

The influence of research on the development of higher education in Europe

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A complex terrain

- Who are we trying to influence?
- What do they want?
- How can we provide it?
- When will they want it and when can we provide it?
- And what will they do with it?

Many actors

- European Commission
- Other European organisations
- National ministries
- NGOs
- Companies
- University ‘managers’
- University ‘academics/researchers’
- Users/consumers – ‘stakeholders’

EIPEE: Evidence Informed Policy in Education in Europe

- Athens Institute for Education and Research
- Campbell Collaboration
- Danish Clearinghouse for Educational Research
- Department of Sciences of Education and Cultural and Formative Processes, University of Florence
- Directorate of Knowledge Management, Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, Netherlands
- European Association for Practitioner Research on Improving Learning
- EPPI-Centre, Institute of Education, University of London
- German Commission of Education Organisation, Education Planning & Law
- German Institute for International Research
- Hungarian Institute for Educational Research and Development
- Institute for Effective Education, University of York
- Ministry of Education and Research, Norway
- National Union of Teachers, England
- Research Utilisation Research Unit, University of Edinburgh
- Swiss Coordination Centre for Research in Education
- Education Evidence Portal (EEP), UK

A question of 'place'

- European Union
- European Higher Education Area
- Nation states
- Regions and other sub-national territories
- Cross-border groupings
- Localities (e.g. city regions)
- Europe 'in the world'

A question of 'authority and decision-making'

Sources and levels of authority

- Individual professors, departments, faculties and universities
- National Ministries
- Other national agencies (e.g. quality assurance bodies and research councils)
- European Commission
- Other European actors (ERC, ESF, ENQA, EUA, Council of Europe)
- Other 'stakeholders' – users, consumers, interest groups

The legitimisation of disorder

“we need....administrative doctrines and broader ideologies that tell officials they are doing alright when the system as a whole looks like a mess, nearly everyone in the system feels powerless, and no one can clearly identify who is doing what to whom.”

Burton Clark, 1983

What do 'users' want?

1. What is it that they need to know?
2. What is already known?
3. What is not known?
4. What are our research questions?

Types of higher education policy research

- Studies to support policy development
- Studies to support policy implementation
- Studies to support policy evaluation

- ‘Questions which are best left unasked’!

Policy agendas: Education and Training 2020

“A European strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.”

- Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality
- Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training
- Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship
- Enhancing innovation and creativity, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training.

Policy agendas: The Bologna process

Making European higher education 'coherent, compatible and attractive'

- Mobility between and within higher education systems, and into the labour market.
- Lifelong learning and recognition of informal learning
- Increase mobility (one fifth of graduates to have studied abroad)
- An external dimension: increase attractiveness of Europe as an education destination
- An external dimension: support recognition of European degrees worldwide
- Importance of quality assurance systems.

The discourse

- Economy
- Skills
- Enterprise
- Innovation
- Technology
- Competences
- Globalisation
- Sustainability
- Demography
- Mobility
- Social cohesion
- Opportunity
- Equity
- Community
- Public good
- Lifelong learning

Knowledge society

“Knowledge can no longer be regarded as discrete and coherent, its production defined by clear rules and governed by settled routines. Instead, it has become a mixture of theory and practice, abstraction and aggregation, ideas and data. The boundaries between the intellectual world and its environment have become blurred as hybrid science combines cognitive and non-cognitive elements in novel and creative ways.”

(Gibbons et al, 1994)

‘Socially robust’ knowledge

- ‘relational’ (neither absolute nor relative)
- When research has been ‘infiltrated’ and ‘improved’ by social knowledge
- Has a strong empirical dimension – frequent testing, feedback & improvement
- A ‘strongly contextualised’ scientific field
- A ‘fine’ distinction between ‘robustness’ and ‘acceptability’
- From ‘scientific autonomy’ to ‘scientific accountability’

(Nowotny et al, 2004)

Making 'socially robust' knowledge: Implications for methods

1) Roles and relationships

- Researchers
- Practitioners
- Policy makers
- Interest groups

Making 'socially robust' knowledge: Implications for methods

2) Taking account of contexts

- Geography and history
- What is being compared?
- Policies, practices and impacts
- Differentiated higher education and differentiated societies
- Within Europe and extra Europe comparison

Making ‘socially robust’ knowledge: Implications for researchers

- Drawing in ‘social knowledge’
- Juggling multiple roles
- Recognising ‘power’ and ‘interests’
- Valuing ‘distance’
- Challenging assumptions
- Multi-methods
- Multiple audiences