An Overview of School Evaluation (Self and Central) and School Development Plans in the EU Countries

1. Introduction
1.1. This short paper/presentation will set out points around school self-evaluation, central/national evaluation and school development plans. These 3 topics are inter-related. School self-evaluations are very influenced by central school evaluations, sometimes explicitly, sometimes implicitly. Both school self-evaluations, and where they exist central school evaluations very much influence school development plans. Indeed school development plans often start with the school evaluations and try to action improvements and remedy weaknesses in the school’s performance as illustrated by self and central school evaluations.

1.2. This paper is derived from information and examples from the various members of the ET 2020 Working Group on Schools Policy (2014-15). There was information from Sweden, Norway, Poland, Lithuania, Estonia and Hungary, Portugal, Italy, Luxembourg, England and Malta.

1.3. Of course the examples and illustrations from the various countries are unique to the particular country. I have tried to distil the range of information and illustrations given into the broad themes. Any misinterpretation of the information and illustrations is mine alone and for which I apologise.

2. Central evaluations of schools
2.1. It is difficult to discuss school self-evaluations without a brief discussion on central evaluations of schools as these often determine or at least heavily influence school self-evaluations. Central evaluations often determine the priority areas that schools seek to address in their Development plans.

2.2. Analysing the various country submissions on school evaluations, it is clear that there is a spectrum of central/national evaluation systems which run from the obligatory to the non-obligatory. Some central/national evaluation systems have been established in legislation (Sweden, Estonia). These central/national systems are all aimed at improving and assuring quality in school performance, especially in teaching and learning. Most of the central/national evaluation systems also offer some training and tools for self-evaluation.

2.3. Many of the central/national systems have a supervisory and/or monitoring role in relation to school self-evaluations. Some central/national systems (England, Poland) grade schools following evaluations. Some (England, Portugal) use a proportionate system of evaluation/inspection, with in England those schools graded ‘outstanding’ may receive no further national inspection. Inspection/evaluation is focused on the least good schools. In Portugal there can be multiple interventions by the central body.

2.4. Most of the countries in this study have some form of national standards for teaching and learning, quality and for curriculum. Central inspection usually evaluates the school against these standards.

3. School self-evaluation/assessment
3.1. All the countries covered by this paper have school self-evaluation processes. In some countries school self-evaluation is obligatory (Sweden, Norway, Poland, Hungary, Flanders, Portugal, Italy). In some countries such as England, self-evaluation is not
obligatory now, although it was, and in fact the central inspection was supposedly a check on whether the school’s self-evaluation was correct. In practice all schools engage in self-evaluations so as to be prepared for national inspection, although self-evaluation is also enormously useful for other school activities such as preparing the School Development Plan.

3.2. The Processes of School Self-evaluation: each country, and where self-evaluation is not obligatory, each school, may have its own processes for self-evaluation. However in reviewing the self-evaluation as described in the country papers, it is clear that there are stages in the self-evaluation which may be termed differently in different systems but are very similar. These seem to be in 5 stages:

- **Stage 1**: a time for planning and preparation; creating a clear picture of where the school is currently: often focus on teaching and learning, can be more focused on selecting an area within the school for priority intervention: can be a set of basic questions - Who is this for? Why are we doing this? What is the best structure? How are we to judge? Where are we now?

- **Stage 2**: the time to set goals, to define strengths and weaknesses, the areas needing development, to identify improvement areas in each intervention areas: What do we do? What are the tools for the job? What are the priorities?

- **Stage 3**: the time to finalise the methodologies of the evaluation: how to reach the goals that have been defined in Stage 2: can be an in-depth analysis of selected problems: can be the time for horizontal reflection and initiate a debate about rigour – objectivity, relevance, adequacy, credibility, feasibility and implementation

- **Stage 4**: the time for action, implementation, of reporting of the results of the analysis of the data, the procedures investigated, what will the final products look like?

- **Stage 5**: evaluation and feedback into school activities and setting the base for the next self-evaluation process: using the results for further improvement: assessing the effectiveness of improvement actions, effective monitoring of supervisory and pedagogic co-ordination:

3.3. Timescales: very varied: mostly annual but examples of where the self-evaluation is for the length of the school development plan (3-5 years); others for a set period – 4 years, 5 years.

3.4. Information for self-evaluation: to try to provide a clear picture (One system has 67 indicators in 5 areas of school performance). Most systems have provision for information on national/regional/local data including data on comparable schools and benchmarking. Information and data usually required:

- of the school’s current capacity, quantitative and qualitative data on performance levels;
- the school’s values and mission
- changes in school’s circumstances since last evaluation;
- leadership and management in school; effectiveness of school governors, boards, ‘owners’.
- staff including their numbers and qualifications, professional development activities, team teaching and teacher collaboration: support staff numbers and usage
- pupils including numbers, numbers of disadvantaged pupils, numbers of pupils with special educational needs, attainment, destinations, retention, absenteeism,
grade/year repetition, examination and test results, pupil progress especially to any external standards and benchmarks, pupil characteristics, pupil behaviour

- parent involvement in school
- external support: which agencies, school involvement in community, range and quality of partnership with external stakeholders

3.5. **Choice of methodology of self-evaluation:** There can be a variety of methodologies for school evaluation. Some evaluations methodologies are set by national policies. In some systems, the schools, usually the school leader/s can choose the methodology for the self-evaluation and which areas of the school will be evaluated (Flanders, Norway, Poland). In other systems (Lithuania) the School Council selects the areas and methodology of the self-evaluation, the methods and the tools for evaluation.

3.6. There are a wide variety of measures used to gather the necessary information used in self-evaluation. Identification of school policies and assessment of how effective these are important, as are examination and test results and analysis of pupil data, especially around attainment and progress.

3.7. Other methods used in self-evaluation are the creation of working groups, usually comprised of staff to look at particular areas and issues. Questionnaires to staff, parents, pupils and external stakeholders are a feature of a number of self-evaluation methodologies. As are interviews with school leaders, teachers, leaders of professional and curriculum teams, pupils, parents and external stakeholders.

3.8. **Participants in self-evaluation:** Participants may vary according to the area of evaluation. Can be a focus on perceived problems and issues. Some systems need approval of teachers:

- School governors/trustees/ ‘owners’
- School leaders who often have a lead role and responsibilities in planning, implementation and publication of the final report; curriculum and pastoral managers and leaders
- School staff, including non-teaching staff, often through staff/teacher councils
- Parents often through a variety of bodies such as parent councils
- Pupils often through pupil councils,
- Municipalities and/or appropriate other local government bodies.
- National bodies who often have supervisory role in self-assessment
- External experts and consultants

3.9. The English national inspectorate have usefully advised that that a self-evaluation summary is likely to be most effective when it is:

- concise and succinct, captures the key points and, where relevant, identifies sources of evidence or more detailed evaluative material
- evaluative rather than descriptive or repetitive, and captures succinctly the impact of the school’s actions on the quality of teaching, pupils’ achievement, behaviour and safety
- a working document which is regularly used to inform governors of the school’s improvement activity and is updated as part of the school’s self-evaluation processes developed by, and used to inform, leaders, including governors and middle leaders as well as senior staff
- linked to part two of the School inspection handbook, and to the Subsidiary guidance so that strengths and weaknesses are set out in relation to pupils’ achievement, the quality of teaching, behaviour and safety, the school’s provision for the pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and, where relevant the
effectiveness of the sixth form, which together can then provide a picture of the school's assessment of its overall effectiveness

- linked to school improvement planning, and identifies areas for improvement
- an indicator of the success of the school's actions in tackling issues identified at the previous inspection.

4. School Development Plans

4.1. The objective of school evaluations, both self- and external evaluations is that schools and the quality of their provision, delivery and outcomes improve. As with school self-assessment, in some systems school development plans are obligatory (Norway, Lithuania Portugal). In others they are not obligatory, but schools nonetheless formulate development plans. Where development plans are not obligatory, schools can have a considerable degree of autonomy in their creation and form. However even in these systems there can be educational standards which set out the expected activities and range of issues schools need to consider (Poland). In some systems (Estonia) the Development Plan is drafted by the school head and approved by the School Council. In other system the Development Plan is a co-operative venture involving the school board, student and teacher councils and external experts. The final Plan will have to be approved by the Board and the councils.

4.2. The duration of Development Plans can vary. Some will be relatively short term, perhaps a year, before being re-assessed and possibly re-formulated, often as a result of further evaluations whether internal or external. Some can be more long term. (3 years in Estonia). Yet others may be rolling development plans which are reviewed regularly and updated where necessary.

4.3. Process: the processes involved in creating a school development plan may vary with the subject matter of the plan. For example is it the totality of the school and its activities that are being covered by the plan, or it is particular areas and issues that are the subject of the plan. As with self-evaluation plans, most of the methods of formulating the Development Plan have five stages in common:

Stage 1: analysis:

- a description of the school - Its vision and mission
- the main points arising from the school self-evaluation
- the priorities of the Plan in the light of national and local priorities
- an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the school or particular areas and issues to be covered by the Plan
- strategic goals.

Stage 2: planning:

- the actions to be taken to fulfil the plan:
- who will take the actions:
- what measures and indicators will be used to monitor the implementation of the plan and its success or failure:
- who will have responsibility for implementation and monitoring of the Plan
- time line of the actions:
- resources needed to implement the Plan
- identification of where these resources will be found
- what support will be needed

Stage 3: implementation
Stage 4: evaluation

Stage 5: feedback:
- to the school and its next self-evaluation,
- to the governing body
- to stakeholders,
- to central agencies if necessary.

4.4. Participants: again these will be very similar to the participants in the school self-evaluation. These may vary depending on the coverage of the Development Plan: school leaders, pastoral and curriculum leaders, teachers and other staff, internal experts eg home-school liaison workers, mentors, special needs staff and co-ordinators, national agencies as appropriate, external experts and stakeholders, pupils and parents councils

5. Support for Self-evaluation and Development Plans - examples from EU countries

Sweden: national agency with general guidelines for quality assurance, e-learning tools for self-evaluation

Norway: training from central, regional and local authorities

Poland: training at national and regional levels

Lithuania: National Agency for School Evaluation gives methodological support, priorities and co-ordinates co-operation between schools towns, self-evaluation and performance quality consultants. Develops recommendations on data collection, processing and analysis

Flanders: central Data Warehouse with school specific data with the aim of increasing capacity for policy making: also local authority data community and education zone data and Flemish education data. School Advisory Service supports schools’ policy making capacity. Government organises and subsidies training. Ministerial web site with pupils' test scores to establish school comparisons and benchmarks

Portugal: Inspectorate has major role, supports and monitors self-evaluation. There is training provided centrally and through universities and training centres. There is access through the Inspectorate to a self-evaluation tools and frameworks. There are electronic links to self-evaluation models and international projects

Italy: help from national bodies and universities and training centres: training at regional level by inspectors and experts

Luxembourg: separate national schemes for primary and secondary schools. Training by a National agency within the Ministry of Education

England: national inspectorate publishes a handbook on inspection with methodology and what constitutes outstanding, good, needing improvement and inadequate provision. National training by the inspectorate when major changes to the inspection regimes and frameworks. Inspectorate speak at national conferences and training events. Great use of external and private consultants paid for by the school.