

How can research and initial teacher education institutions support research use?

EVIDENCE



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Abstract

How can research and initial teacher education institutions become active drivers of evidence-informed policy and practice? Drawing on new data from the OECD's 2023 Survey of Knowledge Mobilisation and international research, this paper offers considerations and inspiring examples on how to strengthen the role of research and initial teacher education institutions in knowledge mobilisation.

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Related publications:

- OECD (2025), *Everybody Cares About Using Education Research Sometimes: Perspectives of Knowledge Intermediaries*, Educational Research and Innovation, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/5ef88972-en>.
- OECD (2023), *Who Really Cares about Using Education Research in Policy and Practice?: Developing a Culture of Research Engagement*, Educational Research and Innovation, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/bc641427-en>.
- OECD (2022), *Who Cares about Using Education Research in Policy and Practice?: Strengthening Research Engagement*, Educational Research and Innovation, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/d7ff793d-en>.

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Executive Summary

Research institutions (RIs) and initial teacher education institutions (ITEs) report to be among the most active organisations in facilitating the use of research in education. However, in many OECD systems, their potential to support a more thoughtful and systematic use of research evidence in education policy and practice is still not entirely fulfilled. Few ITEs actively support the development of teacher candidates' and educators' research engagement skills, and research staff in RIs often have limited incentives to engage in collaborative research with or disseminate their research findings to policymakers, practitioners or the wider public.

Drawing on new data from the OECD's 2023 Survey of Knowledge Mobilisation, this paper offers inspiring examples and considerations for RIs, ITEs and governments on how to strengthen the role of ITEs and RIs in knowledge mobilisation. The analysis presented in this paper suggests the following considerations:

1. **Mandates matter:** Institutions with a formal mandate for knowledge mobilisation are significantly more active in supporting research use than those without.
2. **Research-informed teacher education:** Most ITE institutions report that graduating teacher candidates lack sufficient skills to engage with research, highlighting a need to embed research engagement skills development more systematically in ITE curricula. Teacher educators also need dedicated incentives and supports to engage with educational research.
3. **Collaborative research and research dissemination:** Research institutions often lack dedicated training, incentives and structures to help researchers produce and communicate policy- and practice-relevant research.
4. **Interdisciplinary collaboration between ITEs and RIs:** Stronger partnerships between research and ITE institutions, especially within higher education institutions, are needed to improve the flow of pedagogical and subject-specific research into teacher education and classroom practice.
5. **System-level levers:** Governments can play a vital role in creating the right framework conditions for research and ITE institutions to operate in, for instance, by embedding knowledge mobilisation or research engagement in regulatory, funding and quality assurance frameworks.

1 What role do research and initial teacher education institutions play in knowledge mobilisation today?

1.1 Research and ITE institutions can play a key role in supporting evidence use in education policy and practice. *But are they there yet?*

Research and initial teacher education institutions are seen as key actors in countries' knowledge mobilisation systems for education ...

In 2021, the OECD carried out a Policy Survey on Strengthening the Impact of Education Research, collecting responses from 37 ministries of education on the production, dissemination and use of education research in policy and practice in their respective jurisdictions (OECD, 2022^[1]). In that survey, responding ministries identified research institutions (RIs) and initial teacher education institutions (ITEs) as some of the most active and important actors in the production and dissemination of education research. One of the reasons for this is because RIs and ITEs are often located in or connected to the same higher education institution (HEI) or education department. This creates opportunities to connect the research and practice communities and functions, and to mobilise knowledge. For example, the research conducted in HEIs can be directly integrated into teacher education curricula; the practice of teacher educators can model effective teaching, based on research; and the connection of teacher education with schools can help to identify research needs.

In this paper, knowledge mobilisation is defined as follows:

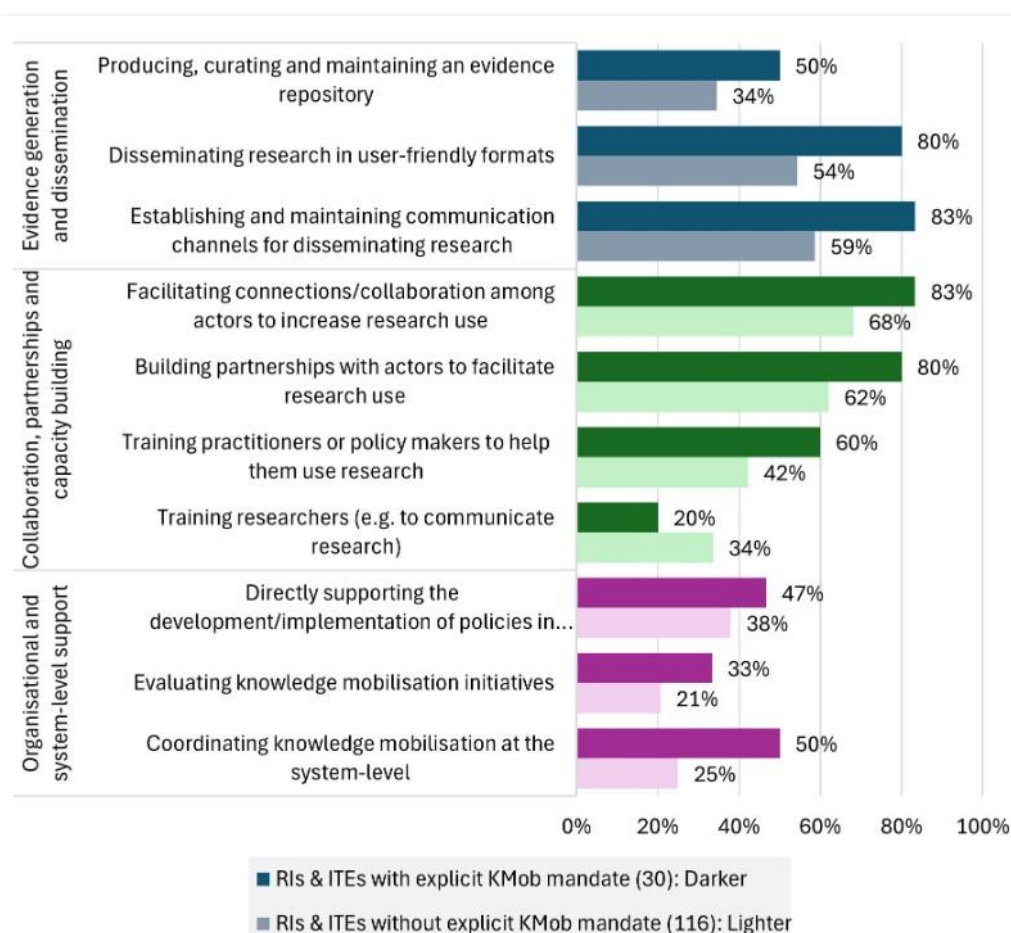
Knowledge mobilisation refers to all intentional efforts aimed at facilitating policymakers' and practitioners' engagement with research. It includes generating policy- and practice-relevant evidence and making it accessible, building relationships to connect the research, practice and policy communities, and building stakeholders' capacity in engaging with research (OECD, 2025^[2]).

... but few have a formal mandate for knowledge mobilisation

Despite research and ITE institutions being seen as important knowledge mobilisers, evidence from the intermediaries' survey suggests that few have a formal mandate to facilitate research use in education policy or practice (OECD, 2025^[2]). In total, only 29 RIs and 5 ITEs responding to the intermediaries' survey indicated that they are also a formal knowledge intermediary, meaning that they operate as an independent or government-affiliated What Works Centre or brokerage agency at the national or regional level. Giving RIs and ITEs a formal knowledge mobilisation mandate, however, may increase their activity levels in knowledge mobilisation. In all but four of 21 different knowledge mobilisation activity types, RIs and ITEs with a formal knowledge mobilisation mandate are more active than those without such as mandate (see Figure 1).

The differences are most pronounced for the activities “disseminating research in user-friendly formats”, “establishing/maintaining communication channels to disseminate research”, “facilitating connections/collaboration among actors to facilitate research use” and “building partnerships to facilitate research use”. For each of these four activities, on average 80% or more of RIs/ITEs with a formal mandate indicated that they engaged in them either to a large extent or systematically. For RIs/ITEs without an explicit mandate, the responses range between 40% and 60% on average. They are also more likely to provide organisational and system-level support to governments and schools (see Box 1 for examples).

Figure 1. Research and ITE institutions with and without an explicit knowledge mobilisation mandate engaging in selected knowledge mobilisation activities



Notes: Dark-coloured bars represent the percentage of RIs and ITEs with a formal knowledge mobilisation mandate engaging to a large extent or systematically in a given knowledge mobilisation activity. Light-coloured bars indicate the percentage of RIs and ITEs without a formal mandate doing so. Knowledge mobilisation activities are grouped by type of knowledge mobilisation approach: Evidence generation and dissemination; Collaboration, partnerships and capacity building; Organisational and system-level support.

Source: OECD Survey of Knowledge Mobilisation in Education data, in OECD (2025^[2]), *Everybody Cares About Using Education Research Sometimes: Perspectives of Knowledge Intermediaries*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/5ef88972-en>.

Box 1. Examples of organisational and system-level support by research and ITE institutions

Building partnerships with actors to facilitate research use (Netherlands)

In the Netherlands, 28 HEIs are part of seven “Regional Higher Education-School Clusters” that were established by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science to support close to 360 primary and secondary schools to improve their teaching and learning practice (HE-School Clusters, 2018^[3]).

Directly supporting policy organisations/schools (University of Warsaw, Poland)

In Poland, the University of Warsaw was formally appointed by the City Council of Ostrołęka to develop a series of diagnostic reports for all schools in the region over a four-year period (2019-23). Based on these reports, cross-cutting issues were identified and discussed with the schools and local authorities to jointly develop school improvement plans. Academics involved in the project offered assistance in implementing those plans and helped to monitor progress (Ostrołęka, 2023^[4]).

Co-ordinating knowledge mobilisation at the system level (University of Stavanger, Norway)

In Norway, the Ministry of Education and Research established the Knowledge Centre for Education at the University of Stavanger, following a public call for tenders (University of Stavanger, n.d.^[5]). Since 2013, the university centre has been operating as a formal knowledge intermediary in Norway.

1.2 What if research institutions were given a system-level mandate to evaluate the impact of knowledge mobilisation?

Evaluating other intermediaries’ knowledge mobilisation activities could be a well-suited role for research institutions with demonstrated expertise in evaluation. RIs have a lot of expertise that can be leveraged to support other institutions with the evaluation of their knowledge mobilisation activities. Evidence from the intermediaries’ survey suggests that RIs are slightly more active than other organisation types in evaluating their knowledge mobilisation activities, especially RIs located outside HEIs. On average 26% of all responding RIs (and 34% of RIs located outside of a HEI) reported that they evaluated most or all of their knowledge mobilisation activities. This compares with only 18% for all other organisation types.

Giving RIs a formal mandate to evaluate the knowledge mobilisation activities of other intermediaries could help to better understand what effective knowledge mobilisation looks like, i.e. build the limited evidence on “what works in what works” (OECD, 2025^[2]). Box 2 offers an example from the United Kingdom, where a research centre is evaluating the knowledge mobilisation activities of eight other intermediaries.

Box 2. Evaluating the impact of knowledge mobilisation activities in the United Kingdom

In the United Kingdom (UK), researchers at the Wales Centre for Public Policy have carried out an external evaluation of the UK What Works Network, a network of nine independent What Works Centres (WWCs) and three affiliate members. The study points to the importance of relations between WWCs, policymakers and other users or stakeholders to facilitate the use of research in policy and practice. Several WWCs are also developing their own frameworks to monitor their knowledge mobilisation activities and employ varied methods to gather evidence on the use of their work. Based on the findings of this evaluation, the Centre plans to develop a (self-)evaluation framework to help improve the quality and relevance of other intermediaries’ knowledge mobilisation initiatives (Vallance et al., 2025^[6]).

2 How to strengthen initial teacher education institutions' role in knowledge mobilisation?

2.1 ITEs must play a stronger role in developing the research engagement skills of teacher candidates and educators

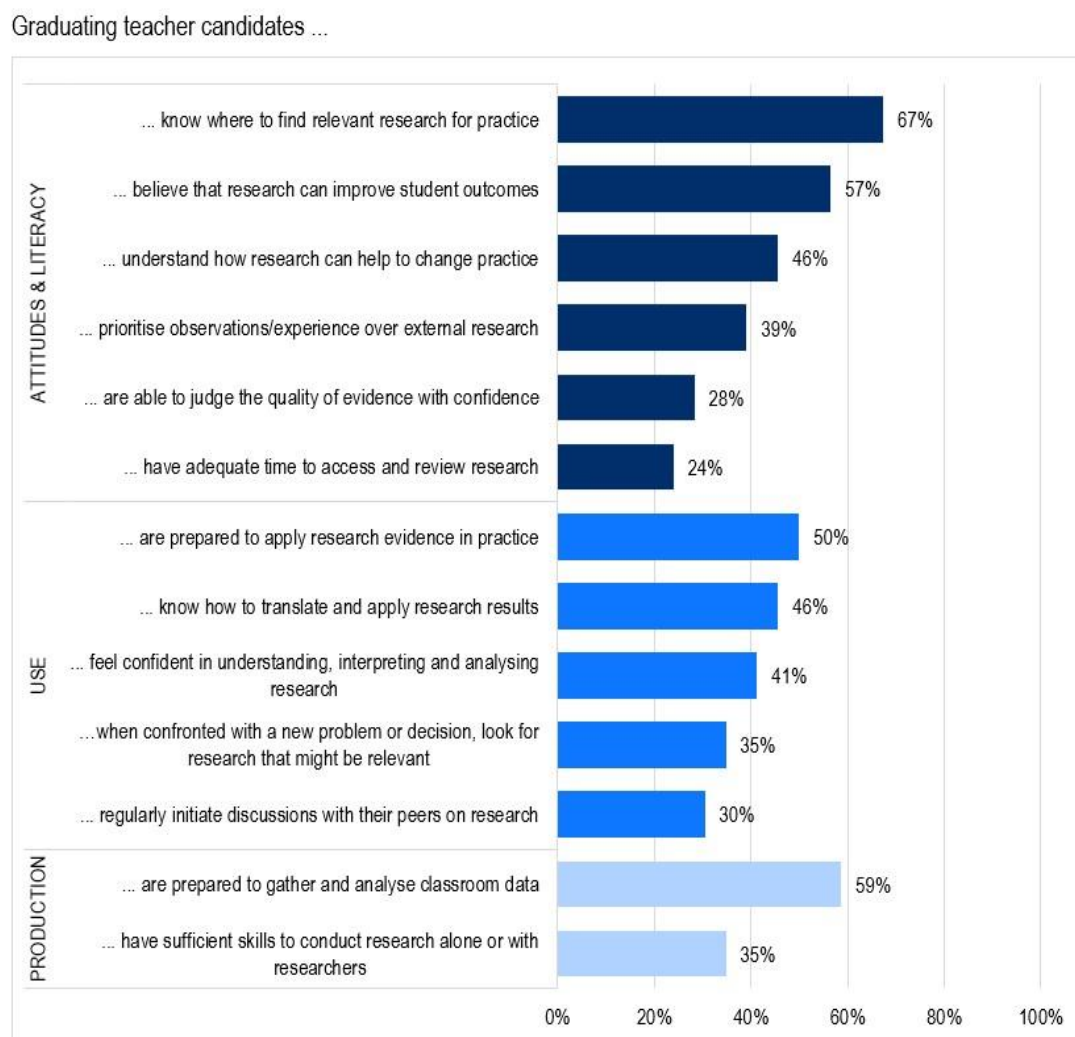
In the intermediaries' survey, the majority of responding ITEs said that they believe graduating teacher candidates' research engagement skills are insufficiently developed. This is a concerning finding. For instance, only 35% of ITEs agreed or strongly agreed that, when confronted with a new problem or decision, graduating teacher candidates will look for research that might be relevant. And only 28% think that graduating teacher candidates are able to judge the quality of education research with confidence (see Figure 2). It is debatable if every new teacher should be able to conduct academic research. However, it is crucial that each teacher has sufficiently developed skills and attitudes allowing them to thoughtfully question their own practice, find and understand relevant research findings, distinguish scientific evidence from other sources of information, and can integrate insights from research evidence into their daily practice. There are three reasons that might explain these figures.

For most ITEs, developing teacher candidates' research engagement skills is not a key activity

In the intermediaries' survey, only 48% of ITEs reported that they frequently or systematically support educational practitioners to develop research skills (see Figure 2). Even fewer ITEs (33%) said that they provide training for school leaders. This may be because developing research engagement skills is not a formal requirement in the national standards for ITE in most OECD systems. In 12 out of 36 OECD and partner countries with available data, HEIs are entirely free to decide whether and how to include the development of research skills in their ITE curricula (OECD, 2022^[71]).

Even in cases where research engagement skills development is integrated in ITE curricula, this is often done through a separate project or module. For example, teacher candidates may be required to submit a research paper to graduate, but educational research may not be systematically integrated across all modules of the ITE curriculum. This entails the risk that "student-teachers and teacher educators view research competence as an 'add on' rather than a crucial foundation of teacher education and the teaching profession in general" (OECD, 2023, p. 9^[8]). In some jurisdictions, however, national standards for ITE do include the development of research engagement skills as an explicit requirement, and external quality assurance mechanisms exist to check that HEIs follow these standards (see Box 3).

Figure 2. Graduating teacher candidates' research engagement skills according to ITE institutions



Notes: This figure shows the percentage of ITEs agreeing or strongly agreeing with statements related to the research engagement skills of graduating teacher candidates. Statements are grouped based on the dimensions of research engagement skills: Literacy, Use and Production. Source: OECD Survey of Knowledge mobilisation in Education data, in OECD (2025^[2]), *Everybody Cares About Using Education Research Sometimes: Perspectives of Knowledge Intermediaries*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/5ef88972-en>.

Many ITEs face challenges to keep up with and integrate the latest developments in education research into their curricula

Integrating scientific research into teacher education curricula is especially challenging for higher education systems where governments impose strict requirements on the content, subjects or competencies to be taught. These requirements can hinder the capacity of ITEs to regularly update and align their curricula with the latest developments in scientific research (Révai, 2018^[9]; OECD, 2025^[10]). As an alternative, some countries make professional bodies responsible for setting and maintaining quality standards, as these organisations are often more closely connected, and responsive, to changing industry requirements and developments in research. Typically, such bodies will include representatives from industry and academia. This flexibility is crucial for programmes that prepare students for employment in specific sectors or jobs (including the teaching profession), where required knowledge and skills can evolve rapidly.

Internationally, this self-regulated approach is quite well-established in sectors such as medicine or business, where there are even global professional networks that drive national quality standards (e.g. the World Federation of Medical Education (WFME) or the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB)). For the teaching profession, there are some examples where professional teaching bodies set and maintain national quality standards for teaching. In Ireland, for example, the Teaching Council is responsible for regulating the teaching profession. More than half of the Council consists of representatives from the primary and secondary school sectors (see Box 3). Education International and UNESCO have also collaborated to develop a “Global Framework for Professional Teaching Standards” (Education International, 2019^[11]), representing more than 33 million teachers worldwide.

The structure of ITE curricula can also pose challenges to connect teacher education with the latest developments and challenges in practice. In many ITE programmes, there is no connection between the pedagogical and subject-specific training teacher candidates receive, and their practical training in the classroom. This is especially a challenge in consecutive teacher training programmes, where practical training follows a period of more theoretical training (OECD, 2019^[12]). For this reason, some systems have supported the development of concurrent ITE programmes and research-practice partnerships, in which education practitioners and ITE providers work closely together to design, deliver and update the ITE curriculum (see Box 3).

In many ITE institutions, teacher educators have insufficient opportunities to develop their own research engagement skills

Teacher educators also need opportunities to actively engage with and align their teaching practices with the latest developments in scientific research and update the subjects they teach accordingly. However, for many teacher educators, research engagement is not part of their responsibilities or included in performance assessment (OECD, 2024^[13]). In the intermediaries’ survey, only 60% of ITEs agreed or strongly agreed that their institution has formal processes in place to encourage staff to engage critically with different information sources (e.g. scientific articles, policy or guidance documents from official bodies, or information gathered from professional development activities or conferences).

Finally, continuing professional learning (CPL) among teaching staff in higher education – and this includes teacher educators – is only slowly starting to become a part of HEIs’ culture (OECD, 2024^[13]; OECD, 2025^[14]). Evidence from a 2024 survey conducted by the European Universities Association (EUA), which collected responses from 163 HEIs, found that 70% of HEIs now have a learning and teaching centre operating at central/institutional level that offers CPL to teaching staff. Compared with 2018, this represents a steep increase, when only 47% of surveyed institutions said they had such a centre (Zhang, 2025^[15]).

2.2 Options to strengthen the research dimension in initial teacher education

In some leading OECD systems, governments, research and initial teacher education institutions have adopted different approaches to address some of the challenges outlined above and strengthen the research dimension in ITE programmes. Box 3 presents a selection of country examples intended as inspiration for governments and initial teacher education institutions.

Box 3. Country examples on strengthening the research dimension in initial teacher education

Integrating research engagement skills in national standards for teacher education (Australia and Ireland)

In Australia, the professional standards for teachers include an explicit requirement for ITEs to develop teacher candidates' research engagement skills (AITSL, 2018_[16]). Similarly, in Ireland all ITE providers must apply for accreditation with the Teaching Council and meet seven standards. One of these is "Creativity and Reflective Practice" and seeks to ensure that ITEs focus on developing "a creative mindset among student-teachers, teachers as reflective practitioners, teachers as innovators, teachers as researchers" (Teaching Council Ireland, 2020, p. 14_[17]).

Strengthening the theory-practice link through concurrent teacher training (Tartu University, Estonia)

In Estonia, the University of Tartu carried out a major revision of its teacher education programme in 2012/13 following an external evaluation by the Estonian Quality Agency for Education (HAKA). A key objective of the revision focused on strengthening the link between education theory and practice. To achieve this, two key changes introduced by the university were to embed continuous teaching practicum throughout the two-year master's programme, and to more closely involve teachers, school leaders and teacher candidates in research projects (Révai, 2018_[9]).

Fostering research-based collaboration between ITEs and schools (Sweden)

In Sweden, the government launched a major national pilot in 2017 (involving 25 HEIs) to develop and test sustainable collaboration models between academia and the school system in the areas of research, teacher education and school activities. In January 2025, the project (ULF: Education, Learning, Research) transitioned into a permanent operation. It is now co-ordinated by four universities, with each university working in a "node", fostering collaboration with HEIs and schools in its region to support collaboration between schools and academia (Government of Sweden, 2025_[18]).

Creating professional development opportunities for teacher educators (Finland)

Finland's Teacher Education Forum was established in 2016 by the Ministry of Education and supports research-based collaboration between teacher educators, researchers and school educators through literature reviews, peer learning and benchmarking. The Forum has developed national guidelines and priorities for the further development of teacher education in Finland in 2022-26. Research skills and critical thinking are mentioned as core competencies for the network to focus on in the coming years (Finnish Teacher Education Forum, 2022_[19]).

3

How to strengthen research institutions' role in knowledge mobilisation?

3.1 Research institutions increasingly focus on knowledge mobilisation, but face some important challenges to increase the impact of their work

Ensuring that research is communicated widely to society has become a high-level priority for research institutions (RIs), higher education institutions (HEIs) and policymakers working on science and innovation policy (OECD, 2023^[20]; EC, 2023^[21]). For instance, a survey carried out by the European Universities Association (EUA) among 489 European HEIs has found that 83% of responding institutions saw engagement with society and community as highly important, and 70% that it had grown in importance in the last five years (EUA, 2024^[22]). Engagement with schools is also a key activity for many institutions. A global survey of HEIs in 21 countries found that “most respondents see engagement with pre-collegiate education a part of their mission” (Reimers, 2021, p. 3^[23]). Finally, in the intermediaries' survey 64% of RIs reported that research dissemination is included in researchers' job descriptions; and 53% report that they include collaborative research. However, RIs still face several challenges to engage in impactful knowledge mobilisation.

Researchers have few opportunities to develop their knowledge mobilisation skills through dedicated training or capacity-building activities

Data from the intermediaries' survey shows that only 33% of ITE providers and 30% of research institutions either frequently or systematically offer capacity building to researchers on knowledge mobilisation. This is concerning, because it does not seem any other organisation is filling this gap. Only 15% of formal intermediaries and 8% of public intermediaries frequently or systematically offer capacity building to researchers (e.g. on science communication).

In some OECD jurisdictions, RIs will have a dedicated unit to support researchers to develop their policy- and practice-relevant research skills as well as science communication skills and activities (OECD, 2022^[1]; OECD, 2023^[24]). An example is Durham University's Science Communication and Outreach Department, which even has a specific unit supporting academic staff to engage in collaborative research and science communication with schools (Durham University, n.d.^[25]). Evidence shows that such institutional support structures are becoming increasingly common across HEIs. In the same EUA survey cited earlier, 49% of responding HEIs said that they had dedicated structures or incentives to support research engagement (EUA, 2024^[22]).

Most researcher training appears to be primarily focused on improving research methods and skills, and not on producing policy or practice-relevant research.

An EUA survey, which collected responses from 217 universities offering doctoral education, found that the courses most commonly offered to doctoral candidates focused on research ethics and integrity (93% of responding universities said they offered these courses), science communication (90%), research methodology (88%) and research data management (86%) (EUA, 2025^[26]). By contrast, only half (54%) of universities said that they offered training on innovation/knowledge valorisation and 39% that they offered training on public engagement. In the higher education community, public engagement usually refers to sharing scientific knowledge through, for example, science communication, expertise and policy advice (OECD, 2019^[27]).

To support the research community in generating policy- and practice-relevant research, some organisations have started to develop specific competency frameworks. One example is the European Commission’s “Science for Policy” competency framework, which offers guidance to RIs working at the science-for-policy interface (European Commission, 2023^[28]). Another example is Rosa’s (2023^[29]) framework for producing practically relevant education research. This framework includes ten practice-focused guidelines for education researchers, one of which is to develop mechanisms to directly involve practitioners in the design and production of education research.

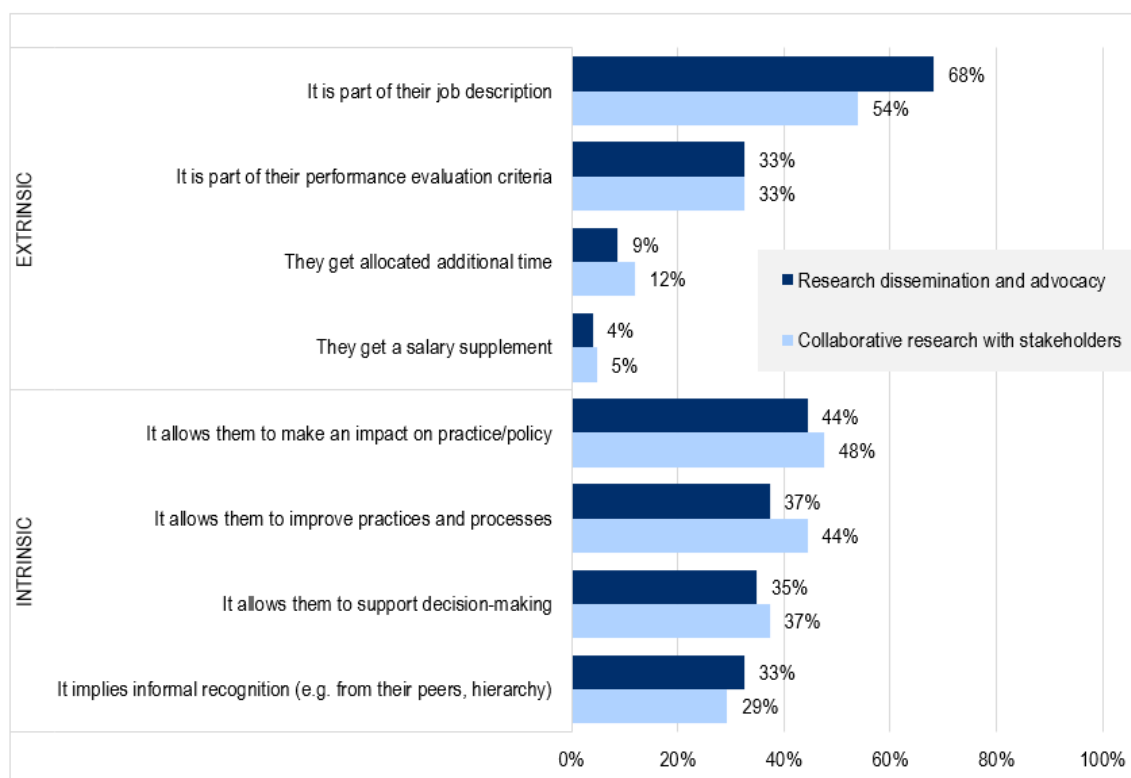
Incentives for researchers to engage in knowledge mobilisation are limited

The research community tends to be characterised by high levels of autonomy, with incentives primarily directed towards conducting primary or secondary research, and publishing in peer-reviewed academic journals (OECD, 2022^[11]). As a result, many do not prioritise research dissemination/advocacy or engaging in collaborative research with external stakeholders. This underscores the importance of RIs developing appropriate incentive and reward structures for knowledge mobilisation (OECD, 2024^[13]).

Evidence from the intermediaries’ survey suggests that the primary incentives for researchers to engage in knowledge mobilisation might be *intrinsic* in nature (i.e. they come from a personal desire for growth, a sense of purpose or satisfaction). Such incentives include making an impact on policy/practice and informal recognition among peers. By contrast, RIs have far fewer *extrinsic* incentives to engage in knowledge mobilisation (i.e. they are compensated or supported externally to do this). While two out of three RIs said that research dissemination and 54% that collaborative research is part of the job description of research staff in their organisation, less than 10% of RIs reported that researchers received allocated time or a salary supplement for engaging in these activities (see Figure 3).

Due to limited incentives, researchers continue to spend most of their time on conducting primary or secondary research instead of research dissemination or collaborative research. Data from an international survey of faculty working time in HEIs across 13 countries (carried out in 2007/08) shows that, on average, full-time academics spent only 7% of their annualised hours on service (including public engagement) (Bentley and Kyvik, 2012^[30]). By contrast, research occupied about 40% of their working time, 30% was spent on teaching, and 15% on administration. A follow-up survey conducted in 2017/18 found that the proportion of academics’ working hours spent on research has been increasing in recent years, especially in highly ranked and research-oriented institutions (Teichler, Aarrevaara and Huang, 2022^[31]).

Figure 3. Incentives for research staff in research institutions to engage in selected knowledge mobilisation activities



Note: This figure shows the percentage of research institutions reporting the existence of a given incentive for research staff in their organisation for selected knowledge mobilisation activities. Dark-coloured bars refer to the percentage of research institutions reporting the existence of a given incentive for "Research dissemination and advocacy". Light-coloured bars for "Collaborative research with stakeholders".

Source: OECD Survey of Knowledge mobilisation in Education data. Full results included in OECD (2025^[2]), *Everybody Cares About Using Education Research Sometimes: Perspectives of Knowledge Intermediaries*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/5ef88972-en>.

3.2 Options to strengthen researchers' engagement in knowledge mobilisation

While it is certainly not necessary for every researcher to engage in knowledge mobilisation or collaborative research with stakeholders, it is important that those who do wish to do so are supported and recognised for their efforts. At the system level, countries can try to incentivise and support researchers' knowledge mobilisation efforts by establishing a national support centre for science communication and/or embedding knowledge mobilisation in research assessment frameworks. Such approaches consist of "steering at a distance" to complement, rather than replace, the efforts of individual institutions to support research engagement (OECD, 2008^[32]; OECD, 2020^[33]). Box 4 presents a selection of country examples intended as inspiration for governments.

Box 4. Country examples of system-level supports and incentives for knowledge mobilisation in research institutions

Establishing a national support centre for knowledge mobilisation (Netherlands and United Kingdom)

In recent years, several OECD systems have set up dedicated structures at the national level to support the research community both in- and outside HEIs to strengthen their knowledge mobilisation efforts. For example, in October 2024 the Netherlands established a National Centre of Expertise for Science and Society (NEWS: *Nationaal Expertisecentrum Wetenschap en Samenleving*) (NEWS, 2025^[34]). The mission of NEWS is to “foster the connection between science and society through better science communication” (Verkade and Smeets, 2023, p. 3^[35]). In the UK, a similar entity – the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE) – has been supporting HEIs’ knowledge mobilisation efforts already since 2013. One concrete project example led by the NCCPE is the School-University Partnerships Initiative (SUPI). The project ran from 2013 to 2017 and supported 12 UK universities to establish school-university partnerships. Through 900 school engagement initiatives, SUPI engaged 600 schools, 2 000 academics, 3 800 teachers and 40 000 school students. The project also developed guidance to inform the higher education sector (NCCPE, 2017^[36]).

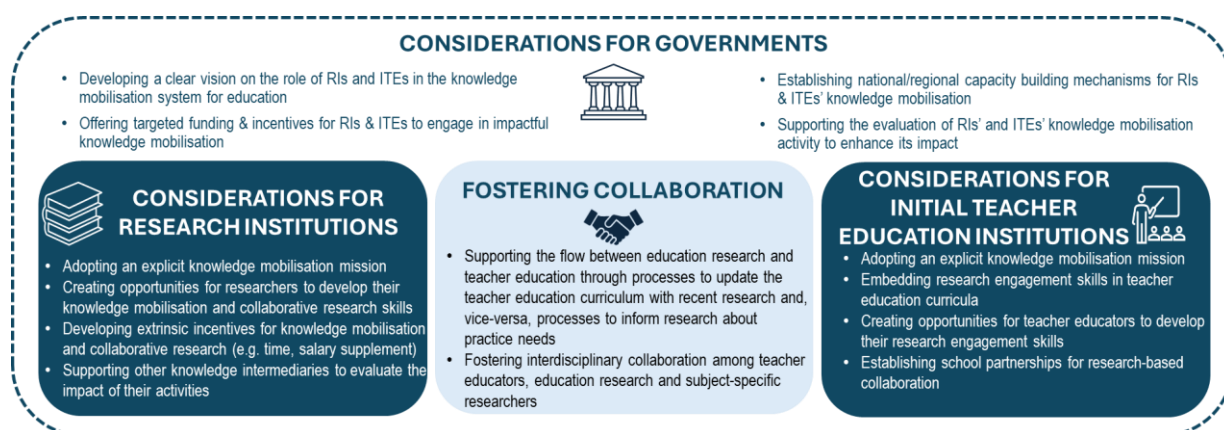
Embedding knowledge mobilisation in research assessment and funding frameworks (United Kingdom)

Over the years, systems have evolved from evaluating the quality of research based on academic publications and purely quantitative output metrics only (e.g. number of publications or citation metrics) towards examining the societal impact of research and making greater use of qualitative methods and peer review. The UK’s Research Excellence Framework (REF) is perhaps the most well-known international example. Since 2014, every HEI in the UK undergoes an external assessment of its research quality based on three areas: research outputs (which determines 60% of the final score), research impact beyond academia (25%) and the vitality and sustainability of the research environment (15%). Impact is defined as “an effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia” (REF, 2025^[37]). Since the evaluation informs the allocation of block-grant research funding, it has led to a major shift among academics and, arguably, increased their knowledge mobilisation activity. However, there has been criticism of the REF among UK academics because of the performance management aspect of impact evaluation ((n.a.), 2020^[38]). Moreover, it remains difficult to develop clear and reliable indicators to effectively measure societal impact (OECD, 2019^[27]).

4 How to make research and ITE institutions knowledge mobilisation champions?

This paper has presented several international policy and practice examples to strengthen the role of research institutions (RIs) and initial teacher education institutions (ITEs) in knowledge mobilisation. However, more action is needed to turn RIs and ITEs into knowledge mobilisation champions. These are depicted in Figure 4 and described in the following sections.

Figure 4. Actions to strengthen the role of research and ITE institutions in knowledge mobilisation



4.1 Fostering collaboration: reflection questions for higher education institutions

Research and ITE institutions are often located within the same institution – most often a higher education institution (HEI). In the intermediaries' survey, 40 out of 48 ITEs located inside a HEI also identified as a research institution. HEIs as “dual role” institutions emerged as a result of countries gradually transferring the responsibility for ITE from specialist teacher education colleges to HEIs since the 1980s, thereby creating opportunities for better research-practice links in education (Musset, 2010^[39]; OECD, 2023^[8]). In the intermediaries' survey, 80% of RIs located inside a HEI reported that they often or regularly collaborated with teacher educators, teachers and school leaders. By contrast, far fewer RIs located outside a HEI collaborate with teachers and school leaders (63%) or teacher educators (39%).

However, even within HEIs that conduct both educational research and offer initial teacher education, some important barriers to collaboration remain.

How can HEIs improve the flow between education research and teacher education?

In some HEIs there can be a strict separation between the staff engaged in research and those responsible for teacher education. This may be because they operate in separate units within the same institution, or due to separate teaching and research pathways embedded in the institution's academic career structure (OECD, 2024^[13]). In such HEIs, researchers engage very little or are not required at all to engage in teacher training. Vice-versa, teacher educators engage very little or are not required at all to conduct research.

To help address this challenge, HEIs may wish to reflect on the following questions:

- How are the responsibilities of teacher educators and staff engaged in educational research in your institution divided? Is there scope to strengthen the involvement of educational researchers in the design and delivery of ITE?
- How can the career and/or professional development structures that govern research and teacher education staff in your institution be revised to foster collaboration between both types of staff?
- What other mechanisms can be developed or strengthened in your institution to incentivise and recognise the efforts of teacher educators engaging in practice-oriented research and, vice-versa, engage education researchers in the design and delivery of ITE?

How can interdisciplinary collaboration be increased to improve teacher education?

In many HEIs, there also is a weak link between teacher education and subject-specific research. Even in institutions where teacher educators do engage in educational research and embed this in their teaching practice, institutions can face challenges to connect the ITE curriculum with the latest developments in subject-specific and pedagogical research.

To help address this challenge, HEIs may wish to reflect on the following questions:

- To what extent are subject-specific and pedagogical research included in the design and delivery of your institution's ITE curricula?
- What incentives or supports can be created to better connect or embed subject-specific research with ITE curricula in your institution?

4.2 Creating the framework conditions: reflection questions for governments, research and initial teacher education institutions

Governments, research and ITE institutions should also reflect on a number of organisational and system-level enablers to foster the development of teacher educators and candidates' research engagement skills, and researchers' knowledge mobilisation skills. Reflection questions for each of these three stakeholders are presented in the following sections.

Reflection questions for initial teacher education institutions

As noted in this paper, ITE institutions have a duty to support the development of student teachers' research engagement skills. However, in many OECD jurisdictions this is not included as an explicit focus in ITE curricula. Teacher educators are often also not required to hold a teaching qualification or engage in scientific research. As a result, ITE programmes may not be aligned with the latest evidence-based practices in effective teaching in higher education.

To help address this challenge, ITEs may wish to reflect on the following questions:

- How can your ITE programme strengthen teacher candidates' research engagement skills? How can it foster a research mindset among teacher candidates?
- What can you do to ensure that your ITE programme is regularly updated with scientific research on teaching and learning as well as subject-specific research?
- What additional support and incentives can your organisation offer to build the capacity of teacher educators to engage in educational research?

Reflection questions for research institutions

For research institutions, it is crucial to ensure that scientific research responds to the needs of education policymakers and practitioners, and that the findings from such research are disseminated to both actors in a targeted and efficient way. However, in many research institutions staff engaged in education research have limited incentives, training or support to engage in impactful knowledge mobilisation.

To help address this challenge, RIs may wish to reflect on the following questions:

- How is knowledge mobilisation integrated into the daily work of researchers in your institution? What are the incentives for such activities (e.g. research dissemination and collaborative research) and what hinders engagement in these?
- How do researchers collaborate with practitioners, policymakers and knowledge intermediaries to support the generation of policy- and practice-relevant research and its use?
- How can you build researchers' capacity and support them to engage in impactful knowledge mobilisation?
- How can you support the rigorous evaluation of knowledge mobilisation activities?

Reflection questions for governments

Finally, governments play a major role in steering the behaviour of RIs and ITEs through the regulatory, funding and quality assurance frameworks they set. These should be designed in such a way that they encourage and support RIs to focus on knowledge mobilisation, or for ITEs to focus on developing teacher candidates' research engagement skills. In addition to this, governments need to develop a clear vision on the role they wish RIs and ITEs to play in their wider knowledge mobilisation systems for education. As noted, despite being among the most active, they are only one among a wider set of actors that play a role in countries' knowledge mobilisation system.

To effectively determine the desired role for RIs and ITEs in countries' wider knowledge mobilisation systems for education, policymakers may wish to reflect on the following questions:

- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the knowledge mobilisation activities carried out by RIs and ITEs in your system?
- What role do you think *all* RIs and ITEs should play in knowledge mobilisation? How can you support these institutions in this role (e.g. with resources and incentives)?
- Which *specific* institutions do you think should take on a more formal mandate to support system-level knowledge mobilisation? How can the government support that?

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How can research and initial teacher education institutions become active drivers of evidence-informed policy and practice? Drawing on new data from the OECD's 2023 Survey of Knowledge Mobilisation and international research, this paper offers considerations and inspiring examples on how to strengthen the role of research and initial teacher education institutions in knowledge mobilisation.


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