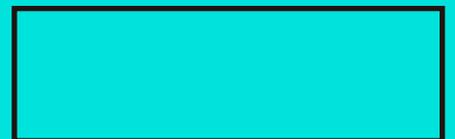
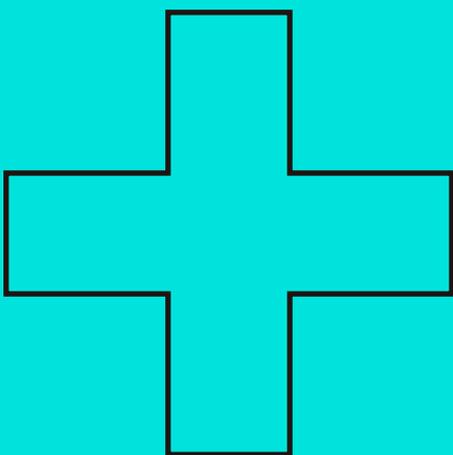


# Research in the service of an evidence- informed education policy

Josep M. Vilalta and Núria Comas



**+ RECERCA**

**X MILLOR  
EDUCACIÓ**

CONNECTING POLICY  
AND EVIDENCE

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CONNECTING POLICY  
AND EVIDENCE

 FUNDACIÓ  
BOFILL

Educació per canviar-ho tot

## Research in the service of an evidence-informed education policy

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>The disconnect between research and education policy in Catalonia</b>	6
<b>Precedents indicating the anomaly of education in Catalonia, but also the way forward</b>	10
<b>The urgency of an evidence-informed education policy and a regional commitment that takes research in education into account</b>	12
<b>The need for an institutional commitment</b>	16
<b>The principles of a system that promotes evidence-informed education policies and the path that remains to be taken in Catalonia</b>	18
Objective 1 Ensure that there is educational research that provides valuable and useful knowledge for Catalonia's educational challenges	20
Objective 2 Ensure that the knowledge produced is transferred and known by key actors in the education system	23
Objective 3 Evaluate education policies rigorously and systematically	26
Objective 4 Ensure that evidence is systematically taken into account when formulating, designing and reviewing education policies	28
<b>Looking ahead to 2024: one per cent for educational R&amp;D and the Plan for Evidence-Informed Education Policies</b>	32
<b>Annex</b>	38

# RESEARCH

Scientific research and the evaluation of public programs and policies provide evidence-informed information for government decision-making. They are key to detecting and determining the scope of problems and their causes, identifying social trends and therefore anticipating future needs or risks, assessing a policy's technical or economic viability, acceptability or contextual suitability; establishing a policy's effectiveness or efficiency; detecting its unforeseen consequences and so on.

**Policy making is much more than applying the conclusions of science, but we must have rigorous knowledge to make good decisions.** Incorporating and considering the results of scientific research is extremely valuable for addressing social issues: not only does it allow for more effective management, a greater impact and a more efficient use of resources, but it also helps to streamline public debate and bring greater transparency to the process of designing and implementing public policies, and their results.

**And yet, in Catalonia there is no firm commitment to make research and evaluation a key tool for educational improvement.** In 2018 data, €38 million were spent on R&D in education, which accounts for 1.1% of the total R&D carried out in Catalonia. This spending on research and development in education mainly takes place in the business sector (50%) and universities (45.5%). The role of the Government of Catalonia (Generalitat)

in spending on R&D in education (2.6% of what is spent by all stakeholders in the sector) is very modest if we compare it with that of R&D as a whole (9.4%).

If we look at the Government of Catalonia and public universities' total expenditure on research and development, only 1.5% (about €14 million) was devoted to education, far less than the 33.7% (€319.9 million) intended for protecting and improving human health or the 8.9% (€84.5 million) earmarked for developing agriculture, livestock, forestry and fishing. Moreover, this all takes place in a context in which total investment in R&D relative to GDP remains stagnant at around 1.5%, well below the 2% that Spain had set as a goal by 2020 (not to mention the 3% average target for the European Union as a whole).

Such a low level of investment in findings about education contrasts with the magnitude of educational spending in the Government of Catalonia's budgets: the line item allocated to the Catalan Ministry of Education is its second largest expenditure (in 2018 data, €5.1904 billion), which is only surpassed by that of the Catalan Ministry of Health (€9.9832 billion). Thus, while the Government of Catalonia and public universities allocate an amount equivalent to 3.2% of the Catalan Ministry of Health's total budget to R&D for improving health, they allocate the equivalent of 0.27% of the Catalan Ministry of Education's budget to R&D in education.

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<sup>1</sup> Statistical Institute of Catalonia. Statistics on research and development. <https://www.idescat.cat/pub/?id=rd>

<sup>2</sup> Monthly Implementation Report, no. 48, February 2019. Catalan Ministry of the Vice Presidency, the Economy and the Treasury. Generalitat de Catalunya.

# The disconnect between research and education policy in Catalonia

The lack of investment is seen clearly in the role played by research findings in formulating education policies, in transforming the education system and generally in decision-making on everything that affects children and young people's education inside and outside school.

Catalan universities have more than 80 recognised research groups working on education (SGR) that focus on a wide variety of subjects, such as pedagogical and didactic methods linked to various disciplines and/or grades, the interaction between technology and education and education policies. In addition, Catalonia's scientific production must be seen as part of international production, whose channels of dissemination continue to multiply and improve. However, **there is little effort to take advantage of the potential of all this knowledge** to inform education practice and policies in Catalonia.

This **exacerbates the risk that decisions about education practices and policies will be made based on tradition or inertia, that practices that have proven ineffective will remain in place or that policies that have proven effective will not be promoted.** For example, repeating a year of school is still a widespread practice in Catalonia, much more than in neighbouring countries, and yet international research agrees that it does not bring any benefits for educational progress or the attitudes of the repeating students, but does have negative impacts and is extremely costly. Furthermore, although summer activities or educational leisure can have a notable effect on reducing social and educational inequalities, there has not been a sufficiently determined effort to universalise and guarantee access to them for the most disadvantaged groups.

This disconnect between knowledge and education policy and practice also **encourages change to take place as part of innovation processes detached from evaluation, and therefore hinders evidence-informed decision-making.**

As such, Catalonia has been experiencing a wave of transformation in education practices for years that have not been supported by any commitment to evaluation. As such, we now know very little about the effectiveness of many of the innovations that have been implemented in schools.

Similarly, most plans and programmes promoted by the education administrations (the Catalan Ministry of Education and local authorities) are not evaluated. Thus, for example, in the last 15 years in Catalonia, decisions have been made about the length of the school day without considering evidence of the effects of each of the changes implemented. In fact, significant action was approved last year, such as the Plan for Improving Educational Opportunities, the Digital Education Plan and the recently approved Decree on the programming of courses and admissions, though no appropriate evaluation plan was provided for any of the three.

## Educational guidance and equity: two national evidence-informed strategies

### Tutoring for students most affected by school closures

Following the closure of schools in England in the spring of 2020 in response to the covid-19 pandemic, the [National Tutoring Programme](#) was launched: a major national strategy to support individual students who may have suffered the effects of closure to a greater extent through tutoring and academic mentoring.

The programme funds schools' access to academic mentors who join them or to guidance resources provided by previously accredited local bodies with expertise in this type of educational support. The aim is to reduce the gap in educational outcomes based on students' socio-economic backgrounds, which it was thought could possibly widen since the outbreak of the pandemic.

Promoted by an alliance between the UK government and five third-sector organisations, it has been designed taking into account [solid evidence of the positive impact of one-on-one tutoring](#) and [tutoring in small groups](#), indicating that they have the potential to reduce this gap. [The schools](#) and [organisations](#) that provide the tutors have guides with recommendations connected with the conclusions of the research to help them to ensure proper follow-up with the students.

At the same time that the initiative began, a set of studies and evaluations were launched whose [protocols can be viewed on the programme's website](#). Real-time monitoring of the programme's development is based on key data (the number and profile of participating students and schools, the level of attendance at mentoring sessions) and information is being gathered on how it is rolled out by the participating actors and organisations to evaluate its implementation. Finally, an evaluation is being made of tutoring's impact on student outcomes, analysing the differences based on the applied tutoring model, the students' profile and the schools' characteristics.

## Strengthening family involvement in schooling

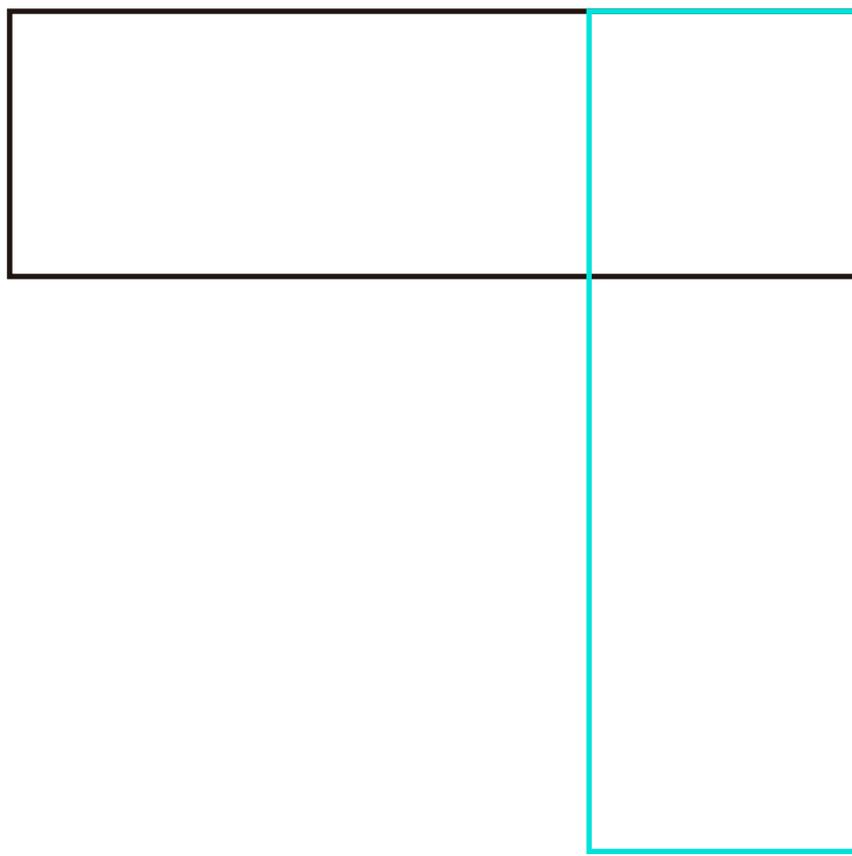
Research has found that families' involvement in their children's schooling affects their educational outcomes and opportunities. Therefore, in 2008, in Créteil, a department near the city of Paris, a pilot programme was launched that sought to increase the participation of disadvantaged families with a lower level of involvement due to linguistic reasons or social barriers.

Called *La Mallette des Parents*, the programme consisted of three sessions designed for school administrations to discuss some aspects related to the transition to the first level of secondary education with parents. From 2008 to 2013, several experimental evaluations were carried out to check the impact of the programme and found that it led to greater family participation, which in turn improved the school atmosphere and reduced absenteeism.

These evaluations were made possible thanks to the [Fonds d'Expérimentation pour la Jeunesse](#), a French government initiative to promote experimentally evaluated pilot programmes aimed at education success, equal opportunities and better social and professional integration of people under 25 years of age.

The good results obtained in the various evaluations [allowed the French government to extend the programme](#): in 2010, it began to be implemented in 1,300 schools and in 2015 it was used in every school in the country.

# Precedents indicating the anomaly of education in Catalonia, but also the way forward



The use of knowledge for better decision-making is not exclusively necessary and challenging in the education sector, nor does it only affect Catalonia: it cuts across all areas of public policy and is a subject of interest for the institutions of many countries.

Despite being a challenge that comes from afar, in the last 20 years **governments around the world have intensified efforts to build sustainable and efficient systems that ensure that public policies are designed with the best information available.** 'What works' trends and movements in favour of evidence-informed practices have been a turning point in this regard. Movements in favour of greater transparency for governments and public administrations, and of responsible research and innovation, open and linked to social challenges, support this concept and point in this direction.

The proof of these efforts is clearly visible. From the United States and the United Kingdom to many of the states of central and northern Europe (Belgium, the Netherlands, Norway, etc.), Chile and the Philippines, various mechanisms are being provided in the education sector that allow them to: 1) produce quality evidence that is relevant and useful for education policy, 2) make this evidence known to those responsible for public programmes and policies and to other key actors (education networks, professional organisations, socio-educational organisations, families, organised groups of people) and 3) incorporate this knowledge into public debate and decision-making.

Therefore, some international experiences are gathered throughout this paper that serve as a sample of the solutions that are being implemented everywhere

to establish a better link between knowledge and public policy. Some examples belong to the education sector, while others are multisectoral initiatives or institutions that nevertheless indicate what could be perfectly valid ways to improve the evidentiary basis of education policies in Catalonia.

It is true that one does not have to go very far to find valuable examples. In other areas of public policy, important progress has been made in Catalonia which should serve as sources of learning in education. Thus, for example, the Strategic Plan for Research and Innovation in Health (PERIS) 2021-2027 is about to be published, which, following the path of the two previous PERIS, aims to develop a comprehensive research and innovation system of excellence to provide solutions to society's health problems and prepare the system for future challenges and needs.

However, there is no framework in education that favours the production and use of educational research to tackle Catalonia's challenges. The experience of the Catalan R&D system in the health sector is a close and valuable precedent that exemplifies how the commitment to invest decisively in research and knowledge is key to improving quality in the development of policies and internships and in the provision of services.

# The urgency of an evidence- informed education policy and a regional commitment that takes research in education into account

Undoubtedly, overcoming the separation between rigorous knowledge and decision-making on education is a challenge that has to do with all the links in the education system. Decisions on education are made at multiple levels, so research needs to permeate both the high-level planning of education administrations and the initial and ongoing training of teachers. Information that is important for decision-making needs to be produced and transferred at all levels of the system and among all actors, from those responsible for education policies (public decision-makers and managers) to teachers and other professionals (whether new or experienced), educational institution administrations, inspectors, educational resource centres, social organisation managers and professionals, etc.

**Spain's new education law (LOMLOE) commits education administrations to take this step forward** assertively, fostering “the creation of unified bases of knowledge, evidence and good practices” and promoting “the development of research centres that are specialised benchmarks in order to improve teaching practices and educational processes, boost results and ensure the quality of education with greater equity and inclusion”.

However, this paper focuses on the need and the action to be taken to **better govern the relationship between knowledge and education policies and to achieve education policies informed by the evidence**. Allocating efforts to lead and conduct the system based on the evidence is essential and urgent if we consider the scale of the challenges facing Catalonia today.

After a decade of improvement, the indicators of recent years show a stagnant

and increasingly uneven education system and the crisis caused by the pandemic will exacerbate this trend if no strategic commitment is made to reverse it. But beyond the strictly educational aspect, we are in a situation in which all social needs are worsening and it will often be necessary to decide how to invest necessarily limited resources. Therefore, it will be essential to have the tools to resolutely defend the need for Catalonia to invest decisively in education and in effective education policies, which are oriented towards the quality and equity of the system. Research and knowledge must be key tools in this process.

The coronavirus crisis is showing everyone the complexity of making the necessary political decisions. At a time when the guarantee of some rights seems to contradict the guarantee of others, it is important that the public authorities possess and consider rigorous information about everything relevant for good decision-making. In this context, we have seen how important it is for governments and administrations to **bear in mind all research findings on the causes of educational inequality, the mechanisms for reversing it and the conditions that guarantee learning and the right to a quality education for all children and young people**. Moreover, they must do so considering the consequences of violations of this right, which are equally well-demonstrated by research.

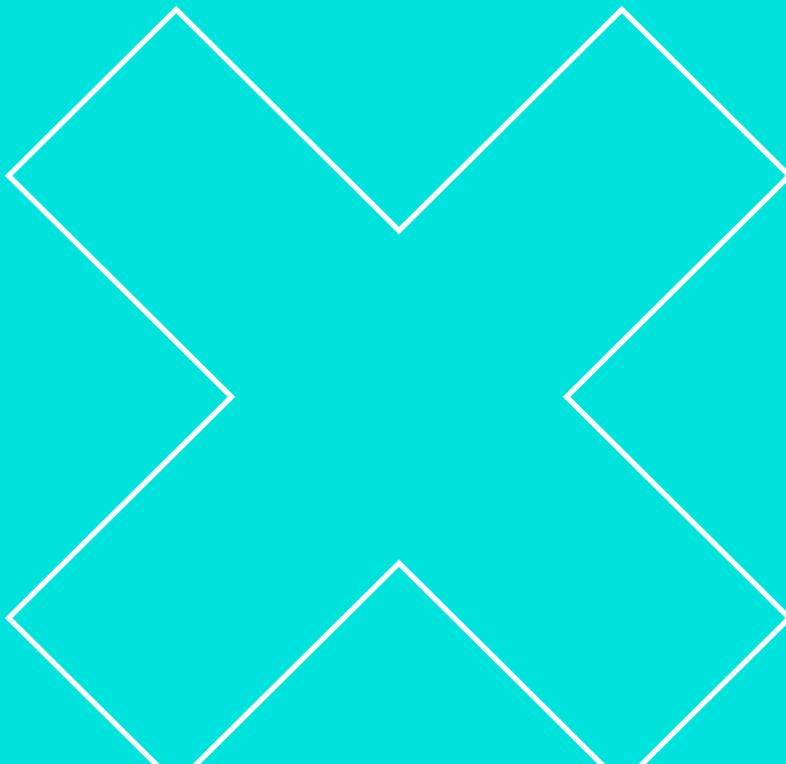
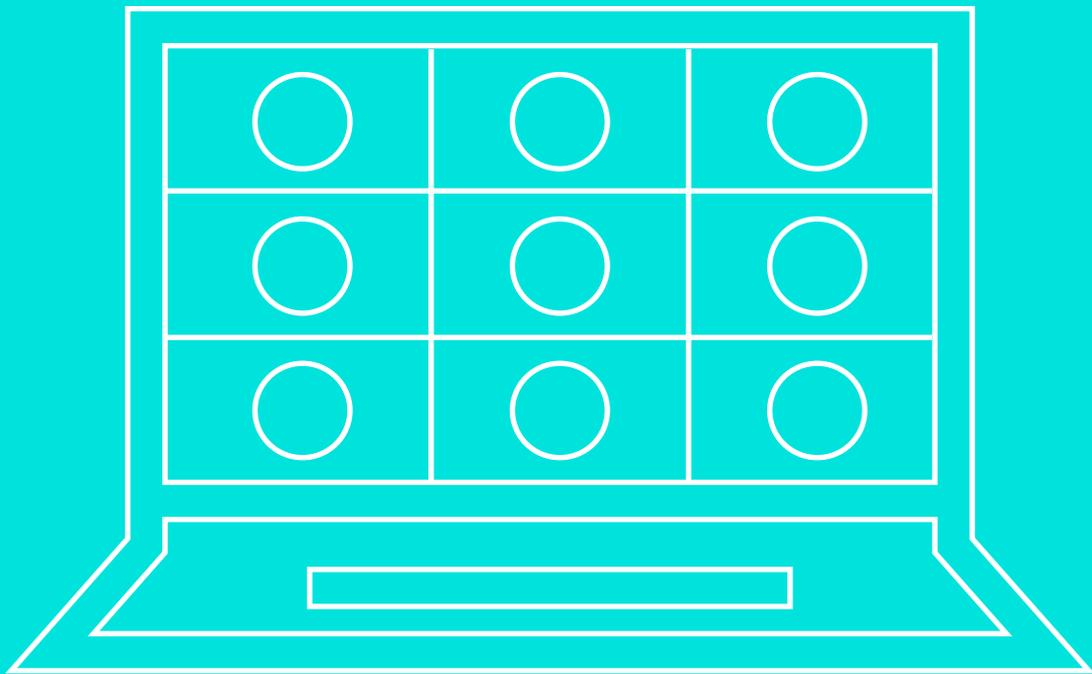
The clearest example of the role that research has played during the highest point of the pandemic in Catalonia is that school attendance has been ensured throughout the 2020-21 school year, given the evidence that school closures cause harm that is difficult for students

to overcome, especially for those with fewer resources. **Now that we glimpse a way out of the crisis, research can also be decisive in designing plans for recovery, compensation or redesigning the system.**

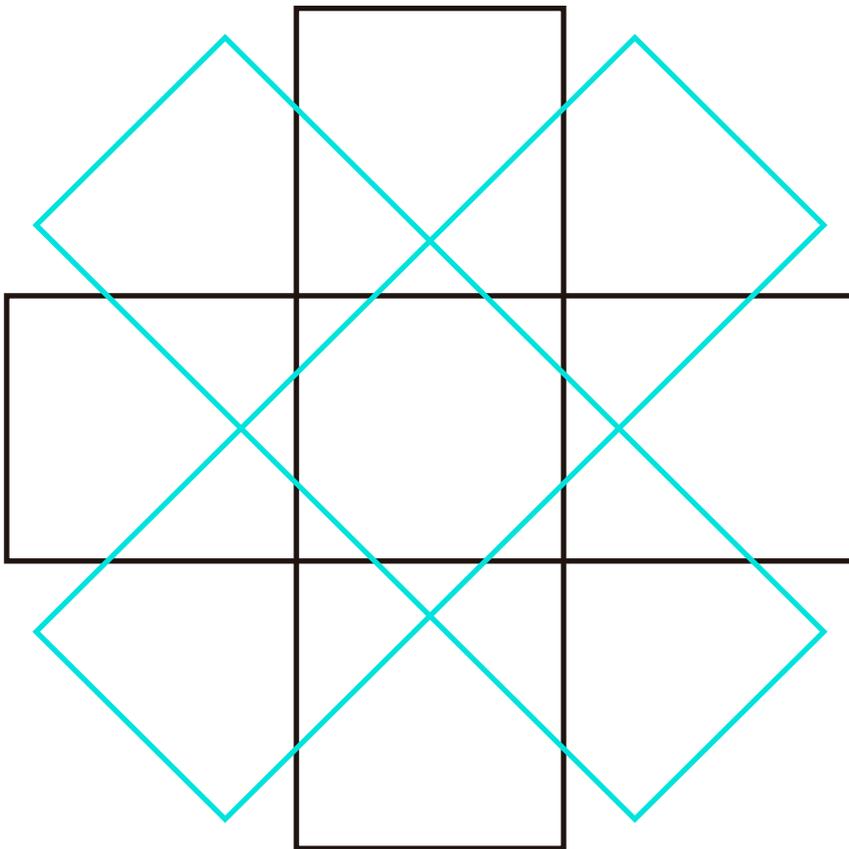
Since the outbreak of the pandemic, Catalan researchers have been very active in pointing out and vindicating the key lessons and takeaways of research on education. This crisis is demonstrating the talent, the value and especially the commitment of researchers working in the education sector in Catalonia who have played a leading role in the public debate on managing the pandemic, including everything that has had to do

with closing and reopening schools and extracurricular activities, organisational, technological and curricular adaptation in schools and the policies needed to address the social and educational crisis that is currently under way. This all comes in a context in which the evidence for educational practice has often not been given the same importance or value as research in other fields, when it has been necessary to discuss what kinds of prevention needed to be pursued.

Of course, overcoming the separation between knowledge and education policies cannot depend on the goodwill of some researchers or public managers. A profound transformation is required.



# The need for an institutional commitment



In the last 10 years, initiatives have been developed or departments or organisations have been created that promote more research-related education policies. In this sense, the creation of the [Catalan Ministry of Education's Research Service](#) in 2018 is a big development. During this time, however, there have also been missed opportunities, such as the failure to develop the [Agency for Evaluation and Prospective in Education](#), which is provided for in the Education of Law of Catalonia of 2009.

Of course, there are also ad hoc agreements between researchers and experts on the one hand and administrative departments on the other regarding the production of evidence or knowledge-based advice in the policy approach of some specific issues. However, what the experience in other countries and the precedents in Catalonia show is that **we need systems integrating institutions, rules and practices** that ensure that education policies are grounded in evidence sustainably, transparently and enduringly over time.

The institutions and mechanisms with which other countries have been endowed are a source of valuable lessons. Of course they are not without their challenges and difficulties, but they should help us to ask ourselves and outline some answers to key questions. What kinds of evidence should ground the various types of decisions involved in addressing policy for educational challenges? How do we ensure the quality, transparency and autonomy of bodies and departments that are engaged in transferring or providing evidence-informed advice?

However, the specific formulas that need to be developed must be in line with Catalonia's own institutional framework, take advantage of existing resources and talent and be geared to meeting Catalonia's educational needs and challenges. **Catalonia must develop its own system that guarantees that the education policies that are formulated and implemented are informed by the evidence and that this system is designed based on the discussion and thinking of the key stakeholders.**

# The principles of a **system** that promotes evidence- informed education policies and the path that remains to be taken in Catalonia

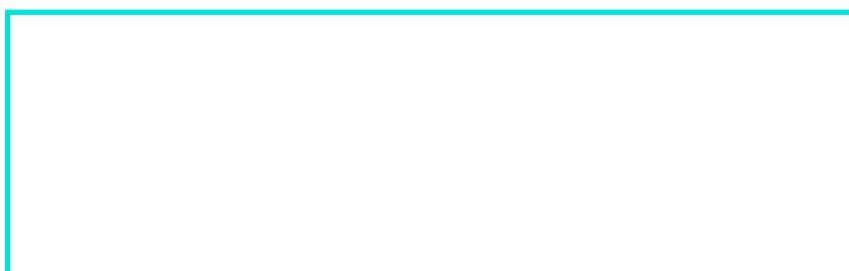
In more advanced environments where scientific knowledge is made a core part of the formulation and improvement of public policy, mechanisms are being put in place that have to do with the **production, activation, spread and use of knowledge**.

Leading organisations like the European Commission's [Joint Research Centre](#) and the [Alliance for Useful Evidence](#) have devoted much effort to identifying the best strategies for bringing research and public policy closer together in order to improve policy action and ground it in evidence. Much of this activity involves the creation of **knowledge brokers**, bodies or departments that are independent or attached to scientific or political institutions and help to detect and transfer the information needed for public policy. In other cases, it focuses on the use of **incentives** or **capacity-building** to promote the production, transfer or use of a certain type of knowledge.

These previous studies and experiences enable us to chart the path we must take in Catalonia if we wish to be prepared to meet our collective social and educational challenges and to do so by making use of our scientific talent and the knowledge produced both in Catalonia and abroad.

Therefore, it is urgent that action be taken in Catalonia to achieve these four major objectives:

1. **Ensure that there is educational research that provides [valuable and useful knowledge](#) for Catalonia's educational challenges.**
2. **Ensure that the knowledge produced is [transferred and known](#) by key actors in the education system.**
3. **[Evaluate](#) education policies rigorously and systematically.**
4. **Ensure that [evidence is systematically taken into account](#) when formulating, designing and reviewing education policies.**



# Objective 1

Ensure that there is educational research that provides **valuable and useful knowledge** for Catalonia's educational challenges

In order for research to potentially be informative and help to solve Catalonia's challenges, we must ensure that researchers are in a position to answer important questions satisfactorily. This means having stable, top-level research groups and institutions with the incentives and resources to devote some of their talent and effort to answering these questions with quality research. In many countries, there are large research centres dedicated entirely to education. This does not happen in Catalonia, where none of the [CERCA centres](#) are devoted to education.

To ensure that part of educational research efforts are devoted to responding to priority challenges, policy makers must help to define the challenges and frame the research questions for which knowledge must be produced. In various formats and at different levels, the aim is to **create opportunities and incentives for applied and impactful research**. To this end,

various initiatives are under way around the world that have to do with the "co-production" of research questions between researchers, public managers and other professionals, the evaluation of research and researchers based on criteria of public policy impact, the provision of specific lines of funding for research that meets specific challenges or, directly, the creation of research centres aimed at producing knowledge to answer politically prioritised questions.

The existence of such mechanisms in the educational research system of Catalonia is testimonial. The [ARMIF calls](#), which are aimed at the production of research to improve the initial training of teachers of child and primary education, are one of the few current initiatives in this regard. Furthermore, the creation of the Equity Observatory in the Non-University Education System was approved in 2017, but the decree activating its implementation has not yet been approved.

The coordinators of the recognised research groups of Catalan universities working in education denounce the underfunding suffered by research in the sector. Up to 95% believe that the administrative and resource support given by the government to educational research is insufficient.

This ends up having an impact on the transferability of this research to education practice and policies. **Only 5% of coordinators believe that research in education ends up transferring knowledge and influencing improvements to government policies.** According to the coordinators of the research groups, the three main causes of this lack of impact are the facts that public calls for research and criteria for academic promotion do not value evaluation and applied research for improving education policies and plans (by 58%), that the education administration does not attach enough value or credibility to academic knowledge (according to 55%) and that there is a lack of stable and institutionally recognised meeting spaces for research groups and policy makers (by 47%).

## Netherlands Initiative for Education Research (NRO)

www

### *The Netherlands*

The NRO is a department of the [Dutch Research Council](#) (NWO), an independent institution attached to the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. The NRO is responsible for coordinating and funding research in education conducted in the Netherlands, and for facilitating the use of knowledge by education managers and professionals. These actors are involved in identifying needs and gaps in knowledge, designing calls and evaluating proposals. There is a clear focus on promoting research that produces information useful for practice and public policy.

The NRO coordinates and funds research **on three levels**: to contribute knowledge to classroom teaching, to improve school organisation and to strengthen education policies.

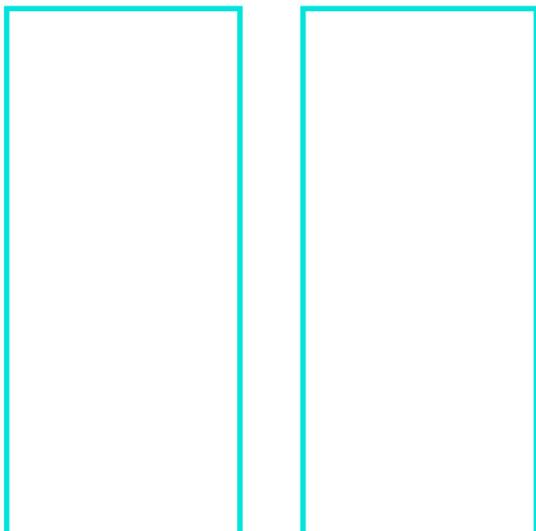
The results of this research are collected in various repositories to promote their spread.

Catalonia suffers from another important shortcoming in producing quality research: **researchers and analysts do not always have reliable data on basic aspects of the education system**. While it is true that an important step has been taken with the implementation of the Student Registry (RALC) by the Catalan Ministry of Education, which assigns a unique identifier to each student linked to information about their schooling history, it is currently not possible to get longitudinal quality data on aspects such as student results (in terms of skills or absenteeism) or any grants or scholarships received. Furthermore, there are data from administrative records that are not consolidated into parsable databases.

Finally, the way in which access to this data is managed has much room for improvement: the waiting time to access the data can be extended for many months and the coexistence of two parallel procedures (via the Catalan Ministry of Education and through public information requests managed by Govern Obert ('Open Government')) is inefficient.

# Objective 2

Ensure that the knowledge produced is transferred and known by key actors in the education system



In order to be able to take advantage of the knowledge generated, the key stakeholders in the education system need to be aware of it, receive it and be able to appropriate it. The debate on the problems or challenges to be addressed in the present and in the future, on the possible action to tackle them and the very process of designing the programmes and policies that are finally undertaken should incorporate rigorous knowledge of all these aspects at its core. The knowledge produced must reach all individuals, families, socio-educational organisations, professional organisations, trade unions, political parties, etc. so they can hold an informed debate and so all decision-makers and professionals in the education system can make the best decisions.

In Catalonia, the [Higher Council for the Evaluation of the Education System](#) and Idescat systematically publish data such on the aggregate results of PISA tests, aptitude tests, dropout rates, demographic trends that help to plan what to provide in education and more. We naturally assume that these data must be made public and disclosed to those responsible for public policies and to the general public, made accessible on websites and receive media coverage.

However, **there are few mechanisms provided to identify, collect, synthesise and make much of the research produced in Catalonia and abroad intelligible to public administrators and public policy makers.** In particular, there is no mechanism to routinise the spread of the findings and results of evaluations of educational programmes and policies to important stakeholders involved in discussions on education. From 2012 to 2014, the [National Institute for Educational Assessment](#), which

is attached to the Spanish Ministry of Education, wanted to do more than simply monitor the system and made a commitment to spread evidence from rigorous evaluations to education policy makers through a [programme of international conferences and seminars](#) that was unfortunately interrupted.

In recent years, some initiatives have emerged that seek to make research in education more available to the system's stakeholders. Some are more focused on teaching and learning strategies and aimed at schools (such as those promoted by [Educaixa](#)), while others deal more with education policies (such as Ivàlua and the Fundació Bofill's [‘What Works in Education?’](#) project). Universities also have knowledge transfer offices and long-standing Institutes of Education Sciences (ICE). In addition, some have set up educational research centres or institutes to promote the transfer of research to educational institutions. The Catalan Ministry of Education's Research Service, created in 2018, also performs some of these tasks. There is also the [Parliamentary Advisory Council on Science and Technology](#) (CAPCIT), which is limited in scope and firmly focused on health sciences and technology.

Taken together, these are partial initiatives that fail to solve the underlying problem. Thus, the spread of knowledge produced at universities is very often restricted to academic publications or events, knowledge produced specifically for public policy is often hidden and the conclusions and results of research that is published and spread internationally are unknown.

Many international efforts are aimed at filling this gap that fundamentally have to do with creating specific bodies

tasked with identifying, synthesising and spreading the most important evidence for policy-related decision-making. The case of the United Kingdom, with its 12 What Works Centres devoted to different areas of public policy, is paradigmatic. Sweden, Denmark and Norway have followed this path in the education sector and each have a university responsible for conducting systematic reviews of educational programmes to provide public managers and teachers with knowledge relevant for practice.

## What Works Network

www

### *United Kingdom*

The What Works Centres are organisations financed by a combination of public and private funds that perform multiple functions within the system. In 2013, the government pushed for the creation of this network to ensure that each area of public policy had relevant evidence. The network currently consists of 12 centres devoted to different areas of public policy (education, health, ageing, crime, etc.). The **Education Endowment Foundation** is one of the busiest centres and has been in operation since 2011.

Each centre aims to increase both the supply and demand of evidence in its field. To do so, they fund and commission evaluations of programmes (and are therefore active in the production of evidence), but their core activity is the systematic reviews and creation of tools to share research results simply and aimed at the decision-making processes of civil servants and practitioners. They also provide advice and training so those same people can take advantage of this knowledge. They focus on research in 'what works' from causal and especially experimental studies.

# Objective 3

## Evaluate

education policies  
rigorously and  
systematically

The knowledge that can be produced on how public policies function is one of the best sources of lessons for any system in terms of continuous improvement, in addition to being a tool of accountability and transparency for the general public, of course. It is therefore essential to promote a systematic and rigorous evaluation that provides information on the implementation, effectiveness and efficiency of the educational programmes and policies put in place.

In recent years, Catalonia has been endowed with some mechanisms that promote the production of this knowledge. This is the case of [Ivàlua](#) (Catalan Institute for the Evaluation of Public Policy), which has been operating since 2009 and conducted the first experimental evaluations of educational programmes in Catalonia. The [Fund for the Promotion of Public Policy Evaluation](#) (PROAVA), an initiative of the Catalan Ministry of the Economy that

provides the Catalan ministries with specific funding devoted to evaluating public policy, was launched in 2019. In addition, the Higher Council for the Evaluation of the Education System is in charge of developing, processing, analysing and publishing some system indicators, such as aptitude tests and indicators from international tests such as PISA and TIMSS.

However, **most policies and programmes are designed with no plans to evaluate them. As a result, very few policies and programmes end up being evaluated overall**, and when they are it is almost always due to one-off agreements. The evaluations that are conducted are short-term exercises, so the conclusions they may reach are limited in scope. There are also often shortcomings in the dissemination of their findings and in the ability to learn about the system as a result, among other things.

## Dutch Court of Audit

www

*The Netherlands*

The Dutch Court of Audit is a [public institution](#) independent of the government that was created to audit the proper functioning of government policy in terms of economic management, but also of effectiveness and efficiency. Its action is divided into eight areas of public policy.

It conducts assessments on public policy implementation and impact for each area, as well as government financial audits, combining both functions like the United States' [Government Accountability Office](#) (GAO).

# Objective 4

Ensure that

evidence is

systematically

taken into account

when formulating,  
designing and  
reviewing education  
policies

There are two major sets of mechanisms designed to ensure that scientific knowledge is integrated into decision-making. The first has to do with teams of **public managers with a culture and skills linked to science and the use of evidence for public policy**. The training targeting leaders and employees of active public administrations (such as that provided by institutions such as the [Public Administration School of Catalonia](#) and Ivàlua) is one of these mechanisms, which can be combined with the use of criteria to prioritise and select the people who pursue these positions to ensure that at least part of the teams are already incorporated into the institutions with these acquired skills.

The second set of mechanisms has to do with **departments and procedures that force, encourage and facilitate the incorporation of evidence**. These departments and mechanisms can be located and accommodated in different ways within the entire procedure to formulate and approve public policies: from internal departments in public administrations, which advise how programmes are designed, to external bodies that review the appropriateness of these approaches by taking the available scientific knowledge into account.

In Catalonia, the Catalan Ministry of Education and local authorities have technical offices or planning and assessment services that perform some functions in this regard, but they are limited in scope. This means that there must be one-off agreements with researchers or consultants to receive this type of advice, without a framework promoting and facilitating it.

Furthermore, the Government of Catalonia's initiatives that involve an investment of over €10 million and regulatory proposals require the preparation of ex-ante evaluation reports that include an analysis of the needs or problems, justifications of that choice compared to alternatives, a study of the economic and social impact, an evaluation plan and other aspects. As of 2020, these reports are now public and can be viewed on the Government of Catalonia's website. Yet in practice, evidence-informed initiatives are actually rather rare and there is currently no incentive or requirement to try to improve the situation, as such shortcomings do not preclude approval of the initiatives. There are also quite a few education-related public programmes and initiatives that do not meet these investment and reporting requirements.

## Policy Research and Development Division (PRDD)

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### *The Philippines*

The PRDD is a division of the Philippine Department of Education established in 2015. Its goal is to support the Department of Education in making evidence-based decisions. Before any policy or programme is approved, it is reviewed by the PRDD to assess whether it has been designed with a sufficient basis in evidence. At present, most areas of the Department of Education have involved the PRDD since start of the policy design process.

One of its first actions was to map all the education policies in operation and classify them according to their grounding in scientific evidence.

The PRDD also aims to act as a liaison between the education administration and other education-related institutions in the production and use of knowledge. One of its main activities is to award grants (funding and support) to teachers to conduct action research in the classroom. It has relied on the advice of J-PAL to institutionalise monitoring and evaluation and to conduct a large-scale impact evaluation on the secondary school curriculum.

## The Productivity Commission

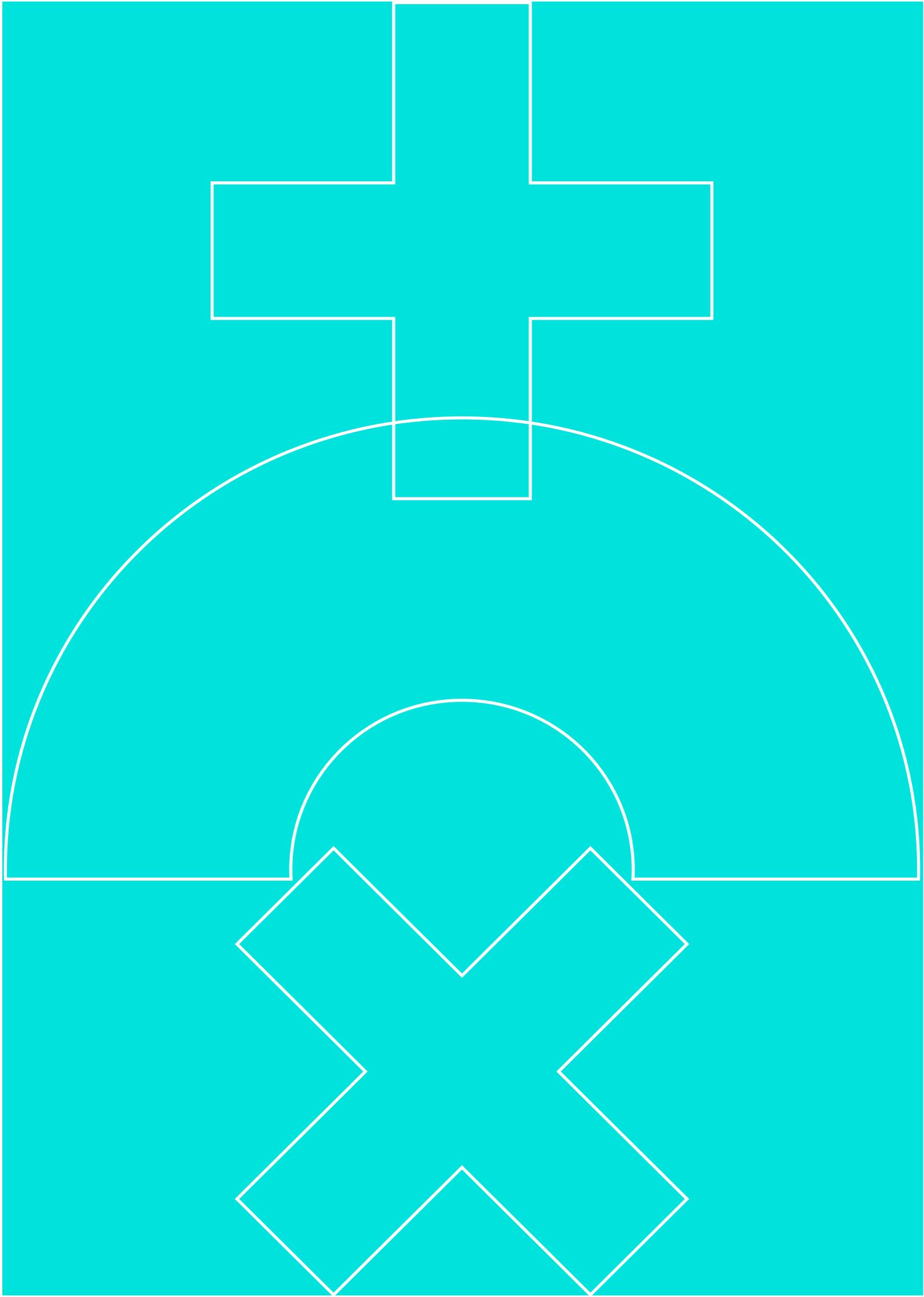
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### *Australia*

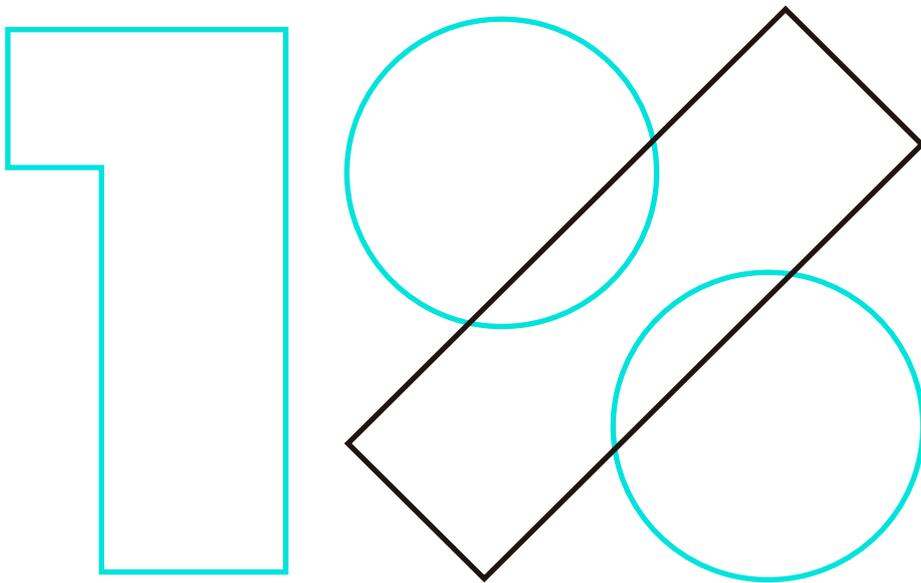
The Productivity Commission is an independent government organisation that plays a consultative role and is responsible for conducting research and public consultations based on key issues related to regulation and public economic, social and environmental policies pursued by the government.

The commissions may include prospective studies, diagnoses or evaluations of policies carried out, but they are generally far-reaching and are conducted from a multi-method and multidisciplinary approach. They combine research procedures with participatory or consultative processes involving civil society or key actors dealing with a set of problems.

All stages of consultations and research are publicised, so that key actors and individuals can give feedback on preliminary versions of the reports.



# Looking ahead to 2024: one per cent for educational R&D and the Plan for Evidence- Informed Education Policies



The commitment to education policies connected with research must be based on the increased public effort to understand the education sector.

We propose that **by 2024, the annual expenditure of the Government of Catalonia and public universities devoted to educational R&D be equivalent to 1% of the Catalan Ministry of Education's budget**. This would mean quadrupling the investment made thus far. In the current budget, it would amount to €56.7 million. This increase should help to lay the foundations for a comprehensive R&D system that stimulates improvement in the education system as a whole.

In addition to this budget increase, taking a step towards education policies grounded in research and evaluation requires a decisive strategic impetus. We propose the implementation of a **Plan for Evidence-Informed Education Policies 2021-2024**, focused on four main lines and incorporating these 16 key points:

## Strengthen research in education to address Catalonia's needs

**1. Develop stable lines of funding for multidisciplinary research** that are specifically aimed at improving understanding to meet **Catalonia's educational challenges** and that can inform how public policies are designed. The administration must design these calls for funding with a strong strategic orientation. The selection process will prioritise projects' transferability and potential to have an impact on the system, as well as their evidentiary basis and contribution to the international conversation on education.

**2. Change the criteria of the University Quality Agency for assessing the research of the departments** of the universities and criteria for evaluating **their professors' achievements** to incentivise research pursued in cooperation with the departments and stakeholders responsible for education policies and with schools, which guarantees transfer and the empowerment of actors in the use of knowledge and has a positive impact on the development of some better education policies.

**3. Increase the basic funding of research groups focusing on education**, retain professor-researchers with stable

contracts and support less experienced researchers with more predoctoral and postdoctoral fellowships. This improvement in funding, which must result from an agreement between the Catalan Ministry of Education, the Catalan Ministry of Research and Universities and other areas of government with competence over educational matters, should serve to strengthen and improve the working conditions and stability of research groups focused on education.

## Encourage the transfer and joint work of educational research and policy

### 4.

**Create an advisory commission made up of researchers focused on education that contrasts the informational needs linked to the political priorities** of the Government of Catalonia's ministries in charge of education. This commission should be used to plan how these needs are met (through other actions in this plan).

### 5.

**Promote a plan to extend Industrial PhDs in education** based on agreements between educational institutions and universities and focused on priority thematic areas for developing the system. The plan should include mechanisms that provide for the transfer and incorporation of learning from educational institutions. Establish similar agreements for the preparation of Master's degree theses.

### 6.

**Develop a platform for the transfer of knowledge on education policies** that can inform those responsible for the education administration (at the Catalan, supralocal and local level), other stakeholders responsible for implementing public policies (inspection, schools, other services and organisations), social stakeholders and the general public, based on knowledge produced internationally and in Catalonia. This platform should include a web repository

of evidence on education policies and a basic advisory service for the use of evidence in formulating and evaluating education policies. It should be supported through calls for research groups and other incentives to synthesise evidence that answers key questions and challenges.

## Incorporate research and evidence in the design, implementation and evaluation of education policies

### 7.

Open a work process based on expert debate between public managers and researchers in education to prepare a **white paper on an evidence-informed education policy**. It must define an ideal model for incorporating scientific knowledge throughout the process to form and implement an education policy and define criteria regarding the type of knowledge that is considered solid and robust for each of stage of the decision-making process.

### 8.

**Promote development of the data infrastructure on education in Catalonia and facilitate its access for the purposes of research and evaluation of public policy.** A battery of key indicators of the education system (relating to formal and non-formal education) must be defined and the means to ensure their uniform and systematic stimulation must be established. The aim is to have administrative registration databases with anonymous individualised information for each child or young person who joins the system, with socio-demographic data and relevant aspects of their educational history (performance, achievement of skills, absenteeism, participation in activities,

etc.). At the same time, specific data on policy design and implementation should be provided. This should all make it possible to diagnose and measure the problems and evaluate the programmes and policies that they are aimed to address. The channel providing access to data on the education system must be standardised by the Catalan Ministry of Education, which is the owner, making requests for access to public information managed by Govern Obert ('Open Government') exceptional.

## 9.

**Design and implement a training strategy on research and the use of evidence for intensive, high-level education policies aimed at decision-makers and public managers of the different education administrations,**

in cooperation with the Public Administration School of Catalonia and other stakeholders. Training, which must be modulated according to the position and responsibilities of decision-makers and employees, must have a double substantive and methodological component; it should include the most important contributions from local and international educational research and be geared towards the acquisition of skills to identify needs and opportunities for knowledge production and use.

## 10.

**Require the educational plans and policies of the Government of Catalonia to be based on rigorous data and knowledge and have a proper evaluation plan before they are approved.** These two aspects are currently included in the existing ex-ante evaluation reports (such as the Economic and Social Impact Report, evaluated by the Catalan Ministry of the Economy, and the regulatory impact

assessment report, evaluated by the Catalan Ministry of Presidency), **but the sufficiency thresholds of both criteria must be raised.** At the same time, promote the inclusion of information on these two aspects in the documentation corresponding to all relevant programmes and plans of the education administrations for which these types of supporting reports are not required. The aim is that **all the educational programmes, plans and policies that are implemented are based explicitly on the information available** and that their evaluation is already designed before their implementation.

# Develop key structures and an institutional architecture that ensures the viability of the plan as a whole

**11.**  
**Create a stable liaison department between the Catalan Ministry of Education and the Catalan Ministry of Research and Universities** to develop initiatives to promote applied research to meet educational challenges.

**12.**  
**Resume the development of the Equity Observatory in the Education System** with the ministries linked to equity, the local administration, the third sector, the Catalan Ombudsman and the university and research groups. The observatory must guarantee quality diagnosis and advice to the public authorities for designing education policies that promote equity and equal opportunities.

**13.**  
**Strengthen the Research Service and the Technical Office of the Catalan Ministry of Education** so they assume the role of advising on the **evidence-informed design** of proposed education policies in the various departments of the Catalan Ministry of Education.

**14.**  
**Set up the Agency for Evaluation and Prospective in Education**, which was provided for in the Education

Law of Catalonia of 2009 but never implemented. This agency must carry out a core function within education policy: to create **evaluations that help the system to learn** and to impel the research necessary to **anticipate the needs and challenges of the future**. It must act autonomously and report regularly to Parliament and the School Board.

**15.**  
Extend the functions of the Parliamentary Advisory Council on Science and Technology (CAPCIT) to act as a **parliamentary advisory office in all matters relating to the social sciences** and more particularly to **education**.

**16.**  
Promote the design of evidence-informed municipal policy by **implementing education knowledge-brokers in the city councils of large municipalities and by providing advisory services to small and medium-sized municipalities** through provincial councils, the Catalan Ministry of Education's Territorial Services or other bodies. These services will also need to identify the knowledge that local actors need.

# Annex

This report has been prepared from a work process led by the Fundació Bofill that included:



A **review of the literature** and a **prospecting of international models and initiatives** aimed at promoting evidence-informed public policies connected to research and evaluation.



Two **seminars** held in December 2020 that enjoyed the participation of:

- **PAULA ADAM**, research director of the Agency for Health Quality and Assessment of Catalonia (AQuAS).
- **JAUME BLASCO**, education consultant and advisor on culture, education, community and science at Barcelona City Council.
- **XAVIER BONAL**, professor of the Sociology Department of the Autonomous University of Barcelona and director of the university's research group Globalisation, Education and Social Policy (GEPS).
- **CATERINA CALSAMIGLIA**, ICREA research professor at the Institute for Political Economy and Governance (IPEG).
- **MOISÈS ESTEBAN**, professor of the Psychology Department and director of the Educational Research Institute of the University of Girona.
- **MERCÈ GISBERT**, professor of the Pedagogy Department of the University of Rovira i Virgili and coordinator of the Applied Research Group in Education and Technology (ARGET).

- **LOURDES GUÀRDIA**, vice dean of teaching in Psychology and Education Science Studies at the Open University of Catalonia.
- **XAVIER MARTÍNEZ-CELORRIO**, cabinet advisor to the Minister of Education and Professional Training and researcher of the Research Group on Creativity, Innovation and Urban Transformation (CRIT) of the University of Barcelona.
- **VICTÒRIA MIQUEL**, director of the research division at AGAUR.
- **JOSEP MANEL TORRES**, advisor to the management of the Quality Assessment Department of the University Quality Agency Assessor (AQU).
- **ANTONI ZABALA**, president of Editorial Graó.



A **survey** addressed to the **coordinators of the recognised research groups** (SGR) of **Catalan universities** working in the **education** sector. The list [“Research Groups Recognised by the Government of Catalonia SGR 2017-2020 \(updated September 2019\)”](#) identified 83 research groups focused on the education sector and sent the survey to all their coordinators. Forty of these coordinators answered the complete survey and 11 answered it partially (together, accounting for 61% in total). The fieldwork was conducted from 17 November to 20 December 2020.

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