

Education Scotland core strategies

Strategic objective 5:

Influence national policy through
evidence-based advice



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1: What is this strategy trying to do?

This strategy is designed to support the implementation of Education Scotland's fifth strategic objective, which aims to 'influence national policy through evidence-based advice'. The strategy addresses the most effective ways in which our unique range of evidence, drawn from all our independent evaluations, engagement and capacity building activities can combine to make our professional advice highly influential. It should be viewed within the overall context of the corporate plan and is one of a suite of strategies which have been developed for each strategic objective.

Each strategy exists to help all Education Scotland staff and our key stakeholders align their work to make the biggest possible impact. When planning and delivering our work, we should use these strategies to ask ourselves whether what we are doing, or the way we are doing it, can be further improved to have even more impact.

Education Scotland's Framework Document outlines the principal duties of our Chief Executive, one of which includes providing independent professional advice information and evidence to Scottish Ministers, relevant Scottish Government directorates and key national bodies including those responsible for funding, policy development, management, quality and delivery of education.

Education Scotland is in a unique position to draw on its extensive intelligences to provide strong evidence-based advice for the development, implementation and review of national policy in relation to learning in all settings and for all ages. Our staff are very proactive in working with policy colleagues, not only in learning but increasingly across health, justice and a wide range of other portfolios. They seek to influence developments at early stages of development and thinking, making best use of their knowledge and expertise. By delivering on our aspirations for this strategic objective we will rely and draw on Education Scotland's Knowledge into Action Plan, using our intelligences and evidence to deliver more effective policy in collaboration with colleagues. Our evidence base comprises knowledge that comes from all our activities, many contexts and sources and in various forms, including through:

- practitioner wisdom and experience;
- the experience of learners and other stakeholders;
- inspection and review evidence;
- national and international benchmarking, case studies which exemplify good practice and the experience of others in achieving improvement;
- practitioner led action-research and academic research;
- analysis and interpretation of operational data for example on activity, costs, quality; and
- performance information.

Education Scotland is uniquely placed to bring this evidence together to inform policy by providing an independent overview of the evidence.

For the purposes of our work we are using a broad definition of policy: a set of ideas or a plan of what to do in particular situations that has been agreed officially by a government, a political party, or a group of people in key national bodies relevant to education.

What do we say in the corporate plan about this objective?

'As the national education improvement agency we have access to a uniquely broad range of knowledge and evidence from our evaluative and engagement activities. Together with our awareness of knowledge from research and international analyses, we have a strong responsibility for ensuring that we use this evidence base effectively to provide high-quality, professional advice in ways that have a positive influence on the policy-making process.'

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To do this, we will:

- ensure staff are clear about their roles in influencing policy;
- develop processes that enable us to regularly gather and analyse relevant data and intelligence to ensure we have much of what is required to hand;
- ensure that we share and agree our purposes, role and expectations with policy colleagues in government and other organisations in relation to policy development and implementation; and
- ensure that wider colleagues, stakeholders and practitioners are clear about our role as civil servants in relation to policy development and implementation.

What does this strategy commit our staff to?

This strategy commits our staff to:

- make the best of the published knowledge and evidence base, combined with sharing, reflecting and learning from experience and using knowledge gained to inform their practice and ensure that decisions are based on sound evidence;
- proactively contribute to the acquisition, development, recording and sharing of knowledge and evidence to inform their own practice and to support the virtual learning cycle; and
- provide clear, independent, balanced evidence-based advice to policy colleagues at a time and in a way that will maximise impact.

In implementing this strategy, staff will undertake and prioritise the following activities:

- Provide up-to-date information and intelligence on progress, strengths and issues in implementing key aspects of current policy and the overall picture of improvement.
- Maintain a detailed understanding of current and future issues and priorities with which leaders and practitioners will be dealing with and the challenges of future delivery.
- Identify and keep up to date with policy connections across Scottish Government and relevant national partners, working collaboratively to co-design and co-produce advice.
- Analyse our on-going stakeholder engagement to inform our intelligence.

- Develop our evidence base and using it, enable the policy landscape and education system to evolve to anticipate and meet the future needs of all learners.
- Capitalise on the collective resources and expertise of practitioners, services, organisations and agencies engaged in education and with communities.
- Engage widely with partners and stakeholders to ensure our advice is informed by an appropriate range of perspectives and views.
- Broker and undertake externally commissioned investigations of current policy areas and provide evaluative reports on a wide range of policy areas.
- Provide and host secondments of staff in partnership with Scottish Government, national partners and Local Authorities to support the development of staff, policy and practice.
- Provide oral and written advice in response to specific requests from Scottish Government officials and Ministers, and other members of the Scottish Parliament, maintaining a close working knowledge of current and developing policy thinking.
- Participate actively in working groups across Scottish Government and relevant national and international partners to advise and shape policy and practice.
- Provide direct support and briefings for Ministerial and senior staff engagements as required.

2: What do we believe about our role in influencing policy?

We believe that Education Scotland is ideally placed to engage with policy makers in Government and other national and international bodies to provide professional advice that will improve outcomes for all learners. Our well-informed advice is highly persuasive and influential to Ministers, policy leads and national bodies as it draws firmly on high levels of professional judgement and analysis that are based on triangulated evidence. As we engage with stakeholders, our professional advice directly informs the thinking and strategies in national bodies relevant to education, aligning the role and activities of partners with Government policy. Delivering this aspect of our work effectively will enable us to achieve our vision and play a significant and highly regarded role in ensuring:

- educational outcomes for all learners are improving;
- inequity in educational outcomes is eradicated; and
- public confidence in education is high.

Education Scotland's status as an Executive Agency provides focus, authenticity and reach. We believe that we can use this Executive Agency status to maximise our influence on informing and developing national policy. We focus on key issues and priorities at national and local levels. We offer authenticity because of our arms-length status and our range of specialist expertise and knowledge. Our reach enables us to both views learning from the perspective of the learner and also to engage strategically with the providers of learning. Education Scotland operates independently, but remains directly accountable to Scottish Ministers for the work that it does.

Our business is therefore aligned directly with the Government's objectives and priorities. However, our inspection, review and reporting functions are also independent from Scottish Ministers and safeguards are in place to ensure the integrity and impartiality of inspection and review. Our Code of Practice for inspection and review outlines the approaches we take to ensure our independence at the point of evaluation during our full range of scrutiny activity. Overall, Education Scotland has access across Scotland to a uniquely broad based wealth of knowledge and evidence about learning through its evaluative and engagement activity in all relevant sectors. We work very closely with a wide range of Scottish Government Directorates to ensure that this knowledge and evidence is available for use in their work. This includes those leading on policy across learning; children and families; employability, skills and lifelong learning; justice; local government and communities; safer communities and public health.

Education Scotland has direct policy responsibility for youth work and adult learning. This work sits alongside our CLD inspection activities and extensive capacity building programme. The combination of policy, development and evaluation work, together with appropriate firewalls safeguarding the integrity of each element, provides a strong source of expertise and experience to feed directly into cross-cutting policy making across Scottish Government and into the sharing of expertise within Education Scotland.

Education Scotland also works collaboratively with a wide range of other organisations to assist us in the collation, analysis and application of evidence. This includes national partners and other scrutiny bodies, universities and colleges, local authorities, parent groups and third sector organisations.

Education Scotland has a major influence in relation to Government thinking on policy. We undertake this role through:

- engaging in regular and wide-ranging communications and meetings with policy colleagues across Government and other agencies, identifying common;
- areas of work and increasingly co-producing during the transition from policy to implementation;
- engaging in regular dialogue with ministers and ensuring we provide well-timed professional education advice on issues of national priority;
- providing specific oral and written advice in response to specific requests from Scottish Government officials and Ministers, and other members of the Scottish Parliament;
- working to capitalise on the collective resources and expertise of practitioners, services, organisations and agencies engaged in education and with communities;
- publishing timely thematic and aspect reviews, state of the nation reports and sectoral advice and resources; and
- increasing the reach of our evidence to the broader cross-cutting policy landscape across and beyond education and children's services.

What are the building blocks needed to ensure that this strategy makes the biggest difference?

Having the most effective and appropriate influence on national policy requires all staff in Education Scotland to have a full understanding of their responsibilities in relation to building a professional overview and communicating this effectively. We will support staff through the work of our analytical services team, communications team and planning and performance team and by ensuring that our corporate priorities are understood and implemented by staff across the agency.

1. Developing more systematic approaches to knowledge and information management across the agency

Continued development of systematic approaches to knowledge and information by:

- developing Education Scotland's organisational capacity and capability for creating, accessing, using and sharing knowledge (**looking inwards**);
- establishing effective national approaches to supporting knowledge into action across education in Scotland (**looking outwards**); and
- supporting the continued development of an evidence base which will support Education Scotland to anticipate what change is required to ensure the education system is responsive.

Embedding knowledge into action is the role of **all staff** within Education Scotland.

2. Being clear about our purpose to ensure we undertake our roles and remits flexibly and constructively across all our programmes and projects

Every member of staff has a responsibility to understand their own role and also the best ways that they can contribute to the wider organisation. In order to do this staff will require to ensure they have a good up to date understanding of the main projects and programmes within the organisation and to be proactive in updating colleagues on intelligence, research and practice and policy developments.

3. Building effective working relationships across Education Scotland teams and with external partners and stakeholders in gathering and synthesising intelligences systematically to influence national stakeholders' operational policy

All teams should develop an explicit remit and direction that makes their priorities and responsibilities clear to internal and external stakeholders. Teams will need to identify their key stakeholders and share intelligence and analysis on an appropriate and systematic basis.

4. Maximising opportunities to share professional advice across Governments in increasingly agile and responsive ways in order to ensure the effectiveness of our impact.

We have agreed that we will use three approaches to joint working with Scottish Government and we would plan to apply these when working with other colleagues:

- **Close collaboration** will be used when working on new ideas and on areas of high political and media interest;
- **Joint programme delivery** will be used for the management and implementation of policy, which often highlight key issues for policy considerations; and
- **Agreed arms-length delivery** when it is clear that there are specific reasons for operational independence including inspection and reporting, review and other aspects of scrutiny and evaluation.

Managers and staff will ensure that they are as ready to respond to requests for policy advice and intelligence as can be expected. They will keep up to date with the impact and implementation of key policy areas and any issues arising across the education sector. As well as offering this information as requested, staff will also be proactive in offering policy advice to colleagues to make best use of our unique role.

3: What are the key features of implementation?

This section provides an overview of the key aspects of implementing this strategy.

We will:

- develop an action plan which will drive the successful implementation of the strategy. This plan will provide detail of responsibilities of staff, how the strategy will be taken forward across all aspects of Education Scotland and how this will impact on our engagement with Scottish Government and other key partners;
- build the capacity of our staff to implement this strategy by identifying and sharing effective practice;
- embed our culture of self-improvement as the basis for progress towards collecting and providing excellence in professional advice. The language and approach of looking inwards, looking outwards and looking forwards underpin all of our approaches to business planning;
- work increasingly closely with policymakers and other key stakeholders at early stages of project and business development and developing joint objectives where appropriate and practicable. There will be increasingly clear links between our business priorities and those of Scottish Government and other national organisations which will enable stakeholders to identify who is responsible for what. Clear demarcation of responsibilities will enable colleagues and external stakeholders to evaluate our impact more effectively and lead to more effective prioritisation;
- build the confidence of our stakeholders who will be able to increasingly see us making effective use of our engagement with them in informing policy development; and
- discuss the impact of this strategic objective regularly within the Leadership Forum and they will oversee how the strategy is being used and implemented across all aspects of Education Scotland's work.

We will use the approaches outlined in the virtuous cycle of improvement to plan our approaches to influencing policy and leading on adult learning and youth work policy. Our programme plans will clearly signal how we will know each step is making a difference.



4: How will we evaluate the impact of this strategy?

Our impact will be measured against the principles highlighted in this paper and in relation to success criteria identified in the Corporate Plan as follows:

- We will set up a strategic objective steering group made up of staff from across the agency that will oversee how the strategy is being implemented and used across all aspects of our work. This group will consider key issues relating to our influence in relation to policy development and provide an appropriate stimulus and catalyst for new approaches as required and monitor and report on the impact of its action plan.
- Feedback from Ministers and Scottish Government colleagues about the range, quality and effectiveness of our advice and relationships will confirm that we are increasingly agile as an organisation and making better connections across all policy frameworks.
- Our key partners report that our advice is impartial and high quality and that our relationships with Ministers has credibility which influences policy.
- Our key partners report that we work collaboratively with them in knowledge gathering around key policy areas.