge and skills they need to drive their employability, productivity and well-being in the years to come (World Bank, 2011).

In order to implement its vision, the MOECSY has proceeded during the last years in a big educational reform, in a number of areas, setting certain priorities. The new needs and demands of the society, the poor results on international surveys, the priorities set by the European Commission,

the economic demands of the national market and the trends in scientific knowledge led the Ministry to set priorities and to proceed to educational reforms. Some of these reforms have already been completed whereas others are in the process of completion. The formulation of the different policies has been conducted through a methodology that involved the MOECSY's stakeholders in an active way.

Real change is only possible by taking a truly systemic approach, which refers to 'clear strategy, broad engagement and a consistent message' (Fullan, 2010). We are consistent at policy level to raise quality standards both for education provision and students' results, using evidence-based policies and accountability mechanisms, despite voices arguing against it (Apple, 2011, 2016; Ball, 2013). To succeed, we use a synergetic approach involving all of us – the Ministry (all the Departments of School Education and the Pedagogical Institute), the House of Representatives, teachers, teachers' unions, parents' associations, students, academics, researchers – working together across all levels of the educational system. The view that education is a site of conflict (Apple, 2016) is an international admission; there is conflict or disagreement most of the time because of different ideological positions or different priorities. There is only one way to overcome this situation, and this is by dialogue and compromising. Our clear message reflects the way we as politicians and government agents act in terms of producing new legislation with a clear strategy to create change which is co-founded, therefore understandable and acceptable. There is no other way, but to work together in a common scope nurturing a culture that welcomes everyone's ideas and suggestions, focusing on the best interest of our students and our society.

In this paper the role of the advisory bodies and stakeholders will be highlighted, then an outline of the educational reforms that have taken place will be presented and finally the policies that are now in high priority will be discussed.

Advisory bodies and stakeholders' role in the Cyprus educational system

In general, advisory bodies tend to have multiple labels, flexible structures and different foci since the angle of observation and interest is different in each situation. In the Cyprus educational system (CES) Symvoulío Paideias (Education Council) and expert committees are the main bodies involved with advisory responsibilities. Advisory council members and experts – national or European/international – provide guidance, knowledge, skills and feedback to the Ministry, typically as it pertains to a specific area of expertise. Stautberg and Green (2007) argue that they expect from consultative bodies in education nothing less than innovative advice and dynamic perspectives. In line with that, we need the same and we get the same. Symvoulío Paideias and expert committees support and enhance the mission of the Ministry and are a critical link in driving education forward.

Symvoulío Paideias (Education Council) consists of governmental officials from all sectors of the CES, primary, secondary and higher education and also from the Pedagogical Institute. The broad synthesis and representativeness of the Council serve the coordination of the sectors in subjects of common interest or important policy issues which need to be analysed from every member's point of view in a holistic way, as to avoid conflicts and misunderstandings. The Council members act as advisors and auditors to the Ministry, so as to support effective decision-making, strategic focus, guide quality improvement and assess policy effectiveness. Whenever needed Symvoulío Paideias is offering its services to the Ministry so as to deal with innovation and change successfully.

Expert Committees are comprized of accomplished experts (academics in most cases) and officials of the Ministry, offering innovative advice.

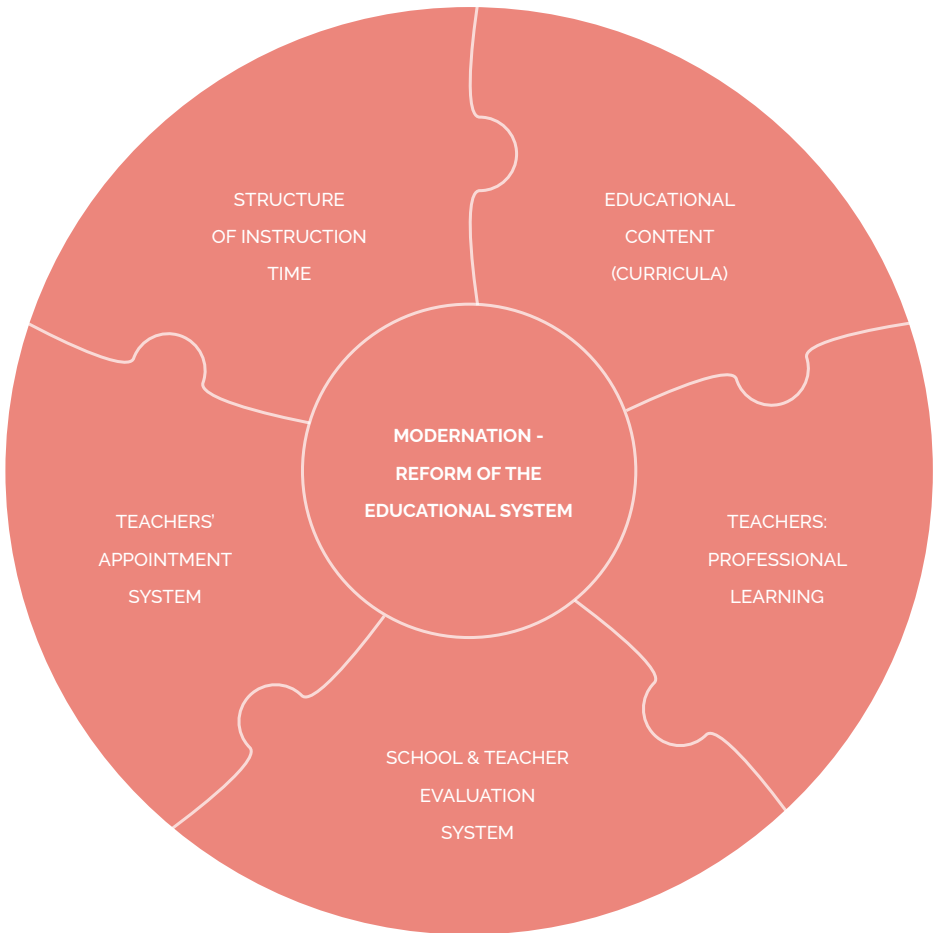
Before any policy planning the Ministry sets up a committee of experts to address in a given timeframe the educational topic under examination. Therefore, there are numerous committees which deal with educational issues, so as to provide expertise, guidance, knowledge, understanding, strategic thinking and offering suggestions for policy making. Despite the fact that it is not compulsory for the Ministry to adopt their suggestions and recommendations, in most cases the Ministry uses the recommendations to facilitate the dialogue with stakeholders.

Stakeholders in education such as parent associations, teacher unions and pupils' organizations have a significant role to play as well, because it is widely known that pressure in education is exerted by all parties concerned. Each organization is autonomous following a different agenda, which serves the best interests of their members. In each organization the board members are elected for a certain period. Associations of school parents act as the communication channel between parents and pupils and the Ministry, having in their focus the best interest of their children. Teacher unions are involved in a continuous effort to represent their members all in all topics under consideration, educational issues but labour matters as well. The primary task of pupils' official organizations is to represent the views, opinions and concerns of the pupils' body, offering positive criticism demanding changes, improvements and being supportive to implement policies, whereas in other occasions they have a negative stance in implementing change.

It is important to highlight that when the Ministry is formulating a policy and this policy gets the approval of the Ministers' Cabinet or even from a legislation bill, it is compulsory to start a dialogue with the stakeholders and have the stakeholders' views on the topic.

Reform strategies

During the last decade the Cyprus Educational System is under reform, which concerns a broad framework of areas of the education system, defining that the system is changing radically. Some of them are completed, whereas others are still into the reforming process. The main areas where the reform of the educational system focused, are presented in the figure below.



More specifically, the strategies for reform developed were the following:

- developing new, revised curricula for all public schools from pre-primary to upper secondary education, including performance indicators and attainment targets;
- reforming existing school timetables at each level (primary, secondary education), based on the local realities and needs and by considering international indicators (OECD). Moreover, in upper secondary general education (lyceum) there was a new provision of orientation subject electives, based on current scientific developments and modern sectors of the economy and society;
- introducing a new system for the appointment of teachers, through a new legislation, where there is adoption of a completely transparent procedure – ranking candidates based on predetermined, meritocratic and measurable criteria;
- developing and implementing a new policy for teacher professional learning with the emphasis being on school based in-service training, based on the needs of each school. This new policy provides opportunities for professional learning to all teachers in a systematic way, focuses on the needs assessment either of the school or the individual teacher and gives special emphasis on reflection;
- establishing the Quality Assurance Agency and Certification for Higher Education;
- constructing mechanisms for validating non-formal and informal learning;
- upgrading vocational education and training in Cyprus in order to satisfy the new needs that have occurred and strengthen the national economy and reduce the unemployment rates;
- expanding tertiary education which has been accompanied by a series of specific measures that enhance the rights of students to equal access to this sector.

Major reform policies under priority for the years 2019-2021 involve: students' assessment system, school and teachers' assessment system, prevention of violence and delinquency, educational needs of pupils with a migrant background, and special needs/inclusive education.

Pupils' assessment system

The Ministry has developed a new policy on pupils' assessment for both primary and secondary education. The proposal was developed through experts' committees where academics, Ministry's officials and teachers' unions representatives participated. The final text was formed after further consultation with the stakeholders' bodies. Through this new policy special emphasis is given on formative assessment and the use of alternative methods for assessment (e.g. projects, portfolio etc.) as well as the introduction of national term exams, for the first time, for pupils of the first class of the lyceum.

Teachers' evaluation system

The Ministry has developed a new proposal for teachers' evaluation. The proposal was developed through experts' committees where academics, Ministry officials and teachers' unions representatives participated. The new proposal (January 2019) consisted of the following: formative assessment of teachers and school evaluation; support for novice teachers, contract staff and substitutes by a mentor to get proper induction training how to teach best; evaluation of evaluators, which is introduced for the first time in the CES; and continuous support for teachers. The proposal also sets out a new horizontal career step for teachers, the place of Senior Teacher, so as to better profit from experienced teachers in the system offering them promotion without leaving the classroom. School heads will play a more substantial role in teachers' evaluation. Lastly, the proposal provides for meta-evaluation, as a means to continuously improve the evaluation criteria and procedures. The new framework provides many valuable measures which include: multiple evaluators (there would be an increase of their numbers), support for professional development, the link to student and school assessment, and the evaluation of school heads and inspectors. We will invest in further training the evaluators, school heads and teachers to be able to effectively observe and provide feedback. The Ministry has initiated a dialogue with the stakeholders.

Prevention of violence and delinquency

The MOECSY has designed and developed the National Strategy for Preventing and addressing School Violence, which has a four years' timeframe of implementation. Very recently the Ministry has decided to restructure its services in order to enhance the level of support given to schools to prevent and to address school violence.

According to its role and responsibilities, and based on the before-mentioned strategy, the Cyprus Observatory on School Violence (COSV) of the Pedagogical Institute, has developed and implemented actions that aim to prevent and address bullying and violence in schools. COSV provides support to school units for the implementation of actions and programs aimed at improving the school climate, with the ultimate aim of reducing violence in schools. These programs are the 'Conflict Resolution - School Mediation' and the 'Recognition and Management of School Bullying'. The COSV supports schools in the implementation of anti-bullying programmes, which deal with recognizing, preventing and combating bullying. With the 'Conflict Resolution - School Mediation' schools are encouraged to find effective ways of resolving student conflicts as well as alternative ways of managing conflict situations at school. Special, immediate support is also given to schools to face serious incidents of violence through the Special Task Force of the Ministry.

The program 'Actions for social and school inclusion' (DRA.S.E), which replaced the ZEP schools (Zones of Educational Priority) is an all-encompassing, holistic program of morning and afternoon activities and lessons, as well as after school supplementary lessons to reinforce subjects of study (Greek language, maths, physics, chemistry, computer science, economics etc.). DRA.S.E. also offers programmes for personal development and helps students to develop social skills through creative programmes like theatre, art, physical education (sports/dance), music. Moreover, the program also encompasses 'Information and Social-emotional Support Centers', offering psychological support to students and parents.

Educational needs of pupils with a migrant background

In the last couple of years, the turbulent situation in the Middle East and in African countries has led to an influx of refugees in Cyprus. An interdepartmental committee of the Ministry of Education for the integration of children with a migrant background into the CES is the body responsible for developing and implementing the policy for migrant children. The committee submitted a policy paper and an action plan in 2016, including the areas of reception of newcomers, teaching Greek as a second language, mapping out migrant population, teacher professional learning and intercultural and antiracist dimensions in education. Extra hours for teaching Greek as a second/additional language are given to the school level for each student for two years. Besides that, the Ministry implements different projects co-funded by the European Commission, such as a project for Greek language afterschool classes for third country minors which is being funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund. Under the same scheme, new material and teacher guides for reception, teaching Greek as a second language and school – parent relations have been produced and promoted by the Pedagogical Institute for all schools. In the case of secondary education, a diagnostic test is used to identify language needs. There is monitoring through tests on the pupils' progress in learning Greek as a second language. Transition classes with 18 hours pull-out classes focusing on language learning are implemented in schools in Cyprus which have large concentrations of students with a migrant background. In 2019, a Peer Counselling was organized by the European Commission and the Ministry. The two-day consultative work supported the National Committee's discussions regarding the welcoming phase and the integration of children with a migrant background in the CES and in shaping the Action plan for the period 2019–2022. A positive fact, as identified in the TALIS outcomes, reflecting the efforts of the Ministry to empower teachers in issues of intercultural education, is that the proportion of teachers (48.5%) who feel well or very well prepared to teach in multicultural and/or multilingual settings is the highest in the EU (EU average 23.8%).

Special needs/inclusive education

The area of special needs education is among the Ministry's high priorities. Through the support of the European Commission, the reform of special needs education has advanced. New draft legislation has been consulted on with stakeholders with the aim of completing both the law and the new regulations by the end of 2020. The bill provides for transforming special needs schools into resource centres, which will both empower mainstream schools and provide education and support to children with multiple and severe support needs. Teaching special needs pupils ranks highest among training needs for Cypriot teachers (27%) (OECD, 2019).

Epilogue

Our mission and efforts are directed to the continuous improvement of the provided education to ensure equal learning opportunities for all learners, through the implementation of an education policy that is governed by the values of equality, inclusiveness, creativity and innovation, aiming at lifelong balanced and inclusive development. We envision to improve the quality of citizens' life through education, to develop a literate nation with advanced skills, responsibility, democratic ethos, who will embrace their historical identity but also respect diversity. Citizens with an integrated personality, capable of contributing creatively to the development of our society and meeting the challenges of the future.

In this era of change, all stakeholders share in common the fact that their role and mission have pupils' welfare and quality education in the centre. The Ministry of Education has the same goal, which is governed by the principles of accountability and transparency and follows an evidence-based decision-making process. The Ministry is accountable to stakeholders for the relevancy, quality and effectiveness of academic programs and curriculum, proposed changes and innovations, for the welfare of all students, for providing books and other learning materials, for teachers' professional development so as to deliver better lessons, be effective and drive their students to successful learning, for school buildings etc.

We need to better understand each other, listen carefully what every party has to propose, and provide opportunities to everyone to participate. The interactions should be synergetic, governed by the values of respect and shared responsibility. If we introduce dialogue, cooperation and co-development of legislation involving all stakeholders, then we might succeed in changing our system for the better, leaving aside any difficulties and limitations. We need everyone to contribute, so as to feel that it is their decision, their strategy, their change. Bearing in mind that current reforms, like every other reform, have limits, we have to be alerted that a continuous effort is required to succeed.

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Flemish Education Council

Participation from civil society for high-quality education

Mia Douterlungne

Roos Herpelinck

The Vlor is the strategic advisory council for the education and training policy field for the Flemish (Dutch-speaking) community.

Mia Douterlungne is Secretary General of the Vlor.

Roos Herpelinck is Director at the Vlor, responsible for international education and training policy.

This contribution expresses a belief in the democratic value of participation of civil society in preparing education policy. It demonstrates the added value of the Vlor as a strategic advisory council embedded formally and by decree. The Vlor remains convinced of the absolute added value of the representation model (in comparison with a sheer expert model), which structurally gives organized civil society a say in the advisory process. Based on experiences and evaluation of its own functioning, the Vlor identifies several arguments that are in favour of this model.



Introduction

This contribution is based on an ongoing reflection process among members and staff members of the Flemish Education Council (Vlor) on how the advisory council functions, but it primarily expresses a belief in the democratic value of participation of civil society in preparing education policy. The international network of education councils has always been an inspirational factor and has helped us build the advisory council into what it has become today.

The Flemish Education Council: a short description

The Vlor dates back to 1991, when several (level-related) education councils were united into a single structure. Belgium already had a long history of policy participation in education, aimed at pacifying the ideological differences of opinion after the school funding controversy in 1959. The foundation of the Vlor was rendered possible and was given a strong boost by the new state reform of 1988 under which the education authority was almost completely transferred to the three language communities in Belgium: the French-speaking, Dutch-speaking and German-speaking communities.

The Vlor is the strategic advisory council for the education and training policy field for the Flemish (Dutch-speaking) community. As an advisory and consultative body, it plays a major part in preparing education policy, but it is independent of the competent Minister and the Education Administration.

The Vlor may advise or organize consultations on all education matters within the competence of the Flemish community: education in its narrow sense as well as other sectors in the education and training policy field, such as the centers for student guidance and part-time training. Additionally, initiatives from other policy fields that have a clear impact on education are assessed by the council on its own initiative or on request.

Policy making is – mostly - based on a cyclic process (Plan, Do, Check, Act). The Minister of Education and Training prepares a policy proposal (white paper, concept note, decree) in collaboration with his staff and advisors

and the education administration. During or at the end of this conceptual phase, he gathers advice amongst others of the Flemish Education Council, and based on this broader information he can adjust some measures. The Flemish Parliament (decree) and the Flemish Government (implementation decree) finally approve the policy measure, after which it is implemented in education. The education administration and other education support services may support schools during the implementation phase. Next, in a model of good policy practice, the impact of the policy conducted is reviewed with the help of input from the inspectorate, the reactions from schools, education networks and other organisations. An advice of the Vlor might be relevant, also in this evaluation process. In its advice, the Vlor may include evaluative considerations concerning current change processes. This may result in adjustments to the policy and the preparation of new policy measures.

The Vlor offers advice on request of the decision makers (Minister, public administration, Parliament) or on its own initiative. In the latter case, or when the Vlor reviews policy letters and policy documents, it takes on its task at an early stage in the policy preparation. In other cases, the Vlor is consulted at the end of the policy preparation process.

Besides, the Vlor can be asked to execute renewal projects, in which case it is also involved in the policy implementation.

The identity of the Vlor

The Vlor has both an advisory and a deliberative function. These functions have been laid down in the decree on participation at school and the Flemish Education Council (2 April 2004) and in the governance decree of 7 December 2018.

The Vlor operates based on formal and structured advisory procedures. These guarantee that stakeholders and experts are consulted in a transparent, independent and efficient way. As views on the Flemish policy are formulated collectively, the common positions endorsed within the advisory council prevail over individual interests. This is reflected

in motivated and substantiated advice that has a public character and therefore a specific place in the public and political debates.

A specific function of the Vlor is its deliberative function that is embedded by decree (Article 74 of the decree on participation at school and the Flemish Education Council). These deliberations may serve various objectives and have different output. In the complex education landscape, the deliberations make it easier to create active support, to promote cooperation between groups of actors and to encourage the implementation of renewal projects and this with respect for the freedom of education and with respect for the decision-making processes of every actor in the system.

'The Flemish Education Council brings together all important players in education policy. Education providers, trade unions and civil society deliberate together and render advice about all relevant education policy. Contributing to this puts OVSG (Education organized by municipalities) on the map of the educational landscape.'

PATRIEK DELBAERE, GENERAL DIRECTOR OVSG

The added value of the Vlor as a strategic advisory council embedded formally and by decree

The instrument of strategic advisory councils in their present form is described in research (SBOV, 2014) as follows: 'Strategic advisory bodies are used as a major instrument for the institutionalization of the consultation of stakeholders. They ensure a structural and structured commitment of primarily representative civil-society organizations in various phases of the policy cycle, supported by legal safeguards with respect to independence, composition, support, rights, authorities, etc. The system of advisory councils provides clear rules, a high level of continuity, expertise accrual, an intensive dialogue between various organizations and guaranteed transparency towards politics, parliament and citizens.'

A further explanation is provided below.

Contribution to the democratic nature of the policy

To begin with, a formal advisory procedure contributes to the democratic nature of the policy making process. The current decree ensures that the advisory procedure is transparent and safeguards the public status of advice. These principles of transparency and the public nature contribute to stronger confidence in the government.

Guarantee of participation

In addition, the current system offers the solid guarantee of participation. The consultation of the advisory councils is structurally embedded in the policy cycle and the regulatory process. In combination with the public nature of advice, this prevents too extensive a degree of permissiveness. Without formally stipulated participation, there is no guarantee that advice is requested or brought about.

Continuity in the policy process

The current advisory system may also encourage continuity in the policy process. Advisory councils have the possibility of rendering advice on their own initiative. Proactively and for the medium or long term, they may point out the possibilities and risks of the policy for the respective policy field.

Consultation at all crucial moments in the decree-based process

As the Government is obliged to consult the Vlor about drafts of decrees and strategic regulations, all represented stakeholders can express their point of view on new proposals at least just before the final approval by the Flemish Government or Parliament.

However, as an advisory council, the Vlor considers it important to be able to provide input or feedback at various strategic moments. Both the structure and the composition as well as the reference framework it uses make the Vlor an efficient forum to do so.

The Vlor can play a part in a very early phase, when developing the concept for a new policy, when policy-makers ask field workers for input or

want to test their own initial ideas among the stakeholders. When a more coherent framework is developed in a subsequent phase (in the form of a consultation paper, a white paper or a green paper, for instance), the Vlor can provide a forum to assess, via the stakeholders, whether proposals are desirable, feasible and acceptable.

At any rate, the Vlor wants to render advice at the moment when the policy is converted into a (draft) regulation. After all, a draft regulation may deviate essentially from the options proposed at an earlier stage. Also for the members of the Flemish Parliament who discuss these draft decrees, it is important that a formal Vlor advice is part of the policy making file.

'The Vlor guarantees continuity in participation, we have to deal with that with care'

ANN VERRETH, PRESIDENT OF THE VLOR SINCE 2018

Gathering knowledge systematically

The organization of the current advisory system also allows for knowledge to be gathered, accumulated systematically, made accessible and shared among the participants by the formal advisory bodies. This offers better guarantees for strong (evidence informed) advisory work.

Mandatory feedback from the Government

Compliance with and feedback on advice by the Government are also stipulated in the current framework. The requester of advice is formally obliged to give feedback on the advice received and to motivate at least why advice or elements of advice are not followed. This principle may increase the commitment and motivation of those participating in the advisory process.

The importance of the independence of the Vlor as a strategic advisory council

The independence of the Vlor has been laid down in the current advisory

system by decree. According to the Vlor, this independence is an absolute condition for the strategic advisory councils to function properly. The council emphasizes the importance of the independence of the secretariat and the autonomy of the policy field.

The independence of the Vlor secretariat

The current decree stipulates that the Vlor can organize its own internal functioning. When it comes to the details and administrative aspects, the council is supported by a secretariat that conducts an autonomous financial, operational and personnel policy and is only accountable to its members.

This independence and control by the stakeholders involved has the major benefit that the advisory council has every opportunity to gain expertise and embed it, with respect to both education itself and to supporting and facilitating the advisory process (as a major success factor for the quality of advice). High-quality advisory procedures can only be set up based on this independence, if the secretariat and the council members have access to all relevant information required for executing the advisory task.

The added value of the Vlor as a representation model

The Vlor consists of representatives from the educational field and broader civil society. 300 members have a mandate from their organization: school network organizations representing the education providers, teacher unions representing the teachers, pupil and student organizations, parents' associations, socio-economic organizations and socio-cultural organizations. Independent experts as such are not members of the councils. The Vlor is convinced of the added value of its present composition, certainly given the societal and historical context of the Flemish participation model. Based on experiences and evaluation of its own functioning, the Vlor identifies several arguments that are in favour of this model.

Ever since Belgium was established, the freedom of education has been codified in the Belgian Constitution. It means that everyone may found a

school but also that the freedom of choice between public schools and confessional education must be safeguarded. This context of (active) freedom of education allows for diversity in available education. The legitimacy and impact of the advisory system partly depends on the extent to which it gives account of this diversity.

By involving the stakeholders working as field workers in the organization of education or being educated themselves, the Government also puts the expertise, knowledge and information they have at their disposal to good use. In this way, the Government can identify the bottlenecks and obstacles in advance and establish possible alternative solutions to achieve the same policy objective. All this information can contribute to the quality of regulations.

This way, we turn our schools into meaningful learning and living environments where people really meet each other on the basis of equality, reciprocity and respect, and thus contribute to a more just society. That is our societal task, which is more relevant today than ever. I also show this ambition in my work in the Vlor, where I take the values of the pedagogical project of the GO! forward in the cooperation with colleagues from the broad educational field. Together we strive for quality education for all pupils, to maximize opportunities by giving each young person the opportunity to develop his or her own talents.

RAYMONDA VERDYCK, MANAGING DIRECTOR OF THE GO! EDUCATION OF THE FLEMISH COMMUNITY

Due to this composition model, the councils of the Vlor have a wide diversity of hands-on expertise. Participants from various levels, sectors and interests from education and beyond consult each other in a structural way.

Participants are not active in the Vlor as individuals but they represent an organization with structured decision making processes. So, they function

as a serving hatch between the education field and the Government. They translate signals from their field into relevant policy advice. This principle works in two ways: representatives are legitimized by the group they represent and must justify themselves, but conversely these representatives can feed their group with views gained in a collective Vlor advice.

By involving various stakeholders in the advisory process, especially when the process leads to unanimous advice, an initial step is made in creating consensus and wide social support. In a sector such as the education sector, where some of the organizations represented in the Vlor will need to focus more on implementing this policy, working on this support is essential. Without this support, acceptance will be a harder and slower process, leading to greater risks of a policy implementation falling short. The consultation process allows policy makers to assess in advance where bottlenecks may occur and to adjust proposals.

Thanks to the Vlor, I have the opportunity to question critically policy developments in education, and to participate in the advisory work. The striving for consensus in a multitude of perspectives is very enriching and important.

ISABEL ROTS, STUDY DEPARTMENT COV, CHRISTIAN TEACHERS' UNION

The representation model helps to find a balance between the various groups of stakeholders where policy influencing is concerned.

The organizations participating in negotiations in one of the subsequent phases of the policy process will feel more strongly committed to what has been gained in the collective advice (and which is also shared by other stakeholders). Civil society organizations consult their basis (schools, staff, pupils, parents, socio-cultural organizations, minority associations, employee and employer organizations, etc.) with respect to policy preparation and for passing on signals of what is going wrong in the field.

'Independent experts' are formally not members of the councils. However, that does not exclude scientific expertise from playing a part in the advisory process. On the condition that the policy has sufficient leeway (in terms of time and resources, for instance), the council can include this input in drafting an advisory procedure: via seminars, hearings, participation of experts in preparatory working groups, via the preparatory work by the staff (literature research).

The system of advisory councils in Flanders has lately come under pressure. Organizations based on representativeness are questioned increasingly, with a shift towards other forms of participation as a result. The Vlor has the intention to move along in the new public governance by making optimum use of the uniqueness/strength of representative organizations and simultaneously seek the connection with other forms of participation in advisory processes. In the first place, the representatives from civil society are mandated by the group they represent and use the signals from the field in their views. Within the contours of this representation model, the Vlor also wants to decide to organize a form of direct consultation of stakeholders when designing an advisory procedure. Here, too, the Vlor has established a tradition in recent years by organizing focus groups, surveys, round-table sessions, etc. The results of such processes will be reinforced if they can be incorporated in an advisory process and become part of formal advice to the Government based on a wide consensus.

A major touchstone: impact and continued effect of the advisory council

The Vlor also tries to gain more insight into the continued effect and/or impact of advice and other results of its work. To this end, preparatory work has been done from a conceptual and procedural perspective. Every year, the results of this continued effect are included in the annual report. Continued effect is understood to mean all effects that occur as a result of the functioning of an advisory council. This is not only about advice but also about information and knowledge obtained from consultations, workshop days, explorations, reports, etc.

Gaining this insight is closely linked to the various views on policies and policy processes and on the way in which these are designed. In public administration, there are rational approaches with a logical order of structured processes on the one hand, and political approaches in which policy is brought about as a negotiation process between various social groups and based on negotiation processes on the other hand.

There are several layers of influencing: conceptual influence, influence on the agenda setting, political-strategic use.

A continued effect can also involve various target groups: the Minister and his staff and advisors, administration, members of Parliament, as well as an opinion-forming role towards civil society itself (broadening one's horizon, redefining an issue).

A continued effect may occur at various moments in a policy cycle: direct policy adjustment, or many years later on the school policy after regulations have been adjusted. The term curve plays a role with respect to the nature (instrumental/conceptual), size and impact of advisory work.

Continued effect and ownership: it is difficult to discern a one-to-one relationship between the work of the advisory council and the eventual policy decision. Policy is mostly the result of a multi-perspective approach involving various Government and administration levels and various actors (from local to European, lobby groups, political parties, etc.).

The Vlor, where all education stakeholders and opinions come together, is an example of democracy in action. The recommendations are the result of negotiations, of a conscious search for the common ground.

KRIS VERSLUYS, FORMER EDUCATION DIRECTOR AT GHENT UNIVERSITY

The Vlor also operates internationally

The Vlor sets great store by improving its vision with what is happening abroad. It is clear that international organizations like the OECD, UNESCO and the various UN committees expect education to make a major contribution when addressing societal challenges. Since 2000, the European Union has developed an education policy that is based on voluntary cooperation between member states (open coordination method). In its advisory work, the Vlor therefore devotes a great deal of attention to the international dimension of the dossiers. The council closely follows the latest international education topics and formulates advice concerning the major international dossiers on its own initiative. This advice is primarily intended for the Flemish decision-makers who defend the Flemish point of view at international forums.

The cooperation with other education councils in the context of EUNEC also broadens the horizon of the education council. With respect to setting relevant themes as well as to working methods and approach, it is very rewarding to achieve cross-border exchange and further professionalisation.

Today, nobody will deny that the Vlor, in changing circumstances and taking into account evolving policies, can look back to 25 years of good work as a strategic advisory council for the Flemish education policy. At the same time, the Vlor is a successful consultation platform for representatives of the member organizations. A platform where structural, ideological, pedagogical and societal differences can be bridged. The fact that the Vlor closely follows international developments, through intense international cooperation, deserves respect.

LOUIS VAN BENEDEN, FORMER PRESIDENT OF VLOR, FORMER PRESIDENT OF EUNEC

The Vlor: a strategic advisory council with several roles

Roles can be perceived differently. Advisory councils can be regarded as knowledge brokers, inspirators, agenda setters or policy analysts. In such perspectives, the council's role is associated with the nature of the continued effect of advice, and the emphasis is placed on the advisory council being instrumental with respect to the policy. Advisory councils, however, can also assume other roles, such as promoting mutual learning among stakeholders, stimulating adjustment and cooperation or providing a forum for consultation and negotiation purposes.

The Vlor must be instrumental towards both the Government and its members. Objectives may thus vary. Officials, for example, use participation to seek new insights, knowledge and perspectives or new policy input. Politicians specifically look for support for policies and social parties look for influence. Strategic advisory councils are organizations that establish connections between various worlds: government, civil society and science. And insofar as advisory councils manage to cater for all tastes, they succeed in performing their task.

It is a privilege to look, together with so many partners, each with their own expertise, to what is binding us: opportunities to grow for every learner

HILDE TIMMERMANS, STUDY DEPARTMENT GEZINSBOND – FAMILY UNION

Good advisory councils do more than merely render advice. 'They should be able to achieve the balance between critical distance from the Government and commitment to the Government, between being an instrumental provider of knowledge and being a critical thorn in the flesh, between giving answers and asking questions, between advisory tasks and other tasks.' (Van Damme, J. & al. (2011). *Burger, Bestuur en Beleid* 7(2):105-119)



CNESCO, France

Cnesco: From scientific and participatory diagnosis to education policy support

Nathalie Mons

Jean-François Chesné

Alice Gatinot

The French Center for Education Studies (Cnesco) is a national center for education public policy evaluation, analysis and support. It aims to improve the knowledge of French and foreign school systems and their levers in order to create dynamics of change through an original scientific and participatory method. Its recent integration into an institution of higher education called the National Conservatory of Arts and Crafts (Cnam) is an opportunity to develop training and public policy support activities both in France and internationally.

Nathalie Mons is a professor of sociology specialized in education public policies. She is the founder and Managing Director of Cnesco. She devotes her research to education policy analysis from an international comparative perspective. In 2012, she co-supervised a consultation on education run by the French Ministry of Education, which aimed to inform the law on the reorganization of the school system, and led to the creation of Cnesco in 2014. Nathalie is a Paris Institute for Political Studies graduate (Sciences Po Paris). She started her career by working in the private sector for fifteen years, where she held several positions in France and abroad (United States, Sri Lanka, etc.) in the fields of communication, new technologies, and of course education. In addition to her research activities, she leads a university consortium (Mados), which offers a bespoke blended course to senior education leaders (education inspectors, principals, etc.).

Jean-François Chesné has been the Executive Manager of Cnesco since 2015. He began his career as a mathematics teacher in secondary school, before turning to teacher training. He has a PhD in mathematics education and his research focuses on teaching practices and student skills in mathematics. Before joining Cnesco, he worked for the French Ministry of Education, where he was the head of the office for the assessment of experiments in education. He was also the national project manager of the International Teaching and Learning Survey in 2013 (TALIS 2013).

Alice Gatinot has been working as a project manager at Cnesco since 2019. She is also studying for a master's degree in public policy at the Paris Institute for Political Studies (Sciences Po Paris) and an online bachelor's degree in education sciences.

Cnesco was initially created with a six-year term by the French law on the reorganization of the school system adopted on 8th July 2013 with the aim of performing an independent evaluation of the education system by bringing together the world of research, communities of practice and policy makers related to specific public policies for education. For this purpose, Cnesco has implemented an original scientific and participatory method that aims to overcome simplistic top down solutions and create interactions between the different stakeholders (students, parents, professionals from the educational field and other Ministries related to the academic area, local authorities...). Since the 1st of September 2019, Cnesco has integrated an institution of higher education (Cnam) and become the French Centre for Education Studies, which marks an evolution of its missions, namely both continuation of its previous activities and carrying new activities of training and international development.

Cnesco's creation is part of the rise of the evaluation of education public policies and more generally of the growing adhesion by policy makers to the evidence-based policy paradigm. By drawing on the reflections of research in sociology and political science on public policy evaluation models,

Cnesco has developed as a bridge between the world of research, communities of practice and policymakers.

It aims to overcome simplistic top down solutions and foster interactions between various stakeholders (pupils, parents, professionals from the educational field and other ministries related to the academic area, local authorities...). Thus in a first part, we will present the institutional and scientific context of education policy making that includes Cnesco's creation. The increasing importance of evaluation on public policy making is a matter of heated scientific and political debates that have informed Cnesco's method. Cnesco has been a real experimental laboratory for six years with the aim to make the link between research findings, practice changes and public decision-making. In that respect, it has implemented an original scientific and participatory method that we will introduce in the second part. Finally, we will present a short overview of the main results, limits and perspectives of Cnesco for the coming years.

Institutional and scientific context of education policy development in France and Cnesco's creation

Cnesco was created against the backdrop of the growing importance of evaluation on public policy making, which is the subject of fierce scientific debate and controversy. However, the fine analysis of these criticisms has allowed the Cnesco to develop an original system of interactions between research and education stakeholders.

The rise of the evaluation of public policies in France: a political tool at the heart of heated debates

While evaluation is not a new practice in the education systems of developed countries, new forms of evaluation have been developed since

the 1990's (Mons, 2009; Mons & Pons, 2013). This has led to a paradigm shift which, in order to refine understanding, must be linked to four recent evolutions in education systems. The first evolution is the focus on a quantitative measure of learning and the priority given to cognitive objectives at the expense of broader socialization objectives (Osborn, 2006). The second one is the development of a new social control of teachers and schools by education administrators, most often in the context of decentralization and school autonomy reforms (Maroy, 2013). The third one is the evolution of the distribution of powers between central actors and local officials, whose room for manoeuvre is heavily restricted (Broadfoot, 2000). At last, the fourth notable evolution is the development of school accountability to the general public, mostly the parents, and the redefinition of relations between the State, administration and civil society (Manin, 1996). Faced with these multiple influences, the affirmation of evaluation has been accompanied by waves of critical research on its possible effects and consequences in the educational field evaluation and has become a powerful political tool. In that respect, the relevance of an automatic link between evaluation findings and practice changes and ultimately, the improvement of student outcomes, is strongly questioned. Moreover, the field of evaluation in France appears to be strongly 'balkanized' with multiple stakeholders, various academic fields and specific methods that ignore multidisciplinary and cross-analyses. As a result of these two observations, little use is made of evaluation findings by decision-makers and grassroots stakeholders. Some authors have thus pointed out the need for stakeholder participation (Duran & Monnier, 1992; Demailly, 2003) from the design of the evaluation to the recommendations that may result from it. This is the context surrounding Cnesco's creation in 2013.

A context conducive to Cnesco's creation

Cnesco was created by law on 8th July 2013 to conduct an independent evaluation of the French school system. Faced with such a context of both pre-eminence and mistrust of school evaluation in France, Cnesco has sought to develop an innovative and participative methodology for evaluating school policies and practices in order to link the world of

research, communities of practice and policy makers. This strategy, which will be further developed below, resulted from consultations carried out in 2013 as part of the Cnesco prefiguration mission recorded in the Prefiguration Report for the construction of Cnesco (Mons, 2013). Interviews were conducted with about fifty actors belonging to the Ministry of Education as well as researchers, unions, associations, media and school system evaluators not connected to the Ministry of Education. Cnesco can be analyzed as a laboratory that seeks to build bridges between research and education stakeholders. The Council was initially legally composed of eight scientists from various disciplinary fields, four members of Parliament, two members of the Economic, Social and Environmental Council (CESE). Council members were backed by an advisory board, which included actors of the education system at large that met at least twice a year, and an operational team led by the executive manager, Jean-François Chesné, that worked under the authority of the Council's President to implement Cnesco's activities. To this end, Cnesco's activities were organized around three main missions: evaluating the way in which the school system functions and the results it achieves, disseminating evaluation and research, and following up of the implementation of the recommendations produced through both research work and during public conferences.

In 2019, after six years of activities and recognition of its work, a recent transformation of Cnesco has led to a reconfiguration of its institutional anchor which allows it to reinforce its independence and to broaden and deepen its activities.

The recent evolution of Cnesco: an expansion of its training and international outreach missions

Since 1st September 2019, Cnesco is now integrated into the National Conservatory of Arts and Crafts (Cnam), a leading higher education and research institution affiliated to the Ministry of Higher Education and Research. Cnesco's activities are supported by different sources of funding including the Ministry of Education, European funding and institutional actors such as the *Agence universitaire de la Francophonie* (AUF) and the *Agence française de développement* (AFD) in the framework of specific

thematic international activities detailed below. In this new context, Cnesco continues its scientific and participative activities that have made it a success over the past six years. Moreover, enhanced by the creation of a new chair for the 'Evaluation of Public Education Policies' at the Cnam entrusted to Nathalie Mons, Professor of sociology and President of Cnesco, the center enlarges the scope of its missions. Its new position gives Cnesco the opportunity to develop new activities of training in France and abroad. Its activities are now structured around four missions at the service of education. It continues to produce research work characterized by its multidisciplinary and international dimensions (mission n°1), and effective tools for exchanges, scientific dissemination and consensus building (mission n°2 through Consensus Conferences and International Comparison Conferences). Cnesco develops training and change support activities for grassroots stakeholders (mission n°3) and increases its international outreach through multiple partnerships (mission n°4).

The first mission consists in delivering high-level scientific products. It relies on a wide multidisciplinary network of French and foreign researchers (economists, sociologists, psychologists, educational specialists, geographers, etc.). Cnesco has developed this first activity based on a problematized vision of evaluation within the framework of themes identified according to the needs of the educational community. The production of original content is based on a systematized structure in three axes: an overview of the French situation, a literature review, and a comparative approach. For example, Cnesco published two original reports and a series of thematic contributions on territorial inequalities in October 2018. The second mission is embodied in the strategy of dissemination and practitioner involvement through various formats of activity developed in the following section. The themes to be dealt with by 2020-2022 are continuous training of education personnel (teachers and principals), the implementation of school professional development policies and educational reforms, the evaluation of pupils and students by teachers, citizenship education, inclusive education, digital learning, and the support of drop-out students aged 16 to 18. The third and fourth missions are reinforced within the new Cnesco. Innovative continuous

training courses will be set up to complement the training originally set up by the Ministry of Education. Based on the dual support of academics and expert practitioners, these trainings aim to accompany practitioners in the implementation of structural and pedagogical reforms. This new strategy is structured around two poles. First, the existing learning master's degree M@dos intended for supervisory staff of the French Ministry of Education will be reinforced by new courses with certificates. Secondly, the concept of 'action-training' is developed on the themes of the current reforms (differentiated learning, school guidance policies, etc.). The fourth mission aims to strengthen the international influence of Cnesco's products and methods. This involves setting up simultaneous conferences in a partner country for international comparisons, participating in Erasmus + projects, and partnerships with the *Agence universitaire de la Francophonie* (AUF) and the *Agence française de développement* (AFD) detailed in the third section.

As presented below, the increasing importance of evaluation in public policy making has been the subject of a reflexive work carried out by Cnesco to model an original method that is both scientific and participatory.

Focus on the participatory evaluation process developed by Cnesco: an original method of interactions between research, communities of practice and education policy makers

In the context of a strong hold on evaluation tools and heated debates on the uses and effects of these tools, Cnesco has striven to embody the concept of 'ideational broker' theorized by the political scientist John L. Campbell (2008). This concept is based on a new paradigm of the relationship between research, communities of practice and decision-makers. In the face of the failure of direct links between these different actors, Campbell theorizes the necessity to provide spaces for open dialogues to create effective links where '(these) actors are primarily responsible for the creation, maintenance and dissemination of ideas' (Campbell, 2008). Cnesco wanted to be one of prime spaces for dialogue in the field of education. In this sense, Cnesco fits very clearly into the pluralist public policy evaluation model, with the objective of sharing evaluation with the educational community by involving it in the process of

constructing evaluation. Cnesco is therefore not conceived as an external 'watchdog' controller which would intervene exclusively *a posteriori* to make evaluations disconnected from operational realities on the quality of the functioning and results of the school system. It is also not designed to disseminate research findings in a top down logic, but as a resource centre and a support structure for the implementation of reforms in the foreseeable future, in France and abroad. Cnesco thus promotes an original and participatory method combining the elaboration of high-level scientific diagnoses and the participation of actors in the field. The links between research, practitioners and decision-makers were not conceived in a univocal sense - as a vertical transfer of knowledge - but as interactions notably modelled through the format of Consensus Conferences and International Comparison Conferences. Moreover, this method has been improved since Cnesco joined the Cnam, an institution of higher education. Cnesco thus accompanies these actors thanks to training activities adapted to local needs.

A model based on two main axes: a scientific and participatory evaluation

Cnesco's method is a variation of the participatory evaluation model highlighted by political scientists such as Duran and Monnier (1992). It is an original method of evaluating educational policies and practices based on two major dimensions. It relies on the one hand on, a high level of scientific expertise with a network of 300 French and foreign researchers associated with its activities since its creation and on the other hand on the participation of field educational actors (teachers, principals, parents, education inspectors, members of local authorities, etc.), i.e. more than 1,500 since its creation. Based on these two dimensions and in order to contribute to concrete institutional and academic change, Cnesco has developed an original five-step method. First, Cnesco produces scientific evaluations carried out by researchers to allow an objective analysis of the school's situation on a specific issue. Secondly, it strengthens reflections among educators thanks to the analysis of the questions of grassroots stakeholders. As a third step, the stakeholders exchange, understand the issues and propose recommendations during public

conferences based on the conclusions of Cnesco evaluations. Then Cnesco disseminates the results of research and evaluations towards the whole educational community. Finally, the fifth step is following up how these recommendations are implemented.



It has been necessary to embody these co-construction objectives in concrete activities. In this sense, Cnesco implements a participatory evaluation process that aims to transform evaluation results into a lever of institutional and academic change. It develops a wide range of activities in order to disseminate the results. It aims to create specific forums for debate, bringing together actors from a variety of backgrounds (students, parents, professionals from the educational field, local authorities, associations, etc.).

A multiplicity of activity formats: Reports, Consensus Conferences, International Comparisons Conferences and Interactive Virtual Conferences

Cnesco produces multidisciplinary quantitative and qualitative evaluations. Its scientific reports include independent national investigations, international comparisons and syntheses of research conducted in France and abroad. Fed by these reports, the participative approach comes in three formats: Consensus Conferences, International Comparisons Conferences and Interactive Virtual Conferences. Consensus Conferences aim to forge a link between, on the one hand the questions and concerns of educators and the general public, and on the other hand, research findings. It is an original format in which a jury made up of members from the educational community (parents, teachers, associations, etc.) is responsible for auditioning scientists from various subjects to produce recommendations based on scientific evaluation resources produced by the researchers gathered by Cnesco. The issues covered since the Cnesco's creation are: repeating a year and other options (2015), numbers and arithmetic in

primary school (2015), reading (2016), differentiated learning (2017), writing and drafting (2018), and modern languages (2019). In the same vein, Cnesco's work aims to take into account the practices and experiences of education systems worldwide. In order to facilitate this comparative perspective, International Comparisons Conferences aim to foster meetings between French and international researchers and French stakeholders on a specific policy issue, notably through the exchange of research findings and best practices related to specific public policies for education. The topics covered are social inclusion at school (2015), school and disability (2016), vocational education (2016), school drop-out (2017), and school guidance (2018). Finally, Interactive Virtual Conferences allow live and remote exchanges between experts on a given topic and actors in the field on Cnesco's evaluations. The objective is to deepen the understanding of related scientific Cnesco reports, including a few specific recommendations following a Consensus Conference. The issues covered are numbers and arithmetic in primary school (2015), reading comprehension (2016), comparison of PISA and TIMSS evaluations (2016), and differentiated learning (2017).

Through the organization of these conferences, the objective of Cnesco is to make scientific resources accessible to everyone but also to give a strong legitimacy to research results by organizing exchanges in order on the one hand to obtain points of consensus, and on the other hand to highlight scientific disagreements still to be worked out.

Overview and key results of Cnesco's method (strong stakeholder participation, high website viewing and development of international projects)

First, Cnesco's method of scientific and participatory evaluation is nowadays supported by the education community because it fills a real need. Nearly 300 researchers have taken part in Cnesco's activities over six years. For example, the Cnesco report on educational inequalities of social and migratory origin (2016) came about thanks to the contributions of 22 French and international teams, including sociologists, educational economists, psychologists and educationalists. This cross-disciplinary approach has

made it possible to analyse the multiple causes of these inequalities in school results and student achievements, from the classroom and pedagogical practices to the national level involving public policy decisions. The actors in the field then benefited from original, rich, synthetic and accessible scientific contributions, examining school inequalities through multiple prisms. All these scientific reports have been published on the Cnesco website in order to make evaluation results and recommendations available to every citizen. In six years, the Cnesco's wide network of researchers has produced more than 40 reports on a variety of education topics: learning the basics (mathematics, reading, etc.), social inclusion, disability, vocational education, repeating a year, school drop-out, quality of life at school, etc. Moreover, in order to make sure stakeholders and decision-makers take up evaluation results and recommendations, Cnesco has diversified the dissemination formats available on its website: scientific reports as mentioned previously, online resources, expert videos, analytical notes, conferences broadcast either live or taped, interactive virtual conferences, etc. As a result, more than 1.6 million pages have been viewed on the website since its creation, including 600,000 in 2018. In addition, the web pages of the virtual conferences have been consulted more than 62,000 times. On the institutional side, the Cnesco method has been evaluated very positively by two parliamentary reports in 2018. Cnesco has also been noticed by the Alliance for Useful Evidence (London) as one of the eight international initiatives that effectively build bridges between research results and citizens. Besides, Cnesco's recommendations and resources have inspired reforms and programmes of the Ministry of Education like a vademecum of local social inclusion policies (2016), the Villani-Torossian Mathematic Programme (2018), and a guide dedicated to learning how to write distributed to teachers (2019). Cnesco has also received many institutional requests: several local education authorities and directors of ministry services have asked Cnesco to present to teachers, inspectors and education advisers its recommendations on mathematics in primary school, reading, and differentiated learning. Local authorities are relying on the Cnesco scientific products, particularly on the theme of social inclusion at school, in order to implement effective local policies. National education research institutions are systematically involved in the Cnesco's

operations. Another characteristic of the evaluation model developed by Cnesco is the participation of the actors of the educational community in the field.

As a result, more than 1,500 education practitioners and members of civil society have been directly involved in all the Cnesco operations at all stages of each activity.

The success of the implementation of Cnesco's method has led to both strengthening of its international activities and reinforcement of the fifth step of its method, that is following up on recommendations, by modelling new support activities. Cnesco's second focus is the strengthening of its international activities.

Results, limits and perspectives for the coming years

The evolution of Cnesco's institutional anchorage, six years after its creation, has enabled it to reflect on the successes and limitations of its model. These reflections have led to the need to model Cnesco's method with a view to internationalize its activities and reinforce the training and support activities. In that respect, Cnesco aims to develop a scientific, participatory and formative method.

The success of the model: towards an internationalization of Cnesco's method

The international strategy is designed around three areas: the accessibility of resources through its website, the remote participation of foreign policy makers and practitioners to its International Comparison Conferences and the implementation of Cnesco's method in various national contexts. In that respect, foreign audiences are now able to follow the conferences live, in French and English, ask questions to the experts, as well as organize their own workshops to produce recommendations in relation to their national contexts. As a member of the Executive Committee of the European Network of Education Council (EUNEC), Cnesco has conducted bilateral exchanges with organizations such as Education Endowment Foundation (England), the *Agencia de Calidad de la Educación* (Chile), the *Conseil supérieur de l'éducation* (Quebec). Furthermore, given their success, the

Cnesco conferences set up in France are now exported abroad according to local demand. They offer a scientific analysis of school policies and systems implemented internationally. Since 2017, this format has been used in Morocco and Chile with the implementation of the International Comparison Conference on school drop-out. Partnerships are also launched with the *Agence universitaire de la Francophonie* (AUF) to organize Consensus Conferences in African countries, including for example the Consensus Conference on repeating a year and other options held in 2015. Partnerships are also launched with the *Agence française de développement* (AFD) in order to initiate reflections on the evaluation of public policies and to develop diagnostic and support tools for public education policies in developing countries, based on Cnesco's method.

A strong penetration of Cnesco products in the political sphere but a limited integration into public policy design

Even if Cnesco's method is a success and has strong penetrations into the practitioner's world, it is important to highlight that the exchanges between Cnesco and decision-makers have been less easy to build. Cnesco has only been seized once by the Minister of Education in six years. Its recommendations have had little success in translating into public policy. Its reports have been able to inform and inspire ministerial reflections or publications (like the Mathematics programme, the learning how to write guide or the vademecum previously mentioned) but Cnesco has never been integrated into the design of public education policies. One possible explanation is that research, evaluation and policy time frames vary widely. Research and evaluation are part of the long term, while politics and public policy as they are designed in France operate in the immediate future. In addition, France is marked by a weak institutionalization of the place and role of evaluation in the public decision-making process. Largely produced by internal actors to the Ministry of Education, the evaluation of public education policies remains without prescriptive power linked to its recommendations. France leaves almost complete freedom to the Government to design public policies, beyond social consultation, which does not favour the integration of research findings into this process. Conversely, in Germany, any decision on the organization of vocational

education must be scientifically documented and argued with regard to possible alternative policy choices. France could draw inspiration from such a model in order to develop within the school sector a decision-making process inviting the executive power to feed its decisions from organizations such as Cnesco.

Challenges and perspectives for the future

Based on the model of pluralist evaluation of public policies, Cnesco has developed an original method of scientific activity which benefits from the research findings of political scientists and sociologists of public action. Its original scientific activity (multidisciplinary, international, popularization, meta-analysis, etc.) and its participatory activity formats (Consensus Conferences, International Comparison Conferences, Interactive Virtual Conferences) have ensured strong commitments and support from field actors to produce a collective intelligence. At Cnesco, it has been hypothesized that this method of dialogical exercise, if it really feeds into the elaboration of reforms, can bring a new form of legitimacy to public decision-making. This legitimacy is based on the quality of the debates prepared beforehand nourished by multidisciplinary and accessible scientific resources; the variety of the points of view confronted and on solidity of consensus between the actors involved. These participatory mechanisms therefore need to be organized methodically, reinforced and adapted to the specific conditions of local contexts. In addition, thanks to its integration into the Cnam and the support of existing structures (M@dos master's degree), Cnesco plans to expand its training and support mission for actors in the field, that is the last phase of its five-stage method detailed previously. Cnesco's ambition is thus to continue to scientifically nourish the discussions around the French and foreign school systems, while stimulating dynamics of change thanks to a participatory evaluation and adapted continuous training based on the needs of the field. Moving towards a scientific, participatory and formative evaluation is one of the major challenges of the new Cnesco.

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Teaching Council, Ireland

A little more conversation, a lot more action: Consultation in education policy development in Ireland

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The Teaching Council is the professional standards body for the teaching profession in Ireland. It promotes and regulates teaching as a profession. It acts in the interests of the public good while upholding and enhancing standards in the teaching profession.

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This chapter describes the innovative, comprehensive and multi-layered processes by which the Teaching Council consulted with (and is continuing to consult with) teachers and other stakeholders in planning for and developing Cosán, the national framework for teachers' learning. (Cosán is the Gaelic word for pathway.) It also outlines the Council's learning from an earlier experience of policy development and the way in which its thinking shifted between that process, and the Cosán policy development process. In doing so, the authors differentiate between consulting, and 'consulting with'. This article also introduces BEACONS (Bringing Education Alive on a National Scale), an innovative community engagement and policy development model that the Council is pioneering in order to facilitate richer and more inclusive conversations about teaching and learning, between teachers, parents and students.



The education system in Ireland is deeply embedded in our culture. We have almost 4,000 schools for a population of almost 1 million students, and a register of more than 100,000 teachers. There is a shared commitment to the importance of education for social and economic progress. Yet attitudes to policy reform can vary significantly among teachers, parents and students. For that reason, the establishment of, and support for, effective cycles of policy development, including mechanisms for consultation with relevant stakeholders, continues to be crucial.

The Teaching Council is the professional standards body for the teaching profession in Ireland. It promotes and regulates teaching as a profession. It acts in the interests of the public good while upholding and enhancing standards in the teaching profession. There are 37 members on the Council, with a significant majority (22) of them registered teachers. These include teacher union representatives. The balance is made up of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), parent nominees, school management and Ministerial nominees. This model is a partnership one designed to ensure that while teachers lead the conversations about the promotion and regulation of their profession, they do so in a spirit of partnership with the Government Department and stakeholders.

Since its establishment almost 14 years ago, the Council has designed and led the implementation of a number of significant educational policy forms. Some of these have proved challenging, and we have learned from those, and revised our approach to policy reform, based on the experience. Others have been much richer and ultimately more successful, in terms of levels of engagement and goodwill towards them. In this chapter, we share some of our learnings, so that they might inform other policy makers facing similar challenges and opportunities.

Droichead – the National Framework for the Induction of Newly Qualified Teachers.

The Council published its Policy on the Continuum of Teacher Education in 2011. In that document, for the first time in the history of the State, it mapped teachers' learning along a continuum of teacher education from

initial teacher education through induction and into ongoing professional learning. The policy stated that not only were there three distinct phases, but each one should transition seamlessly into the next. Informed by a growing body of research and evidence internationally that supported the case for a more formal structured programme of induction for newly qualified teachers, the policy set out the Council's intention to establish statutory induction procedures for newly qualified teachers. The experience of designing, piloting and implementing this process, starting in the teeth of the worst financial crisis in the history of the State, has taught us a lot about change management in the most challenging of circumstances!

We have learned about the need to carefully scaffold the gap between theory, research, policy and practice, and how this process cannot be rushed.

Indeed, this has had wider strategic implications for other areas of the Council's work, e.g., research in teaching and learning.

Later in 2011, the Council commenced the process of designing a **Career Entry Professional Programme** (CEPP). Having designed same, it engaged in a consultation process in early 2012 which involved a series of 17 meetings and resulted in 232 individual written submissions. As part of that consultation process, a phased introduction, from September of that year, was proposed. A large amount of negative feedback received as part of that process, in particular from mentors and school principals, focused on the proposed evaluative element of the programme. This was seen as being unworkable in the context of existing collegial and supportive school cultures in Ireland. Concerns were also expressed about the timelines set out by the Council for implementation, as these were seen by many as being unrealistic.

On 1 September 2012, the statutory instrument commencing the Teaching Council's functions in relation to the induction and probation of newly qualified teachers was signed by the Minister for Education and Skills,

with effect from that date. This meant that the Teaching Council now had responsibility for these areas, and was required to ensure that appropriate policies were in place without delay, or risk presiding over a policy and legislative vacuum.

Less than eight months later, therefore, in May 2013, the Teaching Council published **a revised policy on a new model of induction and probation for newly qualified teachers**. This was considerably different to CEPP, and was entitled Droichead. Droichead is the Irish language word for bridge, reflecting the fact that this induction programme seeks to support a seamless transition from initial teacher education to professional practice as a qualified teacher. This followed a relatively short consultation process in April/May 2013, whereby the Teaching Council sought feedback on a draft Droichead policy document. The new model was introduced to a small number of schools on a pilot basis from September 2013 and, based on the learning from that pilot, and from independent research carried out by the Council, *an updated Droichead framework* was published in March 2016. This updated framework included a number of significant changes, which arose from concerns expressed by key stakeholders, including teacher unions and principals' bodies. Further feedback resulted in the establishment of an internal working group to re-visit the policy yet again in late 2016, and a **fourth revised policy** was approved by the Council in December 2016 and published in early 2017. The timelines for the growth of Droichead, which had been published in March 2016, were further extended in response to ongoing concerns about their feasibility.

The process of policy development was time-consuming and, at times, very challenging for the Teaching Council. As a learning organization, the Council reflected on the experience, and acknowledged that there were lessons to be learned from same. In particular it accepted, with the benefit of hindsight, the importance of honest conversations with stakeholders happening before any policy document is drafted, so that the Council might be fully informed of the perspectives of the various stakeholders, and have a more nuanced understanding of the issues. These conversations cannot be rushed, and the importance of allowing the necessary time and space

for all stages of the policy development cycle was another key learning of the Council. A third learning was about the centrality of teachers as agents of change. These learnings continue to inform the Council's work, and resulted in a much more innovative approach to policy development when the Council turned its attention to the next phase on the continuum of teachers' learning – Continuing Professional Development (CPD).

A new approach: Cosán, the national framework for teachers' learning

In its **Policy on the Continuum of Teacher Education**, the Council signalled its intention to adopt 'a coherent national framework for CPD'. Having learned from the experience of consultation in developing the Droichead framework, the Council appreciated that the development of a national framework would, by its very existence, represent a degree of cultural change for registered teachers and the education system more broadly. It would therefore require a novel approach which would ensure that the framework ultimately developed would be grounded in the realities of teachers' professional lives, and of the Irish education system more broadly. In 2014, the Council initiated a comprehensive and multi-layered consultation process, and designed it to take place over multiple phases, extended over a number of years. The following is an overview of each stage of the process, and the ways in which the framework has developed, and will continue to develop, in response to the feedback received.

First phase of consultation

The first phase of consultation, which took place in late 2014, comprised three avenues of consultation exclusively with the teaching profession. They were:

1. An online survey for individual teachers
2. A series of 25 consultation workshops in education centres nationwide
3. Whole-school feedback following school-based workshops.

In addition, in early March 2015, the Council convened a meeting of registered teachers who had recently carried out research on continuing

professional development (CPD) or related areas, in order to discuss their key findings and, in particular, the learnings from their critical review of the literature in this area.

This was a unique process in that it did not involve the Council consulting on a prepared draft of the framework. Rather, it invited initial views **before** the drafting process commenced. And it invited those views from teachers only in the first instance.

This was an entirely new approach for the Council, and for many teachers and stakeholders also. And it was not an uncontentious one. Some stakeholders, including providers of learning opportunities for teachers, were not shy in querying the approach, and seeking opportunities to contribute to the policy development process at an early opportunity. For some teachers too, it raised eyebrows. Indeed, it was so novel, that a small number of teachers were initially sceptical, and wondered if perhaps the Council already had a policy developed, ready for launching at a later date, and was simply engaged in an elaborate public relations exercise!

Over the course of the process, the Council reassured those teachers and stakeholders, and provided a clear rationale for prioritizing teachers' voices in the first instance. And that rationale was a relatively simple one: that there needed to be a national conversation about teachers' learning, involving all relevant stakeholders, but that conversation should be led by those at the heart of the professional endeavour, i.e., teachers.

It proved to be an effective approach, resulting in 3,349 teachers participating in rich professional conversations and generating valuable data in Phase 1. In doing so, the process enabled the voice of teachers to shape the language and structures of teaching and learning.

Second phase of consultation

In May 2015, the Council published Cosán, the first draft of the framework, and began the next phase of consultation. The second phase included a national consultation event for stakeholders, which was attended by more than 100 representatives of the various stakeholder bodies. The Teaching Council gathered a rich variety of feedback, and stakeholders were invited to request follow-up bilateral meetings if they wished. The Council also received 65 written responses from a range of institutions and organisations including providers of CPD, teacher unions, universities, and State agencies in education,

More than 1,600 individual teachers and other stakeholders contributed to the conversation in the second phase of consultation, by completing an online feedback form, submitting feedback by email, or by attending one of a series of ten workshops, which took place in education centres around the country. The workshops, facilitated by teachers working with the Teaching Council, gathered a broad spectrum of opinions from the profession.

As an alternative to the education centre workshops, schools, or clusters of neighbouring schools, were invited to organize their own school-based meetings. The Teaching Council developed a feedback form with prompts to aid staff reflection and discussion. Phase 2 of the consultation closed in December 2015.

Third phase of consultation

All of the feedback was collated and considered by the Teaching Council, and the draft framework was revised having regard to same. This **updated Cosán framework** was approved by the Council on 15 February 2016. The policy development process then continued, as a phase of school-based research was initiated. During that phase, which is ongoing, schools that opt in to the Cosán Development Process will apply the framework in their particular context and share their insights from this experimental process with the Teaching Council. The findings of the research will inform the ongoing evolution of the framework.

What makes the Cosán policy development process different?

The development of Cosán was, and continues to be, in every sense of the term, a professionally-led process. As a starting point, the Teaching Council initiated the conversation with the profession, before it engaged with other stakeholders.

A second innovative feature of the Cosán development process was that, in initiating the conversation with the teaching profession, the Council did so with an open mind, and a blank sheet, asking teachers to share their views based on their experience of professional learning to date, and their wishes and aspirations for a national framework for CPD based on that experience. (Indeed, one of the key findings to emerge, was that the term CPD did not adequately reflect the different ways in which teachers learn. When asked what CPD meant to them, many teachers talked of formal programmes of learning e.g. Master's, Ph.Ds etc. When asked how they learn, most teachers spoke of a myriad of processes, formal and informal, that took place both within and outside the school, e.g., mentoring other teachers, personal reading, staff meetings, etc. So the broader term, 'teachers' learning' emerged, and ultimately became central to the framework. This was a novel and courageous approach for the Teaching Council as a policy-maker. Prior to that, the Council's engagement with the profession, as is the norm in policy development cycles, typically happened after the Council had produced a first draft of a policy.

In the case of Cosán, the Council only commenced its deliberative and drafting processes after it had heard what the profession had to say. When a first draft had been prepared, based on the initial input from teachers, there were further cycles of engagement with the profession, and subsequently other stakeholders, in order to refine and improve it. Through the ongoing experimental engagement with Cosán by schools, it continues to be a truly iterative, bottom-up and centre-out (rather than top-down) development process.

Consulting, versus 'consulting with'



“We must put this to a rigorous and thorough public consultation that we can then ignore if it disagrees with us.”

It can be argued that many conceptualizations of consultation, while well-intentioned, are rooted in a somewhat limited understanding of the purpose of consultation. The term 'consulting' is often used interchangeably with the term 'listening', which is typically a one-way activity engaged in by policy-makers before making decisions.

The term 'consulting with', on the other hand, is a richer and more expansive term, which implies an authentic conversation, where all partners engage on an equal footing, and all are keen to learn more about, and develop a more in-depth understanding of, each other's position and opinions, with a view to working together to co-create sustainable solutions.

And it is this concept which has promoted the Council to design a new community engagement and policy development model – BEACONS.

BEACONS

Through BEACONS (Bringing Education Alive for our Communities on a National Scale), an innovative community engagement and policy development model, the Council, in collaboration with a diverse group of stakeholders, is seeking to facilitate richer and more inclusive conversations about teaching and learning, between teachers, parents and students at the local community level. The goal is to develop a suite of models that any school could choose from and adapt to their own needs, based on the emerging core principles of BEACONS. The intention is that this work would facilitate enhanced engagement between local communities and national consultative processes on issues of common interest and importance to them. In this sense, BEACONS has the potential to be what Professor Michael Fullan has referred to as 'the glue in the middle', where more traditional top-down processes, and perhaps more innovative bottom-up models, can come together and meet in the middle. In this way, BEACONS can facilitate authentic 'consultation with', in a way that is sustainable and impactful.

BEACONS has been recognized and supported under the Irish government's Department of Public Expenditure and Reform's Innovation Fund 2019. This has enabled a total of four BEACONS events to be held in three communities in Ireland – one in a rural town called Ennistymon, in County Clare in the West of Ireland; a second in Baltinglass, a small village in County Wicklow on the East Coast, and the third in an area in central Dublin, Ireland's capital city. In each case, a number of schools have come together over a day and a half, each of them bringing principals, teachers, parents and students, to engage in a conversational process about whatever education issues they wish to talk about. National organisations such as the Teaching Council have attended, sometimes as co-participants, and sometimes simply as observers. This has developed further the innovative approaches evidenced above in Cosán. Engagement with teachers has been fused in real time with the other groups at the heart of our school communities – parents and students. Furthermore, the events have not been held for the purpose of consulting about a particular

proposal or model of anything. Yet two independent evaluation reports¹ reveal that they have yielded insights for both the communities themselves, and for national organisations, into a wide range of educational issues. The reports also highlight the fact that they have fostered small but significant changes in the culture of participating schools, and an appetite amongst the school communities for more of the same type of engagement.

In its 14 years of growth, the Council's approach to engagement with others about policy affecting teaching and learning has evolved significantly. From a process involving national level stakeholders and the Department of Education and Skills, (a process will always have its place in policy development), the Council has expanded and deepened its approach to include practising teachers in significant numbers before other stakeholders. It then further evolved its approach to one aimed at fostering conversational engagements between key voices at the local community level which will in turn connect back to the national-level consultation processes. In this way, the Council as a learning organisation finds itself on the cusp of closing the virtuous feedback loop so that policy development and implementation, along with community living and learning, become ever more closely aligned.

From a discourse of top-down/bottom-up, to one of vertical and horizontal conversations (national/local and local/local), it appears that we are seeing an emerging sphericity in education which will foster a more inclusive approach to teaching and learning for the benefit of all teachers and learners.

1 https://www.teachingcouncil.ie/Website/en/_fileupload/CES-Report-Evaluation-of-the-BEACONS-pilot-event.pdf and https://www.teachingcouncil.ie/Website/en/_fileupload/BEACONS-CES-Report-Evaluation-of-the-first-series-of-BEACONS-events.pdf



Education Council, Lithuania

Understanding the role of education stakeholders in Lithuania

Saule Maciukaite-Zviniene

Aiste Kairiene

The Lithuanian Council of Education is a membership association next to the Parliament that mobilizes the education community, parents and students' representatives, business associations, trade unions, delegates of Parliament and Government. It aims to shape effective public policy and foster high-quality practice. As the major advising association to the President, Parliament and Government, its strength lies in the diverse membership and expertise in Lithuania and abroad.

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The engagement of various stakeholders is essential in order to cater for the implementation of high-quality education. This overview focuses on the role and diversity of internal and external education stakeholders in Lithuania.



Introduction

Lithuania has made significant progress in the past decade by ensuring wide access to early childhood education and care, non-formal education, increasing the enrolment into higher education, introducing a quality assurance system in vocational and higher education. The demographic decline put a lot of pressure on the public network of educational institutions. Therefore, Lithuania has undergone a consolidation of the network of schools and public universities. Still, the access of high-quality education for every child has remained a priority in the political agenda and beyond.

This overview focuses on the role and diversity of internal and external education stakeholders in Lithuania. It is well known that teachers, students, parents, trade unions, different civil organizations have different interests, perceptions and preoccupations. The engagement of various stakeholders is essential in order to cater for the implementation of high-quality education.

External Stakeholders in Lithuania

Over the last few decades decision makers and education institutions (schools, universities, colleges, VET institutions, etc.) have been confronted with increasing outside monitoring and pressure aimed at national and institutional reforms (Picture 1).



Picture 1. Major Independent External Stakeholders

External stakeholders draw new directions in the education processes and expect the change and turnout of internal stakeholders towards it. Their presence makes education institutions and decision makers more responsive to societal and environmental needs and changes.

The Lithuanian Council of Education is a membership association next to the Parliament that mobilizes the education community, parents and students' representatives, business associations, trade unions, delegates of Parliament and Government. It aims to shape effective public policy and foster high-quality practice. As the major advising association to the President, Parliament and Government, its strength lies in the diverse membership and expertise in Lithuania and abroad.

The Research Council of Lithuania fulfils the role of an expert institution tackling challenges of science and higher education development on a national level. The Council is a counsellor of the Lithuanian Parliament and the Government on research and researchers training issues, implements programme based competitive funding of research, administers most important Lithuanian science development programmes, evaluates research performance and represents Lithuanian science in various European institutions and other international organizations.

Executives boards next to the Ministry of Education, Research and Sport.

The Board of Higher Education and the Board of General Education are established by the order of the Minister to advise and provide expertise on education issues. The Board of Higher Education is also in charge of monitoring agreements between the state and higher education institutions, also evaluating external candidates to the boards of universities and colleges.

The Association of Local Authorities in Lithuania is a non-profit, non-governmental organization, representing the common interests of its members – local authorities in all national institutions, as well as in international organizations of local authorities. The Association seeks to implement the provisions of the European Charter of Local Self-

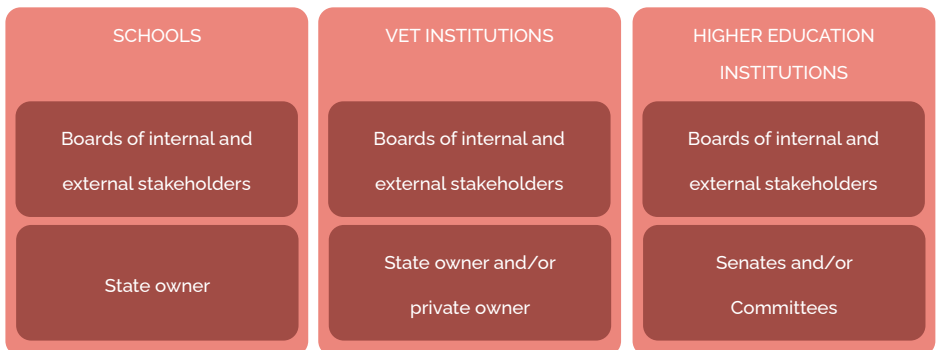
Government in Lithuania, to organize and coordinate activities of its members in the areas of investment attraction, development of municipal economies, improvement of legislature, business support, public security, culture, education, science, health care, social care and protection, improvement of local services, as well as relations with international organizations and municipalities abroad.

Councils of Regions provide recommendations to the Ministry of Internal Affairs on regional policy regarding the reduction of regional socio-economic disparities within the country.

The overview of the stakeholders is determined by the complexity of education. Surrounded by a variety of stakeholders with different expectations and requirements, decision makers and education institutions need to find a balance between these groups.

Internal Stakeholders in Lithuania

Quality assessment as a transformative process underlines the need to involve the multiple internal and external stakeholders concerned with shifting education institutions to become more change focused (Fadeeva et al., 2014). It is crucially important for every education institution to understand the expectations of internal stakeholders. Sometimes expectations of external stakeholders are unfeasible and they tend to rise (Picture 2).



Picture 2. Major Independent Internal Stakeholders

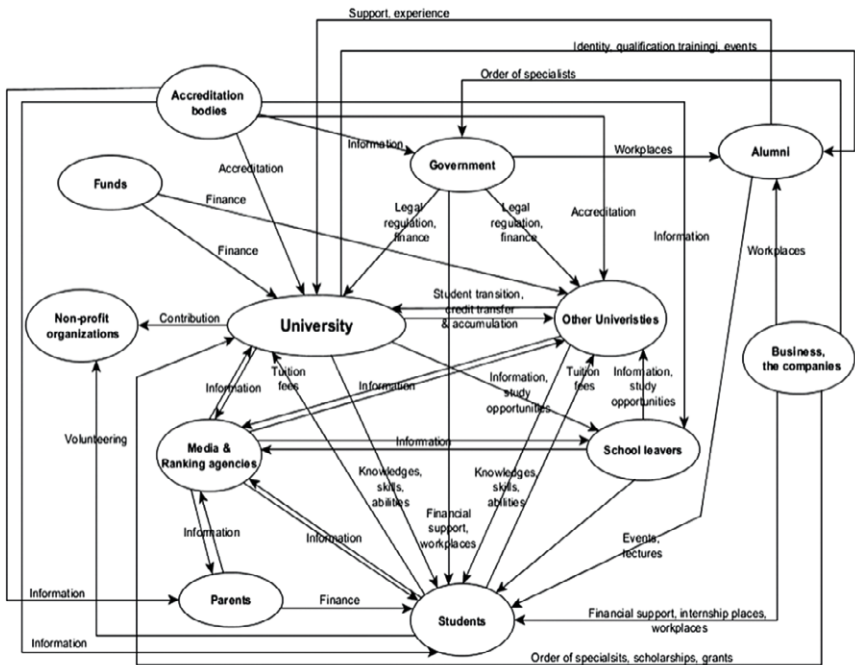
The School Board (both of early childhood education and care and of general education) is the superior self-governing body in the school. It participates in the strategic school management, forms the direction of education and curriculum along with the school principal, and supervises the activities of the school principal and education quality. It consists of pupils, teachers, parents and representatives from the local community.

The Board in the VET Institution fulfils the role of the collegial management body. Besides the functions mentioned above, it takes part in the human resource, infrastructure and finance management, establishes the general number of study places. Social partners, representatives from the Council of Regions and the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport are the members of the Board along with the representatives from students, teachers and school administration.

Higher Education Institution Board is a governing body of an institution's strategic affairs. Through this Board the accountability to the society, social responsibility and quick and effective response to the changes is ensured. Approximately one third of the Board is elected from the society and ensures the institution's links with society's needs and expectations towards the higher education institution.

Internal stakeholders can be a significant source of information in determining whether an education institution is state of the art. Education institutions have a complex organizational structure. Senior managers and mid-managers are the most influential internal group of stakeholders; however, they should strive for external opinions for the relevant issues. Teachers and academic staff are seen as strong group of stakeholders who have professional opinion on education processes.

Different studies show that in Lithuania an ecosystem of internal and external stakeholders is especially developed in higher education system (hereafter - HES). (Picture 3).



Picture 3. Linkages of External and Internal Stakeholders in HES
 Source: Labanauskis et al. (2017)

In the post new management system the network governance in the Lithuanian education system has been gaining its ground as a form of deliberative democracy building trust in society and strengthening the roles of both internal and especially external stakeholders.

Still, it is in need of more dynamic engagement tools especially of external stakeholders.

Innovative Engagement Tools and the Role of Education Councils

Education continues to be seen as an important vehicle towards economic growth, and it is expected to provide new means to overcome the economic and societal crisis. The dynamics of engagement tools through a systemic perspective characterized by the resources, demand conditions and other factors contributing to the potential of new governance in education. New tools for engagement are necessary to boost the quality, capacity and legitimacy of education governance, especially at the level of municipalities and in education institutions. More effective and socially acceptable decisions on education are needed to solve the looming problems related to the grand economic and societal challenges. To support a sustainable renewal in this field, it remains essential to identify most innovative public engagement tools for education stakeholders. Such an approach refers to new opportunities for municipalities and other institutions to mobilize the capacities and to accelerate evidence-based education processes.

The potential of stakeholders in contributing to more effective responses to grand educational challenges lies in two interrelated factors. First, more intense interaction between various stakeholders is necessary and an effective mobilization of the civil society itself is therefore needed to develop new socio-technical solutions. Second, mainstreaming the societal challenges facing Lithuanian society is critical for generating public awareness and political support for educational reforms that has a direct impact on welfare state.

While new engagement approaches are increasingly being developed, an understanding of the different types of societal engagement procedures suitable for education sector, their systemic and contextual requirements, and real value for decision making in education sector remains underdeveloped. For this purpose, councils of education in different countries contribute to an increased understanding and value of engagement tools in solving educational challenges.

An initial framework proposed for councils of education is based on the contextual factors that contributes to the functioning and transferability of engagement practices referring to 'participatory performance'. The framework is constructed on four critical characteristics of the 'participatory systems': resources, demand conditions, supportive factors, and governmental strategies (Table 1).

Councils of education participate in the policy cycle; therefore, it should be determined that different engagement tools are more relevant and linked to policy cycle stages: information gathering, policy formulation, implementation and monitoring.

PARTICIPATORY RESOURCES	DEMAND CONDITIONS	SUPPORTIVE FACTORS	GOVERNMENTAL STRATEGIES	EXAMPLE FROM LITHUANIAN COUNCIL OF EDUCATION (LCE)
Regulations supporting engagement	National culture of debate	Activity of civil society organizations	Acceptance of advices	During the last decade the number of national hearings and collaboration between decision makers and LCE has increased. Parliament approved that one of the functions of LCE is the provision of consultations to major decision-makers
Community of professionals	Level of public education	Networking between actors	History of participative culture	LCE members are experts and delegated representatives from education and research associations, students and pupils, and also business.

Links to education and research institutions	Saturation of a participatory market	Trust of education and research institutions	International pressure	More than half of LCE members are from education and research institutions. It also has a member from Lithuanian diaspora.
Upgrading of participatory skills	Level of techno-scientific controversy	Existence of e-platforms	Open government tools	Chair and Vice-Chair represent LCE. LCE has a sharing platform, all decisions are public and shared with the major decision makers via common data base.
Funding opportunities	Social capital			LCE members work exclusively on voluntary basis.

Source: elaborated by the authors based on PE2020 results.

Conclusions

Education governance is in a state of continuous transformation, which is caused by societal challenges. Education continues to be seen as an important vehicle towards innovations and economic growth, and it is expected to provide new means to overcome different crisis. During the last decade from the perspective of the political ideals, there has been a shift toward an increased involvement of people and civil society organizations – both quantitatively and qualitatively – in the shaping and delivering of Lithuanian education policy. An increased interest also needs attention in terms of effective functioning of education system.

It is due to continued transformation that neither education governance system nor networking of external and internal stakeholders or engagement tools will suffice. Referring to the above, LCE shows its core values of inclusion, excellence, cooperation and impact via its activities and serves the education community.

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Higher Council for Education, Training and Scientific
Research, Morocco

A road map for the reform of education in Morocco

Rahma Bourqia

Rabéa Naciri

The Higher Council for Education, Training and Scientific Research is an independent consultative body established by article 168 of the Constitution, responsible for giving its opinion on all public policies and questions of national interest concerning education, training and scientific research.

As an independent advisory body for good governance, sustainable development and participatory democracy, the Council's vocation is to serve as a melting pot for strategic reflection on the issues of education, training and scientific research and a plural space of debate and coordination on all questions of interest to education, training and scientific research.

It also has the role of informing decision-makers, stakeholders and public opinion, by means of methodical and rigorous quantitative and qualitative evaluations, on the different aspects of the education, training and scientific research system.

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This paper draws the context of the educational reform in Morocco. During the last three decades, Morocco has witnessed great changes at the demographic, social, economic and cultural levels. The paper explains the Council's positioning in the educational landscape.

Recently, the Council has undertaken a process of reflection, collaboration, elaboration and adoption of the 'Strategic Vision 2015-2030' as a new road map for reform, which drew the perspectives and set out a new horizon. Thanks to the independent nature of the Council, the pluralism of its composition as well as to the missions and skills it is endowed with, this institution is often asked to play a central role in the social mobilization in favour of school and its reform.

The paper reflects on how the role of the Council can be redirected towards thinking the process of implementing the Vision in a challenging context.

Education systems worldwide are today facing new challenges: the internationalization of education, the implementation of new standards generated by international surveys on student achievement, universities' rankings, the increasing mobility of skills and the internationalization of labour markets. These factors, together with the rapid development of digital technologies and artificial intelligence, are major challenges that put the pressure on the educational system and require an improvement of the quality in schools and universities. Education in Morocco is not an exception as these challenges are global and underpin other local difficulties. This calls for initiating a reform that sets education on the quality path and elevate its development as a social issue.

Context of the reform in Morocco

Following independence in 1956, Morocco chose to make school a means to build a national State through teaching the population and striving to allay the colonization's heavy legacy. Indeed, setting an education system through the establishment of schools in both rural and urban areas as well as the installation of universities, has allowed Morocco in the first three decades after its independence to train executives whose mission was to build a public administration; a foundation for an independent Moroccan State and for the development of the country.

During the last three decades, Morocco has witnessed great changes at the demographic, social, economic and cultural levels. This has caused a pressure on authorities to grant education for all, extend infrastructure to all Moroccan regions, and increase school quality. Following the publishing of the National Charter for Education and Training in 1999, several reforms had been undertaken. However, despite the improvements brought about to the system by these reforms, they were not efficient enough to absorb the internal shortfalls of the education system, heightened by spatial and social inequalities.

The Higher Council for Education was instituted in 2006. In order to give it new impetus, it was renewed in 2014 under the name of Higher Council for Education, Training and Scientific Research (hereafter the Council).¹ With

this change, a new phase has been initiated in the efforts to support the reform of the educational system and contribute to accompany it with an aim to overcome the obstacles that impede the development of a quality education for all.

The Constitution of 2011 established the Council as an independent constitutional institution of good governance. The Constitution grants, in Article 31, the right to education a central place and considers, in article 32, that: 'State, public schools and territorial authorities work towards mobilizing all means to facilitate an equal access to all citizens to their right to a modern, accessible and quality education'. The Constitution has therefore granted the right of every child to basic learning and provided the obligation for the family and the authorities to see to its application. Keeping with its missions of consultation, publishing advisory opinions (upon request or through self-request) and preparing retrospective and prospective evaluations of public policies as well as of national interest related issues in the field of education, training or research, the Council places its work in the framework of the new Constitution; a real renewed social contract for the country. The law organizing the Council grants the National Authority for Evaluation, one of its organs, to carry out general, sectorial as well as thematic evaluations of public policies and programmes in public schools and in higher education, vocational training and scientific research.

Reinforced by its new prerogatives, the Council published in 2014 an evaluation of the implementation of the National Charter for Education and Training (2000-2013)² – the first objective general systemic evaluation – that highlighted the different improvements made during that period, and underlined the persisting shortcomings.

Taking into account the education budget allocation (5,8% of GDP per capita), the Council's evaluation shows that public funding is high in comparison to the results achieved in similar countries. In fact, it reveals that despite the important achievements made in the access to primary education, several challenges are still to be addressed. At the top of these

issues lies the question of languages (scientific and technical subjects are taught in Arabic in primary and secondary school and in French in university), the low enrolment rate in a modern preschool system, the growing learning inequalities between public sector and private sector students and the mismatch between education and training in the labour market. Finally yet importantly, the shortfalls in both basic and continuous training as well as the teachers' working conditions.

This evaluation also displays issues related to governance of the education system and to the lack of synergy between its different components and points out the problems linked to the operationalization, conduct and design of reforms to ensure an effective implementation. Particular emphasis is placed on the negative effects of the succession of reforms and the discontinuity entailed by the changes of Government.

In this regard, the Council is called to play a catalyst role in favour of the renewal of school in a context marked by an increasing social demand for a quality education and a deep reconsideration of the very essence of school by the different components of society.

In fact the Council has been challenged by the highest authority of the country, who has called for 'a stopover in order to make a conscience examination, objectively, to allow us evaluate the different achievements made so far, and identify the existing weaknesses and failures ...'.³

The Council's positioning in the educational landscape

The Council is a kind of a 'Parliament of Education'. Its composition combines professional proficiency and expertise and takes into account gender parity as well as representativeness of the different intellectual, political and socio-professional currents. The diversity of the members' profiles and background aims at guaranteeing the Council's independence, and encourages a maximum of convergence on the main orientations and recommendations of the reform.⁴

The Council has a privileged position in the educational landscape. As an independent constitutional institution, its role consists of enlightening decision makers, actors as well as public opinion through publishing advisory opinions, diagnosis reports, rigorous and methodical quantitative and qualitative evaluation on the different aspects of the educational system. To this end, the National Authority for Evaluation (NAE), the evaluation organ at the Council, in one of the main assets of the institution.

Thanks to its great autonomy, plural composition, consultative and evaluative prerogatives and its scientific and participative approach, the Council meets all the objective conditions necessary to the fulfilment of its missions as a source of proposal, monitoring and support for the competent authorities, capable of triggering a continuous dynamic of improvement all along the process of change.

Through the nature and the diversity of the questions raised and their quality, the reports published, the scientific debate and the social debate generated around main issues related to school, the Council occupies an original place in the institutional, the political and the scientific landscapes one in Morocco.

A Strategic Vision for 2030: a road map for education in Morocco

Based on the studies realized and the lessons learned, the Council had undertaken a process of reflection, collaboration, elaboration and adoption of the 'Strategic Vision 2015-2030' as a new road map for reform, which drew the perspectives and set out a new horizon.

This Vision is founded on four pillars, developed through four big choices, potentially able to lead to the desired reform. They constitute a road map with systemic entries and relevant leverages for a renewal of the education system:

- A school of equity and equal opportunities which guarantees access to the education system through making preschool compulsory and generalizing it progressively (compulsory education involves

every child from 3 to 16 years old), while ensuring a bigger spatial, social and gender justice and promoting education for children with disabilities ;

- A quality school for all, setting as priorities completely rethinking the programmes, setting-up a new pedagogical model to ensure students' abilities development and encourage them to gain critical thinking and creativity, and adopting language alternation to promote foreign languages mastery at an early age. These reforms will be on the back of evaluation systems in order to promote a quality teaching for all children. To this end, the legislator has to create an independent permanent commission to be in charge of reviewing curricula and updating them ;
- A school for the promotion of individuals and society by combating illiteracy and offering new prospects for cultural fulfilment through education, training and through opportunities to integrate working life;
- A school with an efficient leadership capable of restructuring the educational system in such a way as to help achieve a better consistency of its components. This will allow implementing reforms and designing a new model to carry out changes.

While working on the implementation of the Strategic Vision, the Council is called upon to learn lessons from the past reforms and their implementation, with a clarification of the general approach which prevailed their elaboration, basing the said approach on some choices, namely:

- Not to turn the Strategic Vision into a technical operational programme, the missions of which are the responsibility of the only executive authorities (Ministry of Education, Vocational Training and Scientific Research);
- Strengthen the achievements, without hesitating to adopt new approaches for change, which would allow solving the remaining cross-sectional problems;
- Identify priorities in consistency with the time required for their implementation;
- Ensure a careful follow-up and automatic internal and external evaluations of the process of reform implementation in order to

make, in time, the necessary corrections and to proceed to the continuous improvement of the results;

- Consider the Strategic Vision 2015-2030 as a progressive framework, flexible and open to adaptations and development, which become possible in the light of evaluations and dynamics launched by the reform.

The Vision contains several recommendations, among which the necessity to issue a framework law as a legislative mandatory tool that ensures the sustainability of the reform and its protection from political changes in such a strategic sector as education. The adoption of this law is very innovative in the field of education as a national contractual framework that commits the State as well as all stakeholders in the field of education. This commitment provides an opportunity to update and strengthen the legal and organisational framework for all the components of the education system.

The Council and the mobilization for change

Overcoming scepticism so that the emergence of a fair and quality education happens is not only necessary, but also possible in a world full of complexities; it cannot happen through school alone. Realities as geographic remoteness of families from schools and factors such as considering teachers and other education actors as an element of the problem rather than of the solution are, mostly, at the origin of the current scepticism towards the possibility of a successful school reform. This definitely calls the Council to introduce a new dynamic in the mobilization for school.

Aware of the necessary anchorage of the participative and contractual approach adopted in order to establish a social pact, capable of structuring everybody's commitment to the reform and its success, the Council has called to make of 2015-2030 a period of sustainable societal mobilization for the renewing of the Moroccan school, as a national priority.

Thanks to the independent nature of the Council, the pluralism of its

composition as well as to the missions and skills it is endowed with, this institution is often asked to play a central role in the social mobilization in favour of school and its reform. In compliance with this conviction and commitment, the Council has initiated many consultancies aiming at involving all the actors and stakeholders in this '*examen de conscience*' on the situation of schools and their perspectives, in pace with different stages of the Council's work.

This is how the Council chose a participative approach, with an ascendant way to make education actors' ideas and points of view go along with a top-down way in order to share results of the evaluations with actors, stakeholders and the public opinion. Even though the Council, by its composition, is a space of debate and exchange on education and its components, it remains open to the other institutions which provide training and to the point of view of the ground actors.

It is within this framework that the Council had chosen a dialogue with actors through organizing regional meetings, where the main objective was to inform participants on the orientations of the Strategic Vision and to present the different projects and the different measurers planned to this end by different ministries. The ultimate goal for such an approach was to extend collaboration, participation and stakeholders' participation.

The Council is very careful regarding public opinion mobilization. Hosting public debates at the occasion of the publication of each one of its publications, as well as communication meetings, represent an opportunity for media interaction, with researchers and different actors. Furthermore, scientific meetings that are organized by the Council, and the collaboration of national and international expertise, have achieved great attendance, benefited from media exposure that encourage, hence, public debate on the different challenges and perspectives of the reform.

The main challenges of reform implementation

One of the conditions of the reform process' stability and sustainability is to entrench a legal framework. The recent enactment of the 'framework

law', recommended by the Strategic Vision, is a strong tool that ensures reform sustainability. However, in the process of reform implementation, the challenge is to have an accordance between political temporality and reform temporality. The contracting authority for implementation is politics, whereas the institutional positioning of the Council can accompany the effective implementation only through evaluation.

To make a reform succeed, particularly in the education field, its implementation requires necessarily leadership, mobilization, material and financial resources as well as knowledge. It requires also interpretation of the suggested reform and its content by appointing a mandated commission for its implementation, and requires, finally, setting an iterative framework and a consistent evaluation follow-up all along the implementation process.

Five years after the adoption of the Strategic Vision, its implementation remains a real challenge in terms of pace and agenda, of adoption of the legal framework imposed by the law, of stability and continuity of the reform process, and finally, of appropriation by stakeholders directly concerned by the reform.

Reform operationalization and pace implementation are a major challenge. The heaviness of the legislative and legal processes contributes to heighten these challenges. The Council is therefore, asked to play a dynamic role in the reflection, not only on the strategic orientations of the reform, but also, and mainly, on the implementation of the reform, its pace and the ways to accelerate it.

Lessons should be learned from previous reforms. The Council's analytical report on the implementation of the 2000-2013 National Charter for Education and Training emphasizes the shortage witnessed during the setup and monitoring phase of the reform, started in 2000.

Indeed, by questioning the reasons behind the constraints that hindered the achievement of all of the objectives related to the previous education

reform, this report ends up highlighting the lack of strategic planning, as well as the management and implementation modes of the reform. In other words, there are deficiencies in governance, in management engineering and administration, which supervise, hold, support and make it possible to deploy educational engineering.⁵

However, the lessons drawn from the previous educational reform should be taken advantage of at the crucial stage of implementing the Strategic Vision and its Framework Law. Those responsible for public policy cannot consider that these two texts are sufficient. In fact, they need operational plans and implementation schedules, along with an approach to drive the change, beside monitoring and assessment frameworks. Therefore, the Vision of the Council can achieve its objectives only if supported by an operational conception of public authorities, bolstered by clear and structuring priorities, and a drawn and mastered implementation process and a strategic modality to lead and conduct the change.

The stakeholders still have to accept and believe in the meaning and the aims of the reform. The issue of social mobilization is mentioned in the Strategic Vision 2015-2030 as a specific paradigm to which an independent lever is dedicated, divided into clear and well-defined provisions, stating the duties of all actors and stakeholders: Government, local authorities, educational, training and scientific research institutions, trade union organizations, economic operators, families, NGOs, the media, etc.

Despite the main place given to collaboration and mobilization of all stakeholders, the fear remains that political decisions be taken from one side only, and by the central power, at the implementation stage, without previous consultation or open dialogue with the various stakeholders, who are intermediaries for decision-makers who, in their turn, are formally commissioned to implement the reform.

However, the lessons drawn from previous educational reforms carried out in Morocco and those implemented worldwide show that large-scale reforms like the one currently being promoted in Morocco cannot be

implemented properly, and that they lose much of their meaning and thereby, the aims sought through them cannot be reached.⁶ On the one hand, the central power assumes that when a reform is decided, the stakeholders primarily concerned will immediately implement it. On the other hand, local educational stakeholders (who are the real stakeholders of the reform) tend to limit large-scale reforms to tools to be implemented by taking away their true meaning and strategic aim.⁷

Continuous announcement, without previous dialogue or use by the teachers and the intermediate stakeholders aiming to give the impression of acting towards the implementation of the reform, only reinforces the surrounding feelings of distrust and scepticism. Indeed, the political leadership in charge of education tends to make full-scale oral declarations and reports on the achievements to be launched, but does not make a reform or demonstrate the impact on improving the quality of education. In order to push teachers and other intermediary stakeholders to join in, there is a need to increase the number of structured areas and the opportunities for exchange and learning, to achieve the reform as defined by the Government, and its priorities to local contexts.

Also, reform announcements in Morocco often generate unions and corporatists claims from different profession categories in the field of education. This calls political authorities to intensify dialogue with every segment of the labour market and focus attention on the means required to satisfy each one. This leads to address the challenge to initiate a virtuous dynamic to enable all stakeholders of change, at the central level, the intermediate level and inside classrooms, to understand the meaning and the aims of the reform, and to make it theirs.

Throughout the world, the increase in the number of assessments is intended to empower all stakeholders (decision-makers, supervising staff and teachers, etc.), to encourage performance and take into consideration the needs of schools and students in learning.

Over the past decade, the culture of public policy assessment has

gradually gained ground in Morocco. As a witness of this, there is the emphasis laid by the 2011 Constitution in seven articles on assessment as a founding principle of accountability and good governance of public policies, but also the setup of the National Authority for Evaluation (NAE) to the Higher Council for Education, Training and Scientific Research. This body has developed a 'Performance framework for the follow-up of the Strategic Vision 2015-2030'.⁹ It makes it possible to assess the status of education and its development, but also to identify the sources of strengths and weaknesses of education in Morocco. Due to the quality of the reports and their importance in terms of adjusting the priorities and the measures to be implemented, this body is one of the greatest assets of the current reform, provided that the political and bureaucratic contexts are more favourable.

Indeed, the success of the reform goes along with the institutionalization of assessment as a condition and requirement for establishing the performance of public action. Currently, it is a major challenge to better inform political decision-makers and the public, in order to ensure the reforms are coherent by making better use of assessment data, and to gather up the stakeholders to help them achieve the objectives of the Strategic Vision. Evaluation and knowledge have to guide decisions and to be a pedagogical mean to accompany the process of the reform.

Conclusion

How should the role of the Council be redirected towards thinking the process of implementing the Vision in a challenging context?

It is common knowledge - and around the world - that schools are among the most difficult institutions to reform. This observation is more acute in the Moroccan context because of the challenges and uncertainties witnessed when implementing education reforms.

As a constitutional independent institution of good governance, the Council, through the missions and prerogatives entrusted to it by law, should work towards achieving the reform by operating as a surveillance body capable

of alerting to the threats to the implementation process. The focus on the assessment of processes and on the diagnosis of operational functioning of the reform is necessary to implementation follow-up.

The Council members, who have proven their value through their achievements, openness and willingness to establish dialogue, but also through their role as intermediaries between families, the school and the Council, should be a catalyst in the acceleration of the reform. They should enable reforms to last so that all children in schools benefit from a fair and good education. By 2030, a leap forward should have been made towards quality education. This deadline has been fixed for an unquestionable improvement of education in Moroccan schools.

Notes

- 1 Following the adoption of the Constitution of 2011, the Higher Council for Education, Training and Scientific Research has replaced the Higher Council for Education.
- 2 NAE-HCETSR (2014). Analytic Report : The implementation of the National Education and Training Charter 2000-2013. Achievements, shortfalls & challenges.
- 3 Address of the King of Morocco on August, 20th 2013 at the occasion of the anniversary of the Revolution of the King and the people.
- 4 Members of the Council represent the education unions, the most representative ones, pedagogical and administrative actors, parents & students' tutors, teachers, students, territorial authorities, civil society associations, companies and representative institution of higher education, as well as private ones.
- 5 NAE-HCETR. Analytical Report. Op.cit.
- 6 Lessard, C., Desjardins, P.-D., Schwimmer, M. & al (2008). 'Les politiques et les pratiques en éducation : un couplage problématique. Une perspective Anglo-Américaine.' *Carrefours de l'éducation*, (25)1: 155-194
- 7 Idem.
- 8 This framework is a composite index, which compiles 157 indicators, and is declined in three dimensions and 27 sub-dimensions, taking into account the three pillars of the Strategic Vision 2015-2030 as well as the sustainable development goals related to education (SDG4) including horizon 2030.





Dutch Education Council

Building connections

Renée van Schoonhoven

The Education Council is an independent governmental advisory body covering all domains of education (policies) and consisting of experts from academia and education practice. The Council provides advice, both solicited and unsolicited, to the Government, especially the Minister charged with education matters. Moreover, both chambers of the Dutch Parliament may ask the Council for advice. Local authorities can call on the Education Council in special cases of local education policy.

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The Education Council is literally and figuratively unavoidable in the Dutch educational system, in which the Council has fulfilled an essential function for more than a hundred years now. It will need to remain a perfect example of flexibility and agility in the coming decades, because it is only with that flexibility and agility that it will be possible to build the connections that are so necessary in the educational system. Professor van Schoonhoven expands on this statement in her essay written to mark the EUNEC twentieth anniversary.



The Dutch Education Council is unavoidable. At least, that is my conclusion if I look back briefly at the ways in which I have come into contact with the Council during the course of my career. It started back in the 1980s, when I was studying Sociology at Erasmus University Rotterdam and was lucky enough to be the student assistant to the educational sociologist Mart-Jan de Jong. His colleague Han Leune was at that time president of the Education Council. That meant that Mart-Jan had to take over a good chunk of the academic work that was being 'neglected', and he wasn't always very happy about that. But the Education Council was quite simply the most authoritative body in the Dutch education system, and if your colleague is invited to lead it, you simply take on the extra burden. A few years later I came into contact with Fons van Wieringen and, under his supervision, was able to carry out research as an external doctoral student on terms of employment and HR policy in education. I had barely begun my project when... he too became president of the Education Council. I remember him being enormously happy and proud to achieve this honour; he took his work for the Council extremely seriously for many years thereafter. He often did so with an enormous amount of enthusiasm, pleasure and humour, though there were some advisory projects which he found hard work. And that showed. As it happens, the current Council president, Edith Hooge, also obtained her doctorate during that same period, and she will undoubtedly share this recollection.

Over the last twenty years, I have also occasionally been able to make a contribution behind the scenes to the creation of the Council's advisory reports. As a result, I have developed an enormous admiration for the dedication of the staff, the staff office, and the role of the secretary. Yes, the Council is an authoritative institution, but that authority doesn't happen all by itself. Rather, it stems from the huge amounts of work done by the staff and the Council, and from the quality they deliver as a result. I will return to that at the end of this essay.

The Council is still unavoidable in my present work in educational law. No to the educational system meaningful bill goes through Parliament without first receiving advice from the Council. That advice not only finds its way

into policy and politics, but also into lecture halls and into educational law research, as recently happened with the advisory brief on improving the mission of schools in relation to citizenship.

The Education Council is literally and figuratively unavoidable. That of course applies not just in my work, but above all in the Dutch educational system, in which the Council has fulfilled an essential function for more than a hundred years now. And I expect it to continue doing so over the coming decades. That does not of course mean that the Council's capacity and working methods are set in stone. On the contrary, I expect the Council to be a perfect example of flexibility and agility in the coming decades. And it will need to be, because it is only with that flexibility and agility that it will be possible to build the connections that are so necessary in the educational system.

I will expand on this statement in this essay. To do this, in section 1 I will first situate the mission and working methods of the Dutch Education Council today, in 2020; in doing so, I will inevitably have to look briefly at the history of the Council and the developments that have taken place within it. I will continue in section 2 to briefly describe developments in the public decision-making about education in the Netherlands and the social context in which those developments have taken place. The concluding section will highlight the importance of the Council's work both in the here and now and in the near future.

The Dutch Education Council in 2020

The historical roots of the Education Council go back more than a hundred years. The perceived need to educate the people not only provided a backdrop for the settlement of the long-running struggle for equality of school funding, but also for the installation of the Education Council by law in 1919.¹ The creation of the Council was described as '*... the first step (...) towards achieving an improvement in education.*' Against this backdrop, the Council was to be staffed with 'persons who may be expected to have a mastery of the educational and pedagogical issues of today and who are able to identify, sift and promote the elements of value from among

the wide array of insights and views.' The Council members were to be drawn from different sections of the community; this was also intended to help Council meetings contribute to prolonging the – still brittle – peace in the schools funding struggle. The Council was charged with 'focusing exclusively on preparing measures of general import, needed to raise and maintain the pedagogical standard of education.'² The Explanatory Memorandum in fact stressed several times that the work of the Council was to be kept separate from the activities of the civil servants at the newly established Ministry of Education; the activities of the Council were also not to impinge on the territory of the Inspectorate of Education, and vice versa. In short, the independence of the Education Council was important from the start; it must not become part of the Ministry of Education, and that is still the case today.

The functionality, configuration and working methods of the Council were inspired by the launch of a new phase in the relationship between policy, science and educational practice. This correspondence between the form and function of the Council on the one hand and the relationships between policy, educational practice and science on the other was later reflected in the four different phases that can be distinguished in the Council's work.³

Following its launch in the first half of the twentieth century, the Council had the onerous task of seeking a focus for its work: was the Council above all an *educational reformer* or a *guardian* of the equality (especially financial equality) between private and public schools? The function of arbitrator and guardian of the freedom of education dominated in this early period. Thereafter, the form and function of the Council between 1955 and 1975 were shaped mainly by *educational reform and democratization*. The focus in this period was on expanding the educational system, raising the school-leaving age, and improving education. In the last two decades of the twentieth century, all this changed once again and the Council acquired a new and formal role as the definitive advisory body for the government. This meant less emphasis on the importance of educational reform as such and a greater emphasis on the importance of evidence-based policy. Finally, from 1997 onwards, we see a more customized role for the Council,

with a return to its core task of advising government and Parliament on the broad outlines of education policy, of education legislation and of the implementation or application of that legislation.^{4,5} The law stipulates that the Council must consist of a minimum of eight and a maximum of nineteen members.

The change of direction in 1997 was in fact fairly rigorous in the sense that the number of Council members was reduced from more than 80 to a maximum of nineteen. All manner of tasks which had been placed with the Education Council over the decades were scrapped; the Council was charged with shifting its focus to advising on broad outlines of policy.⁶ All these changes did not of course take place in a vacuum, but were part of a broader move towards a substantial reduction in the number of government advisory bodies, achieved through the Advisory System (Reform) Act, to give it its official title (*Herzieningswet adviesstelsel* in Dutch), better known as the 'Desert Act' (*Woestijnwet*). Its purpose was to slim down the advisory system and increase its transparency, to restore the primacy of politics and open a window on political decision-making. Put differently, the forest of advisory bodies meant it had become unclear whether policy was still being determined by government and Parliament, and it was felt that there was a need to cut down large tracts of this forest, including in the field of education policy.⁷ The 'Desert Act' marked the formal end of the original Education Council in 1997, with the new Council being established more or less simultaneously.⁸ The legal requirement for advisory bodies to give advice was abolished and replaced by the power to request advice. All this fitted in with 'the general commitment of central government to place responsibility for decision-making more in the hands of politicians and less in the hands of experts and representatives of particular interests.'

Today, twenty years after this fairly radical change, we can say that the new Council has stabilized in terms of its form and functionality. In 2020, the Council has nine members in addition to the president, all of whom participate in the Council in a personal capacity; the Council is now supported by a professional staff and professional secretary. The Work Programme for 2020 describes the Council's objectives: (1) promoting the

quality of public decision-making on education; (2) contributing to building connections between government and society; and (3) acting as a critical sparring partner for government and those working in education.⁹ The Minister adopts the Council's Work Programme, but the Council naturally formulates the Programme itself based on discussions with Ministers, Parliament and stakeholders from the field of education. The Education Council advises across the full breadth of the education system, from primary and secondary right through to higher education. Its advisory reports are characterised by a solid scientific basis combined with a focus on practice, whilst respecting the core focus areas for the longer term such as the relationship between public and private education, between differentiation and selection and between the continuing concern for and freedom of education. According to the Work Programme, in addition to the necessary advice on legislation, topics earmarked for advisory reports in 2020 include more inclusive education, differences between boys and girls within the school system, and, last but not least, freedom of education.

A relevant question, partly in the light of the EUNEC anniversary, is whether the Education Council still 'works' in 2020? A first answer to this question comes from the report of an evaluation of the Council in 2019.¹⁰ That report shows that, without exception, relevant stakeholders that are associated with the Council value the work done by the Council. In this sense, the Education Council's value added is plain.

The Council in 2020 is regarded as an authoritative, independent and expert advisory body. Its strength lies above all in the quality of its advice, and in the analyses on which that advice is based.

The evaluation also points out that further improvements are possible, though these are mainly concerned with what I would regard as the more operational and pragmatic aspects, such as 'pay attention to the number of advisory reports you publish' and 'communicate more, and more clearly, with those working in the field', and so on. Without doubt, the Council and its staff are already working on these recommendations.

In short, the Education Council is in a good position in 2020. The quality it delivers and the appreciation of its work are high. Everything is in order. The question then is, can that be sustained over the next decade?

And what now?

Until the end of the last century, the role of the Education Council was unambiguous – or, perhaps, one-dimensional – in the sense that, before taking any political decisions, Ministers at the department of Education, Culture and Science would first parade their policy proposals past the advisory councils. There were many, institutionalized consultation bodies in which policy proposals were discussed, before ultimately ending up with the final advisory body, the Education Council. After that came the parliamentary debate.

Not only did the positioning of the Council itself change from 1997, so did the way in which policy proposals ultimately come to Parliament. It was not just the Council that underwent a transformation;¹¹ the years around the turn of the century also ushered in changes to the whole system, the interwoven web of consultative bodies in and around the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science that had arisen during the period of 'constructive education policy'.¹² That interwoven web included bodies which focused on educational content programming, such as the Central Committee for Educational Consultation (CCOO) and later the Primary and Secondary Education Consultation Forum (POVO). There was also a consultation system in which the employment conditions of teaching staff were discussed. Over the course of twenty years this was devolved to the collective bargaining system that prevails today. Policy proposals which passed through this web of consultations could count on 'support'. At the same time, this process was also sluggish and cumbersome: 'The Minister could not move so much as a single comma without those working in education (...) being involved in the decision. Then there was the POVO, to which the Minister had to appeal in an almost Stalinist atmosphere if he wanted to do so much as move a semicolon. (...) Every implementation plan was chewed over, pre-digested, to an almost corporatist degree.'¹³ 'Support' for the proposals by no means always translated into genuine support for

the policy among teachers; it regularly transpired that the representatives in the consultative bodies were closer to the politicians and the policy than to those actually teaching in schools.¹⁴

In the first decade of this century the dense, closely interwoven consultation system was slowly but surely dismantled. Writing in 2010, Bronneman observed that the consultation between the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and those working in education had become a much less institutionalized process than in the past. She noted that dialogue now took place not only with directly involved educational organizations, but also with individual stakeholders and external experts. There is also a great deal of consultation on individual policy items, such as 'appropriate education'.¹⁵ The Education Council has itself observed that this trend does not necessarily mean that policy, legislation and regulations will immediately enjoy more support from direct stakeholders. The Council therefore advocates different kinds of representation in the creation of policy, legislation and regulations, with a view to achieving a better alignment with the wishes and needs of education.¹⁶

Going back to where we started at the beginning of this section, today, in 2020, we can say that the Education Council can no longer be positioned as a one-dimensional factor in the decision-making process with regard to education policy. For one thing, that process itself no longer consists solely of a single, broadly composed decision-making channel. There is no longer a network of fixed discussion partners and regulated consultation forums in which decisions on education policy are prepared. Instead, there is a melee of (ever-changing) representations and relationships, both as regards the type of stakeholders with which consultations take place and as regards the intensity of those consultations. Some legislative proposals are drafted without any consultation at all with (co-)stakeholders; this was for example the case with the Vocational Education and Training (Early Registration and Right to Admission) Act (*Wet vervroegde aanmelding en toelatingsrecht tot het mbo*). On the other hand, there are also processes in which the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science works very closely with selected representatives of education practice in developing policy, legislation and

regulations. This happened in the run-up to the Register of Teachers Act (*Wet op het lerarenregister*), for example – though as it turned out, this did not guarantee the implementation of the Act, large parts of which have still not come into effect; deliberations are currently under way on repealing these unimplemented legal provisions.¹⁷

| *Uniformity has made way for multiplicity*

We see this increasing multi-dimensionality not just in policy making structures,¹⁸ but also in the types of governance employed in administration and policy, including governance in and of education. Here again, we can say that uniformity has made way for multiplicity. According to several authors, the explanation for this lies in the transition to a 'late-modern' society, in which governance concepts that prevailed until well into the twentieth century are becoming less and less effective. In abstract terms, this is because the sources of authority, organizational capabilities and institutional frameworks have begun diverging from each other, in turn meaning there are fewer links than in the past between the point of intervention of a policy and its envisaged effect. Where in the middle of the last century, for example, there was still a fairly solid link between institutions such as the family, church and school on the one hand and political parties on the other, these links are much less self-evident today. Social relationships are much more non-linear and organic in nature; lifestyles and networks are today more changeable and more fluid.¹⁹ This has resulted in a quest for forms of governance which are more fit for purpose in today's context, for example by making use of the (flexible) networks that are already present within society.²⁰

Put differently: in the twentieth century the legislator largely used the instrument of hierarchical governance, involving (a) laying down in legislation and regulations;²¹ in the 1980s, a second governance concept was added, namely (b) outsourcing to the market, followed by a third option, (c) consulting with those working in the field on the importance of customization, network relationships and self-regulation.

Today, we see a mix of these three options in the practice of education policy and legislation – though it is not always clear whether this mix is being applied deliberately. In her study, Hooge, for example, characterizes the mix of options used in practice by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science as 'flexible network governance by the government', but also adds the caveat that it is unclear whether this form of governance is deliberate and intentional.²³ It is also unclear whether the governance option ultimately used is the most appropriate. Bannink and Bosselaar write in this respect that we do not know what constitutes an ideal form of governance at the present juncture, implying that 'we must learn to live with the insight that we have to take a position ourselves in a field that is and will continue to be characterised by multiplicity.'²⁴

In his recent publication on governance, *Besturen zonder wij*, Bannink formulates it a little more critically, as 'in reality, we are just scrambling around without a focus'. In an era when we know more and more, we also know more and more different things. At the same time, the diversity of wishes and desires of people and organizations only increases. The premise that both knowledge and preferences can be linked together in some way – a premise that must be met for effective governance based on a given hierarchy, market or network – is being met less and less often. In other words, there is virtually no 'we' any more on which policy can be based. Instead, we are juggling with a variety of governance concepts in the hope that the 'happy meal' that is the ultimately constructed governance mix might contain a nugget. And sometimes it does.

Bannink makes four recommendations to administrators and policy makers. First: do not work from the basis of assumed uniformity, but start from the premise that existing governance concepts assume the presence of a 'we' which is by no means always still present. Governance is a thorny issue for which there are no uniform or unambiguous solutions. Second: be fully aware that governance is about influencing relationships between actors and that it is always necessary to take into account the preferences and actions of those actors. Third: rather than a 'we', there is a collection of individual 'I's', which means that actors ultimately always make their own

choices; moreover, those choices will ultimately manifest themselves in actual actions in practice, rather than stemming directly from covenants or consultation agreements. Fourth and finally: against this background, governance is above all a question of ploughing on, continuing to try to find the right mix, hard work, continuing to engage in interaction, all with the principal objective of thoroughly understanding what others are saying and obtaining a realistic picture of the likely practical actions after agreement has been reached at the negotiating table or following a consultation round. All in all, Bannink argues that this means that governance in 2020 is not a matter of building on commonality, but above all of creating commonality.²⁵

Building connections

The recent evaluation by Baars et al. does not contain an analysis of what the changing societal and administrative context as outlined above means for the work of the Education Council. The evaluation culminates in a number of clear recommendations: try to limit the number of advisory reports in the future; with this in mind, focus mainly on the big strategic issues in education policy; make the switch from analysis to recommendation in the advisory reports easier to follow by exploring possible scenarios, and so on. As commented earlier in this essay, these tips are valuable and the Council and its staff will undoubtedly already be working on implementing them. But are they sufficient?

In his farewell address in 2011, Fons van Wieringen remarked that the advisory reports of the Education Council are so good because they are taken seriously, adding in the same breath – and to some hilarity in the audience – that they are taken seriously because they are so good. He was being completely serious, however, stressing the importance for Dutch education of ensuring that this virtuous circle is maintained and nourished in the decades ahead.

In short, we may – or perhaps must – expect a good deal from the Education Council going forward. The bar is high, and it needs to be. It will be clear from the foregoing that these ambitions can be met if the Council strives to be sufficiently agile in the coming period in the ever more fluid

world of education, in which variable governance mixes abound and – just as in society in general – there appears to be no clearly identifiable 'we'.

It will be key not to start from the traditional presumption that we (can) know everything and that we will ultimately reach a consensus, but above all to engage in interactive dialogue with all manner of bodies and stakeholders involved in education policy.

The results of this interaction can and will undoubtedly lead to the production of advisory reports by the Council in the 21st century which are good and which are taken seriously. The added value of the advisory reports will however lie above all in the process by which they are created, because it is with these processes the Education Council meets the growing need for connection in education policy.

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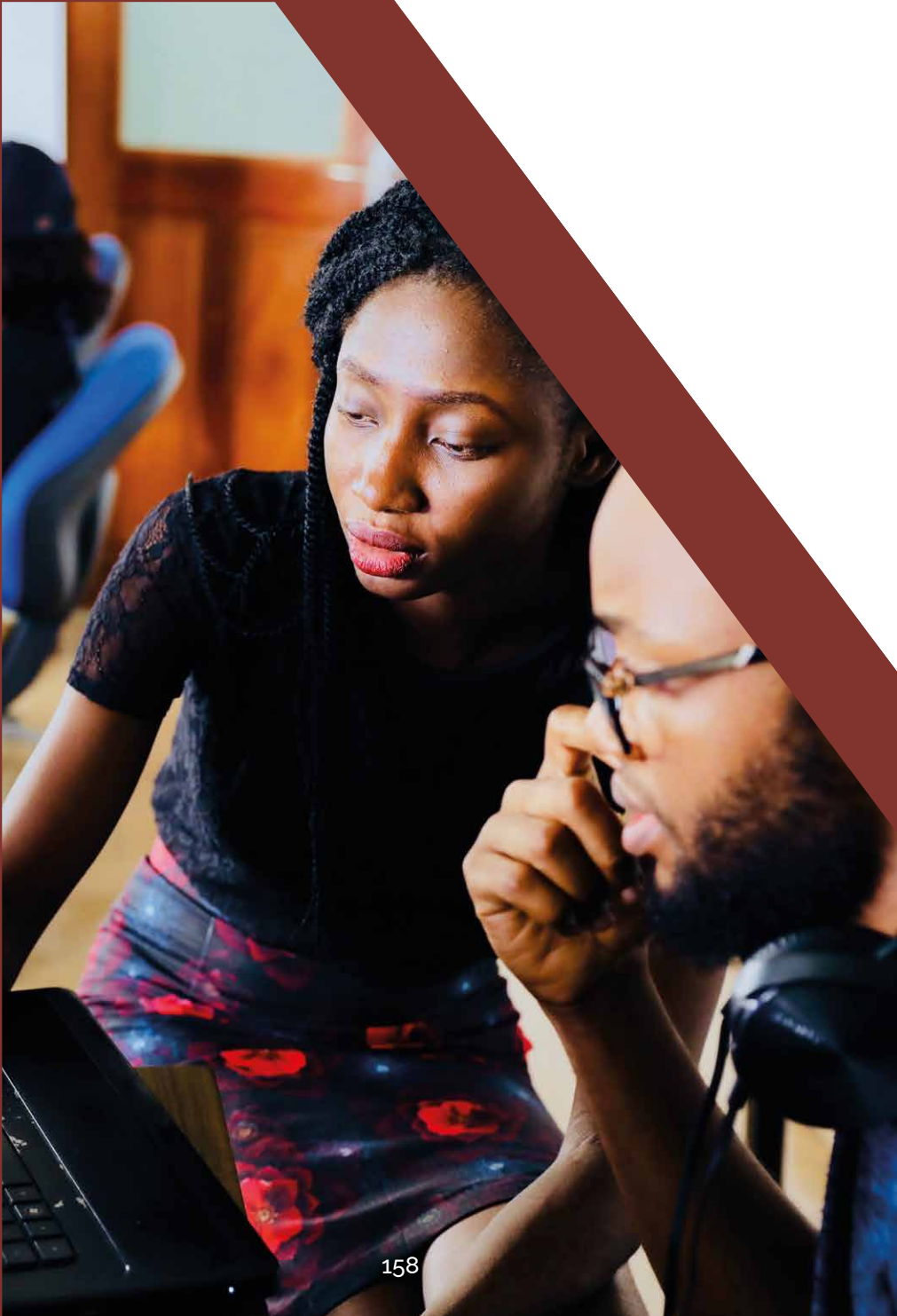
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- 5 In the laws governing primary and secondary education, the Education Council also plays a role as an adviser to the Minister with regard to attainment targets for education in the Friesian language. The Council can also act as an adviser to Municipal Executives and municipal Councils on issues relating to freedom of education in municipal education accommodation policy.
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National Education Council, Portugal

The advisory role in education, in Portugal

Ercília Faria

Manuel Miguéns

The Portuguese Education Council (CNE) is an independent advisory body on educational matters, whose President is elected by the Parliament.

The CNE produces statements and recommendations on educational matters, according to its own agenda or as a response to requests from the Parliament or the Government.

The CNE promotes the debate among social, economic and cultural interest groups, in order to reach consensus on educational matters.

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This paper demonstrates how the Education Council, established in 1987, fulfils its mission to ensure the participation of the various scientific, social, cultural and economic forces in the search for extended consensus concerning educational policies. Distinctive features of the Council are emphasized, such as its representativeness, its independence, the fact that it combines stakeholders' views and expertise, its right of initiative.

Today, great technological challenges and changes create instability and uncertainty, but also new possibilities, new perspectives, new questions and new problems that education must face and tackle in order to prepare and educate young people for today's world. Every advice, report and study undertaken by CNE seeks to anticipate or respond to those rapid changes in society, but also to preserve the distinctive marks of the Council's activity.



A paper published by the National Education Council (*Conselho Nacional de Educação - CNE*) (Gregório, 2016) signed by a member of its scientific and technical staff, notes that the emergence of the role of consultation in education in Portugal dates back to 1859 with the creation of the General Council of Public Instruction (*Conselho Geral da Instrução Pública*). Between then and the current characteristics of the Council, nine governing bodies with advisory functions in education were identified. In addition to the consultation role, most of these councils had duties related to inspecting educational institutions and some had the obligation to submit reports to the Government. The various councils responded to government requests or issued their opinions on their own initiative. Although their advice was intended to support the Government in the decision making process, their recommendations might not be considered by the authorities.

In all precedent cases, the President of the Council was the Minister in charge of the education sector. These councils were permanent and had a similar membership in their composition, but the number and origin of the members varied a lot. While some had only members appointed by the central Government, most of them integrated other members also appointed by the Government, but representing higher education institutions as well as literary, scientific and professors' corporations.

The first high level advisory body concerning education was created in 1982, long after the revolution of 25 April 1974, by Decree-Law 152/82, of 22 April. This National Education Council was, then, an organ of mixed composition, including a President, appointed by the Government and five members, civil servants with recognized merits in the field of education. The remaining members of the Council were the Secretary-General of the Ministry, the Directors-General and nine members appointed for three years to represent the universities (public and private) the polytechnic institutes, the Ministry of Labour, the Education Committee of the Parliament and parents associations, trade unions, employers' associations, and student unions. This composition shows that practically half of the Council members were appointed by the supervising Minister. In its first design and concept, the Council did not, however, come into operation.

Mission and competences

The Portuguese National Education Council, with today's predominant features, was established in 1987, following the approval of the Education Act, in which its institutionalization was reaffirmed as part of the national education system and regulated later by the Law 31/87 of 9 July. CNE was then defined as a superior, independent advisory body designed to provide a platform for various social, cultural and economic forces to search for broad consensus, regarding educational policies. As stated in a document submitted and approved by the CNE plenary, 'In light of the mission and objectives that were originally assigned to CNE, consolidated in the course of an already long practice, the Council was configured essentially as an organ of debate and socio-educational consultation, of an advisory nature.' (CNE, 2006)

The revision of its statutes in 2015, maintains its definition as an independent advisory body which works closely with the Ministries of Education and Science, Technology and Higher Education and has administrative autonomy. The mission of CNE continues to be to ensure the participation of the various scientific, social, cultural and economic forces in the search for extended consensus concerning educational policies. The following competences are assigned to the Council: i) support the formulation of educational policies that are under Government responsibility, through cooperation involving Public Administration, personalities of recognized merits and representatives of academic, social and economic interests; ii) issue and publish advice, opinions and recommendations on all matters related to the implementation of national policies aimed at the educational, scientific and technological system; and iii) to promote thoughtful reflection, discussion and debate, and to formulate proposals within the scope of its mission and the objectives of the education system.

Composition

In line with the ideas of autonomy and great representativeness, stated in its Organic Law, the Council includes members appointed by the Parliament, the Government, the Regional Assemblies of the Autonomous Regions, the

Administrative Regions, and the National Association of Municipalities. But the majority of its members are stakeholders, designated by a large number of social bodies - employers' and trade unions, parents' associations, student unions, scientific associations, pedagogical associations, cultural associations, private and cooperative education associations, confessional organizations and the National Youth Council. It also includes members chosen according to their specific scientific and pedagogical expertise, designated by co-option, and not by ministerial appointment, in a total of 67 members. The term of office lasts for four years. The membership of the Council reveals a combination of social participation and representation with expertise in the field of education.

The diversity in the membership and the knowledge, experience and expertise brought to the reflection and debate allow the production of advice combining the views of stakeholders with those perspectives supported by evidence.

With such a diverse composition, the Council must seek broad consensus, as stipulated by the organic law. 'As a universe of organized action, CNE is a space for confronting ideas and positions in an interrelation of conflict and cooperation' (Ramos, 2017). And this constitutes the added value of the Council, inasmuch as it is not just a parliament with different voices exaggerating their differences or even conflict. From the very beginning the Presidents and the members of the National Education Council promoted discussion, debate and confrontation of ideas within a calm atmosphere, described by Eduardo Marçal Grilo as a 'quiet, smooth conflict' (Grilo, 2003) that made CNE a respected and highly regarded institution.

Distinctive features

Its capital of knowledge, experience and expertise, its independence and its ability to add value to the common good of a society, indelibly mark the functioning of the National Education Council. It follows 'from the understanding and praxis of the institution itself, that CNE constitutes an independent organ of a special nature, whose functions go beyond the

strict scope of the so-called consultative administration, normally intended to issue opinions of a technical nature' (CNE, 2006).

Starting from the differences and even the divergence of conceptions, the Council raises itself in search for broad consensual solutions through critical, alive and informed debate. Consensual solutions, 'that might be useful in bridging gaps between civil society and the State - because education is, first of all, the fundamental freedom of people, then the cultural task of families and civil society, then still the task of the State' (Pinto, 2003).

The National Education Council has some distinctive features that should be emphasized.

Representativeness

It is an organ of wide representation and diversity of members, which includes representatives from different political, social, economic and cultural bodies, educational stakeholders and specially qualified people, who are co-opted to reinforce the Council's expertise.

Independence

The President is elected by Parliament and is not appointed or chosen by the Ministry of Education or the Ministry of Science. The members of the Council are appointed personally and to some extent act independently of the entity that nominates them. The Council's opinions and recommendations are made public. The approved advice is published in the official journal - *Diário da República*. The Council prepares its recommendations at the request of the Government or Parliament, but may publish advice on its own initiative, being this 'right of initiative' also an important source of independence.

Stakeholders' views plus Evidence

As already mentioned above, CNE has developed its own way of building consensus trying to combine interests, views and perspectives of those

representing different social, economic, cultural or political forces with the best available evidence gathered internally or brought by national, European and international academics.

Non-Executive

The fact that the Council does not have executive competencies, is not responsible for action, has preserved its essential function, which is intended to be useful for all decision makers: political, social, educational, and for the whole society.

Finally, the already mentioned **right of initiative** is extended to the ability to organize the most diverse activities such as conferences, seminars, hearings, surveys or research studies, that fall within the Council's sphere of action, resulting in publications which became references in the field of education. The 'State of Education', a report that includes the main indicators of our education system, published since 2010, is probably the best example of these regular publications. In the words of Barbosa de Melo '...The publication of its advice, opinions, and recommendations, which already comprises numerous volumes, shows that the members of the Council understand that it is also up to them to promote a public informed discussion about the issues and problems of education in our country. Here lies the prestige and strength that CNE has developed since its origins' (Melo, 2003).

Key dimensions of CNE's work

CNE's action is developed taking into account both the participation of social representation decanted in its membership and its vocation as evidence based policy advisor. Its approach in the preparation of the advice to be issued, integrates on the one hand, the discussion and debate on the different points of view - the perspective of participation and social representation, and, on the other hand, the positions and views of academic studies and scientific research - the best available evidence. As stated by David Justino 'These are not mere opinions, but positions based on scientific evidence, on comparisons with other experiences and problems, on the value of potential alternatives, on the estimation of impacts' (Justino, 2017).

Over its 30 years of activity, the National Education Council has issued advice and recommendations more than 130 times, focusing on a wide variety of issues and problems in the field of education policies. CNE sought to become a deeply rooted and respected institution based on the quality of its advice and recommendations, but also by the studies and reports it prepares and by the conferences, seminars and debates it organizes.

A number of significant changes were introduced in the past two decades, particularly in the way its activities are developed. Examples of these are the launch of recommendations prepared over an extended period of time that include contributions collected through scientific studies, seminars, hearings, debates, meetings of specialized committees and plenary sessions of the Council; the preparation of technical reports by CNE's technical-scientific staff that support and justify the Council's opinions and recommendations; conducting and publishing thematic studies on education.

Even more relevant were the approval of influential advice on early childhood and pre-school education, on retention and grade repetition, and on special needs education; the studies on assessment, quality and equity in education, on selection and recruitment of teachers, and on students' performances and equity; and the annual publication of the report 'State of Education' since 2010.

It is worth noting also the implementation of multiple initiatives in all districts of the Continent and in the Autonomous Regions, in partnership with several local entities - municipalities, basic and secondary schools, higher education institutions, companies and associations.

The National Debate on Education, organized at the request of Parliament and developed throughout the year 2006 was also a remarkable initiative. Its dimension and scope and the important question that gave it the motto 'How are we going to improve education in the coming years?' led the then President, Júlio Pedrosa, to affirm 'I believe that there have been few occasions, if any, where such a wide and diverse expression of

concerns, desires and points of view on Education in our country have been expressed' (Pedrosa, 2007).

The National Education Council has been able to avoid the temptations that typically affect 'boundary organizations' working on the frontiers between society, politics and the academy. Political temptations which would transform the institution 'into an instance of power endowed with the competence to decide or execute education policies'; bureaucratic temptations, failing to prevail 'the idea and the will to serve society aiming to improve the educational system'; academic temptations, starting to 'be conceived and act as a forum for education scientists and researchers' (Melo, 2003). As it is stressed in a document approved by the CNE plenary 'an organ of such broad representation, on the one hand, and of such marked independence, on the other hand, could not seriously commit itself to decision-making, executive or judicial functions, without thereby compromising its internal capacity to generate consensus and its independence' (CNE, 2006).

Concluding remarks

A former president of CNE states that 'formal institutions, although legitimized and sustained by law, are created, developed and affirmed, by the will of men and women who give them meaning, give them the form and justify the social recognition that makes them last' (Justino, 2017).

In a European comparative study of education councils, promoted by the European Network of Education Councils (EUNEC), advisory bodies are regarded as operating 'in a competitive policy environment where advice is coming from multiple sources and with different claims to legitimacy. Therefore, they have to be able to gain and sustain access to the policy making process. Not only the advice itself needs to be of high quality and of high relevance, the advisory body itself also needs to establish and maintain a high status in order for their advice to be taken into account'. And concluded: 'What appears to be crucial is the way in which the advisory body is able to function as a real 'boundary organization' bridging the worlds of science, state and society, tailoring to the needs of different

actors' (Brans, Van Damme, & Gaskell, 2010).

In 2003, Mário Pinto stated: 'The Council today is confronted, like all of society, with new problems, currently referred to with new expressions - such as information society, globalization, etc. In fact, in the last few years much has changed [...] In this sense, I would say that the Council's vocation has broadened, and now has to be exercised not only towards the so-called public education policies, but in a much broader way, in view of what can be called the cultural and civic thinking of society'.

More recently, at a conference organized by the CNE, on *Education and the challenges of the future*, attention was drawn to a new paradigm, due to the great technological changes underway, the convergence of technologies, the interconnectivity of geographies and content, the appearance of machines that are increasingly autonomous and endowed with artificial intelligence. These are the challenges and changes creating instability and uncertainty, but also new possibilities, new perspectives, new questions and new problems that education must face and tackle in order to prepare and educate young people for today's world. What consequences will technological developments have on employment, the media, security, privacy, democracy itself...? What implications will this have on the nature and distribution of work among everyone and throughout their lives and, for each one, in their relationship with leisure? How to preserve and implement ethical principles related to their many social and economic implications?

For the current President of CNE, Maria Emilia Brederode Santos, these are issues that have general effects on society, but are particularly important in education that is a privileged instrument to guide, pilot, and command change. She adds: 'CNE will have to launch a debate on these issues, deepen them and collaborate with other national and international bodies, in the reflection and invention of the future' (Santos, 2017).

But she also considers that 'CNE's action should focus not only on those who are in the educational system, but also on those who leave it prematurely or who did not enter it (...); adults who left school without

qualifying (...), the working population that need to be professionally converted or updated; the elderly population who do not want to stay mentally inactive and seek intellectual enrichment opportunities'.

At the Parliamentary hearing for her election as President of CNE, Maria Emilia Brederode Santos assured:

'Education has to tear borders, widen its scope, communicate with other areas of knowledge to identify the new challenges and enable citizens to participate in social transformations, to be able to invent alternative responses and to make choices regarding humanity's good. I would like CNE, either on its own initiative, or collaborating in other people's initiatives, to contribute to a better future.'

In the video at the end of the second term as President of CNE, Teresa Ambrósio testified 'I learned how, in a democratic life, educational policy decisions can be prepared, through the participation of various actors, various personalities, and various representatives of institutions linked to education, making them all express their expectations, their interests and try to coordinate themselves in finding solutions for the education problems'.

Teresa Ambrósio, President of the National Education Council from 1996 to 2002, is regarded by a former Minister of Education as 'the main driver of the network of similar organizations - with the aim of promoting and encouraging the exchange of experiences, encouraging international reflection and allowing mutual enrichment of educational experiences through the contact across borders' (Martins, 2007).

Successive CNE presidents, members, secretary-generals and technical-scientific staff have participated, over the years, in the construction of a project that is renewed every term. Every advice, report and study seeks to anticipate or respond to rapid changes in society, but also to preserve the distinctive marks of the Council's activity.

In current times of 'online everything', where the political temptation to use open and public consultation from the internet or social media is paramount, it is crucial to show the merits and added value of the organized, informed, institutionalized, debated, reflexive, pondered, evidence-based and scientifically grounded consultation provided by Education Councils.

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The Conseil Supérieur
de l'Éducation
du Québec: a
governmental
organization
examining
educational issues
that has existed for
more than 55 years

Maryse Lassonde

Christina Vigna

Marina St-Louis

In brief, *the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation* is an independent body separate from the *Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement supérieur*. The role of the Council is to advise the Minister on any education-related issues and consequently it must, at least every two years, prepare a report for the Minister on the state and needs of education.

The Council may decide the topics and themes of its briefs and reports on the state and needs of education, and determine through its own internal regulations when and how they are made public. The Council is a body for consultation and critical analysis within a framework of democratic institutions at arm's length from pressure groups.

Maryse Lassonde is president of the Council. After obtaining her Ph.D. in Neuropsychology from Stanford University in 1977, Maryse Lassonde was Professor at *Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières* from 1977 to 1988 and at *Université de Montréal* from 1988–2012, where she was named Professor Emerita in 2013. Dr. Lassonde was President of the *Association francophone pour le savoir* (ACFAS) in 1993. She has also held a Canada Research Chair in Developmental Neuropsychology from 2001 to 2013. She was President of the Royal Society of Canada from 2015 to 2017. Lastly, she was also Scientific Director of the *Fond Québécois de la Recherche sur la Nature et les Technologies* from January 2012 to July 2018 and is currently holding the position of President of the *Conseil supérieur de l'éducation du Québec*.

Christina Vigna is secretary general of the Council.

Marina St-Louis is research agent at the Council.

The *Conseil supérieur de l'éducation* (Quebec Higher Council of Education) was established in 1964. The main role of the Council was to ensure that the demands of stakeholders in the education sector and the public were heard by the Minister and the Government. This paper draws the history of the Council, from its origins to the modernized, revitalized Council it is today. It describes how the Council exercises three complementary but interrelated functions (policy, democratic and educational), allowing to formulate and share its comprehensive, integrated and evolving vision of the education sector in Québec.

Origins

The *Conseil supérieur de l'éducation* (Québec Higher Council of Education) was established in 1964, at the same time as the *Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec* (Québec Ministry of Education), following publication of the report issued by The Royal Commission of Inquiry on Education in the Province of Québec (Parent Report), which recommended the creation of the Council to oversee the development of education in Québec and to advise the Minister. At that time, Québec society was engaged in a period of significant reform and modernization, known as the Quiet Revolution. The Council and the *Ministère de l'Éducation* were established during this time of intense social change.

The Parent Report stated that the main role of the *Ministère de l'Éducation* was to administer and coordinate the entire education sector, with the Council acting as a sort of 'standing commission of inquiry' in the field of education. The Council could take positions on all matters related to education involving every level and type of education, from Kindergarten to higher and adult education.

The main role of the Council was to ensure that the demands of stakeholders in the education sector and the public were heard by the Minister and the Government. The Council was to become the Minister's primary advisor in the field of education, and required a comprehensive vision of the entire educational system. In fact, at the time, the main problem with education was a lack of coordination and the absence of a global vision, which is why the Parent Report emphasized the need for unified functionality through the Council and the creation of a *Ministère de l'Éducation*. In effect, each educational sector (private, public, English, French, primary, secondary, university, technical and vocational) previously operated in a vacuum, with no unifying links or coordination, which made it difficult to transition from one level of education to another, among other challenges.

At the time of its creation, the Council comprized 24 members from different backgrounds, including a Catholic Chairperson and Protestant Vice-

Chairperson appointed by the Government. The Council was made up of four commissions (Elementary Education, Secondary Education, Technical and Vocational Education and Higher Education) and two committees that were responsible for religious affairs (Catholic and Protestant).

In its first few years, the Council focused on enhancing the school system, particularly through informing the public with respect to educational issues. At that time, the Council was engaged in developing a free and modern public education system by providing advice concerning specific and 'operational' questions related to educational planning and development. As the Council evolved, this contribution to short-term questions gradually transitioned to a more medium- and long-term contribution, in keeping with the vision of the Council's role as described by the Parent Commission.

Similarly, the make-up of the Council and its bodies was also adjusted over the years, reflecting certain historical and social changes. In 1969, two years after the introduction of the first general and vocational colleges (Cégeps), the Commission on College Education was created to replace the Commission on Technical and Vocational Education. At the same time, the *Act respecting the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation* provided for the formation of a Commission on Adult Education, due to the development of this educational sector. In 1993, within the context of revamping college education and the creation of the *Commission d'évaluation de l'enseignement collégial*, two other councils were dissolved (*Conseil des collèges* and *Conseil des universités*). The Act respecting the *Conseil supérieur de l'éducation* was again amended, replacing the Commission on Higher Education with the Commission on College Education and the Commission on University Education and Research.

In 1999, a new body was created: the *Comité consultatif sur l'accessibilité financière aux études* (CCAFE). Administratively attached to the Council, the CCAFE was independent with respect to content. Its advice was not followed by the Council but by the CCAFE itself. The CCAFE was responsible for advising the Education Minister on all matters that the latter submitted to it in connection with financial aid programs instituted under

the *Act respecting financial assistance for education expenses*, along with tuition, admission, enrolment and other fees, and with initiatives or policies that may affect financial accessibility to education. However, this committee is no longer part of the Council from an administrative perspective. Since 2014, administrative support for the CCAFE has been provided by the *Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement supérieur*.

A Modernized Council

In 2000, major changes were made to the composition of the Council within the context of the secularization of the educational system, resulting in the elimination of the two religious committees (Catholic and Protestant) that had been established when the Council was created. The religious affiliation criterion for appointing members and the requirement for having a chairperson of one denomination and vice-chairperson of another were also abolished. Since that time, the Council has only had one chairperson (the president), and its membership has decreased from 24 to 22 members, which is the current number.

In 2006, the *Act respecting the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation* was amended as part of the reassessment of the relevance of all Québec government bodies. The Council was maintained, but its operating rules were relaxed. Its responsibilities now included the production of a report on the state and needs of education every two years, rather than every year. In addition, the Council would now determine the number and composition of its commissions through an internal management by-law.

More recently, in 2019, the Council changed the name of one of its commissions. The former Commission on College Education is now the Commission on College Education and Research. The word 'research' was added to highlight the importance of this aspect to the missions and activities of colleges. The name change was inspired by the role of research in college education from the beginnings of these institutions in Québec and its prolific history over the past 50 years. The Council has also underscored the significance of college research activities in many of its briefs. Research has been an integral part of the missions of colleges since

1993, and has received recognition and substantial financial support from both levels of government, and these factors were taken into account in selecting the new name of the commission.

The Council currently comprises five commissions: the Commission on Preschool and Elementary Education, the Commission on Secondary Education, the Commission on College Education and Research, the Commission on University Education and Research and the Commission on Adult Education and Continuing Education. Each commission has between nine and fifteen members, who are appointed by the Council following consultations with institutions and organizations in the education sector. The chairperson of each commission is appointed from among the members of the Council. The Council also creates another committee and appoints its members to prepare reports on the state and needs of education. The makeup of this committee varies depending on the topics covered in each report. If necessary, the Council can establish an ad hoc committee charged with preparing a draft brief or report, especially in response to legislative and regulatory changes that require an in-depth understanding of the issues and a timely response.

Those who sit on the Council and its commissions act as members of the public, and as volunteers. They do not serve as experts, managers or representatives of special interests. However, they do possess strong social roots, coming from a variety of communities and regions and belonging to the two major language groups. They are educators, administrators, parents or students from diverse educational levels and sectors, or members of civil society.

Mandate and Functions

The mission of the Council is to collaborate with the *Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement supérieur* and to advise it on all education-related issues. The Council has the authority to make recommendations. However, it cannot act in place of the Minister or order that certain actions be taken or positions be adopted. Therefore, its power is advisory, and not legislative. Consequently, the Council informs the Minister with respect to the state and

needs of education. It provides the Minister with critical analyses supported by research and consultation with experts and members of the education community, and by the deliberations of Council members. It also advises the Minister on long-term changes to be made to the educational system.

In so doing, the Council provides the public with a certain right of review and ability to influence the Government's actions in the education sector.

In its role as Ministerial advisor, and pursuant to its constituent Act, the Council acts either on its own initiative (own-initiative advice), in response to a request received from the Minister (solicited advice) or because, pursuant to the Act, it is required to submit a brief to the Minister with respect to a regulation that the latter plans to adopt or amend (regulatory advice). In carrying out these functions, the Council relies heavily on scientific research, but it differs from a conventional research organization.

In fact, in its co-construction model, the Council takes into consideration the available scientific data and the practical experience of its members.

The discussions and deliberations of the Council help to put this experience in perspective and contrast it with the experience of others, and with the research on the subject under study.

The Council carries out its mission through the exercise of three complementary but interrelated functions: policy, democratic and educational.

In its *policy role*, the Council submits briefs and suggests guidelines aimed at assisting the Minister in making informed decisions. It proposes a balanced and realistic vision of not only what is immediately possible, but also what is desirable over the medium and long terms. The Council's analyses, which are based on a solid understanding of the state and needs

of education, shed new light on current and emerging questions, issues and phenomena. The guidelines and recommendations proposed by the Council may be addressed to the Minister and to other stakeholders in the education sector to influence decisions in varying circumstances. Toward this end, the Council relies on research and analysis drawn from scientific knowledge and practical experience that must be thorough in order to provide proper information to all relevant stakeholders.

In fulfilling its policy role, the Council must remain critical but unbiased. It acts as the representative of general interests in the education sector, and not that of special interest groups. It must maintain a certain distance from current events and refrain from issuing immediate opinions without first submitting them to deliberation among its members. This allows the Council to protect its critical analysis role as an advisory organization to political decision-makers and the public. In carrying out this function, it must seek consensus from all of its members, who represent the entire population.

In its *democratic role*, the Council promotes bridge building among citizens, decision-makers and stakeholders in the education sector (teaching/academic staff, parents, students, educational personnel and other interested parties). Thanks to their civic commitment, nearly 100 people contribute to the work and analysis carried out by the Council and its bodies on a volunteer basis. This democratic role is also exercised through consultations that the Council conducts with the public and various stakeholders in the education sector within the context of formulating its briefs and reports.

In fulfilling its democratic role, the Council must ensure equitable representation of society among its membership, commissions and committees. It must seek balanced representation among men and women, people from the various regions of Québec, Anglophones and Francophones, members of cultural communities, First Nations and Inuit representatives and representatives of the different levels and sectors of education. Two senior officials from the *Ministère de l'Éducation et de*

l'Enseignement supérieur act as *ex officio* associate members of the Council with no voting rights. This is one example of bridge-building between the Ministry and the Council.

Finally, in its *educational role*, the Council proposes values, principles, situational analyses and potential solutions, which it submits to educational institutions for consideration and deliberation. The Council places special emphasis on disseminating the results of its analyses as widely as possible. These efforts are aimed at contributing to public debates on education and exerting its influence among ministerial and government officials, and within civil society. The Council must primarily focus on ensuring effective dissemination of its briefs and reports. This function also relates to its policy role, because the influence of its advice depends on the content of its publications and the rigour with which they are formulated.

Therefore, the Council is a key player in building bridges between research and action, and between policy decisions and actions to be implemented within the day-to-day operation of education systems. Its role as co-creator of public policy in an environment of tension among many centres of interest appears to be a necessary one, not only in terms of attaining consensus, but also in terms of maintaining these centres and helping them to survive various controversies.

THE COUNCIL IN 2020: A REVITALIZED ORGANIZATION

Over the first few decades of its existence, the Council essentially stood alone as the front-line advisor to educational decision-makers. Today, a larger number of organizations indirectly participate in formulating public educational policies. Thus, over the past few years, the Council has been forced to contend with positioning challenges related to its advisory role. The 2018-2022 Strategic Plan, which highlights the new vision of the Council, was released during this period.

Strengthened by the appointment of its new president, Maryse Lassonde, along with additional human and financial resources, the Council re-examined its operating methods and bolstered its influence among

decision-makers and stakeholders in the education sector. In particular, the Council relies on the quality of experience and the availability of its volunteer members. Today, nearly 100 volunteers contribute to the analyses and to the richness of the work done by the Council and its bodies. The Council also draws upon the skills and experience of approximately 35 individuals who work within its organization.

Throughout this Strategic Plan period, the Council's activities are marked by a period of growth and modernization that result in unprecedented achievements that are generally aimed at expanding the scope of its activities. For example, research documents that are prepared to support the deliberations of the Council's commissions are now made public. Seminars are organized in partnership with other organizations (*Fonds de recherche du Québec*, college associations, etc.) to discuss education-related topics. Some of the themes that have led to conferences involving large numbers of stakeholders in the education sector include funding for educational research, enhancing research at the collegial level and the effects of gender on education.

While its work traditionally focuses on medium- and long-term perspectives, the Council now plans to develop activities and projects aimed at informing decision-makers over the short term. In keeping with its mission, the Council also intends to exert greater influence on the legislative process and among decision-making bodies, while maintaining its neutrality and the quality of its analyses, which are fundamental to its legitimacy.

Furthermore, in acknowledging that its influence depends in part on the actions of its readers and target audiences, the Council seeks to ensure the effective adoption of its advice among the relevant stakeholders. Toward this end, it is increasing its visibility and investing in various communication platforms, which will ultimately raise its profile. Over the past year, the Council has expanded the scope of its work by diversifying the nature of its productions and creating tools aimed at fostering ownership (webinars, workshops, tool kits, etc.) that are suited to the needs and

specific requirements of its target audiences. The Council has also been more proactive on the public scene, and most recently, it used social media to promote the dissemination of its work (www.cse.gouv.qc.ca). The Council intends to continue to increase its involvement in the workings of the government by playing a more active role in initiatives that support decision-making.

The Council also seeks to augment its initiatives and collaborations with various Québec partners from the educational sector on an international scale. Accordingly, in 2019, the Council signed a bilateral agreement with the *Conseil supérieur de l'éducation, de la formation et de la recherche scientifique du Maroc*. Similarly, the Council participates in many international conferences (UNESCO, EUNEC, CAEI, OFE, etc.), and has promoted multiple activities related to these conferences and seminars.

The influence, prestige and development of the Council are the main factors that drive its activities, and combined with its written work, they enable the Council to maintain its role as an indispensable authority and a revitalized organization that formulates and shares its comprehensive, integrated and evolving vision of the education sector in Québec.





State School Council, Spain

The Spanish Case: an interview with the President of the State School Council.

Enrique Roca

The State School Council is the national advisory body which enables active participation of the stakeholders involved in compulsory education. One of its main responsibilities is to provide general advice regarding the education bills or regulations to be issued by the Government and any other that the Ministry in charge of Education decides to submit for consultation. Over one hundred counsellors from a great variety of institutions are represented.



Currently, since November 2018, Mr. Enrique Roca is President of the State School Council. During his extensive professional experience he has held various positions, such as: Senior Advisor to the Cabinet of the Secretary of State for Education, Director of the Educational Research and Documentation Centre (1994-1996), and Director of the Institute for Evaluation (2006-2010). He was also appointed Spanish Representative at the OECD Education Policy Committee, PISA Governing Board (PGB), PISA Strategic Development Group (SDG), and in the Standing Group of Indicators of the European Union (SGIB). Head of International Relations of the Ministry of Education and Consultant for the OEI (2012-2018), where he coordinated the development of the 2021 Education Goals Program and the Report 'Miradas', also based on the Education Goals 2021.

This interview with the President of the Spanish State School Council, Mr. Enrique Roca, attempts to approach the main features of this national advisory body, which assures the greatest representation of the education community in the country's democratic institutions. The Council legislative role in Spain has been enhanced in recent years, following the efforts of both Spanish and regional governments, to adapt the law-making process to Better Regulation and Governance Policies encouraged by the OECD and the European Union. The Council is also responsible for the publishing of the Annual Report on the state and situation of the educational system, which is the authoritative source for information on the state of education in the country and provides data on the structure, finances and performance of education.

INTERVIEW



What does it mean to your professional career to become President of the State School Council?

Teaching at the university, and in secondary schools, has enriched me personally and professionally for more than 20 years. I have also devoted my career to educational research, the results of evaluation and assessment, and also to analyze educational data and draw up indicators. At the same time, I was responsible for law-making, more precisely two of the Spanish educational laws. From that perspective, I am delighted to use my skills and professional experience to serve the purpose of the Council and the representatives of the educational community. We have assumed the major responsibility of advising the educational authorities in the definition of the policies and measures that are necessary for the improvement of Spanish education.

Please give us information about the main features of the Council and the most relevant organizations and institutions represented in this advisory body.

The State School Council is the national advisory body for the participation of the stakeholders involved in pre-primary and primary education, secondary education and vocational training. One of its main responsibilities is to provide general advice regarding the education bills or regulations to be issued by the Government and any other that the Ministry in charge of education decides to submit for consultation. Over one hundred counsellors, from a great variety of institutions, are represented: teachers, parents, students, administrative staff, trade unions, business organizations, educational authorities (Government), local entities, universities or higher education representatives, women rights representatives people of recognized standing and professional experience and the Presidents of the Regional School Councils.

The State School Council, in its plenary meeting, should be consulted

“ on the general teaching schedule and the basic standards fixed by the Government for the management of the education system. It also corresponds to the Council, in its Plenary Meeting, to approve the Annual Report on the state and situation of the education system. This Annual Report is a complex text made up by a long descriptive section which includes proposals for the improvement of education made by the Counsellors.

The Standing Committee (Comisión Permanente) of the State School Council is composed of the President, Vice-President and a quarter of the representatives of the groups and organizations, except that corresponding to the Presidents of the Regional School Councils. Apart from other duties, this Committee serves as a working group to prepare and approve the draft version of the Annual Report on the state and situation of the education system that is then submitted to the plenary meeting. Besides, the Committee issues reports to offer advice on draft legislation or collaborates in the publishing of the annual magazine. The Committee can also propose specific studies on educational topics, and organize workshops and events.

How is education and participation affected by the political organization of the country?

Though the right to education is guaranteed in the Spanish Constitution, and is considered as a fundamental right for everyone, Spain is a decentralized country and the role and competence in education is also decentralized, both at a political and administrative level. The Law establishes the allocation of responsibilities between the central Government and the Autonomous Communities (Regional Authorities). For this reason, the Regions have to be represented, and play a very special and important role, in the State School Council.

At a national level, it is important to mention the role of the Education Sector Conference: the Committee which encourages territorial cooperation. It is chaired by the Government, responsible for education, and the corresponding representatives of the Regional



Authorities in charge of Education are part of it. The Autonomous Cities of Ceuta and Melilla are also represented. It is an advisory body that encourages decision-making and coordination, aimed at reaching agreements on common matters.

The Regional School Councils, dependent on the Regional Authorities, are also very important as advisory bodies. They exercise similar competences to those of the State School Council regarding teaching programs, opinions on legislation and educational regulations, as well as reports and proposals to their respective administrations. The proportional representation of the various social sectors in each of the Regional School Councils and the State School Council is quite similar, although the total number of counsellors is variable, depending mainly on the size of the educational community they represent. The Presidents of the Regional School Councils gather together in a Committee (Junta de Participación Autonómica) that plays an active part within the State School Council.

I would also like to mention the School Boards. The advisory bodies which ensure that the educational community is entitled to intervene and express their opinions about the school management. In schools supported by public funds, the School Board is composed of the director as president, the head teacher, a counsellor or representative of the City Council in whose municipality the school is located, a number of teachers, no less than one third of the total members of the Council, a number of parents and students, elected respectively by and among them, who also cannot be less than one third of the total members of the Council. Education proposals come mainly from those three relevant sectors. The School Board is also made by a representative of the administration and service staff; and the secretary, who acts as secretary of the Board, with the right to speak but not to vote.

What is the added value of the education proposals made by the counsellors? Why is reaching consensus so important?

We are really glad to say that in 2019, the Standing Committee

“ of the State School Council developed a number of proposals, which were approved by our plenary meeting. These proposals highlight some specific issues that are particularly important for the Spanish educational community. They are based on the EU 2020 key objectives, on the one hand, and the UNESCO 2030 Goals for Sustainable Development on the other. These goals, as it is well known, aim to 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all' by 2030 as UNESCO Goal 4 states. Only by talking, discussing and making decisions together is when we are exercising a democratic participation. I like to emphasize that this is the added value of consensus-based proposals.

Which are the proposals? Are they connected with the main concerns of the education community?

I think that most of them reflect the main issues that concern the Spanish stakeholders. We reflected upon: how to extend free schooling from 0 to 3, both to public and private schools, ensure a decrease in repetition, consider inclusion as one of the main principles of education in every stage, pay special attention to the early detection of learning difficulties, boost teachers' co-working and evaluation of key competences, encourage a school and classroom organization using innovative methods and teamwork, grant scholarships and study aids in post-compulsory education, reduce early school leaving below 10%, guarantee that at least 95% of the students may continue their studies when they finish compulsory education, encourage the development of a special statute devoted to the teaching profession, favour the presence of female students and encourage lifelong learning and adult participation in education and training activities. We also paid special attention to the fact that investment in education should be increased.

Our proposals also demanded education and training for professional, personal and social success. It should be noted that education and training, in addition to facilitating access to

“ employment, has to provide each citizen with the conditions for well-being, access to culture and the exercise of rights, freedoms and responsibilities in democratic societies.

How is stakeholders' participation, mainly of parents and pupils, facilitated and exercised at schools?

Educational administrations regulate and ensure participation of stakeholders involved in decision-making: apart from teachers and members of the administrative staff, pupils and parents are also represented. The educational authorities also take appropriate measures so that parents receive individualized advice, as well as the necessary information to help them in the education of their children.

Pupils can associate, depending on their age (especially from lower secondary school and upward), creating organizations in accordance with the Law. Through these associations they can express their opinion about everything that affects their school life, collaborate in the school work and in complementary and extracurricular activities, promote participation in the advisory bodies. In this way they are trained to exercise citizenship and to take active participation in economic, social and cultural life, with a critical and responsible attitude, capable of adapting to changing situations in the knowledge society.

How can the Reports issued by the State School Council influence legislation and policy making in the field of education?

It is not a simple or easy task to define how the work of the Council influences decision-making at policy level. The Council's advice is not formally binding. However the intrinsic value of its advice is a democratic input in the policy process. It is also true that the Ministry and the educational administrations have to give a detailed account of the Council amendments, both for those they accept and incorporate in the legislative projects, and for those they don't accept, justifying the reasons why they are rejected.

“ In my view, there is a traceable effect that can have profound and sustainable impact in the medium term: the proposals that the Council representatives make, as members of the educational community, extend to all the counsellors, and serve as an enriching element. In turn, those counsellors may transfer these reflections to the stakeholders that belong to their own sectors. This dissemination process can contribute to a better understanding of education and its challenges. But, above all, it may help to focus clearly on the advantages of a good education for all and to identify education as the greatest country asset, and a guarantee of future prosperity. If this dissemination process is successful, stakeholders from different sectors may transfer these demands to the political authorities: a circular shape structure that can influence policy making.

In addition, there is no doubt that the proposals are going to reach families and students, as the direct beneficiaries of educational success. The Council's publications, such as reports, studies and the Education Magazine, also contribute to this dissemination process. But teachers, families and students too are responsible for making this communication possible.

The legislative role of the Education Council in Spain has been enhanced in recent years, following the efforts of both Spanish and regional governments, to adapt the law-making process to Better Regulation and Governance Policies encouraged by the OECD and the European Union.

How is stakeholders' participation influenced by international standards?

One of the main regulatory tools in the OECD catalogue is 'Stakeholder engagement and transparency'. Countries should adopt mechanisms which allow systematic adoption of stakeholder engagement improving its methodology and transparency. Oversight and quality control of stakeholder engagement must also be taken into consideration.

“ After the publication in 2014 of the OECD's report 'Spain from administrative reform to continuous improvement', the 2015 Administrative Procedure Act and Public Sector Act have been approved. Another milestone is the 2017 Royal Decree which regulates the 'ex ante' assessment of laws: this one compels the Government to publish the Education Council's reports including the answers to any report observations.

What other channels are opened for citizens' participation?

The Ministry of Education and Vocational Training provides a website for public consultation. The ultimate goal is to be aware of the opinion of citizens, organizations and associations before a legislative project is developed. This channel is the access to the procedures of prior public consultation and hearing. It also serves as public information in the process of drafting the bills and draft regulatory standards that are promoted by the Ministry.

But this is not the only one. We can also find some other collegiate decision-making bodies in the field of education. The Vocational Training Board is the advisory body that encourages a fluent dialogue between business organizations, trade unions and the different administrations in charge of Labour and Education. The Board of Governors for Higher Arts Studies is a Government advisory body, with special relevance in the field of higher artistic education. The Spanish Observatory for Peaceful School Coexistence plays an active part to foster mutual respect and peaceful conflict resolution, prevention of bullying and of all the forms of cyberbullying, as well as violence in schools. Some other Observatories are managed by the Regional Educational Authorities, or focus on racism, xenophobia, or violence against women. Finally, I want to refer to the Observatory for scholarships and study grants, which has to prepare statistics and reports that contribute to improving the efficiency and transparency of scholarships and university grants, with the participation of social agents and students.

“ I feel that more use should be made of these advisory bodies, because they can be very useful to ensure citizens' participation. I also have to emphasize that the main stakeholders (teachers, parents, pupils, students and some of the most representative private school organizations) have direct access to public authorities in charge of education to claim their rights.

What are the main contents of the Annual Report on the State and situation of the education system?

The Annual Report, as I said before, is a complex text made up by an extensive section that contains a vast amount of information, with a concrete structure. In 2019 Chapter A was devoted to outline the European and international perspective that clearly determines the overall picture of education in Spain, incorporating population factors, as well as a description of the educational, social, economic and cultural background that influences the context of education. Chapter B dealt with public expenditure, human resources and types of schools. Chapter C was a little bit more complex, because it described the main education policies and programs carried out by the Government, in cooperation with the Regional Authorities. Among them: concern about diversity and compensatory education, equality between men and women, special learning needs, non-formal and distance education and training, school co-existence, initial and on-going teacher training, educational research, information and communication technologies and e-learning, foreign languages, academic and professional guidance. As searching for equity is one of the main goals, it also describes the policy for scholarships and study grants. Chapter D talked about students' results, national and international evaluation standards, and the follow-up of the EU 2020 Strategy and its benchmarks. Finally, Chapter E depicted the main features of education in the Autonomous Cities of Ceuta and Melilla. It also explains the main activities carried out by the Departments of Education of the Spanish Embassies abroad, together with a description of the network of Spanish schools and other programs aimed at the promotion of the Spanish language and culture.



Talking about the future, what is your working plan? What will be the contributions of the different stakeholders?

On the one hand, the State School Council publishes, on a yearly basis, an Education Magazine ('Participación Educativa'). Next year's edition will be devoted to innovation. As is always the case, we aim to create a balance between articles written by scholars or skilled professionals, and best practice examples that come from the Regions. We are very interested in giving voice to all of them, so they feel represented and really relevant and useful.

On the other hand, the technical team of the Council has started to develop a study on the success of primary and secondary education in Spain. This study would revolve around three main axes: repetition, qualifications and early school leaving. Apart from Spain, nine other western countries have been chosen for the study. We think that they are relevant for a better understanding of the analysis and to produce comparable data: Canada, France, Germany, Italy, The Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States.

The School Councils of the Regions will also have an active participation in the study. Their analysis may contain aspects such as whether the focus of education is placed on teaching or learning and the evaluation of basic competencies or the families' involvement in education. A working group with representatives of the Regional Councils has been set up, and the results of this study will lead to a specific publication and will be included in the Annual Report on the state and situation of the educational system.

Being educational success the key issue of the study, are the proposals made by the counsellors aimed at implementing this goal?

Of course they are, especially those referred to inclusion as an essential principle in all educational stages. Inclusion requires, first, to recognize student diversity and, second, to provide adequate means and resources for schools supported with public funds so that they

“ can guarantee equal opportunities, regardless of the students' social, cultural and economic background. The proposals also refer to early detection of special educational needs and learning difficulties.

And the counsellors plead for a decisive decrease in repetition; the aim is that, at least, 90% of students will not have repeated any school year at the end of compulsory secondary education.

The Plenary is also concerned with the teacher teams' involvement in the evaluation and certification of the basic competences. These competences must be addressed in each of the areas or subjects, but it is important to be able to work and evaluate them together. The assessment of these competences is essential for decision-making about course promotion.

It is also important to encourage school and classroom organization and the use of innovative methods, helping all students according to their specific needs and learning rhythms.

We would like to thank you for your time and for the detailed analysis of the Spanish case. Is there anything you want to add as a conclusion?

It has been a pleasure for me, and specially to have the chance to contribute to this special reader on the occasion of EUNEC's anniversary. So let me finish wishing the European Network another 20 years of successful work.

COLOPHON

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Education councils in Europe

Going beyond the tensions

EUNEC is the European Network of Education Councils. Education Councils advise the government of their country or region on education. Many European countries have their national or regional education councils. Their composition and competence vary, but in general, there is consultation and debate between representatives and/or experts from diverse backgrounds with the aim of providing advice, organizing consultations and preparing prospective research on educational policy topics. EUNEC is the result of a common interest in each other's activities of various Education Councils in Member States of the European Union, and recently of Councils outside the Union. Via EUNEC they exchange information on the education policy in their country or region and their viewpoints on the matter.

As education and training develop an international dimension, EUNEC wants to play an important role at the European level of education policy, as a representative of the entire educational field and as a discussion partner for European policy makers.

EUNEC was officially launched in 2000 during a meeting of representatives of Education Councils in Lisbon, after preparatory meetings in Tomar (1997) and Bruges (1998). This reader is published at the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the network.

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