Comparative Study on Quality Assurance in EU School Education Systems – Policies, procedures and practices

Final report

DG EAC
Order 12 Lot 3 DG EAC Framework Contract

4 June 2015
Europe Direct is a service to help you find answers to your questions about the European Union.

Freephone number (*):
00 800 6 7 8 9 10 11

(*)The information given is free, as are most calls (though some operators, phone boxes or hotels may charge you).


Language version: EN
Catalogue number: NC-04-15-279-EN-N
DOI : 10.2766/422920

© European Union, 2015
Reproduction is authorised provided the source is acknowledged.
# Table of Contents

Table of Contents ................................................................. 2
Executive summary .................................................................... 11

1 Introduction ........................................................................... 20
1.1 Study context ..................................................................... 20
1.1.1 Why this study? .......................................................... 20
1.1.2 What is quality assurance? ............................................ 21
1.1.3 Quality assurance in school educational systems on the EU policy agenda ............................................. 22
1.2 Study objectives ............................................................... 24
1.3 Study scope ....................................................................... 24
1.4 Study methodology ......................................................... 26
1.4.1 Literature review .......................................................... 26
1.4.2 Background country research ....................................... 27
1.4.3 Case-studies .................................................................. 28
1.4.4 Expert workshops .......................................................... 30
1.4.5 Discussion of the methodology ..................................... 30
2 What is understood as ‘Quality’ and ‘Quality Assurance’? ................. 33
2.1 Definitions of what quality in school systems is ......................... 33
2.1.1 Quality as achievement of key competences or learning outcomes ......................................................... 34
2.1.2 Quality in terms of equity and inclusiveness ...................... 34
2.1.3 Quality as excellence ..................................................... 35
2.1.4 Quality as positive destinations (meeting labour market or further education needs) ................................. 35

2.2 How Quality Assurance in school systems is understood across the EU ................................................................. 36
2.2.1 The core functions of Quality Assurance ......................... 36
2.2.2 How QA is understood by stakeholders in EU school systems ................................................................. 37
3 Quality Assurance systems ..................................................... 39
3.1 Main approaches used ....................................................... 39
3.2 What influences/drives the choice in approach to QA in the school sector ......................................................... 40
3.2.1 Level of school and local autonomy ......................... 40
3.2.2 Values underpinning approaches to QA ...................... 42
3.3 Areas of the school sector that are quality assured .................. 42
3.3.1 Education context ......................................................... 43
3.3.2 Inputs into the education process .................................. 44
3.3.3 Education process: teachers competences, school leadership and pupils’ assessment .................................. 45
3.3.4 School outputs and learning outcomes .......................... 46
3.4 3.4 Main activities and tools ............................................. 46
3.5 Actors involved in QA ....................................................... 49
3.5.1 System level actors ......................................................... 49
3.5.2 Regional or local actors ............................................... 50
3.5.3 School stakeholders ..................................................... 52
3.5.4 Parents and the wider community .................................. 53
4 Results and outcomes of Quality Assurance in EU school education systems ................................................................. 55
4.2 How the results of QA are being monitored across EU school systems ................................................................. 56
4.3 The outcomes of effective QA across EU school systems ................. 59
4.4 Critical factors which contribute to the effectiveness of QA policies, activities and practices ................................................................. 62
4.4.1 The overall landscape: Conditions under which quality assurance policies, activities and practices are effective ................................................................. 63
4.4.2 Success factors related to the design and implementation of QA policies, activities and practices ................................................................. 64
5 Strengths and weaknesses and trends in QA in school education in the EU ........ 70
5.1 Strengths in existing QA systems across the EU ................................ 70
5.1.1 Consolidated QA systems exist in a number of countries ................. 70
5.1.2 Efforts for QA to include a formative function ................................ 72
5.2 Weaknesses and gaps in existing QA systems across the EU .............. 73
5.2.1 Lack of consolidation or coherence in QA systems ......................... 73
5.2.2 Difficulties utilising the results of QA activities ............................ 74
5.2.3 Lack of capacity to conduct QA and use its results ....................... 75
5.3 Trends in QA in the school sector ................................................. 75
5.3.1 Learning outcomes for the purpose of QA and broadening their scope .... 75
5.3.2 Tension between autonomy and the principle of equity in access to quality education ............................................................................... 76
5.3.3 Needs-based QA ........................................................................ 77
5.3.4 Bringing further coherence into QA systems or approaches ............. 77
5.3.5 Improving the quality and attractiveness of teaching profession ........ 78
5.3.6 A more contextualised understanding of schools’ performance .......... 79
6 Reflections on potential EU level actions to support national QA efforts in the school sector ........................................................................ 81
6.1 Overall rationale for EU level actions in the area ............................ 81
6.2 Existing actions in the area of QA in education systems ................... 81
6.3 The characteristics of any potential EU level actions in the area .......... 83
6.4 The added value of potential EU level actions .................................. 84
6.5 Seven proposed EU action scenarios .............................................. 85
7 Conclusions .................................................................................... 93
Annex 1 Scenarios of potential EU level actions .................................... 97
Annex 2 Case studies .......................................................................... 105
Annex 3 Review of academic literature on topics related to Quality Assurance in EU school systems ...................................................................... 214
GLOSSARY

The definitions of the terms in this glossary are based on two main sources, the Cedefop (2011) Glossary - Quality in education and training and the glossary comprised within the 2014 Eurydice Report on Assuring quality in education. Most of the definitions of the terms in this glossary were fully reproduced from these sources, while several were adapted from definitions specific to the VET sector to ones specific to the school sector. In cases where terms used in this final report were not included in the two main sources mentioned, other official definitions have been used and referenced.

- **Accountability**: Obligation to demonstrate that an activity has been conducted in compliance with agreed rules and standards or to report fairly and accurately on performance results vis-à-vis mandated roles and/or plans.

- **Area of education (that is quality assured)**: the study refers to ‘areas of education’ which can be the subject of Quality Assurance policies, procedures, practices or activities. The study broadly groups those areas under the following categories: (1) the educational context (school relationship with parents and other organisations in the community; school climate and its various components; school and system governance); (2) inputs into the educational system (education standards; facilities and equipment); the education process (curriculum; learners’ assessment (formative and/or summative); (3) teaching and learning methods; requirements for teachers in terms of qualifications, competences, responsibilities; same for school leadership); education outputs and outcomes (graduation rates, drop-out rates, etc.; learning outcomes (qualifications); equal opportunities, etc.). The study has looked at how each area has been ‘quality assured’.

- **Assessment of learning outcomes**: process of appraising knowledge, know-how, skills and/or competences of an individual against predefined criteria (learning expectations, measurement of learning outcomes). Assessment is typically followed by validation and certification.

- **Authority responsible for the external evaluation of schools**: can refer to the public authority (e.g. the Ministry of Education) to which the body (inspectorate or other) in charge of carrying out the evaluation belongs, to the public authority (e.g. the parliament) to which an independent body in charge of carrying out school evaluation is accountable to, or to the public authority (e.g. local authorities) in charge of carrying out the evaluation.

- **Central/top authorities**: they are in charge of education in a given country. The top educational authority is located at national (state) level in the vast majority of countries. However, in Belgium, Germany, and the United Kingdom, the regions (Communities, Länder, etc.) are responsible in all or most areas relating to education (including school evaluation) and are considered as the top level in this survey.

- **Competence**: Proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development.

- **Consultation with school management before drafting the final evaluation report**: an evaluation procedure that exists in some countries and involves a discussion between evaluators and certain school members on the findings of evaluation. This discussion occurs before the final evaluation report is written and gives schools – and especially their management bodies – an opportunity to react to it, correcting factual errors or clarifying certain points.

- **Criterion**: principle or reference item used to assess, analyse or compare.
Curriculum: inventory of activities implemented to design, organise and plan an education or training action, including definition of learning objectives, content, methods (including assessment) and material, as well as arrangements for training teachers and trainers.

Effectiveness: extent to which the objectives of a policy or an intervention are achieved, usually without reference to costs.


European qualification framework for lifelong learning (EQF): Reference tool for describing and comparing qualification levels in qualifications systems learning developed at national, international or sectoral levels. The EQF’s main components are a set of eight reference levels described in terms of learning outcomes (combination of knowledge, skills and/or competences) and mechanisms and principles for voluntary cooperation. The eight levels cover the entire span of qualifications from those recognising basic knowledge, skills and competences to those awarded at the highest level of academic and professional and vocational education and training. EQF is a translation device for qualification systems. Levels 1-4 (out of the 8) correspond to school education. Reference tool to compare the qualification levels of different qualifications systems and promote both lifelong learning and equal opportunities in a knowledge-based society, as well as further integration of the European labour market, while respecting the rich diversity of national education systems.

Evaluation follow-up: an evaluation procedure that exist in some countries and during which external evaluators examine how far schools have achieved the objectives they have been set during their evaluation, or check that they have complied with the recommendations made to them.

Evaluation framework: the one or several documents used by evaluators to elaborate their parameters and/or required standards in order to evaluate schools. They provide the (quantitative and/or qualitative) basis on which judgments are formed. Evaluation frameworks vary in their form and use. For instance, they can be documents that evaluators will use when visiting schools but also pre-structured templates filled in by local authorities for reporting to the central/top authority about schools for which they are responsible.

Evaluation of local authority education provision: may be performed by the central/top education authorities, the inspectorate, or a national education agency. It evaluates local authorities with respect to their administration of schools within the geographical area under their jurisdiction.

Evaluation of schools: focuses on the activities carried out by school staff without seeking to assign responsibility to individual staff members. Evaluation of this kind seeks to monitor or improve school performance and student results, and findings are presented in an overall report that does not include individual teacher appraisal information. If the work of the school head is appraised as part of a general evaluation covering all school activities (including those for which the school head is not directly responsible) and findings are used with a view to improving the quality of the school concerned, this is regarded as school evaluation. The evaluation of schools may be external or internal.

Evaluators: the person or group of persons whose responsibility is to select relevant data and form an evaluative judgement about their content.

---

- **External evaluation of schools**: is conducted by evaluators who report to a local, regional or central/top education authority and who are not directly involved in the activities of the school being evaluated. Such an evaluation covers a broad range of school activities, including teaching and learning and/or all aspects of the management of the school.

- **Individual teacher evaluation**: involves forming a judgement about the work of teachers and delivering personal, verbal or written feedback in order to guide them and help them to improve their teaching. This evaluation may occur during the process of school evaluation (in which case it generally results in verbal feedback), or may be carried out separately (possibly leading to a formal appraisal of the teacher).

- **Internal evaluation of schools**: evaluation undertaken by persons or groups of persons who are directly involved with the school (such as the school head or its teaching and administrative staff and pupils). Teaching and/or management tasks may be evaluated.

- **Learning outcomes**: set of knowledge, skills and/or competences and learning attainments individual has acquired and/or is able to demonstrate after completion of a learning process, either formal, non-formal or informal.

- **Learning outcomes approach versus input approach**: “Learning outcomes are described as written statements of what a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to do at the end of a period of learning. Learning outcomes started to gain importance at policy level and have consequently been supported by the development of national qualifications frameworks (Berlin Communiqué), the adoption of the ESG, the overarching outcomes-focused Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area (QFEHEA) (Bergen Communiqué) and the European Qualifications Frameworks for Lifelong Learning. Learning outcomes benefit for quality assurance as they increase transparency and comparability between qualification standards. Learning outcomes are also valuable in terms of course design”\(^2\).

- **Monitoring the performance of the education system at national or regional level**: implies a process of collecting and analysing information in order to check system performance in relation to goals and standards and enable any necessary changes to be made. The range of data used may include for instance the results of school self-evaluation, external examinations or other national assessments, specially prepared performance indicators or outcomes of international evaluations (including PIRLS, TIMSS, PISA, etc.). Some countries rely on the evidence of experts or a special authority such as a council set up to monitor reform.

- **National tests**: refers to the national administration of standardised tests and centrally set examinations. The tests contain centrally set procedures for the preparation of their content, administration and marking, and for the interpretation and use of their results. These tests are standardised by the central (or top-level) education authorities.

- **OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS)**: is an international survey that consists of asking teachers and schools about their working conditions and the learning environments. It covers important themes such as initial teacher education and professional development; what sort of appraisal and feedback teachers get; the school climate; school leadership; and teachers’ instructional beliefs and pedagogical practices. The survey targets Lower secondary education teachers and leaders of mainstream schools.\(^3\)

---


\(^3\) OECD website: [http://www.oecd.org/edu/school/talis.htm](http://www.oecd.org/edu/school/talis.htm)
- **Open Method of Coordination**: new framework for cooperation between coordination Member States, whose national policies can thus be directed towards certain common objectives.

- **Outcome (quality)**: positive or negative longer-term socioeconomic change or impact that occurs directly or indirectly from an intervention’s input, activities and output.

- **Output (quality)**: immediate and direct tangible result of an intervention.

- **Peer learning**: form of cooperative learning that improves the value of learner-learner interaction and results in various learning outcomes for all participants.

- **Performance**: measure of the level of attainment achieved by an individual, team, organisation or process.

- **PISA** (Programme for International Student Assessment) is a triennial international survey which aims to evaluate education systems worldwide by testing the skills and knowledge of 15-year-old students⁴.

- **Procedure**: specified way to carry out an activity or process.

- **Process**: set of interrelated or interacting activities which transform input into output.

- **Qualification** covers different aspects: (a) formal qualification: the formal outcome (certificate, diploma or title) of an assessment and validation process which is obtained when a competent body determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards and/or possesses the necessary competence to do a job in a specific area of work. A qualification confers official recognition of the value of learning outcomes in the labour market and in education and training. A qualification can be a legal entitlement to practice a trade (OECD); (b) job requirements: knowledge, aptitudes and skills required to perform specific tasks attached to a particular work position (ILO).

- **Qualification framework**: instrument for development and classification of qualifications (at national or sectoral levels) according to a set of criteria (such as using descriptors) applicable to specified levels of learning outcomes. A qualification framework can be used to: i) establish national standards of knowledge, skills and competences, ii) promote quality of education; iii) provide a system of coordination and/or integration of qualifications and enable comparison of qualifications by relating qualifications to one another, and/or iv) promote access to learning, transfer of learning outcomes and progression in learning.

- **Quality**: degree to which a set of inherent characteristics fulfils requirements.

- **Quality assurance approach**: any integrated set of policies, procedures, rules, criteria, tools and verification instruments and mechanisms that together ensure and improve the quality provided by a [school] institution. Comment: ‘approach’ is used as an overall term because the term ‘system’ is often used in a narrower sense. ‘Approach’ covers both very fixed and formalised real systems and any sets of more systematic behaviour meant to regulate and/or to develop the quality performance of a [school] system.

- **Quality assurance activity**: an activity involving the design, implementation, evaluation or review of a QA policy, process, procedure, practice or tool.

- **Quality assurance (in school education)**: policies, procedures, practices and activities involving planning, implementation, evaluation, reporting, and quality improvement, implemented to ensure that school education (content of programmes,
curricula, assessment and validation of learning outcomes, etc.) meets the quality requirements expected by stakeholders.

- **Quality assurance practice**: the usual way(s) of implementing a QA approach, policy, procedure, activity or tool; a habit or custom, as opposed to the theory or idea.

- **Quality assurance result or outcome**: maintenance or / and improvement of quality standards or objectives, following the introduction of a certain QA policy, procedure, practice, activity or tool.

- **Quality assurance system**: As opposed to the term ‘QA approach’, which covers a way of considering or performing QA, influenced by cultural concepts, a value system, and the specific characteristics of a school system (e.g. governance, autonomy), the term ‘QA system’ covers all integrated set of policies, procedures, rules, criteria, tools and verification instruments and mechanisms that together ensure and improve the quality provided by a school institution.

- **Quality assurance tool**: a specific tool developed to support school stakeholders maintain or improve quality standards or objectives, e.g. teacher and school head qualification standards/competence frameworks, centrally-set guidelines on teaching and learning methods, frameworks for school external or internal evaluation etc.

- **Quality control**: part of quality management focused on providing confidence that quality requirements will be fulfilled.

- **Quality cycle / PDCA cycle**: cycle of four stages one has to go through to realise continuous improvement, as described by Deming: P (plan) (project phase); D (do) (execution phase); C (check) (control phase); A (act) (action, adaptation and correction phase).

- **Quality indicator**: formally recognised figure(s) or ratio(s) used as yardsticks to judge and assess quality performance.

- **Quality monitoring**: systematic collection and analysis of quality indicators to determine whether the quality of education and training meet the standards set.

- **Quality objective**: something sought, or aimed for, related to quality.

- **Quality policy**: overall intentions and direction of a [country or school system or organisation] with regard to quality as formally expressed by [decision-makers].

- **Quality requirement**: needs or expectations expressed in terms of quality.

- **Regional authorities**: authorities politically and/or administratively situated below central authorities. This can also refer to an administrative division of the central/top authorities operating at regional level.

- **Self-assessment** (of an individual): activity (ies) of individuals to observe, analyse and judge their performance based on predefined criteria and determine how they can improve it.

- **Stakeholders** [in school education]: all those who have an interest in school activities, for example, policymakers, local authorities, school staff, parents, pupils, employers, higher education or VET institutions, society, at large, etc.

- **Standard** (in education and training): Statement approved and formalised by a (in education and training) recognised body, which defines the rules to follow in a given context or the results to be achieved.
- **TIMSS** (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) is an international survey that measures trends in mathematics and science achievement at the fourth and eighth grades\(^5\).

- **Eurypedia-European Encyclopaedia on National Education Systems** is a resource tool which is regularly updated and completed by the Eurydice Network and its national experts, involving education experts and national ministries responsible for education from across Europe. It offers comprehensive descriptions of 38 European education systems, usually at national level, but sometimes also at regional level\(^6\).

---

\(^5\) TIMSS and PIRLS International Study Center: [http://timssandpirls.bc.edu/home/pdf/TP_About.pdf](http://timssandpirls.bc.edu/home/pdf/TP_About.pdf)

Executive summary

Why this study?
Maintaining and improving the quality of school education systems is a key concern for many EU governments in their goals to support their country’s social cohesion, equity, employment, innovation and growth. Whilst most EU countries do not have a specific definition of what ‘quality in school education’ is, the study found that it is broadly understood as achieved when (1) key competences are acquired by all pupils, and/or (2) school systems are equitable and inclusive (i.e. low or declining disparities in educational outcomes), and/or (3) are driven by excellence (e.g. in teaching or school governance), and/or (4) bring pupils to transition successful from school to the labour market or to further education. A ‘quality’ school education system is also which responds and adapts to new challenges (e.g. budgetary cuts, increasing diversity in classrooms, the use of digital resources, etc.) and approaches (e.g. the key competences approach, the learning outcomes approach, the importance of delivering social outcomes of education, etc.). Failing to do can result in underperformance, measured for example by early school leaving, difficulties in transition between education sectors or into the labour market and poor social outcomes. In most countries, the quality of different areas of education varies within the school system, and inequalities in learning outcomes, for example in basic skills attainment or qualification rates, exist.

The performance of a school education system is impacted by how the quality of all areas which compose it is monitored, maintained and improved, and how responsive it is to emerging needs. This, in turn, is influenced by the types of Quality Assurance policies, procedures and activities which exist and how those are organised and implemented in practice.

In May 2014, the Council of EU Ministers recognised the need to develop a culture of quality enhancement in teaching and learning which can raise standards and improve learning outcomes. With due regard for subsidiarity, the European Commission was given a mandate to work on quality assurance supporting education and training, covering all sectors of education, including the school sector, within the Open Method of Coordination (OMC). Specifically, the Council invited the European Commission to “strengthen mutual learning through European cooperation on quality assurance in all sectors” and “explore ways to support Member States in developing their quality assurance arrangements so as to cater for different modes of learning and teaching or so that such arrangements could also be applied to various sectors and levels of education and training”.

This study is one contribution to the Commission’s reflections on EU countries’ needs for cooperation and coordination in the field of quality assurance in the school sector, and on potential EU level actions to support national efforts. The study covers QA policies, procedures, activities and practices in EU 28 school educational systems at the following levels (1) primary; (2) lower-secondary; and (3) upper-secondary (general education). It

---

7 The study broadly groups those areas under the following categories: (1) the educational context (school relationship with parents and other organisations in the community; school climate and its various components; school and system governance); (2) inputs into the educational system (education standards; facilities and equipment); the education process (curriculum; learners’ assessment (formative and/or summative); (3) teaching and learning methods; requirements for teachers in terms of qualifications, competences, responsibilities; same for school leadership); education outputs and outcomes (graduation rates, drop-out rates, etc.; learning outcomes (qualifications); equal opportunities, etc.). The study has looked at how each area has been ‘quality assured’.
9 Ibid.
identifies different types of QA systems and approaches across EU school educational systems, their drivers, the activities and tools which make them up, and actors involved. It also identifies results and outcomes of effective QA across the EU school education systems, as well as key strengths and weaknesses in how QA is currently conducted and general trends. Considering current weaknesses in QA across EU school educational systems and the EU’s new mandate to support national efforts in this area, the study also considers potential EU actions in the field to add value to what is happening at the national level.

What is Quality Assurance, and how does it contribute to ‘Quality’?

How the quality of the different components of a school system is assured and improved has an impact on the overall performance of this system. This, in turn, is determined by the types of Quality Assurance policies, procedures and activities in place to assure this. Indeed, QA broadly serves two key functions:

- a summative function which relates to ensuring that actors of the school system are held accountable for their results and that processes are controlled and compliant with regulation. This function translates into QA policies and activities which ensure that quality standards and objectives which cover the different areas of school education (e.g. in teaching, learning, pupils’ assessments, school climate, teacher training, etc.) are met, and

- a formative function which relates to the improvement of practices and results (e.g. recommendations for improvement, action plans, improvement and support measures such as critical friend, counsellors etc.). This function is essential to ensure that weaknesses identified in a given area of education, following an ‘summative’ QA activity or process (control/compliance check), are addressed, and also that ‘standards for quality’ and objectives are adapted to emerging needs and challenges, in a continuous cycle of improvement.

The study found that in most EU countries the term ‘quality assurance’ is not used as such in the school sector. Stakeholders consulted in this study tended to know specific QA activities or processes (e.g. external school evaluation or inspections, internal evaluation, teacher appraisals) without necessarily referring to them as such, or understanding them as part of a QA system or approach. Nevertheless, QA activities exist and are identifiable in all EU school systems even if they are not systematically related to Quality Assurance. Re-labelling existing activities as QA ones could maximise their potential use for accountability and improvement purposes however, or to consider them as part of a QA system or a QA cycle.

Quality Assurance activities and systems across EU school systems

The study identified ‘QA system’ as an integrated set of policies, activities, procedures, rules, criteria, tools and verification instruments and mechanisms that together are designed to ensure and improve the quality provided by a school institution or school system. Depending on the QA system in question, this set of instruments and mechanisms can be more or less organised according to a Quality Assurance cycle, to realise continuous improvement. In some countries, the QA cycle is also enshrined in QA

---

10 If standards are too low and thus achievable by all or most schools, teachers, pupils etc. without much effort, QA policies, procedures and practices will not lead to good outcomes, nor drive improvement. For ‘standards for quality’ to lead to ‘quality’ attainment and improvement, they must be ‘fit-for-purpose’ and regularly updated.

11 Unlike in the higher education or VET sector where QA is a more established language.

12 Definition adapted from a definition of QA approach in Cedefop, Glossary - Quality in education and training, 2011.

13 Deming described his Quality cycle as follows: P (plan) (project phase); D (do) (execution phase); C (check) (control phase); A (act) (action, adaptation and correction phase).
tools such as quality or school evaluation frameworks or QA activities such as school evaluations. The study identified quality assurance activities and processes which take place during the following phases:

- the standard-setting phase. Activities under this phase lead quality standards in different areas of a school system being set, e.g. learning outcomes, teaching standards, standards in learning processes (e.g. curricula, learning methods), standards in pupils’ assessments, etc.;

- the accountability phase. Activities and tools under this phase provide information on the performance of individuals, schools and/or the school system as a whole. Activities and tools include: schools’ external and internal evaluation, staff appraisal, pupils’ assessment, European and International tests and surveys such as the OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) or TIMSS or PISA, and

- the improvement phase. Activities and tools during this phase aim to support quality improvement processes amongst individuals, schools and the school system as a whole. They include requirements for school staff’s further training; school development or improvement plans; the provision of supportive material, counselling or methodological support of qualified advisors; networking activities etc.

Those activities and tools are then applied to the different dimensions or areas of school education whose ‘quality’ is to be maintained and/or improved. The study found that some areas were given more priority than others, as per the deployment of resources for their QA. Most frequently, countries focus most of their QA efforts on assuring the quality of (1) learning outcomes, (2) teachers (recruitment, training, teaching methods etc.), (3) the school education context (school climate, school governance, relationships with parents etc.). Whether other areas of education are ‘quality assured’, or how thoroughly, varies by country.

The study found that, in the majority of EU countries, QA systems are not sufficiently consolidated: the coherence and strategic linking of various QA activities (e.g. teacher or pupils’ assessments, school evaluations, curriculum development, definition of learning outcomes) is insufficient, formative activities and processes are generally limited and there are shortcomings in the QA of certain areas of education (which can have an impact on the QA of other related areas). Coherent and consolidated QA systems are those where different QA activities build on each other in a consistent manner and work towards the same objectives. This exists in some school systems but in a minority of cases.

**Stakeholder’s involvement in QA in EU school systems**

A variety of stakeholders at different levels of the school system (central, regional/local and school levels) are concerned by how QA in the school sector is conducted: parents, pupils, teachers, school heads, ministry officials, employers, other sectors of education etc. They have been distinguished according to the level of the school system at which they are involved in QA design and/or implementation:

---

14 The study looks at how each area has been ‘quality assured’. The study broadly groups ‘areas’ under the following categories: (1) the educational context (school relationship with parents and other organisations in the community; school climate and its various components; school and system governance); (2) inputs into the educational system (education standards; facilities and equipment); the education process (curriculum; learners’ assessment (formative and/or summative); (3) teaching and learning methods; requirements for teachers in terms of qualifications, competences, responsibilities; same for school leadership); education outputs and outcomes (graduation rates, drop-out rates, etc.; learning outcomes (qualifications); equal opportunities, etc.).
• At system level, central or decentralised governments and other independent oversight or advisory bodies have a mandate to assure the quality of certain aspects of school quality. In addition, associations of school and local level actors (e.g. parents, teachers, school heads, local authorities) are also more or less consulted by public actors and have an influence on the development of policy orientations and legal texts.

• In some countries, local or regional authorities and schools are involved in the design and implementation of some QA activities and procedures (e.g. through the development of performance targets and objectives, the implementation of external evaluations, staff appraisal etc.). In countries where school or local autonomy is high, the type, depth and scope of QA activities can vary depending on schools and regional or local authorities, e.g. some schools can choose to produce improvement plans following a school evaluation process, others may not. Local and school autonomy in QA thus creates variability in approaches to QA and in their effectiveness. This is a problem where system-level checks, to ensure consistency across a system, are weak. This being said the study found that some autonomy at school and local levels was a factor which contributed to engaging school actors in the implementation of QA policies and activities, and thus improved their likelihood to be effective.

• School leaders and teachers are key in turning the ‘intentions’ of system-level actors into realities (e.g. in implementing teaching methods, assessment guidance, assuring the school climate is appropriate etc.) and in creating a quality / self-assessment culture in schools. However school leaders and teachers can lack capacity / incentives to engage in QA activities and use their results (e.g. use data available on school and pupils’ performance; introduce change in teaching, learning and other school practices). In some systems they also do not have sufficient autonomy to introduce appropriate changes (in timetable organisation, in staffing etc.).

• Pupils are generally consulted to monitor the quality of educational inputs, e.g. the quality of teaching or of school climate. This can take place in external or internal school evaluations. In some countries, pupil representatives are also part of school boards or councils to reflect on school plans or strategic orientations or the set-up of concrete projects. Pupils are involved in QA activities which assess the quality of education outcomes, e.g. standardised or continuous progress assessments.

• Parents’ involvement in QA activities across EU school systems can vary significantly from one school to another, depending on the school’s capacity to engage with them and also on the school’s population’s socio-economic characteristics. They are generally consulted in school planning and school evaluation activities.

• In some countries, efforts are made to involve employer and/or higher education representatives to ensure that education processes are fit for the purpose of post-school transition to further education or employment, but this is not systematic across EU school systems.

The study found that a high degree of stakeholder involvement in the design and implementation of QA at all relevant levels (system, local and school levels) is, in itself, a quality assurance measure. Indeed decisions are more likely to be implemented effectively when they reflect a wide array of interest. On the contrary, when stakeholders are poorly consulted, the purpose of QA policies or activities can be unclear and/or actors’ engagement in QA activities and processes can suffer.
Importantly, the extent to which ‘intentions’ of QA policies and activities, set by system-level actors, are turned into realities, depends on the practice(s) of (mainly) school actors and intermediaries (e.g. local authorities, inspectors etc.). Therefore, it is key that they are engaged in QA processes and activities, through prior consultation and support measures, such as training.

**Quality Assurance approaches across EU school systems**

QA approaches are broadly characterised by the degree to which they are summative or formative in function, i.e. whether they primarily aimed at accountability and control, or at improvement and development. Approaches are also differentiated by the broad ‘orientation’ of QA, i.e. whether the onus of QA is placed on bodies which are external to schools or onto schools themselves. Most QA systems encompass QA policies and activities which combine summative and formative aspects, as well as a more or less external or internal orientation.

A school system’s traditions, values and characteristics influence the QA approach. For example, the role that schools and school actors are expected to play in delivering quality education plays a part in shaping which quality assurance approaches are taken. Approaches are also influenced by (1) the level of autonomy given to schools and local supervisory bodies, (2) the importance given to non-education factors (e.g. family background, geography) on the performance of a school or geographical area, and (3) whether QA is ‘market-driven’ (strong accountability towards parents where school choice is high), to the State or to schools themselves.

**Results and outcomes of effective QA in maintaining and improving ‘quality’ in EU school systems, and contributing factors**

The study found that the evidence base on the effects of existing QA policies, processes and activities on school education outcomes is limited. QA systems in most EU school systems lack processes to assess changes in practices and behaviours following existing QA policies and activities. This prevents systems’ ability to critically reflect and determine levers to activate to improve the quality of relevant areas of school education.

The review of the existing academic literature on QA topics and the ten case studies of good QA practice, conducted within the present study, provide some evidence of positive effects which can be linked to QA activities. The study has thus found that effective QA activities contribute to positive changes in (1) teaching and learning, school and (2) system management and performance measurement, and (3) changes in attitudes and behaviours regarding QA itself and to (4) improvements in a system’s QA and evaluation culture.

A number of factors were identified which are associated with instigating the mechanisms leading to effective QA. A combination of the overall context and ‘QA measure’- specific factors were found to have improved the evaluation culture; strengthened the QA cycle; enhanced the legitimacy and know-how of school heads to promote change among school-level actors; and improved dialogue between public authorities and school actors.

Factors which the study found to have contributed to effective QA include: the availability of adequate resources, the existence of a coherent QA framework at policy level, the alignment between QA policies and between these and other educational policies, and the need to take into account the level of autonomy of schools and local authorities, as well as their capacity to act upon this autonomy. The active involvement of all the relevant actors in QA, one of the most often mentioned success factors, also benefits from the clarity in the communication of the goals, procedures and expected outcomes of QA measures, built on a fluent dialogue between school-level and system-level actors. In addition, the QA measure should be fit-for-purpose, that is, relevant for the goals it tries to achieve in the context where it is being implemented. Successful implementation also
depends on the skills of school leaders who tend to have an important role in QA and, at the same time, act as facilitators who support the active participation of other school-level actors in the definition and development of QA measures. The availability of quality, ease-of-use performance and context data at school-level, and the training and capacity-building of school-level actors to use this data, are also of utmost importance for the implementation of effective QA.

Current strengths and weaknesses in how QA is conducted across EU school educational systems, and trends

The study identified the following commonly-shared weaknesses:

- In several countries, system-level actors face difficulties in formulating or ensuring effective implementation of QA policies or activities
- In other countries, the performance of certain areas of school education is insufficiently monitored, or information is weak or not used for further improvements
- In other countries, the effectiveness of QA in maintaining and improving quality is insufficiently monitored, or information is weak or not used for further improvements.
- In other countries, school leaders and teachers lack capacity / incentives to properly implement QA activities and use their results, or have faced difficulties in implementing certain QA activities.

The study found that the strengths and weaknesses of Member States’ QA systems are broadly related to:

- their level of consolidation (or lack thereof), ie. the extent to which dimensions of school education to be ‘quality assured’ are defined, indicators to measure the attainment of quality standards, as well as targets, exist; and also the extent to which the different activities and processes, which compose a given QA system, are organised according to a QA cycle;
- the level efforts (or lack thereof) for QA to include a formative function, beyond a ‘strictly’ accountability function. QA activities that are guided by a formative principle are geared towards introducing improvement in practices of the school system which thus enable the system to continuously improve.

As mentioned under the previous section (Results and outcomes of effective QA in maintaining and improving ‘quality’ in EU school systems, and contributing factors) the efficiency of a QA system is affected by any difficulties utilising the results of QA activities, linked to insufficiencies at the core of QA activities themselves (e.g. are they measuring ‘what matters’ and well), and which challenge the quality and comparability of results, and ultimately, their usability. A lack of capacity amongst actors to conduct QA activities and utilise their results to maintain their standards or for improvement.

The study identified a number of positive trends across QA systems in EU school systems:

- using learning outcomes, and broadening their scope so they include the social outcomes of education, for the purpose of QA
- Following a needs-based approach to QA, whereby QA resources are deployed to schools, actors and areas which perform the least well
- Efforts to consolidate QA systems and bring strategic coherence
- Improve the quality of teaching, a key input to a school system, and looking at all contributing factors (recruitment, training, support measures etc.)
• Contextualising the performance of schools, considering socio-economic factors, and thus adapting responses.

Scenarios of potential EU level actions to support national QA efforts

Based on the findings, the study identified where EU level action could add value to national and school efforts, as well as existing international actions (OECD, SICI, etc.). Given the boundaries of the EU’s legal competence in the field of education, actions at EU level can either take the form of cooperation activities under the OMC or of EU funding15. Key EU Added Value include its ability to:

• mobilise the capacity and expertise of relevant stakeholders – policy-makers, academic experts and practitioners – in all interested Member States.

• Provide financial support to this area.

The relevance of EU level actions will vary according to countries’ starting points and needs, but also to their interest and priorities. Learning from good practice available in other countries is likely to be mostly relevant to countries where the QA and school evaluation culture is weak, or where opportunities to learn about existing effective QA are few. Building evidence at EU level of the (1) performance of areas of school education traditionally insufficiently considered in existing QA systems, or of (2) the level effectiveness of different QA policies, procedures or activities, in maintaining and improving quality, would also be mostly relevant to countries where needs exist and are not covered at national level. This being said, there is value of learning from the experience in other QA systems even for countries with more consolidated QA systems, provided associated costs do not outweigh the benefits. In any case, support QA efforts in the school sector at EU level will incentivise Member States to consider the issue further.

The suggested seven EU action scenarios are:

• Scenario 1 - Identification of common EU guiding principles to QA in the school sector
• Scenario 2 - EU level exchanges on existing QA practices
• Scenario 3 - Support to research on QA in the school sector
• Scenario 4 - Support to the measurement of the social outcomes of school education
• Scenario 5 - Capacity building of school-level actors in QA
• Scenario 6 - Support to school’s self-assessment
• Scenario 7 - Peer review programme on QA practices16.

The first three scenarios would involve system-level stakeholders whilst the last three target school-level stakeholders. Scenarios 6 and 7 can be considered as sub-scenarios of scenario 5. Indeed scenario 6 is about capacity building for one type of QA activity, i.e. self-assessment. Scenario 7 on the other hand concerns one type of capacity-building activity, i.e. peer reviews. The study suggests that EU level actions involving system-level actors or measures are more likely to lead to wide impact than those involving school level actors. Effects of an EU level action are also likely to be wider and more sustainable when system-level actors are involved (rather than at school level actors)

15 EU funding to support QA in the school sector could be integrated in the Erasmus+ programme, the European Social Fund, the Horizon Research and Innovation programme or provided through new programmes.

16 Scenarios 6 and 7 can be considered as sub-scenarios of scenario 5. Indeed scenario 6 is about capacity building for one type of QA activity, i.e. self-assessment. Scenario 7 on the other hand concerns one type of capacity-building activity, i.e. peer reviews.
and can therefore directly feedback knowledge and competences acquired at system level in system-level policies or guidance. In some school systems, supporting school level actors may be the priority however and few resources may exist to do so at national/local level. Finally, to maximise learning, exchanges should preferably occur amongst clusters of countries with similar approaches to QA and/or school system characteristics (level of autonomy, competition etc.). Targeting support to countries or stakeholder groups ‘most-in-need’ of support on QA will also be key to add value to what already exists.
1 Introduction

1.1 Study context

1.1.1 Why this study?

The quality of an education system depends on its capacity to equip young people with the skills and competences needed for their personal development and fulfilment, to function in society and to integrate into the labour market. Countries aim to enhance the quality of their education systems to support social cohesion, equity, employment, innovation and/or competitiveness. Improving the quality of education is therefore a key concern for many governments and serves as one basis for education reforms.

New emerging needs and challenges (e.g. increasing diversity in classrooms, budgetary cuts, the use of digital resources, improving teacher training, school equipment, etc.) require school systems to adapt so that they can deliver in these evolving contexts. New organisational approaches (e.g. the key competences approach, the learning outcomes approach, the importance of delivering social outcomes of education, etc.) also emerge and can be adopted in order to deliver quality outcomes. School systems’ capacity to respond to the new challenges and adapt governance, teaching and learning mechanisms is key. Failing to do can result in underperformance, measured for example by early school leaving, difficulties in transition between education sectors or into the labour market and poor social outcomes.

In view of the need for school systems to constantly adapt and deliver ‘quality’, joint reflections at EU level have led to an agreement on common objectives for education systems under ’ET 2020’ - a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training.17 The ET 2020 strategic framework for European cooperation has introduced some key benchmarks to be reached by the EU as a whole by 2020, two of which directly concern school level education (1) reducing early school leaving to fewer than 10% of young people, and (2) reducing under-achievement in reading, mathematics and science to fewer than 15% of 15-year-olds (based on PISA results)18.

Even though these benchmarks provide some international points of reference for quality of learning outcomes (though these continue to be debated19), there is no single standard on what constitutes a good quality education system. Each EU country is responsible for its own education system and hence the exact understanding of what constitutes quality education differs across EU countries, and also within them, as do the measures in place to meet quality standards and objectives.

For countries to maintain and improve the quality of their education system and also meet their national objectives, quality assurance policies, procedures and practices exist. The Eurypedia-European Encyclopaedia on National Education Systems defines quality assurance in the school sector20 ‘as an all-embracing term referring to policies, systems, procedures and practices that are designed to achieve, maintain or enhance quality in the school sector, and that rely on an evaluation and assessment process’.

---

19 See for example the debate around PISA measurement. Open letter to OECD OECD and Pisa tests are damaging education worldwide – academics, The Guardian, 6 May 2014
20 Eurypedia-European Encyclopedia on National Education Systems.
The aim of this study is to provide a comprehensive analysis and overview of how school quality assurance (QA) policies, procedures and practices currently work in EU Member States in order to meet the quality objectives and challenges mentioned above. It outlines what Member States are doing to ensure quality in school education; it also identifies what effects these QA policies, procedures and practices produce and the factors contributing to their success. On the basis of the analysis of these elements, the study identifies a number of scenarios for potential EU-level actions which could support Member States in their quality assurance efforts.

1.1.2 What is quality assurance?

Quality assurance policies, procedures and practices are part of school education systems in order to maintain and improve quality in education and to also meet national quality objectives.

The difference between the terms quality and quality assurance is best explained as follows. Whilst quality is the desired result, quality assurance is the process through which systems try to ensure that quality is achieved and continuously improved. This distinction applies not only to education but also any other area to which quality assurance is applied.

In the arena of school education, quality assurance (referred to as QA in the remainder of this report) is a way to ensure that a school education system is fit for purpose. It aims to support the attainment and maintenance of exiting quality standards in school education and also to enhance those, as well as encompassing the processes and practices which exist to support those aims. QA can be described as serving two core functions which are (1) accountability and maintaining standards and (2) improvement.

The scope of quality assurance covers different dimensions:

- Types of QA activities conducted. Quality assurance activities take place during all stages of the quality assurance cycle, from identifying the standards or objectives to be maintained or reached, to taking stock of whether they have been met and plans for improvement. The study identified the quality assurance activities which take place during the following phases:
  - the standard-setting phase. Activities under this phase lead quality standards in different areas of a school system being set, e.g. learning outcomes, teaching standards, standards in learning processes (e.g. curricula, learning methods), standards in pupils’ assessments, etc.;
  - the accountability phase. Activities and tools under this phase provide information on the performance of individuals, schools and/or the school system as a whole. Activities and tools include: schools’ external and internal evaluation, staff appraisal, pupils’ assessment, European and International tests and surveys such as the OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) or TIMSS or PISA, and
  - the improvement phase. Activities and tools during this phase aim to support quality improvement processes amongst individuals, schools and the school system as a whole. They include requirements for school staff’s further training; school development or improvement plans; the provision of supportive material, counselling or methodological support of qualified advisors; networking activities etc.

- Levels at which those QA activities occur. QA activities can be designed, implemented and reviewed at the level of schools, at system level, and also at intermediary level (regions or municipalities).
Areas or dimensions of education which are ‘quality assured’. The study broadly groups them under the following categories:

- the educational context (school relationship with parents and other organisations in the community; school climate and its various components; school and system governance);
- inputs into the educational system (education standards; facilities and equipment); the education process (curriculum; learners’ assessment (formative and/or summative);
- teaching and learning methods; requirements for teachers in terms of qualifications, competences, responsibilities; same for school leadership);
- education outputs and outcomes (graduation rates, drop-out rates, etc.; learning outcomes (qualifications); equal opportunities, etc.).

1.1.3 Quality assurance in school educational systems on the EU policy agenda

The Lisbon Treaty states that the EU should contribute to the development of quality education by promoting Member States’ cooperation, while respecting their responsibility for the organisation of education systems and for the content of teaching.\(^\text{21}\)

Given this mandate, the EU has developed several initiatives in the area of quality assurance as part of the Open Method of Coordination in the field of education and training. The theme of quality assurance, as a way to ensure that quality is achieved and continuously improved, has featured on the EU agenda in the area of education and training for over a decade.

To date, several different developments have taken place in each of education sector (school education, vocational education and training – VET, higher education and adult learning) separately, respecting the specific features of each sector.

The below gives a brief overview of the main activities in the school sector:

- A pilot project on Quality Evaluation in School Education was conducted in 1997\(^\text{22}\);
- In 1998, the 26 EU Education Ministers invited the Commission to establish a Working Committee on Quality Indicators in order to identify indicators or benchmarks to facilitate the evaluation of education systems at national level. The report submitted in 2000 provided a set of 16 indicators and examples of quality measures in European schools with the aim of stimulating discussions and possible transfers of measures across countries.
- The Parliament and the Council issued a Recommendation on European Cooperation in Quality Evaluation in School Education (2001/166/EC) in 2001. It encouraged national authorities responsible for the quality of education to cooperate with each other on how to achieve quality and on objective-setting, and to engage in networking at European level. The recommendation considered that the quality of a system could not be defined in absolute terms and that Community added value lays in information exchanges focused on methodological developments and examples of good practices.

In the period following the adoption of the Recommendation, the policy work of the Commission in the field of school education addressed issues related to quality and quality assurance such as the Key Competences framework, teacher education, and the EU benchmarks regarding Early School leaving, Literacy, and Maths & Science, and Early Child Education and Care. This was conducted within OMC working groups.

---

\(^\text{21}\) Art. 165.

Mobility and partnership activities in Member States (and other participating countries) which addressed quality in schools related issues have also been supported through the Lifelong Learning Programme (2007-2013) and currently under Erasmus+ (2014-2020).

In May 2014, the European Commission was given a mandate from the EU Council of Ministers to work on quality assurance supporting education and training, covering all sectors of education, including the school sector. The Council recognised the need to develop a proper culture of quality enhancement in teaching and learning which can raise standards and improve learning outcomes.

With due regard for subsidiarity and within the Open Method of Coordination, the European Council notably:

- Invited the European Commission and Member States to “explore the scope for Member States to strengthen their own quality assurance provisions and initiatives in the fields of pre-school education, school education and adult learning in the light of the experience gained in other sectors”;

- Invited the European Commission to:
  - “improve the links and synergies between EU transparency tools that support quality assurance, recognition and mobility, seeking further complementarity and convergence between such tools, including by taking stock of the consultations on a European Area for Skills and Qualifications”;
  - “Continue to strengthen mutual learning through European cooperation on quality assurance in all sectors,“;
  - “Explore ways to support Member States in developing their quality assurance arrangements so as to cater for different modes of learning and teaching or so that such arrangements could also be applied to various sectors and levels of education and training”.

On the basis of this mandate, the Commission has reflected on countries’ needs for cooperation and coordination in the field of quality assurance and, linked to that, on possible future actions at EU level to support national efforts.

One study led by Eurydice – on “Assuring Quality in Education: Policies and Approaches to School Evaluation in Europe” - supported EU level reflections. The study published in January 2015 reviews the key features of the structures and organisation of external and internal school evaluation specifically in Europe.

The present study addresses quality assurance from a broader perspective, going beyond school evaluation, and adopts a more analytical approach of the entire quality cycle at system and school level. It identifies different types of QA systems and approaches across EU school educational systems, their drivers, the activities and tools which make them up, and actors involved. It also presents results and outcomes of effective QA identified by the study, as well as key strengths and weaknesses in how QA is conducted across EU school educational systems. Considering current weaknesses in QA across EU school educational systems and the EU’s new mandate to support national efforts in this area, the study considers potential EU actions in the field.

---


24 Ibid. p. 6.

1.2 Study objectives

This study aims to inform the Commission’s reflections on addressing the topic of quality assurance in school education at EU level. More specifically, the study aims to provide DG Education and Culture (DG EAC) with a:

- Strengthened evidence base on Member States’ current quality assurance policies, procedures and practices;
- Comparative overview of the main characteristics, strengths, weaknesses and results of the different quality assurance policies, procedures and practices currently in place across the EU;
- Basis for discussions at EU level on quality assurance in the school sector, by identifying:
  - Areas in the practical implementation, at national level, of quality assurance policies and procedures that need further development;
  - Good practices that can be the basis for learning and exchange at EU level;
  - Possibilities for future EU action in the area of quality assurance in the school sector.

Due to the transversal nature of quality assurance, findings from this study can be used to inform different areas, such as policies to tackle early school leaving and those to enhance attainment in basic skills.

1.3 Study scope

Box 1 Scope

The study covers quality assurance systems and practices of all 28 EU Member States of the EU at the following levels of school education:

- Primary;
- Lower-secondary; and
- Upper-secondary (general education).

Please notice that pre-primary education; is out of the scope of this study:

Analysing quality assurance in the school sector across the EU is a complex task. School education is typically quite strongly regulated in all EU countries. It is one of the key pillars of European welfare systems, with high levels of public funding and efforts to ensure not only universal access but also to strive for equity. Measures to ensure compliance and the achievement of desired learning outcomes exist in all countries. These are however not necessarily called ‘quality assurance’ as they may be implicit. One of the challenges of this study has been to analyse a set of policies and procedures or even activities which may not be explicitly formulated in a corpus of guidelines and practice at national level.

This study has captured the ‘picture’ of quality assurance policies, procedures, activities and practices in each country based on a quality assurance matrix with three dimensions. Those dimensions evolved in the course of the study. The below dimensions represent the latest version of the QA matrix used to inform the analysis presented in the report.

---

26 Educational decision making in a number of Member States does not take place at the central national level. For those countries, data was collected as follows: for Belgium, information was collected separately for the three communities (Flanders, Wallonia and German-speaking community). For the UK, information was collected for England, Wales and Northern Ireland together, and separately for Scotland. In Germany, the federal level framework was examined alongside information on two Landers (Saxony and Rhineland-Palatinate).
They are:

- **Levels** - Quality assurance takes place at the level of schools as well as at system level (i.e. strategy or laws specific to QA, the use of educational standards, requirements for teachers and school leaders, etc.). In several EU countries the intermediary level of regions or municipalities has key responsibilities for quality assurance, hence this level is also covered in this study.

- **Areas of education** - QA activities usually focus on maintaining and enhancing the quality of:
  - the educational context: school relationship with parents and other organisations in the community; school climate and its various components; school and system governance;
  - Inputs into the educational system: education standards; facilities and equipment;
  - The education process: curriculum; learners’ assessment (formative and/or summative); teaching and learning methods; requirements for teachers in terms of qualifications, competences, responsibilities; same for school leadership;
  - Education outputs and outcomes: graduation rates, drop-out rates, etc.; learning outcomes (qualifications); equal opportunities, etc.

- **The stage of the policy or ‘practice’ cycle at which quality assurance takes place:**
  - the objective and standard-setting phase;
  - the accountability phase; and
  - the improvement phase

The primary focus of this study has been to look at the levels, areas of school education and stages of the cycle where quality assurance procedures, activities and practices take place.

A secondary focus was to collect evidence on quality assurance activities which have proved to be effective in terms of maintaining and improving quality standards in
different areas of school education, as well as the critical success factors related to their impact.

1.4 Study methodology

Box 2 What the study did
This study was conducted between May 2014 and April 2015. During this period, the research team:

- Carried out a literature review of academic articles on the themes of quality assurance, quality in school education and related topics such as external and internal school evaluation, school autonomy and student assessment, among others.
- Mapped what quality assurance policies, procedures and practices exist at system, local / regional and school levels in the EU-28. This involved a review of legislation, strategies for improving quality in school education, national assessments, requirements for school leaders and teachers, etc.
- Carried out 10 case-studies on specific quality assurance practices, procedures, tools or activities that had proved to be effective in improving school education quality.
- Held two workshops with national and EU experts to reflect on the study’s initial findings, share knowledge and expertise on strengths, weaknesses and gaps in quality assurance in school education and discuss what the EU could do to support Member States’ efforts in this field.
- Performed a comparative analysis of quality assurance policies, procedures and practices at across the EU.
- Reflected on scenarios of potential EU level actions which could support EU MS’ efforts in QA in school education systems.

1.4.1 Literature review
At the study’s inception stage, a review 8 reports was conducted to inform the design of the study’s analytical framework and identify key issues to be captured by the study. Topics covered were: Quality assurance; the role of inspectorates in Europe in supporting school improvement; evaluation and assessment in school education; the accreditation of training providers; quality assurance of adult learning; self-evaluation in schools; research and practices associated with improved basic skills achievement, the level of influence of EQAVET on national quality assurance systems.

A more substantial literature review was carried out during the data collection phase of the study in order to collect findings from the research community on different themes related to quality assurance in school education. It is provided in Annex 3 of this report. The screening of potentially useful sources for the literature review involved the identification and collection of relevant international academic literature through the EBSCO Host. Academic articles were identified on the basis of search by keywords such as: ‘school system’, ‘school governance’, ‘school autonomy’, ‘quality in education’, ‘school quality assurance’.


28 The leading provider of online information resources to researchers in academia, research organisations and government. This provides access to full text for over 10,000 peer reviewed journals and periodicals in dozens of languages.
‘student testing’, ‘school curriculum’, ‘teacher education’, ‘reform in education’, etc. The
articles were then shortlisted according to their relevance to the goal of the present
systematic review.

The following main themes or QA activities were covered in the literature review:

- Pupils’ assessment;
- School inspections;
- Principles underpinning school organisation;
- Approaches to school improvement;
- School self-assessments;
- School curriculum;
- Teacher education;
- Teacher appraisals.

The academic articles reviewed span the period 2004-2013 and cover a variety of EU
Member States (10 EU-28 countries: Finland, Spain, UK, Romania, Sweden, Germany,
Portugal, Ireland, Netherlands and Belgium). One of the studies covered several
countries (South-East Europe) and there were 4 comparative studies also covering more
than one country. The review showed that more data is available on the accountability
via assessment of learning outcomes, school internal evaluation, school inspections and
school autonomy and less on formative activities, such as quality assurance approaches.
Several of the articles identified refer to and use results of international standardised
assessments, such as PISA, PIRLS and TIMMS. A greater number of articles discuss QA
policies or procedures at system level; these are followed by articles which reflect on QA
at school level and, lastly, by articles which address issues at regional / local level. Most
articles however focus on describing the QA policies, procedures or practices and their
effectiveness from the stakeholders’ perspective.

1.4.2 Background country research

The mapping phase consisted of collecting information on the national quality assurance
systems across EU-28 through desk research and national-level interviews. It included an
examination of the:

- Quality assurance policies, procedures and practices at system, local / regional and
school levels;
- The extent to which there is a quality assurance cycle at system, local / regional and
school levels;
- The level of comprehensiveness of the national QA system;
- Policies, activities and practices to promote quality culture;
- Evidence of effectiveness of quality assurance practices, activities and procedures.

In total 103 national-level interviews were carried out in the EU-28 with the following
types of stakeholders involved in QA in the school sector:

- Representatives from various departments within the ministries of education in charge
of standard-setting in the school sector, policy formulation and reform, and evaluation
of results at system-level;
- Representatives of independent advisory bodies at national level;
• Representatives of local or regional authorities competent in the formulation, implementation and/or evaluation of different school areas and/or QA measures;
• Representatives of teachers or school heads at national level;
• Academics and researchers;
• Other national stakeholders.

Table 1.1 Breakdown of national-level interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ministries of education</th>
<th>Local/ regional authorities</th>
<th>Advisory bodies</th>
<th>Associations of teachers or school leaders</th>
<th>Academics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number of interviews</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ICF International

A comparative analysis of the EU-28 QA systems was then performed on the basis of the data collected through the country background research that were coded through the NVIVO software. The comparative analysis identified main trends in QA across national school systems as well as strengths, gaps and weaknesses in these QA systems.

1.4.3 Case-studies

Subsequently, ten QA activities or tools, identified during the country background research, were selected to be analysed in depth via case studies. The aim of the case studies was to offer insights on QA activities or tools which worked well in different countries what changes were associated with the activity and which factors triggered these changes. Different types of QA activities and tools at system-level, local and school-level where some evidence of effectiveness were identified during country background research. They were short-listed for in-depth review based on their relevance. In addition, the selection of measures captured:

• Different degrees of school and local autonomy in deciding on quality assurance in the school sector,
• Different understandings of what quality in school education is,
• Different types of activities: performance-based resources allocation, standardised tests, combining external and internal evaluation, school self-evaluation, online benchmarking tool and head teacher appraisal.
• Different scope of the QA measures: some measures cover the use of a specific tool (e.g. online benchmarking tool) while others are more overarching activities (e.g. internal and external evaluation of schools).

The aim of the case studies was to understand how education practices and their outcomes evolved as a result of the QA activity, and also to learn from the experiences of those involved directly such as inspectors, school heads, teachers and students.

Researchers visited two schools in each of the 10 countries in view of capturing the diversity of implementation and use of the QA activity or tool in question. On-site interviews were conducted with strategic-level stakeholders as well as school actors.

Box 3 Breakdown of case-study interviewees

• Representatives of ministry of education’s department(s) in charge of quality assurance in the school sector: 8
• Inspectors: 11
In total, 79 interviews were carried out with officials from the ministry of education, inspectors, school principals, teachers, academics and other actors (see Box above). The interviews gathered stakeholders’ in-depth perceptions of the following aspects of the QA activity or tool:

- Extent to which the QA activity or tool is effectively being applied,
- Its relevance and usefulness for improving the quality of school education, including the measure’s strengths and weaknesses,
- Factors of success and obstacles,
- The activity or tool’s added value regarding the quality of school education,
- Evidence of changes observed following the introduction of the QA activity or tool, and
- Where the activity or tool was recently introduced, the reasons for the introduction of the QA activity or tool, expected changes and support measures introduced were covered.

The table below outlines the case-study countries, QA activity or tool and their key characteristics. Full case study write ups are annexed to this report.

**Table 1.2 QA activity or tools selected for the case studies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FR</td>
<td>Introduction of Objectives-based resources allocation under the 2001 Organic Law on Finance Laws (or LOLF)</td>
<td>Entry into force in 2006; Objectives-based resources allocation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DK</td>
<td>Introduction of National standardised tests in Danish Folkeskolen (municipal primary and lower secondary schools)</td>
<td>Introduced in 2010; National standardised tests administered by the Ministry of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CZ</td>
<td>ESF funded project ‘self-assessment’ aimed at improving self-assessment in pre-primary schools, primary and secondary schools</td>
<td>Capacity-building to schools to support self-evaluation processes; Project led by the National Institute for Education – ESF-co-funded, introduced in 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saxony (DE)</td>
<td>Introduction of compulsory external school evaluations in all schools</td>
<td>Inclusion of external evaluation in existing QA cycle at school level in 2004; Federal State-wide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EE</td>
<td>Compulsory school internal evaluation</td>
<td>Nation-wide; High stakeholder inclusion (satisfaction surveys among students and parents); existence of internal evaluation trainings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Country | Measure | Characteristics
--- | --- | ---
**Basque Country (ES)** | Formative appraisal of school heads | Staff appraisal system built to improve school management and leadership and hence to improve school quality
**IE** | Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning (WSE-MLL) model in primary schools | Provides whole-school evaluative information, advice and support regarding the quality of learning, teaching and management
**IT** | VALES (School evaluation and development) pilot project – introduces internal evaluation and links it to existing external evaluation | 3-year pilot project aimed at testing the implementation of the “Evaluation National System” (SNV), to be introduced country-wide in 2014-2015
**PT** | Introduction of incentives according to school performance under the ‘indicator of teaching effectiveness’ | Nation-wide but measured at the level of each school; used by the Ministry to decide on incentives for schools (increased number of staff/hours)
**Scotland (UK)** | Online benchmarking tool “Insight data tool” | Improve schools’ ability to compare to other similar (virtual) schools, for them to identify areas of improvement and success

**Source:** ICF International

### 1.4.4 Expert workshops

The study engaged with national and EU experts who have direct experience in the area of quality assurance in the school sector. This took the form of two expert workshops held in Brussels on 4 December 2014 and on 18 February 2015, involving 23 participants in each of the workshops. Experts from national ministries, inspectors, school leaders, academics, representatives of teacher training universities and research organisations on quality assurance as well as Commission representatives and the core study team from ICF International took part in the two workshops. Representatives of initiatives of quality assurance at European level in the field of Higher Education and Vocational Education and Training were also involved in the workshops to facilitate learning exchanges between QA in school education and the other sectors of education.

During the events, an exchange took place on the initial findings of the study. The discussions in the first workshop centred on identifying the main gaps in quality assurance in school education. This led to a reflection on how EU actions could help address those gaps. During the second workshop, experts reflected on potential scenarios for EU-level actions and assessed their possible added value and feasibility. The results of these two events were used to:

- Inform the comparative analysis, and
- Develop scenarios for possible future EU actions.

### 1.4.5 Discussion of the methodology

The main strength of the methodology used is the combination of providing an overview on the topic of quality assurance in the 28 EU Member States – involving interviews with relevant stakeholders in each country – and the in-depth analysis of specific QA activities or tools through the development of case studies. While the first task presents the state of play and detects the main strengths and weaknesses in how QA is conducted across national school education systems, the second task provided a detailed analysis of the
type of effects which can be expected from the introduction of QA policies, or activities or procedures and the factors contributing to those changes.

The desk research and national interviews carried out in the first phase of the assignment – in the course of the country background research – informed case studies and the on-site interviews. The analysis of the effects of quality assurance activities or policies, and critical factors was partly driven by evidence from the literature review (see Annex 3). This evidence was complemented by insights shared by experts participating in the workshops and by findings from desk research and interviews, in the course of the country background research, and case studies.

The proposed list of possible EU actions to support QA in the school sector was informed by experts’ discussions during the workshops which were based on their analysis of strengths, weaknesses and gaps regarding quality assurance across the EU-28. The participation of European Commission officers and representatives of initiatives of quality assurance at European level in the field of Higher Education and Vocational Education and Training helped define the scope of the suggested actions considering EU’s legal competence in the field of school education.

A small number of methodological challenges were encountered over the course of this study:

- Challenge of breadth of the study due to the large scope of (1) areas of school education covered by QA activities, (2) levels (system, regional/local) and (3) stages in an intervention cycle (planning or design, implementation, evaluation, and review) at which those occur. The breadth of the study was also wide in view of the diversity of QA approaches, systems and practices in the EU and more so in countries where school and local autonomy in QA in school education is high. This meant that background country research was broader than initially expected and that the sample of interviewees and sources to be consulted had to be chosen carefully with the view of optimal scope coverage. Country background research was therefore not exhaustive but as complete as possible given the study’s mandate. The study also presents findings on the basis of research carried out during the study period. Given the changes and ongoing reforms in school education, these findings have to be considered in light of any new developments since the time of writing;

- Challenge in defining the terminology and concept of ‘quality assurance’ in the school sector considering that in about half of EU countries, the term ‘quality assurance’ is not used as such in the school sector. Stakeholders consulted in this study tended to know specific QA activities or processes (e.g. inspections, internal evaluation, teacher appraisals) without necessarily referring to them as such or understanding them as part of a QA system or approach. This required some scoping work to define terms. The literature review and the review of existing glossaries supported the definition of terms. The glossary provided in this study was developed continuously and used by the study team. Researchers also needed to re-frame the conversation with national stakeholders (esp. practitioners) and define terms when establishing contact with them and when collecting information. In some cases interviewees were reluctant to apply the term ‘QA’ to the education sector as they associated it with the ‘industrialisation of learning’ and other private sector terminology. Re-framing information collected in desk research and in the literature review was also needed, for it to be considered as part of QA.

- Challenge of depth of the study due to limited existing information on how the QA policies, procedures and practices are implemented and followed in practice. Whilst

---

29 The researchers in charge of the case studies were, in most cases, the same researchers responsible for the correspondent working document, or were given access to those reports.

30 Unlike in the higher education or VET sector where QA is a more established language.
information on the intentions of QA policies, procedures and activities was available in policy, guidance or reporting documents, information on current practices was harder to gather, also in view of their diversity within and across countries. Data was thus collected mostly through interviews with a mix of stakeholders in order to capture the variety of practices. Here, the ten case studies were also key in understanding QA practices at different levels, and explaining factors. Whilst the study sought to provide an as accurate picture of the realities of QA across the EU as possible, it is based on the evidence it was able to collect;

- Scarce available evidence, in most countries, of the effects of QA activities on maintaining and enhancing quality standards and practices. Country background research gathered limited information on the effectiveness of existing QA policies, procedures and activities across the EU. The review of the existing academic literature on QA topics and the ten case studies covered this gap. The effects of QA activities was indeed the focus of the 10 case studies and the literature review also provided some evidence, though not always the most recent, of effects of certain QA activities. This challenge remains as there are shortcomings in many countries on the methods used to assess the effectiveness of QA and also in the availability of quantitative and qualitative longitudinal data to measure effectiveness.

Navigating this report

**Chapter One** sets out the context of the study as presented above.

**Chapter Two** describes how quality in schools and quality assurance is understood across the EU.

**Chapter Three** presents the key characteristics of quality assurance systems in EU school education systems, in particular the main QA approaches followed, drivers, areas of school education ‘quality assured’, main QA activities and tools used, and actors involved.

**Chapter Four** presents the results and outcomes of QA policies, procedures and activities across the EU, as well as their contributing factors.

**Chapter Five** presents the main strengths and weaknesses in how QA in EU school education systems is conducted, as well as trends in QA across the EU.

**Chapter Six** outlines scenarios of potential EU actions which could support national efforts in QA in the school sector.

The report closes with a set of conclusions.

The report includes in Annexes the:

- The seven EU level action scenarios,
- 10 case studies,
- A comparative table presenting the academic articles reviewed.
2 What is understood as ‘Quality’ and ‘Quality Assurance’?

2.1 Definitions of what quality in school systems is

This section explores how ‘quality’ and ‘quality assurance’ are understood across the EU, based on the literature review, country research, case studies and the findings from the two expert workshops.

Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training is one of the four strategic objectives of the ET 2020. Within this framework, Member States refer to high quality education and training systems – encompassing school education among others – in terms of:

- Equity (reducing disparities in educational performance or outcomes)
- Efficiency (value for money or cost-effectiveness)
- Importance for enhancing employability (fitness for purpose)
- Acquisition of key competences by everyone and raising the level of basic skills (literacy, numeracy, science)
- Developing excellence at all levels of education and training.

At EU level no common definition or understanding on ‘what quality in school systems is’ exists. Rather different school educational systems define and operationalise their quality standards and the dimensions of what constitutes a ‘quality’ system in a variety of ways. They also set their own national objectives. Defining what is meant by quality in schools is a basis to defining the standards to reach it, as well as the monitoring and evaluation frameworks put in place to assess the attainment of those standards.

The ET 2020 framework mentions how quality can be achieved, notably by:

- Developing effective quality assurance systems
- Ensuring high quality teaching
- Improving quality of governance and leadership of education and training institutions
- Sustainable use of resources
- Promotion of evidence-based policy and practice in education and training.

Most EU countries do not have a specific definition of what quality in school education is. However, the discourse found in national policy documents highlights which factors are emphasised when discussing quality of the educational system and schooling. The country researchers gave a picture of the main themes and issues influencing the development of quality assurance policies, activities and procedures. By looking at what drives the developments in this field one can also deduce what the country’s understanding of quality is. The four main ways of understanding quality in school education are:

- Quality as achievement of key competences (or more specifically certain basic skills);
- Quality as equity and inclusiveness;
- Quality as excellence;
- Quality as positive destinations (fitness for purpose in meeting labour market or further education / lifelong learning needs).

A recent review of OECD countries’ quality assurance systems done in the Czech Republic\textsuperscript{32} to inform national discussions used slightly different categories:

- Excellence as well as equity;
- Fitness for purpose and transformation (added value) were put together in the same category; and
- Cost-effectiveness or value for money.

Most countries consider quality in school education from different perspectives. Some countries have developed strategies or discourses which cover all or several types of understanding of quality school education.

2.1.1 Quality as achievement of key competences or learning outcomes

The focus of policy and strategic documents at national level indicate an increasing trend in understanding quality in terms of achieving key competence or learning outcomes. This is related to PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) which nearly all EU countries now take part in. The benchmarking arising from this survey, and other similar international student surveys, has highlighted achievement gaps both within and across countries. In response, the educational discourse of some Member States has been increasingly concerned with low performance and/or the trend in performance where an increasing number of students are failing to meet minimum thresholds for basic skills. Failure to meet minimum levels of competences is understood as reflecting poor quality of education/schools. In this context, improving standards in schooling in order to raise achievements is a way to ensure ‘better’ quality. The box provides examples of recent reforms focus on improving the attainment of learning outcomes.

**Box 4 National policies focused on attainment of key competences**

In Denmark, improving pupils’ academic achievement rates has been the focus of the 2014 reform of the public primary and lower secondary school\textsuperscript{33} which introduced centralised standardised tests as part of a wider framework for developing an enhanced evaluation culture.

Similarly, in Sweden, governmental reform efforts aimed to raise ‘quality’ in terms of learning outcomes, notably by making the curricula more prescriptive and increasing student testing.

In Greece, since 2009, the New School reform focused, among other aspects, on curriculum reform and on improving pupils’ basic skills such as literacy and maths. In 2014 the government introduced a modification of secondary education exams.

2.1.2 Quality in terms of equity and inclusiveness

National school education strategic objectives and discourses can also strongly focus on the issue of equity and inclusiveness. Large-scale comparative surveys of students throw the spotlight not only on performance between countries, but also on differences within Member States. Inequality can be considered within and between schools not only in terms of pupils’ learning outcomes but encompassing also school resources, student body composition, ability grouping, and the quality of school infrastructure (to name a few).

\textsuperscript{32} Univerzita Tomáše Bati ve Zlíně (2013) Analýza současných systémů sledování a hodnocení kvality a efektivity ve vzdělávání

\textsuperscript{33} Political agreement, 7 June 2013: ‘Aftale mellem regeringen (Socialdemokraterne, Radikale Venstre og Socialistisk Folkeparti), Venstre og Dansk Folkeparti om et fagligt løft af folkeskolens’ (p. 31). Link: http://uvm.dk/~media/UVM/Filer/Folkeskolereformhjemmeside/2014/Oktobe/141010%20Endelig%20aftaletekst%207.6.2013.pdf (accessed on 23 February 2015)
For all Member States it is now possible to identify the degree of inequality within the educational system such as segregation between schools and the strength of the relationship between students’ background (social or ethnic) and their academic results. National level policy documents indicate goals that quality schooling includes not only ensuring students reach their academic potential, in terms of learning outcomes, but to also reduce the inequalities in educational processes and outcomes. The discourse includes ensuring that quality education is accessible to all and that it functions in a fair way to provide equality of opportunity. For example, the primary objective of the French education system is to ensure that every student, regardless of their social and cultural background, has an equal opportunity to succeed at school. In Croatia education in primary and secondary schools is based on equality of opportunity for all students according to their abilities. Similarly, in Finland, the main principle underpinning the concept of ‘quality’ in education is the equal opportunity to education regardless of age, sex, location, ability, mother tongue or background. The education legislation in Estonia states that general education of good quality is equally available to all persons regardless of their social and economic background, nationality, gender, place of residence or special educational needs.

This also translates into policy developments: a number of countries have set national objectives to reduce the impact of social background on students’ academic outcomes (e.g. DK, Scot. FR). Other policy developments include reforming the schooling system to ensure more inclusion and flexibility (DE Rheinland), an emphasis on individualised learning (CZ, EE) and accommodating the specific needs of pupils through individualised learning and formative assessment (CZ).

### 2.1.3 Quality as excellence

In some countries, quality in schools is considered as aspiring to reach excellence in school education. This means enabling all pupils and school actors to reach their fullest potential and not just minimum standards. In such education systems quality is usually also understood in terms of equity and inclusiveness, hence efforts exist to ensure that disadvantaged pupils can also reach excellence.

The Danish school reform introduced in August 2014 has made it a national goal that the public school system challenges all pupils to achieve their full potential. The French Programming Law no. 2013 – 595 of 8 July 2013 sets as an overarching objective the overall raising of the level of knowledge, skills and culture of all pupils. In Scotland, quality school education is understood as raising attainment and achievement for all learners through the curriculum for excellence; this means that it is not enough to bring the bottom up but also vital that good schools are made outstanding, which the Insight benchmarking tool aims to help achieve.

### 2.1.4 Quality as positive destinations (meeting labour market or further education needs)

A central purpose of education is to equip young people with knowledge, skills and competences to enable them to successfully progress towards further levels of education (VET or higher education) or to enter the labour market. The policy discourse is therefore also concerned with how well prepared young people are to transition successfully to the next stage of education or to entering the job market. For example, in the UK and Ireland, national policies are increasingly focusing on helping learners embark on positive destinations upon leaving school. Quality can therefore also be understood as how well schooling prepares young people for employment or in terms of completing secondary schooling or transitioning to higher education. The targets defined at the national level of some countries (e.g. DK, LV, PT, FR, EL) are concerned with completion rates/reducing the number of educational drop-outs.
2.2 How Quality Assurance in school systems is understood across the EU

As mentioned above, whilst quality in school education is an aspired outcome, quality assurance is the process put in place to maximise ‘quality’ as an end result. The Eurypedia-European Encyclopaedia on National Education Systems defines quality assurance in the school sector as ‘an all-embracing term referring to policies, systems, procedures and practices that are designed to achieve, maintain or enhance quality in the school sector, and that rely on an evaluation and assessment process’.

2.2.1 The core functions of Quality Assurance

In school education, quality assurance (QA) is a way to support the development, attainment and maintenance of quality standards and also to enhance those, as well as processes and practices which exist to support this. QA’s core functions are (1) accountability, in relation to the school’s systems results and maintain standards and (2) improvement of processes to ensure this. Those can be assimilated to summative and formative functions, defined as follows:

- The summative function of QA relates to accountability, control and compliance checks. This function translates into QA measures which ensure that different quality standards (e.g. in teaching, learning, pupils’ assessments, education standards etc.) are met and maintained.
- The formative function of QA relates to improvement and development. Formative QA activities include either recommendations for improvement, action plans, and also improvement and support measures, e.g. via critical friend, counsellors etc.

In some countries, quality assurance is mainly understood according to its summative function, i.e. as a process to assure, monitor or control that standards in school education are met. This implies that quality standards for different dimensions of school education are set centrally at national, regional or school level. The box below provides a definition of ‘quality’ standards.

Box 5 Definition of quality standards

A recent Eurydice report defines a quality standard as ‘a benchmark, norm, regulation or standard of proficiency against which a measurable aspect of a task is evaluated’. It should be noted that the concept of ‘standard’ can refer to the ‘absolute’ levels of attainment (i.e. in national assessment), but they can also be ‘relative’ as when they are used in relation to the ‘expected’ levels of performance (i.e. benchmark as predictor of performance of a learner or class, school, cohort, etc.).

The relevance of quality standards is key to effective QA. The mere existence of ‘standards for quality’ does not necessarily lead to ‘quality’. If standards are too low and thus achievable by all or most schools, teachers, pupils etc. without much effort, QA policies, procedures and practices will not lead to good outcomes, nor drive improvement. This poses the question of ensuring that quality standards are appropriate and also improved and adapted over time, alongside with fine-tuning QA processes which support their attainment.

34 Eurypedia-European Encyclopedia on National Education Systems.
This issue introduces the formative function of quality assurance. Some countries have integrated QA as a way to continuously improve the quality of education and the processes which enable this result. The formative function of QA is thus a strong component of the national approach to QA. This approach involves a strong review stage in the QA cycle, and implies that QA tools (e.g. including quality standards) and activities are regularly updated to ensure they meet the needs of their users and ‘beneficiaries’ (pupils, schools, supervising authorities etc.).

2.2.2 How QA is understood by stakeholders in EU school systems

In most countries in Europe, the term ‘quality assurance’ is not used as such in the school sector, unlike in the higher education or VET sector where QA is a more established language. Case study interviews with school actors have shown that discussing ‘quality assurance in schools’ may pose language difficulties and school actors tend to better know and understand specific activities of QA (inspections, internal evaluation, teacher appraisals).

A good illustration of how the QA term is used across the EU Member States is by looking at the designations of the main public bodies involved in QA in each country. For example, while some countries have ‘QA’ agencies or departments, others have ‘Quality Improvement’ agencies or ‘School Performance’ units. Most countries have a national assessment institute or centre, which proves the central role of assessments in the QA systems. The different terms used in the titles of the main QA bodies hint at the different understanding of QA in the school sector across the EU.

### Table 2.1 Titles of main Quality Assurance bodies in the EU Member States

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of the main QA body(ies)</th>
<th>Member States</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality Assurance Agency / Department</td>
<td>BEnl, EL, MT, RO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency / Department / Institute for Education Development (of School Quality)</td>
<td>DE, AT, HU, LT, LU, PL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department of School Performance</td>
<td>FR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Quality Service</td>
<td>DE Saxony, LV,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency for Quality and Supervision / Monitoring / Control</td>
<td>BE fr, BG, DK, HU, SE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Institute / Centre for Assessment</td>
<td>BG, CY, CZ, ES, FI, FR, HR, IE, IT, LT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SI, SK, UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency for Public Management</td>
<td>SE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ICF country research

In some countries, the ‘quality assurance’ terminology is used mainly by specialists in the field or those working directly on the design, monitoring or review of QA activities while other actors at national, regional/local and school level do not use the term as such and thus, in many cases, do not share the same understanding of what QA is. Moreover, there are countries in which the ‘QA’ term creates resistance because it is linked to performance-based management and thus perceived as an ideologically-laden term.

---

37 Most EU countries have a body at system level – education inspectorate or other agency – which has a mandate to monitor and evaluate quality of education in the country and to propose measures to improve it.
denoting the ‘industrialisation of learning’. This does not mean that QA processes and activities do not exist in the country, but that they are labelled differently: for example in France, QA activities are considered under terms such as ‘evaluation, forecasting and the measurement of performance’.
3 Quality Assurance systems

The previous section outlined both what can be considered to be ‘quality’ in school education and how quality assurance is defined and understood in EU school systems. Not only is there diversity in the understanding of the overall concept of quality assurance, there is also diversity in how QA is conducted in the school sector. A quality assurance system exists in some countries, coherently and strategically linking the diversity of QA activities which exist in the school sector; in others a much less coherent set of activities and measures exist for the purpose of QA.

The QA approach and the extent to which it results in a coherent and strategic QA system, in turn influences the design and implementation of QA activities and tools and the areas of school education whose quality is assured as well as the actors involved in QA. This approach can be modified and evolve over time.

This section identifies the different QA approaches by looking at the function and orientation of QA as well as the drivers of QA which play a role in shaping which approach is taken, not least the understanding of quality assurance as identified in the previous section.

Finally this section presents the current trends in QA across the EU, as well as the main strengths, weaknesses and gaps in how QA is conducted in the school sector across the EU.

3.1 Main approaches used

The previous section highlighted the diversity in how quality assurance is understood across the EU. The study also finds that there are differences in the types of activities and tools that are utilised, stakeholders involved and the focus of QA efforts. Therefore, it is not possible to clearly categorise or classify distinct types of QA systems. However, QA approaches are broadly characterised by the importance given to the summative and formative functions of QA (see section 2.2) and also to its ‘orientation’.

- The function of QA – as mentioned under section 2.2.1 a distinction can be made between the summative and formative function of QA. Summative QA approaches are primarily aimed at accountability and control. This function translates into QA measures which ensure that different quality standards (e.g. in teaching, learning, pupils’ assessments, education standards etc.) are met and maintained. This manifests itself through QA measures that include checking or measuring compliance with the regulations for these standards, whereas formative QA approaches focus on improvement and development. QA policies, activities and practices that are guided by a formative principle involve either recommendations for improvement, action plans, and also improvement and support measures, e.g. via critical friend, counsellors etc. It should be noted that development and improvement is incorporated into some summative approaches, however accountability and control remains the main function of those approaches.

- The orientation of QA activities (the distinction between internal and external school evaluations is one example of an activity where a difference in ‘orientation’ of QA exists). Externally oriented QA activities (e.g. external school evaluations, standardised pupils’ assessment, teacher appraisal conducted by an external inspectors) are characterised by placing the onus of QA (both summative and formative approaches) on bodies which are external to schools themselves. Conversely, internally oriented QA activities stem from school education providers having or assuming primary responsibility for quality assurance. The characteristics of internally oriented approaches include “internal accountability, consisting of school...
processes, critical reflection and school-community interaction” (e.g. staff appraisal conducted by the school head; self-evaluation processes. Improvements come from within schools via school networking, exchanges of good practices within and between schools, collective reflections, etc.). In most cases, national QA approaches reflect a mix of the summative and formative functions of QA and an external and internal orientation. This means that whilst the focus of the approach can be on the summative function of QA, efforts exist to increase its formative function. Similarly whereas the onus of most QA activities in a country can be on State or external bodies, schools can also be encouraged to take part in QA activities developed or implemented from within, e.g. self-assessments, internal reflections on teaching practices, etc. The box below presents examples of ‘mixed’ approaches to QA.

**Box 6 Examples of mixed approaches to QA**

*Summative, internally oriented QA activity:* Several countries (e.g. FR, England) use summative tests designed by the teacher to measure his/her classroom’s progress against expected learning outcomes. They take the form of regular progress tests and are used by the teacher to adapt teaching and learning methods to the classroom’s needs and learning pace.

*Summative, externally oriented QA activity:* standardised pupils’ assessments. Standardised tests are used to measure how well pupils, across a school system, attain educational standards. Standardised tests can also be used to make decisions on pupils’ qualifications e.g. upper-secondary leaving certificate examinations such as the *Baccalaureat* in France.

*Formative, externally-oriented QA activity:* In Austria, development counselling is available to schools (‘Entwicklungsberatung in Schulen’). It is delivered by so-called school development counsellors who are external experts, selected by the Ministry of Education and trained at universities of teacher training. Their role is to support schools in the Austrian initiative for school quality (Schulqualität Allgemeinbildung - SQA) which is similar to a QA cycle (planning, implementation and evaluation stage) and support the further development of teaching, organisation and staff.

*Formative, internally-oriented QA activity:* SOK is a voluntary network of more than 800 schools / agencies in Flanders (and the Netherlands) to exchange best practices on quality policies. SOK-seminars target school executives, responsible for quality assurance and staff with an interest in quality assurance. Some seminars are also addressed to teachers. The network is open to all schools independently from education levels and level of expertise on quality policies. In BENl and NL where school autonomy is high, networking activities to exchange on best practices have been reported as useful.

### 3.2 What influences/drives the choice in approach to QA in the school sector

#### 3.2.1 Level of school and local autonomy

As previously mentioned the level of autonomy given to schools and local authorities over different dimensions of quality of the school system determines in turn whether the onus of QA is mainly on schools or on bodies external to schools (i.e. the orientation of QA).

---

38 Sahlberg, Pasi, op cit.  
39 Schooloverstijgend Kwaliteitsnetwerk (Cross-school Quality Network)
According to a definition provided in a Eurydice study, “The notion of 'school autonomy' refers [...] to several different aspects of school management (essentially funding and human resources). Schools may be autonomous to varying degrees regarding these aspects. They are considered to be fully autonomous, or to have a high degree of autonomy, if they are fully responsible for their decisions subject to legal constraints or the general framework of education legislation. This does not preclude consultation with other education authorities. Schools are partly autonomous if they take decisions within a set of predetermined options or require approval for decisions from their education authority. Autonomy may also be implied where there is an absence of rules or regulations in a given area. [...] In some countries, decision-making powers reside with local education authorities, which have the option to delegate decision-making powers to schools. In [...] countries where the majority school enrolments are in the private grant-aided sector, school autonomy may also refer to the delegation of decision-making powers to schools from the competent private education authority (known sometimes as the 'organising body').”

According to a definition provided by M. Gargallo in 2013, “Autonomy refers to the decision-making capacity of a school – delegated from central or local authorities – and the manner and areas over which decisions can be made. There is a difference between territorial decentralisation and school autonomy. Delegating decision-making powers to lower levels of government does not always grant the school increased capacity for deciding over the areas mentioned above”. The article identifies the four following broad areas of school autonomy: “Organisation of instruction (curriculum, pedagogic methods, choice of textbooks); Planning and structures (determining the program of study, subjects offered, etc.); Personnel management (teaching and non-teaching staff); Resource management (ability to make purchases or organise allocation of resources for operational costs)“.

In countries where decision-making over some or most areas of the school sector have been devolved to the local or school level (e.g. SE, FI, DK, BEnl, BEfr, SI, HR, NL, Scot.), most quality assurance policies, procedures and activities have also been devolved. This has an effect on school and local level actors’ level of interest in QA and ownership of QA. This is important as school actors are the key in maintaining quality levels, and also, in enhancing them, as will be furthered discussed in section 4 outlining the critical factors related to effective QA.

Countries where school autonomy is high consider that the preservation of local diversity, fostering innovations at school and local level and bearing of responsibility for quality at grassroots level, are guiding principles for a quality educational system. This is a view shared by some academics, e.g. according to Pasi Sahlberg “Risk-taking, creativity and innovation have been valued as lighthouses of educational change”. This has an influence on whether QA activities and tools are left to schools and local actors to develop and implement in a differentiated way, according to local or school specific characteristics. Common (system-level) frameworks, templates or guidelines might not exist (e.g. to conduct e.g. self-assessment or external inspections, or appraisal of school staff) as those are developed at local or school level. For example in England, schools are encouraged to develop their own internal evaluation frameworks in order to foster creativity and innovation and also with the intention of promoting school-level
accountability for QA. In Finland, quality assurance of school education is the responsibility of local authorities (mainly municipalities) which are the school education providers. They have the freedom to choose the forms, methods and focus of quality assurance and may also delegate some or most aspects of QA to schools. Similarly, in Spain each Autonomous Community is responsible for determining how far school autonomy extends in practice, scope and nature.

In countries where the school system is centralised, most QA activities are also centralised. Whilst there may be a strong degree of ‘control’ at the central level, the QA systems in some centralised countries do enable local and school actors to engage and ‘own’ them at local and school level. In other countries, local and school actors have limited autonomy to adapt them to their specificities or use the results of QA themselves in a significant manner. For example, whilst a school evaluation or teacher appraisal may identify weaknesses, the school head or even local supervisory authority in a given system may not have the financial or human resource management competences to introduce remedial measures.

### 3.2.2 Values underpinning approaches to QA

The choice of approach to QA is also influenced by the values underpinning school systems. For example some countries have traditionally been adverse to measuring pupils’ learning outcomes via standardised pupils’ assessment, for “cultural” reasons, in relation to a country’s understanding of their school’s system’s societal function. Therefore, the overall QA approach may be more or less formative rather than summative in function. The case study on the introduction of national standardised tests in 2010 in Denmark highlights that in recent years Danish society has increasingly accepted that the school as an institution is a place where you learn and perform, and thus where testing can take place,

In other countries (e.g. England, Northern Ireland, Sweden), the introduction of market principles in education (privatisation of education, high school choice etc.) is a basis for more summative QA approaches and QA is primarily directed towards parents and pupils, who are considered ‘consumers’. This determines QA measures and processes put in place, e.g. rankings, availability of school’s ‘performance’ data (e.g. results in tests, finances, staffing, or activities conducted) to parents (e.g. so they are able to make an informed school choice) or to other schools. Transparency, competition and comparability are important drivers of QA in such approaches. In other countries such principles are considered to contribute to negative competitive pressure and stigmatisation between schools/teachers and this approach has been rejected. For example, some countries (DE R-P, BENL, NI and Scot., IT) avoid school rankings for those reasons.

Quality assurance activities and tools also change as a result of changes to the concept of quality. A good example is the Scottish curriculum reform that underpins the definition of quality as excellence; as a result, the approach to benchmarking schools’ performance has changed too from the league table model (known as STACs) to the ‘Insight’ benchmarking tool which focuses on continuous improvement of every school and every pupil, underpinning the principles of equity, inclusiveness, excellence, attention to diversity and local needs.

### 3.3 Areas of the school sector that are quality assured

Quality assurance involves evaluating, assessing or monitoring specific areas of school education. These areas were identified following a review of international (comparative) studies on quality assurance at various levels of education. The areas were then grouped
under the following categories: education context, inputs into the education, the education process, and outputs and outcomes.

Box 8 The different areas of quality assurance of the school sector

- Education context
  - School relationship with parents, other organisations in the community
  - School climate and its various components
  - School and system governance
- Inputs into the education systems:
  - Educational standards
  - Facilities and equipment
- Process:
  - Curriculum
  - Learners’ assessment
  - Teaching and learning methods/pedagogies
  - Teachers
  - School leadership
- Outputs and outcomes
  - Graduation rates
  - Dropout rates
  - Learning outcomes (qualifications)

The focus on these areas and where QA efforts are deployed vary by country. The subsections therefore provide an overview of what countries broadly do to assure the quality of each area. This overview is based on information provided through the country background research which looked at how different areas of school education were quality assurance at system, local and provider level. Information on coverage (how each area is QA-ed) was easily identifiable at system level on the basis of the set of legal requirements, guidelines, guidance or tools by area to be used by all schools and local actors in a given country. In countries where local and school autonomy is high, it was not possible to provide a comprehensive overview on how each area is QA-ed differently at local and school level.

The study found that, most frequently, countries focus most of their QA efforts on the following:

- Learning outcomes,
- the quality of teachers (one input into the education system),
- the school education context.

3.3.1 Education context

Schools cannot work in autarchy to provide quality education. It is generally recognised that positive and constructive relationships with parents, as partners in a child’s development, and with other organisations in the community in which schools are embedded, are key to meeting a systems’ educational objectives. Similarly a positive school climate and school and system governance structures are other key components of a quality school system.

Legal prescriptions or guidelines exist at system level in all countries on schools’ duties to engage with parents and the wider community, on what constitutes a positive working
and learning climate and good governance structures. For example, in 2014 the Welsh Government started developing a tool kit for schools on family and community engagement. In the Netherlands schools are required to have a *school prospectus* in which they annually provide information to parents and students on their goals, the achievement of students in the school, choices in teaching time, etc. Finally the composition and/or functioning of boards of schools or education providers is prescribed in some countries such as England and Northern Ireland, Ireland and the Netherlands, while it is left to education providers’ decisions in decentralised states (e.g. DK) or left open to consultation in Wales.

The monitoring of those different dimensions of an education context (quality of schools’ relationships with parents and community organisations; quality of the school climate; quality of school and system governance) is generally conducted via self-evaluation processes and/or external monitoring and inspection processes, or via licensing and administrative supervision and audits or bilateral discussions with supervisory authorities. Those processes can take place at system, local and/or school levels. For example, in Lithuania’s the external evaluation indicator framework includes two indicators monitor (1) cooperation between teachers and parents and (2) the pedagogical and psychological education of parents. Three indicators monitor the school’s external relationships with the local community and other organisations, and the creation of positive image of the school. In BEfr, inspectors also monitor issues related to the school climate, e.g. truancy, detecting segregation mechanisms, collaboration with the psycho-medical team, students’ participation mechanisms, etc. With regards, school and system governance, the Swedish Schools Inspectorate checks how education providers fulfil their legal obligations on schools governance structures and schools’ management. In Malta external school evaluation covers the following aspects of school governance: the school has effective internal evaluation processes; the School Development Plan (SDP) document has appropriate structure, content and format; the SDP process is implemented and monitored; Administrative Structures ensure effective school management; and the school’s human resources are well managed.

### 3.3.2 Inputs into the education process

One form of input to the education process is the formulation of standards for education attainment. All countries reviewed have some form of learning outcomes based standards in place. According to CEDEFOP those “are statements of what an individual should know, understand and/or be able to do at the end of a learning process”\(^{44}\). The development of these has constituted a major area of reform in recent years in a number of countries (see section 3.7 on Trends for additional details).

Education standards can be developed at system level or at decentralised level (school, local providers, region). Learning Outcomes also vary according to their level of detail and of prescription. Some countries (e.g. NL, BE nl) have defined a general set of Learning Outcomes and exist at the level of a learning cycle, rather than being broken down by grade. This provides schools with more freedom to further develop school-level education standards. Other countries define standards per subject per grade in LO (so there are many more and much more detailed definitions). In others, the focus is on reaching key standards and giving more autonomy to schools to adjust those according to students’ profile, schools’ profile etc.

The update of educational standards or of learning outcomes is foreseen more or less regularly across countries. For example in DK, the centrally-developed standards (the “Common Objectives”) were set in 2009 and updated in 2014.

Another form of input concerns the equipment and facilities of schools. Once again there are typically some sort of minimum requirements related to health and safety and schools’ capacity. Centrally-set legal prescriptions or guidelines can be more or less stringent and broad in scope, e.g. limited to considerations on building and learning environment safety to attention to other aspects, e.g. barrier-free access, teacher/pupil ratio, quality of ICT equipment, etc. The check of compliance with the centrally-set legal prescriptions or guidelines is generally conducted during external evaluations or self-assessment exercises, or via administrative supervision or controls conducted by central or local authorities.

Finally the relationship between funding and quality is another area of quality assurance at system level. The issue of effectiveness of education funding is covered in a separate study commissioned by DG EAC (“Mapping exercise of existing tools, instruments and approaches to promote efficiency and effectiveness of investments in education and training (E&T)”).

3.3.3 Education process: teachers competences, school leadership and pupils’ assessment

System-level guidance, legal requirements, standards, monitoring and review measures exist to assure the quality of educational processes, such as the development and application of curricula, teaching, school leadership and the assessment of pupils’ learning.

Learning outcomes standards are in many countries complemented by national level curricula that give indications about how students should be led towards achieving the national standards. The quality of the curricula is ensured by the process and actors involved in its development. In several countries the curricula is developed by more or less broad-ranging expert commissions, according to subject generally, gathering e.g. academics, practitioners (teachers) and pedagogic and subject-related associations.

Requirements concerning the teacher occupation exist in all countries analysed. These are typically formulated in terms of qualification requirements. The quality of teaching also depends on requirements for further training which allows teachers to update and upgrade their skills. In most EU countries continuing professional development is an obligation and/ or a requirement for career advancement and salary increase. However little is known about the relevance and effectiveness of this teacher training.

With regards teaching and learning methods/pedagogies are applied by teachers in classrooms, system-level actors have overall given teachers relative freedom to select methods considered the most appropriate to meet the needs of their context. In some countries, the (framework) curricula include recommendations on which teaching and learning methods to use (e.g. on the use of integrated subject and language learning). In some countries, the appropriateness of teaching methods and approaches is measured by using pilot tests or research work before introduction at system-level. Teaching and learning methods is an area that is also commonly included in the external evaluation of schools reflecting concern with not only learning outcomes, but also the teaching process. Evaluations can also cover professional development, lesson planning and classroom management.

With regards school leadership and management, in most centralised countries, minimum standards in terms of competences and experience to become a school head are prescribed at system-level. In some countries, qualification standards exist but are non-mandatory. The quality of school leadership is generally monitored and evaluated at system level via the aggregation of results of inspections, external evaluations, or self-assessments conducted at the level of schools or local education providers.
3.3.4 School outputs and learning outcomes

Graduation and dropout rates are monitored in close to all EU countries as means to measure to what extent the school system brings its pupils to the completion of a learning cycle. The measurement of learning outcomes provides an overview of the qualification function of the school system as whole, as well as the extent to which a school system performs in terms of meeting its educational standards and planned outcomes.

At system level this is done via standardized assessments, final qualifying examinations or / and international tests (PISA, TIMSS). These tests can be conducted at national level, i.e. by all schools across the system (e.g. SE, FR, DK, EE, UK and PT), or on a voluntary basis (BEnl). They can be sample-based (DE, ES, BEnl within the framework of the National Assessment Programme) in which case comparable performance information on all schools is not available. In Germany, central comparative reviews - across-Länder - of the achievement of the educational standards take place every 3 to 5 years on a sample of pupils.

In the past fifteen years, many countries have developed standardised measurements and tests of students’ outcomes as a means of quality assurance. For instance, Denmark introduced national tests administered by the Ministry of Education to all schools, carried out for the first time in 2010.

These assessments provide:

- Pupils an assessment on their performance and progress towards acquiring a qualification or moving to the next level of education; and
- System and school level actors information on performance at their respective levels.

3.4 Main activities and tools

The QA approach as well as the focus of countries’ QA efforts influence which QA activities and tools are used in a country and where resources are poured. For example in countries where QA efforts are focused on the quality of teachers (e.g. FI), resources are geared towards teacher training, selection and inspection or appraisal.

The main QA activities and tools identified by the present study are presented under Table 3.1. They are distinguished according to:

- Whether QA is more or less externally or internally oriented; i.e. whether QA activities and tools are mainly external from schools or school education providers (i.e. conducted or set at system or local level), or are internal to schools;

- The different phases of the Quality Assurance cycle. Under this section we distinguish:
  o the standard-setting phase,
  o the accountability phase (summative function of QA) and
  o the improvement phase (formative function of QA).

It should be noted that activities mapped below are not considered as part of QA by some countries. The below activities have therefore been included whether or not all countries considered them to be part of QA.
Table 3.1  **Main QA activities and tools identified by the present study**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard-setting phase</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>External to the school</strong></td>
<td><strong>Internal to the school/education provider</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centrally-set standards on different dimensions of school life, e.g. relations with parents and the wider community, facilities and equipment etc.</td>
<td>School or local provider-specific standards which complement or adapt those at system level(^{45})</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centrally-set educational standards, in terms of learning outcomes, and their integration in curriculum</td>
<td>Educational standards (incl. learning outcomes and curriculum) set or complemented at school or local provider level(^{46})</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Processes to ensure that educational standards remain useful and relevant, e.g. Provisions to update the centrally-set curricula; Expert commissions to develop centrally-set curricula etc.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher and school head qualification standards/competence frameworks; CPD</td>
<td>Teaching credentials / appraisal processes / CPD requirements specific to the education provider or school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centrally-set guidelines on teaching and learning methods</td>
<td>Development and choice of teaching and learning methods adapted to classroom needs, to school population etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design of pupils’ assessment, incl. monitoring of pupils’ assessment’s ability to measure acquisition of competences</td>
<td>Summative tests designed at school or education provider level; Formative assessments in classrooms, i.e. regular progress tests.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frameworks for school external or internal evaluation, or school quality framework set at system level</td>
<td>School-or education provider specific frameworks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Accountability phase**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th><strong>External</strong></th>
<th><strong>Internal</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>System-level monitoring or evaluation of dimensions of school quality across the education system, e.g. via Inspectorate Annual report or system evaluations</td>
<td>Local school education provider-specific monitoring or evaluation processes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National standardised assessments, to measure and compare learning outcomes across the system</td>
<td>School / local provider-specific pupil assessments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European and International tests and surveys such as the OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) or Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) or Programme for ...</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{45}\) Some education providers / schools may require certain activities to maintain relations with parents or a positive school climate, which others may not.

\(^{46}\) In Denmark for instance, the school curriculum is to some extent regulated by the Common Objectives, but schools traditionally have a high-level of autonomy in defining their curriculum.
International Student Assessment (PISA) or Eurostat, to measure attainment of basic skills, school climate, quality of teaching etc.

Central compliance check of standards in teaching and learning processes, via evaluations, inspections, external teacher appraisal etc.

School / local provider specific compliance check of standards in teaching, via self-evaluations, head teacher observations, internal teacher appraisal, etc.

School staff performance evaluation/appraisal conducted by externally by school head or board of governors, or staff self-appraisal – can also be part of internal evaluation

Aggregation of performance data in national statistical database on e.g. graduation and dropout rates

** Improvement phase **

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>External improvement</th>
<th>Internal improvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>External requirements for school head and teacher further training</td>
<td>Internal requirements for school head and teacher further training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotion of a formative use of school evaluation / assessment results, e.g. for the update of curricula, pupil assessment tools, when set at system level</td>
<td>Internal formative use of QA results, e.g. schools draft and implement a school development or improvement plan, or introduce remedial measures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measures to help schools implement QA measures: provision of supportive material, teacher training, counselling or methodological support of qualified advisors</td>
<td>Networking activities and other support measures at school / local provider level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of system-level statistics for forward planning</td>
<td>Use of school data/statistics for forward planning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ICF analysis

The scope of the QA activities and tools presented in Table 3.1 varies across countries. For example, whilst continuing professional development is an obligation in some countries (PT, ES, BE, IT, AT, CZ, SK, UK, FI, according to Eurydice’s 2013 Key data on teachers and school leaders in Europe47) and even a requirement for career advancement (e.g. PT, ES, SK), in other countries continuous training is optional and voluntary. Similarly whilst requirements or guidelines on how to assess pupils exist in most countries, these are not necessarily sufficient to ensure the consistency of the marking of results across units (schools, education provider, geographical region); and some countries (e.g. Scot., Eng.) have further introduced external verification to ensure that pupils’ results and assessment processes are appropriate.

The processes through which the QA activities and tools listed in the table above (e.g. educational standards or teaching methods and approaches or pupils’ assessment) can also be 'quality assured’ to make sure that they are relevant and adequate. In the case of the design of educational standards, some countries have done this via: academic research, more or less broad consultations of school actors, and then the testing of the new standards through pilot projects. Similarly provisions exist in most countries to regularly update the curricula to ensure that educational standards remain useful and

---

47 Eurydice, *Key data on teachers and school leaders in Europe*, 2013, p. 57.
relevant. Furthermore bilateral discussions and negotiations between education providers and supervisory authorities (e.g. to define objectives and targets, and discuss monitoring and evaluation results, as well as improvement measures) are also increasingly part of the QA process.

Another important consideration related to QA activities and tools put in place is how consolidated the QA system at national level is. This refers to the extent to which QA policies, procedures and activities are linked up and part of a coherent framework, working towards the same objectives. In most systems, different QA activities are linked up and capitalise on each other, e.g. school evaluation and teacher assessment, or when the results of school external evaluations are analysed at system level. However in most systems, there are also discrepancies in the sequencing or in the continuum of activities. The level of consolidation of QA systems is looked at further under section 3.6.

3.5 Actors involved in QA

The degree of stakeholder involvement in QA in the school sector at system, local and school levels is in itself a quality assurance procedure: inclusive decision-making can ensure that a wide array of interests is taken into consideration and that decisions will be more easily understood and ultimately implemented effectively. On the contrary, when stakeholders are poorly consulted, this can lead to confusion over the purpose of QA. Poor consultation can also result in weak ownership over QA activities and tools.

3.5.1 System level actors

At system level central governments – often, ministries of education - or other central actors such as the national Inspectorate or other independent oversight or advisory bodies at national level have a mandate to assure the quality of certain aspects of school quality. In decentralised countries, this includes decentralised governments, e.g. the Federal States or Länder in Germany or the Autonomous Communities in Spain.

The second category of stakeholders involved in QA at system level are associations of school and local level actors, e.g. parents, teachers, school heads, local authorities.

The degree to which those organisations are involved in QA varies across the EU. Some countries have more inclusive traditions than others. In other countries, policy and decision-making is public authority-dominated and opinions expressed by civil society have little influence, or consultation occurs late in the decision-making process (i.e. after the development of prescriptions or policy). In other countries, the degree of consultation varies according to the preferences of the education minister or government in place. In DK and FR the current governments have taken steps towards increased involvement from parents and pupils. In EE the Ministry of education has sought to broaden consultation to less-represented stakeholder groups. In other countries whilst participation of school-level actors is an intention at system level, the evidence that it translates in practice is weak.

The extent to which those representative bodies are consulted and able to influence the QA process also varies according to:

- their mandate and role, e.g. some of those bodies provide technical and scientific support to inform political decision-making, others simply publish “opinions” and “recommendations” for the government to consider,
- their level of organisation and ability to voice common positions,
- the quality of the relationship established with public authorities,
- their capacity to engage in a constructive dialogue with public authorities,
• the type and composition of consultation mechanisms (e.g. via a State School Council, a National Council of Education, Parent Councils, an advisory commission to the Ministry).

The box below presents some examples of national consultation mechanisms and their ways of working.

**Box 9 Examples of stakeholder consultations**

Consultation is well structured in Scotland (UK) via (1) the Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers (SNCT) a tripartite body comprising members from teaching organisations, Local Authorities, and the Scottish Government, and (2) the National Parent Forum Scotland (UK) (NPFS) and Parent Councils in each local authority area are consulted as part of policy making. The NPFS and Parent Councils in each local authority area have reportedly had particular input in the development of the Curriculum of Excellence.

Parent consultation is stipulated in the law in DE Rhineland. Similarly in BEfr the government has a legal obligation to consult relevant stakeholders (namely trade unions, education network authorities, and in certain cases representatives of parents) in the case of a school reform.

In Ireland, according to McNamara, G., et al, the 2003 issued framework for school evaluation and self-evaluation entitled Looking at our Schools (LAOS) was agreed upon “only after long and difficult negotiations with teacher unions that saw the views of the teacher unions being accorded significant weight”, this produced an emphasis on cooperation and partnership rather than monitoring and accountability48.

In Portugal, the National Council of Education is an independent entity, with a consultative function. It issues opinions and recommendations on education, either on its own initiative or as response to requests by the parliament or the government. The Council recommended that schools should present an improvement plan after the delivery of an external evaluation report by the Inspection, and this is now a requirement.

In Romania, according to the Law of National Education, the Ministry of Education plans and implements national strategies in the field of education in consultation with teachers’ associations, parents’ associations, the National Council of students, trade unions, local public authorities, the civil society and business associations. The Public Policies Unit within the Ministry of National Education is in charge of conducting the consultation process, but also other units may have the initiative, depending on the specific issue of consultation.

### 3.5.2 Regional or local actors

Systems can be distinguished according to the role regional or municipal authorities have in the quality assurance of school education. Three groups can be identified:

- Systems where local or regional authorities have a strong role in QA of school education
- Systems where local or regional authorities have a complementary role in QA of school education
- Systems where local or regional authorities have a limited role in QA of school education

---

In the first group, local or regional authorities have a strong role in quality assurance of school education. This is usually linked to the fact that these authorities are in fact education providers or owners of public schools: municipalities have a role in public schools and private providers have their own quality assurance systems.

In some countries, they are involved in assuring the quality of close to all areas of school education. In other countries local or regional authorities have autonomy over the QA process. This creates considerable variability, which is also conditioned by resource availability. For instance, in Finland the responsibility for quality assurance is devolved to education providers, which are mainly municipalities. The methods, focus/areas and practices related to quality assurance are determined by each provider; there are national quality guidelines but their use is not compulsory. The box below provides further examples.

**Box 10 Examples of systems where local or regional authorities have a strong role in QA of school education**

In Denmark municipalities are obliged to write a quality report every second year on each of the schools in their jurisdiction and submit this to the Agency for Quality and Supervision in the Ministry of Education. The ministry determines compulsory fields to include in the quality report and the information which must be covered in the action plan. The compulsory fields in the quality report are linked to the national ‘common objectives’ for primary and lower secondary schools. These translate into a set of indicators centrally designed. In the event of poor performance of a school, the municipality must elaborate an action plan. Now, municipalities can use additional instruments (e.g. annual measurements of pupils’ well-being and parental satisfaction) and also have the possibility to add their own objectives and indicators in the report.

Latvia municipalities participate in school and teacher evaluations (which are regulated at system level). Some, not all, municipalities develop their own education strategies with quality-related indicators. For instance, in Riga (Latvia’s capital and biggest city) the City Development Strategy includes indicators related to education quality, e.g. ‘the performance of students in Riga schools in centralised tests should be statistically higher than the national average in the same tests’.

In Slovakia municipalities (primary and lower secondary) and regions (upper secondary) are school owners and monitor the application of legislation by schools. They can issue management and guidance notes for the head teachers, and they evaluate head teachers.

In the second group, the responsibility for QA around the different areas of school education is split between system level actors, municipalities and regional authorities. Their role in QA includes the development of performance targets and objectives, the implementation of external evaluations, staff appraisal, etc. For example, in Cyprus, in primary education, regional authorities provide supervision of teachers and school heads. Heads of schools are evaluated by the regional authorities for their managerial abilities and this evaluation is seen as an indirect evaluation of schools.

In the third group, municipalities or regional authorities have a very limited role in quality assurance in school education, e.g. in school’s financial issues. Close to all QA is centralised at the level of system-level actors.

In general, where local or regional authorities play a role in QA, it is the municipalities or communes that mainly play a role in the QA of lower education levels (e.g. of primary education (e.g. ES, LU) or primary and lower secondary (e.g. CZ, DK, PL, PT, SK)) while regional authorities tend to be involved more in the QA of upper-secondary school
education (e.g. CZ, SK; districts in the case of PL). In some systems, regional authorities have a role in QA at an intermediary level between municipalities or schools and system level actors. For instance, in Estonia, the county (region) governor mediates in reforms designed at central level and implemented at local level, implements administrative supervisions in schools, analyses the efficiency of the school network, and helps carrying out national exams. The local authorities’ functions regarding quality assurance are often supervised. For instance, in Lithuania, the division of the municipality responsible for education is audited by the municipality’s own internal audit service. In the UK (W, NI, S) local authorities or other school managing authorities are often inspected by the national inspectorates.

3.5.3 School stakeholders

School stakeholders encompass the following set of actors: school staff, pupils, boards of governors. Their involvement at system level has been presented under section 3.5.1. This sub-section looks at their involvement in school-level QA policies, procedures and practices.

School leaders and teachers and other actors of the school community are in fact the key ‘agents of change’. They have a key role in turning the ‘intentions’ of system-level actors into realities, or in closing the gap between legal requirements and practice, e.g. in implementing teaching methods, assessment guidance, assuring the school climate is appropriate etc. More generally, school leaders and teachers have a key role in creating a quality / self-assessment culture at school, and also in avoiding perverse effects of certain QA activities, e.g. “teaching to the test”, competitive environment etc. They are also key stakeholders to consult or gather information from, by system level actors.

The role of school level actors in QA is essential in systems where school autonomy is high and the approach to QA is internally-oriented: school stakeholders can develop their own QA activities and tools, e.g. implementing internal evaluations or staff appraisal, developing training plans or school projects, or using school specific indicators or reporting systems. In some countries teacher appraisal can be conducted internally, usually under the responsibility of head teachers (e.g. DE (R-P), PL, FR, SI) or sometimes of senior colleagues (e.g. BEnl). The box below provides country-specific examples.

Box 11 Examples of school stakeholder involvement in the implementation of QA measures

In Slovenia teachers are evaluated by their head teachers and their colleagues on a regular basis. Head teachers carry out interviews with individual teacher annually. On the basis of observations of teacher’s work in a classroom, an annual interview, the results of monitoring of his/her working products and opinions of teacher’s colleagues, head teachers make proposals for promotion to titles and send it to the ministry of education.

In Estonia the internal evaluation report is drafted by the head of the school who submits it to the board of trustees and to the owner of the school.

In France, at secondary school level, teachers receive two appraisals, an educational and an administrative one, conducted respectively by the inspectorates and by the school head.

However school leaders and teachers can lack capacity / incentives to engage in QA activities and use their results (e.g. use data available on school and pupils’ performance; introduce change in teaching, learning and other school practices). In some
systems they also do not have sufficient autonomy to introduce appropriate changes (in
timetable organisation, in staffing etc.).

Regarding the involvement of pupils in QA activities, the study found that their
involvement is higher in secondary schools than in primary schools, where they are
represented by their parents (see section 3.5.4).

In some countries, pupils are consulted to monitor the quality of educational inputs, e.g.
the quality of teaching or of school climate. For example in Denmark, municipalities’
annual quality reports aggregate the results of annual surveys on the school climate sent
to pupils and school staff. According to Eurydice (2014), most European countries consult
pupils in school external evaluation (EE, LV, LT, PL, PT, SE, UK (E, W, NI, S, CZ, DE, IE,
ES, IT, RO). This is also the case in internal evaluations (e.g. BEfr, EE, ES, SE, UK (NI,
W)) according to Eurydice (2014). In some countries (BEnl, CY, SK) only pupils are
consulted in school external evaluation.

In some countries, pupil representatives are also part of school boards or councils to
reflect on school plans or strategic orientations or the set-up of concrete projects. For
example in the French-speaking Community of Belgium pupil representatives take part in
the school council which is composed of the head of school and representatives of the
organising education authority (Pouvoirs organisateurs) at regional level, as well as
parents, and actors of the school’s local socio-economic environment.

Pupils’ learning outcomes are in any case at the core of QA systems in all EU school
systems. They are thus generally involved in QA activities which assess the quality of
education outcomes, e.g. standardised or continuous progress assessments. Effects of
teaching processes are also monitored via dashboards of indicators, e.g. school
attendance rates, early-school leaving, qualification rates, etc. Attention to the outcomes
of education on pupils is also demonstrated by the use of value-added indicators used to
measure a school’s contribution to the pupils’ progress since his/her arrival in class or
school (FR, BEnl, ES, IT, PL).

3.5.4 Parents and the wider community

The structuring of schools’ relationships with parents and the wider community can take
different forms.

In some countries, legal requirements or guidelines exist to setup Parent’s Councils or
Associations for them to be consulted in decision-making at school level. In other
countries, parents are not required to organise themselves and rely on more or less
regular meetings with teachers to discuss their child’s progress. In addition, within the
same country, parents’ involvement can vary significantly from one school to another,
depending on the school’s capacity to engage with them and also on the school’s
population’s socio-economic characteristics. The box below provides two country
examples where parents are active members of the school community.

Box 12 Parents’ role in schools in Rhineland-Palatinate (DE) and Slovenia (SI)

In Rhineland-Palatinate (DE) the school law stipulates the setup of Parent’s Councils at
several levels: the school level, the regional level and the state level. The State Parent
Council is to be involved in several aspects such as principles of school provision and
organisation, principles of further training for teachers and also principles of quality
development work in schools. The State Parent Council is in practice an active body
with a relatively high public outreach. There have currently been issues on which a
disagreement between parent council and school authorities existed (e.g. on the
discussion about a final thesis for school leavers at upper secondary schools or on
inclusive learning in schools).
In Slovenia, the law also stipulates that every school must appoint the council of parents (CP). Parents are legally able to:

- participate in drafting the proposal of a development programme for the school, education plan, and school house rules;
- convey opinions about the annual work plan;
- adopt their own programme for cooperation with the school, regarding integration in the local environment;
- Parents can also discuss the annual report on the self-evaluation of the school, as well as matters submitted by the school inspections.

In some countries, efforts are made to involve employer and/or higher education representatives, e.g. consult them on the content of curriculum and assessments, to ensure they are fit for the purpose of post-school transition to further education or employment. For example, in England, employers and higher education providers, who had expressed concerns over school leavers’ achievements, were reportedly widely consulted in the reform of the National Curriculum. However, broadly it was found that stakeholder involvement, from the wider community is limited.
4 Results and outcomes of Quality Assurance in EU school education systems

This section shows how QA conducted in EU school education systems can lead to maintaining quality education and quality improvements.

Results and outcomes of quality assurance activities are diverse, first of all considering that the type of “quality”, they are to contribute to, differs across the EU. Also, the approach to QA followed depends, as mentioned under section 3, on the characteristics of the school system (most significantly, governance and level of school autonomy) and values which underpin it. This section will show that other factors are at play, e.g. resources available for the design and implementation of the QA procedures and activities (economic and human resources, including the competences of those involved in the activities at system and school level), and policy priorities (these can for instance determine the amount of resources allocated to QA or the definition of quality used). These aspects are reflected in Figure 4.1 which presents a simplified theory of change for QA in school education systems.

**Figure 4.1 Quality Assurance in school education systems: theory of change**

This theory of change specifies that the introduction of a certain QA activity or tool aims to maintain and improve quality standards and practices. The present study found that the introduction of QA policies, procedures and activities generates changes both in the attitudes and the behaviours regarding QA (e.g. by increasing use of data to inform decision-making at both system and school-level). This has also been observed in literature (Sammons, 2008; McNamara et al., 2011).

Once system and school level actors acknowledge the utility of QA, further changes can occur in the policies, procedures and practices which assure the quality of teaching and learning, school and school system governance, etc.

Before looking at the results of QA, the first sub-section looks at how they are monitored across the EU.
4.2 How the results of QA are being monitored across EU school systems

Monitoring systems in place examine:

- How effective the QA policy, procedure or practice is at measuring quality (existing monitoring systems to check the appropriateness of the design and implementation of QA measures);
- How effective the QA policy, procedure or practice is at maintaining or improving quality standards or dimensions, leading to better outcomes.

The development of the case studies led to a better understanding of the monitoring systems in place in EU countries, existing gaps, and the difficulties encountered in the measurement of effectiveness of quality assurance measures.

Monitoring systems cover different stages of the implementation of QA policies and procedures (see Figure 4.2). Firstly, there are mechanisms in place to follow-up the implementation of the QA policy / procedure itself, which often collect information on how the policy/procedure is perceived by actors involved in its implementation. This information is used to improve the design and implementation of the procedure. Secondly, the monitoring system often gathers information on any changes in attitudes towards QA and perceived changes in behaviour. Changes in educational outcomes seem to be less often systematically monitored.

As an example, the meta-evaluation of the ‘Evaluation of school head’s performance’ in the Basque Country (Spain) provides the results of a survey for inspectors in charge of the evaluation and members of schools’ leadership teams. These professionals were asked whether “the process of evaluation has contributed to the improvement of the work of the leadership team”.

A high number of positive responses to the previous item can be interpreted as a sign of an increased acceptance of QA procedures (change in attitudes) and of their use to change practices (change in behaviours). However, the survey does not collect information on the specific outcomes resulting from the implementation of the policy or activity.

---

The rationale behind this type of monitoring is that good implementation of policies, activities and procedures, where objectives and procedures are clear for all stakeholders, contributes to engagement in QA and effects on behaviours and this will ultimately contribute to positive outcomes (i.e. maintaining or improving standards). In fact, clarity of the policy, procedure or activity and engagement of stakeholders have emerged as two relevant factors for the effectiveness of QA policies, activities or procedures (see section 4.4).

However, as pointed out by QA experts participating in the workshops held in the framework of this study, for QA policies, activities or procedures to be considered effective, they need to have positive effects on quality.

Some conditions need to be met in order to adequately measure the outcomes of a QA policy, activity, procedure or practice:

- Shared understanding of ‘quality’ and ‘quality assurance’, and of what is to be measured to determine effectiveness (what outcomes);
- Economic and human resources available for the task;
- Clarity regarding who is responsible for the measurement of effectiveness of QA policies, activities, or procedures;
- Those responsible have the necessary skills to perform such measurement;
- Consistent and lasting commitment to the QA policies, activities, and procedures , to be able to assess outcomes in the medium and long-term;
- Availability of quantitative and qualitative, longitudinal, easy-to-use data to support the measurement, e.g. longitudinal data on students’ pathways;
- The measurement takes into account the context, most significantly the socio-cultural background of each school.

Schools often lack the capacity to undertake such evaluations of effectiveness. The Lithuanian National Agency for School Evaluation conducted a survey in 2010-2011.

---

50 Information based on case studies and discussions held in the workshops.
which, among other things, analysed how successful were schools in improving selected activities after self-evaluation. Schools’ internal evaluation data shows that schools most frequently (99.3%) use internal evaluation data and information in planning their activities, but only some of them (21%) can evaluate the impact of those activities because of the difficulties of measuring it.\(^51\) The existence of support measures (such as training) for those in charge of QA activities at school level has not surprisingly been identified as a factor contributing to effectiveness (see section 4.4).

Moreover, the transversal nature of quality assurance presents a challenge to the assessment of its effectiveness. There can be several concurrent QA activities, each informing the development of several policies and practices, which are accompanied by other policies and practices not necessarily informed by QA procedures. Hence, it is often complex to establish causal links between QA and changes in attitudes, behaviours and educational outcomes.

The existence of an overarching QA system and the coherence between policies and measures -also identified in this study as factors contributing to the effectiveness of QA practices- helps to tackle this challenge. If all the measures are under the same QA umbrella, it is easier to see how they articulate and how each measure contributes to common goals.

The methods used to assess effectiveness are also a matter of discussion. As mentioned, the availability of quantitative and qualitative longitudinal data is essential to a measurement of effectiveness. For instance, the introduction of national and regional standardised testing, as well as the participation in international student assessments as PISA, allows countries to follow up student’s learning outcomes.

Changes in teacher performance, or in teaching and learning practices, as a result of a given QA policy, activity, procedure or practice more often rely on the collection of qualitative data, mainly through analyses of school documents, interviews, surveys for the different stakeholders, and observation.\(^52\) Information collected through surveys reflects the perceptions of those surveyed rather than actual changes; while information collected through other means may be conditioned by the context of evaluation. School actors may write in their documents, comment in the interviews, or act during observations according to what they believe it is expected from them by the external evaluator. As an analogy to the well-known expression of ‘teaching to the test’, the issue could be called ‘acting to the evaluation’.

Interestingly, this is not necessarily seen as a negative phenomenon; an evaluation carried out by the University of Leipzig (SBI, 2013b), reflects of the fact that if school actors know what is expected from them, and now how to act accordingly, this is already a positive sign (see blue box below).

---

\(^{51}\) General educational quality of school performance, National Agency for School Evaluation Annual Report 2013. Available at: [http://www.nmva.smm.lt/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/Bendrojo-ugdymo-mokylk%5B3-veiklos-kokyb%4C%97.-Nacionalin%5C%97s-mokylk%5B3-vertinimo-agent%5C%5BABros-metinis-prane-%5B5%5Bmas-2013-4.pdf](http://www.nmva.smm.lt/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/Bendrojo-ugdymo-mokylk%5B3-veiklos-kokyb%4C%97.-Nacionalin%5C%97s-mokylk%5B3-vertinimo-agent%5C%5BABros-metinis-prane-%5B5%5Bmas-2013-4.pdf)

\(^{52}\) Information based on background country research and case studies.
Box 13 The phenomenon of ‘acting to the evaluation’ and its effects on the monitoring of results from QA

Evidence from the RUN study carried out by the University of Leipzig on the external evaluation of Saxon schools - The RUN study carried out by the University of Leipzig (SBI, 2013b) investigated the acceptance and use of the results of external evaluation in 30 Saxon schools and concluded that the first cycle of external evaluations in Saxony had had ‘a normative effect’ on school actors. This was reflected in the interviewees’ account of ‘staging of good instruction during site visits’ (SBI, 2013b, p.93). Although practicing good instruction with pupils like a theatre play in order to perform well during class observation is not the primary objective of external evaluations as such, the RUN study argues that this shows that teachers know what good instruction entails and what is expected of them. The results of the external evaluation therefore establish a common understanding among the school community (principal, teachers, pupils and parents), and between the school community and the school inspection of the quality areas in which a school needs to improve.

Source: Case study on the External Evaluation of schools in the Federal State of Saxony (Germany).

4.3 The outcomes of effective QA across EU school systems

QA in school education ultimately aim at maintaining the quality of a system and also improving it. EU countries differ in what they consider to be the most relevant outcomes (definition of quality), and what they believe is needed to maintain and improve them. The latter is at least partially based on scientific evidence across the EU countries. For instance, Finland devotes great attention to teachers and their training based on findings from literature, including the 2007 McKinsey report, which states that high-performing school systems are characterised by excellent quality of teachers and teacher education (Malinen et al., 2012). Following the theory of change presented in Figure 4.1, the improvement of teacher performance could be considered an intermediate outcome contributing to the final goal of improving the education system and enhancing students’ outcomes.

This section presents the evidence of the various outcomes (i.e. effects on attitudes and behaviours regarding QA, teaching and learning policies, procedures and practices, and pupil outcomes) that come about as a result of effective QA activities and practices. The information on outcomes has been mostly extracted from case studies which cover activities and practices for which there is evidence of effectiveness. Consequently, it cannot be assumed that all QA practices will be associated with these types of positive outcomes. Therefore, the following section should be read as the outcomes of QA procedures, tools and activities that are well designed, part of a coherent system and supported by competent stakeholders (i.e. encompassing the critical success factors identified in section 4.4).

Effects on attitudes towards QA and related behaviours are observed as the main outputs of the introduction of QA activities and practices in the short term, and are perceived as pre-requisites for further changes. In fact, these initial outputs are reflected within the factors for success. The most common positive changes regarding QA observed are listed below, and illustrated by examples from the case studies.

- Improved evaluation culture and shared understanding of what quality is and how to measure it, and strengthening of the QA cycle

The introduction of QA activities and practices at national or regional level often contributes to a common understanding of what quality is. The use of criteria for external evaluations helps schools apprehend what is expected from them and sets a base on which to build dialogue among the school community and between this community and education authorities. The existence of guidelines or support for internal evaluations also contributes to a shared understanding of what quality is, facilitates dialogue within the school community, and contributes to the embedment of QA activities in regular school practices (these aspects were mentioned by interviewees from the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia and Saxony case studies).

A common understanding of what quality is constitutes the base to both maintain standards and reinforce the QA cycle. Once school personnel see that there is a need to make improvements in order to reach or maintain certain standards, they will be more inclined to introduce QA practices. Actually, external QA procedures often trigger discussion and reflection within schools, and raise awareness of shortcomings and positive aspects (this was reported by interviewees from several case studies, e.g. IE, IT). The availability of external evidence facilitates the identification of needs and the (re)definition of goals, contributing to the planning and review stages of the QA cycle.

QA activities and practices may have effects on the quality of documents drafted by schools to support planning. For instance, in Saxony, schools’ external evaluation has been followed by an increase in the quality of ‘school programmes’, while in the Basque Country (ES) the evaluation of school heads’ performance has contributed to a rise in quality of the ‘leadership projects’ presented by school heads in the beginning of their mandates.

Also, the introduction of QA activities and practices often aims at increasing the capacity of schools to use evaluative data, reflect on it and introduce changes. In EU countries schools frequently have access to a variety of evaluative data, internal (e.g. students’ grades, results of parent’s surveys) and external (e.g. results in national or regional tests, inspection reports). However, it is not always straightforward for schools to interpret how this information is articulated and how it can be used for decision making. QA tools and activities often increase schools’ knowledge and understanding of the data available, for instance, by facilitating the comparison of the schools’ results in a given indicator with the results at regional or national level, or with the results of similar schools in terms of the socioeconomic background of students (the Scottish, Portuguese and Italian case studies mentioned effects on the capacity of schools to use evaluative data).

- **Increased legitimacy and know-how of school heads to promote change among school-level actors**

There is evidence that QA activities and practices increase the know-how of school heads. The introduction of frameworks or guidelines for external or internal QA processes supports head masters in viewing school management as a comprehensive system that entails different sub-processes (setting goals, implementing activities, evaluating them, using evaluation results to review activities) and different areas (leadership, staff management, school climate, students’ academic results, cooperation with the school community, etc.) (as reported by interviewees from the Estonian and Basque Country (ES) case studies). This promotes school leadership development and management skills of school heads. This is particularly relevant in countries where school heads do not receive any specific training for their position as a manager, as mentioned by an interviewee from Estonia.

Also, QA activities practices involving actors external to the school, often add legitimacy to school heads’ decisions. The results of an external evaluation identifying needs for improvement and giving recommendations, provide arguments to justify the introduction of changes in school procedures or practices which could otherwise be challenging to implement due to entrenched practices or resistance to change from
teachers and school management. This aspect was mentioned by interviewees from the Irish and Saxony case studies.

- **Improved dialogue between public authorities and school actors**
  The development of a common QA culture is linked to dialogue between actors at system-level and school-level, but also across these levels. QA activities and procedures often promoted dialogue between schools and inspectorates, improving the relationships between them. For instance, in Saxony the results of schools’ external evaluation are the basis for negotiations between the school and the school inspection. In the Basque Country (ES), the introduction of the evaluation of school heads’ performance, gave inspectors a more supportive role (less focused on control). Also, in the Irish ‘Whole-school evaluation’, principals welcomed the attitude of inspectors and the chance to have open and honest conversations about the strengths and weaknesses of their school.

- **Changes in teaching and learning policies, procedures and practices**
  QA processes can contribute to changes in teaching and learning policies, procedures and practices, in different areas:
  - Teaching and learning;
  - Pupils’ assessment;
  - School management;
  - Teachers’ continuing professional development;
  - Stakeholders’ participation;
  - Measurement of the performance of the whole system.

  The specific changes depend on the nature of a given tool, activity or practice. Also, many of the QA practices allow for flexibility in the implementation of changes at school level. For instance, external evaluations usually involve the detection of shortcomings and needs, and the issuing of recommendations; however, schools often have flexibility to tailor recommendations to their context (see example in blue box below).

---

**Box 14 Changes in teaching and learning practices following the Irish model ‘Whole-school evaluation – management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL)’**

The WSE-MLL report sets out recommendations for action that the school must address. The nature of the recommendations and the time-scale for change very much depends upon the school, its circumstances and priorities. Overall, inspectors ensure that recommendations are amendable for action by the school.

Some recommendations would be actionable by the school almost immediately and may constitute fairly straightforward changes. For example, one of the recommendations for school A was to review student council structures. Recommendations to address broader policies and procedures, such as the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), as in the case of school B, are more pervasive but senior management may welcome the opportunity to action such issues so as to get policies and procedures in order and up-to-date.

Teaching and learning recommendations are expressed at a whole-school level as overall themes and are generally more challenging and require longer-term shifts in the school. For example, a WSE-MLL may call for less teacher-led teaching or ask for extension of good teaching and learning practices.

Source: Case study on the WSE-MLL in Ireland.
Changes in educational outcomes

There is little direct evidence in the case studies on the impact of QA policies, activities and practices on educational outcomes:

- Preliminary findings on the Scottish 'Insight benchmarking tool' suggest that the data from this tool helps to identify the needs of students in terms of curricular paths and that this has contributed to an increasing number of students staying on at school.

- In Denmark, the 2013 Rambøll evaluation concluded that national tests might have had a positive impact on pupils’ academic performances. At the same time, the evaluation also stressed that there was scope for an improved formative use of tests by teachers.\textsuperscript{54}

The low amount of evidence is greatly due to the transversal nature of QA and the complexity of factors contributing to educational outcomes. As put by the researcher in charge of the Estonian case study:

"Even though (schools’) internal evaluation is a particular evaluation process or method in theory, it might not be viewed as something separate from the other school processes taking place in practice or other factors influencing the outcomes of schools (e.g. particularities of a student body, funding of schools, parental involvement, teachers’ skills, etc.). Moreover, there have been several changes in the Estonian education system recently (...) that also affect the results and outcomes of students. Therefore, it is very complicated distinguish the impact of internal evaluation from other school level measures or influencing factors and attribute improvements or changes to one particular activity."

However, whilst direct observable impacts from QA are not found for student outcomes in most cases, it is perhaps reasonable to assume that the changes mentioned in the above sections can have knock-on effects on pupil outcomes. For example, it has been argued\textsuperscript{55} that reflective understanding is central to good teaching. Therefore quality assurance that involves teachers reflecting on their practice could stimulate better teaching approaches and in turn more positive student outcomes.

4.4 Critical factors which contribute to the effectiveness of QA policies, activities and practices

The above section outlines the impact that effective quality assurance policies, activities and practices can have in school education. Specifically, it highlights the impact in terms of effective quality assurance leading to changes in attitudes and behaviours towards QA itself, as well as the positive impacts that it can have on teaching and learning, school and system governance policies, activities and practices, and ultimately on maintaining and improving the quality of education. This section now turns to identifying the success factors that characterised these examples of effective QA which led to those changes and explores how they lead to effective outcomes.

The following subsections group the main factors contributing to the effectiveness of QA activities identified in this study.

\textsuperscript{54} Evaluering af de nationale test i Folkeskolen (2013). Available at: http://www.ktst.dk/~media/UVM/Filer/Udd/Paa%20tvaers/Priser/131119%Evaluering%20af%20de%20nationale%20test_rapport.ashx

\textsuperscript{55} Hole, S., McEntree, G.H. (1999) Reflection is at the Heart of Practice, Educational Leadership, vol 56 no. 8, p34-37.
4.4.1 The overall landscape: Conditions under which quality assurance policies, activities and practices are effective

The first condition for the implementation of any QA policy, activity or practice is the availability of resources, mainly human resources. The amount of resources needed varies depending on the type of activities. For instance, the existence of regular inspections of schools requires a skilled team of inspectors, involving considerable investment, while a system-level control based on data on outcomes (for instance, graduation rates) and internal QA activities is in principle a less costly approach (Slater, 2013). The second option might however provide less information on whether quality standards are being met.

EU countries have developed strategies to improve efficiency in the use resources. For instance, as mentioned in Section 3.7 there is a trend towards focusing inspection on schools presenting poorer results, while using less resource-demanding strategies in the schools with better results.

Governments acknowledge that also QA policies, activities and practices implemented by school staff require the allocation of additional resources, to cover mainly for staff time dedicated to QA instead of other activities such as teaching (e.g. additional resources are provided to schools in the VALES project in Italy and in the evaluation of school heads in the Basque Country (ES)). Moreover, some of the factors contributing to the effectiveness of QA activities and practices mentioned below—for instance, the provision of support or training on QA for school-level actors—also require extra funding.

In addition to the availability of resources, the effectiveness of QA policies, activities and practices depends on their insertion in a coherent system at policy level. Literature provides evidence of inconsistencies between QA policies and other policies (MacKinnon, 2011), of the confusion created by the multiplicity of QA activities and growing number of indicators (Sammons, 2008), as well as of the need to provide comprehensive practices which combine evaluation and support (Mujika & Etxeberria, 2004; Sammons, 2008; McNamara et al., 2011).

The alignment between QA policies and between these and other educational policies emerges as a relevant condition for the effectiveness of QA policies. Aligned policies are geared towards the same objectives (according to the definition of quality in use) and inform each other. For instance, evidence from schools’ evaluations could inform the development of the curricula, or the priorities for teacher training. If, on the contrary, a school evaluation detects certain deficiencies in teaching, but no support or training is offered to address them, it is unlikely that there will be any improvements.

A coherent QA strategy would make the connection between the different measures explicit, and establish the mechanisms to strengthen the links between them. For instance, if schools’ external evaluation is performed by an institution and the support to address the recommendations arising from the evaluation is provided by a different institution, there should be mechanisms for the coordination of those institutions.

The existence of a coherent strategy over time, where QA and other educational policies are aligned, is only possible if it is backed up politically. Experts participating in the workshops and stakeholders interviewed for the case studies commented on the detrimental effects of changing educational priorities and policies each time there is a change in the composition of the government. Two phenomena seem to concur in the development of educational policies: on the one hand, the impact of many policies and

57 As reflected in the background country research conducted under this assignment.
58 In Italy, each school participating in the VALES project received 10.000 Euros; In the Basque Country (ES), schools participating in the evaluation of head teacher performance receive more teachers/teaching hours.
measures can best be assessed in the long-term (e.g. by following up students’ pathways); on the other hand, the field of education is highly politisised and often new governments introduce new measures without allowing enough time to assess the effectiveness of previous measures and use the resulting evidence to inform the new ones.

In all countries the political landscape can change every few years when new governments are formed and this can pose a challenge for the continuity of QA policies. When QA policies and activities are embedded in regular activities of well-established institutions – e.g. in the Inspectorate programming for a certain period of time – this helps to ensure a more progressive and coherent introduction of policy reforms in the area. In turn, this allows policies to produce effects and for these effects to be monitored over time.

**Box 15 Coherent strategy and political support over time as a condition for the effectiveness of QA practices.**

*An example from the Basque Country (ES)*

The evaluation of school head performance is inserted in the triennial plans of the Inspectorate. Interviewees mentioned that since the introduction of the activity, there have been several parties in the regional government and they have all respected the Inspectorate triennial plans. The stability of these plans, despite changes at political level has been identified by stakeholders as one of the most relevant critical factors contributing to coherence and continuity in the implementation of the activity and hence to its effectiveness.

Source: case study on the evaluation of school head performance for school improvement in the Basque Country (ES)

The implementation of QA policies, activities and practices is also conditioned by the level of autonomy of schools or local authorities. As argued by many, the degree in which a school can fully apply the QA cycle, and namely act upon the results of an evaluation, depends on its autonomy to implement changes (Leeder & Mabbett, 2011).

Interestingly, it has been observed that schools have a varying degree of capacity to act upon autonomy, i.e. not all know how to interpret the results of evaluation or to introduce changes even when they have the autonomy to do so. In fact, increased autonomy can be seen as either an opportunity or be a matter of concern for schools (Malinen, 2012; Young, 2013). Ultimately, this creates inequalities across schools, if further support is not provided to the schools with a lower capacity to be autonomous.

**4.4.2 Success factors related to the design and implementation of QA policies, activities and practices**

One of the most relevant factors contributing to the effectiveness of QA policies, activities and practices lies in the very definition of QA, on whether QA aims at ensuring quality, at improving quality, or both. A focus on improvement is given by a formative approach to QA.

Formative student assessment has been praised in literature for its positive impact on students’ outcomes (Priestley, M. & Sime, D., 2005; Hendrickson, K., 2012; Taber, K. S., et al., 2011). This is easily extrapolated to QA policies, activities and practices impacting different aspects of school education quality. A formative approach implies frequent exchanges with different actors and this allows for early detection of difficulties and timely improvements of the design and implementation of the QA policies, activities and practices, as well as tailoring them to each school specific context. Moreover, putting the
stress on support for improvement rather than control is perceived as less menacing and more useful by school-level actors thus promoting their engagement (as mentioned by several interviewees from case studies, e.g. IT, Scot.).

The involvement of stakeholders is recognised as a critical factor across QA policies, activities and practices, and there is agreement that it should go beyond school staff to also include parents, students and other relevant stakeholders, as for instance representatives from local authorities. For instance, parental engagement has been observed to incentivise school actors to pay attention to QA (Danish case study). The involvement of stakeholders contributes to a quality culture in the school community. When the members of the school community participate in the implementation of a given QA activity, tool or practice, they are driven to reflect about the school’s goals and the practices put in place to attain those goals, and what their role is or could be in the enhancement of quality. A collaborative approach not only in the implementation but also in the design of a given QA activity or tool can further enhance engagement (see example in blue box below). An increased knowledge of the processes put in place for QA, and the possibility to provide inputs to their design, improvement or further development, creates a sense of ownership of the process, putting the emphasis on improvement rather than just compliance.

**Box 16 Embedment of schools internal evaluation in schools’ regular practices - an example from Estonia**

Even though the state has developed some example models for school to use in the implementation of internal evaluation, school leaders interviewed for the case study emphasized the importance of adjusting the model to their own needs, conditions and already existing school processes. The original recommended/sample model was quite extensive and the development of the report would have been highly time-consuming. Hence, the two schools visited within the case study developed their own data collection processes focusing on their needs and adopted a report format that is shorter and more practical.

Source: case study on schools internal evaluation in Estonia

Experts participating in the workshops referred to the need of finding a balance between top-down and bottom-up approaches, taking also into account the degree of autonomy of schools in each country. For instance, in Scotland, where there is a considerable degree of local autonomy, stakeholders interviewed for the case study mentioned that a ‘push-pull’ dynamic triggered the school education reform and the QA measures and ensure their continuity. They consider that a political push at national level and bottom-up demand (school and local level) lie at the core of the success of the QA approach in the country.

As a pre-requisite for the involvement of stakeholders, the need for clarity of QA policies, of their purposes and procedures and of the roles of those involved in their implementation is recognised as one of the main critical success factors, both by experts participating in the workshop and by interviewees from case studies, as well as in relevant literature (MacKinnon, 2011). In fact, the monitoring of QA policies, activities and practices often detects the need to improve the clarity of the information provided to participants, including that of the documentation and materials used (case studies from Saxony, Basque Country (ES)).

Along with clarity, there is the need to ensure the appropriateness of QA policies, activities and practices. As put by MacKinnon (2011), there is a need to find a balance between the relevance of the QA activities and their complexity: it is important to measure something worthwhile and, simultaneously, avoid that the processes are too complex. In addition, activities should be fit-for-purpose taking into account the context.
in which they are implemented. In fact, school-level stakeholders praise the flexibility of QA policies and activities to account for the specificities of schools (mentioned by interviewees for the Estonian, Scottish and Portuguese case studies). This flexibility contributes to the embedding of QA procedures in the regular practices of a school, improving the engagement of school actors, who start seeing it as part of their daily activities instead of additional work brought upon them.

The tailoring of QA activities to the singularity of each school, and their overall effective implementation, depends on the availability of quality, ease-of-use performance and context data on each school. Useful performance data that education authorities can provide to schools includes for instance results in national and international tests, as well as reports of schools’ external evaluations, which take into account the school context, and most significantly the socio-economic background of students (Mujika & Etxeberria, 2004; Sammons, 2008).

The availability of data by itself does not contribute to quality if end-users do not know how it can be used. Training and capacity building of school-level actors in the use of evaluative data has been often identified as a factor contributing both to the engagement of stakeholders and to a good implementation of QA activities and tools (McNamara et al., 2011; Schildkamp, K., 2012; Swaffield & MacBeath, 2005). Not surprisingly, training in QA for school-level actors is a common feature across European countries.

**Box 17 Examples of training and capacity building of school-level actors**

**Training for the use of national tests at school level in Denmark**

Given the high level of autonomy in the Danish school system, national tests are used differently between teachers. To professionalise the use and interpretation of the national tests, it is key to provide information and training to school leaders and teachers; for example in the form of user groups, workshops and training. Some municipalities have also implemented their own supporting measures, for instance the ‘transformer’.

The tool ‘transformer’ was created as a response to teachers’ uncertainties about the usefulness of the national tests, as they were already aware of the pupils’ levels prior to the tests. As the test results in the four reading tests (grade 2, 4, 6 and 8) were presented on four different percentile scales; the ‘transformer’ transforms the results into a common interval scale (like the PISA scale). Before introducing the ‘transformer’ the school held workshops for the teachers about the use of the tool, which allows the school to compare test results of the pupil across tests and in this way follow the pupils’ academic progression. Currently, it is used in 28 out of Denmark’s 98 municipalities.

Source: case study on the national tests in Denmark

**Support to schools self-evaluation in Cyprus**

In Cyprus, schools are increasingly encouraged to carry out internal evaluation. When they choose to do so, they usually follow self-evaluation projects and templates developed in the context of national and international projects on school internal evaluation. In particular, the University of Cyprus and the Centre of Educational Research are licensed by the Ministry of Education and Culture to offer scientific support to schools in this field.

Source: country background research on Cyprus.

Although education authorities have a role in identifying support and training needs, and facilitating access to the adequate responses to these needs, school leaders are in a privileged position to promote QA at school-level.
Stakeholders and experts agree on the relevance of school leaders’ role and skills for the adequate implementation of QA policies, activities and practices in school education (Bubb & Earley, 2008; Sahlberg, 2010; Schildkamp, 2012). Actually, according to findings from the country background research developed for this study, the differences in leaders’ competences are often the cause of inequalities in the implementation of adequate QA activities across schools. A school head with knowledge on QA as well as strong leadership skills can determine that a particular school implements appropriate QA activities, while this is not a case in a similar school in the same country, region, or municipality.

School-level leadership needs to be inspiring and facilitating. It needs to promote a positive climate and attitude towards QA activities and procedures among school actors, and support the increase of school actors’ capacity to use evaluation data and participate actively in the definition and development of QA activities.

Schools’ heads are however not immune to the more common concerns about QA among school-level actors:

- Concerns that the activities will mean more control from public authorities;
- Feeling of vulnerability due to being personally evaluated, and concerns about the consequences of evaluation on daily work and careers;
- Concerns that the activities will increase work-load, especially for members of leadership teams;
- Difficulties of school level actors to understand the activities, mainly in the beginning of its introduction;
- Demotivation due to critical findings. The identification of a considerable amount of shortcomings in a given school may be demotivating for school actors.

A fluent dialogue between school-level and system-level actors can help address the previous issues. Thorough and clear explanations of the policies and activities to be implemented, their goals, and their consequences, as well as of the distribution of responsibilities in their implementation, would be a first step to address these concerns. Also, the adoption of a constructive approach by external evaluators when communicating critical findings, as well as the identification of positive developments alongside shortcomings, are to a certain extent a way of preventing demotivation of school actors (as mentioned by interviewees for case studies e.g. IE). It should be considered that in countries where there is a low level of school autonomy, dialogue with education authorities is also paramount to decide on the changes in policies and practices that will follow the results of evaluations.

**Box 18 Dialogue between school-level and system-level actors**

**An example from Luxembourg**

In the process of school evaluation, each Luxembourgish school (primary and secondary level) receives a ‘school report’ from the quality agency (*Agence pour le Développement de la Qualité Scolaire – ADQS*). This report provides data about the socio-economic and cultural composition of the school population, results in standardised tests, a SWOT analysis of the school performance and an overview of the perception of pupils, parents and teachers about their school.

The ADQS worked together with schools to establish an evaluation/quality culture based on self-assessment for the purpose of improvement. Now the process is seen as a preparatory activity to the internal evaluation/self-assessment.

Source: country background research on Luxembourg
An example from France

Following the entry into force of France’s 2001 Framework Law for Public Finance Laws (LOLF)\(^5^9\) which modified public finance rules and resources allocation of the budget of the French State\(^6^0\), stakeholders consulted for the case study in France reported that a key contribution of the LOLF had been the strengthening of ‘management dialogues’ (‘dialogue de gestion’) between the central administration and local state authorities (academies) and also between the latter and schools. In the course of the ‘management dialogues’, academies’ situation is looked at, and achievement of annual objectives and targets discussed. The prior-existing ‘dialogue de gestion’ between academies and central authorities is used to voice demands to the central administration for support to a specific project or priorities, as local actors are aware that the use of resources allocated to them will be closely scrutinised by parliamentarians and other actors of the system. Local and school actors also have a better understanding of the ministry’s resource allocation methods and approaches – as they are part of the dialogue and modes are transparent. Also, by using the pre-existing contrats d’objectifs and le projet d’établissement as the starting point of the annual management dialogue (dialogue de gestion) between the DGESCO and academies authorities, the LOLF strengthened the value of those documents and supporting processes.

Source: case study France

Other factors which improve buy-in of QA activities among school actors are related to the (perceived) appropriateness of the activity and legitimacy of external actors in charge of their implementation. Evidence from the case studies provides some examples of factors contributing to success:

- The design and implementation of the tool or activity has a scientific basis. For instance, in Saxony, the scientific basis of quality criteria has been seen to contribute to the acceptance of external evaluations by the school community and the school inspectorate.
- Reliability and objectivity of the assessment, for instance through the organisation of training assessments where evaluators’ assessment is calibrated (e.g. Basque Country (ES)).
- Constant evaluation and adjustment of the measure, including the collection of feedback from school actors (e.g. Saxony).
- The perceived legitimacy of external evaluators. The ideal background of evaluators and the composition of evaluation teams is a matter of debate: for instance, while some acknowledge that school-level actors feel reassured by the presence of teachers in evaluation teams, others argue that it is more important that evaluators have specific training and experience in this area, and others insist on the added-value of a multi-competence team, including for instance professionals with a school background and professionals with a research background.\(^6^1\)

Box 19 Examples of profiles of external school evaluators

Multi-competence teams of ‘supporters of improvement’ in the Italian VALES project

External evaluators play a central role within the VALES project. They have the role of

---
\(^5^9\) Loi organique n° 2001-692 du 1er août 2001 relative aux lois de finances
\(^6^0\) The LOLF does not apply to the budget of French local authorities (« régions »and « départements ») which have their own legal personality, distinct from the State’s.
\(^6^1\) Information based on experts’ discussions during the second workshop.
critical friends who support schools in analysing processes and practices in a critical way, but also suggest directions in order to tackle critical points and design an improvement plan. Actually, they are not identified as “evaluators” but as “supporters of improvement”.

The team of evaluators visiting schools has to be made up of two people with a different professional background: one of them has as background a strong experience in schools, such as a ministerial school inspector or a head teacher; the other one has competences in the field of research methods in education, such as an educational researcher.

Source: case study on the VALES project in Italy

**Polish inspectors trained in management or administration**

In Poland, external evaluations are performed by inspectors from Regional Superintendents’ Offices (*kuratoria* - regional inspectorates). Inspectors are teachers or academics with at least five years of work experience and must have completed a management or administration course.

Source: country background research on Poland
5 Strengths and weaknesses and trends in QA in school education in the EU

This section presents a broad overview of strengths and weaknesses in how QA is currently conducted in EU school education systems. It also presents the recent trends in QA outlining where some Member States are heading in relation to QA in school education and new developments in the area.

Section 4 provides some evidence of how some of the strengths identified contribute to effective outcomes of QA and (some) of the weaknesses/challenges identified here can be overcome by effective QA activities.

5.1 Strengths in existing QA systems across the EU

A number of strengths in how QA is conducted, and examples of good practice, were already identified in previous sections of this report. They are summarized in the next paragraph.

Strengths already presented in previous sections of the report include:

- the existence in all countries of bodies at system and local levels involved in (1) standard-setting in different areas of school education, (2) monitoring and evaluating whether those standards are met and maintained and (3) proposing activities to improve quality in those different areas (see section 3.5)

- in most countries, national school quality or performance frameworks or tools, or frameworks for school (external or internal) evaluation exist. Those tools are useful as they generally define the dimensions of quality to be assured, and can also include indicators to be measured and/or minimum education goals to be achieved. This provides all actors a sense of the direction and purpose of QA (see section 3.4). This is further elaborated on in section 5.1.1

- In some countries, the existence of broad consultation and involvement of school stakeholders in the QA cycle, thus maximising potential for effective QA (see section 3.5).

Additional strengths are presented in the following sub-sections (5.1.1 to 5.1.2), and illustrated with examples of good practice.

5.1.1 Consolidated QA systems exist in a number of countries

In several countries coherent QA systems, supported by frameworks, activities, tools and policies. This means that:

- Dimensions of school education to be ‘quality assured’ are defined, sometimes in a quality or evaluation framework,

- Indicators to measure the attainment of quality standards exist

- Targets and objectives, beyond minimum quality standards, exist,

- Results of different QA activities are used within other QA activities.
The box below provides examples of countries with quality systems supported by frameworks and tools.

**Box 20 Example of countries with consolidated quality systems supported by frameworks, tools and activities**

**Quality systems**

The Education Institute of Saxony (SBI) developed criteria for school quality which provide the framework for the external evaluations (SBI, 2010). The quality criteria cover five quality areas: performance, teaching and learning, school culture, professional development, management and leadership, and cooperation. This normative effect of the external evaluation was confirmed by the school actors interviewed for this case study: the quality criteria on the basis of which the external evaluation is carried out provide a clear and binding definition of school quality in Saxony. The results of the external evaluation therefore establish a common understanding among the school community (principal, teachers, pupils and parents), and between the school community and the school inspection of the quality areas in which a school needs to improve.

Other examples include: Austria’s national quality system based on six quality areas was introduced in 2012 as part of the initiative for school quality in general education (SQA) aimed at enhancing the quality of schools over the period 2012-2016; the School Quality Framework in Rhineland-Palatinate (DE), the CIPO-framework used by the inspectorate in BENl. In DK the Ministry of Education has developed a template for a quality report which municipalities fill in on an annual basis to measure the quality of schools. Education Scotland (UK) provides the framework for the self-evaluations for all the schools in the country via the ‘How good is your school?’- guidelines, as well as the guidance “Evaluating and Improving our Curriculum – Primary, Evaluating and Improving our Curriculum S1-S3” and “The Child at the Centre”.

**Quality frameworks**

In France, ‘performance indicators’ exist to measure, at national and school level, results achieved under the ‘school teaching’ mission defined under the loi organique relative aux lois de finances (LOLF), France’s public finance framework (case study); in 2012, the framework included 87 indicators which mainly required quantitative scoring, e.g. access to education, pupil trajectories or staff management. Although it is not considered as a quality framework as such, it is used to measure the system’ performance.

Another example is the Czech Republic’s ESF-funded initiative (case study) which aimed to define criteria for school quality to be used in school’s self-assessment and which would be shared by all actors. At the end of the project, 19 criteria were formulated for planning, 24 criteria for implementing and 17 criteria for the quality of the internal school report.

In addition, coherent and consolidated QA systems are those where different QA activities (e.g. teacher or pupils’ assessments, school evaluations, curriculum development, definition of learning outcomes) build on each other in a coherent manner and work towards the same objectives. Building on a conceptual framework by Swaffield S. & MacBeath J. (on how internal and external school evaluations can be linked\(^\text{62}\), QA activities can:

---

\(^\text{62}\) Swaffield S. & MacBeath J. (2005) identified three ways of combining self- and external evaluation "(1) Parallel - the two systems run side by side each with their own criteria and protocols; (2) Sequential - external bodies follow on from a school’s own evaluation and use that as the focus of their quality assurance system. (3) \)
• Be sequential – one QA activity follows another; for example in Luxembourg, the school’s external assessment, which is performed by an external agency, is considered as a preparatory activity to the internal evaluation (It is actually not considered as an external evaluation proper). In some countries one of the purposes of external evaluations is to check whether internal quality assurance mechanisms/internal evaluations are in place and cover the relevant areas (e.g. DE (Rhineland-Palatinate and Saxony), HU, MT).

• Build on each other / be cooperative – on the basis of a common approach to QA. Examples of the capitalisation of QA activities include:
  o In several countries, internal evaluation is often based on external evaluation and the correspondent frameworks or guidelines. This is for instance the case of Austria, Belgium (German-speaking Community), the Czech Republic, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania and UK (England). In Latvia internal and external evaluations have to cover the same topics.
  o the exploitation of the results of teacher or pupils’ assessment in school evaluation. For example in Ireland, inspectors and head teachers are expected to review pupils’ outcomes in national tests when conducting self or external evaluation. Similarly in Croatia the results of national tests are the starting point for school’s self-evaluations.
  o The aggregation and analysis at regional or system level of school (external or internal) evaluations for the purpose of gaining an overview of the performance of the system and make system level adjustments on this basis (e.g. UK(S)), FR, AT, SE, DK)
  o other links between QA policies, procedures and activities, e.g. in Poland, the school head is required to exploit findings from school evaluations or legal compliance checks in the development of his/her pedagogical supervision plan.

5.1.2 Efforts for QA to include a formative function

As previously mentioned, efforts exist in all EU countries for QA to include a formative function, beyond a ‘strictly’ accountability function. QA activities that are guided by a formative principle are geared towards introducing improvement in practices of the school system which thus enable the system to continuously improve (please see section 3.1 and 3.2).

The increasing focus on QA as continuous enhancement of quality is reflected in Member States’ commitment in the May 2014 Council Conclusions which welcomed the progress achieved in developing ‘a culture of continuous quality enhancement’ and states that ‘Considerable scope exists for more effective approaches to quality assurance across all sectors of education and training, which move away from a ‘checklist’ approach towards the development of a genuine ingrained culture of quality enhancement in teaching and learning which can raise standards and improve learning outcomes’.

This is evident in the focus given to the formative use of QA results in official strategic or guidance documents. For example, in Lithuania, the “Guidelines for the Self-Evaluation of Performance Quality in General Education Schools” emphasise that internal evaluation is only effective if the results are used to inform management decisions, improve education provision and help teachers further develop their skills. Similarly legislation in Croatia prescribes that the results of standardised student assessments and internal self-evaluations are used by schools for continuous improvement of their work.

The text below presents current practices in school evaluation in particular, according to Eurydice (2014):


63 http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52014XG0614(07)&from=EN
nine education systems use internal evaluation findings, not only for monitoring purposes, but also to inform decisions on the provision of in-service training or the allocation of resources, or to spread examples of good practices (AT, CY (ISCED 2-3), EL, FR (ISCED 1), LT, LT, RO, UK (W), and Iceland)

In almost all education systems in Europe, external and/or internal evaluations are followed by the issuing of recommendations to schools.

In terms of how the results of QA activities are implemented in a formative way, in several countries schools are asked to draft and implement a school development or improvement plan based on school evaluation results. In others individuals’ assessments are intended to be used for improvement purposes. In Portugal teacher performance appraisal is to be formative and followed by the introduction of improvement measures. Similarly in France, teachers’ appraisal was modified to be geared more towards providing the teacher with recommendations on areas of improvement and/or in-service training.

The degree to which the formative function of QA is implemented in a system depends on the existence of incentives to use the results of QA. Some countries apply positive incentives to encourage schools to make use of QA results, and negative ones if schools fail to act according to results of QA activities. Positive incentives are mentioned under section 3.4 which presents activities and tools under the improvement phase of the QA cycle. They are those measures which support the implementation of QA activities, e.g. provision of supportive material, teacher training, counselling or methodological support, networking activities etc. In terms of negative incentives, some countries use sanctions (e.g. fines or dismissal) if schools or local authorities fail to act on QA results. Incentive structures are weak in some countries and it is left to the school to decide whether recommendations, provided following QA activities, are followed up on or not. This can lead to lack of, or variability in, the formative use of QA.

5.2 Weaknesses and gaps in existing QA systems across the EU

The evidence collected for this study points to a set of weaknesses in how QA in the school sector is conducted, which are shared by several EU countries.

5.2.1 Lack of consolidation or coherence in QA systems

Whilst one of the strengths identified by the study was the existence, in some countries, of consolidated and coherent QA systems, the opposite was identified in the majority of countries.

Lack of consolidation and coherence in QA systems can take different forms, e.g.:

- Lack of alignment between QA policies, procedures and practices, in the objectives they are to work towards, e.g. if pupils’ assessment processes are not updated following the reform of the curricula. An example of this is mentioned in a 2011 article written by MacKinnon which considered that “Following the introduction of a new competence-based curriculum in Scotland (UK) ("Curriculum for Excellence"), the [then] current inspection model [did] not reflect the curriculum changes which [was] seen as a problem. Consequently, the inspectorate’s method of self-evaluation no longer make[de] practical sense at school level”64.

- In countries where school or local autonomy is high, the type, depth and scope of QA activities can vary depending on schools or regional or local authorities, e.g. in the absence of a legal requirement at system level, only some schools design improvement plans following a school evaluation process; some local school providers

---

or education networks use external inspectors for QA and others do not, as they have autonomy on the design of certain QA procedures, activities or tools. This can lead to inconsistencies in how QA is conducted across a given system;

- Redundancies amongst different QA procedures, activities and tools which measure more or less the same elements but differently or for different institutions, e.g. several sets of indicators measuring the performance of the school systems;
- Fragmentation of QA activities across institutions which formally cooperate but whose collective action is limited by fragmented spheres of competence. In some countries, the quality assurance cycle seems to be suffering from the institutional separation between evaluation (carried out by a public agency) and quality development (carried out by the school and the school supervision via target agreements). Links between the two processes are too weak to ensure that findings from evaluations are used for formative purposes. In some cases this is due to a lack of autonomy by certain QA actors needed to implement improvement measures, e.g. in some countries, school heads do not have autonomy in the management of human and material resources.

5.2.2 Difficulties utilising the results of QA activities

Close to all EU countries encounter difficulties in using the results of their quality assurance activities.

This is commonly related to insufficiencies in QA activities themselves. For instance, in the case of pupils’ assessment, one concern is the relevance of specific tests and whether they are measuring the competences, skills and knowledge which matter. According to Pasi Sahlberg there is a risk that tests “assess standard knowledge delivered by a prescribed curriculum — the outcomes that are easily measurable, and not necessarily the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that students will need in their lives within a knowledge society (e.g. creativity)”\(^{65}\).

Other difficulties utilising the results of QA activities relate to:

- Shortcomings in the contextualisation of performance data. Some countries do not sufficiently consider school characteristics (e.g. socio-economical characteristics of school population, financial resources, geographical location, etc.) when reflecting on school’s performance results.
- Lack of longitudinal data to measure real progress in students’ and teachers’ performances over time. Alternative sources of information mentioned are international surveys, such as TIMSS and PISA.
- Lack of system-level overviews on the standards’ maintenance in certain areas of school education, e.g. in pupils’ assessment, teachers/school heads’ Continuous Professional Development; use of teaching and learning methods, etc. For example, the present study found that checking whether pupils’ assessment processes met standards was not systematic in all countries. Similarly the regularity of certain QA activities may not be sufficient, e.g. in several countries, individual teacher appraisals are only performed under specific circumstances, for instance in the probationary period (e.g. DE (R-P), ES, IT, PT), in the event of upcoming promotion (e.g. DE (R-P), PT), teachers who are the subject of complaints (e.g. DE (S), EE, HR, LU), or teachers whose students’ learning outcomes are low (e.g. EE). Considering that ‘teaching processes’ is a key input in the education process, it is important to be able to measure the performance of teachers regularly and also be able to introduce remedial measures when needed, which irregular appraisals do not allow.

These shortcomings challenge the quality and comparability of results, and ultimately, their usability.\(^66\)

5.2.3 Lack of capacity to conduct QA and use its results

Effective QA requires time and human resources as well as a certain set of competences, e.g. evaluative, capacity to engage a system or school community, data literacy, etc. In several countries some school stakeholders or bodies involved in QA reportedly lack capacity (in terms of financial, time or material resources, or in competences) to be effective in their roles.

Insufficient resources for schools to really invest in quality assurance has been identified in several countries. This is a problem considering that certain QA activities (e.g. external evaluations, whole school evaluations) create an important workload for teachers and head teachers, in addition to their regular activities.

Furthermore, key QA actors (e.g. inspectors or school heads) in some countries reportedly lack essential competences (e.g. to record data from observation of classes and analyse) to properly perform QA. Similarly, in some countries the formative function of QA, is limited by school actors’ lack competences to properly use the results of evaluative information and to act on those and plan strategically for improvement.

Such shortcomings limit QA’s effectiveness in term of maintaining quality standards and introducing continuous improvement. They also contribute to limiting the credibility of a QA system.

5.3 Trends in QA in the school sector

Quality assurance systems evolve over time reflecting the changing priorities, function and orientation of quality assurance approaches followed by EU Member States. This sub-section presents recent trends or developments affecting and characterising QA approaches following by a number of Member States. These trends are based on the evidence gathered during the literature review, interviews with EU and national level stakeholders, case studies and during the expert workshops. Information on current trends also guides reflections on potential EU level actions to support national QA efforts in the school sector, presented under section 6.

5.3.1 Learning outcomes for the purpose of QA and broadening their scope

One key trend has been that educational standards have increasingly been defined in terms of learning outcomes.\(^67\) According to CEDEFOP, “learning outcomes are statements of what an individual should know, understand and/or be able to do at the end of a learning process”\(^68\). The use of learning outcomes can be considered a quality assurance tool as they can be used as standards against which curricula can be defined and against which students can be assessed.

This trend has been supported by the introduction and use of the European Qualifications Frameworks (EQF).\(^69\) The EQF is a meta-framework designed to relate national

\(^66\) It also poses the question of the equality of treatment of pupils across a system. This relates to a weakness mentioned above: inconsistencies in how QA is conducted across a given system.


\(^69\) http://ec.europa.eu/eqf/home_en.htm
qualifications systems to a common European reference framework\textsuperscript{70}. The EQF is composed of a set of 8 reference levels described in terms of learning outcomes\textsuperscript{71} and levels 1-4 levels correspond to school education. Most countries now reference their national qualifications frameworks or directly link their qualifications systems to the EQF. The EQF is in itself a QA tool as it aims to guarantee that all those who achieve a certain school education qualification have acquired learning outcomes which characterises the given level of qualification. This is important to avoid inappropriate transitions from one level to another, as well as early school leaving.

A more recent trend has been understanding quality of education as achievement of social learning outcomes in addition to academic ones. Traditionally quality of education was understood in terms of academic learning outcomes and most countries have focused their QA efforts on the attainment of a certain set of standards, e.g. basic skills (i.e. maths and literacy) or academic skills. The trend to increasingly consider \textit{social} learning outcomes reflects countries’ level of consideration of school education’s function to socialise young people and equip them with competences to function as citizens and workers with a broad range of soft and hard skills. In a few EU countries (e.g. NL, Scot.), non-academic competences, such as civic and social ones, have increasingly been considered in curriculum design and measured in pupils’ assessments. For example, the Scottish Curriculum for Excellence aims to ‘enable every young person to be a successful learner, a confident individual, an effective contributor and a responsible citizen’\textsuperscript{72}. Similarly the German-speaking Community of Belgium establishes that compulsory education must “prepare all students to be responsible citizens, able to contribute to the development of a democratic, pluralist and open society”. This trend is also reflected by proposals to include the measurement of social outcomes as part of the next wave of OECD PISA testing\textsuperscript{73}.

5.3.2 Tension between autonomy and the principle of equity in access to quality education

Another major trend relates to the tension between giving local actors autonomy over school matters and upholding the principle of equity in access to quality education. In some countries where QA has traditionally been strongly decentralised or internally-oriented, there has been a movement towards consolidating some quality assurance measures at national level, e.g. the setting of national standards to achieve greater consistency across the entire school system (e.g. in DK, BE, NL, ES, HU), or system level monitoring processes (e.g. DK). This trend in consolidating QA at system level is partly a response to differences in pupils’ outcomes across the education system. In systems where school and local autonomy is high, system-level quality assurance has an essential role in guaranteeing pupils and parents an appropriate level of equity in access to quality education, regardless of their geographical location.

On the other hand, in countries that have a strong degree of centralisation, some aspects of quality assurance (e.g. school evaluations, the setting of performance targets) have more recently been delegated to school or local level. Paola Mattei notes that in the 1980s and 1990s “State schools in England, Germany, France and Italy have been reformed so as to ensure less hierarchical educational accountability, moving away from mainly centralised systems of controls” and “the decentralisation of state responsibilities...”\textsuperscript{74},\textsuperscript{75}

\textsuperscript{70} Cullen Peter (Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC), Ireland), “Chapter 3: Determining whether intended learning outcomes meet subject-specific and academic and/or professional requirements”, in ENQA, Quality Assurance and Learning Outcomes - workshop report 17, 2010.
\textsuperscript{71} Cedefop, Glossary - Quality in education and training, 2011, p. 65.
\textsuperscript{72} These are the 4 ‘capacities’ which constitute the goal of the recent curricular reform (Curriculum for Excellence).
\textsuperscript{73} Australia measured also social relationships, school connectedness, school climate and other non-academic learning outcomes as part of PISA 2012 and proposed that this is included in the framework for PISA 2015. Source: http://www.acer.edu.au/documents/PISA-2012-Report.pdf
to the regional administrations and schools had led to organisational reforms of schools’ internal governance\textsuperscript{74}. She considers however that in the case of some countries, the "old" hierarchical accountability systems, [had been] only marginally changed by the new systems of performance-based evaluation and decentralised management at the school level" and that whilst “schools have gained legal and juridical ‘autonomy’ and the power of head teachers has been strengthened, […] reforms have been timid in relation to choice and competition reforms”\textsuperscript{75}. Recent examples of the ‘decentralisation’ of certain QA procedures or activities exist in France: In France, since the application in 2006 of the Loi organique n° 2001-692 du 1er août 2001 relative aux lois de finances (LOLF) to the management of the school system following an objective-oriented approach, the role of regional authorities (academie) and schools in co-developing schools’ targets and in measuring their performance has been reinforced.

5.3.3 Needs-based QA

QA can be highly resource-intensive, both on the side of the external actors involved in QA and for the school staff who have to devote time to it. Prioritizing accountability and/or improvement measures for schools facing more difficulties has a strategy in several countries. Some countries have developed risk analysis as a way to differentiate between schools that need a full evaluation from those that do not. For instance, in Northern Ireland, since 2010 the Training Inspectorate has started to use a proportionate and risk-based inspection strategy which will be completed in 2016. Schools have an inspection at least every three years but the length and nature of inspection varies according to the risk rating of the school. Assessment of risk is based on performance indicators such as national test results and the ongoing monitoring of district inspectors. Risk analysis has also been adopted by Denmark, the Netherlands, Sweden and England. Other countries are employing a differentiated approach to prioritise schools with more difficulties. In Belgium (Flemish-speaking community) schools with better developed quality assurance processes will be inspected less regularly. In Lithuania, schools are generally evaluated every 7 years, but when the school performance is poor and the progress insignificant evaluations are carried out more frequently. In Poland and Portugal, although the average frequency is every 5 years, it is shorter (up to 3 years) for schools obtaining a low grade in previous evaluations. In Austria the inspection can carry out a more frequent and detailed monitoring if it identifies problems in a particular school. In Belgium (French-speaking Community) the inspection decides on the frequency of external evaluations, and there are ongoing discussions about the use of the quantitative information by inspectors, for instance for identifying schools more in need of their services.

The adoption of a differentiated approach by which schools with more difficulties are evaluated with a higher frequency reflects a change in the focus from accountability towards school improvement. On the one hand, by reducing inspections of schools with better results, education authorities show trust in the schools’ capacity to maintain quality standards. On the other hand, it releases resources for schools which are more in need of support.

5.3.4 Bringing further coherence into QA systems or approaches

Combining external and internal QA activities is part of a wider movement towards creating coherence in QA systems or approaches, where:

- Dimensions of school quality are defined,
- Indicators to measure the attainment of quality standards exist


\textsuperscript{75} Mattei, Paola. Op.cit.
• Targets and objectives, beyond minimum quality standards, exist,
• QA activities build on each other.

This is further explained under the section in strengths in QA. Coherence in QA can also be achieved by organising QA activities around the so-called “QA cycle” whereby those are organised according to different stages in QA: standard-setting, accountability and improvement phases. In several countries, a quality cycle was already established, notably through the use of the Deming cycle or circle, also known as the PDCA (Plan, Do, Check, Act) cycle. There is evidence that this approach is increasingly being used to organise QA. In Italy, the new National Evaluation System (SNV), to be introduced in the 2014-5 school year, was inspired by the PDCA cycle (case study). Austria, Germany (Saxony) and France have in recent years introduced systems by which the entities responsible for external school evaluations agree on targets, which are followed up, evaluated, and used in the revision of school planning. The box below presents how France’s 2001 Framework Law for Public Finance Laws (LOLF) which modified public finance rules, has effectively introduced a QA framework and QA cycle (although not recognised as such in France) across the different levels of the French school system (central level, academies and schools).

Box 21 Examples of State resources allocation in the French school system under the 2001 Framework Law for Public Finance Laws (LOLF)

The Loi organique n° 2001-692 du 1er août 2001 relative aux lois de finances (LOLF) a so-called organic or framework law, provides a legal and conceptual framework for public finance rules. It has been considered, under the present study, as a QA framework as it effectively introduces a QA cycle across the different levels of the French school system (central level, academies and schools). It has introduced or reinforced new obligations on all actors of the system: from conducting a diagnosis of needs at académie and school levels, to the setting of objectives and targets (in the Annual Performance Projects (PAP)), reflecting on implementing actions and allocating financial and human resources to achieve those. The LOLF also includes processes of monitoring and evaluation of those actions, e.g. in in Annual Performance Reports (RAP) and via the use of performance indicators.

5.3.5 Improving the quality and attractiveness of teaching profession

The quality of teachers and school heads, and related QA processes (e.g. initial education, further training, recruitment and appraisal modes etc.), is widely considered as a key factor of a system’s performance. More so as increased attention has been given to the key role school heads and teachers have in assuring quality and in change management.

Where the quality of teachers and gaps in their initial and/or continuous training have been a concern at system-level, some countries have addressed this, generally by increasing qualification or entry levels or standards in recruitment and appraisals (e.g.

76 Loi organique n° 2001-692 du 1er août 2001 relative aux lois de finances
77 The LOLF does not apply to the budget of French local authorities (“régions” and “départements”) which have their own legal personality, distinct from the State’s.
78 Malinen O.-P et al. (2012) Teacher education in Finland: a review of a national effort for preparing teachers for the future. Curriculum Journal. Vol. 23 Issue 4, p567-584, “It is one of the most frequently cited factors explaining the quality of the Finnish education system and the very good outcomes, such as the highest scores in PISA tests. […] A 2007 McKinsey report states that high-performing school systems are characterized by excellent quality of teachers and teacher education. […] Other meta-analyses prove that teacher quality accounts for a large proportion of the variance in student achievement”. 

Final report
BG, FR, DK, PT), or strengthening the practical orientation of initial training (e.g. FR), or reinforcing continuous training.

**Box 22 Examples of recent reforms that aim at improving the quality of the teaching profession**

In 2014 Bulgaria introduced a model for teacher attestation, based on professional standards, as a basis for professional and career development, and a system for quality control, differentiated payment and professional development.

In Hungary, the ‘teacher training development’ project, managed by the Education Authority and Educatio Ltd., aims to develop a new system of teacher training that corresponds closely to the new system of public education, new curriculum and the new teacher career programme, all recently implemented in the country.

In Portugal, the government has recently introduced a knowledge and competences national test for prospective teachers to be able to work in public schools; it was conducted for the first time in 2014. Also, there is a new regulation on teacher appraisal with the aim of simplifying the process, make it more formative, and introducing national standards.

The quality of teachers, teacher education and further training relates to the attractiveness of the teaching profession. In some countries, the declining level of attractiveness of the teaching profession raises concerns. For example, according to Swedish responses to the OECD’s 2013 TALIS, only 5% teachers reported that teaching is a valued profession in society. Some of those countries concerned have taken steps in response: for example, the recent, 2014-2019 Flemish government agreement includes reforming and improving teachers’ education, and teacher salaries were increased in Sweden in an effort to increase the attractiveness of teacher posts.

**5.3.6 A more contextualised understanding of schools’ performance**

When considering schools’ performances, a trend across countries has been to increase attention to non-school related factors in pupils’ outcomes. Such factors included “family and community social capital, and peer group influence.” For example some countries take the socio-economic characteristics of pupils’ families into account when measuring the contribution of the school to the pupils’ progress since his arrival in class or school.

The school’s contribution to a given pupils’ progress during their school career can be measured via standardised tests. Results in standardised tests allow the measurement of deviation in results from one assessment unit to another (school, local provider, geographical region), or in comparison to the system-level average. Introducing socio-economic weighting of results provides a more sophisticated understanding of performance, as it takes into account differences in schools’ composition. The box below provides some examples.

---


Box 23 Examples of contextualised performance measurement

The Inspectorate of Catalonia has an agreement with other departments to build a database with data on the socio-economic characteristics of students’ families (employment status, level of incomes, education level). The Inspectorate has built an index (from -7 to +7) to classify schools and this information is provided to schools’ head teachers. This helps to contextualise students’ results and analyse the added value of the school.

In England, Ofsted introduced in the mid-2000 a new contextualised value added (CVA) method based on a more complex definition of prior attainment than the simple value added model, together with a range of contextual variables (e.g. gender, ethnicity, age, Free School Meals Eligibility, special education needs, among others) known to affect academic outcomes, to predict the attainment of individual pupils. It then compares each individual’s actual test or examination results against that prediction\textsuperscript{81}.

6 Reflections on potential EU level actions to support national QA efforts in the school sector

Based on the study’s findings, this section provides an overview of scenarios for possible EU-level actions which could support Member States’ QA efforts in the school sector.

The section presents the overall rationale for any EU level actions to support national QA efforts in the school sector. It then provides an overview of existing international and multilateral initiatives in the area of QA in the school sector, and sets an EU level action against those as well as against existing EU level initiatives in the VET and HE sectors. The characteristics of any EU level action in the area are then presented, followed by the added value of any EU level actions. A detailed description of the scenarios is presented in the last sub-section, as well as in Annex 1. The section concludes with reflections on the relevance and feasibility of the proposed scenarios.

6.1 Overall rationale for EU level actions in the area

In May 2014, the Council of Ministers recognised in its Conclusions\(^{82}\) the need for Member States to develop a proper culture of quality enhancement in teaching and learning which can raise standards and improve learning outcomes. It then invited the European Commission to explore ways to support Member States’ QA efforts including in the school sector.

Considering weaknesses and gaps, identified by this study, in how QA is conducted across EU school systems, as well as the evidence of effective QA and contributing factors, EU level actions could contribute to:

- Improve QA arrangements and the QA culture across EU school systems and especially in those countries where those are weak, thus contributing to lifting up the level of quality of national school systems across the EU,
- Increase transparency on existing QA policies, procedures and practices, to the benefit of intra-EU mobility for EU school actors (teachers, pupils etc.).

To be relevant and useful, any actions at EU level would need to:

- add value to existing national, regional/local and international initiatives;
- be cost-effective, so that effects are appropriate in relation to costs incurred. At this stage the scenarios are insufficiently develop to make a judgement on this aspect.

6.2 Existing actions in the area of QA in education systems

Cooperation at EU level on QA in the school sector would support current EU strategic orientations, such as the "Education and Training 2020“ (ET 2020) strategic framework for Member States’ cooperation in education and training, which aims to ensure that all young people and adults in the EU have the possibility to access good quality education and develop skills and competences required in modern societies. ET 2020 specifically aims to improve the quality and efficiency of education and training and address educational disadvantage through high quality inclusive and early education\(^{83}\).

The box below presents existing international or multi-national initiatives in the area of QA in the school sector, which an EU level action could build from or complement.

---


\(^{83}\) http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/education_training_youth/general_framework/ef0016_en.htm
Box 24 Existing international or multi-national initiatives in the area of QA in the school sector

- Significant work on inspection processes conducted by the Standing International Conference of national and regional Inspectorates of education (SICI). SICI comprises members from 17 EU countries and engages them in regular exchanges on inspection practices\(^\text{84}\) that are one key element of countries’ QA systems.
- Some countries have already set up transnational networks to exchange information and practices about QA in school education. For example, exchanges are already taking place between German-speaking countries including Germany, Luxembourg, Belgium and Switzerland. Another example is the ‘Qualeduc’ initiative\(^\text{85}\) involving best-practice exchanges on school self-evaluation between relevant stakeholders from France, Austria, Hungary and Romania.
- A recent OECD initiative which analyses the role of socio-emotional skills in social progress, and proposes strategies to raise those\(^\text{86}\). Results will soon be published in a report on ‘Skills for Social Progress: The Power of Social and Emotional Skills’.

Finally, steps at EU level had already been taken to improve QA in the VET and HE sectors, despite some initial difficulties in establishing common ground. EU level cooperation on QA in the school sector could build on this previous experience. The box below presents relevant EU tools which support the transparency and recognition of individuals’ skills, competences and qualifications, and which have a QA purpose.

Box 25 EU tools to support the transparency and recognition of individuals’ skills, competences and qualifications

- The European Qualifications Frameworks (EQF)\(^\text{87}\) encourages countries to put in place qualifications systems that are based on learning outcomes (expressing what a person knows and is able to do when s/he holds a given qualification);
- The Recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning\(^\text{88}\) recommends that countries should make sure that individuals’ have the possibility to demonstrate what they have learnt outside the formal education system and for these skills and competences to be recognised in view of further education and training or career progression;
- Work on credit systems in higher education and VET (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS)\(^\text{89}\) and European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET)\(^\text{90}\)) is intended to support the recognition and transfer of achieved skills and competences across education systems and institutions. The basic idea behind both systems is that if an individual has already acquired some knowledge, skills and competences, this should be recognised in view of his/her

\(^{84}\) SICI organises regular workshops on a variety of topics related to QA in the school sector, such as ‘How to go with the data flow’, ‘Inspecting school quality: social outcomes of education’, ‘sustaining school improvement after feedback’. More information available at: http://www.sici-inspectorates.eu/Activities/SICI-Workshops
\(^{86}\) http://www.oecd.org/edu/ceri/educationandsocialprogress.htm
\(^{87}\) http://ec.europa.eu/eqf/home_en.htm
\(^{89}\) http://ec.europa.eu/education/tools/ects_en.htm
further learning.

- Europass\(^{91}\) consists of a series of templates that help people document their qualifications, skills and competences and work experience in a standardised manner across the EU; and

- The European Skills, Competence, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO)\(^{92}\) terminology is intended to help education and training and labour market sectors to better match education programmes to labour market requirements and personal profiles to job requirements through a common taxonomy.

### 6.3 The characteristics of any potential EU level actions in the area

Any EU level actions in support of national QA efforts in the school sector would need to respect the subsidiarity principle as well the diversity of Member States’ education systems, as per Article 165 paragraph 1 of the Lisbon Treaty which states that: *The Union shall contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging cooperation between Member States and, if necessary, by supporting and supplementing their action, while fully respecting the responsibility of the Member States for the content of teaching and the organisation of education systems and their cultural and linguistic diversity*\(^{93}\).

Considering the EU’s legal competence in the field of education, two broad categories of actions at EU level are available:

- Policy level cooperation within the Open Method of Coordination in education and training (ET 2020). Cooperation under the OMC is voluntary thus the EU can develop actions to support national efforts in favour of QA in the school sector, but it is up to Member States to decide whether they participate in those or not. Cooperation activities under the Open Method of Coordination. Examples of such activities are: the measurement of performance on the basis of an agreed set of indicators for EU-level comparisons (some already exist as part of ET2020); the co-development of common principles or guidelines for national QA systems; the exchange of good practices; peer-reviews; training, awareness raising, information and communication activities, etc.;

- EU funding to support transnational activities related to QA in the school sector, or activities at national, regional or local level focused on the attainment of EU objectives. EU support to QA in the school sector thus could be integrated in new or existing programmes. The box below presents existing available funding. Such activities can involve local as well as system-level stakeholders. Examples of such activities are: social experimentation, development of innovative models, transfer of innovative practice, etc.

#### Box 26 Funding possibilities

- The Erasmus + programme 2014-2020 can provide: (1) Support for intra-EU mobility (Key Action 1) of school staff (including school leader)\(s\) or inspectors and (2) Support for trans-national capacity-building projects under Key Action 2 strategic

---

\(^{91}\) http://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/en/home

\(^{92}\) https://ec.europa.eu/esco/home

partnerships, including support to the development of methods, tools and materials etc. 94

- The European Social Fund 2014-2020 provides Member States the opportunity to include QA in the school sector in their Operational Programmes. Some countries such as the Czech Republic have already made it a priority of their Partnership Agreement under ESF to support initiatives to improve the quality of all levels of education 95, including enhancing the quality of school education.

- Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation programme 2014-2020 can possibly fund research-oriented initiatives about the quality of school education under the section dedicated to ‘Societal Challenges – Europe in a changing world: Inclusive, innovative and reflective societies’ 96.

### 6.4 The added value of potential EU level actions

As a reminder the key common weaknesses in QA in EU school systems identified by the study are:

- In several countries, system-level actors face difficulties in formulating or ensuring effective implementation of QA policies or activities.

- In other countries, the performance of certain areas of school education is insufficiently monitored, or information is weak or not used for further improvements.

- In other countries, the effectiveness of QA in maintaining and improving quality is insufficiently monitored, or information is weak or not used for further improvements.

- In other countries, school leaders and teachers lack capacity / incentives to properly implement QA activities and use their results, or have faced difficulties in implementing certain QA activities.

This section presents the added value of working on those issues at EU level.

Firstly, providing space at EU level to support QA efforts in the school sector will put the issue of QA in the school sector on national agendas. Signalling this is an issue which has been picked up on at EU level would likely incentivise Member States to consider it further. Secondly, the EU is in a unique position to address this issues by:

- Providing a platform to reflect on the issue and learn from experience and existing best practices across more than 28 different school systems. Indeed it can mobilise

94 “Erasmus+ aims to improve the quality of teaching and learning from pre-primary through to secondary level in schools across Europe. It will provide opportunities for people working in school education to develop their professional skills and to work together with partners in Europe. Activities support the sharing of good practice and testing of innovative approaches that address shared challenges, such as early school leaving or poor levels of basic skills. Activities can foster links with the world outside school and other fields of education and training. Opportunities for staff to undertake European professional development activities abroad, including: (1) Structured courses or training; (2) Teaching assignments; (3) Job shadowing or observations. Cooperation between schools or other organisations: Establish international strategic partnerships to co-operate on issues of shared interest. Cooperation between schools (e-Twinning): Teachers can network and run joint classroom projects with colleagues in Europe, access learning resources and take part in professional development opportunities. The following organisations in participating countries can take part: (1) Schools (pre-primary through to secondary level); (2) Local and regional authorities that are responsible for school education; (3) Any other organisation active in the field of school education”. http://ec.europa.eu/education/opportunities/school/index_en.htm. “For projects relevant for the field of school education, the main targets are: school leaders, school teachers and school staff, pupils in pre-primary, primary and secondary education”, Erasmus+ Programme Guide, http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/documents/erasmus-plus-programme-guide_en.pdf

95 http://ec.europa.eu/esf/main.jsp?catId=67&langId=en&newsId=8360

the capacity and expertise of relevant stakeholders – policy-makers, academic experts and practitioners – in all interested Member States.

- Provide financial support to this area.

More precisely, system level stakeholders would have a space to reflect on how QA systems can be shaped to work effectively and according to which guiding principles. National stakeholders could learn from best practice on how to organise existing policies, procedures, activities or practices as part of consistent QA system or cycle. Considering the trend identified by this study that some countries are taking steps to further embed the formative function of QA into their QA approaches, and others less so, EU level actions could make the case for strengthening the formative function of QA. EU level actions could also make the case for covering areas of school education overlooked in some QA systems. Discussions at EU level could incorporate coverage of areas insufficiently ‘quality assured’ and considering them holistically. National stakeholders could learn from existing best practice, and thus build their capacity and knowledge. EU level action could strengthen the evidence base, pulling in knowledge from experts across the EU, or supporting comparative analyses across systems. Evidence or tools produced at EU level would fill in a gap which exists in several countries. Finally to ensure that school level stakeholders, who are the key ‘agents’ of change, are engaged in QA activities or policies and able to apply them, transnational peer learning and other capacity-building capacities could be organised at EU level, with the expectation that they would lead to changes in practices and behaviours, more in tune with the intentions of QA activities.

According to different school system’s ‘advancement’ in the area of QA, some countries will be more interested in learning from other’s experiences, or receiving financial support in this area, than others. Any EU level actions are likely be more relevant to countries where gaps and weaknesses in QA in the school sector exist, or where little attention and few resources have been given to the area. Support available at EU level would then be most relevant to countries where capacity building of system level or/school-level actors in QA is not available or sufficient, or even on national agendas.

Learning from good practice available in other countries is also mostly relevant to countries where the QA and school evaluation culture is weak, or where opportunities to learn about existing effective QA are few. Building evidence at EU level of the (1) performance of areas of school education traditionally insufficiently considered in existing QA systems, or of (2) the level effectiveness of different QA policies, procedures or activities, in maintaining and improving quality, would also be mostly relevant to countries where needs exist and are not covered at national level. This being said, there is value of learning from the experience in other QA systems even for countries with more consolidated QA systems, provided associated costs do not outweigh the benefits.

Whilst under the OMC the EU can provide opportunities for cooperation at EU level, whether those are seized or not will depend on Member States’ needs and interest in taking part in an action at EU level. This will also vary according to countries’ understanding of what QA in the school sector is and how important it is to meet quality standards and objectives.

### 6.5 Seven proposed EU action scenarios

Based on the study’s findings and on discussions held at the two expert workshops, seven scenarios for EU level action have been developed. They are presented in the overview table below. A more detailed description is presented in annex 1.

The seven EU action scenarios are:

- Scenario 1 - Identification of common EU guiding principles to QA in the school sector
- Scenario 2 - EU level exchanges on existing QA practices
- Scenario 3 - Support to research on QA in the school sector
- Scenario 4 - Support to the measurement of the social outcomes of school education
- Scenario 5 - Capacity building of school-level actors in QA
- Scenario 6 - Support to school's self-assessment
- Scenario 7 - Peer review programme on QA practices.

The following is to be noted:

- The first three scenarios target system-level stakeholders whilst the last three target school-level stakeholders.
- Scenarios 6 and 7 can be considered as sub-scenarios of scenario 5. Indeed scenario 6 is about capacity building for one type of QA activity, i.e. self-assessment. Scenario 7 on the other hand concerns one type of capacity-building activity, i.e. peer reviews.
Table 6.1 Overview of the scenarios

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identified weakness</th>
<th>EU action scenario</th>
<th>EU added value</th>
<th>Expected outputs and outcomes</th>
<th>Tools/means/resources</th>
<th>Potential benefits</th>
<th>Potential challenges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Action scenarios targeting system-level stakeholders</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulties faced by some EU countries in formulating or implementing QA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Scenario 1: Agreement on common EU guiding principles to QA in the school sector. | Provide a space at EU level for interested national stakeholders to discuss common EU guiding principles to QA. | Guiding principles agreed on at EU level could provide positive 'inspiration' for national stakeholders to consider when designing and implementing QA. | • Participation would be voluntary  
• System-level actors (e.g. policy-makers, inspectors with system-level overview) would be the more relevant category to involve in the discussion  
• The group(s) could meet and discuss over a certain period in expert groups or workshops or another meeting format.  
• Discussion could start from the findings of the present study. | • Co-development and consultation process would lead to engagement, ownership of those principles  
• Support to the development of a QA and evaluation culture in the school sector, especially in countries where this is limited | • The process could be perceived as 'top-down' by school-level actors  
• Process could be considered as intrusive by some EU MS  
• Principles would need to be meaningful and not generic to maximise changes of them being used  
• Agreement on guiding principles to QA may be difficult to reach due to the divergence in national QA approaches  
• Support may be needed to apply the principles |
| Scenario 2 – EU level exchanges on existing QA policies, procedures and practices | Providing the opportunity for learning from existing effective QA in some EU MS | High quality reflections on effective QA in the school sector could lead to policy learning and ultimately to the transfer of practices | • Activities could be: presentations of countries practices, city visits, peer-to-peer exchanges, peer reviews  
• Exchanges could be organised by theme, e.g. consolidation of the QA framework, measurement of effects of QA, use of QA results,  
• Exchanges could take place amongst countries with similar approaches to QA or similar school systems or by language groups.  
• To be impactful, the exchanges should involve system-level actors mainly. | • Efficiency gains by giving national stakeholders access to successful practices in the field of QA  
• Exchanges should lead to tangible outputs  
• Take-up of best practices is likely to vary, partly due to some limitations to transferability  
• Value-for-money of the exchanges should be considered |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identified weakness</th>
<th>EU action scenario</th>
<th>EU added value</th>
<th>Expected outputs and outcomes</th>
<th>Tools/means/resources</th>
<th>Potential benefits</th>
<th>Potential challenges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shortcomings at national level in evidence of (1) the performance of certain areas of school education and of (2) the effectiveness of QA in maintaining and improving quality</td>
<td>Scenario 3 – Support to research on QA in the school sector</td>
<td>EU level support to research; ‘Support to evidence creation’. Most relevant to countries where evidence on the effects of QA is lacking</td>
<td>Evidence creation would support evidence-based decision-taking and policy-making. • EU (co-) funding of evaluations, or research at EU or MS level on the effectiveness of specific quality assurance tools and activities, or of the results of specific QA policies, procedures and practices. • Findings from the research could be publicly accessible. • Research outputs could lead to the development of measurement tools or other QA tools. • Universities or consortia could conduct the research work</td>
<td>• Evidence on the effects of QA would support evidence-based and less politically influenced decision-making • Independence and rigour of researchers will give credibility to the research • Public availability of the research, if decided on, would add to accountability structures • Research could build on existing work from OECD and SICI</td>
<td>• The quality and robustness of the research method, sources etc. would have to be high for research outputs to be used • Targeting of participant countries (the most in need) would have to be paid attention to • Limits in availability of longitudinal data to measure the effects of QA on quality over time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insufficient focus given in most EU countries to the measurement of non-academic, social outcomes of school education</td>
<td>Scenario 4 – Support to the measurement of the social outcomes of school education</td>
<td>Attention to the social outcomes of school education is a general trend, supported by social partners. EU level support would signal this is an important issue on the agenda and incentivise MS to pay attention to it.</td>
<td>Development of concepts or tools to consider or measure the social outcomes of school education</td>
<td>• Tools or concepts developed through EU support would be available to national stakeholders to use • Tools and concepts could be developed by academics or consortia, or by national experts.</td>
<td>• Evidence produced would complement PISA’s measurement of basic skills attainment/academic achievement. • Would lead to a more comprehensive overview of the performance of a school system, • Action would build on existing OECD and SICI projects</td>
<td>• Current initiatives driven by the OEDC, SICI and Australia • Perhaps perceived as intrusive by some Member States • Tools, concepts and data produced would need to be user-friendly, or supported by accompanying measure, to maximize chance of usage • Potentially resource-intensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Identified weakness</strong></td>
<td><strong>EU action scenario</strong></td>
<td><strong>EU added value</strong></td>
<td><strong>Expected outputs and outcomes</strong></td>
<td><strong>Tools/means/resources</strong></td>
<td><strong>Potential benefits</strong></td>
<td><strong>Potential challenges</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In several countries, school leaders and teachers lack capacity / incentives to engage in QA activities and use their results, or have faced difficulties in implementing certain QA activities</td>
<td>Scenario 5 – Capacity building of school-level actors in QA</td>
<td>EU level support to capacity-building to school level actors is especially relevant in countries where this is not available or sufficient</td>
<td>Build the capacity of school leaders, teachers and their supervisory authorities at local level (where relevant) to conduct QA and initiate changes as a result</td>
<td>• EU (co-) funding to, e.g. the inclusion of QA elements in initial teacher/head teacher training, or in continuous training, or in participation by school actors’ to trans-national exchanges on QA practices; or in the provision of support to the use of online resources. • Capacity-building would target school leaders and decision-makers within schools. • It could be provided by cluster of countries with the same needs and with similar approaches to QA, or in the same language group (German, French, English etc.).</td>
<td>Effects on practices at school level are more likely to be immediate than those involving system-level actors. • EU level support could also prompt reflections at national level. • could build on what Erasmus + has funded in the area/can fund</td>
<td>Effects could be limited to participating schools • Action would need to be coherent with other developments at system level in participating countries More likely impact in countries where autonomy is higher and school agents have limited where school agents have room to introduce changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Scenario 6 – EU level support to school level actors’ capacity to engage in self-assessment.</td>
<td>Learning from good practice available in other countries is esp. relevant in countries where the self-assessment culture is weak.</td>
<td>School actors’ capacity to engage in self-assessment has improved and best practices have been transferred at the level of schools</td>
<td>Support could be to the promotion of good practice exchanges, or the funding of projects between schools and local authorities to strengthen methods and approaches to schools’ self-assessment, or via other support (e.g. IT resources, training/coaching, international groups of interest etc.). • Focus could be put on school leaders.</td>
<td>Learning from ‘practical’ good practice supports reflective practices • initiative could raise the profile of ‘good practice’ or ‘innovative’ schools</td>
<td>Effects could be limited to participating schools Action would need to be coherent with other developments at system level in participating countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Scenario 7 – Peer review programme on QA practices</td>
<td>EU level support to learning from peers is esp. relevant in countries where this is not available or sufficient</td>
<td>Having Schools, local authorities and system-level actors learn from the experience of QA in other countries could build their knowledge base and capacity to engage in QA.</td>
<td>• Having different QA procedures and practices be evaluated by peers, e.g. have inspectors from one country critically evaluate school inspection in another • Standards against which the peer reviews will be conducted would need to be agreed on. • Peer-reviews could take place within systems which share similar characteristics (level of autonomy of</td>
<td>Potential transfer of good practices across countries. • Networking effect is an outcome in itself. • Likely immediate to medium-term effect.</td>
<td>Effects could be limited to participating schools. • Targeting of participants (the most in need) would have to be paid attention to</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Final report**

89
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identified weakness</th>
<th>EU action scenario</th>
<th>EU added value</th>
<th>Expected outputs and outcomes</th>
<th>Tools/means/resources</th>
<th>Potential benefits</th>
<th>Potential challenges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- A mechanism could be introduced to identify actors ‘most in need of this support’,
- Sustainability of effects could be supported via dissemination activities at national and at EU level.

ICF analysis
Having presented the scenarios in the table above and in Annex 1, the study has therefore put forward seven potential EU level actions which would address current gaps, common to several EU countries (although not to all, and, also, to varying degrees).

Incorporating feedback from the experts (gathered at the study’s two workshops), ICF considered the scenarios’ feasibility, relevance and added value. The following points can be made, to guide further reflections:

- The relevance of EU level actions will vary according to countries’ starting points and needs, but also to their interest and priorities. For example, research or credible evidence on the effects of different QA policies, procedures and practices is severely lacking in some countries and less in others. Similarly research findings would allow less politically influenced decision-making which is more of an issue in some countries than in others, or discussion on common EU guiding principles to QA is less useful in countries which have already defined guiding principles.

- EU level actions involving system-level actors or measures (scenarios 1 to 3) are more likely to be impactful than those involving school level actors. Indeed the effects of an EU level action are likely to be wider and more sustainable when system-level actors are involved directly and can therefore directly feedback knowledge and competences acquired at system level (rather than at school level). It is however also important to include views from school level actors (parents, local authorities, professional bodies, pupils) on the practices discussed.

- Scenarios which target school level actors (scenarios 5 to 7) are considered to be less likely to be sufficiently impactful. Effects would be limited to the schools and actors which benefit from the EU level action. Moreover, to be impactful and sustainable, the results of those EU-level actions at school level would need to be coherent with existing QA orientations at system-level in beneficiary countries. Countries where support to school level actors in the area of QA is a priority issue would however benefit from an EU level action which would target them, rather than system level actors. It is important to consider the impact of such activities and sustainability of their effects however and whether such forms of support should be best conducted at local or national level, rather than at EU level. A way to maximise the impact of the scenarios which target school level actors would be to include dissemination activities, at EU and country level, to ensure that the results of such school-level actions are known and can be transferred further.

- Policy learning and the potential for transfer of best practice would be maximised and cost-effective if exchanges occurred amongst clusters of countries with similar approaches to QA and/or school system characteristics (level of autonomy, competition etc.)

- Targeting support is also important to ensure that countries or stakeholder groups ‘most-in-need’ of support on QA benefit from the proposed EU level actions. This would maximise the potential such EU actions have to ‘lift up’ the quality of QA across EU school systems.

- Sequencing some the proposed EU-level actions is a possible way forward. For example EU-level support to research on QA (scenario 3) could precede the Identification of common EU guiding principles to QA in the school sector (scenario 1) as it would provide robust evidence base to build discussions (under scenario 1) on.
• The proposed EU level action aimed at considering the social outcomes of school education seems less relevant in view of current initiatives driven by the OECD, SICI and Australia (see details under Scenario 4 in annex 1) to do this. Nevertheless including social outcomes in conversations around QA could be included in other EU level actions, and would signal that is important and for Member States to consider.
7 Conclusions

A mandate was given to the Commission by the Council of EU Ministers in May 2014\textsuperscript{97} to support Member States to develop their quality assurance arrangements to raise standards in all education sectors and improve learning outcomes. This study is the first step to identify the state of play of QA in EU school systems, as well as current needs which could be addressed by actions at EU level. To do this, the study looked at the main characteristics of QA systems and approaches which exist in EU 28 school educational systems. It identified the drivers of those QA systems and approaches, the activities and tools which make them up, and actors involved. On this basis, the study was able to identify the recent trends, key strengths and weaknesses of QA systems across the EU. In addition, it examined the results and outcomes of effective QA. Based on this evidence, the study considered various scenarios for EU level action which could add value to existing efforts to address those key issues and support effective QA in school education in Europe.

The study first found that in most EU countries the term ‘quality assurance’ is not used as such in the school sector\textsuperscript{98}. Stakeholders consulted for this study tend to know specific QA activities or processes (e.g. inspections, external school evaluation, teacher appraisals) without necessarily referring to them as such or understanding them as part of a QA system or cycle. In certain countries the term ‘QA’ is associated with the ‘industrialisation of learning’ or to performance-based management and other private sector terminology. For some within the education sector these terms are viewed negatively and not deemed to be relevant to what they do. Framing the discussion around QA in the school sector would allow relevant stakeholders understand that what they are already doing is in fact QA. In addition some benefits could accrue from ‘re-labelling’ existing activities as QA ones. For example stakeholders could conceptualise different activities, with a QA function, as part of a QA system or a QA cycle, and thus maximise their potential use for accountability and improvement purposes. This could also have an impact on the effectiveness of different activities, tools and policies in how they are designed and then implemented. Framing the discussion around QA could be realised by using QA terminology in policy or guidance documents and within the policy discourse.

The study identified a wide range of policies, activities, processes and practices employed in EU countries to maintain and improve ‘quality’ in school education. Some relate to the setting of standards and objectives (e.g. curriculum development, definition of learning outcomes), others to accountability (e.g. teacher or pupils’ assessments, school evaluations) and others to quality improvement (e.g. update of teaching standards, reform of teaching qualifications). This is often based on whether the summative (accountability) or formative (improvement) function of QA is favoured in a given system. The study found that in many countries, QA systems often give most weight to regulation and control aspects rather than what might be termed ‘smart regulation’ whereby both regulation and self-regulation are integrated in a cycle of improvement. QA systems are likely to be most effective when both functions, summative and formative, are complementary and mutually reinforcing. Ensuring that actors and the system as a whole are held accountable for remedial and improvement measures taken to address weaknesses identified is key. Integrating formative QA also ensures that existing ‘standards for quality’ and objectives are updated and adapted to emerging needs and challenges, and that practices to do this are also continuously improved. The trends identified by this study illustrate that some countries are already

\textsuperscript{97} Ibid. p. 6.

\textsuperscript{98} Unlike in the higher education or VET sector where QA is a more established language.
taking steps to embed the formative function of QA into their QA approaches, others less so.

The study also found that, most frequently, countries focus most of their QA efforts on certain areas of education – namely (1) learning outcomes, (2) the quality of teachers, (3) the school education context – and less so on others. How thoroughly other areas of education are ‘quality assured’ varies by country. Some areas can also be considered narrowly. For example attention to learning outcomes is generally limited to academic outcomes, when growing attention is being given to the importance of the social outcomes of school education to ensure that young people are fully equipped to thrive in society. Encouraging countries to pour resources into the QA of all areas, or of areas which are generally less of a focus, would increase the ‘coverage’ of QA efforts. This means that, for example, school climate would be paid attention to, hand-in-hand with the quality of teaching or of school leadership, or the quality of teaching and learning methods/pedagogies would be considered alongside the quality of teacher training. It would also encourage stakeholders to consider QA more holistically, so that it is recognised that quality improvements in one area of school education has an impact on quality in another area. Finally, paying attention to social outcomes of school education would lead to a more comprehensive overview of the performance of a school system. This should ultimately have an effect in terms of improvements in the ‘quality’ and performance of the overall school system.

Finally, good practice points to QA systems which also include tools to assess changes in practices and behaviours and the impact of the QA process on specific outcomes, e.g. positive effects on teaching and learning, on school and system management and performance measurement, or improvements in the QA and evaluation culture. The absence of such monitoring systems results in a weak evidence base for what works in QA to impact the level of quality achieved. The study found that in most countries the evidence on the effectiveness of different QA activities is in fact weak. This prevents systems’ ability to critically reflect and determine levers to activate to improve the quality of relevant areas of school education.

To conclude, EU Member States should be encouraged to consolidate their QA system, which would include a formative function and be organised alongside a ‘QA cycle’. A consolidated QA system defines dimensions of school education to be ‘quality assured’, includes indicators to measure the attainment of quality standards (as well as targets), and different QA activities build on each other in a coherent manner and work towards the same objectives. QA systems should also cover a wide array of areas of school education so that improvements in the quality in one area (e.g. teacher training) are recognised to have a positive effect on another area of education (e.g. pupils’ assessments). This would ensure that all actors direct their efforts towards the same quality objectives, that the results of different QA activities build on each other, in a coherent continuum, and that results are used for to adapt different areas of school education to emerging needs and challenges (updating teacher training, teaching methods etc.). For this to occur it is also essential that systems include mechanisms to monitor the effect of different activities on practices. The study found that factors contributing to the consolidation of QA systems are (1) the availability of adequate resources - economic and human ones, including competences), (2) the existence of a coherent policy orientation which supports QA, (3) alignment with other educational policies, (4) an appropriate level of autonomy of schools and local authorities.

Looking at what an EU level action could do to support some of the trends mentioned or address some of the weaknesses identified, scenario 1 “Identification of common EU guiding principles to QA in the school sector” and scenario 2 “EU level exchanges on existing QA practices” could provide a space at EU level for interested system level
stakeholders to reflect on how QA systems can be shaped to work effectively, and, according to which guiding principles. The case for strengthening the formative function of QA could also be made in EU level discussions and actions. National stakeholders could learn from best practice on how to organise existing policies, procedures, activities or practices as part of consistent QA system or cycle, and thus build their capacity and knowledge. Finally including social outcomes of school education in conversations at EU level around QA (scenario 4 “support to the measurement of the social outcomes of school education”) would signal this is an important issue on the agenda and incentivise MS to pay attention to the social outcomes.

Alongside improving QA systems, efforts also need to put into ensuring that the system is effectively implemented in practice. Indeed, whilst it is important to ensure that QA policies, activities and tools designed at system-level are fit-for-purpose and usable, it is also key to engage school leaders and teachers as the key ‘agents of change’ (regardless of the level of school autonomy in a given country). School actors have a key role in closing the gap between legal requirements and practice, in creating a quality / self-assessment culture in schools, in avoiding perverse effects of certain QA activities (e.g. "teaching to the test", competitive environment etc.), or in ensuring that results of different QA activities are exploited for formative purposes.

To ensure that school level actors are engaged, the study found that the first step was to involve them at system-level in the design of QA activities they hold a stake in. This can encompass parents, pupils, teachers, school heads, but also local authorities, advisory bodies, higher education or VET institutions and employers, which ‘benefit’ from the outcomes of school education. A process of broad consultation of school level actors is likely to lead to QA policies and activities being better designed, understood and implemented as they would have provided feedback on their ‘fitness for purpose’ and usability (e.g. are they measuring ‘what matters’ and are they doing so properly). On the contrary, when stakeholders are poorly consulted, this can lead to confusion over the purpose of QA policies, activities and tools, as well as weak ownership of those. Factors for Member States to take into account in relation to this point are (1) the clarity in the communication of the goals, procedures and expected outcomes of QA policies and activities and (5) fluency of the dialogue between system-level actors and school-level actors, as the key actors of change.

For QA activities to be effectively implemented school level actors must also be sufficiently trained and incentivised. For example, school leaders and teachers need to be trained to acquire the skills to design and implement school development plans, or school leaders’ efforts to engage an entire school community alongside a school project, recognised. The study found however that in several countries school level actors lack of capacity to properly conduct QA activities and/ or to utilise their results, and that this insufficiently addressed. Some positive trends to curb this exist e.g. needs-based QA, improving the quality and attractiveness of the teaching profession, increasing school and local autonomy in QA whilst paying attention to equity in access to quality education. However Member States should be encouraged to engage school level actors further to make sure they provide valuable inputs in the design of QA policies and activities, and are also equipped to implement them effectively in schools.

Three of the study’s proposed EU scenarios target school-level actors to address this issue. Scenarios 5 to 7 target school-level stakeholders and propose actions aimed at their capacity building99. Transnational peer learning and other capacity-building

---

99 Scenario 5 - Capacity building of school-level actors in QA; Scenario 6 - Support to school’s self-assessment; Scenario 7 - Peer review programme on QA practices.
capacities can lead to changes in practices and behaviours, more in tune with the intentions of QA activities.

Taken together, the study suggests that EU level actions involving system-level actors are more likely to lead to wide impact than those involving school level actors. Indeed, effects (e.g. knowledge and competences acquired) are likely to be more sustainable when they can be fed back into system-level policies or guidance. This being said, it is important that scenarios involving system level actors also consider the views and interests of school level actors. Also, in some countries, supporting school level actors may be the priority. It would then be to be seen whether an EU level action would be the most appropriate to address this, or whether a national or local one would be. Finally, policy learning and the potential for transfer of best practice would be maximised and cost-effective if exchanges occurred amongst clusters of countries with similar approaches to QA and/or school system characteristics (level of autonomy, competition etc.). Additionally, targeting support is also important to ensure that countries or stakeholder groups ‘most-in-need’ of support on QA benefit from the proposed EU level actions. This would maximise the potential such EU actions have to ‘lift up’ the quality of QA in the school sector across the EU.
Annex 1 Scenarios of potential EU level actions

Scenario 1 – Identification of common EU guiding principles to QA in the school sector

Gaps/opportunity - In view of the diversity of QA systems and approaches across the EU and of current strengths, weaknesses and gaps related to those, guiding principles agreed on at EU level could provide positive ‘inspiration’ for national stakeholders to consider when designing or implementing QA policies, procedures and activities. An agreement on common EU guiding principles to QA in the school sector could pave the way for agreement on a common EU-level strategy on QA in the school sector.

Type of action - This action is about holding a discussion at EU level on the guiding principles for Quality Assurance in the school sector. An expected result of such a discussion would be an agreement on common EU guiding principles.

The discussion on such principles could be based on the study’s findings on the critical factors for effective QA and on general trends in QA, i.e. the importance of the formative function of QA, stakeholder involvement, evidence-based policy-making, needs-based QA; coherence of orientation across QA measures etc.

The output of such a discussion could be a common guidance document. It could also include examples of best practices and tools from countries which already successfully apply some of those guiding principles. National stakeholders would then be able to refer to this guidance document to formulate and implement QA initiatives.

Description

- The discussion would take place at EU level amongst a group(s) of national stakeholders. Its composition (e.g. academic researchers and practitioners (e.g. inspection body, teacher representatives, officials from local authorities, the central administration) and identification mode (e.g. nominated by the Ministry of education or other) are open and to be determined. Discussions at the study’s workshop suggested that a mix of competences, backgrounds and experience were generally a good practice but that system-level actors (e.g. policy-makers, inspectors with system-level overview) would be the more relevant category.
- The group(s) could meet and discuss over a certain period in expert groups or workshops or another meeting format. Other consultation means to reach out to a wider pool, especially at levels closer to schools, could also be considered, e.g. surveys or call for written contributions.

Potential strengths or benefits

- The co-development and consultation process would secure a certain level of engagement, ownership and commitment from Member States towards using those principles. It would also give it legitimacy.
- Having relevant national stakeholders (identification to be discussed) agree on strategic orientations or guiding principles to underlie QA efforts across the EU is an opportunity to lift up the quality of schools sectors across the EU. This discussion would support the emergence or development at national level of a QA and evaluation culture in the school sector, especially in countries where this remains limited. This could also create efficiency gains by giving national stakeholders access to successful practices in the field of QA.
- This action could contribute to synergies with other EU instruments in the area of quality assurance.

**Potential weaknesses or limitations**

- The process may be considered as too top-down.
- To be useful, the principles would need to be meaningful and not generic, despite the diversity of EU situations.
- Agreement on guiding principles to QA may be difficult to reach due to the divergence in national QA approaches and values which underpin those (e.g. ‘market’ versus State accountability, importance of transparency of performance data etc., of quality improvement via competition over collaboration).
- There is no guarantee that the guiding principles, or any outputs of the discussion at EU level on those, will be used as there are not tied to any legal obligations.
- Related to the latter, national stakeholders may need more support in applying those guiding principles to the specificities of their school systems.
- Some national stakeholders may challenge the value of discussing EU common principles as they have conducted similar exercises at national level.
- The process and outputs may be considered as intrusive or too prescriptive by some stakeholders, especially those categories which would not have been sufficiently consulted, or from certain Member States.
- The agreement and co-development process is lengthy.

**EU Added Value**

- Provide a space at EU level for interested national stakeholders to discuss common EU guiding principles to QA. The EU is in a unique position to mobilise the capacity and expertise of relevant stakeholders in all interested Member States.
- Most useful for some countries, e.g. some have already defined guiding principles, others have not and would benefit most from this.

---

**Scenario 2 – EU level exchanges on existing QA practices**

**Gaps/opportunity** - Some EU countries encounter difficulties in formulating or in implementation QA policies, procedures and activities (e.g. school internal evaluation), or in bringing coherence to a QA system (e.g. in implementing different policies, procedures or activities consistently and coherently across different educational units (schools, local authorities)). Other countries could benefit from learning from existing QA practices in other school systems. Exchanges at EU level on existing QA practices could help address those needs.

**Type of action** – This action concerns exchanges on national QA practices in the school sector. Such exchanges could take place within one or more group(s) working on different QA themes or measures, e.g. external inspections, pupils’ assessments, system-level evaluations, stakeholder engagement, etc. Relevant categories of stakeholders to engage in such best practice exchanges – are to be determined. They could include a mix of national practitioners, policymakers, and/or academic researchers.

**Description** – In order to be relevant, this action should build on and not duplicate existing similar initiatives. A fact-finding exercise on existing initiatives and Member
States involved could therefore be a first step in developing this action.

The exchanges could take place amongst groups of national stakeholders organised according to countries with similar approaches to QA (formative/summative, external/internal orientation, etc.) or similar school systems (e.g. level of autonomy, level of competition etc.). This would ensure that best practices exchanged could also be transferred. On the other hand, discussions held at the study’s workshops indicated that there was also interest in learning from experience from QA in different systems.

Activities could include: presentations of countries practices, city visits, peer-to-peer exchanges, peer reviews etc. Exchanges could be organised by theme, e.g. consolidation of the QA framework, measurement of effects of QA, use of QA data and results, etc.

**Potential strengths or benefits**

- Strong stakeholder engagement could result in high quality reflections on effective QA in the school sector, and ultimately in the transfer of practices and in the production of new evidence of effective practices.
- EU level exchanges of good practices can strengthen the credibility of practices at national level.
- Learning from weaknesses and improving QA systems also has value.
- To be impactful, the exchanges should involve system-level actors mainly. It is however also important to include views from school level actors on the practices discussed.
- Discussions at the workshop indicated interest in sharing information on existing QA practices at EU level.

**Potential weaknesses or limitations**

- There is a risk that exchanges lead to few tangible outputs.
- The take-up of best practices is likely to vary and could be limited, partly due to some limitations to transferability.
- Related to this, the ‘value-for-money’ of the exchanges could be questioned.
- A challenge will be that participants also reflect views and practices from school level actors: parents, local authorities, professional bodies, pupils, etc.

**EU Added Value**

- Providing the opportunity for learning from existing effective QA in some EU MS
- The EU is in a unique position to mobilise the capacity and expertise of relevant stakeholders in all interested Member States.

**Scenario 3 – Support to research on QA in the school sector**

**Gaps/opportunity** - EU level support to research could help address current shortcomings at national level in overviews of the performance of certain areas of school education (e.g. teachers/school heads’ CPD; use of teaching and learning methods, appropriateness and consistency of assessment, etc.). EU level support to research could also support shortcomings in evidence on the contribution of QA to maintaining and improving quality. This action would thus be ‘Support to evidence creation’. This could in turn support improvements in the use made of results of QA procedures and possibly to evidence-based policy-making.

**Type and description of action** – This action would support research. This could
take the form of EU (co-) funding of evaluations, or research at EU or MS level on the effectiveness of specific quality assurance tools and activities, or of system-level reviews of the results of specific QA policies, procedures and activities. Findings from the research could be publicly accessible. Research outputs could lead to the development of measurement tools or other QA tools. Universities or consortia could conduct the research work.

Potential strengths or benefits

- Member States which would volunteer to have their QA policies, procedures and practices reviewed or researched are likely to be interested in results and committed to using recommendations.
- The independence of researchers (from school level actors or policy makers) will give credibility to the research’s findings.
- Research or credible evidence on the effects of different QA policies, procedures and practices is severely lacking in some countries and would support decision-making that is evidence-based and less politically influenced.
- The public availability of the research, if decided on, would add to accountability structures at system level.
- The research could build on existing work, e.g. the OECD’s or SICI’s.

Potential weaknesses or limitations

- Member States which would volunteer to have their QA policies, procedures and activities reviewed or researched may not be those in most need of robust evidence for policy-making. The relevance and quality of such an action will depend on the quality and robustness of the research method, sources etc.
- Likely to only impact those countries that undergo a review.
- The diversity of situations may lead to weak or generic research findings or of limited use to relevant stakeholders.
- Quality research requires time and longitudinal data to measure the effects of QA on quality over time.

EU Added Value

- EU level action could strengthen the evidence base, pulling in knowledge from experts across the EU, or supporting comparative analyses across systems. Evidence or tools produced at EU level would fill in a gap which exists in several countries.
- Most relevant to countries where evidence on the effects of QA is lacking.

Scenario 4 – Support to the measurement of the social outcomes of school education

Gaps/opportunity – Considering the insufficient focus given in most EU countries to the measurement of non-academic, social outcomes of school education (civil, social, ‘soft’ skills) and increasing attention given to this, an action at EU level could address this.

Type and description of action – An EU level action could support the development of concepts or tools to consider or measure the social outcomes of school education, e.g. a survey tool to measure social outcomes across the EU, similar to PISA. The tools or concepts would then be available for national stakeholders to use. The tools and concepts could be developed by academics or consortia, or by national experts. It would provide national stakeholders with a
framework to be used for further developments at national level.

**Potential strengths or benefits**

- The measure would build on existing projects on considering the social outcomes of school education, e.g. the Education and Social Progress project[^100] which proposes strategies to develop socio-emotional skills for young people to succeed in modern life, and the work of SICI’s working group on the assessment of Social Outcomes in Education[^101]. Another expert mentioned at the workshop that Australia initiated further consideration of social outcomes in the next OECD PISA tests.
- Further considering social skills reflects demands from social partners and EU objectives.
- Member States would be equipped to better take the social outcomes of school education into account. Evidence produced would complement PISA which measures basic skills attainment/academic achievement. This would lead to a more comprehensive overview of the performance of a school system, beyond academic achievements.

**Potential weaknesses or limitations**

- This may be perceived as ideological or as intrusive by some Member States and may require cultural change to be accepted.
- The use of the tools supported and/or data produced will depend on their level of complexity, support provided, perceived added-value etc. The relevance, added value and design of the research/tool should therefore be looked at carefully.
- This action is likely to be resource-intensive.

**EU Added Value**

- EU level support to the consideration and measurement of the social outcomes of school education would signal this is an important issue on the agenda and incentivise MS to pay attention to it

---

[^100]: [http://www.oecd.org/edu/ceri/educationandsocialprogress.htm](http://www.oecd.org/edu/ceri/educationandsocialprogress.htm)
could be provided by cluster of countries with the same needs and with similar approaches to QA, or in the same language group (German, French, English etc.).

**Potential strengths or benefits**
- Effects on practices at school level are more likely to be immediate than those involving system-level actors.
- Participation in such capacity-building initiatives could incentivise school actors to be more firmly involved in QA.
- Such an initiative could also prompt reflections on capacity-building needs to be addressed at national level.
- This initiative could build on what Erasmus + has funded in the area/can fund.

**Potential weaknesses or limitations**
- This action concerns school level actors. Initiatives will thus be highly context-dependent.
- Beneficiaries would also have to be properly targeted to ensure that are the most relevant in relation to needs.
- The form of the action would also need to be coherent with other developments at system level in participating countries.
- The level of autonomy school leaders varies largely across EU countries. In some countries, they have formal competences and limited room to introduce changes.
- The impact of effects of this action on practices at school level is smaller in scope than that of effects at system level.
- A challenge will also be to ensure that the effects of capacity-building are sustained over time.
- Limited funding availability within existing EU programmes which could support such actions.

**EU Added Value**
- This EU level action would add the most value in countries where capacity building of school-level actors in QA is not available or not sufficient.

---

**Scenario 6 – Support to school’s self-assessment**

**Gaps/opportunity** - The introduction of self-assessment is a general trend across most EU countries. Some countries however have faced implementation difficulties or could benefit from exposure to existing best practices in other EU countries.

**Type and description of action:** this action consists in building school actors’ capacity to engage in self-assessment. This could take place via the promotion of good practice exchanges on school-level self-assessment, or the funding of projects between schools and local authorities to strengthen methods and approaches to schools’ self-assessment, or via other support (e.g. IT resources, training/coaching, international groups of interest etc.). Focus could be put on strengthening the competences of school leaders. Local supervisory authorities could also be involved, where relevant.

**Potential strengths or benefits**
- Learning from ‘practical’ good practice (concrete examples) in other countries supports reflective practices. This is especially important where the QA and evaluation culture in the school sector is weak.
- This initiative could raise the profile of ‘good practice’ or ‘innovative’ schools.
Engagement of local authorities could strengthen sustainability.

Potential weaknesses or limitations

- Impact is likely to be local and thus smaller in scope than if action involved system level actors.
- Such an initiative would need to tie in with developments at system level to avoid the risk of having schools 'rush ahead' of system-level changes.
- The diversity of school contexts and self-assessment models may limit the value of the exchanges and transferability of practices.
- Limited funding availability within existing EU programmes which could support such actions.

EU Added Value

- This EU level action would add the most value in countries where capacity building of school-level actors in QA is not available or not sufficient.
- Learning from good practice available in other countries is especially relevant in countries where self-assessment culture is weak.

Scenario 7 – Peer review programme on QA practices

Gaps/opportunity – Schools, local authorities and system-level actors do not always have the opportunity to learn how peers, in their own country, or abroad, conduct QA. Learning from the experience in systems with similar or even different QA approaches could build their knowledge base and capacity to engage in QA.

Type and description of action - This action would involve having different QA procedures, activities, and practices be evaluated by peers, e.g. have inspectors from one country critically evaluate school inspection conducted in another, or the same within in country. Standards against which the peer reviews will be conducted would need to be agreed on. To be most relevant, peer-reviews would take place amongst QA actors within systems which share similar characteristics (level of autonomy of schools, local authorities, etc.) or QA approaches. This would support critical reflections and knowledge exchange between peers within or between Member States. Such activities could be co-funded within existing or perhaps new EU support programmes. A mechanism could be introduced to identify actors 'most in need of this support', e.g. in the case of schools, based on available ranking or performance data (e.g. inspection results, or assessment results). Sustainability of effects could be supported via dissemination activities: events could be organised at national level, culminating in a common event at EU level, in order to share knowledge gained via the peer review activities.

Potential strengths or benefits

- Potential transfer of good practices across countries.
- Networking effect is an outcome in itself.
- Likely immediate to medium-term effect.

Potential weaknesses or limitations

- Limited system-level impact.
- Some stakeholders may consider that peer reviews are most useful and impactful if conducted at national level (and not at EU level).
- It may attract QA actors who don’t need this form of support the most.
- Practical constraints (language, understanding of different regulatory contexts).
• Limited funding availability within existing EU programmes which could support such actions.
• In view of this, it is important that countries ‘most in need’ of support participate.

**EU Added Value**

• This EU level action would add the most value in countries where capacity building of school-level actors in QA is not available or not sufficient.
• EU level support to learning from peers is esp. relevant in countries where this is not available or sufficient.
Annex 2 Case studies

Czech Republic - Path to quality

Basic facts box:

- **Country:** The Czech Republic
- **Characteristics of the school system:** The responsibility for education is shared between central bodies (the Government, Parliament, and the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports – MoEYS) and the regions. Staffing costs and teaching resources are covered by the state. Capital and operating costs are covered by school organising bodies. Municipalities are the organising bodies for schools providing compulsory education and kindergartens, while the regions are the organising bodies for secondary schools. Schools in the Czech Republic enjoy a high degree of autonomy. The school head is fully responsible for school management, including the recruitment of teachers, financial management, and curriculum organisation, and also for educational leadership. Schools are evaluated by the Czech School Inspectorate (CSI); each school should undergo a comprehensive evaluation at least once every six years. Internal school evaluation is assumed/expected but no report is required. Schools are obliged to publish an annual report on school development at least once every six years. The inspection criteria for school evaluation are approved and published for every school year. They are rather general and can only be used for rough guidance.
- **School level which the measure covers:** pre-primary, primary, lower, and upper secondary schools.
- **Scope of implementation of the measure:** sample of schools; in the long term all ISCED 0-ISCED 5B schools in the Czech Republic.
- **Participation in the measure:** on a voluntary basis.
- **Stage in the QA cycle:** evaluation, review.
- **Date of start of the measure:** 1 May 2009.
- **Stakeholders involved:** academics; school heads; teachers; representatives of MoEYS and its agencies; representatives of school organising bodies; school inspectors. Around 100 academics, 50 policy makers, and 5000 school heads, deputy heads or teachers were directly involved in the activities.
- **Target issue the QA measure addresses:** capacity building to support school internal evaluation.
- **Information on levels of funding and source:** European Social Fund and state budget of the Czech Republic; 61,017,619 CZK.

1.1 General context

In the Czech education system, schools are evaluated by the CSI (at least once every six years). The inspection criteria for school evaluation are approved and published for every school year. They are rather general and can only be used for rough guidance with respect to the characteristics of the quality of school performance. School organising bodies (regions, municipalities) are also allowed to evaluate schools but usually restrict their evaluation to financial and managerial aspects of how schools function. Schools are also obliged to publish an annual report on school development.

In order to balance external and internal evaluation, according to the Education Act (Act No. 561/2004 Coll. on Pre-school, Basic, Secondary, and Tertiary Professional Education) and edict No. 15/2005 Coll, which came into effect on 1 January 2005,
every Czech school at the ISCED levels 0-5B was obliged to develop an internal evaluation report at three-year intervals. The focus was on the following areas: conditions; processes; support for pupils, cooperation with parents and the impact of the relationship with parents and other actors on educational outcomes; educational outcomes; school management, educational leadership, and professional development; and educational outcomes after accounting for local conditions and financial resources.

The concept of internal evaluation was very new and demanding for Czech schools. Internal evaluation was not included in the initial education of teachers and school heads. Instruments for internal evaluation were not available. Methodological and educational support was accidental, and no systematic opportunities were provided at the national level. According to a survey carried out by the National Institute for Further Education in 2009, 60% of school heads perceived the requirement to carry out internal evaluation as being difficult to comply with.\textsuperscript{102}

The aim of the project was to instruct school staff about the importance and usefulness of internal evaluation and to provide them with a pool of assessment instruments of the best possible quality, accompanied by various kinds of methodological support to facilitate their implementation in schools. The second goal of the project was to facilitate the use of internal assessment in external assessment carried out by school organising bodies and school inspectors, and define criteria for school quality that would be shared by all actors.\textsuperscript{103}

During the period of the project, the Education Act was amended (Act No. 472/2011 Coll), and edict No. 15/2005 Coll was abolished. It means that the obligation of schools to develop an internal evaluation report was abolished, starting from 1 January 2012. According to the current version of the Education Act, schools are obliged to perform internal evaluation as a basis for the annual school report; however, they have no obligation to document it and have no guidance on the areas in which internal evaluation should be performed. The project terminated on 31 August 2012. This report focuses on the results of the project, and also reflects on its impact 2.5 years after its termination.

With respect to the participation of school staff and other actors, the following principles were applied: voluntariness, an individual approach, expertise, an active approach, ethics, and safety.

Schools had an option to participate directly in the piloting of one or more instruments, in professional development, in peer activities, or in the development of a case study. Schools that were not interested in being directly involved were able to profit from the instruments that were developed in the project, attend workshops or conferences, or learn from various publications developed within the project.

With respect to the development of the instruments and guidelines, the guiding principles were expertise, cooperation, and consensus. An important aspect of the project was its endeavour to build on the best expertise available in the country. The project engaged the best educators, psychologists, and researchers in cooperating in the development of the evaluation instruments. As a consequence, the outcomes of the project are of a very good quality and broad scope. In the development of the guidelines and criteria for external evaluation, the representatives of the most

\textsuperscript{102} Chvál et al, 2013; Černý, Procházková, 2012.

\textsuperscript{103} Chvál et al, 2013.
important associations, ministry officials, and school inspectors were engaged and arrived at consensual solutions\textsuperscript{104}.

1.2 Description of the measure

The main aim of the project was capacity building in the area of school internal evaluation among school staff and, to some extent, also among school organising bodies, officials of the ministry and ministerial agencies, school inspectors, and university teachers. The objectives were to mobilise the expertise available in the area of internal evaluation at the Czech faculties of education in order to develop a set of internal evaluation instruments and to facilitate the implementation of these instruments in Czech schools by providing miscellaneous types of methodological support, including peer reviews, school visits, workshops, conferences, textbooks, and professional development.

The supplementary aim was to develop consensual descriptions of the attributes of a high-quality school performance and a high-quality school internal evaluation, so that these descriptions could be shared as common standards.

The project wanted to contribute to achieving a situation in which all schools understand the concept of internal evaluation and perceive its importance and usefulness; a pool of high-quality and well-documented instruments is available to all schools, together with miscellaneous types of methodological support and professional development opportunities; the criteria for high-quality school performance and high-quality internal evaluation are carefully defined and shared among all the stakeholders.

The project directors approached all the leading experts in relevant areas concerning school quality. They motivated them to participate in the joint development of internal evaluation instruments. This was a unique approach that allowed the expertise available in the country to be fully utilised. Consequently, the resulting instruments are of high quality and mirror the most important aspects of school performance. The instruments were piloted and carefully documented and offered to all schools. Other accompanying educational materials were provided – a glossary, publications about various aspects of internal evaluation, best practice from Czech schools and other education systems, and manuals.

All the ISCED 0-ISCED 5B schools in the Czech Republic were approached and offered the opportunity to participate in the project, which offered participation in the pilot, professional development activities for school staff, school peer activities, or the development of a case study. Schools were able to choose freely whether to participate and in which activity.

A working group of inspectors, school heads, school organising bodies, and ministry officials was constituted to develop descriptions of good-quality school performance and school internal evaluation.

Specific activities and outcomes:

- Surveys among school heads, deputy heads, teachers, representatives of school organising bodies, and school inspectors (2618 respondents in total) monitored the gains brought about by the project and also brought many important pieces of information concerning the needs of schools in the area of internal evaluation\textsuperscript{105}.

\textsuperscript{104} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{105} Černý 2010b; Černý 2011a; Černý, Procházková 2010.
• School case studies – 30 case studies (involving 24 experts + 90 teachers or school heads) were developed to document the approaches of Czech schools towards internal evaluation.

• 30 instruments for internal evaluation were developed with the use of the expertise of leading Czech experts and international experience. They cover all the important areas of school work listed in the edict, and collect the evidence via questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, observations, and document analysis. All the instruments were precisely documented (including their theoretical background, goals, methodology, terms of use, interpretation options, and words of caution). In each instrument, the process of validation is described. 10 instruments were standardised at the national level and the corresponding parameters (national norms, Cronbach alphas, correlations etc.) were provided. Each instrument is accompanied by a detailed administration manual. At the end of the project, 300 schools (around 5% of all primary and secondary schools) used the instruments provided. The most popular was the overarching Framework for internal evaluation instrument and questionnaires for assessing the school climate: School climate, Classroom climate, and Climate of the school staff. At the end of the project, all instruments with the documentation were published at the Portal of the National Framework Programme that was established to support the curricular reform and is administered by the National Institute for Education. The portal is widely used by teachers and school heads (http://evaluacninastroje.rvp.cz).

• The project organised three types of collective learning activities: workshops, school visits, and peer reviews. There were 60 one-day workshops, out of which 49 were focused on internal evaluation and its processes in general; eight were focused on specific instruments and three on peer review processes. Each workshop was attended by approximately 15 participants from 10-15 schools. The project organised 40 two-day visits of school teams. The visits focused on the exchange of experience in the area of internal evaluation. The specific focus was negotiated between pairs of participating schools. The visits had well-defined scenarios and were facilitated by project experts. Peer reviews were organised in order to provide feedback and recommendations on selected areas of internal evaluation. 28 two-day peer review visits were carried out during the project.

• Additional learning opportunities were provided by one-day regional conferences attended by 30-60 participants that were organised in all 14 regions at the beginning and at the end of the project.

• The project also provided two types of advisory services: technical advisory and field advisory. The technical advisory service was provided by email or phone and dealt with questions related to the registration on the portal containing the instruments and the documentation; the content of individual instruments; administration; utility etc.

• The field advisory service was provided by a network of advisors (two advisors in each region) who were certificated in the Coordinator of internal evaluation professional development course (also designed within the project) and participated in the follow-up course, Advisor in the area of internal evaluation. These advisors helped individual schools with the implementation of internal evaluation measures on a long-term or short-term basis. They were

---

107 Havelková, 2011.
supervised by experienced experts. Altogether, 180 visits by the advisors took place within the framework of the project. On the basis of the experience from advisory work, the certification procedure for internal evaluation advisors was modified and improved.

- The Co-ordinator of internal evaluation professional development module developed in the project was attended by 217 participants during the project. The module (250 hours) was modified on the basis of the experience gained in the project and finalised at the end of the project\textsuperscript{108}.

- The second objective was the development of criteria for school organising bodies regarding the quality of school work. A working group of 20 representatives of school associations, the CSI, and school organising bodies was established. The aim of the group was to define the criteria for the evaluation of an internal evaluation plan, internal evaluation processes, and a report and to develop the methodology for the implementation of the criteria, including the software support. Altogether, 19 criteria were formulated for planning, 24 criteria for implementing, and 17 criteria for the quality of the school report\textsuperscript{109}.

- Within the framework of the project, 10 publications were elaborated that focused on partial aspects of internal evaluation.

- The project engaged a variety of schools of different levels, from nursery schools to higher professional schools. The design of the project allowed each school to choose services according to its needs and choose relevant partners for peer and group activities. Interviewed persons agreed that the main strength of the project was the active involvement of all stakeholders. Different boards and working groups were constituted, with diverse memberships. School heads had the opportunity to choose the way of participating from a broad offer. Academics participated as instrument developers. This massive engagement led to a situation where a) the maximum amount of expertise present in the country was utilised, and b) all the actors involved in different bodies and different stages learned from the project and from others. The interest in internal evaluation and perception of its importance increased among all the actors, as did the feeling of ownership of the outcomes.

### 1.3 Effectiveness of the QA measure

The measure was received very well as the first systematic help provided after the obligation to carry out internal evaluation had been enacted. The project developed 30 case studies of schools that, according to local experts, were ahead of other schools in the area of internal evaluation. The case studies revealed that although the schools believed that internal evaluation was an important component of school activities that could improve the quality of the school in a participatory way, their competencies to carry out internal evaluation effectively were just emerging. The questionnaire surveys carried out in 2009 and in 2011, which were answered by 531 and 433 school heads or deputies respectively, and complemented by 20 in-depth interviews, showed that the majority of schools welcomed the measure. Many of them, however, complained that it came too late\textsuperscript{110}. 71% of the workshop participants, 86% of the participants in the school visits, and 76% of the participants in the peer reviews stated that the activity met their expectations and about the same percentage of participants stated

\textsuperscript{108} Černý, 2010a.

\textsuperscript{109} Chvál, Michek, Mechlová, 2011.

\textsuperscript{110} Černý, 2010b; Černý, 2011a; Černý, 2011b.
that they could profit from the activity in their work. The participants appreciated the opportunity to learn in a safe environment; they expressed increasing internal confidence and expertise in the area of internal evaluation and also increasing perception of its usefulness\textsuperscript{111}.

Focus groups of advisors and school staff receiving advice showed that the advisory activities in schools were perceived as very useful by both groups. The advisors helped the schools to set the goals of internal evaluation and to choose suitable instruments from the pool. The advisors appreciated the continuous supervision and personal growth. The vast majority of school staff members attending the Co-ordinator of internal evaluation professional development programme (95%) were satisfied with the programme and regarded it as very useful\textsuperscript{112}.

Between 2009 and 2011, the internal confidence of school leaders with respect to their capacity to carry out internal evaluation and interpret its results increased (this could have been caused by the project). Schools that participated in any of the project activities assessed the project positively. 90% of them would welcome continuation of the support provided. 78% of the schools declared that they gained useful new skills or knowledge; 59% agreed that they now understand how to organise internal evaluation in their schools effectively, and others agreed that as a result of the project internal evaluation is less demanding than before\textsuperscript{113}.

The criteria for the external evaluation of schools developed by the project currently serve as a basis for the description of a “Good School” – a joint initiative of the Ministry of Education and the CSI.

1.4 Critical factors of the QA measure

The project was very well designed and implemented. However, it was launched five years after the obligation to carry out internal evaluation had been enacted. Many school heads were already frustrated: they did not understand the usefulness of internal evaluation and did not possess the competencies for its implementation in their schools. Their complaints probably contributed to the amendment of the Education Act from 1 January 2012 by which the edict stipulating the components of school evaluation was abolished, together with the obligation to develop internal evaluation reports and the obligation of the Czech School Inspectorate to include the results of a school’s internal evaluation in its external evaluation. The legislative change was prepared before the project could have impacts that would have been visible at the system level.

Internal evaluation is still included in the Education Act, in addition to the external evaluation of the CSI, and should serve as a basis for the development of the school’s annual report. However, it is not perceived as an important activity deserving support. There is no person at the National Institute for Education who is responsible for providing support for internal evaluation and building on the outcomes of the project systematically and developing them further. Two members of the project team stay at the institution for one day a week and organise additional workshops (seven workshops for 91 participants from 49 schools in 2014). However, the team members report that since the change in the legislation, the schools are no longer interested in the topic of internal evaluation as such as they believe that they do not need it any longer. On the other hand, the resources of the project are utilised under other headings: within the framework of “management of change” or within other topics –

\textsuperscript{111} Havelková, 2011.
\textsuperscript{112} Černý, 2010a.
\textsuperscript{113} Černý, Procházková, 2012.
e.g. the school or classroom climate. The National Institute for Further Education included school internal evaluation into its preparatory courses for future school heads. They can also choose the topic for their thesis and utilise the resources of the project. The expertise of the persons trained as internal evaluation consultants is used for advising schools on their school educational programmes. The instruments from the portal are used by schools to a lesser extent than during the project but they do use them occasionally. Some other institutions also recommend the instruments in the context of other activities.

The project was too short to achieve its full potential. It was originally planned for five years – in the final two years the main focus was intended to be on the promotion of the instruments that had been developed and support for schools in their implementation, including workshops, peer activities, and professional development. As a result of the changes in the political representation and related changes in policy priorities, the project was not extended and its dissemination has thus not been completed. This contributed to the fact that the majority of school staff are not fully familiar with the instruments. In the period of ESF projects schools are bogged down with offers to participate in numerous projects of very varying quality. For schools it is very difficult to choose important projects and also important topics for their development. More time and systematic effort is needed to explain to schools why internal evaluation is important and useful and to teach them how to perform it effectively.

On the other hand, the people who were interviewed agree that the project brought many useful activities to many schools and that many educators gained expertise in the area of internal evaluation. The instruments have been developed and are publicly available, and the methodological guidance is available in manuals and also in project bulletins. Many organisations, including the CSI, are working with the outcomes of the project. The project results could be taken up at any time. In the meantime, schools become gradually familiar with the existence of the instruments. They will not perceive them as something new and threatening.

It is probable that new teacher standards (developed within an ESF project and released in January 2015) will foster the use of the instruments as school heads could use the instruments for the evaluation of teachers’ performance. Within the framework of the ESF project NIQES, the CSI develops criteria for the external school evaluation (“Good Quality School”). The criteria build on the outcomes of the project Path to Quality. It is highly probable that publishing the criteria will increase the interest of schools in carrying out internal evaluation using available internal evaluation instruments.

Conclusion: The project was very well designed and achieved remarkable results. To achieve its full potential, it should have been launched earlier, and there should have been continuous follow-up activities that would have systematically utilised all the project outcomes. All the people who were interviewed believe that it could have had a substantial impact on the vast majority of schools and significantly improved their work. On the other hand, it is very important that the outcomes of the project are available to interested schools and other stakeholders. It is highly probable that the project resources will be utilised to a much higher extent in future.

The most frequently mentioned strengths of the project are quality of the support, well-planned wide offer of activities for school staff, the spirit of mutual learning, good promotion.
1.5 Transferability

The project itself is well designed and fully transferable. All four main activities – project monitoring, instrument development, case studies, and professional development – could be implemented in a very similar way in other systems. The focus of the instruments would probably differ according to the expertise available in the particular system; the processes, however, could be identical. The same is true for the peer activities. They are fully transferable, including their scenarios; the content would probably differ, depending on the needs of the schools. The contents and outcomes are not directly transferable (to translate the Czech instruments is not recommended), but the processes are. At the same time the project directors believe that the project is very comprehensive because it can accommodate the needs of schools at various competence levels: beginners would profit from workshops, more advanced schools would profit from peer activities. Advanced school heads and deputies would receive focused professional development and consequently be able to provide help to less knowledgeable colleagues.

The least transferable activity is the development of the criteria for school quality and criteria for the external evaluation of schools. This depends on the status of the organisation that coordinates the project. The National Institute for Education could only make recommendations as it is not responsible for the external evaluation of schools. Other institutions may influence the external evaluation of schools to a larger extent.

1.6 Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Name of Institution</th>
<th>Date of interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ministry of Education: Director of the Section for Education</td>
<td>5.02.2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Ministry of Education: Head of the Department of the Conception of the Education System</td>
<td>5.02.2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Basic school in Prague: Headmaster</td>
<td>29.01.2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Basic school in Karviná: Headmaster</td>
<td>29.01.2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Director of the Path to Quality project</td>
<td>26.01.2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Deputy Director of the Path to Quality project</td>
<td>26.01.2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>National Institute for Professional Development: Head of the regional office in Plzen</td>
<td>27.01.2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Technical University in Liberec: associate professor</td>
<td>20.01.2015</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.7 References


Case study on resources allocation in the French school system under the 2001 Framework Law for Public Finance Laws (LOLF)\textsuperscript{114}

**Case Study 2 Basic facts box:**

- **Country:** France
- **Level of local and school autonomy:** low to medium level of school autonomy\textsuperscript{115}; larger autonomy at the level of the académie\textsuperscript{116}
- **School level:** primary, upper and/or lower secondary school
- **Scope of implementation:** State-run and privately-run schools
- **Stage in the QA cycle:** all stages - planning/design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, review.
- **Date of start of the measure:** voted in 2001 with entry into force in 2006
- **Stakeholders involved:** several departments of the Ministry of Education (DGESCO\textsuperscript{117}, DAF\textsuperscript{118} and the DGRH\textsuperscript{119}, 30 académies, other local actors, e.g. inspection académique at department level
- **Target issue the QA measure addresses:** setting of objectives, allocation of resources, measurement of performance of entire school system via scoring of indicators.
- **Any information on levels of funding and source:** Education policy is the French State’s first budget item. In 2011, budget commitments under the ‘school education’ mission (agriculture excluded) amounted to 60.5 billion euros (cf. RERS 2011)\textsuperscript{120}.

### 1.1 General context

The *Loi organique n° 2001-692 du 1er août 2001 relative aux lois de finances* (LOLF) is a so-called organic or framework law - it provides a legal and conceptual framework for the budget of the French State\textsuperscript{121}. It overhauls previous French budgetary rules set under the *Ordonnance n°59-2 du 2 janvier 1959*.

\textsuperscript{114} Loi organique n° 2001-692 du 1er août 2001 relative aux lois de finances

\textsuperscript{115} From the start of the 2016 school year, lower secondary schools are to be granted further pedagogical autonomy under the "rèforme des collèges" reform. Lower secondary schools teachers are encouraged to innovate. 20% of their time is to be dedicated to new teaching methods. http://www.education.gouv.fr/cid88073/mieux-apprendre-pour-mieux-reussir-les-points-cles-du-college-2016.html; http://legifrance.gouv.fr/eli/decret/2015/5/19/MENE1511207D/jo/texte and http://www.education.gouv.fr/pid25535/bulletin_officiel.html?cid_bo=89165

\textsuperscript{116} The autonomy of upper secondary schools also increased from 2010 following the “rèforme des lycées d’enseignement général et technologique”.

\textsuperscript{117} Direction générale de l’enseignement scolaire, Ministère de l’éducation nationale, de l’enseignement supérieur et de la recherche.

\textsuperscript{118} Direction des affaires financières

\textsuperscript{119} Direction générale des ressources humaines


\textsuperscript{121} It does not apply to the budget of French local authorities (« régions »and « départements ») which have their own legal personality, distinct from the State’s.
The main objectives of the LOLF were to:

- improve the allocation of public finances by linking available financial resources to objectives, and following this up with an evaluation process
- change approaches to public management from a resource-driven one to a results or performance-driven one, notably by increasing accountability and empowerment across the different levels of the French school system
- improve the transparency of the use of public funds by increasing the French Parliament’s control over the State budget. Indeed, under the LOLF, Parliament votes on the entire budget (in the past it only voted on new financial allocations) and can also ask to modify financial allocations from one area to another (e.g. it once requested more allocations to agricultural education).

The LOLF has been considered, under the present study, as a QA framework as it effectively introduces a QA cycle, with different QA activities from a diagnosis of needs, to the setting of objectives, implementing actions and allocation of means to achieve those, followed by an evaluation of those actions in light of means granted.

The LOLF is part of wider efforts to reform and modernise public management approaches. The introduction of the LOLF was surrounded by a debate on performance-based management approaches (allocation of resources according to performance of schools and academies) versus the management of performance (allocation of resources according to needs and/or objectives, and social-economic and geographical context). Several interviewees mentioned that de facto the approach followed has varied according to the political orientations and guidelines of the government in power and also according to the country’s overall budgetary situation. Interviewees indicated that the current approach favours the allocation of resources across educational territories (academies) in an equitable and efficient manner, with the help of contextual indicators (socio-economic and geographical indicators).

When the LOLF was first introduced, it was perceived differently across the system:

- It created enthusiasm amongst some actors as it granted more autonomy to academies to design BOPs and use them to deliver on academies’ projects and priorities.
- It was met with concerns amongst actors which associated the LOLF with efficiency concerns and performance-based management, associated with private sector methods. It was also introduced at the same time as the revision générale des politiques publiques (RGPP), which led to 80 000 job cuts. It was thus associated with budgetary cuts, rather than as a framework to target the allocate resources to meet objectives.

---

122 For example, a debate centred on the indicator ‘repeat school year’ (redoublement) included in the LOLF. The rationale behind this indicator, perceived by some teacher unions, was that lowering its score would improve the flow and transition of pupils through their school career and thus free teachers’ time, which would justify job cuts.
1.2 Description of the QA framework

The LOLF was voted in 2001 and applied first to the 2006 budgetary exercise. Prior to the LOLF, under the 1959 ordonnance, each ministry was allocated, on an annual basis, a lump sum by expenditure type (investment, functioning, etc.). Those lump sums could not be shifted from one expenditure type to another, nor changed. The LOLF changes this by allocating funds to a 'mission' which can be assimilated to a specific public policy under the auspice of one or more ministries. Parliamentarians now vote on financial allocations made to each 'mission', when prior to the LOLF they voted on types of expenditures. They also vote on the entire budget when in the past they only voted on new financial allocations.


Each Programme is broken down in Annual Performance Projects (PAP) which include objectives and targets and allocated means, based on an estimation of costs. The achievement of each PAP is then evaluated in Annual Performance Reports (RAP) according to a set of indicators. The RAP is then presented at Parliament. The RAP presents achievements in relation to resources allocated. The box below presents indicators used to measure the attainment of one objective under the Programme ‘primary education’.

Case Study 3 Performance indicators under Programme « primary education »

OBJECTIF 1 - Conduire tous les élèves à la maîtrise des compétences de base exigibles au terme de la scolarité primaire

- INDICATEUR 1.1: Proportion d’élèves maîtrisant, en fin d’école primaire, les compétences de base en français et en mathématiques
- INDICATEUR 1.2: Proportion d’élèves maîtrisant, en fin de CE1, les compétences du palier 1 du socle commun
- INDICATEUR 1.3: Proportion d’élèves maîtrisant, en fin de CM2, les compétences du socle commun (palier 2)
- INDICATEUR 1.4: Proportion d’élèves entrant en sixième avec au moins un an de retard
- INDICATEUR 1.5: Proportion d’élèves apprenant l’allemand
- INDICATEUR 1.6: Taux de redoublement

Each of the 6 programmes is then supported by:
- A central ‘working budget’ (or budget opérationnel (BOP)), which funds mainly the operations of the central administration and
- the working budgets or BOPs at the level of each of the 30 académies, which make up the French school system.

123 Enseignement scolaire 1° degré.
Allowances (dotations) to State-run schools are made up of:
- the wage bill (masse salariale) and
- administrative appropriations (crédits de fonctionnement).

The wage bill (masse salariale) makes up the large majority of financial resources allocated to the school education mission (currently approximatively 93%). The Direction des affaires financières (DAF) and the Direction générale des ressources humaines (DGRH) manage the dialogue on personnel (masse salariale).

The LOLF works hand-in-hand with other measures which preceded the LOLF, or were initially distinct from it. Those measures were motivated by efficiency-related concerns or bringing further autonomy to actors at intermediary levels (academies) and school levels.

Those measures are:
- a contractual (with no legal grounding however) agreement between academies authorities and the DGESCO under two formats (1) the ‘contract of agreed objectives’ (contrats d’objectifs), introduced by the 2005 loi d’orientation and (2) et the académie plan (projet académique), made compulsory in 1999 and monitored by the académies authorities in annual progress reports.
- A management dialogue between the academies authorities and State-run schools, where schools’ results are compared, and improvement measures, including capacity-related ones, are discussed.

Setting objectives and allocating resources

The LOLF gives programme managers, at the level of the central administration, and managers at academies level, autonomy to set their own target objectives and importantly to allocate means to achieve those. Indeed, funds – available under a programme - are aggregated under an envelope (globalisation des crédits au sein d’un programme) – however their use can be moved across the ‘actions’ which make each programme up, according to the principle of ‘interchangeability’ (fongibilité des crédits entre titre et action). This can done at central level, by the programme manager, or at académie level by the académie managers and the recteur according to local needs or priorities. This principle of ‘interchangeability’ is notably limited by the fact that funds allocated at programme-level, to personnel and the wage bills can not go over a certain limit (plafond de masse salariale).

As mentioned above, the LOLF is consistent with a wider movement to give more autonomy to intermediary levels – academies – and to schools. Indeed, under the LOLF actors at different levels of the school system are required to reflect on, and co-develop, their strategic objectives and orientations. In addition, each académie is responsible for the design and implementation of their BOP to achieve those objectives, in consultation with central authorities through the so-called dialogue de gestion (this which was not the case under the previous financial rules). Specifically, each recteur d’académie can use

---

124 Rapport OCDE
125 Rapport OCDE
126 OCDE report p. 56.
allocations made under the BOP to meet his/her strategic objectives, as set in their *projet académique*. During the *dialogue de gestion*, the *Sous-direction de la gestion des programmes budgétaires* of the DGESCO and *académie* managers share a diagnosis of the *académie*’s needs, and hold discussions with financial and educational experts on where best to deploy means available under the BOP (e.g. remedial measures, accompanying measures) in order to meet the programmes’ objectives. The intention is therefore to make the BOP responsive to local needs, priorities and realities, thus improving the efficiency of the management and use made of budgets.

**Evaluation**

The LOLF also requires that the attainment of objectives and targets, set under Annual Performance Projects (PAP) for each Programme, is measured. Monitoring and evaluation is conducted on the basis of (1) the annual scoring of measurement indicators used under the “school education” mission (In 2012 there were 87 indicators which mainly required quantitative scoring, e.g. access to education, pupil trajectories or staff management) and programme evaluations provided under the so-called Annual Performance Reports (RAP). This system thus holds Programme managers and managers at *académie* level accountable for their use of funds (following the interchangeability principle).

The *Sous-direction de la gestion des programmes budgétaires* and the *Sous-direction dédiée à la « performance » et au « dialogue avec les académies »* of the DGESCO are involved in checking the use made of allocated means and deviations between targets and results, and comparisons of results across *academies*. This done on the basis of performance indicators (the so-called MELUSINE indicators) and is also part of the ‘management dialogue (« dialogue de gestion ») with the *recteurs d’académies*, during which actions to take to address needs and meet objectives, are discussed. The scores of the MELUSINE indicators also enable actors at the level of *academies* to compare their performance, per objective and per programme, to a national average or to other *academies*.

### 1.3 Effectiveness of the QA framework and critical factors of the QA framework

The literature and interviews indicate that the LOLF has produced effects of different types and strengths, and at all levels of the French school system. They are outlined here below:

- Following the entry into force of the LOLF, financial resources are now allocated on the basis of needs-based criteria, objectives and intended results, at national and *académie* levels. The LOLF, in effect, introduced a cycle whereby objectives and targets are set over a 3-year period, and accompanied by an allocation of resources to achieve those, and their attainment is then evaluated at the end of a three year cycle.
- The increased political (parliamentarian) scrutiny of the allocation and use made of resources. The Parliament has, since the LOLF, a say on *all* budgetary allocations, not just new ones (as was the case under the previous regime). Interviewees also reported that the PAPs and RAPs

---

127 *Ibid*, p. 36.
were read by Parliamentarians, as demonstrated in the questions submitted by them to the Education Ministry.

- The LOLF has introduced new obligations on actors at all levels of the school system, from central ministerial departments, to intermediary levels (academies) to schools. It has diffused an evaluation culture across the French school system which is now more firmly rooted than ever before. It has structured an accountability chain across different levels – central administration – academies – schools. All actors in the chain are held accountable for results made of the funds they were responsible for. A key novelty, reported by interviewees, is that the responsibility chain is now two-ways rather than traditionally ‘downwards’ – it is also ‘upwards’ - this is an effect of the political / parliamentarian attention to results and use of all funds, under the LOLF. Increased accountability has also boosted the use made of the prior-existing “dialogue de gestion” between academies and central authorities: programme managers and actors at at academie and school levels, are aware that results will be scrutinised by their supervisory bodies and ultimately by the Parliament.

- The LOLF’s monitoring and evaluation processes also allowed a better overview of the performance of the French school sector as a whole, and also of its separate units. They indicated that under the previous system, resources were allocated to types of expenditures, in the absence of an overview of ‘what the school system or academie should achieve’ and ‘how’.

- Local and school actors also have a better understanding of the ministry’s resource allocation methods and approaches – as they are part of the dialogue and modes are transparent.

- The production of new data and data collection mechanisms, interviewees reported that the LOLF provided various actors across the French school systems with a common budgetary nomenclature used for different purposes:
  - Financial controllers at academie level now carefully scrutinize available dashboard of indicators which academie inspectors have built to understand the territories they work on;
  - School heads use APAE indicators to develop their school plan projet d’établissement and establish their school’s diagnosis.
  - The MELUSINE indicators are also used by academie managers to monitor the progress of each academie and departement.
  - Those indicators are also used to work on specific issues across Ministries, such as on educational priority policies and urban development policy.

Interviewees mentioned that the indicators used by the LOLF existed prior to the LOLF but since their inclusion in the LOLF, attention to them increased, notably during the management dialogue (dialogue de gestion) and during the review of the budget at the Parliament. Interviewees reported for example that the ‘repeat year’ indicator is now paid attention to and reflects that actors are convinced repeating a year should be avoided and rates reduced. This has been reflected in national aggregates, where figures have declined over time. The case study did not verify this further.

This being said, a number of shortcomings were also mentioned by interviewees or in the literature. The first one relates to an initial intention of the LOLF – to introduce a performance-based public management approach (although this was debated at the time of the introduction of the LOLF).
Reasons not to follow a performance-based management approach, invoked by interviewees are:

- lack of scientific measurements of the link between (1) the performance of the academies, (2) resources allocated, and (3) other explanatory factors. Some interviewees considered that resources allocated weren’t sufficient explanatory factors of schools or academies’ performances. They gave the example of academies’ scores of the indicator on ‘baccalaureat success rate’: scores can be compared but it is difficult to establish which academie is more or less merit-worthy without a very precise understanding of the reasons for the score from one academie to another. Another example is the use of the ‘repeat of year’ indicator whose rates have been reduced across the country. However in the absence of clarity on reasons for this, it is not possible to establish whether this is a perverse of virtuous effect of the official discourse (to make it pupils ‘repeat’ a year an exceptional occurrence, rather than a default one) on teachers’ practices, ie. a perverse effect would be to keep pupils transition from one year to another, or transfer to another school, despite poor results, thus keeping rates low; a virtuous effect would be that schools have developed remedial and support measures which have improved learning outcomes for successful transitions. Interviewees reported there was insufficient data on amounts of funds poured to tackle this specific problem and thus understand the scores of this particular indicator.

- changes occur over medium to long periods of time, and annual and triannual timeframes under the LOLF do not allow a precise measurement of the effects of resources allocated on performance. One interviewee mentioned that ‘persuasion’ mechanisms, enabled within the dialogue de gestion, were more effective (in terms of changing management or teaching practices) than the simple allocation of addition financial or human resources.

- Academies have in fact a rather limited room for manoeuvre to allocate available resources, as most are earmarked to teaching staff. Interviewees overall reported that since most of financial allocations were earmarked to human resources, and decided upon at central level, other levers to activate were limited. [this argument is developed in section 1.4]

- Scores also have to be viewed against the academie’s socio-economic and rural/urban context. Interviewees mentioned that whilst in some academies the pupil/teacher ratio greater than in another, results were worse – and that this was, reportedly, predominantly due to the much lower socio-economic characteristics of that academie.

Other reported shortcomings relate to:

- The disconnection between decisions on resources (including on human ones) from the annual management dialogue (dialogue de gestion) between the DGESCO and each academie. This means that whilst the academie’s performance, its projets pedagogiques, d’établissements etc, can be discussed within the annual dialogue de gestion, they are not systematically linked with decisions made on the allocation of financial and especially of human resources. Other interviewees indicated on the contrary that the management dialogue (dialogue de gestion) was in fact the place where recteurs could make demands to the central administration for support to a specific project or orientation.
According to some interviewees, the LOLF has led to debates centred on the budget, and the reduction of spending, rather than on strategic (re)orientation ones.

Some indicators and objectives set under the LOLF ‘school mission’ have been criticized as insufficiently relevant to measure the performance of the school system, rather than tackling the most important issues.

The literature and some interviewees challenged the usability of the LOLF indicators to measure the performance of the system over time due to their instability and regular updates since 2006, as well as by the existence of separate indicators also used by the Ministry of Education.

1.4 Académie-level actors’ feedback and views

Several managers in the academies of Nantes and Lille were interviewed for this case study.

They confirmed that an essential effect of the LOLF has been that is has improved the accountability and empowerment of managers across the ‘chain of responsibility’. They considered that the LOLF introduced a new culture of objective-driven management – working with objectives, indicators, evaluations, needs, use of funds, in the Education Nationale, which is part of the French civil service - and raising awareness amongst all public sector actors about the importance of scrutinizing and understanding performance results. The LOLF reportedly made different actors of the system aware of their responsibilities and contributed to changing their approach from a strictly ‘accounting’ one to a ‘service-delivery’ one. It also contributed to collective critical reflections on working methods, priorities, pedagogical choices in relation to the specific needs of their territories and means, etc. This was reported as positive and needed.

Interviewees reported that:

- the implementation of the LOLF has required that local tools be created and staff trained to understand the framework under the LOLF. Interviewees from the Lille académie reported that they had to develop a series of local tools, and groups of local stakeholders (recteurs, inspection académique at department level) working on management, forecasting, monitoring, data aggregation etc, so as to be able to comply with the various requirements of the LOLF framework.

- The LOLF introduced a collaborative work culture where financial and pedagogical actors convene to reflect on possible changes in pedagogical approaches and on the best deployment of available financial resources to meet those objectives. Interviewees reported that pedagogical and financial managers meet every 3 years to define the objectives of their projet académique and schools’ projet pédagogique according to national objectives and the recteur’s priorities, reflect on local needs and ways to meet those. In the past financial and pedagogical considerations were distinct, and different divisions worked in silos. Now financial auditors reportedly consider their work as at the service of the projet pédagogique.

- a key contribution of the LOLF was the strengthening of the pre-existing contrats d’objectifs and projet d’établissement. Prior to the LOLF, interviewees mentioned there was no real incentive to develop a solid projet d’établissement, basis on a rigorous diagnosis of need and
followed by an evaluation. By using the contrats d’objectifs and the projet d’établissement as the starting point of the annual management dialogue (dialogue de gestion) between the DGESCO and académies authorities, the LOLF strengthened the value of those documents and supporting processes.

- The LOLF allowed managers to reflect and design projects specific to the académie, which was not the case under the previous system. In the académie of Nantes and Lille, the current priorities are education prioritaire. In Nantes, another priority is preventing early school leaving (dérouche scolaire).
- Interviewees praised the availability of progress monitoring and results measurement systems in order to do this. They reported the use of national dashboards of indicators including the MELUSINE ones and the use of those indicators within the dialogue de gestion with the DGESCO. During that dialogue, trends are looked at and explanatory factors considered, targets at n+2 are set, and targets at n+1 modified if needed. They appreciated the logistical and analytical support from departments at the central ministry (DGESCO, DAFF and DGHRH) was appreciated.

Interviewees did however report that margins and autonomy for the allocation of available funds (as per the ‘fungible’ (inter-changeable) nature of funds) was, in fact, limited:

- Considering that académies do not have a say in decisions on the type and numbers of staff recruited\(^\text{128}\) (this is done at central level), sums to re-allocate within the total envelop to académie-specific priorities are in fact small. This means that any resources available under the local BOP are deployed to meet those priorities. Those resources are reportedly limited to (1) operational funds (moyens de fonctionnement) to schools (EPLE) to support académies specific projects, and (2) social appropriations (credits sociaux), however.
- Another shortcoming reported by some interviewees in the académies consulted is that funds can not be moved from one BOP to another as the envelop available is earmarked to each of the 6 programmes which make the ‘school education’ mission up.

As a result of the latter point, interviewees reported that they mainly worked on pedagogical solutions. In Nantes académie authorities have chosen to work on providing pedagogical support to pupils and teachers, and on triggering innovation in teaching and learning approaches. For example, in order to increase the number of pupils in technical branches, groups of teachers were created to reflect on effective pedagogies and improve pupils’ results. In Lille, académie authorities have reflected on developing teacher training.

### 1.5 Transferability

The QA framework introduced by the LOLF could be transferred to other EU school systems, provided requirements made are (1) understood by all actors across the system, and resources poured to achieve this, e.g. through support and accompanying measures (2) systems and processes are in place to support its introduction and implementation, (3) it supports other wider

\(^{128}\) With the exception of the recruitment of contractual agents for which they are competent (within the total envelop granted).
trends, such as increasing autonomy to local and school actors, and efficiency-related measures.

### 1.6 Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Name of Institution</th>
<th>Date of interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Academic researcher</td>
<td>30 January 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Sous-direction de la performance et du dialogue avec les académies, Service du budget, de la performance et des établissements, Ministère de l'éducation nationale, de l'enseignement supérieur et de la recherche</td>
<td>4 March 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Bureau de la synthèse budgétaire, des études et du contrôle de gestion, DGESCO, Ministère de l'éducation nationale, de l'enseignement supérieur et de la recherche (2 persons)</td>
<td>11 February 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Direction de la Prospective et des Moyens d'Enseignement (DPME), Rectorat de Nantes, Ministère de l'éducation nationale, de l'enseignement supérieur et de la recherche (4 persons)</td>
<td>13 April 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Bureau du Secrétariat général de l'académie de Lille, Ministère de l'éducation nationale, de l'enseignement supérieur et de la recherche (2 persons)</td>
<td>16 April 2015</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 1.7 References

- *Diaporama qui résume les changements introduits par la LOLF dans la gestion des crédits d'Etat* - Academie de Lille, 2005
- Academie de Besancon, *diaporama sur la LOLF*, 2010
Germany/Saxony - External Evaluation of schools

Basic facts box:

- **Country**: Germany, Federal State of Saxony
- **Characteristics of the school system**: Saxony’s school system is characterised by many elements of centralisation: there are central exit exams, central curricula, central approval of teaching material and a centralised system of teacher recruitment. Within the limits defined by law, teachers and principals enjoy autonomy in relation to the 'pedagogical approach' and the orientation of the school. In lower secondary education (grade 5), Saxony’s school system streams pupils into the three tracks Gymnasium (highest level), Realschulbildungsgang (intermediate level) and Hauptschulbildungsgang (lowest level).
- **Scope of implementation of the measure**: External evaluations are carried out at all of Saxony (DE)’s 1400 public schools at primary and secondary, and post-secondary education (vocational schools/Berufsschulen). One evaluation cycle takes approximately 5 years. Each year, a random sample of approximately 1/5 of schools is selected for external evaluation.
- **Participation in the measure**: compulsory
- **Stage in the QA cycle**: the external evaluation provides an objective assessment of a school's quality and consequently enables the school community and the School Supervision Board to check whether measures to improve school quality taken as a result of the previous cycle have proved effective. The conclusions from the external evaluations should inform the content of the target agreements between schools and the School Supervision Board and should lead to the formulations of new measures aimed at improving/assuring school quality
- **Date of start of the measure**: the first evaluation cycle took place between 2007 and 2014; the second cycle has started in late 2014.
- **Stakeholders involved**: the stakeholders directly involved in the process are:
  - the Education Institute of Saxony (Saechsisches Bildungsinstitut, SBI) which is responsible for carrying out the external evaluations; and
  - the school community – including principals, teachers, pupils and parents.
  
  The School Supervision Board (Saechsische Bildungsagentur, SBA) is responsible for further work with the school on the basis of the evaluation results.
- **Target issue the QA measure addresses**: External evaluations aim at providing stakeholders with an objective measure of school quality. A report presenting aggregated results informs the policy level about the state of school quality at the system level.
- **Information on levels of funding and source**: The SBI is funded by the Ministry of Education.

1.1 General context

According to the educational mission (Bildungsauftrag) enshrined in Article 1 of Saxony’s Education Act, all individuals should have access to the education which fits their needs and abilities regardless their economic and social situation. Education should transmit values which provide individuals with a meaningful orientation in life and society, should contribute to the development of pupils’ personality, should provide pupils with knowledge and skills and the ability to self-confidently apply them, and should stimulate the joy of life-long learning. Article 59a of the Education Act specifies that the results of schools’ education and training activities should be

---

regularly evaluated and that the Education Institute of Saxony (SBI) supports schools and the school supervision board in this task by developing and implementing a procedure to measure the quality of schooling.

On the basis of this educational mission and acknowledging stakeholders’ expectations towards schools, the Education Institute of Saxony (SBI) developed criteria for school quality which provide the framework for the external evaluations. The quality criteria cover five quality areas: performance, teaching and learning, school culture, professional development, management and leadership, and cooperation. The criteria are presented in detail in section 1.2.

Within the overall quality cycle, the external evaluation has been developed as an instrument to provide all stakeholders, but in particular the school community, with an objective and systematic assessment of the school’s quality. The external evaluation may thus be seen as complementary to the internal evaluations which are ideally (but not compulsorily) carried out by the schools themselves. The appropriateness of a school’s internal evaluation system in terms of methodology and its link to the school’s development objectives is assessed during the external evaluations.

The external evaluations enable schools to assess their level of school quality relative to the Saxon average. More importantly, however, the evaluation report presents both the school’s strengths and areas which necessitate improvement. External evaluations are expected to unfold their greatest potential for quality development if their results are systematically used as a basis for the formulation of targets and quality development measures by the school, and if they inform the target agreements between schools and the school supervision board.

In Saxony (DE), the system of external evaluations is based on the principles of objectivity, standardisation, and hence comparability across schools. Their objective is to support schools as a whole and they are not designed to provide feedback on the performance of individual teachers.

1.2 Description of the measure

The development of a comprehensive quality assurance system in Saxony (DE) according to the Plan, Do, Check, Act (PDCA) cycle of Deming was induced by the publication of the first PISA results where German 15 year olds – unexpectedly for German policy makers and the German public – performed only average in comparison to pupils in other developed countries. This so-called ‘PISA shock’ led to reforms in many German Federal States as it was believed that young peoples’ competency levels could be improved when moving away from traditional steering mechanisms exclusively based on inputs towards an output oriented system of increased school autonomy in combination with external quality assurance mechanisms. As part of this reform, Saxony (DE)’s curricula were rewritten and in 2004 the Education Act was renewed, giving schools more autonomy with regard to pedagogical and organisational matters. In exchange for a higher level of school autonomy, the new Education Act required schools to reflect upon and document their pedagogical work, and to formulate school programmes. At the same time, the Education Act introduced a system of external school evaluations to support schools in this quality development process and to provide all stakeholders with objective information on a school’s quality.

The external evaluations are carried out in 5-year cycles by evaluation teams of the Education Institute of Saxony (SBI). Evaluation teams consist of (former) teachers.

---

SBI, 2010.
with at least five years of teaching experience who need to pass an assessment centre in order to become evaluators and who receive specific training. Most of the evaluators are full-time evaluators. However, some of them are still teaching part-time (up to 40% of their working time).

What are the evaluation criteria?

The evaluation criteria were developed by the SBI on the basis of the latest research evidence and are publicly available\textsuperscript{131}. They apply to all schools in the same way. Five quality areas are distinguished, which are further subdivided into quality characteristics and quality criteria – as presented in Table 7.1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality areas</th>
<th>Quality characteristics</th>
<th>Quality criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Results</td>
<td>Fulfilment of the educational mission</td>
<td>e.g. social competence and methodological competence of pupils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Educational success</td>
<td>e.g. Graduation rates, transfer rates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School satisfaction</td>
<td>Satisfaction of pupils, teachers and parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching and learning</td>
<td>Organisation of teaching and learning</td>
<td>Variety of classes offered, extracurricular activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teaching and learning processes</td>
<td>e.g. maintaining attention, facilitating practical application of knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School culture</td>
<td>Values and norms of school</td>
<td>e.g. shared pedagogical objectives and vision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School climate</td>
<td>e.g. social quality at the school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Individual support</td>
<td>Support of underperforming as well as excellent pupils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional development</td>
<td>Systematic cooperation of staff</td>
<td>e.g. communication among staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Life-long learning</td>
<td>e.g. participation in CPD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management and leadership</td>
<td>Management of administrative affairs and resources</td>
<td>e.g. fulfilment of administrative tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>e.g. leading pedagogical processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quality assurance and development</td>
<td>e.g. school programme development, internal evaluation, outcome-orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Staff development</td>
<td>e.g. Staff development concept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Staff recruitment</td>
<td>e.g. recruitment criteria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperation</td>
<td>Participation of pupils and parents</td>
<td>e.g. participation of pupils and participation of parents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{131} Ibid.
In addition to an overview of the evaluation criteria, the overview document\textsuperscript{132} presents a short description of the meaning of the quality characteristics and associated criteria and a rationale for their inclusion in the evaluation. Taking school climate as an example, the document states:

“The impression that teachers and students have about the school and in particular about the interpersonal relationships at school, can be called the school climate. This does not refer to the current state ("weather"), which can change daily, but to the long-term impression ("climate") the school community has about the atmosphere in the school. Pupils’ development of a positive sense of belonging to the school and to their class depends on these subjective perceptions. A positive school climate is therefore considered an important determinant for pupils’ development and for the effectiveness of learning. The perceived climate depends both on the interpersonal relationships at school and the condition/interior design of the rooms and the school building.”

\textit{How is quality assessed in practice?}

Many results presented in the evaluation report at the end of the evaluation process are based on the outcomes of a survey among teachers and pupils. Regarding the school climate, teachers and pupils are, for example, asked to give a rating from 1 (does not apply) to 5 (applies fully) to the following statement on the teacher-pupil relationship: “A good relationship between teachers and pupils contributes to a good social climate at the school. At school, for example, the tone between teachers and pupils is friendly; the teachers strive for equal treatment of the pupils, take pupils’ problems seriously and take up pupils’ suggestions.”

Teaching and learning processes are assessed by the evaluators during class observations. The assessment grid is publicly available and presents the indicators used to make the assessment\textsuperscript{133}. For example, evaluation of flexibility of teaching and learning processes is done on the basis of the following indicators:

- Interests and experiences of the pupils are integrated into the instruction
- The pupils have the opportunity to shape instruction on the basis of their own ideas
- The teacher is open to the views of the pupils

Evaluation is based on a rating from 1 (does not apply) to 5 (applies fully)

\textit{How is the evaluation process organised?}

External evaluations follow a protocol developed by the SBI and described in a publically available guidance note\textsuperscript{134}:

- A first contact by telephone between school principal and policy officer of the school supervision (SBA) focusses on organisational issues of the external evaluation and the timetable.

\textsuperscript{132} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{133} SBI, 2013c.
\textsuperscript{134} SBI, 2014.
The school consequently receives an information package which aims to increase transparency about the external evaluations at the school and to involve all stakeholders.

Approximately four weeks before the survey the head of the evaluation team contacts the school principal by telephone to agree on remaining organisational issues and the date and time of the interviews.

A survey of pupils, teachers and parents takes place approximately 2 weeks before the school visit (the results of this survey are incorporated in the final evaluation report).

Between the survey and the school visit, the school principal and the evaluation team receive key administrative data on the schools’ performance of the past three years (results of pupil assessments, graduation and drop-out rates, etc.). The school principal has the opportunity to validate and complement these data. Furthermore, the evaluation team is provided with the schools development programme.

The site visit takes two to three days and includes discussions with the school principal and staff responsible for quality management, and class observations (assessment is based on a standardised evaluation form). In addition, a self-selected sample of six teachers, six pupils and six parents are engaged in small group discussions on a variety of topics (World Café methodology). The results of these small group discussions are not considered representative and do not influence the evaluation results. Rather, they are summarised on flip charts which are made available to the school community at the end of the site visit and which provides the school community with a starting point for further discussions on quality development. At the end of the site visit, a final meeting takes place in which the school visit is reflected upon and following steps are outlined.

The report is sent to the school within four weeks of the school visit, together with a feedback questionnaire. After about for weeks the school’s stakeholders and the representative of the school supervision board discuss the results of the report and possible measures for improvement in a 90 minutes meeting. One member of the evaluation team moderates this discussion, another member has the role of an external evaluation expert and stimulates on the basis of the report.

The most important information contained in the evaluation reports and its usefulness can be summarised as follows:

- All quality criteria are rated on a scale from 1 to 5 (red to dark green) indicating the degree of need for action, as depicted in Table 1.2;
- Wherever evaluation depends on teachers’ and pupils’ responses to the survey conducted prior to the school visit, the average rating is reported by group, enabling the comparison of teachers’ and pupils’ evaluation of, for example, the quality of the school climate or the extent to which high and low performing pupils are individually supported in class;
- In addition to school specific information, the average of Saxon schools is reported where possible and relevant to provide the school with an indication of its position relative to others;
With the implementation of the second evaluation cycle, it will for the first time be possible to trace the development of school’s quality over time, provided the criteria have remained unchanged (which is not the case for some).

### Table 1.2 Quality scale and traffic light system indicating need for action in evaluation report

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality scale</th>
<th>Quality assessment</th>
<th>Symbol/Colour</th>
<th>Need for action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Lower</td>
<td>- (red)</td>
<td>Measures leading to improvements should urgently be initiated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Rather low</td>
<td>- (orange)</td>
<td>Measures leading to improvements should be initiated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>0 (yellow)</td>
<td>Provided that there are no areas of development of higher urgency, the school should try to achieve improvement by initiating measures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Rather high</td>
<td>+ (green)</td>
<td>Improvement is still possible. Provided that there are no areas of development of higher urgency, the school should try to achieve improvement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>++ (dark green)</td>
<td>Here the focus should be to maintain this high level of quality.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SBI (2013a)

### 1.3 Effectiveness of the QA measure based on school actor’s feedback and views

The selection of quality criteria on the basis of scientific evidence is expected to ensure that improvement on these criteria, for example in teachers’ participation in continuing professional development, will lead to improvement in the level of pupils’ knowledge and skills. There has not been an evaluation causally linking the introduction of external evaluations with increasing school quality and higher levels of pupils’ performance. However, the RUN study carried out by the University of Leipzig investigated the acceptance and use of the results of the external evaluation in 30 Saxon schools and concluded that the first cycle of external evaluations in Saxony (DE) has had “a normative effect on school actors. It has effects which are reflected in the stories told by the interviewees, such as stories about the staging of good instruction during school visits, or about [...] the use [of the results]”. Although practicing good instruction with pupils like a theatre play in order to perform well during class observation is not the primary objective of the external evaluations as such, the RUN study argues that this shows that teachers know what good instruction entails and what is expected of them. This normative effect of the external evaluation was confirmed by the school actors interviewed for this case study: the quality criteria on the basis of which the external evaluation is carried out provide a clear and binding definition of school quality in Saxony (DE). The results of the external evaluation therefore establish a common understanding among the school community (principal, teachers, pupils and parents), and between the school community and the School Supervision Board of the quality areas in which a school needs to improve. As one

---

137 SBI, 2013b.
138 SBI, 2013b, p.93.
interviewee put it: "The evaluation report determines what is talked about. It is objective and does not emphasise negative or positive results from the outset." To an important degree, it takes the subjectivity of the various school actors out of the discussion and negotiation processes.

In line with its purpose within the quality cycle, interviewees confirm that the external evaluation initiates discussion within the school. This concludes in the development of a new school programme or the adjustment of the previous one. The school programme defines the pedagogical and organisational principles of the school and - as required by the Education Act – needs to be supported by the whole school community. According to the Education Institute of Saxony (DE), the average quality of the school programmes has substantially improved over the past years, which interviewees attribute to the introduction of the system of external evaluations, and the need for self-reflection and documentation of quality development it requires.

Schools were supported in their work on the school programmes (and other quality areas, such as the development of a ‘concept’ for staffs’ continuing professional development) by advisers (Prozessmoderatoren) from the supporting system, offered by the school supervision board (SBA) and through training opportunities for those teachers leading quality development efforts in schools, offered by the Education Institute (SBI).

The fact that the evaluation report is an external assessment of the schools quality is seen as an advantage by the principals interviewed, as it facilitates the principal’s role as a moderator of internal change, rather than a superior ordering change. In addition, the external view provides new insights as sometimes, over time, the school community has become blind to shortcomings in the school’s processes.

In addition to initiating discussion on quality development within the school, the results of the external evaluation are also the basis for negotiations between the school and the school supervision board (SBA), leading to the drawing up of target agreements. However, in Saxony (DE) the results of the external evaluations are not the only sources of information on schools’ quality the school supervision board is working with. In addition to the evaluation reports, Saxon representatives of the supervision board for example have access to results from the centralised exit exams and large-scale pupil assessments. In the RUN evaluation study, this has led to the conclusion that the results from external evaluations compete for the attention of the representative of the school supervision board with other reliable sources of information. While this is to some extent correct for performance related quality areas, interviewees point out that there are no alternatively available measures of the school climate and school satisfaction from the pupils’ perspective. Also, evaluation reports may contain results not expected by the particular representative of the school supervision board, initiating research into the sources of these discrepancies.

A clear limitation of the potential of the external evaluations to initiate quality improvement in Saxony (DE) is that the fulfilment of the targets agreed between schools and school supervision board does not have any implications on the allocation of resources. This is a consequence of the SBA’s minimal leverage regarding the allocation of resources (which is not performance-dependent but rather determined in detail by the Ministry of Education’s regulation), and the overall scarcity of resources – especially teachers. In Saxony (DE), teacher recruitment is centralised and the schools do not have the autonomy to choose their staff, although the school supervision board does the best it can to allocate teachers to schools on the basis of specific needs. Interviewees agree that these limitations do not provide strong incentives for schools to comply with the target agreements, making the system very – or even exclusively – dependent on school principals’ and teachers’ “sense of honour” – as one interviewee explained.
The School Supervision Board’s inability to apply sanctions is directly related to the question of how to improve non-compliers’ acceptance of the idea of quality development and external evaluations. According to the interviewees, most opposition to external evaluations was founded in a misunderstanding of its purpose: rather than a useful instrument for self-help with much autonomy in relation to the quality areas to concentrate on for improvement, external evaluations were sometimes perceived as an assessment with the purpose of categorising schools into good and bad schools and obliging schools to improve in certain areas. The interviewees state that this is less of a problem in the current second cycle of external evaluations as school actors’ understanding of the informative purpose of the evaluations has substantially improved.

Efforts to improve the effectiveness of the measure during and after the first evaluation cycle (2008-2013) have concentrated on the following areas:

- Improving school actors’ understanding of the purpose of external evaluations (through seminars, flyers, posters, letters to parents and a video);
- Improving transparency of the process and the methodology (by making all process and criteria related documents publicly available); and
- Improving the link between external evaluations and the drawing up of target agreements: In contrast to the first evaluation cycle, a meeting on the results of the evaluation report is now held between the school stakeholders and the representative of the school supervision board and the evaluation team in order to answer remaining questions and to discuss possible further steps. This is done in order to professionalise the process of drawing consequences from the report and to make it less dependent on individual school actors.

These changes were implemented on the basis of the Education Institute’s internal evaluation process as well as feedback from school actors. School actors are asked to provide written feedback on each step of the evaluation process in a standardised reply form at the end of each external evaluation.

1.4 Critical factors of the QA measure

This study identifies several factors of critical importance to external evaluations’ effectiveness in triggering quality improvement in schools:

- Factors which increase acceptance of external evaluations by school community and the School Supervision Board:
  - Scientific basis of quality criteria: This has been built in since the start. Researchers were already members of the committee charged with building the foundations of the introduction of the system of external evaluations at the highest working and political level (Aufbaustab);
  - Clarity of purpose and transparency of methodology: The SBI hosts and arranges information campaigns, and produces information material to inform school actors;
  - Transparency and professionalism of the work process: A description of the work process is publicly available. In order to ensure a standardised work process for all schools, the SBI developed a process handbook for evaluators which helps them to deal with a large variety of situations in a standardised way.
  - Reliability and objectivity of the assessment: the SBI takes great care in this point, organising training assessments where evaluators’
assessment is calibrated. Evaluators are also evaluated. According to the interviewees, this gives evaluators confidence in the measure and prepares them well for the school visits, which take place in a challenging atmosphere at times;

- Constant evaluation and adjustment of the external evaluation measure and process on the basis of SBI’s internal evaluations and feedback of school actors.

- Factors which increase school actors’ quality development capacity

  - There has been an ESF project which supported the development of quality management systems in schools. 20 weekly hours (judged by the interviewees as a very substantial contribution) were financed through the ESF and the project improved teachers’ ability to establish self-evaluation and other quality measures in their schools.

  - On demand availability of external evaluators of the School Supervision Board. As a side effect, after having worked as external evaluators for several years, these specially trained teachers have often returned to their former schools where they now can disseminate their QA knowledge and improve QA processes.

  - Continuity: school actors need to get used to measures and processes and this takes time. Continuity in the measures and processes gives them the time needed.

- Continuity in criteria and measures is a precondition for being able to measure progress over time;

- Interviewees believe that sanctions and rewards (e.g. performance dependent allocation of resources, including staff) would increase the effectiveness of target agreements negotiated after the external evaluations have taken place. This is not the case in Saxony (DE). The comprehensive quality assurance system in Saxony (DE) was introduced with a view to substantially increasing school’s autonomy. Yet autonomy, especially with regard to resource allocation, remains low.

According to the interviewees, there are no particular strengths and weaknesses of external evaluations (in Saxony (DE)). The more interesting question is what it can and what it cannot do (what is the purpose and what is not the purpose of external evaluations): With a view to increasing its acceptance as an instrument for self-help, rather than an external assessment triggering automatic sanctions, external evaluations in Saxony (DE) provide school actors with a snap shot of a school’s quality, and are explicitly designed not to provide information on the performance of individuals, do not identify the sources of problems, and do not provide advice on how to solve problems.

### 1.5 Transferability

External evaluations are a flexible measure which can be transferred to any kind of education system. There are no particular barriers to introducing them, but they need to be implemented in a way which fits and reflects the characteristics of the education system:

- The quality criteria need to be defined in accordance to the understanding of school quality in the country/region;
Only quality criteria which are part of the school’s responsibility/autonomy may be assessed and this may differ across school systems. For example, in Saxony (DE), although the quality criteria “appropriate allocation of resources” is part of the quality framework, it is not (yet) assessed during evaluations as Saxon schools do not (yet) have autonomy with regard to the allocation of resources.

External evaluations are also flexible with regard to their focus (and to some extent their purpose): In Saxony (DE), external evaluations provide school actors with a broad snap-shot of a school’s quality and evaluation reports do not provide information on the performance of individuals or even particular departments. This approach was purposefully chosen by the Education Institute to increase acceptance of the measure by teachers (no feedback on individuals) and to ensure comparability across schools (evaluations always encompass the same criteria and the same work processes). Other approaches are possible. For example, the Saxon school supervision board and some principals would like to focus external evaluations on quality areas known to be problematic in a school and would like evaluators to provide feedback on the performance of individual teachers or departments.

The costs of introducing and developing a system of external evaluations (developing criteria, choosing between possible approaches, and setting up support structures) could be decreased through information and peer-learning networks.

1.6 Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Name of Institution</th>
<th>Date of interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Education Institute of Saxony (Saechsisches Bildungsinstitut) 2 interviewees: evaluators</td>
<td>02.02.2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Gymnasium in Dresden: Principal</td>
<td>02.02.2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Oberschule in Dresden: Principal</td>
<td>03.02.2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>School Inspection (Sächsischen Bildungsagentur Dresden) 2 interviewees: Head of school inspection Dresden, School inspector</td>
<td>03.02.2015</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.7 References

- Education Institute of Saxony (SBI, 2010): School Quality in Saxony: A description of criteria/Schulqualitaet im Freistaat Sachsen: Kriterienbeschreibung;
- Education Institute of Saxony (SBI, 2013b): Reception and Use of Results of External Evaluations at Schools/Rezeption und Nutzung von Ergebnissen der
externen Evaluation an sächsischen Grundschulen, Mittelschulen und Gymnasien; https://publikationen.sachsen.de/bdb/artikel/19652


   https://publikationen.sachsen.de/bdb/artikel/22698
Denmark - National Tests

Basic facts box:

- **Country:** Denmark
- **Characteristics of the school system:** The Danish school system has a single structure for primary and lower secondary education. Publicly owned and publicly funded primary and lower secondary schools (Folkeskole, henceforth “public schools”) are the responsibility of municipalities, and are characterised by a high degree of autonomy. On the national level, the Danish public school is regulated by the Public School Act, which provides the overall framework for the schools’ activities. Parents and pupils are represented in local school boards.
- **School level which the measure covers:** primary and lower secondary education.
- **Scope of implementation of the measure:** public schools.
- **Participation in the measure:** They are compulsory for public schools in Denmark in selected grades and subjects.
- **Stage in the QA cycle:** Results from the national tests are part of the review stage of the QA cycle. Every second year the local governments publish a so-called “quality report” which contains information on each of the schools within the municipality. The quality reports have to relate to the national test results and other centrally designed indicators. If a school performs poorly on these indicators, the responsible municipality may develop an action plan to ensure improvements.
- **Date of start of the measure:** The national tests were fully implemented in 2010, but already in 2006 the tests were agreed upon by law.
- **Stakeholders involved:** The National testing system draws on large item banks (approximately 10,000 items) developed from 2006 to 2010 by a private contractor who delivered the testing system. Ministerial appointed task commissions develop supplementary items for the tests. The commissions consist mainly of teachers, lecturers from the teacher colleges and researchers. The national tests are provided by the National Agency for IT and Learning (part of the Ministry of Education).
- **Target issue the QA measure addresses:** The national tests were introduced in 2010 as a response to a report from OECD which concluded that the Danish school system was underperforming, mainly due to a lack of evaluation culture in Danish public schools. The 10 adaptive tests have been introduced as part of a larger project to promote an evaluation culture in the Danish school system.

1.1 General context

The national tests have been introduced as part of a wider framework for developing an enhanced evaluation culture in the Danish public school, with a focus on improving pupils’ academic achievements. The national testing system is designed to be a pedagogical and diagnostic tool to assess pupils’ academic performances in selected subject areas.

---


The promotion and development of an evaluation culture in the Danish school system was a response to in particular an OECD report (2004)\textsuperscript{142} which concluded that feedback and evaluation in Danish public schools were lacking. International tests such as PISA indicated that Danish pupils achieved lower academic results than would be expected, given the resources spent on the school system. The OECD conclusions and recommendations had a strong impact on the 2006 and 2014 reforms of the public primary and lower secondary school in terms of including the development of an evaluation and feedback culture as important elements of the school system\textsuperscript{143}.

In August 2014 a new reform of the Danish public school was introduced. The political agreement from June 2013\textsuperscript{144} included three national goals to improve the quality in the Danish public school:

- The public school must challenge all pupils to reach their fullest potential;
- The public school must reduce the impact of pupils’ social background on academic results; and
- The trust in the public school and pupil well-being must be enhanced by showing respect for professional knowledge and practice.

To achieve these goals quality is assessed at pupil, school and system level according to a range of indicators, which also include results from the national tests\textsuperscript{145}.

To monitor the development of the public school system, evaluations are carried out, for example by the Danish Evaluation Institute (EVA). In 2011 an OECD report highlighted that many initiatives had been implemented to promote an evaluation culture, but that the effect of evaluation and assessment tools - such as the national tests - could be further improved\textsuperscript{146}. In 2013 the Ministry of Education published a comprehensive evaluation (conducted by Rambøll Management Consulting) of the national tests which concluded that the tests could have a positive impact on pupils’ academic achievements, but that the teachers’ formative use of the tests was still lacking behind\textsuperscript{147}. In the same year a TALIS report\textsuperscript{148} stressed that there was room for improvement with regard to the development of an evaluation and feedback culture at the schools.

As national tests is the first scientific national system for measurement of student performance in Denmark, they also represent a break with the classical Danish school tradition, where the teacher is the unchallenged subject matter authority, and municipalities, schools and teachers have had full autonomy of how assessment is carried out between school start and the final exams (by the end of Form 9).


\textsuperscript{143} The national tests were introduced as part of the Ministry of Education's project "Promotion of the Evaluation Culture" (Fremme af Evalueringsskulturen) (Rambøll 2013, p. 4)

\textsuperscript{144} Political agreement, 7 June 2013: "Aftale mellem regeringen (Socialdemokraterne, Radikale Venstre og Socialistisk Folkeparti), Venstre og Dansk Folkeparti om et fagligt løft af folkeskolen" (p. 31). Link: http://uvu.dk/~/media/UVM/Filer/Folkeskolereformhjemmeside/2014/Oktber/141010%20Endelig%20aftal etekst%207.6.2013.pdf (accessed on 23 February 2015)

\textsuperscript{145} www.uvm.dk


\textsuperscript{147} Evaluering af de nationale test i Folkeskolen (2013). Link: http://www.ktst.dk/~/media/UVM/Filer/Udd/Pad%20taeys/Priser/131119%20Evaluering%20af%20 de%20 nationale%20test_rapport.ashx (accessed on 23 February 2015)

1.2 Description of the measure

National tests were introduced by law in 2006 and came into force in 2010 to provide teachers with a pedagogical tool to plan their teaching\(^\text{149}\). The tests are intended to be used formatively: based on tests results the teacher may identify the individual students’ strength and weaknesses. At municipal and system level, the tests provide a systematic overview of school and pupil performance, when the results are aggregated at school and municipal level. School level stakeholders can access the test results in an administrative register.

The national tests consist of ten mandatory tests in the subjects maths (grade 3 and 6); reading (Danish) (grade 2, 4, 6 and 8); physics/chemistry (grade 8); biology (grade 8); geography (grade 8) and English (grade 7). Each of the subjects are divided into three profile areas in which the pupils are tested. Students can also take the test two times on a voluntary basis. Additionally, two voluntary tests (grade 5 and 7) in Danish as a second language are provided. The item bank (the databases of test items) were originally provided by the private contractor that delivered the testing system (according to contract from 2006-2011 between COWI and the ministry\(^\text{150}\)). The new supplementary items are primarily developed by teachers and lecturers from teacher colleges who are members of the Ministry’s task commissions.

The tests are computerised and self-scoring which means that the teachers do not have to correct the tests. They can log on to the test system and read test results. The online nature of the tests means that they only test certain aspects of the pupils’ performances in the profile areas. The tests are for example not suited for testing speaking or writing abilities. The test system contains a flexible booking system, where the schools can book a test until the day before testing.

An important principle of the tests is the adaptivity to the individual pupil’s academic level. The level of difficulty in the questions adjusts to the individual pupil along the tests, based on how the pupil answers in the individual questions. Like in most other countries the academic levels amongst Danish pupils in a class usually vary significantly. The adaptive principle fits into this degree of pupil diversity, as it adapts to the respective pupils’ academic levels\(^\text{151}\).

The school principal and the municipal representative have online access to a socioeconomic reference which at a national level shows the results for pupils with the same socioeconomic background. As previous research suggests that pupils’ socioeconomic background has a significant impact on their academic levels, the socioeconomic reference allows the municipal representative and school principal to compare test results with results from pupils with similar socioeconomic backgrounds. This provides a more precise and equal comparison of test results than a comparison between test results between pupils from different socioeconomic backgrounds. The socioeconomic reference is calculated on the basis of a school’s composition of pupils and includes factors such as sex, ethnicity and parent’s education and income\(^\text{152}\).

\(^{149}\) Evaluering af de nationale test i Folkeskolen (2013). Link: http://www.ktst.dk/~/media/UVM/Filer/Udd/Paa%20tvaers/Priser/131119%20Evaluering%20af%20de%20nationale%20test_rapport.ashx (accessed on 23 February 2015)


\(^{151}\) For more information on the socioeconomic reference, see “Den socioøkonomiske reference for resultaterne af de nationale test – en vejledning til skoleledere og kommuner” (Skolestyrelsen, UVM). Link: http://uvm.dk/~/media/UVM/Filer/Udd/Folke/PDF11/110921_vejledning_sociooeconomisk_reference.pdf (accessed on 23 February 2015)
Results from the national tests are based on the Rasch model. The Rasch scores are converted and presented on a percentile scale which is an ordinal scale ranking scores between 1 and 100. To simplify the result presentation, the percentile scale is divided into five categories which rank the results from ‘performance clearly below average’ (1–10) to ‘performance clearly above average’ (91–100).

Test results are confidential and are not publicly shared, except for the aggregated annual national performance profile. Only stakeholders such as the pupils themselves, teachers, school principals, local school boards and municipal representatives are allowed to see those test results in which they are directly involved. It is the responsibility of the school principal that information about results are kept confidential. Confidentiality has been introduced to avoid ranking between schools, and stresses the objective of the tests to provide teachers with a tool to plan their teaching and tailor the education to their classroom and individual students.

Municipalities must include information on the national test results in their quality reports, which they have to publish every second year. Due to confidentiality the results of each of the schools in the municipality are not published, but it is possible to report on the municipality’s progress in the test results. In addition to the municipal quality report, local quality reports for each of the municipality’s schools are also developed. As with the municipal quality reports, the schools’ local quality reports do not publish test results, although they may report on the progress in the test results. In the future the national tests may play a more important role in the local government’s quality reports as the test results are included in the political targets.

If the test results indicate that a school is underperforming, the local government may have to develop an action plan on how to improve the performance at the school. Poor results from the national tests will however not be the only reason for developing an action plan, as other performance indicators will also be assessed by the local government.

Although the tests are the same for all schools across the country, the high degree of local autonomy means that practices around the tests vary between schools and teachers. Some teachers attach more importance to the tests than others which has an impact on the way the tests are carried out and perceived by the pupils. To support teachers in their use of the national tests, a number of materials have been published at the Ministry of Education’s website.

---

153 The average score of 50 is based on a calculation of the national average score in 2010. For more detailed information on the model, scale and algorithm behind the adaptive principle, see "National Tests in Denmark – CAT as a Pedagogic Tool" (Wandall 2011); and "Notat: Den adaptive algoritme i De Nationale Test" (UVM 2015). Link: http://uvm.dk/~media/UVM/Filer/Udd/Folke/PDF14/Jan/140127%20Notat%20om%20adaptive%20algoritme%20i%20de%20nationale%20test.pdf (accessed on 23 February 2015)

154 For example "Kort og godt om de nationale test i kommunen" (Skolestyrelsen 2010). Link: http://uvm.dk/~media/UVM/Filer/Udd/Gym/PDF11/111021_kort_og_godt_om_de_nationale_test_i_kommunen_print.pdf

155 De nationale test og kommunen – brug af testresultater i kommunens kvalitetsarbejde (Skolestyrelsen). Link: http://uvm.dk/~media/UVM/Filer/Udd/Folke/PDF11/111021_de_nationale_test_og_kommunen_print.pdf (accessed on 5 March 2015). For more information about the role of quality reports, see e.g. Den højst præsterende skole – Hvordan kan skolen løfte elever med svag social baggrund (AFK 2010)

156 Interview with municipal representative

157 Other supporting information about evaluation has also been published; see e.g. Nationale test og anden evaluering af elevens læsning (Pohler and Sørensen 2011)
1.3 Effectiveness of the QA measure

The 2013 Rambøll evaluation concluded that the tests might have had a positive impact on pupils’ academic performances, and that the tests to a certain extent have led to an enhanced focus on evaluation. At the same time, the evaluation also stressed that there was scope for an improved formative use of tests by teachers. Following this finding, ministerial-appointed user groups, including teachers, school principals, municipalities and parents, were set up to support the implementation of the tests and to encourage teachers to use the test results in a formative way. The case study visits confirmed that the formative use of the test results could still be improved, although the enhanced evaluation culture, increased acceptance of testing, and tools such as the “transformer” (see section 1.5) continuously support the formative use of the results.

At system level a positive outcome related to the introduction of the national tests is the national systematisation of performance measurement, at national, school and municipal levels, and dialogue around it. This is for example reflected in the use of the results from the national tests at school and municipal level to measure the attainment of the national goals introduced under the 2014 school reform (and mentioned under section 1.1). When aggregated at municipal and school level, the indicators for the national goals which include the national test results are:

- At least 80% of the pupils must be graded as “good” at reading and maths in the national tests;
- The share of the “very best” pupils in Danish and maths must increase annually;
- The share of pupils with poor results in reading and maths in the national tests must decrease annually.

With the introduction of the new reform these indicators are expected to be a tool for dialogue between the Ministry of Education and the local governments, as well as between the municipalities and the schools. It is too early in the reform process to report on the extent to which they have been used as such. The Ministry also publishes an annual national performance profile on the average performance at national level of pupils’ test results. Results at regional, municipal, school, class and pupil level are still strictly confidential.

The introduction of the indicators in the 2014 reform also led to the development of criteria-based reporting of the national test results in reading (Danish) and maths. Until recently the tests results have only been shown as norm-based; meaning that they show a test result according to the norm of average performance in the five categories on the percentile scale, and is therefore a comparison to other pupils. Criteria-based reporting shows the level of the pupil according to the national targets which have been defined by the Ministry’s content experts. The five categories on the percentile scale (norm-based reporting) are in the criteria-based reporting converted into six levels - from 1 (excellent performance) to 6 (insufficient performance) - which measure the pupil’s level according to the national targets. In an evaluation of the 2014 pilot phasing of criteria-based reporting it was highlighted that this reporting

161 The Ministry of Education’s website offers more detailed information on the criteria-based reporting and the calculations behind this. Link: http://www.uvm.dk/Uddannelser/Folkeskolen/De-nationale-test-og evaluering/De-nationale-test/Kriteriebasering-af-de-nationale-test (accessed on 3 March 2015)
supports the teachers’ formative use of the test results, as it enables teachers to see the levels of pupils according to concrete targets\(^\text{162}\).

The change of the tests from being merely an individual pedagogical tool for teachers to being used to measure the attainment of national strategic targets will most likely lead to a greater focus on the tests than hitherto\(^\text{163}\). The tests will in this way have a double role, as they are both a pedagogical and an accountability tool to assess whether targets have been reached.

At municipal level the tests are one source of data used when assessing school performance within the municipality’s jurisdiction. If a school performs poorly in the national tests, the municipality carries out a more comprehensive analysis of the school’s situation\(^\text{164}\). This takes into account the background of the pupils and the school performance in other tests and exams as well. For example, a school in a deprived area may produce worse results than other schools, but still show progress from its results in the previous years. There may also be specific reasons for poor results in a single cohort, and looking at several cohorts provides a clearer picture of the school’s performance. As such, the national tests can be an effective tool for the local government to monitor certain parameters of academic performance, and perhaps catalyse further analysis and dialogue between the school and the municipality.

At school level the national tests can in particular lead to a greater focus on pupils’ average performance, evaluation and feedback\(^\text{165}\). As indicated during the case study research, this also strengthens the value of the tests, as they become accepted as an evaluation tool. At one school it was for example highlighted that along the increased focus on feedback and evaluation which the tests had contributed to, it had also become more “socially legitimate” to want to perform well in the national tests. During recent years the societal perception of the school in Denmark has to some extent changed towards a stronger idea of the school as an institution where you learn and perform. This presents a break with previous adversity towards testing and performance rating in Danish society\(^\text{166}\).

The individualised tests support teachers in meeting the legal requirement of differentiated teaching in the public school\(^\text{167}\). To teachers the test results provide an overview of their pupils’ performances which leads to further action taken if a pupil performs poorly\(^\text{168}\). Not only national tests will be an indicator of performance; other tests, evaluations and individual pupils’ plans will also indicate the level of pupil performance. If considered necessary the school may prioritise resources on a certain class or pupil. At some point it may also be possible to integrate results from the national tests in the individual pupils’ plans\(^\text{169}\).

---

\(^{/162} \text{Pilotafprøvning af kriteriebaserede tilbagemeldinger: Erforingsopsamling (Rambøll 2014). Link: http://www.ktst.dk/~media/UVM/Filer/Udd/Folke/PDF14/Okt/141009%20Erfaringsopsamling%20Sep%202014.pdf (accessed on 23 February 2015) On the basis of this evaluation, the Ministry developed guidelines for teachers on how to use the criteria-based result viewing. Guidelines are available at the Ministry’s website.}}\)

\(^{/163} \text{The first test period since the introduction of the reform in August 2014 is currently running (Jan - April 2015).}}\)

\(^{/164} \text{Interview with municipal representative}}\)

\(^{/165} \text{Interviews with school management}}\)

\(^{/166} \text{Interview with municipal representative and school management}}\)

\(^{/167} \text{http://www.emu.dk/modul/undervisningsdifferentiering (accessed on 3 March 2015)}}\)

\(^{/168} \text{http://www.uvm.dk/Uddannelser/Folkeskolen/Den-nationale-test-og-evaluering/Elevplaner (accessed on 3 March 2015)}}\)

\(^{/169} \text{All pupils must have an individual pupil’s plan which continuously monitors the pupil’s educational outcomes according to the Common Objectives (objectives for pupils’ learning outcomes), and acts as a tool for dialogue between teachers, pupils and parents. Link: http://www.uvm.dk/Uddannelser/Folkeskolen/Den-nationale-test-og-evaluering/Elevplaner (accessed on 3 March 2015)}}\)
Amongst school stakeholders there is an ongoing awareness about and discussion of potential negative effects of the tests, such as “teaching to the tests”. For this reason it is considered key to establish dialogue between different stakeholders to ensure alignment between objectives and practices around tests. Initiatives such as training and workshops have been important to involve teachers in the intended use of the tests.

Lastly, the confidentiality of test results has sometimes been counter-acting the intended use of the tests. Stakeholders at municipal and school level may be insecure about how they are allowed to use the tests; for example whether they are allowed to share certain results or maybe just leave tests results on paper at a table for a moment. The insecurity around the handling of the tests might therefore be counter-productive to the active use of the tests. During the case study it was highlighted that schools are already being ranked according to test results from the final exams and perhaps municipal tests, and ranking on the basis of the national tests did not seem threatening to the stakeholders at school level. Some school stakeholders would actually like to see how schools compare to each other. It would however require a decision of the Parliament which is not likely to be accepted.

1.4 Critical factors of the QA measure

The national test results show and monitor academic levels of pupils, and is a tool for the teachers in the planning of teaching. They form part of a development of an overall assessment and evaluation framework which is being developed to improve the quality in the Danish school system.

Stakeholder involvement and cooperation between the different stakeholders in the school system is important to make the tests and their use a meaningful tool in the evaluation and assessment framework.

Given the high level of autonomy in the Danish school system, the tests are used differently between teachers. To professionalise the use and interpretation of the national tests, it is key to provide information and training to school leaders and teachers; for example in the form of user groups, workshops and training. Some municipalities have also implemented their own supporting measures, for instance “the transformer” (see section 1.5).

Finally, culturally and socially rooted perceptions of tests are also important, as a school does not exist independently of the surrounding society. During the past decade Danish society seems to have become accustomed and positive towards testing and measurement which have had an impact on the school stakeholders’ attitudes towards the national tests.

1.5 School actors’ feedback and views

During the case study nine school stakeholders were interviewed. Interviews were carried out with a representative from the Ministry of Education; two municipal representatives; two school management representatives; one teacher; one parent/representative from a local school board; one expert/researcher and one representative from the Teachers’ Union. Most interviews were conducted face-to-face.

170 Interview with municipal representative and school management. The evaluation of the criteria-based reporting also highlighted that there is insecurity about who has access to test results (Rambøll 2014, p. 27).

171 Experience from for example USA and Britain have shown that public ranking lead to inflation of test results. This was the reason why the Danish Parliament decided to make the test results strictly confidential.
Across school stakeholders many of the same issues with regard to the national tests came up. Generally, it was agreed that results from the national tests can be useful indicators of pupils’ academic levels, but must be used alongside other information and data about pupils’ performances. Although the effective formative use of the tests has not fully been realised yet since their introduction, the design of the tests and testing more generally have gained increased legitimacy.

Some concerns were raised about the use of national test results in the new school reform, as this may remove the focus on the tests as the teachers’ pedagogical tool. Although the tests are currently low stake, concerns were raised about the potential future implications for school leaders and teachers if a school performs poorly. It was on the positive side also mentioned that it is useful to have concrete performance targets.

One school has a high percentage of non-ethnically Danish pupils, and has previously achieved poor academic results. The school has now experienced significant progress in the national test results. This also follows a greater focus on performance during a number of years. The introduction of the national tests in 2010 therefore fitted well into this existing development. An interesting feature of this school is a very strong parental community. Pupils live geographically close to the school, and parents often meet each other outside the school context. Also, school events for pupils and their parents are often organised. The including parent community has a positive impact on the attitude towards national tests, as it engages the parents in the academic performance at the school, which again has an impact on the pupils’ attitudes. The parents may find useful information about the conduct and use of the tests on the school intranet. Events for the parents on the use of the intranet have been organised, and this has also increased their commitment to the tests as they can easily access information about the tests.

An important challenge for the other school visited is that it has to embrace very different academic levels. As a response to teachers’ uncertainties about the usefulness of the national tests, as they were already aware of the pupils’ levels prior to the tests, the school implemented a new tool called “the transformer” (Beregneren) developed for the Municipality of Copenhagen. The test results in the four reading tests (grade 2, 4, 6 and 8) are presented on four different un-comparable percentile scales (norm referenced ordinal scales that are referring to the students’ performances on the grade level of the test). The transformer transforms the results from these four ordinal scales into one common interval scale (like the PISA scale and the American Lexile scale). This allows the school to compare test results of the pupil from different tests and in this way follow the pupils’ academic progression. If a pupil for example has a lower percentile score in year four than in year two, it does not necessarily mean that the pupil’s performance is worse. The transformer is useful to identify the pupils’ academic development (also called Progression, Growth, Progress or Added Value) as an indicator of the effect of the school’s effort. This supports differentiated education as poor or well performing pupils may have different needs than average performing pupils. Before introducing the transformer the school held workshops for the teachers about the use of the tool. After having used the transformer teachers expressed that it had made the effective and formative use of the national tests more meaningful. Currently the transformer is only developed for tests in reading, but given the positive feedback it has received, it is expected to be introduced in maths and English as well.

172 The transformer (Beregneren) is developed by NordicMetrics (see http://www.nordicmetrics.com/beregneren/) for the Municipality of Copenhagen.
173 The development of the Transformer in maths and English is commissioned by the municipality of Copenhagen and the work is done by NordicMetrics. Currently the transformer in Reading (Danish) is used
The methodological approach in the tests in terms of computerisation and the adaptive principle is an innovative approach which save teachers useful time. The introduction of the national tests was a highly controversial subject much discussed amongst teachers as they argued that they were already able to assess the individual pupils’ academic performance before the tests. However they have now collected national test data all years since 2009/10 since and a tool such as the transformer adds value to the teacher’s existing knowledge, as it allows to monitor a pupil’s positive or negative progression.

1.6 Transferability

Although the Danish Ministry of Education was inspired by other countries in terms of introducing the national tests, the experiences from Denmark also provide lessons for transferability:

- In terms of quality assurance in the school system it is important to look behind reasons for test results, and compare test results to other indicators to develop a comprehensive understanding of how and why schools and the pupils perform at a certain level;

- Multi-level cooperation is important to ensure understanding between the different school system levels. In Denmark this cooperation is specifically aimed at supporting congruence between ministerial intentions and teachers’ practices of the tests;

- Continuous evaluation to ensure improvements is needed to assess whether adjustments and improvements are needed to support the intended use of the tests. The Danish case demonstrated that such evaluations have been useful to improve the usability of the tests;

- The adaptive principle and computerisation are innovative methodological approaches which could be replicated in other tests in other contexts. A significant amount of human and financial resources should however be available to ensure an appropriate development and implementation of the tests;

- The specific school culture and structure in Denmark has an impact on the way the tests are used as a tool by the schools, municipalities and the Ministry. Danish institutions are characterised by a high degree of cooperation and an awareness of co-decision making and bottom-up approaches to the implementation of new initiatives such as the national tests. This has been helpful to the development and improvement of the national tests. Without similar structures another system of systematic follow-up must be in place to support dialogue and feedback around the test results.

1.7 Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Name of Institution</th>
<th>Date of interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Agency of Quality and Supervision, Ministry of Education: Pedagogical consultant</td>
<td>29.01.2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The Children and Youth Administration, Copenhagen Municipality: Consultant</td>
<td>09.02.2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Department of Children and Youth, Aarhus Municipality: Head of</td>
<td>17.02.2015</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>School in Aarhus Municipality</th>
<th>3 interviewees: Vice school principal; Teacher, reading advisor; Chairman of the school board, parent</th>
<th>17.02.2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>School in Copenhagen Municipality: Deputy head and head of the educational department</td>
<td></td>
<td>19.02.2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>The Danish Union of Teachers: Head of Educational and Political department</td>
<td></td>
<td>19.02.2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>NordicMetrics / Aarhus University: Director at NordicMetrics &amp; External Lecturer at Aarhus University</td>
<td></td>
<td>19.02.2015</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 1.8 References


http://eng.uvm.dk/Education/Primary-and-Lower-Secondary-Education/The-Folkeskole (accessed on 12 March 2015)


http://www.emu.dk/modul/undervisningsdifferentiering (accessed on 3 March 2015)


http://www.emu.dk/modul/undervisningsdifferentiering (accessed on 3 March 2015)


http://www.mitbuf.dk/beregneren (accessed on 3 March 2015)
Estonia - Internal Evaluation

**Basic facts box:**
- **Country:** Estonia
- **Characteristics of the school system:** Single structure school education for primary and lower secondary (i.e. basic school) and separate for upper secondary education (since 2013). However, the most dominant school type is that with all of the three levels of education (primary, lower secondary and upper secondary, i.e. grades 1-12) together. New schools should have upper secondary separated from basic school. Most schools are publicly owned by municipalities. High level of school and local autonomy.
- **School level which the measure covers:** The requirement of implementing internal evaluation (IE) is applied to all levels of school education.
- **Scope of implementation of the measure:** all schools (no sampling takes place).
- **Participation in the measure:** compulsory. IE is stipulated by the law (Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act\(^{174}\) and Preschool Child Care Institutions Act\(^{175}\)).
- **Stage in the QA cycle:** IE covers all stages of QA cycle.
- **Date of start of the measure:** IE was introduced as an obligation in 2006. Educational institutions must produce an IE report once in each ‘development plan period’, which lasts at least 3 years.
- **Stakeholders involved:** The structure and organisation of IE is up to the schools to decide. The headmaster approves the procedure after consulting with the board of trustees. Research\(^{176}\) shows that generally teachers, parents and students are involved in the evaluation process.
- **Target issue the QA measure addresses:** IE is an ongoing process aimed at ensuring the conditions supporting the development of students and the consistent development of a school. To that end, the strengths and weaknesses of a school are identified and the development plan of the school is drawn up on the basis thereof. IE involves the analysis of teaching, education and management, and the evaluation of their effectiveness.
- **Information on levels of funding and source:** IE is funded by state and school owners as it is part of the responsibility of schools. There is no information on how much school budget is committed to IE as the school staff performs IE as part of their regular work activities.

### 1.1 General context

The quality assurance system in Estonia covers elements such as: issuing education licences; monitoring performance data of schools; external assessment of learning outcomes; administrative supervision of schools (inspections); supervisory control over schools by their owners; international and national surveys; qualification requirements for school staff; schools’ and teachers’ recognition mechanisms; and school internal evaluation.

Internal evaluation (IE) is a quality assurance measure intended to provide direct input to the development process of schools. Different aspects of school development are analysed in the IE process in view of achieving pre-established development goals.


IE reports/results are available to school owners and the board of trustees who are also stakeholders in the school development process. At the moment, IE is not directly linked to other QA measures; evaluation reports are meant for internal use of schools and are not gathered or reviewed at the Ministry of Education and Research (MER). However, the MER can check (as part of the inspections) whether schools comply with the regulation to carry out IE regularly.

Regarding the guiding principles of the evaluation, it is purely based on self-evaluation and the organisation of the process is left unregulated. The law only stipulates that schools must produce an IE report once in each ‘development plan period’, which lasts at least 3 years.

1.2 Description of the measure

The main objective of the IE is to introduce a continuous process of evaluation aimed at ensuring the conditions supporting the development of students and the consistent development of a school. IE is a process to support the systematic analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of a school and provide input to the development needs. The latter should be outlined in the school development plan in view of the school development goals. The compilation of a school development plan is required by law.

More specifically, the system of IE has the following functions:

- support the management system of schools;
- define relevant indicators regarding the school and collect data on these;
- collect feedback on goal achievement;
- collect data on the expectations, needs and satisfaction of stakeholders;
- monitor the implementation of school values, mission and vision;
- avoid risks;
- recognise the opportunities and key issues in school;
- make conclusions on how activities and outcomes relate to causes and consequences;
- set goals based on analysis and facts;
- provide grounds for resource allocation decisions by the school and the school owner;
- support, motivate and recognise the staff;
- analyse and compare results with other schools;
- monitor long term development of the institution;
- facilitate the visibility of the activities and outcomes of schools.\(^{177}\)

The IE system should ideally provide an overview to the members of the school and its community on why evaluation takes place, what are the expectations and roles of school members in the evaluation system, what aspects are being monitored and how do the different evaluation processes (e.g. student learning assessments and evaluations, teacher evaluations etc.) relate to other types of evaluations and assessments taking place.\(^{178}\)

IE focuses on facilitating improvement in education quality, school development and addressing problems or areas of concern in any relevant fields (teaching, education, management, stakeholder involvement, etc.). The actual change depends on


\(^{178}\) Ibid.
individual schools – to what extent they internalise the evaluation in their school processes and commit to a learning organisation approach.

Estonian IE model has been mostly based on the traditional quality management models, e.g. PDCA cycle or Deming cycle, the Total Quality Management (TQM), the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) model, and the CAF model have been used as examples.

IE was introduced in 2006. The functions of public authorities have changed in recent years:

- Until 2009 IE was managed by the National Examinations and Qualifications Centre (NEQC) until 2009. The NEQC had a Department of Counselling for Internal Evaluation that included experts and counsellors on IE. The functions of the department included the analysis of IE reports submitted by schools; managing the counselling of schools’ IE process; the analysis of IE systems of schools and working on the related development tasks.
- From 2009, the MER became responsible for IE and its responsibility was limited to the counselling process only; the feedback from counsellors and their reports enabled to indirectly monitor the IE process at schools.
- From 2011 onwards, the MER has budget for counselling for around 10% of schools which limits the monitoring process even more.

The MER does not regulate the IE process (e.g. what kind of analysis to carry out, what data to collect, what indicators to monitor, etc.). Also, no mandatory report format or evaluation process or criteria have been introduced; the use of the performance indicators available in the Estonia Education Information System (EHIS) is recommended but not compulsory. The 2011 “Study on Internal Evaluation” demonstrated that 95% of the educational institutions use the recommended IE form provided by the MER; the study also revealed that all reviewed IE reports covered the recommended sections/indicators:

- leadership and management;
- personnel management;
- cooperation with interest groups;
- resource management;
- the teaching and learning process;
- pupil/student results, personnel and interest groups;
- and statistics of the educational institution.

Schools may also include their own indicators which are in accordance with the teaching and education objectives contained in the school development plan.

School heads establish the procedures for school internal evaluation. In the case study schools, the IE processes had the following characteristics:

- IE is an annual evaluation process starting at the beginning of the school year when the goals and activity plan for the respective year are agreed upon.
- The evaluation is typically divided into different sub-processes that are structured around issues such as leadership and strategic management, personnel management, cooperation with stakeholders, resource management, and teaching and learning process (the specific structure of reports could vary).

---

Also, other issues could be included (e.g. special needs education support, extracurricular activities) if deemed necessary by the management team.

- The responsibility of preparing the analysis and sub-reports is divided among different management and staff members according to their fields of expertise. In general, the head master is responsible for leadership, strategic and personnel management issues as well as resource management while the head teacher is more focused on teaching and learning processes and stakeholder inclusion together with other teachers and experts (e.g. special needs education specialist). In one of the schools there was a development manager who carried out work on stakeholder involvement and satisfaction surveys.

- The thematic sub-reports are compiled into a comprehensive report at the end of the school year or prior to the beginning of the next school year. The final report, providing an analysis of achieved results of the previous school year and outlining the development needs for the future, feeds into the next school year goals and activity plan as well as suggests priorities for action. Generally, the results of the final report are presented to the school staff and a seminar is held to discuss the conclusions and future steps.

In the case study schools, the sources of information for carrying out the IE analysis were manifold. In addition to traditional management data on personnel and school performance indicators coming from EHIS, data and information is retrieved from stakeholder satisfaction surveys, teachers’ annual reports and/or development interviews, development interviews with students and parents conducted by teachers; staff meetings; meetings with parents; collecting information from students (e.g. study help needed); school based assessments of learning outcomes (e.g. reading and writing tests; standard-determining tests); school support team meetings (social pedagogue, psychologist, special education specialist, management, other staff or stakeholders if needed); external research done by academics, etc.

The data collection in the case study schools differed in the aspect of how much data is being collected and analysed, and how the data collection process is formalised. One school was different from the other in the aspect of how pervasive the IE process and the related data collection are. One of the schools, being smaller in size and being a basic school, could establish more information collection channels and points of analysis while the bigger secondary school had to formalise the IE processes more and rely on a lower number of data collection avenues. In a smaller school, where the school community is more limited in size, the school staff can be more often in close and also informal contact with other staff, students, and parents and thus retrieve information for evaluation. A larger school has fewer opportunities for that and they have to rely more on formalised communication due to resource limitations.

Since the IE process is not regulated schools can choose the number and extent of necessary stakeholders to be involved. Generally, the inclusion of teachers, parents and students tends to be common. Annual satisfaction surveys are typically held among parents and students; in one of the schools, the staff, the school owner, and the board of trustees have also been involved in the surveys. The board of trustees is also informed of the IE process and the IE report needs to be formally submitted to the board of trustees as well as the owner of the school for the expression of opinion.

### 1.3 Effectiveness of the QA measure

The aim of the IE is to promote the systematic analysis of school activities and provide input to relevant development activities. The process should provide detailed information on specific factors inhibiting development or progress in improving
learning outcomes. The information on problematic issues or factors should then drive the development plans of schools and lay out activities to address the problems or aspects of improvement.

However, IE as such cannot be always clearly separated from other school processes or changes, as the case studies revealed:

- Firstly, even though IE is a particular evaluation process or method in theory, it might not be viewed as something separate from the other school processes taking place in practice or other factors influencing the outcomes of schools (e.g. particularities of a student body, funding of schools, parental involvement, teachers’ skills, etc.).

- Moreover, there have been several changes in the Estonian education system recently at school level that also affect the results and outcomes of students (e.g. changes in education management, curricula, teacher qualification, learning approach, etc.).

Therefore, it is very complicated to distinguish the impact of IE from other school level measures or influencing factors and attribute improvements or changes to one particular activity.

In both of the case study schools, IE was embedded into the everyday processes of schools. School staff is used to analysing their own work, setting development goals accordingly and providing feedback to the management team. Some evaluation activities were taking place in the schools already before the IE was introduced as a compulsory measure. Therefore, it is complicated to bring out the particular effectiveness of IE (as a measure stipulated by the law). However, both schools admitted that introducing the nationwide requirement of performing IE and providing a recommended approach for conducting it, facilitated a more systematic approach to evaluation:

- The recommended IE format (used in the counselling process) provided a comprehensive model for evaluating all the relevant aspects of school and was thus clearly helpful for schools that had not focused much on evaluation before. It enabled schools to better plan their IE process and provided a structure for analysing different aspects of schools.

- During the introduction of the measure, the state also provided counsellors for IE. Counsellors are independent guides that assist schools in understanding their development and what is needed for further improvement. They provide advice on various aspects, e.g. how to set goals, evaluate achievement of goals, what data to collect, how to analyse data, etc.

The representatives of the case study schools appreciate the systematic thinking provided by IE that enables to detect the problem areas of school and follow this up with an analysis of aspects of improvement.

The interviewees also identified that implementing IE systematically facilitates organisational learning. Especially in aspects that concern setting appropriate goals or objectives so that these would be realistic and measurable (i.e. following the SMART criteria). This process allows detecting too general or uninformative goals. For instance, one of the schools had set the objective of ‘activation of the student body at school’; it had been in place for some time and proved unsuccessful. Within the IE process the school realised that this objective did not work and needed to be formulated in a different way.

The IE process has also promoted a better analysis of the processes and activities that lead to the achievement of objectives: what are the factors behind different processes
and how different processes lead to outcomes and impacts. As pointed out in the interviews, IE clearly points to improvements needed in staff competency development. Also, the process has made school leaders approach the issue of outcomes and results in a more nuanced and complex way. For example, in one of the schools IE has facilitated an analysis on how students could be evaluated besides marks or grades (especially relevant in a situation where a large share of students has very good marks). The school realised that grades do not provide enough substantive information on the school development of students.

At a more general level, it can even be said, as one interviewee pointed out, that IE has facilitated school leadership development and management skills. Since headmasters are trained per se in Estonia (there is no particular training programme), the IE has supported them in gaining school management know-how. IE supports headmasters in viewing school management as a comprehensive system that entails different sub-processes – according to the approach of the Deming cycle: setting goals, implementing activities, analysis, improvement – but also different areas of management like leadership and strategic management; personnel management; cooperation with interest groups; resource management; and the education/school process.

Additionally, the case study schools pointed out that implementing IE has, in general, contributed to the advancement of the school culture in terms of internalising the values of constant revision of goals and results, openness to honest feedback and team work in the name of the school long-term goals. This includes being explicit about admitting mistakes or unsuccessful activities and striving for improvements based on these experiences.

The ability to analyse and include stakeholders in the school development process has advanced considerably in Estonia as a result of the IE requirement. This was highlighted by one state-level interviewee. The schools had to better think through who their stakeholders are and what expectations do they have for the school. The provision of sample satisfaction questionnaires by MER enabled schools to implement stakeholder consultation rather easily. The IE study also revealed that for larger schools IE has turned out to be a valuable method of inclusion of school staff and enabled additional motivation for some employees (i.e. increasing work motivation through widening of responsibilities). Also, the measure has facilitated the development of the self-evaluation skills of school staff.  

The extent to which schools are explicitly candid about their results of IE and perform the IE honestly, depends on schools. As the interviewees suggested, IE as it was introduced in 2006, was not received positively across the board. There were a number of schools opposing the measure viewing it to be another bureaucratic requirement put on schools. This latter opinion was mostly held by school leaders not favouring or supporting the quality management approach implemented at schools that involved a thorough evaluation of results.

As initially the IE process involved also the use of the external evaluation counsellors provided by MER (counsellors could be chosen by schools themselves), some schools viewed this as being externally monitored by the state. This might have decreased the motivation of some schools to carry out IE as openly as it was expected; or for some, the external observation drove the schools to demonstrate or prove themselves to be better than they really were (external pressure to perform).

Today, MER does not directly monitor the implementation of IE at schools and thus the pressure to demonstrate performance has decreased. However, now that schools are left with a responsibility to carrying out IE as they see proper, the quality of the process depends entirely on the school head and the school leadership. If the leadership team is convinced of the value and advantages of the process, IE is being properly done while in other schools where the management views it to be something that has to be done because it is required and not containing true value, IE is just carried out formally. As MER does not monitor the implementation of IE, there is no information on how schools actually distribute on this scale. Earlier, MER could obtain feedback from the reports of the counsellors but today the counselling is very limited and therefore MER lacks information on how the system is functioning. It is a shortcoming of the system as it mostly functioning on the basis of trust in schools. However, the monitoring cannot be pervasive as this might be detrimental to the ‘honesty’ of evaluation as said earlier.

1.4 Critical factors of the QA measure

The analysis outlined several important factors related to the successful implementation of IE. The following will summarise these:

- The internal evaluation has to be strongly based on a clear ‘concept’ of the school, i.e. a school needs to have developed a clear vision and mission of the education institution they intend to be. This involves developing particular school values that drive the other school processes (i.e. specific goals, choice of personnel, priorities of resource allocation, etc.). From these the other aspects of school organisation and process management follow, including the emphasis based on organisational learning, feedback, focusing in improvement, etc. In view of IE, this has clear implications on to what extent internal evaluations and continued improvement are appreciated and considered “normal” by school members. In the case study schools, this factor was clearly evident and therefore IE had been internalised as one of the essential school processes.

- Following the previous factor of school concept, the school leaders underscored the importance of “selling” the concept of IE as a valuable process to the school members. This involves creating an understanding of the benefits of IE process as such so that school members fully commit to evaluation and do not consider it a waste of time. When the school values are in place, these provide the foundation for implementing IE already. The values of openness, honesty, appreciation of constructive critique, cooperation, and inclusion are of key importance here.

- The next step is finding the most suitable model of IE for a particular school. Even though the state has developed some example models or format for school to use, these tend to be too burdensome and the school leaders in case study school emphasized the importance of adjusting the model to their own needs, conditions and already existing school processes. The original recommended/sample model was too extensive (too many detailed aspects of evaluation that school were not necessarily needing) and ended up in a report of 50 pages that schools did not know how to use later. It was too time consuming as well. So the case study schools both said that after the first round they developed their own data collection processes focusing on their needs and adopted a report format that is shorter and more practical. The key is finding a good balance between collecting the necessary data for performing an evaluation and setting up new processes or schemes for additional data collection or analysis. It is important that IE would not interfere with the main
processes of school, i.e. teachers still need to be focused on teaching and learning while IE is side measure to support development. Also, the IE report format needs to be rather short and concise; otherwise its practical use as a management tool would be decreased.

- Therefore, embedding the IE successfully (invisibly) into the already existing school processes was another key factor for success. Moreover, the case study schools both outlined that the language used in the process is sometimes very critical. For instance, instead of communication to teachers that we are now going to perform IE at school, teachers were requested to perform their usual analysis of work outcomes and self-assessment and during the years only the format of data collection was slightly changed to enable different analysis of data (if it was needed).

- In terms of carrying out the IE process (whatever it is named in a particular school), the school leaders emphasised the importance of inclusion of different school members and stakeholders in the process (informing, data collection and analysis) so that IE would be compiled on multiple sources of data and views and reflect the opinions of various parties. This in turn presumes an open and collective leadership approach. However, in regard of writing up the IE report, it is preferable to make this a responsibility of one person who can (after the results have been concluded with the relevant school members and IE team) comprehensively summarise the main conclusions. Otherwise the comprehensive approach of IE could be lost.

- The interviews pointed out that it is critical that IE reports are compiled for an internal use only (including the school owner) and are not circulated to external parties because this immediately changes the nature of the process. External monitoring drives school not to be entirely candid and open about results; especially in aspects that need improvement. This last issue is especially sensitive at the moment when smaller schools feel the pressure of closing down. Therefore, external oversight pressures schools to report better results than might actually be the case. Thus, at the moment schools are not required to send their IE report to MER or MER counsellors. However, the disadvantage of the system is that MER does not have any overview on the state of the IE implementation across Estonian schools. They can only analyse this as part of the state supervision if necessary. However, the current system is hampered by the fact that MER has almost no overview of the internal evaluation process and thus it cannot act on the problems if there are any. Therefore, it would be necessary to re-introduce some form of soft monitoring or feedback collection into the system. However, it is necessary to discuss and develop it carefully together with the schools so that the value of the IE would not be lost at the cost of MER receiving feedback.

A study on internal evaluation in Estonia underscored additionally that the following factors facilitate the successful implementation of an IE process: an up-to-date school development plan, an existing habit of data collection in the school; being able to find suitable technical solutions (e.g. data collection methods, e.g. online surveys, electronic data reporting systems, etc.) for IE implementation; inclusion of school staff; support from the school owner/municipality (in the form of interest and advice if necessary); and creating supportive work environment for implementing IE (management being open for feedback, discussions with school members, constructive critique, etc.)

---

The case study schools identified a few challenges related to the implementation of the measure as well. One of the issues they outlined concerned the late provision of EHIS data on external assessments (national examinations, national standard determining tests) that caused delays in compiling comparisons of school data with the national performance data. This is a factor out of schools’ control and thus has been dealt with so that school have adjusted their evaluation process according to the arrival of the data. Another challenge pointed out by schools was finding quantifiable indicators for measuring performance or progress. Schools admitted an occasional lack of knowledge in this aspect but also conceded that all aspects of school life cannot be quantified and qualitative indicators are always needed to complement the quantitative ones. Thus, the schools have tried to find the right balance between the two.

Besides these issues, experts on IE have outlined that schools tend to find IE sometimes challenging because they lack expert knowledge (on quality assurance and performing evaluations); they are too conservative about the potential value of IE; they tend to look for universal “ready-made recipes”; and lack the human and other resources to perform IE properly. It was also pointed out in the interviews that the strategic planning skills of Estonian schools are not always that strong. Some schools still lack the ability to relate the goals of schools to specific activities or processes that facilitate school development towards the set goals. Another challenge identified in the interviews was related to the evaluation of the development of the learner - schools are used to the traditional assessment of student outcomes but lack competence to evaluate the progress of learners (i.e. evaluating general competences). PISA has now drawn more attention to these skills but thus far the national assessment system has left these to the background and therefore schools struggle with evaluating this aspect.

The IE study highlighted additionally that schools, focusing on areas of improvement, sometimes fail to recognise their strengths in the IE process; find IE to be too time consuming as they struggle with finding a suitable approach for their needs and capacities; due to a lack of knowledge and analysis skills tend to collect too much data that they then fail to use in the IE process.

### 1.5 School actors’ feedback and views

The views of the case study school representatives were discussed under the effectiveness section (see 1.3) as well as the critical factors section (1.4).

Regarding the differences in school actors’ opinions, the case studies highlighted the following issues. Both school leaders emphasized the fact that they had already been implementing self-evaluation activities in their school before the responsibility was made compulsory in the law. However, they regard the IE regulation important and valuable in principle, especially for school that did not implement this type of activities before. Still, the success of implementing IE in these schools heavily depends on the school leadership and their belief in the value of the measure. If the initial training and support provided by MER was successful in instilling a belief in the necessity and value of the measure, then IE has important potential in facilitating school development. However, the interviews suggested that there are still potentially schools that have not

---


internalised IE as an important measure and continue to implement it only formally. The extent of this practice is, however, unknown.

The teachers’ representatives views in the case study schools were largely similar as both schools already had teacher feedback systems in place and teachers were used to providing feedback and evaluation of their work. Therefore, IE activities were considered relevant and important. Teachers’ representatives did not regard the IE system to be too burdensome or complicated.

The parents’ views were reflected through the representatives of the board of trustees at the case study schools. The parents’ views did not differ in the aspects of relevance and usability of the measure as neither of the interviewees opposed the measure. However, the schools differed in the aspect of parental involvement in the evaluation process. It was evident that a smaller school can practice a much closer relationship with the parents and the board of trustees on a regular basis (more face-to-face meetings, more frequent student-parent development interviews, more active participation in school activities) while in a larger school the role of parents and the board of trustees is more signified in cases of particular needs or problems. Both case study schools practice holding regular satisfaction surveys among parents.

Students were not interviewed as part of this analysis. In both case study schools, students are regularly surveyed as part of the IE, also development interviews with students are being performed at schools (at least once a year as required by law\textsuperscript{185}) in order to gain input for IE.

1.6 Transferability

The IE implemented in Estonia is, by nature, a universal quality management approach applied to schools. Regardless of the national regulation, every school leader in any school in any country is, in principle, open to apply this approach (in the existing framework of school policies and practice). However, based on the Estonian experience, it is still important to emphasise that large scale school autonomy, as it is the case in Estonia, is vital for a successful IE implementation. School organisation and implementation of internal processes is largely left up to the school head masters to decide here and this creates the preconditions for setting up an IE model that best fits the particular school. This autonomy enables creating an IE process that is matching the needs and capabilities of each individual school and facilitates the learning process as seen relevant by particular leadership. In contrast, when an IE model would be imposed on schools externally, it would be less likely to be embedded in the school processes that in turn are vital for its successful implementation.

In the Estonian case, it is also important to keep in mind that the extensive school management autonomy is coupled with a significant responsibility on the part of school heads. In addition to recognising the importance of their role in successful implementation of IE at their schools, school head also need to be equipped with the relevant knowledge and skills to be able to actually implement IE. For this purpose, MER set up two projects for this purpose in 2006 and onward. These projects involved different types of capacity building at schools but also involved the municipality staff and the counsellors. For instance, the activities included the training of school management teams; development and production of methodological guides for schools for carrying out IE and evaluating teaching and learning at schools; training of IE counsellors for advising schools; providing electronic access to state collected data on school performance and activities (EHIS database); providing a web-based

environment for carrying out satisfaction surveys\textsuperscript{186}. The trained counsellors later assisted and advised schools in their first implementation of IE. It can be seen that MER provided quite extensive support for schools for facilitating competence improvement in this particular areas so that the requirement of performing IE was complemented with implementation support. During the later years MER has supported different school leadership trainings for schools to continue facilitating school development. However, today the resources available for counsellors have become very limited and only a small number of schools can request counselling now. MER can also initiate counselling if this becomes necessary\textsuperscript{187}.

The particularity of IE in Estonia is also the fact that it is directly connected with school development plans that need to be done every three years. The development plan needs to take into account the results of the IE\textsuperscript{188}. This precondition should function as a motivator for schools as IE is supposed to help prepare and provide input for the development plan.

All in all, the Estonian system where autonomy is coupled with responsibility and almost no external checks is hugely dependent on the competences of the school leaders. When the school leaders are convinced of the value of the measures and have the proper competencies, the system should function well. However, as pointed out in the interviewees, the lack of any monitoring or oversight in this system carries the threat of some schools largely ignoring the requirement of performing IE or they do so just as a formality.

\subsection*{1.7 Interviews}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Name of Institution</th>
<th>Date of interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Basic school and upper secondary school functioning as one school (School A). 6 interviewees: Headmaster, Representative of the board of trustees/ Representative of the school owner (municipality), Head teacher, Development manager, Head of support Centre/class teacher, and Mathematics teacher/Head of Teaching in Gymnasium.</td>
<td>29.01.2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Basic school (School B). 4 interviewees: Headmaster, Head teacher, Special education specialist/ class teacher, and Representative of the board of trustees /parent.</td>
<td>04.02.2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Representative of teachers organisation</td>
<td>09.02.2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Representative of internal evaluation counsellors</td>
<td>12.02.2015</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\subsection*{1.8 References}

- Basic Schools and Upper Secondary School Act  

\textsuperscript{186} https://www.hm.ee/et/uudised/algab-projekt-koolikatsuja-2006;  
\textsuperscript{188} Basic Schools and Upper Secondary School Act  
- Preschool Child Care Institutions Act
  http://www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/eesti_uuringukeskus_sisehindamise_loppr
  aport.pdf.
  https://www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/oppeasutuste_sisehindamine_i.pdf
  www.ekk.edu.ee/vvfiles/2/toila.ppthttps://www.hm.ee/et/uudised/algab-
  projekt-koolikatsuja-2006
- http://www.ekk.edu.ee/programmid/programm-oppe-kvaliteedi-parendamine-
  oppeasutustes/programmi-tegevused
Basque Country (Spain) - The evaluation of school head performance for school improvement

Basic facts box:

- Country: Spain; Autonomous Community of the Basque Country.
- Characteristics of the school system: The central State establishes the core curricula (further developed by the Autonomous Communities), mechanisms of quality assurance for the whole State (i.e. the use of standardised tests to measure students’ learning outcomes), and general principles for school and staff evaluation. The departments of education of the Autonomous Communities are responsible for quality assurance in their territories. As such, they contribute to quality assurance mechanisms developed by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport (e.g. by providing data to the national system of indicators) as well as develop their own mechanisms for quality assurance (e.g. school evaluation). Regional inspectorates under the departments of education of the Autonomous Communities are in charge of the supervision and evaluation of schools, as well as the evaluation of teachers’ and school heads’ performance, where this has been implemented. Local authorities do not have autonomy regarding education. Schools have limited autonomy concerning curriculum development and recruitment of staff, and medium autonomy in terms of school organisation. Teachers can decide on teaching methodologies and materials.
- School level which the measure covers: primary, lower and upper secondary school.
- Scope of implementation of the measure: public schools.
- Participation in the measure: on a voluntary basis.
- Stage in the QA cycle: evaluation; yet, it has a formative purpose and promotes the use of the QA cycle at school level.
- Date of start of the measure: 2008/2009
- Stakeholders involved: inspectorate of the Basque Country (ES), inspectors, school heads and other members of the school leadership team (head of studies and secretary).
- Target issue the QA measure addresses: staff appraisal; capacity-building to support the use of the evaluation cycle at schools.
- Information on levels of funding and source: it is funded from the budget of the department of education of the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country (ES).

1.1 General context

In line with the Europe 2020 headline targets and Education and Training 2020 benchmarks, two of the most important objectives for improving Spanish school education are: reducing the rate of early leaving from education and improving educational results according to international criteria (namely in PISA).

The Basque Country (ES) is one of the Autonomous Communities with better results in PISA. It had the lowest rate of early leavers from education and training in 2013, 8.8 %, which is markedly below the Europe 2020 national target (15%) and the national average (23.5 %). Yet, the Basque government intends to continue improving these results. According to the ‘Framework of the pedagogical education model’ for 2020, it aims at introducing qualitative improvements to increase the number of students reaching the highest performance levels. The strategic directions of this framework are: inclusive education and attention to diversity, initial and continuing teacher training.

---

training, design and use of didactic materials, autonomy and control of schools, and evaluation of the education system and research.

One of the key actors in the evaluation of the system is the inspectorate. The Education Inspectorate of the Basque Country (ES) is certified by ISO since 2008 and this is thought to have contributed to the development of a more structured and comprehensive quality assurance system. The role of the Inspectorate goes beyond the supervision of schools (checking of compliance with regulations); it also includes following up and supporting schools and the development of their educational projects, promoting self-evaluation and participating in external evaluation.

The general triennial plan of the Inspectorate (2014-2017) establishes three types of evaluations:

- External evaluations contributing to school improvement. The Inspectorate is responsible for the follow-up of the ‘improvement plans’ designed by schools to improve their results in the standardised tests measuring students’ outcomes.

- Evaluation of school heads’ performance for school improvement. This type of evaluation has been implemented since 2008/2009 and is organised in cycles of four years, which is the time a school head is elected for this position.

- Evaluation of teachers’ performance. In 2014/2015 the Inspectorate has created a work group to develop a ‘teacher profile’ which will allow for the design and implementation of processes for the evaluation of teachers’ performance in the future.

The evaluation of the school heads’ performance started to be designed in 2008. The rationale behind the introduction of this evaluation was that school heads are used to taking action, solving problems, and the inspection could contribute to enhancing their performance by promoting planning and the use of the ‘Plan, Do, Check, Act’ (PDCA) cycle of Deming.

The procedure introduced was inspired by research which links an effective performance of school heads with the existence of a project that allows for the follow-up of objectives, and establishes a good initial diagnosis to determine needed improvements. These studies also link evaluation procedures of staff in the leadership teams, with the existence of a project containing their commitments for a certain period of time. The leadership project should allow for a logical decision-making process and contribute to a culture of constant improvement.

The model of the evaluation of school heads’ performance is interlinked with the process of school heads’ selection. It introduces strategic planning by requiring school head candidates to present a leadership project. Once this project is voted for and

---

191 Actually, the introduction of quality assurance systems (based on ISO standards or the EFQM model) in the education system in the Basque Country (ES) started in schools, VET schools being the pioneers; education authorities followed the trend later on.


193 The application of these tests is under the responsibility of the Basque Institute for Evaluation and Research in non-university education (ISEI-IVEI).

194 School heads are elected based on a leadership project which is voted by the School Board, the Teachers’ Assembly and the Inspectorate.

195 The rationale is based on information from interviews.


197 The project is voted by the School Board, the Teachers’ Assembly and the Inspectorate.
the school head and the proposed leadership team are selected, they start a process of evaluation.

The evaluation aims at quality assurance but also, and most significantly, at quality improvement. At the end of each four-year period, a summative evaluation is performed and the school head must perform at a certain level to be able to stand as candidate for this position for an additional 4-year period. However, most of the school heads pass this evaluation. The main purpose of the measure is that there is a continuous improvement of quality over time.

The evaluation of school heads’ performance has a formative purpose. The procedure includes self-evaluation and is designed with the intention that, with time, the weight of external evaluation decreases while the weight of self-evaluation increases. The initiative therefore contributes to capacity-building and promotes the ownership of QA processes among school actors.

1.2 Description of the measure

The introduction of the evaluation of the school heads’ performance was triggered by the Act on Education issued by the Spanish government in 2006, which established that education authorities can introduce procedures to evaluate the performance of school heads and other members of the school leadership team. Following the issuing of this regulation, the education department of the Basque Country (ES) decided to explore the possibility of introducing an evaluation of the school heads’ performance as a means to enhance quality of school education.

There was a specific circumstance to be taken into account in school education in the Basque Country (ES): in general, leadership roles in schools were negatively perceived by the educational community. There was a widespread belief that those who applied for leadership positions were looking for power and, in consequence, few people applied for these positions since they felt that the educational community would not support them. Hence, many head teachers were designated by the Inspectorate i.e. were imposed to perform this role; this was a source of conflict and tense relationships between the Inspectorate and schools, and resulted in very unstable leadership teams (few lasted the period of four years, established in regulations). Therefore, the introduction of a system of evaluation of the performance of head teachers was seen by the Inspectorate as an opportunity to change this perception and, in fact, there has been a positive change in recent years, reflected on an increase in the rate of school heads who volunteered for this position.

The evaluation of the school heads’ performance applies to school heads of public schools who voluntarily stand as candidates for this position, and consequently agree to present a management project. The project includes a proposal for a leadership team composed of at least of one school head, one head of studies and one secretary; all three positions in the leadership team are covered by the evaluation. The Inspectorate of the Basque Country (ES) has published guidelines on how to design the leadership project and how to implement its evaluation.

---

199 In Spain, the school leadership team is composed of a school head, a head of studies and a secretary. Regional governments may authorise the establishment of other members.
200 This belief has to be interpreted in a historical context. During the dictatorship in Spain, leadership positions where associated with closeness to the regime and thus to an authoritarian approach.
201 'Guide for the development of the leadership project' (Basque Government, 2012) and 'Guide for the evaluation of school head performance' (Basque Government, 2014b).
Both the leadership project and the evaluation of the leadership performance are organised on five dimensions and 18 criteria. They cover the different phases of the QA cycle:

- Planning - dimension 1 on ‘Definition of goals and strategic interventions’,
- Implementation - dimensions 2, 3, 4 on ‘School management, organisation and running’, ‘Pedagogical leadership’ and ‘Participation and cooperation of internal and external stakeholders’, and
- Evaluation and review - ‘Promotion of evaluation and management of change’.

Under these 5 dimensions, there are 10 key criteria, which must be evaluated from the first year of the school head’s work, and 8 non-key criteria, which can be evaluated later. Each criterion is sub-divided into indicators.

For each indicator, there are four levels of attainment. Level 1 indicates a ‘scarce development’ on the criterion, and it corresponds to the minimum performance (what is prescribed by the law). Level 4 indicates an ‘excellent development’.

### Figure 1.1 Example of indicator, level of attainment and source of evidence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension 2</th>
<th>Management, organisation and running of the school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Criterion 7</td>
<td>Leadership of the leadership team, distribution of responsibilities in school organisation and teachers’ involvement and compromise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicator 7.1</td>
<td>Leadership and organisation of all the school activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3</td>
<td>The leadership team has automatized procedures to attain the coordination and coherence of the school’s different activities. These procedures are included in the school’s management documents. The school head coordinates the team but also delegates and distributes responsibilities among its components. The leadership team promotes the distributed leadership making work teams become effective management units.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source of evidence (example)</td>
<td>Distribution of responsibilities among the members of the leadership team (revision of documents, interviews).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ICF based on Basque Government (s.d.). Description of the attainment levels of each criterion.

The document defining the dimensions, criteria, levels, indicators and sources of evidence is used both by schools to perform their self-evaluation and by inspectors for carrying out the external evaluation.

The evaluation follows cycles of four years. It begins with an initial evaluation:

3. Firstly, the leadership team receives a document describing the dimensions, criteria and descriptors for each level, and is asked to position itself on each criterion;
4. Secondly, the team of inspectors visits the school, and discusses the results of the self-evaluation with the leadership team.
5. Based on this discussion, the leadership team designs the first proposals for improvement with the support of the inspectors.

The initial evaluation is completed in the second year and more proposals for improvement are introduced which are followed up throughout the 4-year period (the length of the leadership team mandate). In the fourth and last year of the first

---

203 Basque Government (s.d.). ‘Description of the attainment levels of each criterion’.
evaluation period, the inspectors perform the final summative evaluation and communicate the results to the school leadership team (see figure 1.2).

**Figure 1.2   Description of tasks in the first evaluation period**

![Diagram showing tasks in the first evaluation period](image)

ICF based on Basque Government (2014b).

To pass the final evaluation, the school head needs to attain at least level 2 in all the 10 key criteria, and attain level 2 or show an improvement in the other criteria. The head of studies and the secretary also have to attain at least level 2 in those functions that they are required to undertake according to legislation and in the priority criteria.

The evaluation involves two inspectors, including the one designated for the general supervision of the school and another one who is not so familiarised with the school. Although it is desirable that the second inspector participates in the whole process, in practice, it is not always possible to coordinate agendas. The presence of the two inspectors is only mandatory in the meetings with the leadership team of the first and third year; also, they both sign the final report of the evaluation in the fourth year.

The methods used in the evaluation include the revision of school documents, interviews with the school leadership team, a questionnaire to collect the opinion of the School Board\(^{204}\) (used in the third year), questionnaires for the self-evaluation of each member of the leadership team (head of school, head of studies and secretary), and for the evaluation of the head of studies and secretary by the head of school.

\(^{204}\) In the Basque Country (ES), the School Board is called the ‘highest representative body’ (Órgano Máximo de Representación (OMR)). It is the governing body of the educational institution where the education community participates. It comprises the leadership team and a representative of the school management and services staff, a representative of the City Council, and teachers, parents and students representatives (Source: Eurypedia – Spain ‘Administration and Governance at Local and/or Institutional Level’).
The second period of evaluation (next four years) is similar to the first one, however simplified. For instance, only one inspector interviews the leadership team and this interview is embedded in the regular inspection visits to the school.

The ‘Guide for the evaluation of school head performance’\textsuperscript{205} contains a detailed description of the procedure, establishing for each year of the first period and second period: objectives, activities, and methodological proposals and guidelines. It also includes a set of templates to support the activities\textsuperscript{206}.

1.3 Effectiveness of the QA measure

The aim of the evaluation of the school heads’ performance is the continuous improvement of the performance of school leadership and, in consequence, the increase of the quality of education in the respective school. The process of formative evaluation aims at promoting reflection, evidence-based decision making and the pursuit of constant improvement.\textsuperscript{207}

The Inspectorate evaluates the outcomes of the initiative through two procedures: a) a satisfaction survey for participants, the results of which are reflected in a report; and b) a final global report on the results of the evaluations. These tools do not gather information on concrete changes in school management and leadership, but they rather focus on the appropriateness of the procedures and materials used, and the global evolution of school heads performance in the evaluation criteria.

The Inspectorate conducts surveys on the process of evaluation among those evaluated (members of leadership teams) and the professionals responsible for the evaluation (inspectors), at the end of the four-year periods of evaluation.\textsuperscript{208} Although the results of the 2013 survey were generally positive, it was found that there is a need to simplify the process. As a result, the Inspectorate revised the materials and procedures and, among other aspects, published the ‘Guide for the evaluation of school head performance’. It is not yet possible to know the effect of those changes since they have only been applied to the leadership teams selected from 2013 onwards, and who will respond to the satisfaction survey in 2016-2017 and later.\textsuperscript{209}

In the survey from 2014, the degree of satisfaction among those evaluated was positive and had increased compared to the previous year. Since they had not worked with the new procedure and materials, this improvement in satisfaction was attributed to an increase in experience of the evaluation teams and their participation in training activities provided by the Inspectorate. The Inspectorate identified three areas for improvement (see challenges in section 1.4).\textsuperscript{210}

- The evaluation process of heads of studies’ and secretaries’ performance;
- Revision of the materials used in evaluation and self-evaluation processes;
- The use of the information obtained from the different sectors of the School Board or ‘highest representative body’.

The Inspectorate drafted a final global report on the results of the evaluations, for internal use of the education department.\textsuperscript{211} It covered the school heads who finished

\textsuperscript{205} Basque Government, 2012b.
\textsuperscript{206} Such as the ‘Report on the implementation of proposals for improvement of the previous year and initial evaluation of the 8 non-key criteria’.
\textsuperscript{207} ‘Guide for the evaluation of school head performance’ (Basque Government, 2014b).
\textsuperscript{208} Since the introduction of the initiative, it has conducted two surveys: one in 2012-2013, for leadership teams selected in 2009, and the second one in 2013-2014, for those selected in 2010.
\textsuperscript{209} ‘Evaluation of the school head performance – meta-evaluation’ (Basque Government, s.d.).
\textsuperscript{210} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{211} Report on the results of the final evaluation reports of school heads selected for the period 2009-2013.
a 4-year period of evaluation. The only report available for the moment covers the period 2009-2013. It should be considered that the new materials, including the ‘Guide for the evaluation of school head performance’ were not yet used during this period; this means, for instance, that there was not a systematic initial evaluation.

The main findings from the evaluations of the performance of school heads selected for this position for the period 2009-2013, were:

- From the 174 selected school heads, 139 (79.9%) finished the evaluation process (the others decided to stop the process).
- Most of the school heads who finished the evaluation attained at least a level 2 in all the evaluated dimensions. There was only one school head who did not attain this level, thus not passing the evaluation.
- The dimension scoring highest was ‘School management, organisation and running’ while the dimension scoring lowest was ‘Promotion of evaluation and management of change’.212

However, it was not possible to know if there was an improvement over time because the data collected as part of the initial evaluation was not precise enough to allow for comparisons with the data at the end of the process.

The report included several proposals for improvement, and the Inspectorate has recently introduced measures to address them. The following are amongst the most relevant:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposals for improvement</th>
<th>Measures introduced to address them</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Including a procedure for initial evaluation in the evaluation design, so as to be able to assess improvement over time.</td>
<td>Initial evaluation is now part of the process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing more concrete and clear descriptions of levels and including them in the reference documents for evaluation.</td>
<td>These descriptions were improved in the document ‘Description of the attainment levels of each criterion’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unifying the criteria used by evaluation teams in the attribution of levels, through initial training and follow-up.</td>
<td>The Inspectorate has recently put in place training activities for inspectors; these include in-depth study of the materials and work in teams to solve cases and calibrate scores among the team members.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ICF based on Basque Government (2013); Basque Government, 2014b; Basque Government (s.d.). Descripción de niveles de logro de cada criterio; interviews conducted by ICF.

The global report also reflects on the appropriateness of the requirement of attaining level 2 also in the next four years for the school head –and his/her team- when re-elected. It suggests that the criterion for passing the evaluation should instead be improvement (accounting for any contextual circumstances which might affect it). This aspect has not yet been modified and it implies a change in legislation.

The report also provides recommendations on the training of leadership teams to be provided by the education department of the Basque Government. Based on the results of the evaluations, it suggests that the training should address the dimension on ‘Promotion of evaluation and management of change’ (the dimension with lower scores), and that it should be adapted to the different education levels.

212 Interestingly this is the case for primary and secondary schools but not for VET schools, where the dimensions with lower scores were ‘Pedagogical leadership’ and ‘Participation and cooperation of external and internal stakeholders’.
Moreover, the introduction of the evaluation of school heads’ performance and its formative purpose has had as an indirect effect on the number of teachers who voluntarily candidate for becoming school heads. According to the information provided by interviewees from the Inspectorate, the rate of school heads who have volunteered for their position increased from 22% to around 60% in five years.

1.4 Critical factors of the QA measure

The following factors have been mentioned by interviewees to contribute to the effectiveness of the measure:

- The fact that the evaluation has a formative purpose is considered a critical factor for its implementation (to ensure that is well perceived by schools and by inspectors) and for its effectiveness.

- Stability of the Inspectorate programming, despite changes at political level. Interviewees mentioned that since the introduction of the measure, there have been several parties in the regional government and they have all respected the Inspectorate triennial plans. This is considered fundamental to ensure coherence and continuity in the implementation of the measure.

- The evaluation process is constantly improved based on the feedback from inspectors and school-level actors.

- Training for the inspectors, on the procedures to be followed in the evaluation.

- Training for the school leadership team to be able to understand the procedure without having to spend too much time on it.

- As for the existing incentives:
  - Interviewees both from the inspectorate and from schools agree that the most important incentive to participate in the evaluation is the attribution to the school of more teachers/teaching hours (around half a day of teaching hours, according to interviewees). Interestingly, this was not introduced as an incentive but rather as a measure to release the members of the leadership team from teaching duties so that they will have time to participate in the evaluation procedure.
  - There is a salary supplement for school heads that becomes permanent if they pass the evaluation. However, interviewees both from the inspectorate and from schools agree that the amount of this supplement is too small to constitute an incentive.
  - Participating in the school head performance evaluation, gives the school an advantage when applying for other projects supported by the education department, such as the programme Hamaika Esku. Among other measures, the latter gives more autonomy to schools to decide on organisation aspects and staff management (for instance, schools can ask for a more stable team of teachers), and this is considered a relevant incentive for schools.

- The school heads and their team are elected based on a leadership project which is voted by the School Board, the Teachers’ Assembly and the Inspectorate. This promotes the support of teachers and other stakeholders to

---

the project and its objectives, and the recognition of the work undertaken by the members of the leadership team. In addition, it ensures stability of the leadership team for four years, with a shared project.214

- Good relationship and communication between the leadership team of the school and the inspector responsible for the school.21

- According to members of the school leadership team, the inspector has to be someone who knows what happens in school, who is not too theoretical.

One of the main challenges observed is that the implementation of the evaluation was not successful in all cases (79.9% finished the evaluation process in the period 2009/2013). This does not seem to be related to the socio-economical background of the student population but rather to the legitimacy and cohesion of the leadership team. The evaluation has been applied in schools where the school head had been designated by the Inspectorate but this proved challenging. A school head who did not choose to be in this position is often less motivated and less supported by the other members of the leadership team and the educational community; this shows in the results of the evaluation, often contributing to further discourage the school head. As a consequence they often decide to leave the evaluation process.

Other concrete challenges include:

- According to the members of the Inspectorate there is a need to further develop the evaluation of heads of studies’ and secretaries’ performance. The evaluation of school heads’ performance is highly based on the definition of this role in legislation; however, in the case of heads of studies’ and secretaries’ legislation is less concrete. At the moment, the evaluation of their performance in the Basque Country (ES) focuses on their contribution to the functions of the school head. However, this is now under revision.

- It is also not clear what should be the use of the information obtained from the different sectors of the School Board or ‘highest representative body’ in the third year of the evaluation. For instance, there should be some feedback to this body but this is not the case at the moment.

- The process of evaluation is time-consuming. Inspectors are often called by schools to solve urgent problems and this takes time from the planned activities such as the evaluation of school heads’ performance. To tackle this problem, the Inspectorate does a follow up on the workloads of the teams every two weeks.

- In the first year of implementation, some of the leadership projects presented by school heads were of poor quality. For instance, the Inspectorate observed difficulties in the definition of clear annual objectives. For this reason, the Inspectorate designed the ‘Guide for the development of the leadership project’ which is believed to have contributed to an increase in quality of the projects.

- From the perspective of school leadership members, the training received on the evaluation process was useful. However, it was only offered to the school head, and they believe it should be offered to the whole leadership team.

As an opportunity to be further explored, it was mentioned that inspectors could also promote contacts between schools for the sharing of experiences and best practices.

---

214 This is mentioned both as a condition for and a positive effect of the introduction of the measure.
1.5 School actors’ feedback and views

The first reaction to the introduction of the evaluation of school head performance at school level was concern that it would mean more control from public authorities and more bureaucratic burden. Training on the different aspects of the procedure, including an explanation of the terminology used, is perceived by interviewees as a relevant support measure for the introduction of the measure.

When inquired on changes in school management and leadership, interviewees generally agreed to the following aspects:

- Promotion of reflection among the members of the leadership team.
- Raising awareness: it helps the members of the leadership team visualise the work done (even small tasks) and identify needs; it raises awareness on the roles of each member of the team, and on the daily work which goes beyond what is determined in legislation.
- Increased motivation and reassurance due to the visualisation of improvements, and the feeling that all the members of the team, as well as the inspector, are working towards the same goals.
- Promotion of planning (and revision). For instance, matching what is planned with what is implemented is followed up more systematically; the goals are more concrete; and it helps bringing coherence to the different measures and documents developed by the school.
- Contribution to developing a culture of formative evaluation.
- Improvement of the relationship between schools leadership teams and inspectors (who are perceived as supporting the school rather than controlling).
- It helps the hand over to the next leadership team.
- The approach used in the evaluation is extended to other documents for the school management (e.g. end of year report) which become less theoretical and more focused on concrete actions.

The evaluation also motivated the introduction of concrete measures at school level, for instance:

- In a primary school, the introduction of the objective of ‘improving communication with families’ motivated the revision of the communication mechanisms to adapt them to families with low educational background or knowledge of the languages spoken in the Basque Country (ES) (e.g. reducing length of text, including images, etc.). These and other initiatives have visibly increased the participation of families; for instance, for the first time, there is now a Roma parent in the School Board.

- In a secondary school, the leadership team decided to introduce a questionnaire for students in the last year of upper secondary level about their satisfaction with the school. Students are also asked to evaluate training courses offered by public authorities on different topics throughout the year; this information is used by the school to decide on which courses to request in the following school year.

- Also in a secondary school, the evaluation promoted the introduction of minutes of all the meetings and their publication; these are perceived as helpful to inform decision making.
1.6 Transferability

The evaluation of school heads’ performance designed in the Basque Country (ES) could be easily transferred to another context, especially where there is a limited level of school autonomy. In cases where there is a high degree of school autonomy, public authorities (as the inspection body) may not be entitled to do this type of support/monitoring.

The criteria would have to be adapted to what is considered the role of the school head and other members of the leadership team (e.g. as in legislation). Moreover, it would require training of the actors involved (evaluators; and members of leadership teams) to understand the logics of "formative evaluation" and the process itself.

Other Autonomous Communities (Asturias, Catalonia and Madrid) have been in contact with the Inspectorate of the Basque Country (ES) to learn more about this good practice. Moreover, representatives from the Inspectorate mentioned that they would be interested in interchanging best practices with other countries; more specifically, they would be interested in disseminating their measure for the evaluation of school heads’ performance, and learn from other countries’ experiences in teacher evaluation.
1.7 Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Name of Institution</th>
<th>Date of interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Inspectorate of the Basque Country (ES)</td>
<td>05.02.2015 and 06.02.2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 interviewees: Inspector responsible for the implementation of the measure; Inspector responsible for the design and implementation of the measure; Inspector in charge of school 1; Inspector in charge of school 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Primary school in Vitoria (school 1)</td>
<td>05.02.2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 interviewees: School head; Head of Studies; Secretary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Secondary school in Vitoria (school 2)</td>
<td>06.02.2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 interviewees: School head; Head of Studies; Secretary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.8 References

- Basque Government (s.d.). Descripción de niveles de logro de cada criterio. [Description of the attainment levels of each criterion] (not available online).

• Orden de 25 de mayo de 2012, de la Consejera de Educación, Universidades e Investigación, sobre el proceso de evaluación de los directores y directoras de los centros docentes no universitarios dependientes del Departamento de Educación, Universidades e Investigación, nombrados por un periodo de cuatro años en aplicación del procedimiento establecido en el Decreto 22/2009, de 3 de febrero (BOPV 15/6/2012), http://www.euskadi.net/bopv2/datos/2012/06/1202752a.pdf
Republic of Ireland - Whole-school evaluation – management, leadership and learning

- Basic facts box:
- Country: Ireland
- Characteristics of the school system:
  - The education system is based on partnerships between the State and private institutions. The Department of Education and Skills (DES) is responsible for public education at primary and post-primary levels.
  - The vast majority of primary schools and many post-primary schools are owned and managed by private bodies, including the religious dominations and limited companies. While there is no regional educational structure covering all schools Regional Education Training Boards (ETBs) are statutory authorities which manage and operate a significant proportion of second-level schools and a number of further education colleges and multi-faith community national schools.
  - The second-level education sector comprises secondary, vocational, community and comprehensive schools. Each has different ownership and management structures but are largely State funded and follow the same State prescribed curriculum and take the same State public examinations. Parental involvement is set out in Section 28 of the Education Act 1998.
  - The curriculum for primary and post-primary schools is set centrally through the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment which includes a wide range of stakeholders with interests in education. However, there is also much scope for teachers, within its parameters, to adapt the curriculum to meet the needs of the learners, particularly at primary level. At post-primary level, the Junior Cycle involves greater curriculum freedoms.
  - Education staff make decisions regarding key aspects of teaching and learning. This includes choosing teaching methods, choosing textbooks and pupil group for compulsory learning activities.
  - Schools in Ireland enjoy full autonomy with regarding to selecting school heads, selecting new teachers and dismissing teachers.
  - The management board of primary and post-primary schools includes patron, parent and teacher representatives.
  - All primary schools are required to administer standardised tests in English reading and Mathematics to eligible pupils in years 4, 6 and 8 in the primary school cycle. At post-primary level, summative assessments dominate, with State examinations at the end of the junior cycle (year 3) and of the senior cycle (year 5 or 6). The Leaving Certificate examination affects access to post-school education, training and employment.
  - School level which the measure covers: Primary and Post-Primary (although the two models are different and therefore this case study focuses upon Post-Primary)
  - Scope of implementation of the measure: All schools
  - Participation in the measure: Involuntary
  - Stage in the QA cycle: evaluation
  - Date of start of the measure: February 2012 (at post-primary)
  - Stakeholders involved: School management bodies; school management; teachers; students; parents.
  - Target issue the QA measure addresses: Improvement of management and leadership of the school and teaching and learning.
  - Information on levels of funding and source: Department of Education and Skills (DES)

1.1 General context

Whole-school evaluation – management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) is a model of external evaluation that supersedes the WSE model which was in place from 2003. WSE-MLL was mainstreamed from February 2012 following an 18-month pilot phase in 2010 and 2011 that covered 73 schools.

WSE-MLL is similar to WSE but there are some key changes. The Department of Education and Skills (DES) Inspectorate saw that given the number of schools to inspect and the costs of doing so, a three-day inspection model with two inspectors would offer a tighter focus on the core work of the school – teaching, learning and leadership.

There were other drivers which were informed through the Inspectorate’s self-review process and post-evaluation feedback from schools that had had a WSE. The key shifts were:

- A stronger focus on teaching and learning as opposed to a focus on school policies, procedures and governance (WSE-MLL entails two-thirds observation of classes).
- A cross-curricular approach to evaluating teaching and learning as opposed to concentrating on a small sample of subjects. In the prior model, schools felt that the whole-school element was missing as some subjects were disengaged.
- Evaluation of both management and leadership on the one hand, and teaching and learning on the other. WSE-MLL focuses on the role of management and leadership in teaching and learning in the classroom; it links the two aspects and looks for any relationships between them.

According to the DES Inspectorate, WSE-MLL is intended to fit within a suite of other external inspections at the post-primary level. The main ones are as follows:

- Subject inspections: evaluates the teaching and learning of an individual subject in post-primary schools;
- Programme evaluations: inspects the provision of particular programmes, including Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), the Transition Year programme (TYP), Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) and Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP);
- Inspection of Schools at High Support Units, Special Care Units and Children Detention Schools;
- Specialised or thematic inspections: used to examine the teaching of a specific subject or issue in the educational system (e.g. equality and inclusion issues or English as an additional language);
- Incidental (unannounced) inspections: focus on the quality of teaching and learning in classrooms and other settings;
- Follow-Through Inspections: evaluate the progress a school has made on implementing recommendations made in an earlier inspection.

WSE-MLL is designed to help join up all the inspections, which it is able to do by virtue of taking a whole-school approach rather than focusing on one aspect of the school as other inspections do. For example, the WSE-MLL Guidelines suggests that WSE-MLL follows-up on recommendations made as part of other inspections, especially subject

---

216 Interviews with Inspectorate.
217 Interviews with Inspectorate.
inspections, of which a minimum of three will have been carried out prior to a WSE-MLL.

According the Inspectorate, the design process for WSE-MLL was undertaken very collegiately, encompassing a wide range of national stakeholders. By the time WSE-MLL was being finalised there was a good level of agreement on the measure from all stakeholders. The main output from the pilot and consultations was the Guide to WSE-MLL in Post-Primary Schools, which sets out the practices and procedures of WSE-MLL.

1.2 **Description of the measure**

WSE-MLL applies equally to all schools. WSE-MLLs are not planned on a cyclical basis but are conducted partly based on an assessment of risk to learning in schools and partly on a random basis. Over a year, around 10 % of post-primary schools will have a WSE-MLL. Around 75 % of schools have one kind of external inspection over a year\(^\text{218}\).

Schools are given three weeks’ notification before the inspectors arrive at the school. There are usually two inspectors (a lead reporting inspector and a supporting inspector) although in larger schools (over 700 students) a third inspector would be added.

Following notification, WSE-MLL has six distinct elements, as set out below\(^\text{219}\).

- **Pre-evaluation**

  During this phase inspectors review school documentation (e.g. minutes of Board of Management (BoM) meetings, timetables, enrolment and admissions policies, the Code of Behaviour, and the school calendar) and ask for basic school information (e.g. school priorities, management systems, and previous inspections).

  Inspectors visit the school for an advance day where they meet with representatives of the parents’ association and the BoM. Importantly, at the meeting with the BoM, a member (usually the Principal as secretary of the BoM or others) makes a presentation to the inspectors on the context of the school, its strengths, and areas identified for improvement and development. This process is valuable for helping inspectors to learn (not judge) about the school ‘beyond the facts’. Issues raised may include difficult circumstances, the social situation of the school, and the culture and ethos of the school.

  During pre-evaluation, questionnaires are also given to a sample of students and parents to get their confidential views on the operation and performance of the school.

- **In-school evaluation**

  The in-school part of the inspection is the major component and takes place over three days. Around one day is dedicated to reviewing school documents and meetings with teachers and students.

  **Review of documents**

  The review of documents (curriculum plans and documents, subject plans for each of the subject departments, child protection policy, school self-evaluation material, and minutes of recent staff meetings) is to further understand the school context and to identify any lines of enquiry or issues to discuss during the inspection.

  **Meetings with teachers and students**

\(^{218}\) Interviews with Inspectorate.

\(^{219}\) A Guideline to WSE-MLL, DES; Interviews with schools and Inspectorate.
The teacher meetings involve the principal and deputy principal and also different groups of teachers involved with management and planning and student support. The purpose is to learn about the leadership and management of the school, student support structures, teaching and learning and other aspects of school life. Inspectors gain insights into students’ day-to-day school experience through a meeting with a focus group of students.

**Observation of teaching and learning**

The other two days of the in-school evaluation are taken up with observation of teaching and learning in classrooms. The classes for observation are decided by the inspectors and they aim to cover a broad range of lessons across subjects, programmes and levels and across year groups. They would typically observe 20 or more lessons. Some principals would prefer to have an input into which teachers are seen or to see a clearer rationale for the decision.

The WSE-MLL team evaluates the quality of learning and teaching in the lessons observed as an indicator of the overall quality of learning and teaching in the school. They do not comment on individual teachers at any point during the evaluation. WSE-MLL also does not focus on subject-specific issues, but rather on general aspects of effective teaching and learning (see evaluation framework box).

Following the observation teachers are given 10-20 minutes one-to-one verbal feedback from the inspectors. This conversation is conducted on a private and confidential basis. During the feedback conversation teachers are also able to give contextual information about the class and make comments about school management and leadership.

In addition, throughout the in-school evaluation, inspectors may speak with individual students or groups of students to gain an understanding of their learning experience.

- **Post-evaluation**

After the three days spent in-school there is one day of three separate meetings held with the principle and deputy principal, teaching staff, and the BoM (and including a representative of the patron/trustee and a representative of the parents’ association). At these meetings the reporting inspector gives a verbal presentation to explain the main draft findings and recommendations. Meeting participants are given the opportunity to ask questions, offer clarifications and additional information, and to discuss the scope for improvement based on the recommendations. The meetings are considered as part of the evidence gathering process and the discussions inform the preparation of the draft evaluation report. Both inspectors and school senior management value the meetings as an opportunity for review and reflection.

- **Factual verification and school response**

All inspection reports in Ireland are subject to factual verification and response from the school (as set out in DES policy). The school has ten days to highlight any factual errors using the provided factual verification form.

Following any amendments to the draft, the final WSE-MLL inspection report is issued to the school whereupon it has 20 days to write a formal school response that makes observations on the content of the report and to identify follow-up actions to implement the report’s recommendations. This is usually published as an appendix to the WSE-MLL report.

- **The WSE-MLL Report**

The final report presents the main findings and recommendations of the evaluation. It identifies both strengths and areas that are recommended for development.
The recommendations can provide important direction for school management and staff. Responsibility for overseeing the implementation of recommendations and improvements rests mainly with the BoM and the school principal.

The WSE-MLL report is issued to all school stakeholders and is published on the website of the DES.

- Inspection follow-through

The Inspectorate and other divisions in the Department of Education and Skills will monitor the implementation of recommendations in selected schools and in the system generally.

1.3 Effectiveness of the QA measure

WSE-MLL looks at four different areas of quality in schools, as set out in the box below.

The evaluation framework (Guidelines for WSE-MLL in Post Primary Schools)

The evaluation framework is based on the same framework set out in school self-evaluation in second-level schools\textsuperscript{220}. As such, the WSE-MLL evaluates and reports on the operation of the school under the following areas of enquiry:

- Quality of school management and leadership
  - The BoM: composition and functioning; level of consultation with members of the school and community; role in policy development; the school priorities and the processes for achieving them; engagement with the school self-evaluation process.
  - Effectiveness of leadership for learning: level of self-evaluation; the role of the principal, the deputy principal(s), and the middle management team; the instructional and personal leadership of staff; the motivation of staff; support for CPD; school development planning; communication structures; co-operation and collaboration among the school community; procedures for admissions, transitions, inclusion, student management; operation of the student council; strategies for attendance and the retention of students; support and guidance for students; curriculum and timetable.
  - Management of facilities: physical resources and facilities to support learning and teaching.

- Quality of learning and teaching: Teaching methodology, classroom management, classroom atmosphere; student learning; quality of planning and preparation at individual teacher, subject department and whole-school levels; in-school assessment procedures. It is expected that teachers are able to present their written plans or schemes of work on a termly and yearly basis, but written lesson plans for individual lessons are not required.

- Implementation of recommendations from previous evaluations: How successful the school has been in implementing the recommendations of previous subject, programme and whole-school evaluation reports with regard to management, and with regard to learning and teaching.

- The school’s self-evaluation (SSE) process and capacity for school improvement: WSE-MLL does not evaluate the SSE itself, rather it assesses the SSE framework and processes (including target setting and monitoring), the level of engagement in these processes by the school’s stakeholders, and the school’s capacity for change and improvement.

It is difficult to establish overall conclusive evidence of WSE-MLL’s objective effect on improvement in school quality. This is because at a general level schools are not sufficiently comparable as they each operate within a particular context, have different

\textsuperscript{220} Looking at Our School – an aid to self-evaluation in second-level schools (DES 2003) and School Self-Evaluation Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools (DES 2012)
strengths and weaknesses, and have different improvement trajectories. In any case, changes in schools could not necessarily be ascribed to WSE-MLL alone.

However, data from WSE-MLL follow-through inspections (of which more than 400 have been conducted) show a high achievement rate (75%) in terms of the implementation by schools of recommendations made in inspection reports. Additionally, post-evaluation surveys with principals and teachers demonstrate the effectiveness of WSE-MLL, with 80% of post-primary respondents saying that the evaluation process contributed in a practical way to their plans for school improvement and 79.4% recording that the feedback supported reflection on and development of professional practice. Also the School Improvement Group which works with that small number of schools in which WSE MLL identifies serious shortcomings, has been successful in turning around schools with significant difficulty.

At a school level WSE-MLL is likely to deliver improvement in school quality according to the different activities of the inspection. The following list sets out the potential means though which WSE-MLL can deliver improvements.

The report’s recommendations

The WSE-MLL report sets out recommendations for action that the school must address. The nature of the recommendations and the time-scale for change very much depends upon the school, its circumstances and priorities. Overall, inspectors ensure that recommendations are amendable for action by the school. They make recommendations that would progress the school in terms of the school’s own particular improvement trajectory and capacity for improvement based on where they are now, and therefore constitute an incremental improvement rather than expectation of complete improvement in all areas. The recommendations are also written such that they are able to be checked for progress at the time of a follow-through inspection, which may be up to three years from the WSE-MLL. Other kinds of inspection may also be used to check on progress before the follow-through inspection.

Some recommendations would be actionable by the school almost immediately and may constitute fairly straightforward changes. For example, one of the recommendations for school A was to review student council structures. Recommendations to address broader policies and procedures, such as the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), as in the case of school B, are more pervasive but senior management may welcome the opportunity to action such issues so as to get policies and procedures in order and up-to-date. A WSE-MLL report can give impetus to this.

Teaching and learning recommendations are expressed at a whole-school level as overall themes and are generally more challenging and require longer-term shifts in the school. For example, a WSE-MLL may call for less teacher-led teaching or ask for extension of good teaching and learning practices.

The report’s recommendations can also bring change because they enable a principal to justify and prioritise actions that without the authority and mandate of the WSE-MLL may be challenging to implement due to entrenched practices or resistance to change from teachers and school management.

Policies, procedures and classrooms

---

221 Interviews with Inspectorate.
222 Data provided by Inspectorate.
223 Interviews with Inspectorate.
224 Interviews with schools and Inspectorate.
225 Interviews with schools and Inspectorate.
There are other effects of WSE-MLL which happen prior to the WSE-MLL. During the pre-evaluation phase schools must ensure that their policies and procedures comply with DES requirements and that subject plans are in good order and available to inspectors\textsuperscript{226}. WSE-MLL may also instigate teachers to improve their classroom materials such as ‘key word boards’ and wall-posters\textsuperscript{227}. While these changes may have eventually taken place without the WSE-MLL, the inspection process prompts action and this is found to be a useful process for teachers.

Teacher feedback

As a result of inspectors’ verbal feedback to teachers after classroom observation of teaching and learning, teachers will have the benefit of informal advice on how to improve their practices. While some teachers respond more positively to advice than others, it is likely that teachers will take forward issues that have emerged\textsuperscript{228}. For example, one teacher was pleased to be able to give more attention to differentiated learning.

Support for school self-evaluation processes

WSE-MLL guidelines state that the outcomes of external evaluations such as WSE-MLL should help to inform and complement the outcomes of a school’s self-evaluation (SSE). Likewise, WSE-MLL would take account of SSE outcomes, although SSE is at too much of an early stage for this to be the case yet\textsuperscript{229}. However, WSE-MLL does not evaluate a school’s SSE, but rather comments on SSE processes and capacity for improvement through SSE.

Together, the Inspectorate suggests that these WSE-MLL activities result in schools’ undertaking a stronger reflection of their overall teaching and learning than they would otherwise. School respondents confirm this. One teacher said that WSE-MLL helped to ‘shake up teaching’ by asking questions, and another said that it increases awareness of what is expected from teachers and can encourage continuing professional development. A principal reported that WSE-MLL was productive for bringing a renewed focus on teaching and learning, and for allowing the school to ‘pause for a couple of weeks and look at everything’.

Another overall effect of WSE-MLL, noted by the Inspectorate, is that schools have become more positively engaged with inspection processes and are more willing to engage in improvement. This is likely to be due to the way in which WSE-MLL engages the whole school community.

At the same time, while WSE-MLL is likely to deliver improvement in school quality according to the different activities of the inspection and there is a stronger reflection on overall teaching and learning, schools suggest that WSE-MLL may bring up issues that were already identified by the school and therefore likely to have been actioned in any case. However, WSE-MLL formally identifies such issues and brings impetus for change through the recommendations. WSE-MLL can also reaffirm positive practice in a school and can instigate new actions.

1.4 Critical factors of the QA measure

There are two critical factors which contribute to the success of WSE-MLL as a quality assurance measure.

\textsuperscript{226} Interviews with schools and Inspectorate; A Guideline to WSE-MLL in Post-Primary Schools, DES.

\textsuperscript{227} Interviews with schools.

\textsuperscript{228} Interviews with schools and Inspectorate.

\textsuperscript{229} Interviews with Inspectorate.
A whole school approach: WSE-MLL brings about change through a thorough understanding of the whole school, including a range of subjects and teachers, school management and leadership, the specific context, culture and ethos of the school, and the perspective of parents and students. In this way inspectors can identify overall school themes in a school and are able to triangulate evidence from different sources to ensure that findings are robust and justified. Senior management and teachers welcome this understanding of the specificity of their school, which then means that advice and recommendations are better engaged with by the school and more positively actioned.

Cooperation and collaboration between inspectors and the school: the case study schools were generally positive about the attitude of the inspectors. This is likely to be a product of the WSE-MLL model which fosters mutual respect, trust, positive professional relations and partnership between the Inspectorate and the school community (indeed this is part of the Inspectorate code of practice). Collaboration can be seen in the level of dialogue and discussion between inspectors and the school, which is a key aspect of the meetings and feedback that takes place. It is also an aspect of the process of producing the WSE-MLL report. While inspectors deliver robust findings and uncompromising, challenging recommendations, during post-evaluation meetings the school community has the opportunity to discuss those findings and recommendations with the inspectors. Also, in the process of final factual verification, while the messages of the report are not able to be changed, inspectors offer some flexibility with the choice of wording.

There are also some issues that may determine the effectiveness of WSE-MLL to bring about improvements in quality.

There is a balance to be met between on the one hand identifying weaknesses in management and leadership and teaching, and on the other hand offering encouragement and developmental advice. Principals and deputy principals are in a vulnerable position when inspectors ask colleagues and other members of the school community about management and leadership in the school. Likewise, teachers may feel despondent when a report finds that teaching in a school is not as good as it could be. This is especially so as the report evaluates teachers as a whole and so good teachers feel the weight of criticism.

Shifts in teaching and learning are challenging for schools and teachers, and large-scale issues such as movements towards AFL are likely to require support. Schools, and in particular school principals, are responsible for delivering teaching improvements, but broad changes to teaching and learning approaches may require external advice and continuing professional development for teachers. In particular, this is especially the case for schools with less capacity for internal improvement (e.g. not having enough money for extensive CPD).

The scope for school senior management to respond to identified weaknesses in teaching could be limited by the whole-school approach of WSE-MLL. As the performance of individual teachers is not communicated to senior management and does not feature in the report (it develops thematic areas for improvement), a school may find it difficult to sufficiently target the necessary improvement actions. However, this would depend on the existing knowledge.
of senior management about their teaching staff, which may already been identified through their own observations or peer-review systems.

- Overall, inspectors are faced with the challenge of balancing breadth of coverage with depth of evaluation. There is a balance to be met between conducting a three-day inspection (covering a three-week period) which limits burden on the school and having enough time to gather sufficient information to develop findings about the whole school. The three-day inspection presents logistical challenges for inspectors and can leave some teachers feeling less engaged with the process if their subject or class was not featured.

### 1.5 School actors’ feedback and views

A consistent view was that WSE-MLL brings trepidation and pressure for school management and teachers. In particular, principals and deputy principals bear a significant work-load and feel vulnerable due to being personally evaluated.

Respondents from both schools suggested that while WSE-MLL may not always raise issues that were not already identified, there were considerable benefits in having an opportunity for reflecting on teaching and learning and a chance to ensure that all policies and procedures were in place.

Other views depend on the school and the outcome of its WSE-MLL. For one school, the senior management and teachers were demotivated due to some relatively critical findings which they felt could have been articulated more constructively. On the other hand, another school gained a great deal of affirmation from the WSE-MLL.

Teachers welcomed the feedback from class observations, but teachers from one school stressed the need for WSE-MLL findings and recommendations to take account of any need for teacher development and training.

Principals welcomed the attitude of inspectors and the chance to have open and honest conversations about the strengths and weaknesses of their school.

### 1.6 Transferability

Certain aspects of WSE-MLL could be potentially be transferred to other education systems’ inspections. These are as follows:

- Inspections could look at the whole school, including a range of subjects and both management and leadership and teaching and learning. However, this depends upon the way that WSE-MLL fits in with other external inspections, which WSE-MLL builds on and informs.

- Inspections could adopt a collaborative and cooperative approach, which in WSE-MLL is most evident in pre-evaluation and post-evaluation where inspectors meet with the whole school community to gain insights and understanding about the school context, culture and ethos. However, this is partly a product of the partnership approach to education in Ireland where the DES works with schools in a spirit of reciprocity.

- Inspections could include all school stakeholders and especially parents and students. Again, this is an inherent feature of the Irish education system.

- Inspections could include confidential one-to-one teacher feedback following classroom observations so that teachers can focus on areas for professional development. However, this operates in a context where teachers have considerable autonomy in Ireland.
1.7 Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Name of Institution</th>
<th>Date of interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Department of Education and Skills</td>
<td>5.02.2015, 11.02.2015 and 12.02.2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 interviewees: Assistant Chief Inspector; Inspector; Inspector</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>College 1 in Dublin</td>
<td>11.02.2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 interviewees: Principal; Teacher; Teacher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>College 2 in Dublin</td>
<td>12.02.2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 interviewees: Principal; Teacher; Teacher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.8 References

- School inspection reports (https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Inspection-Reports-Publications/)
## Italy - VALES project

### Basic facts box:

- **Country:** Italy
- **Characteristics of the school system:** The education system in Italy is organized according to the principles of subsidiarity and of autonomy of schools. The State has exclusive legislative competence on general issues on education and on the minimum standards to be guaranteed throughout the country. Regions share their legislative competences with the State on all education issues except for vocational education and training on which they have exclusive legislative competence. Schools are autonomous for didactic, organisation and research and development activities. Compulsory education lasts for 10 years (from 6 to 16 years of age). It covers 5 years of primary school, 3 years of lower secondary school and the first two years of upper secondary school.
- **School level which the measure covers:** The three years project VALES involves all levels of schools: - primary, upper and lower secondary - in a cycle of evaluation and improvement.
- **Scope of implementation of the measure:** The project includes 300 schools.
- **Participation in the measure:** the MIUR (Ministry of Education and Research) has selected schools among those asking to participate to the VALES project.
- **Stage in the QA cycle:** The process of implementation covers all stages of the QA cycle.
- **Date of start of the measure:** The project started in November 2012 and will conclude at the end of 2015.
- **Target issue the QA measure addresses:** VALES has the specific aim to identify: instruments and procedures for self-evaluation, processes of schools practices and ways of selection and education of external inspectors, processes to integrate external and internal evaluation.
- **Information on levels of funding and source:** entirely funded by the State.

### 1.1 General context

The drivers of quality improvements in school education in Italy today are:

- The pronounced variation between learning outcomes in different regional areas and even between schools in the same area;
- The concern for the development of classroom quality and the development of competences;
- The relationship between school qualifications and skills requested in the working world, and therefore school-work rotations (alternanza scuola-lavoro: Work Related Learning);
- Inclusion processes (see the recent legislation issued on Special needs children - BES);
- Measures against truancy and dropouts.

In the context of the pilot project called PQ (Quality Project), started by MIUR in partnership with Confindustria (Confederation of Italian Industries) in the 90s, QA was put on the agenda, focusing on the following aims:

- Incentivizing self evaluation processes and the continuous improvement on the basis of the CAF Education model;

---

234 “Valutazione e Sviluppo della scuola” (Evaluation and Development of School).
• Developing knowledge and competences according to the foundation principles of Total Quality Management;
• Promoting a culture of quality in schools;
• Fostering school networks in order to spread this quality model.

MIUR’s latest (2014) report\(^{236}\) “La buona scuola. Facciamo crescere il Paese” includes a number of action areas to enhance school quality:

- The first one relates to didactic/teaching activities (attività d’aula);
- The second action area is a law introducing a “three-year improvement plan” (“piano triennale di miglioramento”) which each school is required to develop and implement following a self-evaluation/external evaluation process linked to the SNV (Evaluation National System);
- A third element concerns “transparency”: full access to school data in relation to: organisation; self-evaluation report, and improvement plans; economic balances; interactions/partnerships with external local partners;
- A fourth be consistent use area or element for each of these is given by the revision of school curricula to improve a number of teaching areas: Digital literacy and financial literacy; the reinforcement of Work Related Learning.

Efforts to improve QA of the Italian school sector started with the launch of trial projects, such as “Valorizza” e “VSQ” on school system evaluation managed by the INVALSI (National Institute for the Evaluation of the Education and Training System). Among these, Vales has been selected as the model for the development of the National evaluation system to be rolled out in all Italian schools in 2014-15.

1.2 Description of the measure

One of the main aims of the project was to test the development of a school evaluation system as a wider QA process than the ones currently in place. Until now the quality of school education in Italy has been assessed only through the external evaluation of students' outcomes.

The VALES project was designed to trigger a continuous cycle of improvements in the performance of schools. The project was supposed to test and define instruments and procedures aimed to:

- Support schools self-assessment actions;
- Select and train external experts as supporters for self-evaluation and improvement plans development of schools;
- Test an integration mechanism between school self-evaluation and an external evaluation managed by INVALSI.

The project was also designed with two distinct priorities:

- The first is of social nature and is related to aspects of accountability of schools towards the entire country and to the reduction of differences in the results achieved by schools (in particular between the north and the south of the country);
- The second is internal to schools and refers to the diffusion of an evaluation culture and of self-assessment and self-reflection skills with regard to their own

\(^{236}\) It’s a legislative proposal that the Italian First Minister has published to promote shared discussions about school reform inside school communities.
practices and procedures. This measure has been implemented in order to spread the QA culture, and to improve the national educational system.

The main needs which the measure addresses are:

- The improvement of schools’ ability to reflect on, and use existing data, in particular national tests results, in order to identify critical aspects and act consequently to adjust to critical situations;
- The improvement of schools’ self-monitoring and self-reflecting skills with regard to their own practices to identify critical points;
- The creation of virtuous cycles of self-reflection-evaluation and improvement within schools in order to spread QA culture and practices.

VALES is based on the DPCA model - Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle by Deming (1986), with some variations. The VALES project has been introduced so that schools can improve their consciousness and practices related to QA, by offering them a common framework to observe and analyse their processes and to design and put in place improvement plans.

This model has been diffusely tested in pilot projects on school evaluation and QA, and it has been carried out in some Italian regions, such as the previously cited CAF projects for schools and the VSQ project. Following these pilot projects, the DPCA model has been recognized as effective for the orientation and support of improvements in schools (Faggioli, 2014).

The implementation model of VALES is presented below. Challenges faced by interviewed schools are presented in the next sections.

- Process of self-assessment of schools: This process is based on a model provided by the Central Administration (which includes common criteria and tools and standards for self-assessment) to conduct an internal organizational analysis. More specifically, schools undertake a self-assessment which includes the use of external data (i.e. data from the results of the INVALSI tests) and the observation in loco of the processes and practices, at a didactic, organizational and management levels, which are currently in place. The conceptual evaluation framework refers to a model which can be summarized in 4 categories of factors: 1) the results of education; 2) the teaching and learning practices; 3) the organizational environment; 4) the social-environmental context and resources.

- Completion of a self-evaluation report to be sent to the Central Administration: The report summarises the results of the self-evaluation process and contains a reflection on specific areas of evaluation, including empirical evidence and specifying which are the strengths and weaknesses.

- Intervention of external experts: a) preliminary analysis of the report and of the documents of the schools by means of the framework provided by

---

237 The idea underlying this second priority is that the improvement process of the schooling system should be of a bottom-up nature, based therefore on the will and abilities of schools when undertaking the cycle of monitoring-reflection-evaluation-improvement in a relatively (and increasingly) independent fashion. The measure emphasizes how schools, given the appropriate attention to the contexts where they are situated, need to become local systems which are able to manage in a conscious and transparent manner not only learning results but also the organizational and managerial processes which ensure good level of performance.

238 Some examples of these projects are that of the Lombardy Polo of Quality, which has worked to create a self-evaluation model of schools based on the European CAF model (see: http://www.eipa.eu/en/pages/show/8186=141). This project has also been shared by the Campania Polo of Quality which has worked to spread the model inside schools. Recently, in the context of the specific pilot project led by USR Lombardia “Valutare per migliorare”, a software has been created for the self evaluation of schools, following the “CAF external feedback” European procedure, in order to let schools carry out an accurate analysis of their processes.
INVALSI; b) analysis of the self-evaluation report by sharing and involving the Head of the school, some members of staff, in order to develop a discussion to identify potentialities and criticalities; c) observation of the context (structured visiting protocol) by means of interviews, focus groups, in order to involve ALL the stakeholders, including students, non-teaching personnel, during two “normal” school days, in more or less structured situations (also during breaks with students chosen by the evaluators to be involved); d) drafting of the evaluation report to be then send back to the school.

- Drafting of the improvement plan with the support of external experts.
- Implementation of the improvement plan within 6 months.
- Evaluation of the results of the improvement plan.

This last phase still has to take place at the end of this year (2015). At the moment no data/evidence on it exists. The project has been implemented in the same way in all schools that voluntarily have participated to the pilot project. The project has been designed and supervised by INVALSI and INDIRE (National Institute of Documentation, Innovation and Research in Education) together. The two National agencies have also planned and led the training process for external evaluators who play a very important role within VALES, as presented in the box below.

### Box 1 Evaluators’ task

Their task is not limited to evaluating schools in terms of accountability processes. Their commitment operates according to a dual-direction, meaning they have the role of critical friends in order to support schools in analysing processes and practices in a critical way, but they also have to suggest directions in order to amend emerged critical points and design an improvement plan. Due to the very multi-perspective nature of this task, the team of evaluators visiting schools has to be made up of two people with a different professional background: the first of them has to be endowed with a strong experience in schools, such as a ministerial school inspector or a head teacher; the second has to possess competences in the field of research methods in education, such as an educational researcher.

Another central figure within VALES is the head-teacher. He or she has to lead the process inside the school involving and motivating the school community to take part in the continuous self-evaluation-evaluation-improvement loop. He or she also has an important role consisting of creating and managing a positive connection between the external evaluators and the entire school community. A defined staff of close collaborators of the head teacher, made up of in a limited number of teachers, works at the project inside the school: a) before the visit of the external evaluators, the staff has to analyse the context and draft the self-evaluation report; b) during the visit the staff has to accompany the evaluators and support the visiting processes; c) after the visit, the staff has to support the head teacher in the improvement design and process.

Lastly, VALES provides a space to listen to all “types” of school members: teachers, parents, students and non-teaching staff (administrative collaborators, janitors, educators). Some of them are selected by the evaluators to be consulted about various aspects of the school context.

---

239 The external evaluation report represents a moment of control and validation of the results of the self-evaluation process, and is not seen therefore as a moment of assessment unrelated to the improvement aims for the school.
1.3 Effectiveness of QA measure

Since this project is only underway and shall be concluded in some months’ time, by now precise evidence to evaluate its effects is not available yet. Some reflections on the basis of the current situation are presented below:

- First of all, the process of self-evaluation, promoted and oriented by the VALES framework, has been acknowledged as useful to foster the awareness of teachers and other stakeholders concerning the presence of weak and critical points in each school. For example, the first school has become aware of critical accountability system; the second one has become more conscious about weaknesses in didactic planning, competences-based curriculum, teacher training, long term outcomes; and the third school has become aware of gaps in maths teaching, students orientation and communication practices.

- Secondly, some interviewees have highlighted in particular the positive processes developed following a greater focus on positive aspects, which we are often unaware of. For example, a shared self-evaluation process let one school to be more aware of its satisfying innovative approach and another school has become more aware of their communication outcomes despite a great school context complexity. The last school has become more conscious about their strengths of Italian language teaching. Furthermore, the process of deep self-analysis has fostered a school climate characterized by collaboration, active participation and sharing among all kinds of participants, i.e. teachers, parents, students, janitors of the school community.

- A third acknowledged positive effect is given by the improved school staff’s ability to analyse the various types of data on school processes and by the resources given back to schools by the central administration (i.e. data on students outcomes, on state funds given to school etc.) in order to effectively use them to build improvement plans. Concerning the reception of the measure by stakeholders, generally speaking it seems that it has been received better than previous similar pilot projects. Actually, in comparison to other cases there has been a greater number of candidacies presented by schools called to freely participate to the project. Therefore, within the limited number of schools taking part to the project, it seems that the measure has generally been well accepted. However, in this sense, we can suppose that this positive situation has been produced by the fact that all participants, schools, and also external evaluators are voluntarily applying for participating to the project. Many of the schools involved in the VALES project have already participated in other pilot projects promoted by MIUR, INVALSI, INDIRE or other local educational institutions to experiment new/innovative school practices and/or theories. In light of this consideration it is reasonable to believe that their “internal cultures”, motivations and backgrounds could have played an important role in supporting the implementation process of VALES. In this context, it should also be pointed out that head teachers have played a central role with regard to the acceptance of projects within schools. Following the words of one of the interviewed head teachers, they had to be able to connect the measure directly to her actions/responsibility. In fact, during a teachers’ meeting she said: “I’m not afraid of being evaluated, because, the only result I can expect from that process, is that of improvement”.

1.4 Critical factors of the QA measure

In general, interviewees have not identified unintended negative effects of the implementation of the Vales process. They have actually highlighted participants’
increasing collaborative skills. However, they have also stressed many critical points which need to be monitored in order to achieve an effective implementation of the Valess process.

- Respect of time: According to schools’ stakeholders, one negative factor of the VALES process, is given by a bad timing scheduling. In fact, the VALES project has progressed more slowly than as planned. For this reason school stakeholders have had to deal with a consequent difficulty to respect schedules. This is a critical aspect unrelated to the model; it depends on the specific central bodies (MIUR, INVALSI, INDIRE) in charge of the implementation of the project. In fact, the project started in January 2012 and schools’ improvement plans should have been defined at the end of 2013. Indeed, because of the late visits of external experts sent behind time by INVALSI, schools have had to postpone the deadline of their improvement plan (now fixed in 2015). This type of delay has had a negative impact on the participants’ involvement and motivation. In light of this consideration, it is very important to respect scheduled times for the effectiveness of the project.

- Position and background of external evaluators: External evaluators play a central role within the VALES project. They should possess a wide range of competencies in order to not only evaluate schools, but also to establish reliable relationships with schools’ stakeholders and suggest ways to develop amendments and improvements. As already pointed out within the VALES project, they are not identified as “evaluators” but as “supporters of improvement”. Following the observation made by interviewed people inside one school, a critical point in the implementation process of the VALES project has been represented by the lack of an effective support from evaluators during the definition of the improvement plan. Stakeholders expected that they would be provided greater support during this phase. Therefore, in some cases, evaluators have not been experienced enough to adequately support schools to design a plan of improvement.

- Costs: Large amounts of money have been employed by the State to cover the specific evaluators training, travelling expenses, compensation and time. For many evaluators they have to travel across the country to reach the different locations of schools. Furthermore, to carry out their tasks, evaluators are compensated about 1000 Euros (gross amount) for the 5-6 days spent evaluating each school.

- Other costs are linked to the greater tasks, which the school stakeholders have to accomplish and to the resources are available to implement improvement plans. Each schools have been funded with 10.000 Euros as contribution for the expenses due to the implementation of VALES project. The amount has been allocated by State to schools after sending the report of self-evaluation.

- The “evaluation culture” of the school: As stressed by two of interviewed people, an external evaluator and a manager of VALES inside INDIRE, in those cases where schools do not possess an “evaluation culture” and where, as a consequence, stakeholders are not involved to a great extent, there is the risk of the project being seen as a merely bureaucratic measure. Schools who participated in VALES did so on a voluntarily basis and generally had already

---


241 i.e. knowledge about the different purposes of evaluation; awareness of the importance of evaluation in order to foster improvement processes; knowledge about methods and tools to analyse and measure school contexts
been involved in innovation processes. This is not the case of all schools. In this context, a very important role can be played by head teachers, who have to help create a motivating environment towards participation and towards the seizure of in the improvement process.

1.5 School actors’ feedback and views

The first school is a comprehensive institution made up of four primary schools and three lower secondary schools. It is located in the North-East of Italy, in three different areas to the East of Padua. The second school is a high secondary school situated in the Lombardy region, North-West of Italy, in Busto Arsizio (Varese), which is distinctively characterized by a multitasking pole of continuing training. It distinguishes itself for its style and innovation both from the point of view of teaching, the internationalisation of pathways, and the transparency of processes oriented towards individual success. The third school involved is a comprehensive Institute situated in the Lombardy region too, in Fino Mornasco (Como). It includes three different municipalities and it is composed of three kindergarten schools, five primary schools and one lower secondary school.

Impacts/effects of the measure

The main impact is reflected in the possibility to act on the weaknesses of the system by means of an improvement plan specifically related to various aspects of school organization, including teaching, teaching efficacy, inclusion (definition of BES vademecum), the spread of the awareness of the school processes, and involvement of all teachers within the QA measure process. The effects have been acknowledged by school stakeholders include: 1) in order to develop and implement the VALES project in an effective way, schools have put into place some new structures and practices. For example, self-assessment groups of work (GAV= Gruppo di Auto-Valutazione) made up of teachers, the headteacher and by students and parents. These participants are “engines” for the activation of processes of analysis and for the sharing of reflections, all of which before were non-existent within the same schools. Another positive effect recognised by participants is that the VALES project has represented a way to gain awareness on the multiple processes for satisfying innovation and communication approaches and Italian language teaching. During the first two phases (self-evaluation and external evaluation) which have already been undertaken, according to stakeholders, the results reveal that stakeholders, in particular teachers, have a deeper awareness of multiple processes at various levels (i.e. not only teaching/learning, but also organizational, managerial) happening inside schools. Also, they have gain the ability to understand and make sense of the huge amount of data available to schools.

Stakeholders’ reflections

Since VALES is a QA measure involving only those schools that voluntarily took part since 2012, below are some of the key points mentioned by school level stakeholders:

- First school. Although the first school has already experienced other QA measures, such as the CAF (Common Assessment Framework) and the EFQM (European Foundation for Quality Management), a staff-coordinator of this school has stressed that the VALES project could be considered better, because: it doesn’t supports only evaluative processes, but also improvement processes of the entire school system; it incentivizes self-assessment as a shared process involving all teachers/pupils/parents/staff.
- Second school: A representative for the evaluation within the second school said that this measure has allowed them not only to define several criteria for
the evaluation of the school with greater integrity and to reflect on the results of teaching and planning processes, but also to think about the problem of “social” accountability (i.e. schools’ accountability to parents/pupils/wider local community), which until now has not been considered by schools in Italy. The representative also stated that the model offered by VALES is easy to implement because of: the defined and clear criteria of the model; the presence of experts during several steps such as the external assessment and the planning of improvement processes; The head teacher of this second school confirmed what was said by the coordinator. She also stressed her active role throughout each step of the project as an important way to encourage teachers to agree to it.

Third school: Having the third school already experienced the CAF (Common Assessment Framework), the vice-headmaster of this school said that VALES is a better measure because a model exclusively focused on school contexts. Also, they appreciated that VALES supports the involvement of all stakeholders of the school community and the presence of the external evaluator as improvement supporter.

A new approach to QA

According to interviewees, the VALES measure represents an innovative approach to the promotion and assurance of quality. The most important change that seems to be attributed to VALES by stakeholders within schools is given by the framework aimed at involving all of the various school stakeholders, including teachers, students, parents and administrative staff. As specified in the VALES protocol, not only the involvement of the people in charge of coordinating the project is required, but also of all the teachers and the other participants of the school community. They all have to be systematically informed on the development of the project carried out by the specific work team, and the implementation of actions for the improvement processes needs to be shared.

A second innovative point has been identified as follows: the opportunity of being equipped with common assessment tools shared by all the schools in the country. This framework helps everyone to leave behind “self-referentiality”, which is typical of a self-evaluation carried out without any possibility of comparing data with other schools. In addition VALES project seems to give teachers the opportunity to reflect on their actions and on the objectives of schools with a greater level of awareness, thus identifying strengths and weaknesses. A further positive aspect is linked to the financial resources allocated by VALES: they are judged as necessary in terms of support needed to cover internal expenses for the implementation of the entire process in an effective way.

It should be pointed out that - as noticed by some interviewees - it is still too early to identify significant changes in areas such as teaching and management, because schools are still undertaking the planning phase of the entire procedure.

1.6 Transferability

In light of the data we have gathered, we believe that the measure could be replicated in other contexts without great difficulty. Again, we wish to emphasize the following points:

- Respect of timing in order to avoid a drop of interest by stakeholders;
- The important role of external evaluators supporting schools in the process;

It helps teachers focus on weak points and activate sharing discussions, to look for and plan ways of improving processes and procedures.
Resources to ensure adequate support structures for the implementation process;
- The “evaluation culture” of the school to avoid that the process of self-evaluation is reduced to a merely bureaucratic procedure;
- A head teacher able to lead the process in the best possible way.

At the moment in Italy, although VALES project hasn’t been concluded it has been considered a convincing model to spread the importance of self-evaluation-improvement among all schools in the country. Indeed, observing the SNV (National Evaluation System), established by the D.P. n. 80 in 2013, all schools across the country must now complete the process of self-evaluation, following the same procedures provided for by VALES. At the same time, INVALSI and INDIRE are waiting for considering the effects and evaluating the results of improvement plans schools are now implementing.

### 1.7 Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Name of Institution</th>
<th>Date of interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Comprehensive school in the region of Veneto: Teacher</td>
<td>21.01.2015</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 2  | High secondary school in the region of Lombardia  
3 interviewees: Head teacher; Teacher; Student | 26.01.2015 |
| 3  | Comprehensive school in the region of Lombardia: Head teacher’s collaborator | 09.02.2015 |
| 4  | INDIRE  
2 interviewees: Members of INDIRE | 27.01.2015 |
| 5  | National Institution of Documental, Innovation and Educational Research: External evaluator in VALES | 29.01.2015 |

### 1.8 References

### Portugal - System of incentives and rewards of credit hours

**Basic facts box:**

- **Country:** Portugal

Characteristics of the school system: Compulsory education begins at the age of 6 and lasts for 12 years. Tracking is introduced at upper secondary level and includes four main types of courses: scientific-humanistic courses, specialised artistic courses, professional courses and the new vocational courses. However, tracking is also possible at lower secondary level by following the recently created vocational courses.243 These courses target students over 13 years-old with a history of school failure.

Portugal has introduced centralised final examinations for student assessment at the end of each cycle of basic education (Years 4, 6 and 9) in Portuguese and Mathematics, and at the end of secondary education, in several subjects. The results in the exams at national level are published in annual global reports. The Institute for Education Evaluation (IAVE)* coordinates, draws up, validates, applies and supervises the tools for the external evaluation of the educational system (national tests).

The Ministry of Education and Science (MEC) is responsible for goal setting and standard setting: establishment of the learning standards. The Inspectorate-General of Education and Science (MEC) is specifically responsible for the inspection of the whole educational system, external evaluation of schools and for monitoring of schools’ improvement plans.

Schools have limited autonomy. As a general rule, teachers are recruited and appointed centrally. However, the MEC has been providing greater autonomy to schools by encouraging clustering of schools in the same area and ‘autonomy agreements’. Schools that have ‘autonomy agreements’ can achieve greater flexibility on curriculum management and management of human resources.244

- **School level which the measure covers:** primary, lower and upper secondary education.

- **Scope of implementation of the measure:** all public schools of the country.

- **Participation in the measure:** compulsory in the sense that the values are calculated for all public schools at central-level. However, no penalty is associated with bad results in the indicator.

- **Stage in the QA cycle:** The Portuguese indicator on teaching effectiveness is relevant for the evaluation and review stages of the QA cycle.

- **Date of start of the measure:** implemented in the year of 2012-2013 for the first time.

- **Stakeholders involved (in the design/implementation of the indicator):** Ministry of Education and Science, in particular the Minister’s Cabinet, the Directorate General of Education and Science Statistics and the Directorate General of Planning and Financial management, as well as schools heads and staff.

- **Target issue the QA measure addresses:** Better quality of the educational system based on the definition of strategic orientations by the government (e.g. fight against early leaving), efficient and effective school management and utilisation of human resources.

- **Information on levels of funding and source:** funded by the State budget for education.

---

243 Before, it was also possible by following the former ‘education and training courses’.

244 Decree-Law no. 75/2008 of April 22.
1.1 General context

The system of incentives and reward for schools was created within a context of reduction of resources for education and setting up of the EU2020 goals for education. The rationale was to find a way of ensuring an effective education system with fewer resources and to drive policies towards the achievement of the EU2020 goals for Portugal.

Moreover, in the framework of the Programme of Economic and Financial Assistance, the Portuguese government has established the following priorities in education policy:245

- Attain universal participation in pre-school education, basic education (including primary and lower secondary education) and (upper) secondary education;
- Increase the opportunities of youth and adults to obtain certified qualifications;
- Promote improvement in the quality of learning and value public school;
- Reinforce schools’ operating conditions, resources and autonomy;
- Value teachers’ work and profession.

Quality is thus high on the political agenda. More specifically, the Memorandum of Understanding includes two measures specifically related to quality:246

- Set up a monitoring and analysis system that allows to accurately evaluate the results and the impacts of education and training policies, including those that are already being implemented;
- Improve the quality of secondary education through, among other, the redefinition of schools’ model of autonomy, the revision of their funding framework, so as to orientate it towards results, and the reinforcement of the supervision role of the Inspectorate-General.

The underpinning ‘philosophy’ or rationale behind the choice of the current quality assurance approach/system is increasing the transparency and comparability of results (mainly, students’ results but also candidate teachers’ results) in the whole country.

Quality assurance in school education is closely linked to evaluation and the latter is focused on students’ results. The introduction of a framework for the external evaluation of schools has however significantly extended the areas systematically evaluated, for instance including aspects on context and processes. After 2011, there has been a move towards formative evaluation in the external evaluation of schools, since schools now have to present an improvement plan.

The introduction of the system of incentives and rewards (in credit hours – i.e. ‘staff time’) for schools is a clear illustration of the aim of increasing comparability of results and of promoting the orientation of schools towards results. It aims at encouraging schools to improve their results – in terms of school management, students’ achievement and fight against early school leaving – and at introducing a national reference framework for comparing schools’ results at national level. For the sake of transparency, data on schools performance was made publicly available on a specific...
online platform. The platform presents information for all schools. It gives statistical information on schools’ characteristics (e.g. size, types of courses offered, age of students, etc.) as well as school progress over time and variation between results at internal and external (national tests) assessments.

1.2 Description of the measure

The system of incentives and rewards (in credit hours) for schools was created in 2011 (and implemented for the first time in 2012-2013) with the aim to promote quality in education and encouraging schools to develop an efficient school management in terms of allocation of resources, support students’ achievement and fight against early school leaving. Another important collateral aim of the system of incentives and rewards was to reinforce school autonomy, allowing them to decide how to use their credit hours received. It therefore aims to address strategic issues on the educational political agenda of Portugal as noted in the context section such as an efficient and effective allocation and use of resources by schools; the lack of incentives and autonomy for school actors to change their practices; low students’ educational achievement; and high early school leaving rates.

The system of incentives and rewards in credit hours aims at providing school with specific staff time to management and to pedagogical support activities in addition to the regular/compulsory teaching/human resources hours. Specific indicators are used in the allocation of this additional staff time, namely the:

- ‘capacity for management and human resources’ (KxCapG);
- ‘teaching effectiveness’ (EFI);
- ‘dropout rate’ (RA) – which was added later on, in 2013-2014.
- ‘number of classes in school’ (T)

The indicator of ‘capacity for management and human resources’ measures the school needs in terms of management (KxCapG). A specific amount of additional credit hours is allocated to each school solely for management purposes; this amount is calculated based on size of school (i.e. number of students) and on teachers’ status (i.e. ratio of newly appointed teachers vs. experienced teachers). At the end of June, the Ministry of Education and Science (MEC) informs each school separately via an online portal (i.e. the MISI) about how many additional credit hours for management purposes they will receive in the following academic year based on the indicator KxCapG. For this indicator, the results attained by schools do not influence the calculation; it is solely based on inputs. Note that the additional credit hours received for management purposes can be allocated for pedagogical purposes if needed.

---

247 http://infoescolas.mec.pt/
249 EFI is an acronym for effectiveness in Portuguese (eficácia).
250 RA is an acronym for risk of dropout in Portuguese (risco de abandono).
251 T is an acronym for classes in Portuguese (turmas).
252 The KxCapG indicator is obtained from the product of hours needed for management purposes (K) and hours needed for human resources management (CapG).
The indicator of ‘teaching effectiveness’ (EFI) measures the schools’ progress in educational attainment, by analysing three components:

- the results obtained in national examinations in comparison with the national average;
- the differences between average student scores in the national examinations and the average scores obtained internally (i.e. schools’ student assessments).
- the annual variation in school results, by comparing the variation in the national examinations scores in each school with the variation in the overall national scores.

A school can thus receive additional credit hours for three reasons: either a change in the level of results to a level higher than the national average; or a good adjustment between internal and external evaluation results; or a positive progress of student results over time (even if the results are low).

The indicator on ‘dropouts’ (RA) measures the early school leaving rates of each school (based on administrative data collected at central-level). A school can receive additional credit hours if they succeed in reducing the numbers of dropouts by 50%. Schools which do not reach this reduction are invited to present projects for improvement.

The additional credit hours received because of good results in the EFI or RA are to be solely used for pedagogical purposes (e.g. learning support for weaker students, etc.). One school thus cannot transfer hours received for pedagogical purposes for capacity management whereas it can transfer from capacity management to pedagogical purposes.

Finally, each school receive additional credit hours to be used for pedagogical purposes according to the number of classes (T) they have (i.e. one additional credit hour per 10 classes). Schools receive these credit hours regardless their results at the EFI or RA.

### Table 1.3  System of incentives and rewards in credit hours

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Indicators used</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Management</td>
<td>Indicator of ‘capacity for management and human resources’ (KxCapG)</td>
<td>The KxCapG indicator is obtained from the product of hours needed for management purposes (K) and hours needed for human resources management (CapG).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogical</td>
<td>Indicator on teaching effectiveness (EFI)</td>
<td>Based on schools’ results and progress in educational attainment at national examinations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each indicator is weighted according to the schools’ characteristics (e.g. number of classes, socio-economic characteristics, etc.) which enables a statistical valid comparison of results for each indicator.²⁵⁸

It is to be noted that there are other mechanisms for schools to obtain additional credit hours for specific pedagogical support – especially for schools with difficult socio-economical contexts (e.g. the TEIP Programme²⁵⁹). The system of rewards is an additional tool aiming and encouraging all the public schools of the country to achieve better educational results.

Above all, the introduction of the system of incentives/rewards aimed at changing practices at school-level and incentivise school staff to develop internal measures for improving students’ learning (e.g. remedial measures).

Also, the introduction of the calculation system aimed at ensuring a fairer system of distribution of additional hours. According to the ministry, prior to the introduction of the calculation, hours for management and pedagogical purposes were not used in an effective manner – i.e. many schools lacked hours while others were not using the all the hours they had. In addition, the system of rewards is also aimed at ensuring that additional hours for pedagogical support are effectively used for pedagogical support and not for management purposes which was a problem observed by the ministry.

In order to develop such system of rewards, a specific working group was created with the mission of analysing the state of play of the (former) system of additional credit hours and to develop the best fit indicators. For the technical part on the indicators, a specific statistical team was appointed to the task. Various simulations of indicators were performed. It involved the cooperation of the Minister’s Cabinet, the Directorate General of Education and Science Statistics and the Directorate General of Planning and Financial management. Educational stakeholders (e.g. schools councils, school heads, etc.) were also consulted through a public consultation on the indicators. Their opinion on ‘how it would work’ were collected and used to further develop the indicators. Once developed, the indicators were officially presented and explained to school heads. Throughout the years of implementation, the indicators were improved in statistical terms. Informal feedback received from schools was also said to be taken into account.²⁶⁰

Depending on the local context, schools can implement the credit hours they received via the rewarding system in a very different manner. It was the aim of the ministry to provide higher degrees of autonomy to schools when developing support measures for their students – therefore trusting that schools are the best actors in place to define support measures for their students. Schools have total freedom in deciding how to use the additional hours they received via the rewarding system.

²⁶⁰ According to representatives from the ministry interviewed by ICF for the purpose of this study.
In practice, when receiving additional credit hours, the school council redefines the work distribution for teachers and the organization of teaching schedules.\textsuperscript{261} With the additional hours, it can decide to introduce, for instance, weekly remedial support for certain subjects, to create an internal project or even to hire a new teacher. The way the credit hours are used depends on the school context and strategic choices.\textsuperscript{262}

For instance, one of the schools visited for the purpose of this study – which has a majority of socio-economically disadvantaged students and a story of low academic achievement in national examinations – received a considerable amount of credit hours thanks to its overall progression in students’ scores and to the reduction of its early school leaving rates. With the additional hours, it decided to create one additional teaching period per week in Portuguese, Mathematics and History for preparing students for the national examinations of upper-secondary education. It also introduced the same measure at primary level for preparing pupils for the 6\textsuperscript{th} grade national examinations. In addition, it developed an internal project consisting of separate workshops for the weaker students as well as for the most successful students for them to further their knowledge. Finally, due to the long term illness of a teacher, some classes were behind schedule in Mathematics, and the school used some of the credit hours, for mathematics remedial courses for these specific students.

The other school interviewed – which has a population of socio-economically advantaged students and performs high at national examinations across the country – used the credit hours gained to provide additional weekly support in Mathematics as it noticed via its internal assessments that it was the subject with which learners struggled the most.

1.3 Effectiveness of the QA measure

The system of reward was expected to have a direct impact on quality, provided that schools would use the hours gained for developing internal support measures which in turn will improve students’ educational achievement.

System-level stakeholders reported that in the beginning schools felt insecure in relation to the indicators due to the complexity of the calculation and weighting system. They feared to loose hours for additional support. Detailed information was provided to schools and school heads were informed about the indicators and how the results were obtained. System-level stakeholders have the feeling that the measure is now widely accepted and that schools have understood the general aim of working towards a more effective educational system.

System-level stakeholders reported that the measure enabled to break routines at school-level and to improve school staff collaboration for working towards better educational achievement. A major impact was the fact that it enabled to ensure that the additional pedagogical hours would effectively be allocated to learning support rather than for other purposes (opening a school library, for instance).

The measure also introduced a national reference framework for comparing schools’ results overall which was missing. It enabled to better monitor the evolution of the quality of education and to give references to schools to situate themselves in the country landscape.

\textsuperscript{261} Loura, L. & Hormigo, I. (2013), On an indicator of teaching effectiveness based on national assessment results (Second Lisbon Research Workshop on Economics, Statistics and Econometrics of Education)

\textsuperscript{262} National and school-level stakeholders interviewed for the purpose of this study.
The system of rewards also enabled to better detect schools who perform poorly and redirect them to other support services (e.g. Inspectorate) and resources (e.g. TEIP\textsuperscript{263}) that already existed.

A considerable positive impact that the measure is said to have is the fact that it gives visibility and recognition to the work of the less performant schools which usually are negatively portrayed by the media due to their low achievement at national examinations.

Two important consequences of the introduction of the indicators were firstly the fact that schools started paying more attention to the quality of information they reported to central-level – i.e. the data reported from schools became more accurate. And secondly, the fact that collateral indicators were created for ensuring the validity of results. For instance, to make sure that schools do not overestimate their results at internal assessments – which in turn would affect the results at the EFI indicator – a control indicator was created to monitor school consistency in internal results over time.

Despite the fact that the reward system creates incentives for schools to provide targeted support to their students, there is no system in place for actually measuring whether students’ knowledge improved or not over time. As national examinations are made public, the items have to be changed from year to year and this impedes a comparison of students’ learning progression. It is expected that the system of incentives would enable to trigger school support for learning and in turn improve educational attainment.

In addition, although it will be technically possible to implement, there is currently no monitoring in place to analyse to what extent the credit hours ascribed were effectively used to develop pedagogical support at school-level.

Some monitoring is nevertheless in place for analysing school management efficiency. In 2014, 386 schools used 99% of the additional management hours they received. They represent 48% of schools compared to 40% in the previous year.

1.4 Critical factors of the QA measure

Providing autonomy is found key when implementing such indicators and reward system. Indeed, representatives from the ministry believe that providing an injunction from central-level – e.g. 1 hour needs to be allocated to support in mathematics – would be less effective than giving the freedom to the school to decide taking into account its local context.

Schools trusted the ministry of education in the statistical calculations and validity of results, which contributed to a smooth implementation. Overall, stakeholders see the potential of the measure to improve the quality of education. In the same vein, the ministry also communicated a lot on the indicators and transmitted the idea that it would be beneficial to all type of schools including the ones usually portrayed as less performant.

Another success factor was the fact that a specific working group composed of statisticians and policymakers was created to develop the indicators. It is key that the indicators created control for different variables and are weighted taking into account statistical indicators (e.g. school size, etc.). The fact that the pilot–indicators were tested also contributed to ensuring that the statistical model fitted its purposes.

\textsuperscript{263} Educational Territories of Priority Intervention (TEIP), \url{http://www.dgidc.minedu.pt/teip/index.php?s=directorio&pid=41&ppid=13}
A main issue is the fact that national examinations’ items are not the same from year to year. It therefore impacts on the definition of the indicator of teaching effectiveness (EFI). Specific statistical methods addressed the problem.

Another challenge was the lack of accuracy of the data reported from schools. The statistical department liaised with schools for ensuring that the data was accurate. As a consequence, schools started paying more attention to the accuracy of their data. It is important when developing such indicators to ensure that schools systematically report accurate data.

In addition, a current issue is the fact that VET schools are not bound by the indicator of teaching effectiveness (EFI) as VET students have no obligation to undertake the national examinations. More and more VET courses are developed by public schools, and the EFI indicator should include them as well. The statistical team is researching on this issue.

Finally, it was difficult for the ministry to identify whether a school overestimated its results in internal assessments – which in turn would affect the results at the EFI indicator. To cope with this problem, a control indicator was created to monitor school consistency in internal results over time.

1.5 School actors’ feedback and views

Both schools interviewed believe that the system of reward serves the purpose of improving quality assurance in education. It enables school to implement internal actions to support students’ learning as well as to improve school management. Schools value the possibility of having additional hours and the flexibility of the management – i.e. they can decide how to use the hours. For instance, in addition to developing remedial measures, the hours gained also enable to answer human resources issues when a teacher is on long-term sick leave.

However, due to the complexity of the calculation and to the fact that schools cannot access the whole data, schools are unable to calculate their results at the different indicators and therefore cannot anticipate the hours they will receive. This was reported as a major issue by schools. As they only receive the credit hours results from the EFI and the RA at the end of August – and by this time the following school year is already planned – it is very difficult for them to change the teaching schedules again.

A representative of one of the schools visited (namely, a high performing school at national examinations) would have preferred a simpler system of indicators – less dependent on results at national examinations – that would enable to easily have an idea of how many additional hours will be allocated to the school – either for management or pedagogical purposes – and in turn to better plan the school year ahead. In addition, it believes that it will be valuable to let schools decide how many hours should be allocated to management and pedagogical purposes giving them the possibility to transfer hours from one category to another. It also regrets that the calculation of credit hours changes each year – i.e. in the second year, the indicator on dropout rates was added – which hinders the comprehension of how the reward system works.

It also feels that this meritocratic system reflects distrust in schools and in how they would manage additional hours for providing support to their students – i.e. they constantly need to prove that they have students’ interest at stake. They believe it would be possible to introduce a more equitable system where schools with a difficult socio-economic context would receive more hours than best performing schools.
Schools noted that due to the recent educational administrative reforms – i.e. schools were asked to create administrative clusters\textsuperscript{264} of schools – the ministry should have provided a greater number of hours for management purposes. The indicator for capacity of management did not take sufficiently into account the administrative changes and schools felt they lacked hours to effectively create/manage their cluster.

In addition, interviewees had the impression that less performant schools at the EFI indicator are never able to receive additional hours. Actually, one of the schools was able to transfer its credit hours to a low performing school of the cluster – which was never able to gain credit hours before.

Schools value a close contact with the ministry, and believe it is important that they are notified of the allocation of incentives before this information is made public, given the impact it has on the media. One of the schools visited (namely, a low performing school at national examinations) which received additional credit hours, found it strange that the information on the additional hours came first via the media\textsuperscript{265} – i.e. the school was informed it was successful in the indicators by journalists who wanted to interview the school head. Nevertheless, it was shortly followed by a call from the Ministry.

Finally, as previously mentioned, a considerable positive impact that the measure is said to have is the fact that it promotes visibility and recognition to the work of the less performant schools which are usually negatively portrayed by the media due to their low achievement at national examinations. To this regard, one of the schools (namely the one with low performance at national examinations) observed that for the first time it felt its efforts to improve students’ educational achievement were recognised and acknowledged at central-level (note: the school obtained additional credit hours for its good progression in students’ scores over time and for its reduction of dropouts by 50%).

\subsection*{1.6 Transferability}

The system of incentives/credit hours’ reward can be transferred to other contexts, according to system-level stakeholders. A country can easily define statistical indicators that relate to its context. One has to settle the financial limits under and above which schools can be rewarded with additional hours. It would be essential to test the indicators, doing simulations in order to guarantee that additional hours are rewarded in an equitable manner to schools – i.e. to avoid that some schools receive no credit at all. It is also very important to weight the indicators according to the schools’ context.

The main obstacle lies on the type of national standardised tests that a country has. In Portugal, items from year to year are not comparable and this creates statistical issues for comparability. However, if a country has comparable items in its standardised tests, the indicator of teaching effectiveness would be easy to implement.

In terms of structure, there needs to be a centralised data collection system which collects administrative data from schools and data from national standardised assessments. A specific statistical team also needs to be appointed to the tasks of creating the indicators and testing their validity. It is also important to revise each year the statistical model and allow for improvements.

\textsuperscript{264} In Portuguese ‘agrupamento’.
\textsuperscript{265} Schools should have access to their results via their online platform where the Ministry publishes the results (Despacho Normativo n.º 6/2014 de 26 de maio). However, the school visited felt it was not sufficiently informed of its results.
A good communication service needs to be developed in order to properly inform schools and the general public about the measure in order for it to be smoothly accepted by practitioners.

Finally, the more autonomy is given to schools, the most impact the indicators will have. Allowing for schools to decide how to use the hours they receive is essential to guarantee the effectiveness of the measure. The measure was said to be well received notably thanks to the increased autonomy offered to schools.

1.7 Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Name of Institution</th>
<th>Date of interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ministry of education and Sciences - Minister’s Cabinet: Attached to the Minister of Education and Sciences</td>
<td>12.02.2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ministry of education and Sciences - Directorate General of Planning and Financial management: Sub - Director</td>
<td>12.02.2015</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 5  | Secondary School in Lisbon  
2 interviewees: Head of school; Teacher                                              | 13.02.2015        |
| 6  | Secondary School in the district of Setúbal (Lisbon Region)  
2 interviewees: Head of school; Teacher                                              | 13.02.2015        |

1.8 References

Scotland (UK) - ‘Insight’ benchmarking tool

Basic facts box:

- **Country:** Scotland (UK)
- **Characteristics of the school system:** The 32 local authorities (or councils) in Scotland (UK) have direct responsibility for the organisation of primary and secondary schools, the recruitment of teachers, the provision and financing of most educational services and the implementation of Scottish Government’s policies in education. Schools have a high level of autonomy in terms of deciding the curriculum within a national curriculum framework (Curriculum for Excellence).
- **School level which the measure covers:** secondary.
- **Scope of implementation of the measure:** the tool is made available to all secondary schools; special and independent schools are not currently covered by the Insight data tool. However, their inclusion is being considered for a later phase of the development of the tool.
- **Participation in the measure:** It is expected that all schools will be using the new tool already in the current 2014/2015 school year.
- **Stage in the QA cycle:** the measure is relevant for all stages in the quality assurance cycle. It is expected to be used in the planning and design of the annual school curricula as well as in the implementation phase by effecting changes in teachers’ practices and also to serve as a basis for self-evaluation and for inspections.
- **Date of start of the measure:** Insight – also known as Senior Phase Benchmarking tool - was launched in August 2014 and replaced the Standard Tables and Charts (STACs).
- **Stakeholders involved:** The measure has been developed through a partnership involving the Scottish Government (coordinating the measure), Education Scotland (Government agency to support and challenge education), all 32 local education authorities, secondary schools, national education agencies and other partners.
- **Target issue the QA measure addresses:** The tool aims to benchmark and improve the performance of pupils in the senior phase of secondary school based on a wide set of indicators. It provides data for schools’ use to support improvement.
- **Information on levels of funding and source:** It is fully funded by the Scottish Government from the state budget.

1.1 General context

Quality school education in Scotland (UK) is understood as achieving higher attainment for all learners, building wider achievement in terms of positive destinations and closing the attainment gap between those from high and low socio-economic family backgrounds. The goal is to enable each young person to be a successful learner, a confident individual, an effective contributor and a responsible citizen. To this purpose, all existing QA measures are intended to contribute to raising attainment for all, and to improve learners’ employability by equipping them

---

266 Also called the ‘senior phase’ of compulsory schooling, hence stages S4 to S6, covering ages 15 to 18, including attainment achieved in settings such as school-college partnerships.
267 These are the 4 ‘capacités’ which constitute the goal of the recent curricular reform (Curriculum for Excellence).
268 It is not enough to bring the bottom up but also vital that good schools are made outstanding. It should be noted that the Scottish school system is homogenous, mostly made of state schools (publicly owned and publicly funded).
with life skills to help them to embark on positive destinations upon leaving school. Equity and inclusiveness are the underlying principles of any QA tool.

Scotland (UK) has a comprehensive QA system. Inspection, self-evaluation, the flexible and innovative curricular framework (Curriculum of Excellence$^{269}$), teachers’ standards (newly qualified teaching standards and career-long standards for all teachers) and data collection are all inter-linked with the aim of adopting a holistic approach to quality improvement in Scotland. The ‘Insight’ benchmarking tool has been designed to fit into and support the overall QA framework.

There are several key guiding principles underlying the Insight benchmarking tool: reliance on school self-assessment and self-improvement; ownership of QA processes by school staff; priority to local diversity; continuous enhancement of quality; shared understanding that quality enhancement of learning needs to happen in the classroom; and value all learning outcomes (including non-academic qualifications).

### 1.2 Description of the measure

The online Insight benchmarking tool was launched in September 2014. It has been developed through a partnership involving the Scottish Government, local authorities, secondary schools, national education agencies and other partners. In particular, work has been taken forward through a Project Board with representatives from Scottish Government, ADES (Association of Directors of Education in Scotland), Education Scotland, Scottish Qualifications Authority, EIS (Educational Institute of Scotland) and SLS (School Leaders Scotland). A number of teacher reference groups were also set up to discuss the features of the tool and how it can be used to help make improvements in schools.$^{270}$

The purpose of the Insight tool, just as of the entire QA framework, is to maximise schools’ self-improvement. To achieve this goal, the main objective of the tool is to enhance the capacity of school leaders and teachers as well as local authorities to use data to drive self-improvement.$^{271}$

- At school level, the introduction of the Insight benchmarking tool aims to contribute to two major changes: a) teachers becoming reflective practitioners through better use of data, and b) initiate a collaborative approach to analysing data as part of the school’s improvement process. The aspiration is that all teachers at classroom level would use the benchmarking tool to interrogate data according to their specific context and to compare to other similar (virtual) schools. The expectation is that having a better picture of the learner profiles in their class would enable teachers to identify pupils at risk much earlier and put early prevention and/or intervention in place in order to help all students achieve their full potential.

- At the level of local authority, the use of the Insight benchmarking tool aims at identifying areas of success and of improvement for every school as well as across schools. The expectation is that the local authorities would interrogate data from Insight in discussion with schools to effect improvements in a strategic way.

---

$^{269}$ With the Curriculum for Excellence, the Scottish Government changed the approach to evaluating learners’ outcomes towards broader achievements (not only academic outcomes, but also non-academic i.e. social and civic skills). This coherent, more flexible and enriched curriculum from 3 to 18 includes the totality of experiences which are planned for young people through their education (i.e. in / after school, volunteering etc.). More information available at: [http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/thecurriculum/whatiscurriculumforexcellence/](http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/thecurriculum/whatiscurriculumforexcellence/)

$^{270}$ Scottish Government (2014). Insight FAQ. And interviews with system and school level actors.

The Insight tool aims to support the key principles and purposes of ‘Curriculum for Excellence’ by helping local authorities and schools to focus on understanding and reducing the gap between higher and lower achievers and raising attainment for all. Insight also measures attainment and achievement at the point of exit from school, reflecting a key ambition of Curriculum for Excellence, in which schools are encouraged to consider the best and flexible progression routes for their pupils within the ‘senior phase’.

There were three main factors leading to the introduction of the new Insight tool: the findings of the 2007 OECD Report on Quality and Equity of Schooling in Scotland, the development of the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) and the criticisms to Standard Tables and Charts (STACs). To help raise overall standards and quality of attainment, the new Insight tool replaced the STACs and brought some improvements to the former tool:

- It is available to a wider group of users in secondary schools including class teachers, who can interrogate data themselves (STACs was normally used only by school leaders & management); hence, the new tool builds capacity within schools to use evidence;
- It supports CfE by including a wider range of Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework (SCQF) credit-related qualifications and learning programmes (previously, STACs focused mainly on academic pathways);
- It provides more information on educational outcomes including post-school destinations, deprivation level and attainment in literacy & numeracy.
- It is inter-linked with the other approaches to performance evaluation and improvement; these include the Scottish Survey of Literacy and Numeracy (SSLN), Education Scotland (UK) inspection processes, local authority analyses and self-evaluation.

In summary, the key difference from STACs is the increased focus on equity, wider attainment in terms of life chances and post-school destinations from a lifelong learning perspective.

**Key aspects of the Insight tool**

Insight provides data on 4 national measures for schools and local authorities:

- Literacy and numeracy;
- Positive destinations (entry into employment, further training, university, colleges, etc.)

---

272 Attainment information for pupils in school-college partnerships will be included (however, not for those in full-time college education). Skills Development Scotland’s data hub provides information for this group of learners.


274 STACs was the online system used by local authorities and schools, prior to the introduction of the Insight tool, to benchmark and analyse attainment in National Qualifications in Scotland. Using national data, schools were comparing themselves as part of their internal evaluation process.


277 The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) identifies small area concentrations of multiple deprivation across Scotland. It provides an assessment of multiple deprivation based on income, employment, health, education, housing, access to services and levels of crime in the area.

278 Source: Scottish Government (2014). *Key features of Insight*. And interviews with system and school actors.
o Attainment versus deprivation (measures equity level, aims to close the attainment gap)

o Better attainment for all279 (broader qualifications for all, i.e. vocational training, apprenticeships, employability courses and recognising a range of wider achievements)

These 4 national measures are included on an intuitive dashboard online so that an overall picture of performance can be immediately seen in the following areas: i) increasing post-schools participation, ii) improving attainment in literacy and numeracy, iii) improving attainment for all, iv) tackling disadvantage by improving the attainment of lower-achievers. The dashboard provides views at national, local authority and school levels. At school level, it is possible to compare data with the local authority position, the national position and with a ‘virtual school’.280

Additional measures and data, including course information, subjects and learning partners are provided for use at local level as part of Local Measures with performance viewed on a local dashboard which the local authority can use to identify areas of improvement (and set targets) for each school.

One of the most innovative aspects of the new tool is the virtual comparator which takes the characteristics of individual pupils in a school and matches them to similar pupils from across Scotland (UK) to compare individual learners. It is based on a set of criteria (age, stage, gender, level of deprivation, etc.) and allows for comparisons at the following levels:

- 1 individual learner matched to another 10 similar learners in the country;
- 1 school department matched with other similar departments in the same local authority;
- 1 school matched with similar schools in the country;
- 1 Education Authority (local level) matched with the other 31 Education Authorities.

Hence, the Insight benchmarking tool allows comparisons at stage, school and education authority level. The comparison is based on performance of pupils from elsewhere in Scotland (UK) with similar characteristics (i.e. social deprivation, Additional Support Needs, etc.). This provides a ‘like for like’ view of what similar pupils are achieving across Scotland. Educational outcomes for the school can then be compared with outcomes for a large sample of ‘the same kinds of pupils’. Hence, the virtual comparator for a school is not another actual school, but a random sample of similar pupils from other parts of Scotland. This approach was taken to avoid making direct comparisons between schools.

Insight has a set of filters which allow the data to be interrogated further, according to different cohorts of pupils including gender, age, deprivation level, positive destinations, ethnicity, English as second language, additional support needs and looked-after children281. The filters are present for the national measures as well as the local measures. They are useful for looking at particularly vulnerable groups in order to ensure that they receive the required support to move into positive destinations.

279 Work is ongoing in this area to further develop the tool to avoid any bias to certain pathways (academic route).
The virtual comparator is considered an effective tool to help schools understand their strengths and areas for improvement. To ensure its reliability, the virtual comparator was set up together with university researchers.

**Different forms of use of the Insight data tool**

All secondary schools in Scotland (UK) are currently using the Insight benchmarking tool, according to the stakeholders interviewed. A survey to measure pupils’ outcomes on the four national measures is released twice a year. The use of the new tool varies from one local authority to another due to the local diversity and school autonomy in Scotland. Two local authorities known as pioneers in using data to drive school improvement are the Fife Council and the West Lothian Council.

The Fife Council has been developing for over a decade surveys on perceptions of pupils, parents and school staff to capture a holistic view of students’ progressions. It has done this by following the ‘learning organisation’ approach through the ‘4 lenses model’, which meets both strategic and operational needs and provides data at both system and individual level:

- **Lens 1: Measuring against absolute standards** – it translates into attainment of key measures;
- **Lens 2: Measuring against yourself** (school-level) – trends in performance over time;
- **Lens 3: Measuring against similar schools** – it allows benchmarking against social context;
- **Lens 4: Measuring against the pupil’s potential** – longitudinal measures of pupil progression.

Fife’s experience in using data provided a good practice example which informed the thinking at national level towards building a common vision developed through the Insight tool. Fife Council was involved in the prototype of Insight which was made available one year before its launch. According to the stakeholders interviewed at Fife Council, all schools in Fife are already progressing well with using the Tool to support QA in the school. The focus is on rolling out the use of the Tool from school head and school management down to the level of classroom practice, over the coming two years. Delivering training to build the capacity of schools to use Insight is an important part of Fife Council’s activities. An innovative practice carried out in the Fife Council consists in school leaders working together in trios so that they can challenge each other over the data extracted and learn from good practices.

The West Lothian Council\(^\text{282}\) formed a steering group, comprised of deputy head teachers from each of the 11 secondary schools, to ensure Insight is used in schools as effectively as possible. The group consists of experienced users of STACs and new users in order to gather a range of perspectives and feedback. The Council made training on the tool a focus of the Continuous Professional Development to allow all teachers use the tool for professional reflection.

### 1.3 Effectiveness of the QA measure

The introduction of the Insight benchmarking tool was expected to improve quality of teaching and learning by increasing teachers’ capacity to use evaluative data, reflect on it and introduce changes where needed in order to help every learner achieve full potential. Moreover, there is a strong expectation of use of the QA measure: schools

are expected to work with their Local Authority and interrogate data from Insight at local authority level while at school level, class teachers are expected to work with the school leadership team to interrogate and use data to drive improvement in teaching and learning.

According to the interviewees, there are far more people using the new tool than compared to STACs, although it is too early to assess the effectiveness of its use. Insight is generally well-received among all education stakeholders, including school leaders and teachers. The school leaders interviewed indicated several signs of actual changes in their schools:

- **In relation to literacy and numeracy:**
  - Teachers start seeing the improvements in literacy and numeracy as a responsibility of all teachers;
  - Increasing recognition that strong literacy and numeracy skills are essential to fully access the curriculum;
  - Stronger liaison across subjects to ensure that basic skills are mastered;
  - Teachers are becoming increasingly aware of how to identify evidence of improved literacy and numeracy skills within their classroom;
  - Wider skills agenda, i.e. Communication, Collaborative Working, Presentation and Debate are now being taught and used across all classes in some schools;
  - Clear incentive to encourage students to boost literacy and numeracy targets;
  - Initiatives at Council-wide level to boost literacy and numeracy;
  - Evidence shows that the gap between top and bottom 20% achievers is narrowing.

- **Concerning the positive destinations,** a representative of the West Lothian Council stated that ‘the data is extremely useful. We take the SLDR (School Leaver Destination Returns) figures very seriously as we have a very young and growing population in West Lothian and so the tool provides us with a more integrated analysis in this area’283.

- **Actual changes in the area of improving attainment for all:**
  - Links to other indicators such as attendance, wider achievement, skills development, Literacy and Numeracy, Health and Wellbeing, etc.
  - ‘Insight’ data helps identifying the needs of students in terms of curricular paths and this has contributed to an increasing number of students staying on at school.
  - Recognition that progression within secondary school (senior phase) can be a major issue for the lowest 20% learners;
  - Partnerships with local colleges are emerging to try and significantly expand the curriculum for students;
  - Overall there is a much greater emphasis on matching curriculum needs to successful positive destinations.

---

283 Ibid.
Whole school and department analyses of performance across the student cohort are far easier to do with Insight, according to some school actors interviewed.

Changes in the attainment versus deprivation measure:

- Better understanding among teachers that learners’ socio-economic family status is a strong indicator of how they will achieve; for example, one school leader stated: ‘many of our pupils are in the bottom SIMD percentile causing particular socio-economic challenges so it is useful for us to view attainment in this context’

- Increased focus on the ability of every child to access an appropriate curriculum and make significant progress;

- Significantly increased focus on Health and Wellbeing and skills development in some of the schools interviewed;

- Increased S.Q.A. Certification to reflect a wider range of skills and fully capture every student’s achievements.

Across the 4 national measures, the schools interviewed observed the following changes:

- Better awareness among class teachers about deprivation levels, attainment for all, positive destinations, literacy and numeracy targets (far better than before);

- Better ability to predict learners’ progression from year to year;

- Strong indicators for performance in the school;

- Use of data is useful for school departments to motivate improvements in the needed areas (however, most departments already have and use their own statistics).

So far, the Insight tool has proven to be a useful tool for professional reflection and dialogue with some evidence of actual effects on improving relationships between school staff. In the schools where interviews were conducted there has been a change in focus with all staff now using data to reflect on progress and performance in view of driving improvement. One way in which the tool is being used is to steer meetings of the school leadership team about strengths and weaknesses of the school on the basis of the findings from Insight by triggering a conversation with subject teachers and/or school departments to find out what went well, what changes were significant and how to make improvement in a subject or area.

Notably, some of the schools interviewed have not only extracted and analysed the data from Insight, but also planned interventions based on the evidence from the September 2014 survey. One example is the Viewforth High School in Fife that has widened the senior phase with new curricula subjects to improve pupils’ experience at school and thus encourage positive destinations. An innovative new measure planned by Viewforth High School to better support positive destinations is the ‘2+2+1’ model consisting of two days in school, with a focus on boosting literacy and numeracy, two days at college and one day in apprenticeship in a company; this model aims to prepare learners’ transition after school. Another example is the Health and Well-being

---

284 Ibid.
285 Literacy and numeracy; Positive destinations; Attainment versus deprivation and Better attainment for all.
agenda designed by the Auchmuty High School in Fife to reduce the attainment gap by improving all learners' well-being at school.

Some Local Authorities have used data from Insight (from Sep 2014) to identify schools and departments with success in certain areas to team them up in Trios with the schools that did less well in order to share good practices through stimulating a collaborative approach.

1.4 Critical factors of the QA measure

Since the Insight tool has only been recently launched, it is too early to assess the factors which contributed to the effectiveness of this QA measure. However, the stakeholders interviewed highlighted several anticipated critical success factors which can be grouped in 4 categories. In addition, some success factors are specific to the characteristics of the school system in Scotland, namely the autonomy at local level which means variable support available from one Local Authority to another.286

Sustained political support to uphold the QA framework

In Scotland, there has been for a long time a political consensus around the value of Scottish education, which translated into high level of financing for education regardless of the political party in government. Such political consensus on improving the quality of the Scottish education system was partly informed by comparison with other models in the rest of the UK and partly due to the comparisons with other OECD countries in terms of equity of PISA test results. The national debate in 2002-2003 strengthened the political consensus on the priorities and direction of the education reform. The Government, the 32 Local Authorities, school actors and wider public share the vision on the future of school education in Scotland, which translates into clear and strong linkages between system, local and school levels.

According to the stakeholders interviewed, a ‘push-pull’ dynamic triggered the school education reform and the QA measures and ensure their continuity. A political push at national level and bottom-up demand (school and local level) lie at the core of the success of the QA approach in Scotland, including the Insight QA measure.

Collaborative approach in design and implementation of the tool

The process of developing the Insight tool was inclusive and participatory and involved wide consultations with local authorities, schools and other partners in view of ensuring the tool’s relevance and robustness. Moreover, in the implementation phase, one of the key aims of Insight is its collaborative approach when looking at the data. It informs professional dialogue as part of other processes, a dialogue between classroom teachers, principal teachers and school leaders, hence Insight is a real opportunity for informed discussions involving all staff. Such a collaborative approach is a critical success factor as it fosters greater interest and motivation among teachers given that every member of teaching staff has access and can use the data. Other related factors which influence the uptake of the Insight tool are:

- Existence of constructive and formative relationships (trust and dialogue) between inspectors, local education authority and school actors (leaders and teachers);
- Importance of integrating the QA measure with other QA processes;

286 For example, the Local Authorities that have previously invested significant efforts into school data collection and analysis are likely to provide a stronger support and to adopt the new Insight tool faster than others.
Good dissemination of best practices between schools in the same local authority.

Ownership of QA process by school actors (cultural change of mind-set on evaluation)

Teachers’ view on evaluation is beginning to change. They start seeing data as something not to be scared of or imposed as a top-down bureaucratic procedure, but which can help them in their practices in the classroom. This motivates them to get involved with the new tool and have ownership of extracting data that is useful in their work. The ultimate success of the QA measure is anticipated to be given by the cultural change with teachers increasingly believing that data can be used to improve school education by driving evidence-based changes in education from the classroom level up to system level.

Flexibility and ease of use of the QA tool

According to the school actors interviewed, the intuitive, user-friendly nature of Insight and the clear way in which the tool provides information for improvement is a real plus in terms of getting buy-in from schools: ‘STACs was far from intuitive but with Insight, the measures are all in one place on the dashboard making it easy to navigate and allowing users to concentrate on what the data is showing and how it can target improvements’. Moreover, the flexibility of the tool to account for the autonomy of schools and local authorities cannot be underestimated. The vast majority of stakeholders interviewed praised the Insight benchmarking tool for using common goals to measure different schools from different spectrums without antagonising them (as compared to the leagues tables).

Challenges encountered

The stakeholders interviewed indicated three main challenges encountered so far – one technical, one operational and one general:

- One of the main criticisms so far has been that the scales on the global indicator of attainment are still slightly biased towards the academic pathways, hence do not treat all ‘flexible learners’ pathways’ with the exact same value at the moment. For example, according to SQF, not all vocational skills are included in Insight. Work is being conducted at the moment to improve the tool in this area so that the full spectrum of pathways are recognised by the Insight benchmarking; the expectation is that over the next two years the tool becomes ‘curriculum neutral’ (non-biased).

- The introduction of the Curriculum for Excellence and the online benchmarking tool simultaneously has posed difficulties for schools to manage both changes. School leaders and teachers not only need to change their approach to delivering school curriculum, but also to adapt to the new tool for self-evaluation. In practice, this translates into prioritisation of needs and allocation of resources, with many schools focusing on training all their teachers on the new curriculum and only principal teachers on the benchmarking tool, at the moment.

- A key challenge is the cultural shift required by the new benchmarking approach: schools are used to compare their results with other schools (league tables with STACs) but with Insight access to other schools’ data is restricted to

the 4 national measures via the virtual comparator. Hence, schools need to shift their mind-set from comparing to other schools to using data to reflect on the areas to improve within their school.

Support measures
Several support measures have been put in place to facilitate the uptake of the new QA tool:

- Building capacity of Local Authorities – each Education Authority nominated a ‘Local Champion’ (QA assessor) to be trained with Education Scotland (UK) and the Scottish Government so as to then disseminate the acquired knowledge to all schools in the given Local Authority. Moreover, Education Scotland (UK) visited almost all local Authorities to offer support both in the run-up to and post the launch of the new tool (45 field visits).

- Training school leaders and teachers - local authorities offered training on the new tool centrally to school leaders. School leaders then organised internal training for their own teaching staff. Education Scotland (UK) made available resources for training, such as templates, self-help information (videos and materials) and hands-on exercises.

- Raising awareness about the value of better use of data – Education Scotland (UK) has organised partnership events and ‘leadership’ events where it featured workshops on the ‘Insight’ tool. In the year before the launch of the tool, regional events were carried out in every Local Authority to raise awareness about the new benchmarking approach.

- Dissemination and visibility – a new website was developed by the Project Team to keep all relevant actors up-to-date with the on-going developments of the project. In addition, a series of blogs on the Engage for Education website allows sharing perspectives on the design and introduction of Insight.

1.5 School actors’ feedback and views
The school actors interviewed highlighted that the new benchmarking tool is well-accepted among teachers because it is viewed as a tool that allows tailoring of the measurement to the school’s real needs. To improve quality in education, the interviewees found it important to believe in the use of data to drive change at classroom level. They reported little impact of the new tool on their work since most teachers were already using data from other instruments to monitor and track students’ achievements according to a target or predictor as well as to identify factors and plan an intervention when the target had not been achieved. However, the online benchmarking is innovative to teachers in the way the data is presented and the multiple filters that can be used in analysing data to get evidence for change.

Insight is considered an improvement to the previous measurement tool, STACs, because it removed comparisons with other schools (league tables) and recognises
that each school is different and has different groups of learners. While some teachers felt motivated by the competition with other schools via STACs, most of them welcomed the shift to internal improvement to account for the particular local and school context. Teachers also welcomed diminishing exam pressure on learners by focusing on making learning enjoyable.

School actors (leaders and teachers) value the new tool for bringing a much fairer assessment of the learners’ outcomes and the school’s performance as the measurement is sufficiently wide to recognise the success of every school in some areas. The new tool presents a richer and more rounded picture of individual pupils’ attainment across a greater range of school provision, according to the interviewees. In particular, school leaders as well as teachers see the added value of the virtual comparator that allows them to interrogate ‘what do pupils like my school’s pupils typically achieve’.

Interviewees observed that there is room for improvement in terms of ensuring an effective use of the tool at its full potential while acknowledging that the tool needs time to mature and to be reviewed in accordance with the developments of the Curriculum for Excellence. Their expectations were that the new benchmarking tool will improve quality in education by offering a strategic view on attainment and making it possible to identify pupils at risk earlier and thus to plan ahead better prevention or intervention measures. They also see the great potential of this new tool for stimulating enhanced dialogue between schools and local authority on where improvements are needed as well as fostering a dynamic professional conversation among school teachers and between them and the leader. Many schools plan on using evidence from benchmarking in developing more responsive yearly plans in August-September, which is considered the crucial time to reflect on the Insight results.

The schools interviewed shared their observations on the initial evidence of effectiveness. They highlighted that using data from Insight leads to better collaboration between teachers, gives better predictability of learners’ performance and offers strong indicators of school’s performance. The teachers interviewed reported that they are now more aware of the importance of global attainment, positive destinations and deprivation as well as more responsible for literacy and numeracy achievements and encouraged them to be leaders.

As part of their feedback, some school actors found that the new tool is still too complex to be quickly taken up by all class teachers. Some school leaders also found it challenging that school performance is measured on a variable that they have no influence on, which is post-school destinations. They see that in a way Insight brought the after-school transition to the front and has given schools more ownership of driving improvement for learners also after school, which could strengthen the schools’ value and be a driver for change on long term.

1.6 Transferability

All stakeholders consulted highlighted that the ‘Insight’ benchmarking tool can be replicated in any other country from the technical side of the tool. While stressing the specificity of the Scottish school system and QA framework in which Insight is well integrated, they identified the following strategies to ensure the transferability of the measure:

- Participatory reflection on the desired education model in the country – it is important that the starting point is a nation-wide reflection (such as the subjects. This was inherently perceived as unfair for schools in less affluent areas since it did not recognise the value of vocational learning.
national debate in Scotland) to decide upon i) what to value in education, ii) how the education system should look; iii) what should education deliver. The rationale is that the education model chosen influences the technical design of the measurement tool and the statistics.

○ Central data system supported by IT infrastructure – which data is relevant for quality improvement is determined by the QA approach. It is important to ensure a central system for data collection and set up data protection agreements with schools, local authorities and partners. To ensure robustness of a QA tool, a rich set of national data is needed depending on the purpose of its use (in Scotland, schools are used to collecting data and students are easily tracked via their Scottish Candidate Number);

○ Dialogue and collaboration among all stakeholders – work with all relevant agencies, schools, colleges, apprenticeship centres, SQA and other partners is necessary to make it possible to integrate all data on the full spectrum of qualifications (beyond school-based); this requires reaching out to all stakeholders via a continuous dialogue.

○ Capacity and communication – involving practitioners (school actors) in the design and development of the QA tool from the very outset should not be understated; this is what can often trigger the motivation for putting the tool into practice and using it as effectively as possible. Transparency is key to keeping practitioners involved in the QA process as well as building their capacity for taking ownership of the process themselves.

○ Cultural shift in the QA approach – Insight is embedded into a broad educational reform which implies a cultural shift to giving more autonomy to schools and empowering them to develop their school curricula, self-evaluate their progress and drive self-improvement. Given the curricular model of ‘flexible learners’ pathways’, any such measurement tool requires a cultural shift to consider that each student counts and should be supported to achieve their full potential despite their deprivation level, and wider qualifications beyond academic routes also matter, as well as consider that the school’s responsibility does not end with the pupils’ final exams but should continue with after-school transition leading to positive destinations.

### 1.7 Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Name of Institution</th>
<th>Date of interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>General Teaching Council for Scotland</td>
<td>28.01.2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 interviewee: Chief Executive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Fife Council – Education Directorate</td>
<td>30.01.2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 interviewee: Executive Support Officer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Fife Council</td>
<td>05.02.2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 interviewee: Executive Director</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Education Scotland</td>
<td>04.02.2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 interviewee: Inspection Officer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>The Scottish Government</td>
<td>05.02.2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 interviewee: Head of ScotXed Unit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>West Lothian Council – Education Directorate</td>
<td>12.02.2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 interviewee: Head of Services - Quality Assurance &amp; Specialist Services</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td>School Name</td>
<td>Interviewees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Auchmuty High School</td>
<td>3 interviewees: Head Teacher, Principal Teacher of Engineering, Art and Design, Teacher of English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Viewforth High School in Kirkcaldy</td>
<td>1 interviewee: Rector of High School</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.8 **Sources**

- Engage for Education blog: http://engageforeducation.org/category/insight/


Annex 3 Review of academic literature on topics related to Quality Assurance in EU school systems

International academic articles were reviewed in order to identify existing findings on topics related to Quality Assurance in EU school systems. The academic articles were identified and selected on the basis of search by keywords in the EBSCO Host. Academic articles were then screened and shortlisted according to their relevance to the topics covered by the present study. More information on the methodology is provided in section 1.4.1 of the report. The table below presents the main findings from each academic article reviewed. It provides the article’s key characteristics in the first column (background). It then presents key factual information on the QA activity, theme, procedure or policy which the article covers. Evidence from the article on the key strengths and weaknesses of the QA activity, theme, procedure or policy analysed are then summarised in columns 3 and 4. Finally the last column synthesises any evidence from the article on effects of the QA activity, theme, procedure or policy analysed, on different aspects of school quality.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BACKGROUND</th>
<th>Key facts</th>
<th>Identified strengths</th>
<th>Identified weaknesses</th>
<th>Reported effects on school quality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Article:** Mujika J. & Etxeberria K., Evaluation of Secondary Education Schools in the Basque Autonomous Community in Revista Electrónica de Investigación Educativa. 2004, Vol. 6 Issue 2, p1-23. 23p | 55 schools in the Basque Community participate to the REDES external evaluations since 1999-2000 | The strengths of the evaluation model of the REDES lie on the fact that, namely:  
- The information gathered (e.g. pupils results) on each school is contextualised  
- The information is gathered via standardised procedures, i.e. centralised tests in various subject areas, questionnaires to school staff, which are pre-evaluated/validated.  
- The evaluation process is longitudinal. Evaluation results of schools are compared at t and t+1 which allows for monitoring progression in quality.  
- The data from schools remain confidential.  
- It is solely a descriptive evaluation, leaving interpretation of the results up to the school. |  
- Schools have difficulties in translating the evaluation results into improvement strategies. REDES evaluators therefore need to take the time to helping schools develop improvement strategies after the evaluation process.  
- Heavy focus on external evaluation, without any provision for a complementary self-evaluation of schools (for obtaining more contextual information), which in many cases does not take place.  
- Comparison of evaluation results among schools is limited with the available indicators. |  
| **Country of research:** Spain |  |  |  |  |
**BACKGROUND**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key facts</th>
<th>Identified strengths</th>
<th>Identified weaknesses</th>
<th>Reported effects on school quality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basque Autonomous Community.</td>
<td>• In 2009 Scotland promoted a change in the aims of learning through the new “Curriculum for Excellence” (CfE), that didn’t introduce new curriculum content set, but four stated capacities in children learning to be gradually achieved by schools: successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors.</td>
<td>• The author considers that the current inspection model does not reflect the curriculum changes which is seen as a problem.</td>
<td>The article does not give evidence on how the new Curriculum or school inspection procedures have (negatively, according to the authors’ opinion) impacted quality in education.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Country of research: Scotland

**Aim of the research:** The paper presents observations on the nature of school audit methods in light of the implementation of Scotland’s incoming Curriculum for Excellence and the major normative, technological, and cultural changes affecting schools. It points to a mismatch between the concepts and structures of the incoming curriculum and that of the universalistic yet theoretical grading schemas used in Scottish school inspections.

**Method:** The author analyses the current Scottish evaluation system using reference to legislative acts, statements by politicians and representative of the education sector and literature.

**Strength:** well written; based on first-hand experience as the author is a head-teacher

In 2009 Scotland promoted a change in the aims of learning through the new “Curriculum for Excellence” (CfE), that didn’t introduce new curriculum content set, but four stated capacities in children learning to be gradually achieved by schools: successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors.

The new Scotland’s Curriculum for Excellence introduced is based on formative terms. It introduced different type of competences for schools to develop with children, e.g.: “successful learners”, “confident individuals”, “responsible citizens” and “effective contributors”.

No guidance is provided to schools on how to implement the new curriculum principles.

Since 2007 is in use the so called How good is your school? Evaluation framework, based on a defined set of 30 “indicators”. Each indicator has a weight and a range of values. The final score is the summative product of the score of each indicator.

Self-evaluation is carried out in the way that principals and teachers assess their own school against each indicator, then this evaluation will be graded by an external inspector that will also elaborate prescription to the school.

In 2008-2010 major changes in school inspections methodology have been introduced by the Scottish school inspectorate HMIE for immediate

The author considers that the inspectorate’s method of self-evaluation no longer makes practical sense at school level.

The author considers that school inspections have become very heavy and prescriptive. Audit had shifted to a very strict summative process. It is based on a set of 30 indicators on which a school is assessed. Each is ranked at six grade levels. It has become a quasi-judicial process.

The author considers that the current school inspection model should be replaced by a more moderate model, giving space for negotiating the conclusions according to the school’s and pupils learning’ reality.

The author considers that school communities should be integrated into the process of development and evidence-based dialogue of building the new curriculum.

The How good is your school? Is over-structured, too fixed and rely on a too different mental concept to match the needs of CfE.

The actual system that externalises grading and recommendation and that is based on an abstract ideal of “Good school” elides any possibility of building the curriculum in terms of situational application.

The author remarks that in a time of...
### BACKGROUND

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key facts</th>
<th>Identified strengths</th>
<th>Identified weaknesses</th>
<th>Reported effects on school quality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weakness: The paper is a theoretical discussion on the Scottish evaluation system, it doesn't, however, use any collected data to support the position taken. It may be biased as the author is a head-teacher himself.</td>
<td>Implementation (HMIE 2008)</td>
<td>Curriculum transformations having an assessment based on a fixed idea of good and bad is not an appropriate way to conduct an evaluation that would, on the contrary, need more flexibility in order to evaluate the development of a school that may be facing particular challenges or have specific potential to enhance.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Principles underpinning school organisation and governance


**Countries of research:** England, Germany, France and Italy

**Aim of the research:** This article focuses on policy reforms in secondary education in England, Germany, France and Italy. It analyses key policy changes in relation to the decentralisation of decision-making to secondary schools in England, France, Germany and Italy, with a focus on the enactment of policy reforms rather than practices at the micro level.

**Method:** mapping analysis of legislative and policy reforms since the mid-1980s.

**Key characteristics of the study sample:** England, on State schools in England, Germany, France and Italy have been reformed so as to ensure less hierarchical educational accountability, moving away from mainly centralised systems of controls.

The degree to which European education systems have embraced governance reforms and market accountability vary significantly, as empirical findings suggest.

France and Italy:
- an 'old' hierarchical accountability systems, only marginally changed by the new systems of performance-based evaluation and decentralised management at the school level.
- schools have gained legal and juridical 'autonomy' and the power of headteachers has been strengthened, but reforms have been timid in relation to choice and competition reforms.
- the organisational reforms of schools' internal governance have progressed hand in hand with the decentralisation of state responsibilities to the regional administrations.

This paper concludes that one of the most striking policy developments of the 1980s and 1990s has been the centrality that schools have acquired as separate and self-governing 'organisations'.
### BACKGROUND

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key facts</th>
<th>Identified strengths</th>
<th>Identified weaknesses</th>
<th>Reported effects on school quality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Germany</strong>&lt;br&gt;• The German education system is characterised by federalism (Leibfried &amp; Almendinger, 2003) with ongoing trials of autonomous schools and pilot projects in Berlin and North Rhine-Westphalia. Among the education systems under investigation, it represents still the most reluctant one to introduce market accountability based on consumers’ sovereignty and to alter the traditional accountability regimes based on bureaucratic and professional accountability.</td>
<td>&lt;br&gt;</td>
<td>&lt;br&gt;</td>
<td>&lt;br&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England&lt;br&gt;• In comparative terms, the English case is an outlier in so far as market accountability has become a crucial facet of schools’ public accountability. Teachers and headteachers are accountable to parents as consumers through mechanisms based on quantitative indicators and test results.</td>
<td>Role of governing bodies: Local elected officials are powerful actors in French schools, and this remains an exception in Europe. The representation of parents is given a much greater voice in Germany, England and Italy. Electoral politics plays a central role only in France.</td>
<td>&lt;br&gt;</td>
<td>&lt;br&gt;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Article:** Morris, A., Contextualising Catholic school performance in Oxford Review of Education, Dec 2009, Vol. 35 Issue 6, p725-741.<br>Country of research: **England**<br>• It suggest that Catholic schools have, ‘more informed parents’, ‘better pupils’, ‘selective admissions’, ‘fewer children with English as a second language’, ‘fewer ethnic minority pupils’ and ‘fewer pupils with special educational needs’ (Schagen et al., 2002; West & Hind, 2003; Gibbons &<br><br>• This new Ofsted CVA methodology, and its resulting database, enables national comparisons to be made in a way that has not previously been available to researchers.<br><br>• However, as all data have their limitations conclusion must be taken with precaution.<br><br>• Minor changes have been made to the CVA methodology as it has been developed, so that the data from successive year groups are not directly comparable.<br><br>• Catholic schools in England are clustered towards the top of the first school performance tables of the government’s preferred measures of ‘raw’ (i.e. not contextualised pupils’ results) secondary school
**BACKGROUND**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key facts</th>
<th>Identified strengths</th>
<th>Identified weaknesses</th>
<th>Reported effects on school quality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Study target group:</strong> Catholic schools in England.</td>
<td>Silva, 2006).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aim of the research:</strong> This paper investigates possible faith school effects on pupil achievement. It examines the latest government contextualised value added (CVA) data in an attempt to provide some illumination on the positive performance of Catholic schools.</td>
<td>• The new contextualised value added methodology has been introduced in the mid 2000 as a new tool for comparing institutional performance.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Method:</strong> Quantitative analysis of CVA results.</td>
<td>• Contextualised value added is a multi-level statistical modelling technique using the actual test and exam results of all pupils in a given year group. It uses a more complex definition of prior attainment than the simple value added model, together with a range of contextual variables (e.g. gender, ethnicity, age, Free School Meals Eligibility, special education needs, among others) known to affect academic outcomes, to predict the attainment of individual pupils. It then compares each individual's actual test or examination results against that prediction.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strength:</strong> detailed analysis of CVA results. Good overview of the strengths and weaknesses of the CVA method.</td>
<td>• Institutional value added scores are derived from the difference (positive or negative) between the predicted and actual attainment of the school's individual pupils.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Weakness:</strong> the author knew that CVA results could not highlight a potential 'Catholic factor'. To answer that question, the author should have used perhaps ethnography methods coupled with the CVA results analysis.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key characteristics of the study sample:</strong> Faith schools of the Church of England and Catholic faith communities account for approximately 35% of all primary and 16% of secondary schools in England (DFES, 2004).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Inspection data from the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) also indicates that, on average, Catholic schools achieve higher academic standards than other state maintained primary and secondary schools.
- Research has demonstrated that family background and prior attainment remain the major factors associated with pupils' attainment at school – these factors account for 80% of the differences between schools.
- However, even when controlling for background factors, such as in the CVA methods, Catholic schools still perform better.
- Indeed, Catholic both primary and secondary schools obtained better CVA scores compared to the non-Catholic sector both in 2006 and 2007. In both years, a greater proportion of Catholic schools achieve high CVA scores, and half of the Catholic sector schools combine high CVA scores with high levels of academic attainment.

The author identifies US research evidence indicating that pupils attending Catholic elementary and secondary schools (what
### Background

#### Key facts

- Identified strengths
- Identified weaknesses

#### Identified effects on school quality

would be termed private schools in the UK) tend to obtain, on average, higher levels of academic achievement than those attending their state-run counterparts. In addition, they appear particularly effective with pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds and from lower socio-economic groups (Coleman et al., 1982; Greeley, 1982; Hoffer et al., 1985; Bryk et al., 1993; Johnson, 1999; Hoffer, 2000; Jeynes, 2000).  

It also points out the research of Bryk et al. (1993) which highlighted factors that contributed significantly to the high academic standards of Catholic schools in the USA.  

Other studies that have found little or no difference (Kendall, 1996, 1997), and with those whose results are mixed (Schagen et al., 2002; Benton et al., 2003; Schagen & Schagen, 2005) are also mentioned in the article.

The author concludes that whether the CVA result of Catholic school indicate there might be a “Catholic factor” associated with their performance, further research is needed before reaching a tangible conclusion.

### Article: S. Young (2013), *Confident, cautious, concerned and constrained: the new hierarchy of English education*

The education reform in the UK shifted the responsibility over school management from the local authorities to the level of schools, known as school autonomy. This led to a varying degree of schools’ capacity

The study determined 6 factors that lead to the 4 categories of schools:
- School autonomy;
- Accountability;

The study shows that school autonomy is not necessarily positive. There are certain types of schools for which additional autonomy can be seen as a concern – these are the schools that don’t have capacity to respond to the way in

"Confident" schools see this policy as providing an incentive through the new autonomies gained and the chance to become an academy, teaching school or part...
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BACKGROUND</th>
<th>Key facts</th>
<th>Identified strengths</th>
<th>Identified weaknesses</th>
<th>Reported effects on school quality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| schools. Education Journal. Issue 171, p10-11. Country of research: England | to act upon autonomy. Some school leaders welcomed access to a wider pool of services (including for-profit providers). However, others have concerns whether such a patchwork of provision would provide appropriate and equitable support for schools. The study proposes a clear categorisation of schools in England according to their principals’ perceptions towards school autonomy as opportunity or as concern:  
- Confident – positive about school autonomy, expected to gain new autonomies, aiming to become an academy / part of a school alliance;  
- Cautious –moderately positive about school autonomy, uncertain about gaining new autonomies, most have no plans for an academy;  
- Concerned – worried about school autonomy, anticipating negative impact on their school. No plans to become an academy.  
- Constrained – negative on school autonomy, sceptical about any benefits. No plans for an academy. | - School partnerships;  
- External support;  
- Changing role of the Local Authority;  
- Managing change. | which autonomy and accountability is designed in the Government policy. Among smaller and many primary schools, there was considerable concern that additional managerial powers and duties would both disrupt a leadership focus on learning and come hand-in-hand with a lack of support. These schools see changes in their local authority as a concern because schools need to now take on additional responsibility for finance, resources, and a range of services as the local authority does less. Over 80% of the schools in the constrained group said that government policy on school autonomy did not (‘not at all’) provide an incentive to improve pupil achievement or to focus leadership on teaching and learning. |
| Article: N. Harris (2012). Local Authorities and the Accountability Gap in a Fragmenting Schools System. Modern Law Review. Vol. 75 Issue 4, p511-546. Country of research: England | The education reform in the UK shifted the power over the governance of education (control and funding) from the local government to school autonomy and thus led to system’s diversity:  
- Growing numbers of state-funded schools have converted to academies outside Positive impact of free schools:  
- Having curricular freedom, they meet the wishes of parents either for a distinctive form of education or to reflect their preferences (i.e schedule);  
- More special schools established to cater for children with learning difficulties; | Negative impact of free schools:  
- Establishing free schools causes other schools to lose pupils, often the more able ones;  
- Accentuate social divides by enhancing opportunities for the better-off;  
- Curricular freedom may lead to promoting extreme ideas | The article suggests that no causal link has been demonstrated between the independence of a school from local authority control and its success. |
| Method: Survey of more than 834 school principals, 347 governors and 769 senior leaders, 8 case studies, 20 phone interviews and 3 focus groups. Strength: The study presents a clear categorisation and connects it with the wider educational context and actors. Weakness: The article is based on descriptive analysis, rather than statistical data. The only data presented assesses the perceptions of school principals. Key characteristics of the study sample: Both primary and secondary schools were included in the study. | | | |
### BACKGROUND

**Study target group:** Institutions governing the school system

**Aim of the research:** This article analyses the accountability gap given by the extension of school autonomy and the decline in the role of local education authority.

**Method:** Descriptive analysis based on secondary data: collection of case law, history of policy developments and statements of stakeholders.

**Strength:** The article presents a comprehensive analysis of the trends in governance of the school system in England over the last 30 years while considering the wider educational context and implications for the public interest.

**Weakness:** The article focuses on the policy context and politics involved rather than the impact on the schools on the quality of school education outcomes.

---

**Key facts**

- local authority control, which is becoming the norm in the UK.
  - 'Free schools', funded by the state, can be established by various interest groups – parents, teachers, voluntary sector bodies.

Extension of school autonomy means reduced power of control of education by the local authority.

The new system makes local authority a support agency for schools in practice. However, by law, local authorities still have the duty to ensure 'fair access to education' and to promote 'high standards' of education and the fulfilment of learning potential.

While local authorities have this democratic mandate to provide education, the system increasingly lies outside of their control, which leads to the accountability gap.

---

**Identified strengths**

- More free schools located in poorer areas to prioritise disadvantaged children in school admission process and have a financial incentive;
- Positive impact of the academies:
  - Curricular freedom may impact on the ability to raise standards;
  - Capacity to respond to pupils' particular needs and circumstances;

The articles concludes with the suggestion for a possible solution to the 'accountability gap' through local supervision of schools either through a) regional / local Commissioner (US model) or b) give local authorities new regulatory and commissioning roles.

---

**Identified weaknesses**

- Negative impact of the academies:
  - Central power (Secretary of State) can decide to turn any school into academy without consent of local authority;
  - Having own admission arrangements;
  - Variable levels of academic achievement;
  - Higher rate of disciplinary exclusion from academies than from other schools;
  - Only a minority of parents support the creation of free schools and over 60 % would not be interested in helping to set up and run one in their area.

**Negative impact of school autonomy:**

- The introduction of academies and free schools makes it difficult for the local authorities to perform their duties;
- Focusing on individual needs and wishes of parents and pupils at the expense of the collective local interest;

The article suggests that this policy increases the risk of social division, instability of local schooling arrangements and significantly reduced local democratic accountability for state-funded education towards the wider publics and to elected representatives.

---

**Reported effects on school quality**

The article emphasised that there is no clear evidence whether academies impact on higher pupil achievement levels (some studies show substantial success, while other wide variation of success between academies).

### Article


**Country of research:** Spain

**Study target group:** School system

The study identifies 4 areas of school autonomy:

- Organisation of instruction (curriculum, pedagogic methods, choice of textbooks);
- Planning and structures (determining the program of study, subjects offered, etc.)
- Personnel management (teaching and non-teaching staff)
- Resource management (ability to make purchases or organise allocation of resources for operational costs)

Participation is a key objective of the Spanish education system as operational & organisational principle. Parents, teachers and students have the right to intervene in the management and control of schools financed with state funds, including in selecting the schools' head teacher (through the School Council).

In the field of organisation of instruction, Spain gives high decision-making capacity to schools (follows the trend in OECD)

Autonomy is a complex concept with different meanings when applied to education.

The data that emerges suggests that despite general declarations of autonomy, schools are granted very little decision-making capacity in practice. Regional decentralisation of the system has not translated to the delegation of enough competences to schools – explained by the administrations' distrust of schools, and schools' poor sense of responsibility.

In the area of personnel management, schools

- Both the OECD and the EU emphasize autonomy as a factor related to quality when accompanied by accountability and held to standards of reference.
- No evidence of impact of the measure on quality in school education outcomes.
BACKGROUND

Key facts

Identified strengths

Identified weaknesses

Reported effects on school quality

Aim of the research: Examine the level of autonomy of public schools in Spain according to the legal framework, the implementation through the education policies and the international trends.

Method: Judicial review (Constitution, regulatory & international framework) and analysis of OECD data.

Strength: Analyses school autonomy by domain of decision-making & uses OECD data as a general framework to interpret the situation of Spain.

Weakness: No evidence of impact of school autonomy on quality in schools education outcomes.

Autonomy refers to the decision-making capacity of a school – delegated from central or local authorities – and the manner and areas (amongst the four mentioned above) over which decisions can be made.

There is a difference between territorial decentralisation and school autonomy. Delegating decision-making powers to lower levels of government does not always grant the school increased capacity for deciding over the areas mentioned above. A school’s decision-making capacity is conditioned by the applicable legal framework that regulates the manner in which those decisions can be made. In Spain, the law gives the education authorities responsibility for the specific competences of schools in matters of personnel, organisation, and financing by virtue of the level of autonomy they establish. Each Autonomous Region is therefore responsible for determining how far autonomy extends in practice, scope and nature.

Laws have been set in place to ensure the beginning of decentralization. However, the cross-country differences in administration setups allowed for different extents of sector decentralization in education. The concept of “school based management” (SBM) is still a fairly new one.

Results show that while decentralization of education financing and of the school network (i.e. the level of power attributed to local-level to decide on opening a school, class size, financing of transportation, etc.) are expected to have a positive and significant effect on parents’ participation, the decentralization of curriculum related issues, in particular selection and countries).

As for planning and structure of education, schools are granted some level of independence (still below the OECD average).

Autonomy and leadership are interrelated. The trend is to strengthen the school leadership in a more professional manner through specific executive training and to move towards a distribution of leadership to foster and encourage the participation of intermediate actors.

Pedagogic autonomy is guaranteed in Spain – curriculum, didactic methods, teaching programs, etc.

Enjoy very limited autonomy (much below OECD average) due to the civil servant status of teachers – lack of flexibility & mobility, centralised recruitment, etc.

Schools have minimal and highly conditioned autonomy regarding resource management due to the regulation of economic activity in the public sector.

Public schools have no legal personality (unlike universities), hence their structure and operation depends on the authority and resources allocated by the public authority. The article suggests a change in the legal nature of public schools towards a setup of ‘free schools’ (US model) to allow for greater autonomy in personnel and resource management.


Countries of research: South Eastern Europe

Study target group: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania and Serbia

Conclusions are:

- The decentralization process creates a window of opportunity for parents to become more involved in the management of their children’s schools.
- Context adapted decentralization reforms had much better chances of succeeding in involving parents in school management.
- Significant effort and political will needs to come...
**Aim of the research:** To analyse whether elementary and secondary education decentralization reforms in SEE countries have led to higher participation rates of parents in school management.

**Method:** quantitative (simple regression analysis) and qualitative analysis (interviews, focus groups) as well as mapping analysis of legislative documents. The dependent variable, the parent participation index (PPI), is calculated based on statistical data collected during the 2008 School Principals’ Survey. The same dataset is used to define independent variables: financing, human resources, school network and curriculum as indices for decentralisation. Various variables were also controlled for: as control variables the number of years for which the decentralization reform was implemented, the share of spending allocated to education out of total public spending, the influence of the parent committee on decisions over infrastructure development, school size, whether it is located in a post-conflict zone or in an urban area, whether school management related topics are addressed at parents’ meetings and whether the development of textbooks, tends to have a negative impact on parents’ participation in school management.

The model indicates that schools located in post-conflict and in urban areas have greater chances of having low parental involvement in school management. However, contrary to expectations, an increased share of public spending allocated to education does not necessarily draw higher parent participation rates, nor does the number of years for which a certain decentralization reform was implemented, but much rather, as shown above, the reform’s content.

Opposite to what one would expect, having an institutionalized school - parents communication policy does not seem to have a statistically significant effect on parents’ participation in school management. Larger schools seem to have a higher probability to engage parents in school management activities.

Acknowledging that decentralization by law alone will not solve all problems is the first step.
### BACKGROUND

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key facts</th>
<th>Identified strengths</th>
<th>Identified weaknesses</th>
<th>Reported effects on school quality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>school has a communication policy addressed to parents.</td>
<td>• The concept of &quot;standards&quot; in England can refer to the &quot;absolute&quot; levels of attainment in national assessment, but they can also be &quot;relative&quot; as when they are in relation to &quot;expected&quot; levels of performance.</td>
<td>• Different uses of the term standards, and the growing numbers of indicators, targets and different bases for judgments can cause confusion because schools classed as 'failing' in some measures may do well in others.</td>
<td>A large majority (85%) of schools placed in special measures recovered within two years and in most cases improvements were sustained.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strength:</strong> detailed quantitative analysis.</td>
<td>• New initiatives to support schools in challenging circumstances firstly via area-based initiatives such as Education Action Zones (EAZs) and Excellence in Cities (EiC). Both foresee the creation of partnership among group of schools to tackle problems of underachievement and social exclusion in disadvantaged areas through access to funds and new innovations such as the use of learning mentors and collaborative learning among staff.</td>
<td>• The 'naming and shaming' strategy was claimed to unfairly stigmatise staff working in the most challenging circumstances.</td>
<td>Special measures schools benefited from strong leadership, set high expectations for pupil behaviour and developed effective systems for self-evaluation, while creating a strong school identity that helped change the climate of failure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The London challenge (LC) involved a wide range of support tailored to the needs of secondary schools, as a leadership training programme for existing and aspirant leaders, and professional development and support for teachers seeking to improve their teaching. Strategy of intervention in inverse proportion to success. The London Challenge were generally well received by professionals and public.</td>
<td>• In many schools the needs of low attaining pupils were not identified early enough to support them in closing the gap with their peers. Approaches to reduce relative inequality (the size of the equity gap for vulnerable pupil groups such as white working class or black and some minority ethnic groups) have been much less successful than overall results.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Schools are now evaluated on the basis of two order of measures: - Schools effectiveness research (SER) models, based on factors under the school control (as strong leadership from the Head; parents involvement; consistency across lessons; etc.) - Contextual value added (CVA) indicators are used to take into account specificities that are usually out of schools control (social disadvantages of the pupils; etc.)</td>
<td>• In regard to the LC, the arbitrary approach and use of floor targets linked to raw results were strongly criticised. Analysis indicated that a sizeable minority of these schools were not underperforming in CVA terms and in Ofsted inspection judgments.</td>
<td>Educational suggest the LC helped raise standards and target failure, especially for lower performing schools and it was generally well received by professionals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• A return to more frequent, short notice inspections was supported because of the adverse impact of poor education for pupils if left undetected for longer time periods. The overall policy combined evaluation and support, helping identify the problems and implement the solutions.</td>
<td>• Teacher resentment of perceived Government prescription and lack of confidence in teachers' professional skills were noted.</td>
<td>Analyses of national assessment and examination data provide consistent evidence of significant improved overall levels of pupil attainment under New Labour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The overall policy combined evaluation and support, helping identify the problems and implement the solutions.</td>
<td>• In many schools the needs of low attaining pupils were not identified early enough to support them in closing the gap with their peers. Approaches to reduce relative inequality (the size of the equity gap for vulnerable pupil groups such as white working class or black and some minority ethnic groups) have been much less successful than overall results.</td>
<td>International assessments (PIRLS, TIMSS) provide external evidence of increases in primary pupil attainment levels in England, especially in mathematics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>High profile initiatives such as Fresh Start and the Academies programme promoted change.</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Approaches to school improvement**

- The concept of "standards" in England can refer to the "absolute" levels of attainment in national assessment, but they can also be "relative" as when they are in relation to "expected" levels of performance.
- New initiatives to support schools in challenging circumstances firstly via area-based initiatives such as Education Action Zones (EAZs) and Excellence in Cities (EiC). Both foresee the creation of partnership among group of schools to tackle problems of underachievement and social exclusion in disadvantaged areas through access to funds and new innovations such as the use of learning mentors and collaborative learning among staff.
- The London challenge (LC) involved a wide range of support tailored to the needs of secondary schools, as a leadership training programme for existing and aspirant leaders, and professional development and support for teachers seeking to improve their teaching. Strategy of intervention in inverse proportion to success. The London Challenge were generally well received by professionals and public.
- Schools are now evaluated on the basis of two order of measures:
  - Schools effectiveness research (SER) models, based on factors under the school control (as strong leadership from the Head; parents involvement; consistency across lessons; etc.)
  - Contextual value added (CVA) indicators are used to take into account specificities that are usually out of schools control (social disadvantages of the pupils; etc.)
- A return to more frequent, short notice inspections was supported because of the adverse impact of poor education for pupils if left undetected for longer time periods.
- The overall policy combined evaluation and support, helping identify the problems and implement the solutions.
- Strategy of intervention in inverse proportion to success. The London Challenge were generally well received by professionals and public.
- Different uses of the term standards, and the growing numbers of indicators, targets and different bases for judgments can cause confusion because schools classed as 'failing' in some measures may do well in others.
- The 'naming and shaming' strategy was claimed to unfairly stigmatise staff working in the most challenging circumstances.
- In regard to the LC, the arbitrary approach and use of floor targets linked to raw results were strongly criticised. Analysis indicated that a sizeable minority of these schools were not underperforming in CVA terms and in Ofsted inspection judgments.
- Teacher resentment of perceived Government prescription and lack of confidence in teachers' professional skills were noted.
- In many schools the needs of low attaining pupils were not identified early enough to support them in closing the gap with their peers. Approaches to reduce relative inequality (the size of the equity gap for vulnerable pupil groups such as white working class or black and some minority ethnic groups) have been much less successful than overall results.


**Country of research:** England

**Study target group:** Primary and secondary schools in England.

**Aim of the research:** This paper examines New Labour’s approaches to school improvement, particularly the origins and enactment of ‘zero tolerance’ strategies, the different groups of schools identified as needing remedial action, different intervention strategies for poorly performing and failing schools including inspection, Fresh Start, Academies and the London Challenge. It explores evidence of their impact on school improvement, educational standards and equity.

**Method:** The report draws on statistics from the Office from Standards in Education (Ofsted) and DCSF, as well as previous studies.
**BACKGROUND**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key facts</th>
<th>Identified strengths</th>
<th>Identified weaknesses</th>
<th>Reported effects on school quality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strength:</strong> Good overview of policy action and impact evaluation over 10 years. and cultural change, these failing schools were placed in special measures as the “Fresh Start” programme.</td>
<td><strong>Identified strengths</strong></td>
<td><strong>Identified weaknesses</strong></td>
<td>even in schools with a long history of problems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Weakness:</strong> No specific description of single actions. It acknowledges possible changes in the way national assessments were done and calculated and consequential difficulties in comparing data, but does not elaborate on that.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key characteristics of the study sample:</strong> The study focuses in particular on primary and secondary schools that sustained special measures due to low results in national assessments.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Article:** Regulating procedures in public schools: between formal centralism to informal appropriation. (English). Sociologia, Problemas e Práticas. jan-abr 2012, Issue 68, p127-146. 20p. 4.

Country of research: Portugal

**Study target group:** school staff including teachers

**Aim of the research:** Understand how the processes of building and operating the documents structuring school life reflect the orientations from the central administration of education and, simultaneously, describe forms of co-ordination and cultural change, these failing schools were placed in special measures as the “Fresh Start” programme.

The article analyses:
- The school staff discourse on the strategic official school documents (e.g. School Educational Project; the Curricular project of the School or group of schools; and the Class curriculum Project).
- How the school appropriates/uses the official school documents

Three type of schools organisational models identified:
1) innovative models: with existence of consolidated academic recognition practices (e.g. honour student); the promotion of activities by and for the students; the involvement of parents and students in the definition of strategic documents; the intervention of the School Assembly in school life;

- The official school document intended to monitor school activities are interpreted in various different ways by schools.
- Not all school uses each type of official document. Procedures at school-level are done rather via informal processes (e.g. discussions between teachers) rather than via the use of official documents.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>BACKGROUND</strong></th>
<th><strong>Key facts</strong></th>
<th><strong>Identified strengths</strong></th>
<th><strong>Identified weaknesses</strong></th>
<th><strong>Reported effects on school quality</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Method:** Analysis of strategic documents (e.g., school project) and interviews with school staff from/in 20 schools. | 2) Traditional model: no particular activities for awarding academic achievement; no promotion of activities developed by and for the students; no involvement of parents and students in the definition of strategic documents; the school Assembly has a rather formal role. 3) the diffused model with large aggregation of district schools; with recognition of merit activities; participation of students and parents in the school management and collaborative work among teachers. | Strengths of school governance in Romania:  
- Academic record plays a central role in admission in schools: student’s residence, parents’ endorsement and attendance of other family member of that school determine the admission into a given school.  
- Admission policy places a high weight on the student’s need or desire to enroll in a special or specific program. | Weaknesses of the school governance in Romania:  
- Share of country’s GDP spent on education decreased from 4.25 in 2007 to 3% in 2012;  
- The quality of schools’ educational resources as well as the availability and quality of human resources is under the OECD average;  
- At OECD level, on average, private schools obtain poorer results than the public ones, proving that privatisation of schools is not likely to improve performance; (data for Romania is not available)  
- The lack of reporting from Romanian authorities to OECD is indirect evidence that resource allocation is not based on school’s performance and the principal is not hold accountable for school performance. | The performance of Romanian students in PISA is below the OECD average. The lack of resources (funding and quality of school teachers) allocated to education in Romania negatively impacts the performance of the education system, and thus the school outcomes. OECD data proves that, on average, private schools obtain poorer results than the public ones, inferring that privatisation of schools is not likely to improve performance. |
| **Country of research:** Romania  
**Study target group:** school system  
**Aim of the research:** To present a strategic plan for an effective school governance in Romania.  
**Method:** Literature review and data from OECD statistics  
**Strength:** Presents a comprehensive analysis of the Romanian educational environment & identifies the factors for the poor schooling performance.  
**Weakness:** Too broad & general description of the education system in Romania and no strategic plan presented despite the article’s aim. | School governance implies defining the vision and strategic objective of the school and developing adequate programs to build an effective learning community. The process of strategic management involves:  
- Environmental scanning (strategic diagnosis);  
- Mission statement (purpose of the organisation);  
- Identifying strategic objectives (desired outcomes);  
- Defining strategy (the development of long-range plans to achieve the desired outcomes);  
- Strategy implementation;  
- Evaluation, control and feedback.  
School governance in Romania:  
- Staffing is the responsibility of national / local authority;  
- Budgeting decisions are the responsibility of the school’s governing board, with approval from local authorities  
- Educational content and assessment practices are decided by the national authority. | | |
**Key facts:** In Sep 2011, 24 Free Schools opened in England. Such schools can be proposed by school authorities to provide a range plans to achieve the desired outcomes. | Positive implications of Free Schools:  
- Active parental choice – they can choose  
- Attracting applications from the most | Negative effects: | |
| **Study target group:** school system  
**Aim of the research:** To present a strategic plan for an effective school governance in Romania.  
**Method:** Literature review and data from OECD statistics  
**Strength:** Presents a comprehensive analysis of the Romanian educational environment & identifies the factors for the poor schooling performance.  
**Weakness:** Too broad & general description of the education system in Romania and no strategic plan presented despite the article’s aim. | | | |
**BACKGROUND**


Country of research: England

**Study target group**: school system

**Aim of the study**: Analyses the Free Schools initiative & the implications of limited state involvement in school governance.

**Method**: Analysis of regulatory framework and practice.

**Strength**: Uses economic theories of quasi-market of education to prove difference between private and public interests for Free Schools.

**Weakness**: Focus on policy and secondary data, with no new data about the impact of school autonomy on quality in school education outcomes.

**Key facts**

- any social entrepreneur: in practice parents and faith-based groups dominate. A school plan is prepared and approved by the authority.
- Free Schools operate under a ‘contract’ with the central government: they receive public funds and in return they provide a service.
- Free Schools are outside the control of local education authorities and exempted from various central government rules and regulations. Their autonomy extends to:
  - Freedom over the curriculum, subject to the requirement to teach a ‘broad and balanced’ curriculum;
  - Set the pay and conditions of their staff – their teachers are not required to have Qualified Teacher Status;
  - Manage their own budget, made up of educational vouchers attached to pupils;
  - Can vary the length and organisation of the school day and year, subjects to some regulations;
  - Can set their own target numbers (can’t select students)

Yet, Government has retained various regulatory powers: inspections, requirement of data for table leagues, as well as requirements that Free Schools have to ensure that teachers are of requisite ability and the curriculum must be of an appropriate standards. Through these measures, the Government ensures that Free Schools provide a good quality of education.

**Identified strengths**

- to support creation of new schools;
- previously parents could only exercise choice through their housing decisions or by opting for paying fees to private schools;
- Higher parental involvement – parents have been engaged in planning the management of the school, in finding suitable properties and contributing to their renovation, etc.
- Free Schools have a non-profit constitution.

There are 3 models of governance:

- ‘Sponsor model’ – proposers form a partnership with a charitable education provider;
- ‘Promoter model’ – proposers make a contract with the Department and run the school daily;
- ‘School provider’ - proposers establish the school but then contract out the running of it to one/more organisations with specific expertise (open tendering, may include for-profit org.)

In theory, quality is ensured by the governing body retaining right to monitor the performance of the contractor and to insist that key qualities are maintained. However, in the cases where the governing body is not very active (e.g. long-term scenario of a governing body formed of current parents), the for-profit provider can enjoy considerable autonomy, sometimes optimising provision at the expense of quality. That is why the policy introduces the clause for free schools to show that the governing body is viable in the long term.

**Identified weaknesses**

- concerned & engaged parents, hence an indirect selection;
- Competition can push other schools in decline, with insufficient number of pupils to maintain classes.

The contribution of Free School governance to school quality is limited: the wave of enthusiasm for new Free School is likely to fade over time leaving them with no better or worse governing bodies than other community schools (many of which already engage parents and mobilise donations of time and money). The contribution is also limited because parental choice of education is not fully aligned with the public interest - i.e. may be attracted by private benefits out of public education funding (i.e. ideology)

The central problem is that the assumption that the public interest can be pursued just by aggregating numerous private interests. In practice, this can lead to a more divisive education system than before.

Given the high level of teacher influence, there is a risk that school will become a type of labour-managed firm where teachers aim to attract benefits for themselves (shorter days of work, higher salary, etc.)

There is little information about the criteria used to evaluate proposals for establishing of Free Schools. One requirement is known, which is that the proposers must demonstrate that the school will attract students – this is logical since the Government invests in Free Schools by providing capital grants and thus it wants to be satisfied that the building will be occupied for the foreseeable future.


**Reported effects on school quality**

The process of change to organisational practice was implemented in each school by a Change Management Team (CMT) supported by an outside School Workforce Advisor. This CMT was drawn from the whole school workforce, both managerial and teaching.

**Two key success factors of positive changes to organisational practice**

- Use of ICT in curriculum and in school administration;
- Additional support staff that led to changes in number, type and

The participants in the project widely shared the concern for sustainability of changes as they are dependent upon particular resources – ICT and additional staff – that were only gained for the duration of the project. This is due to the change being an externally (centrally) determined and

No evidence of impact of the measure on quality in school education outcomes, since the focus was rather technical (see weaknesses of the policy). Changes on teaching and
### BACKGROUND

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue 1, p. 25-39</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Country of research: England</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Study target group:</strong> 32 pilot schools from Transforming School Workforce Pathfinder Project – project commissioned by the English Government, piloted in 32 schools that had to explore efficient and effective ways in which teachers could be freed up from bureaucracy and to focus on teaching.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aim of the research:</strong> This study evaluates the processes of change to organisational practice and outcomes in the pilot schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Method:</strong> This study draws on 8 case study schools via questionnaire to all staff, interviews with governors &amp; staff, focus group with students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strength:</strong> The study looks into how change to organisational practice is understood and practiced. It compares intended changes with the outcomes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Weakness:</strong> The outcomes only refer to how people feel about change and the only change measured is reduction of hours of work, not the impact on the schools on the quality in school education outcomes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key characteristics of the study sample:</strong> Pilot schools include primary, secondary, and teaching staff, as well as support staff (clerical staff and learning assistants). The task of the CMT was to plan and oversee the change and supply the Department for Education and Skills with monitoring data regarding the progress. CMT had a positive feedback from schools. The head teacher was responsible for the success of the pilot. As part of the change plan, each school could bid for resources – additional support staff, ICT, training and capital build (offices, facilities) – by making a business case for what they wanted to do (aims, outcomes, costs, impact, etc.). The Department would review the plans and then confirm or deny funding. Schools’ change plans show a set of common strategies of changes to their organisational practice:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Employing additional support staff;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Examining the type of work and the workload of existing staff, and negotiating changes to roles;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Using ICT to support learning and to improve administrative efficiency;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Increasing the networking and collaboration between schools;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Restructuring the school day &amp; week.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Deployment of school workforce and increased flexibility of the roles of teacher and support staff.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Controlled process as the schools implemented the project that was defined and supported by the Department for Education and Skills of the UK Government.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Concern over sustainability is regarding:</strong> funding, process and strategy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The anxiety regarding sustainability led to some head teachers’ developing exit strategies from the project.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The focus of the change is not on learning and learners in regard to educational goals, but it is technical:</strong> how supporting learning could be done more efficiently by other members of the workforce or by speeding up planning through the use of ICT.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hence, visible and positive changes have occurred largely in the form of system maintenance rather than a challenge to fundamental structures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reported effects on school quality</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>learning:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Reduced working hours of teachers;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Visible positive changes to work lives;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Improved organisational climate of the school due to attitudinal changes: growth of trust between members of the school workforce;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Change in attitudes by encouraging teachers to ask questions about habits in their practice;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Exchange of good practices across schools;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Opportunities for teachers to better focus on teaching and learning, rather than bureaucratic procedures.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
BACKGROUND

Key facts

Identified strengths

Identified weaknesses

Reported effects on school quality

special schools.

Not mentioned.

Not mentioned.

Instrumental use of the ZEBO feedback within schools increased slightly over the years: 24% of the schools (12 schools) in 2003, 26% (13 schools) in 2004, 32% (10 schools) in 2006.

Results from a survey show that schools that used ZEBO studied the feedback, discussed it, and took measures to improve their schools' quality of education more and more over the years.

Survey results show that respondents from Flemish schools that performed self-evaluation are moderately positive about the extent to which the self-evaluation led to appropriate actions and thus to desired results.

---


Country of research: Netherlands and Flanders

**Study target group:** Primary and secondary schools.

**Aim of the study:** This article presents the results of two studies on the use of school self-evaluation in the Netherlands and Flanders. It focuses on which forms of instrumental use of school self-evaluation results can be found in schools, and how differences in self-evaluation use between schools can be explained.

**Method:** The paper integrates and combines two studies on the use of school self-evaluation: the use of school self-evaluation in Flanders (Belgium) (Vanhoof, 2007) and in the Netherlands (Schildkamp, 2007). The two study are compared on the basis of a theoretical framework according to which it is hypothesised that (A) characteristics of the school self-evaluation (e.g. Relevance and accuracy of...)

- Dutch schools are responsible for the quality of education they provide, for pursuing policies that ensure school improvement and for developing a quality assurance system. Since 2002 the School Inspectorate is following the 'principle of proportionality' according to which the supervision of schools starts from the results of school self-evaluations, if:
  - all relevant aspects in the functioning and results of the school are addressed in the school self-evaluation;
  - the school self-evaluation is based on evidence and is reliable; and
  - the school has high achievement and quality goals

- Dutch schools can use a computerised self-evaluation instrument called ZEBO, that measures 13 process variables at school level (e.g., educational leadership and professional development) and at classroom level (e.g. adaptive education and time on task). The tool provides school reports, classroom reports and comparisons with a national school sample.

- The Flanders Government does not formally oblige schools to engage in school self-evaluation. However, Flemish schools are receiving more autonomy, and self-regulation is expected. For example, in the Flemish Equal Opportunities Decree it is stipulated that schools have to specify in which ways they will evaluate the Not mentioned.

- ZEBO is a non-compulsory system, therefore a small percentage of schools use it.

- Survey results show that in schools where ZEBO was used, often there were not participation strategy to allow leaders, teachers and, eventually, pupils and parents to get to know ZEBO reports and propose measures.

- There are not policies that specifically target self-evaluation tools successful factors (as the needed training to use these tools, the attitude toward innovation, leadership role...)

---

**Dutch schools are responsible for the quality of education they provide, for pursuing policies that ensure school improvement and for developing a quality assurance system.** Since 2002 the School Inspectorate is following the 'principle of proportionality' according to which the supervision of schools starts from the results of school self-evaluations, if:

- all relevant aspects in the functioning and results of the school are addressed in the school self-evaluation;

- the school self-evaluation is based on evidence and is reliable; and

- the school has high achievement and quality goals

**Dutch schools can use a computerised self-evaluation instrument called ZEBO,** that measures 13 process variables at school level (e.g., educational leadership and professional development) and at classroom level (e.g. adaptive education and time on task). The tool provides school reports, classroom reports and comparisons with a national school sample.

**The Flanders Government does not formally oblige schools to engage in school self-evaluation.** However, Flemish schools are receiving more autonomy, and self-regulation is expected. For example, in the Flemish Equal Opportunities Decree it is stipulated that schools have to specify in which ways they will evaluate the Not mentioned.

**ZEBO is a non-compulsory system,** therefore a small percentage of schools use it.

**Survey results show that in schools where ZEBO was used,** often there were not participation strategy to allow leaders, teachers and, eventually, pupils and parents to get to know ZEBO reports and propose measures.

**There are not policies that specifically target self-evaluation tools successful factors (as the needed training to use these tools, the attitude toward innovation, leadership role...)**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BACKGROUND</th>
<th>Key facts</th>
<th>Identified strengths</th>
<th>Identified weaknesses</th>
<th>Reported effects on school quality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Output, ease of data entry and output generation, etc.), (B) implementation process features (e.g. hours of training and support received, encouragement by school leader, etc.), and (C) school and user characteristics (innovation attitude of the staff, School innovation capacity, etc.), influence (D) the instrumental use of school self-evaluation (study and discussion of output, general measures, etc.)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Strength:</strong> The study considers the factors that may influence the success of self-evaluating tools. These factors may be extended beyond the sample of the studies. <strong>Weakness:</strong> Differences between both studies (as the fact that the Dutch study focused on one single self-evaluation instrument, whereas the Flemish study focused on different types of school self-evaluation, the concepts studied, such as the instrumental use of school self-evaluation, were operationalised in slightly different ways), make a straightforward comparison of both studies more difficult. The Flemish study is based on a sample that may or may not be representative of the (unknown) population.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
BACKGROUND

**study sample**: The Dutch study used a convenience sample of 79 school out of 312. The Flemish study targeted a sample consisting in all Flemish schools (primary and secondary) that performed a self-evaluation in the years from 2004 to 2006.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Countries of research: Ireland and Iceland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study target group: Primary and secondary schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aim of the research: This paper seeks to explore points of commonality and contrast between the Irish and Icelandic experience about school inspection and school self-evaluation. In particular the paper try to answer the question of how, if at all, self-evaluation can be operationalised effectively in schools and in such a way as to contribute to enhancing student achievement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Method: The authors conducted a series of semi-structured interviews and analysed them using a specific framework. In the case of <strong>Ireland</strong>:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Since 2003 in Ireland it is theoretically required to schools to provide a self-evaluation based on a 5 areas framework (LAOS): (a) quality of learning and teaching in subjects; (b) quality of support for students; (c) quality of school management; (d) quality of school planning; and (e) quality of curriculum provision. Self-evaluation is preferred to external inspection that is strongly downplayed (basically it serves to verify that self-evaluation is carried out).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• In primary education, there is no national standardised testing and, therefore, no accepted benchmarks against which to compare performance. At the secondary level, inspectors review data on the outcomes of national examinations before evaluating a school. However, teachers are not individually held accountable for results, and the use of examination results to compare schools or teachers is prohibited by law.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The scheme of evaluation was agreed upon only after long and difficult negotiations with teacher unions, this produced an emphasis on cooperation and partnership rather than monitoring and accountability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Iceland</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Despite no specific support from the government, Icelandic schools created evaluation teams, choosing an engaging policy (in contrast with a top-down one). Also, capacity building work-shops were held.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• These teams started developing new and more advanced ways of collecting and sharing data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A procedure was finally established:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Each year the evaluation data are summarised in a report and shared with the school as a whole.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The evaluation team facilitates a discussion of the data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The school leaders then provide the time for teachers to discuss the data and the report by department.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Finally, the principal meets with each teacher individually to review the results of course evaluations for that teacher, asking what goals the teacher would like to set for the following year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Professional development opportunities were provided by the principals to teachers that asked for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ireland:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Despite LAOS was designed as an on-going self-evaluation process, this idea had evidently failed to take hold as a great number of respondents alluded to LAOS as a one-time event to prepare for and then forget.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• At least in the early stages, there is little indication that the inspectors chose to examine concrete data as absentee lists, late lists, in-class assessments, etc. As a result, the idea that this was an evaluation system that was somewhat evidence-free was suggested in more than one school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• No training and capacity building was planned in order to provide schools with the capacity to organize and analyse the available data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Data were generally not shared in the schools. They were mostly handled by the school principal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Inspectors reported that key data which schools should possess, such as drop-out rates and levels of absenteeism, were not available in a usable, accessible format. The lack of usable data, whether provided by the schools and teachers or by some other mechanism, emerged as a key weakness of WSE which needs to be addressed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Background**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key facts</th>
<th>Identified strengths</th>
<th>Identified weaknesses</th>
<th>Reported effects on school quality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ireland, the results are reported under a set of broad themes, namely: (a) the development of evaluation; (b) school culture and the use of data; and (c) leadership and professional development. Strength: The paper compares the experiences of two countries that from similar starting points obtained different outcomes and explores the reasons why this happened. Key characteristics of the study sample: Ireland: 38 schools leaders, 30 teachers, 6 inspectors (schools were not chosen by any specific criteria as size, location, etc.). Iceland: used data from two studies conducted on a number of selected schools.</td>
<td>Introducing self-evaluation forms has the following strengths:</td>
<td>o Finally, comparable information on the national school context were missing and so data from schools eventually collected would be of limited use. o There is a strong scepticism on the utility of self-evaluation, due also to the perceived contradiction between the exhortations to collegial solidarity with teaching staff and the request to confront unacceptable practices and poor teaching.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Iceland</td>
<td>o In 1995, legislation was passed in the Icelandic Parliament, mandating primary schools to engage in a process of self-evaluation, and in 1996, similar legislation was passed in relation to secondary schools. The Ministry of Education also planned to inspect the schools' self-evaluation methods every five years.</td>
<td>o Teachers appreciated the engaging and encouraging approach. o Self-evaluation started to be seen as a way to improve concretely leading to professional development. It is an engaging policy characterised by coaching, sense of ownership of the self-evaluation result (that will be used to self-improvement and not to be judged by external evaluators), and a perceived purpose of the whole process, conducted to a wide acceptance and self-institutionalisation of self-evaluation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article: Bubb &amp; P. Earley (2008), From self-evaluation to school improvement. Education Journal, Issue 113, p. 12-13. Country of research: England Study target group: schools Aim of the research: The study analyses what steps schools can take to ensure that self-evaluation of their practice leads to school improvement (quality of teaching and better student outcomes) through effective Continuing Professional Development (CPD). The article presents the following steps for staff development and school improvement: - Set effective leadership and management of staff development; - Set a clear, shared understanding of professional development; - Develop a learning-centred culture of the school; - Identify staff learning needs; - Clarify the goal(s) and ensure they would make a difference to pupils; - Choose the quickest, most effective and best value for money forms of staff development; - Prioritise staff development that involves discussing, coaching, mentoring, observing and training others; - Make time available for reflection and it on the basis of the self-evaluation.</td>
<td>o Iceland</td>
<td>o The legislation does not provide guidelines, models, or training opportunities for schools to acquire evaluation skills, nor build capacity to use evaluation to inform school improvement. o Iceland culture values independence and does not favour controlling and evaluation. In this context a strong leadership is need to implement new policy. However no leader preparation initiatives were planned.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factors influencing school improvement are multiple and often highly complex. A crucial factor in this approach is persuading teaching staff that school improvement is desirable and possible (convincing them through sharing data, individual accountability, meeting individual needs, targeting the right people, sustaining morale). Factors leading to school improvement are:</td>
<td>o The study suggests that this is due to the narrow approach to CPD as activities (inputs) rather than development of knowledge and expertise as process (outcomes)</td>
<td>o Introducing self-evaluation forms has the following strengths:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Active support of the school leadership team; • Change or initiative connected to other current school</td>
<td>Introducing self-evaluation forms has the following strengths:</td>
<td>o Encourages a greater thoroughness and wide-ranging evaluation of the school's work; o Provides a better understanding of evaluation; o Involves more people in school self-evaluation; o Gives greater attentions to the views of stakeholders. Completing self-evaluation forms can make people realise the need to rethink the school improvement priorities, such as staff development and training.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Completing self-evaluation forms can make people realise the need to rethink the school improvement priorities, such as staff development and training.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>o Finally, comparable information on the national school context were missing and so data from schools eventually collected would be of limited use. o There is a strong scepticism on the utility of self-evaluation, due also to the perceived contradiction between the exhortations to collegial solidarity with teaching staff and the request to confront unacceptable practices and poor teaching.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BACKGROUND</td>
<td>Key facts</td>
<td>Identified strengths</td>
<td>Identified weaknesses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Method: The study draws on analysis of self-evaluation forms of 38 schools in England. 9 case studies of schools visited over 20 months to track the staff development that was intended to lead to planned improvement.</td>
<td>- Focus staff development on outcomes not just provision so as to be able to evaluate its impact; - Promote sharing, acknowledging and celebrating of learning and development to sustain improvement.</td>
<td>- Staff learning strategies: a) lesson observation with developmental feedback; and b) modelling teaching with subsequent time for reflective discussion; - Staff can gain a fuller picture of the context in which they were working.</td>
<td>Development;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strength: The study presents suggestions &amp; recommendations on how to improve the quality of teaching via personalised approach to CPD.</td>
<td>Staff learning strategies: a) lesson observation with developmental feedback; and b) modelling teaching with subsequent time for reflective discussion; - Staff can gain a fuller picture of the context in which they were working.</td>
<td>- Staff learning strategies: a) lesson observation with developmental feedback; and b) modelling teaching with subsequent time for reflective discussion; - Staff can gain a fuller picture of the context in which they were working.</td>
<td>No clear evidence of the impact of CPD on student outcomes and/or the quality of teaching and learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weakness: The study does not go into depth about the evidence of the impact of self-evaluation on quality of teaching and on student outcomes.</td>
<td>- Staff learning strategies: a) lesson observation with developmental feedback; and b) modelling teaching with subsequent time for reflective discussion; - Staff can gain a fuller picture of the context in which they were working.</td>
<td>- Staff learning strategies: a) lesson observation with developmental feedback; and b) modelling teaching with subsequent time for reflective discussion; - Staff can gain a fuller picture of the context in which they were working.</td>
<td>Emphasis on courses or events for CPD (inputs) is too narrow, thus the study suggests a broader definition of school staff development, going beyond inputs and towards any improvement of practice for the benefit of the learners (outcomes).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To sum up, the study found evidence that:
- Strong leadership has positive impact on teaching quality and/or student outcomes.
- Approaches for launching and those for sustaining staff development programmes are similar.

No evidence of impact of the measure on quality in school education outcomes.

The critical friend contributes to the creation of a climate for self-evaluation, facilitating this process, suggesting innovative methods for self-evaluation, pressing for evidence and sharing.

---


Country of research: England

School self-evaluation is high on the agenda in England, partly as a result of changes in the external inspection framework, hence the increased attention to the relation between internal self-evaluation and external inspection. The underlying argument is that schools are more likely to improve when they enjoy external support. Therefore, the
**BACKGROUND**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key facts</th>
<th>Identified strengths</th>
<th>Identified weaknesses</th>
<th>Reported effects on school quality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Study target group: schools | Government encourages ‘critical friends’ - inspectors, advisers, other heads, business or university consultants, parents or school governors – who work with schools to improve their performance. Such support (‘critical friends’) can be invited, proposed or imposed and this influences the purpose, focus and boundaries about their role in the school's self-evaluation. There are 3 models of self- and external evaluation:  
- **Parallel** - the two systems run side by side each with their own criteria and protocols;  
- **Sequential** - external bodies follow on from a school's own evaluation and use that as the focus of their quality assurance system.  
- **Cooperative** - external agencies cooperate with schools to develop a common approach to evaluation. | Friend is wide and potentially highly creative. For example: The critical friend is supportive yet challenging facilitator, aiding and encouraging the evolution of a process uniquely tailored to the values of the school community, where the concerns of the various clients are closely aligned. (This is known as the NUT model in MacBeath, 1999) The more bottom-up is the model, the less the need for the critical friend. The more open the process of self-evaluation, the more significant the role of friendly and critical support. | experience of other schools’ approaches to self-evaluation. |
| Aim of the research: Analyses the relation between self-evaluation and external evaluation by ‘critical friends’. Method: The article draws upon a number of research projects. Strength: Analyses different models of self- and external evaluation, the importance of context, and the various ways in which a critical friend can support school self-evaluation. Weakness: No evidence of impact of the measure on quality in school education outcomes. | | | |
| | | | |

**School Curriculum**
## BACKGROUND


**Country of research:** England

**Study target group:** Catholic secondary school for boys in the north-west of England

**Aim of the research:** Examines how the Opening Minds (OM) curriculum has been implemented with year 7 cohort.

**Method:** Literature review, surveys of 2 student cohorts & 3 interviews with school OM coordinator.

**Strength:** Analyses the perceived benefits and the issues in the implementation of the OM curriculum.

**Weakness:** No evidence of OM impact on school outcomes, only perceptions on its implementation.

**Key characteristics of the study sample:** High share of pupils from disadvantaged background but test results above the national average.

**Curriculum reform started in England with The Schools White Paper 2010 which granted schools increased autonomy in curriculum development and implementation.** The Opening Minds (OM) curriculum is an alternative to National Curriculum (NC).

OM has been taken up by a few schools on their own initiative. These schools support and coach each other (sharing of material and good practice). The way OM is implemented in these different schools varies greatly.

OM is a *competence-curriculum* that aims for students to develop competences in citizenship, learning, managing information, relating to people and managing situations.

The OM rationale is to provide students with the competences & learning experiences they need in the 21st century (both for higher-level education & labour market).

OM main focus is on cross-curricular project-based learning guided by 1 teacher for 1 class (not subject-specific). The emphasis is on learning to learn and collaborative learning.

OM is based on collective ownership – a team of teachers is fully involved in generating the ideas and constructing the framework of each unit of work.

### Identified strengths

- When comparing two year 7 cohorts – 1 with NC and 1 with OM – there is significant difference showing that OM pupils have higher appreciation for their teachers and greater satisfaction with their learning experiences than the NC cohort.

Positive effects of OM curriculum:
- Curriculum is more engaging for students;
- More time of 1 teacher spent with 1 class led to:
  - Higher quality and more personal & academic support provided by teachers in OM classes;
  - Better teacher-student relationship;
- Pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds find a safe environment in the OM classroom;
- Higher parental involvement due to stronger home-school links;
- Project-based learning promotes learner self-esteem by involving pupils with diff strengths.

Success factors in implementing OM curriculum:
- The collaborative approach to the design and delivery of OM together with strong leadership;
- Open door policy;
- Discrete lessons combined with project work;
- Sharing good practices among OM teachers.

### Identified weaknesses

- Challenges in implementing OM:
  - Teachers may be overwhelmed by the need to adopt new pedagogies to deliver a curriculum which requires a very different teaching approach;
  - Teachers may find it difficult to develop competence in teaching a broad spectrum of subjects in which they had not been trained;
  - Lack of more systematic training for OM teachers due to lack of understanding of the competences required to deliver OM curriculum;
  - Complex and time-consuming planning needed for cross-curricular learning units -> resource issues;
  - There is no accreditation system to assure quality and strengthen the support available to schools;
  - More stress for OM teachers who are confronted with problematic student behaviour on a daily basis;

**Constraining factors:**
- The incompatibility of OM curriculum with the Gov. emphasis on examination-dominated qualifications in the culture of ‘performativity’ (i.e. GCSEs);
- The transition from OM-style lessons to subject-focused lessons may lead to students’ discipline & engagement issues and may have detrimental effects on school outcomes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key facts</th>
<th>Identified strengths</th>
<th>Identified weaknesses</th>
<th>Reported effects on school quality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Article:** Moran A. & Clarke L. (2012). *Back to the future: do lessons from Finland point the way to a return to model schools for Northern Ireland?*
| **Finland has a research-based teacher education model which focuses on integrated research components, pedagogical studies and practice teaching.** In Finland, student teachers follow courses in university and undertake practice in a broad spectrum of each unit of work. | **Strengths of the Finnish model:**
- Congruence between the university program and the way student teachers learn to practice;
- It is compulsory for universities that provide teacher education to have at least one alternative to National Curriculum (NC);
- Teacher education in Finland promotes learner self-esteem by involving pupils with different strengths.
| **Weaknesses of the Northern Irish model:**
- Schools involvement in partnerships is only voluntary (versus Finland where compulsory);
- No formal mentoring arrangements in place;
- Training teachers are not paid for their mentoring; | **Finland has very high scores on PISA tests which is, in part, explained by the quality of the teachers.** No concrete evidence of the... |
### BACKGROUND

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key facts</th>
<th>Identified strengths</th>
<th>Identified weaknesses</th>
<th>Reported effects on school quality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>European Journal of Teacher Education. Vol. 35 Issue 3, p275-288</td>
<td>least 1 designated teacher training school;</td>
<td>• No resources transferring to schools;</td>
<td>direct impact of the Finnish model of teacher training on school outcomes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Countries of research: Finland and Northern Ireland Study target group: teachers Aim of the research: Compares teacher education policy in Finland and in Northern Ireland Method: Literature review and interviews with teachers &amp; university</td>
<td>• Training schools are partners in teacher education, and all staff support and supervise student teachers on placement;</td>
<td>• Lack of continuity between the 3 phases in teacher education;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strength: Analyses potential of transferability of the Finnish training school model to Northern Ireland. Weakness: This comparative study does not factor in socio-cultural differences &amp; context sensitivity</td>
<td>• Teachers in training schools are hired by the university &amp; are paid extra for their mentoring;</td>
<td>• Support from training teachers to student teachers tends to be individualized, variable &amp; insufficiently focused on a critical pedagogy or on research;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article: Malinen O.-P et al. (2012) Teacher education in Finland: a review of a national effort for preparing teachers for the future. Curriculum Journal. Vol. 23 Issue 4, p567-584. Country of research: Finland Study target group: teachers Aim of the research: Analyses the nature &amp; role teacher education plays in the Finnish education system. Method: Literature &amp; policy review &amp; questionnaire data from 800 teachers Strength: The article describes the Finnish teacher education</td>
<td>• Teachers are supported to develop their own pedagogies based on research &amp; observations;</td>
<td>Constraining factor in Northern Ireland:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Periods of orientation are arranged in schools and observation tasks are set involving the active observation of teaching.</td>
<td>• There is a very high number of entrants to the profession who, when qualified, are unable to obtain a teaching post, often finding themselves in several temporary posts with difficulties completing induction and early professional development, thus not able to complete the 3 teacher education phases.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strengths of the Northern Irish model:</td>
<td>Positive effects:</td>
<td>The quality of teachers is one of the most frequently cited factors explaining the quality of the Fi education system and the very good outcomes, such as the highest scores in PISA tests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Government funding to support universities to develop partnerships with schools in INE;</td>
<td>• Highly competitive selection at entry: less than one fifth of those accepted to class-teacher education had finished secondary school in the same year, but many keep applying for many years;</td>
<td>2007 McKinsey report states that high-performing school systems are characterized by excellent quality of teachers and teacher education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Teacher education partnership handbook;</td>
<td>• The strong research orientation is not used so much in teachers’ work, only in their training</td>
<td>Other meta-analyses prove that teacher quality accounts for a large proportion of the variance in student achievement (Hattie J. 2009 – 800 meta-analyses).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Student teachers create a career entry profile.</td>
<td>• Teachers tends to be individualized, variable &amp; highly valued;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strengths of FI model of teacher training:</td>
<td>Weaknesses of the model:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Universities providing teacher education are spread across Finland leading to high educational equity;</td>
<td>• After graduation the teachers’ retention in the teaching profession is very high;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Teachers’ work is a highly valued profession;</td>
<td>Parents trust teachers: although they can choose the school where their children go to, most choose the neighboring school;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• High emphasis on supporting the learning of ALL pupils incl. those who struggle to succeed;</td>
<td>Between-school variance of achievement and the effect of students’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Teachers have high autonomy in their class.</td>
<td>Positive effects:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Positive effects:</td>
<td>• After graduation the teachers’ retention in the teaching profession is very high;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• All teachers in Finland graduate in educational sciences (5 years – 3 BA and 2 MA) with an emphasis on didactics and obligation to include supervised practice teaching and the completion of a Master thesis.</td>
<td>Parents trust teachers: although they can choose the school where their children go to, most choose the neighboring school;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher training has a strong focus on practice teaching – i.e. observation of lessons – and research orientation.</td>
<td>Between-school variance of achievement and the effect of students’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**BACKGROUND**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key facts</th>
<th>Identified strengths</th>
<th>Identified weaknesses</th>
<th>Reported effects on school quality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Model and discusses future challenges and reform needs. Weakness: Broad description of the policy, but little focus on the impact on the students' school outcomes. Article: Goodwyn A. (2012). One size fits all: The increasing standardisation of English teachers' work in England. English Teaching: Practice &amp; Critique. Vol. 11 Issue 4, p36-53. Country of research: England. Study target group: Teachers. Aim of the research: Analyses the increasing standardisation of the teachers' work in England. Method: Policy &amp; literature review and the findings of 2 previous research projects, based on teacher surveys. Strength: Reviews recent changes to teacher standards and the relation to the national curriculum. Weakness: Potential bias of argument since the author seems to be active in the National Association of Teaching English (NATE).</td>
<td>The goal is that the teachers become familiar with the latest research on learning and teaching and are able to combine subject content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge in teaching. Socio-economic background on achievement in Finland is among the smallest in the OECD countries. Strengths of the hierarchy of teacher standards: - Demonstrate the professional accomplishments of all teachers; - Ensure that all teachers are properly trained initially by defining pre-service teacher education program requirements; - Assess teacher development and professional learning needs in-service; - Can, as with Advanced Skills Teacher (AST) standards, describe outstanding performance, providing an aspirational level for all teachers; - Can ultimately demonstrate which teachers are highly motivated and effective. Weaknesses of teacher standards in general: - Control of teachers at every stage of their career; - No research-based credibility of the standards; - Teachers have not been sufficiently involved in their development and refinement. Weaknesses of the 'one-size-fits-all' model: - Too restrictive for subject-teachers; - English teachers perceive a diminishment of their role and setback of their profession; - Demotivating effect among the experienced and effective English teachers; - Strong focus on performativity and surveillance in a highly prescriptive standardizing frame for teachers. Impact of the recent standardization policies: - Overall effect on teachers' work is characterized by there being too much content, excessive emphasis on high-stakes testing leading to narrowly focused teaching, and little teacher choice; - Decline of the National Association for the Teaching of English, the key subject association for English teachers, at all levels political and professional; - Many English teachers are choosing a form of local resistance, not via the National Association anymore.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article: Lucica, Criste, Educational systems and secondary school teachers' teachers' appraisals. Evaluation of teachers is the most important feature of QA procedures of any OECD education system. Methods for assessing teacher evaluation and professional development: - Teachers' appraisals; - Teacher activity more efficient, as stated. The article does not discuss how do the teachers' evaluation methods of the countries succeed in order to make the teacher activity more efficient, as stated in the article's objectives.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Teachers appraisals**

| Article: Lucica, Criste, Educational systems and secondary school teachers' teachers' appraisals. Evaluation of teachers is the most important feature of QA procedures of any OECD education system. Methods for assessing teacher evaluation and professional development: - Teachers' appraisals; - Teacher activity more efficient, as stated. The article does not discuss how do the teachers' evaluation methods of the countries succeed in order to make the teacher activity more efficient, as stated in the article's objectives. | |

**Conclusions of the article are that**

- a tendency to standardize...
### BACKGROUND

**Key facts**


Comparative analysis with a focus on Romania

Study target group: secondary schools in OECD countries.

Aim of the research: the article analyses the methods of evaluating secondary school teachers from the developed countries and how do these methods succeed in order to make this activity more efficient.

It aims at: achieving a conceptual delimitation of systems evaluating the secondary school teachers; comparing the Romanian educational system to other educational systems; comparing the methods of evaluating secondary school teachers from Romania with methods used in other countries.

Strength: provides a comparative overview of teachers’ evaluation practices.

Weakness: poor article in terms of content and analysis. Too descriptive with no clear argumentation. Does not discuss how the various evaluation methods succeed in order to make the teachers’ evaluation teachers differ from country to country:

- Estonia: There is no system to evaluate teachers. Their performances is analysed in the context of performances registered by the institution.
- Finland: Being the responsibility of schools, the evaluation of teachers is achieved under the form of annual discussions (interviews), whose purpose is to evaluate the accomplishment of the established objectives for the previous year, as well as the presentation and the analysis of the objectives for the next year.
- Japan: Evaluation is made in two stages: self evaluation; evaluation made by the headmaster and the head of the department, via interviews in order to give them advice for professional development.
- UK: The head of the department completes the evaluation file, which mirrors the achievement level for all the three categories of standards; Newly Qualified Teachers’ interview; Parents and pupils evaluate teachers by answering some questionnaires or by discussing with the inspectors, immediately after the inspection.
- Spain: The evaluation system is designed for pupils, in order to obtain information about the system; Teachers are evaluated by volunteers who establish criteria for the teaching personnel’s promotion and circulation in schools.
- USA: teachers’ evaluation is predominantly the headmaster’s responsibility, but it can be performed by the school district responsible or by teachers from other pre-higher educational institutions as well; in the article’s objectives.

**Identified strengths**

**Identified weaknesses**

Reported effects on school quality

- Educational systems and implicitly the systems evaluating the teachers from pre-higher education;
- Teachers are considered to be the most important domain of the education system and consequently, their training and evaluation constitutes the starting point of the worldwide reforms in education;
- Teacher’s responsibility is increasing and that is why in all reform, objectives regarding initial and continuous training are mentioned;
- In most of developed countries there is a high degree of exigency in recruiting and selecting teachers;
- In many education systems there is an intense preoccupation regarding teachers performance, even in countries like Finland, Spain, Hungary where evaluating teachers is optional or seems like a formality, by systematically analyzing pupils’ results.

### Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identified strengths</th>
<th>Identified weaknesses</th>
<th>Reported effects on school quality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Educational systems and implicitly the systems evaluating the teachers from pre-higher education;</td>
<td>- Teachers are considered to be the most important domain of the education system and consequently, their training and evaluation constitutes the starting point of the worldwide reforms in education;</td>
<td>- Educational systems and implicitly the systems evaluating the teachers from pre-higher education;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Teacher’s responsibility is increasing and that is why in all reform, objectives regarding initial and continuous training are mentioned;</td>
<td>- In most of developed countries there is a high degree of exigency in recruiting and selecting teachers;</td>
<td>- In most of developed countries there is a high degree of exigency in recruiting and selecting teachers;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- In many education systems there is an intense preoccupation regarding teachers performance, even in countries like Finland, Spain, Hungary where evaluating teachers is optional or seems like a formality, by systematically analyzing pupils’ results.</td>
<td></td>
<td>- In many education systems there is an intense preoccupation regarding teachers performance, even in countries like Finland, Spain, Hungary where evaluating teachers is optional or seems like a formality, by systematically analyzing pupils’ results.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
BACKGROUND

Key facts

Identified strengths

Identified weaknesses

Reported effects on school quality

activities more efficient, as initially planned in the article’s aims. Not clear how the author reached her conclusions based on the information provided in the article.

frequency of evaluations varies according to the district, but most of the times substitute teachers are the evaluated ones, the permanent teachers being rarely evaluated formally; - pre-higher school teachers’ evaluation is generally a formal one, by using a standardized evaluation list of criteria - which are to found only at a successful teacher- and by inspecting him while teaching.

Hungary: The system is based on self – evaluation

Romania: Evaluation is achieved by: - self – evaluation; - inspecting the teacher while performing his professional activity and completing afterwards an observation file; - completing the evaluation file by the curriculum coordinator; - interviewing the teacher; - evaluating the teacher's portfolio by the Methodist teacher or by a specific inspector.

Pupils’ assessment

Significant student learning variance can be explained by out-of-school factors, such as family and community social capital, and peer group influence (Coleman et al. 1966; Coleman 1988).

Test-based accountability policies have trapped teachers in a dilemma between schooling for social capital and moral purpose with student-centred pedagogy and learning on one side, and efficiency-driven education with teacher-centred instruction and achievement on the other.

The challenge is how to establish accountability system that would support worthwhile learning, increase social capital and thereby help schools

Weaknesses of student testing and public accountability

- Most current accountability tests assess too much standard knowledge delivered by a prescribed curriculum — the outcomes that are easily measurable, and not necessarily the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that students will need in their lives within a knowledge society (e.g. creativity).

- Accountability structures create a competitive pressure between schools/teachers which - although they provide parents and politicians with information — build suspicion, low morale, and professional cynicism.

What is needed

- Student assessment needs to be designed

The author identifies various researches that have demonstrate that accountability processes increase education performance: Wossmann et al. (2007), Carnoy and Loeb (2002).

The author identifies various researches that have demonstrate that accountability processes have a negative effect on education outcomes: Popham (2007), McNeil (2000); Sacks (2001), Nichols and Berliner (2007). In addition, OECD PISA surveys (OECD 2001, 2004, 2007) suggests that nations that have earlier built their
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BACKGROUND</th>
<th>Key facts</th>
<th>Identified strengths</th>
<th>Identified weaknesses</th>
<th>Reported effects on school quality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The article takes Finland as an example to stress the distinction between intelligent and non-intelligent accountability policies and how they direct teachers and students toward learning differently. Method: not specified. Strength: thorough analysis/discussion of accountability structures.</td>
<td>to be active players in developing our societies. • Finland’s response to improve learning of all students since the early 1970s has relied on four strategic principles: (a) guaranteeing equal opportunities to good public education for all; (b) strengthening professionalism of and trust in teachers, (c) steering educational change by enriched information about the process and performance of teaching and schooling; and (d) facilitating network-based school improvement. • Risk-taking, creativity and innovation have been valued as lighthouses of educational change. • Schools have been credited and teachers recognised for their innovative ideas and initiatives. • The global accountability movement has been reflected in clearer responsibilities, moral purposes and adoption of development-oriented education evaluation policies that integrate ‘accountability’ with overall educational progress in schools.</td>
<td>in ways that support learning—not just achievement—in schools. • School accountability should be based on better tests and broader range of assessment methods that focus on meta-cognitive and skill learning, rely more on sample-based test data (rather than testing all schools), and be matched by stronger parental involvement and community responsibility. • There is a need for new type of accountability policies that balance qualitative with quantitative measures and build on mutual accountability, professional responsibility and trust. • This framework would ensure that schools work effectively and efficiently toward both the public good and the development of students. • It combines internal accountability, consisting of school processes, self-evaluations, critical reflection and school–community interaction, with levels of external accountability that build on monitoring, sample-based student assessment and thematic evaluations appropriate to the stage of development of each individual school.</td>
<td>educational reforms on test-based accountability ideas, have experienced stagnation or decline of student learning, often accompanied by increased drop-outs, compared to some other nations that focus on creating favourable conditions for teaching and learning by promoting cooperation rather than competition in their educational systems, for instance Finland, Slovenia or Estonia.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Three recommendations: 1) educational change efforts should primarily focus on building trust and collective responsibility in schools and their communities. 2) education policies should promote more intelligent forms of school accountability and match them to external accountability needs. 3) educational leadership should
## BACKGROUND

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key facts</th>
<th>Identified strengths</th>
<th>Identified weaknesses</th>
<th>Reported effects on school quality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| The background is that examination standards are a continuous policy focus in England. External assessment has come under intense scrutiny over the years. An alternative considered is school-based assessment. Stages of a typical school-based assessment process:  
- Design of assessment;  
- Design of materials;  
- Cross-teacher understanding / checking of assessment criteria;  
- Task;  
- Marking;  
- Moderation and standards maintenance;  
- Dissemination of results. Research points at 3 conditions that are very influential to the summative assessment:  
- High stakes judgements (e.g. due to school targets or performance-related pay for teachers) may encourage some teachers to give high grades where there is doubt;  
- Opportunities for sharing understanding of teacher assessment procedures,  
- Use of guidance on grading. The discussion groups reveal 4 factors that affect the moderation and standard maintenance:  
- Teacher training,  
- School targets,  
- Resourcing,  
- Teacher specialisation in moderation. Positive impact on teachers:  
- Summative assessment enables reviewing of teaching practice and reviewing of their views of student learning and subject goals;  
- May increase teachers' confidence in their decisions. Positive impact on students:  
- Using guidance on grading increased marking reliability and likelihood that standards are maintained;  
- Guidance on grading reduced influence of non-achievement factors that may improve fairness. Negative impact on teachers:  
- In situations of high-stakes judgements (i.e. school targets), summative assessment may compromise objectivity of professional judgement;  
- School targets and lack of time resources may pressurise teachers. Negative impact on students:  
- Situations of high-stakes judgements can result in grade inflation that might compromise fairness across student cohorts.  
- Time pressure on teachers may result in clerical errors in moderation that may compromise fairness. Wider impacts: Depending on how the influential factors are taken into account in designing the summative assessment, it can affect – positively or negatively – integrity and credibility of the assessment process as well as employers and providers of further education. | Encourage cooperation among teachers and networking among schools, rather than competition and disconnectedness, should therefore characterize education policies and the development of educational systems. |


Country of research: England

Study target group: teachers

Aim of the research: The article focuses on the factors that influence the moderation and standards maintenance in school-based assessment (known as assessment done by teachers, 'summative assessment') in England.

Method: Literature review on school-based assessment processes and discussion groups with 13 examiners & teachers.

Strength: It compares professional examiners' perceptions of conditions that influence moderation and standards maintenance with the research evidence.

Weakness: Study is limited in scale and scope.

Key characteristics of the study sample: -

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Background</th>
<th>Key facts</th>
<th>Identified strengths</th>
<th>Identified weaknesses</th>
<th>Reported effects on school quality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
|            | The background is that examination standards are a continuous policy focus in England. External assessment has come under intense scrutiny over the years. An alternative considered is school-based assessment. Stages of a typical school-based assessment process:  
- Design of assessment;  
- Design of materials;  
- Cross-teacher understanding / checking of assessment criteria;  
- Task;  
- Marking;  
- Moderation and standards maintenance;  
- Dissemination of results. Research points at 3 conditions that are very influential to the summative assessment:  
- High stakes judgements (e.g. due to school targets or performance-related pay for teachers) may encourage some teachers to give high grades where there is doubt;  
- Opportunities for sharing understanding of teacher assessment procedures,  
- Use of guidance on grading. The discussion groups reveal 4 factors that affect the moderation and standard maintenance:  
- Teacher training,  
- School targets,  
- Resourcing,  
- Teacher specialisation in moderation. Positive impact on teachers:  
- Summative assessment enables reviewing of teaching practice and reviewing of their views of student learning and subject goals;  
- May increase teachers' confidence in their decisions. Positive impact on students:  
- Using guidance on grading increased marking reliability and likelihood that standards are maintained;  
- Guidance on grading reduced influence of non-achievement factors that may improve fairness. Negative impact on teachers:  
- In situations of high-stakes judgements (i.e. school targets), summative assessment may compromise objectivity of professional judgement;  
- School targets and lack of time resources may pressurise teachers. Negative impact on students:  
- Situations of high-stakes judgements can result in grade inflation that might compromise fairness across student cohorts.  
- Time pressure on teachers may result in clerical errors in moderation that may compromise fairness. Wider impacts: Depending on how the influential factors are taken into account in designing the summative assessment, it can affect – positively or negatively – integrity and credibility of the assessment process as well as employers and providers of further education. | Encourage cooperation among teachers and networking among schools, rather than competition and disconnectedness, should therefore characterize education policies and the development of educational systems. |
**BACKGROUND**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key facts</th>
<th>Identified strengths</th>
<th>Identified weaknesses</th>
<th>Reported effects on school quality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
- All teachers in the school support the initiative (high disposition to change);  
- Increased reflection on classroom decision-making and pedagogy;  
- Promoted reflection among teachers about the role of dialogue in learning;  
- Perception of reduced marking workload for teachers, combined with a greater degree of flexibility and spontaneity in the classroom;  
- Overall, all teachers made progress and AifL is popular among both teachers and students. | Challenges with applying formative assessment:  
- Teachers had varied degree of experience of and engagement with formative assessment strategies;  
- Some teachers have made more progress than others;  
- Some teachers started AifL from very different bases;  
- Some teachers encountered initial problems with the strategies due to the need to adapt to the new pedagogies and teaching approach (taking some time for adapting). | Some evidence of changed practice: enhanced pupil participation and their increased motivation to learn, leading to greater levels of autonomous learning. |
| **Country of research:** Scotland  
**Study target group:** primary school  
**Aim of the research:** Examines the impact of formative assessment within a school which follows a whole-school approach, meaning the involvement of all relevant school actors (teachers, pupils, parents, school management).  
**Method:** Article draws on a case study of a primary school in Scotland, using interview and observation data.  
**Strength:** Uses social theory to analyse the processes of change that have underpinned the development of formative assessment in the school.  
**Weakness:** No evidence of the impact of formative assessment on school outcomes. | | | |
| **Article:** Mattei P. (2012). *Raising educational standards: national testing of pupils in Scotland*. Education Reform Act that also brought | Positive effects of national testing:  
- Professional accountability of teachers;  
- Information on schools' performance | Negative effects of national testing:  
- Schools tend to attract the best or mostly | Big increase in attainment in all subjects in England, steep rise 1995-2000 and then slower rate |
**BACKGROUND**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key facts</th>
<th>Identified strengths</th>
<th>Identified weaknesses</th>
<th>Reported effects on school quality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>the United Kingdom, 1988-2009. Policy Studies. Vol. 33 Issue 3, p231-247. Countries of research: England, Wales &amp; Scotland Study target group: schools in England, Wales &amp; Scotland Aim of the research: Compares the divergent policies of national testing in England, Scotland and Wales and their outcomes on pupils' attainment Method: Overview of school reforms in the UK, data comparing attainment in England, Wales &amp; Scotland. Strength: Analyse different outcomes of governments' school policies in England, Wales &amp; Scotland prior to &amp; after devolution and shows changes over time (1992-2009) in pupil &amp; school performance in each country. Weakness: Comparisons between England, Wales &amp; Scotland should be treated with caution as their examination systems are very different.</td>
<td>available to parents (due to publication of results) allowing them to choose or 'exit' a school; • Gaining or losing students makes school heads and governing bodies take corrective measures resulting in raising standards; • Harder work by teachers to improve the efficiency and performance of their school • Publication of schools' results informs teachers of their results and produces professional self-corrective actions.</td>
<td>easily taught pupils – 'cream skimming'; • National test results exaggerate improvement; • Teachers may reallocate curriculum and decrease instructional time for non-tested subjects leading to possible narrowing of the curriculum; • Schools concentrate on those on the margins of attainment success rather than poorest performing • Change the meaning of teaching and learning to a 'performativity regime' There are alternatives to how to track the overall effectiveness of a school and how to give teachers individual feedback on their pupils' progress.</td>
<td>of improvement (classic innovation curve) but still not stagnation or deterioration. See Fig. 1 on p. 235. When national testing existed in all three countries, increase in attainment is visible in all of them. See Fig. 7 on p. 242. When schools' examination results across England, Wales &amp; Scotland are compared over time, pupils are overall 'better achievers' in England. The widening achievement gap after 2001 (when Wales and Scotland abolished league tables) can prove the possible detrimental effect of abolishing national testing on school outcomes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Article: Hendrickson K. (2012). Assessment in Finland: A Scholarly Reflection on One Country’s Use of Formative, Summative, and Evaluative Practices. Mid-Western Educational Researcher. Vol. 25 Issue 1/2, p33-43. Country of research: Finland Study target group: schools Finland scores very high on PISA tests and its educational reforms do not include national high-stakes testing. On the contrary, the US responded to low PISA ranking in Math by requiring more, yearly high-stakes testing. Student assessment in Finland takes place in 3 arenas: • Classroom practices (during the course and end of year) • Summative assessment at the end of basic education; | Positive effects of student assessment in FI: • Few formal assessments & few pressures for teachers to prepare students for testing; • Formative assessment within the classroom encourages student self-assessment; • Classroom assessment practices allow teachers to evaluate and change instruction based on student needs; | Weaknesses identified in the study: • Finland does not have a system for encouraging high achieving and gifted students within the classroom, although advocated by parents; • Finland's high achievement is based solely on PISA tests, as it did not participate in any other international testing, such as TIMMS which assesses topics learned across curricula; |
**BACKGROUND**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key facts</th>
<th>Identified strengths</th>
<th>Identified weaknesses</th>
<th>Reported effects on school quality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aim of the research: Examines the use of student assessment in Finland, incl. formative &amp; summative assessment. Method: Policy and literature review Strength: Explores the differences between Finland and the US in national practices in assessment Weakness: Insights drawn only from secondary data.</td>
<td>Yearly assessment provides feedback to students about their progress in learning; Teachers use tests and test-like situations in primary schools, but avoid presenting the situations as tests so that students see the test situations as learning experiences; Frequent formative assessment allows for timely intervention for students who struggle.</td>
<td>Finland has high scores on PISA tests which can be explained due to a lack of high-stakes testing as opposed to the US. Finland has the smallest variance across schools, showing the achievement gap between wealthy and poorer students is minimal.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Matriculation examination at the end of upper secondary and prior to entering further education – this is the only high-stakes standardized test taken by students; Teachers, schools and municipalities perform yearly self-evaluation to improve the quality of education locally. The purpose of assessment in Finland is to improve learning and is encouraging and supportive by nature. Assessment measures a combination of educational progress, work skills, and behavior. Teachers and schools are not evaluated externally or on the basis of student test scores. They have high autonomy based on self-evaluation, with little inspection & control. Finland’s reforms extend beyond school, providing free meals and higher education to all students, alleviating the factors that negatively impact students’ performance.

Finland has high scores on PISA tests which can be explained due to a lack of high-stakes testing as opposed to the US.

- Teachers and schools are not externally evaluated or on the basis of student test scores. They have high autonomy based on self-evaluation, with little inspection & control. Finland’s reforms extend beyond school, providing free meals and higher education to all students, alleviating the factors that negatively impact students’ performance.

- Frequent formative assessment allows for timely intervention for students who struggle.


Country of research: England

Study target group: Trainee

In recent years there has been significant attention given to the nature of assessment, and in particular there has been considerable advice for teachers on the nature of good classroom practice, deriving both from the academic community and official guidance. This study looks at the thinking trainee teachers have about assessment.

- Assessment viewed as an effective means of enquiring into and examining one’s own teaching practice.

- Assessment was also viewed as a means to measure how much students know.

- Trainees also thought that assessment should be used as a way of helping students get the education that is appropriate for them (acting...
### Aim of the research

To find out what the developing understandings are of trainee teachers in relation to the purpose, nature and forms of assessment used in secondary education.

### Method

- **Interviews with a convenience sample of 17 trainee teachers**

### Strength

- Looks at the views of trainees about assessment practices

### Weakness

- Based on only 17 trainee teachers from a convenience sample. Only discusses their views about assessment practices and doesn't link to quality.

### Identified strengths

- Assessment can be motivational for students – i.e. motivated by receiving a grade rather than just written comments.
- Trainees supported the idea that formative assessment is preferable to summative assessment as it supports learning through evaluative feedback, whereas summative assessment is only checking if the students have learnt (not helping them to learn).

### Identified weaknesses

- Doubts about the viability of ‘assessment for learning’ (formative assessment as a means to gather information to inform teaching, inform the learner about progress and create suitable goals for future learning) within the institutional context in which teachers in England work due to the high degree of accountability in the English school system.
- Ability grouping can limit the final grades possible of students – however teachers and schools are (in part) judged by examination results of their students. Weakness of assessment to take this into account.
- The fact that assessment can be used for accountability (to parents, the school, local authorities, or society in general) this can influence the way assessments are conducted and used in schools.
- The emphasis on formative assessment (rather than on-going informal formative assessment) produces a tension as it seems prioritise this type of assessment over others (that are actually an integral part of teacher’s everyday classroom work).
- Formative assessment was not commonly being operationalised as much as the trainee teachers would like due to practical reasons – lack of time in the timetable.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BACKGROUND</th>
<th>Key facts</th>
<th>Identified strengths</th>
<th>Identified weaknesses</th>
<th>Reported effects on school quality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>pressure of summative assessment, overly large class sizes – these have to be overcome if assessment is to be tailored for individual learning purposes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
HOW TO OBTAIN EU PUBLICATIONS

Free publications:
• one copy:
  via EU Bookshop (http://bookshop.europa.eu);
• more than one copy or posters/maps:
  from the European Union’s representations
  (http://ec.europa.eu/represent_en.htm);
  from the delegations in non-EU countries
  (http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/index_en.htm);
  by contacting the Europe Direct service
  (http://europa.eu/europedirect/index_en.htm) or
  calling 00 800 6 7 8 9 10 11 (freephone number from anywhere in the EU) (*).

(*) The information given is free, as are most calls (though some operators, phone boxes or hotels may charge you).

Priced publications:
• via EU Bookshop (http://bookshop.europa.eu).

Priced subscriptions:
• via one of the sales agents of the Publications Office of the European Union