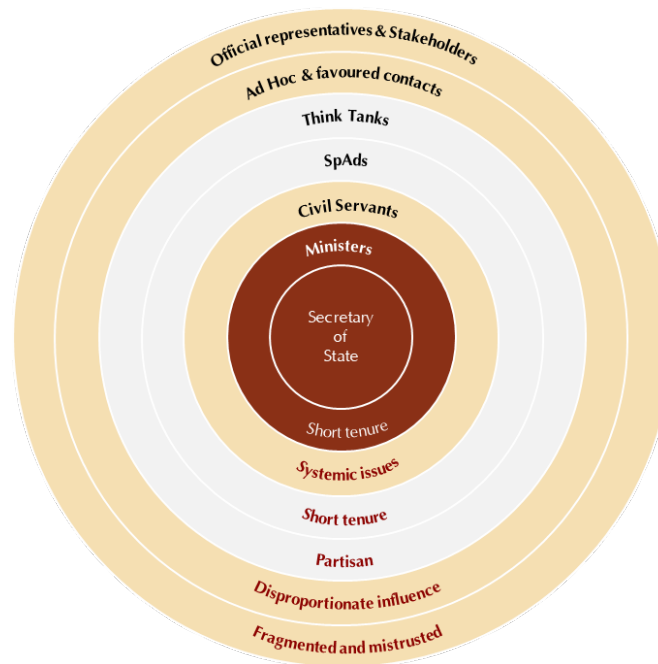# edpol.net

The evidence gap and the need for an Education Policy Knowledge Centre
October 2021   v2

England: challenges in system level education policy making

Policy making challenges

The centralised policy making process is poorly supported.

- Policy is centralised, made at pace and aggravated by a rapid turnover of Ministers
- There are systemic issues in the Civil Service
- DfE is increasingly focused on implementation and maintenance
- Representative bodies are too numerous to be coherent and often mistrusted
- Evidence for policy makers* is fragmented and hard to navigate
- As a consequence, policy churn is high and fundamental issues are not resolved.

Official representatives & Stakeholders
Ad Hoc & favoured contacts
Think Tanks
SpAds
Civil Servants
Ministers
Secretary of State
Short tenure
Systemic issues
Short tenure
Partisan
Disproportionate influence
Fragmented and mistrusted

Strong policy making centre

Weak checks and balances

* See https://www.edpol.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Funding-Research-V12.1-with-cover.pdf

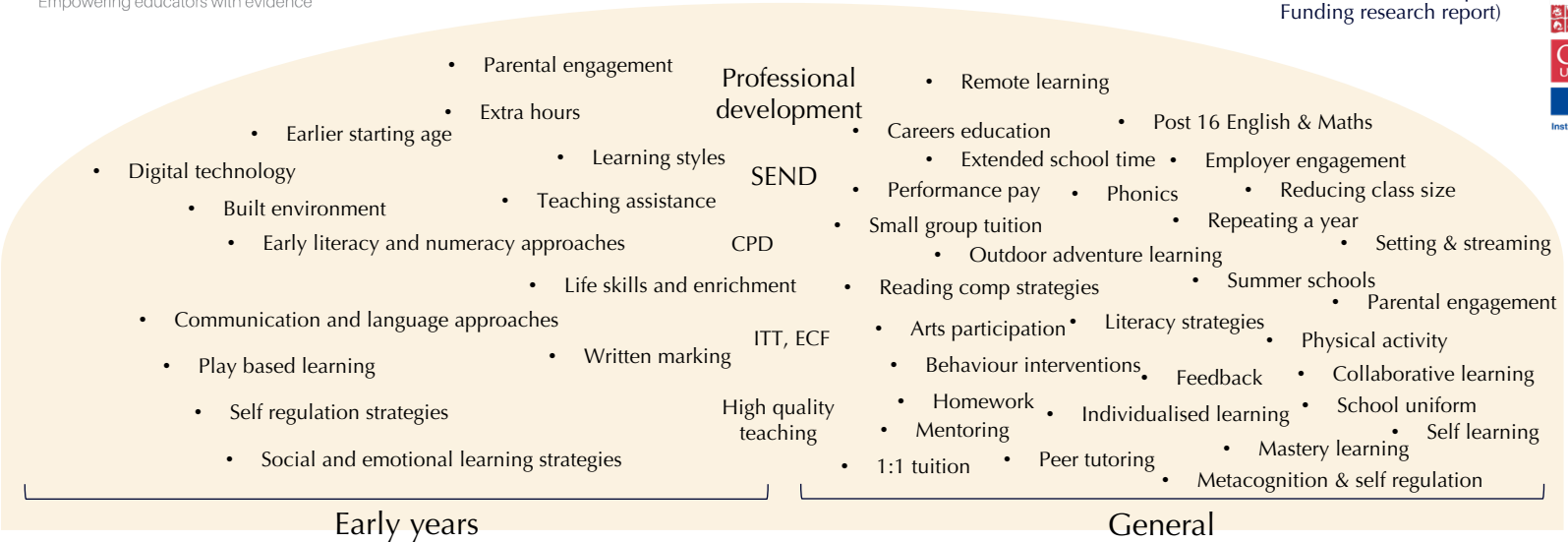edpol.net

Strengthening evidence support for practitioners

Research and evidence synthesis and mediation for practitioners and schools/colleges is relatively well supported

fft education datalab

research ED

curee

ePPI CENTRE

Institute for **Effective Education**
Empowering educators with evidence

Education Endowment Foundation

Alliance for Useful Evidence

.ImpactEd

95% of ESRC funded university research (see edpol Funding research report)

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

EXETER

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Durham University

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

Sheffield Hallam University

University of BRISTOL

CARDIFF UNIVERSITY

UCL Institute of Education

Institution School/College Trust/LA

Practice Teacher/Lecturer

- Parental engagement

Professional development

- Remote learning

- Extra hours
- Earlier starting age
- Learning styles

- Careers education
- Post 16 English & Maths

SEND

- Extended school time
- Employer engagement
- Digital technology
- Teaching assistance
- Performance pay
- Phonics
- Reducing class size
- Built environment

CPD

- Small group tuition
- Repeating a year
- Early literacy and numeracy approaches
- Outdoor adventure learning
- Setting & streaming
- Life skills and enrichment
- Reading comp strategies
- Summer schools
- Communication and language approaches
- Arts participation
- Literacy strategies
- Parental engagement

ITT, ECF

- Written marking
- Behaviour interventions
- Feedback
- Physical activity
- Play based learning
- Homework
- Individualised learning
- Collaborative learning
- Self regulation strategies

High quality teaching

- Mentoring
- School uniform
- Social and emotional learning strategies
- 1:1 tuition
- Peer tutoring
- Mastery learning
- Self learning
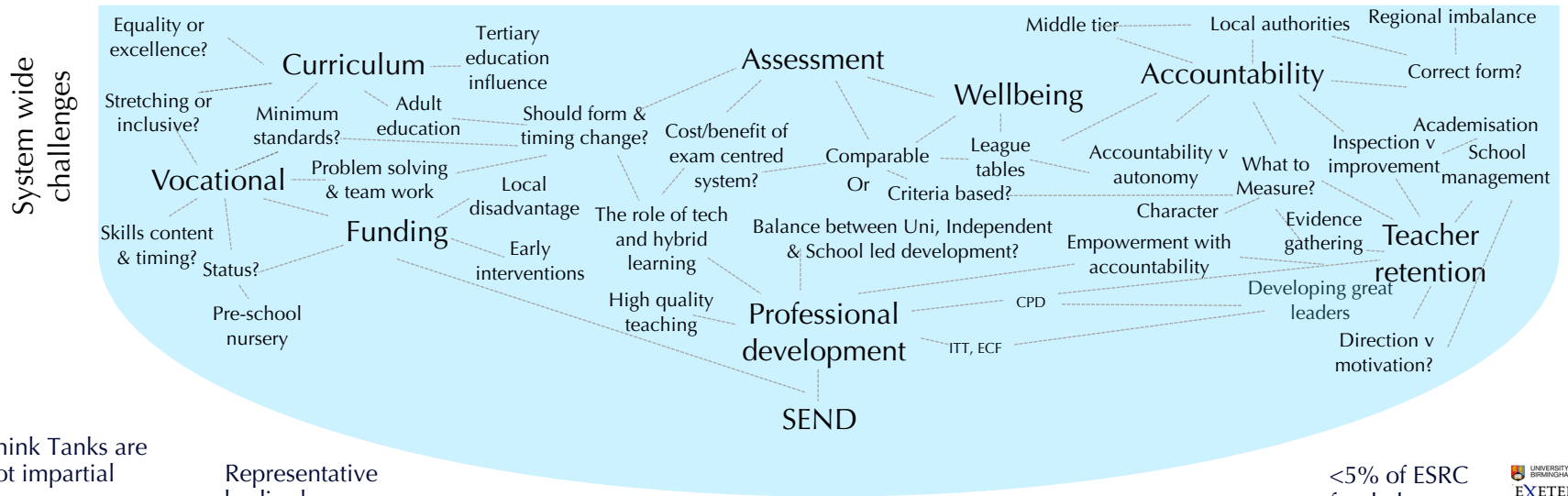- Metacognition & self regulation

Early years

General

Weaker research support for ministers and DfE

In contrast, research, evidence, synthesis and mediation for ministers and the DfE is not well supported

System wide challenges

- Equality or excellence?
- Stretching or inclusive?
- Curriculum
- Tertiary education influence
- Minimum standards?
- Adult education
- Should form & timing change?
- Cost/benefit of exam centred system?
- Assessment
- Middle tier
- Local authorities
- Regional imbalance
- Correct form?
- Accountability
- Wellbeing
- Academisation
- Inspection v improvement
- School management
- Vocational
- Problem solving & team work
- Local disadvantage
- The role of tech and hybrid learning
- Comparable Or Criteria based?
- League tables
- Accountability v autonomy
- What to Measure?
- Skills content & timing?
- Funding
- Early interventions
- Balance between Uni, Independent & School led development?
- Character
- Empowerment with accountability
- Evidence gathering
- Teacher retention
- Status?
- High quality teaching
- Professional development
- CPD
- Developing great leaders
- Pre-school nursery
- ITT, ECF
- Direction v motivation?
- SEND

Think Tanks are not impartial

Representative bodies have sectional interests

Independent research is financially constrained and/or practice orientated

International organisations have bias

9.3 million of DfE funding – little on system policy (2018)

England lacks national research capabilities

<5% of ESRC funded university research addresses System policy issues (see edpol Funding research report)

Research support imbalance

Weaker support for system policy making reflects a structural imbalance. This contributes to a poor policy making process that in turn drives disruptive policy churn.
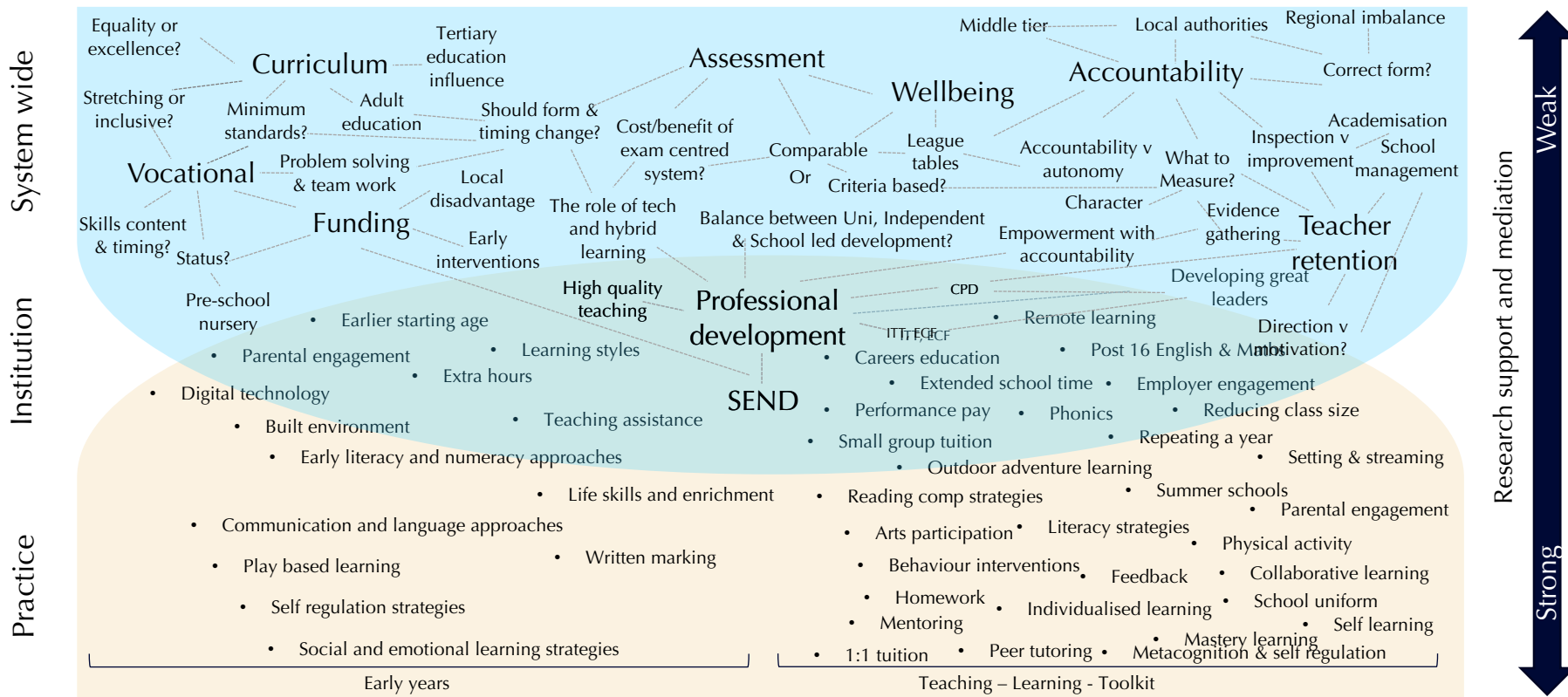
Stronger evidence support for policy in other jurisdictions

Other jurisdictions have long-standing organisations to support policy makers (and to support practitioners - often with separate institutions serving each)

	Finland	Singapore	Australia	Japan
National Institutions	✓	✓	✓	✓
-for practice evidence	✓	✓	✓	✓
-for policy evidence	✓	✓	✓	✓
Government Funded	✓	✓	✗	✓
Operates with independence**	✓	✓	✓	✓
Commissions research	✓	✓	✓	✓
Priorities — Set centrally	✓	✓	✓ ✗	✓
Priorities — Vis a national plan	✓	✓	✗	✓
Existed > 20 years	✓	✓	✓	✓
Long term perspective	✓	✓	✓	✓
Examining evidence from other jurisdictions	?	✓	✓	✓

Comments:

- In all cases, large, national institutions exist to provide rigorous research and evidence

- Different categories of evidence are used to advise a) policy makers and b) practitioners

- Institutions are well established with long-term perspective

- Typically research is directed in accordance with a national plan

- In all cases, institutions exist to objectively understand policy and to improve outcomes

- Funding is typically through government and research integrity is protected

- Evidence is sought from other jurisdiction

*Based on EPI/edpol research "How leading nations organise, focus and fund educational research; December 2020
** At very least pursue unrestrained methodological research

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Benefits of a policy knowledge centre

An "Education Policy Knowledge Centre" could drive material improvements in behavior and the policy making process
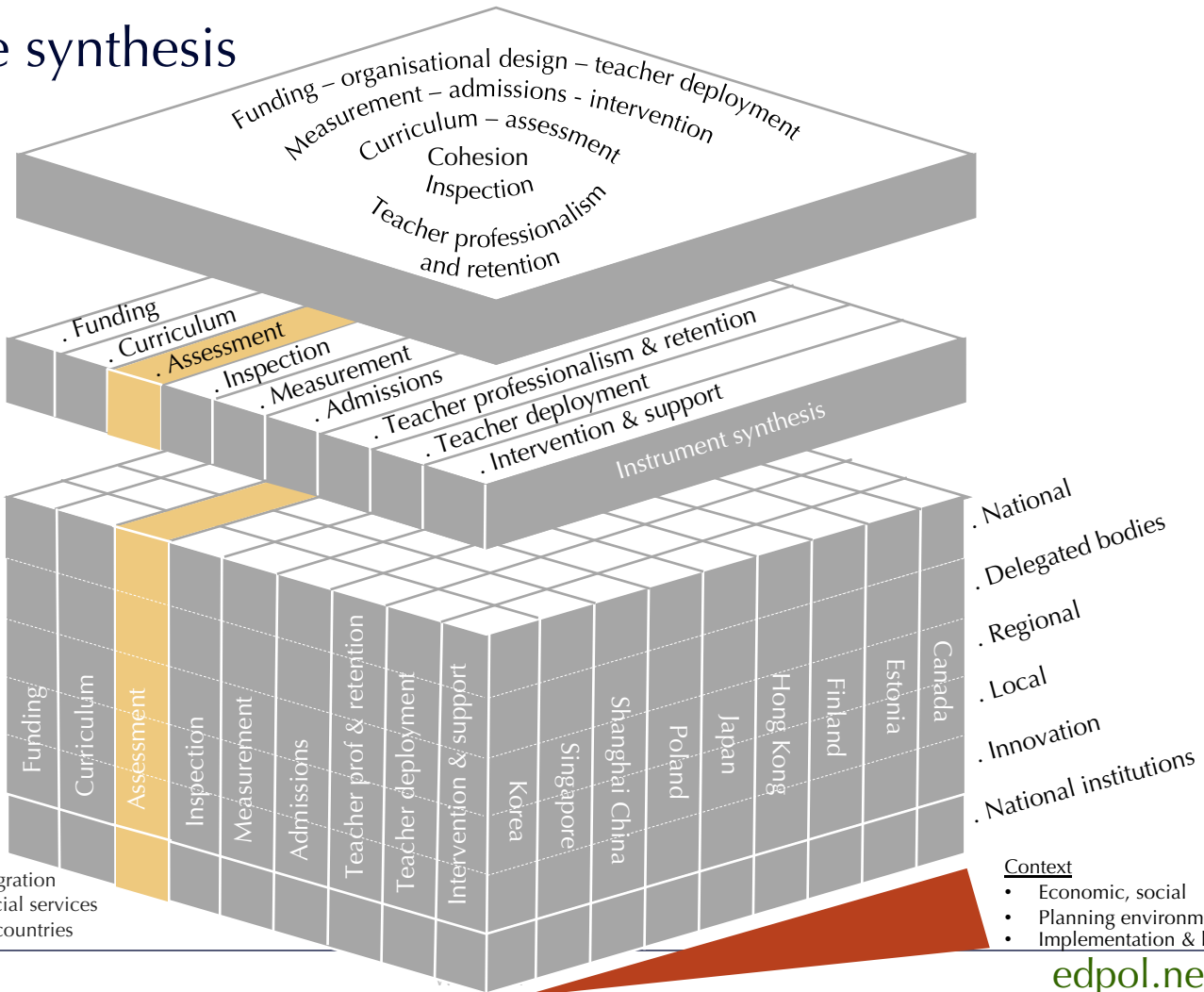
Actors	Current Behavior	With EPKC
No.10, Cabinet Office, Treasury	• Responding to media, core supporters and electorate	• Present with authority about many policy options
SofSs & Ministers	• Responding to short term pressure • Relying on Civil Service and SpAd advice and/or ideology, manifesto, personal priorities	• Rapidly receives more comprehensive and wider ranging advice from SpAds and Civil Service, with options clearly laid out
Civil Servants	• Responding to fast policy turnaround • Inadequate time to work on policy	• Can rapidly move up "knowledge curve" in any policy area, exploring all generic options
SpAds	• Difficult to have comprehensive knowledge	• As above and using the same evidence as Civil Servants; time to consider inter-departmental implications and dependencies
Think Tanks	• Creating credible point-solutions, sometimes without considering interdependent elements of education policy	• Can take a more holistic view of interrelated policies, considering cross-department elements and medium / long term consequences
Ad hoc and favoured contacts	• Providing authoritative but narrower perspective	• Can consider sector/personal position in light of credible alternatives and weighted evidence
Official Representatives and stakeholders	• Often forced to deal with short term member issues • Time and resource mitigates against long term plan consideration	• Move up "knowledge curve" quickly • Can reference other options and available evidence, to credibly respond to new initiatives
Research Bodies	• Pushing forward research and understanding • Often following funding i.e. much at micro/practitioner level • Lack of national plan and priorities	• Opportunity to contribute to meta-studies, meta-analysis and fill in research gaps according to a plan • As per Think Tanks – able to consider whole system
Local and practitioner initiatives	• Difficult to break through noise in educational debate and access government	• Automatically incorporated into weighted knowledge and evidence base
Opposition	• Responding piece-meal according to government agenda	• Improved discussion as opposition can access shared evidence base and credibly respond to any new government initiative
Manifesto writers	• Often written without sufficient time/sometimes experience	• Can examine options using same resource as government and give greater consideration to desired outcomes

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Knowledge centre synthesis model

Education policy system synthesis
(All instruments x all countries)

. Funding – organisational design – teacher deployment
Measurement – admissions - intervention
Curriculum – assessment
Cohesion
Inspection
Teacher professionalism and retention

Education policy instrument*
(All countries)

. Funding
. Curriculum
. Assessment
. Inspection
. Measurement
. Admissions
. Teacher professionalism & retention
. Teacher deployment
. Intervention & support

Instrument synthesis

Education policy instruments by country**:
Comparative review

Funding | Curriculum | Assessment | Inspection | Measurement | Admissions | Teacher prof & retention | Teacher deployment | Intervention & support

Korea | Singapore | Shanghai China | Poland | Japan | Hong Kong | Finland | Estonia | Canada

. National
. Delegated bodies
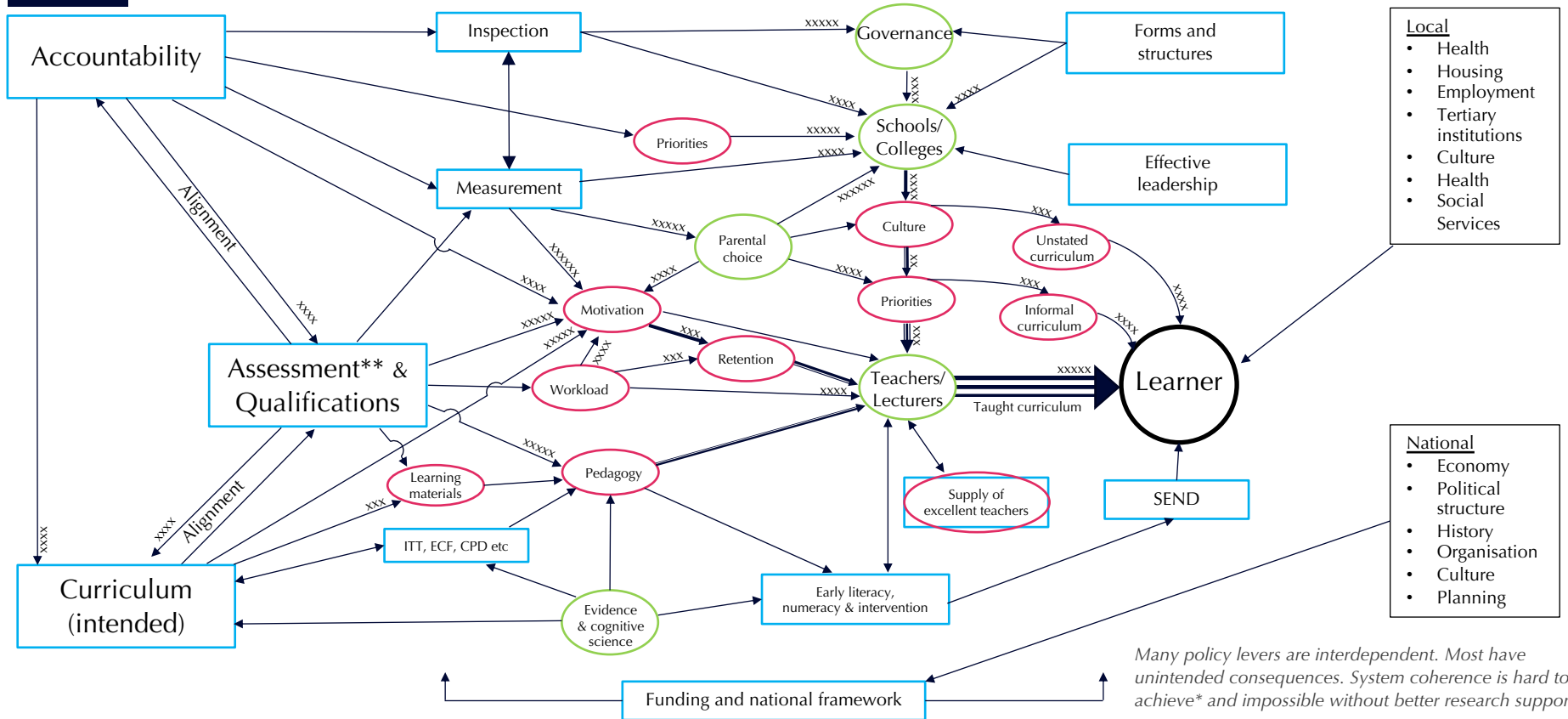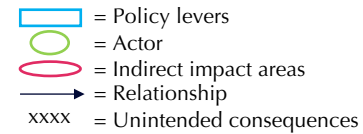. Regional
. Local
. Innovation
. National institutions

- Plus pedagogy, school improvement, integration
- Structures that support schools e.g. LA social services
** Example 9 – final framework closer to 30 countries

Context
- Economic, social
- Planning environment
- Implementation & history

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8

The need to understand system dynamics

System level policy is complex. Comparative research and synthesis would further the understanding of system dynamics, facilitate intended outcomes and promote intelligent policy making

Legend:
- ▭ = Policy levers
- ◯ = Actor
- ⬭ = Indirect impact areas
- → = Relationship
- xxxx = Unintended consequences

External variables

Local
- Health
- Housing
- Employment
- Tertiary institutions
- Culture
- Health
- Social Services

National
- Economy
- Political structure
- History
- Organisation
- Culture
- Planning

Accountability — Inspection — Governance — Forms and structures — Schools/Colleges — Effective leadership — Measurement — Priorities — Parental choice — Culture — Unstated curriculum — Priorities — Informal curriculum — Learner — Motivation — Retention — Teachers/Lecturers — Taught curriculum — Assessment** & Qualifications — Workload — Pedagogy — Learning materials — Supply of excellent teachers — SEND — ITT, ECF, CPD etc — Early literacy, numeracy & intervention — Curriculum (intended) — Evidence & cognitive science — Funding and national framework

Alignment

Many policy levers are interdependent. Most have unintended consequences. System coherence is hard to achieve* and impossible without better research support