European Commission

Supporting school self-evaluation and development through quality assurance policies:
key considerations for policy makers

Report by ET2020 Working Group Schools

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Education and Training

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Executive summary

The **Education and Training 2020 Working Group Schools** is contributing to high quality inclusive education across the **European Education Area** through its analysis of how quality assurance policies can support school- and teacher-led culture of quality enhancement. A culture of quality enhancement in school education places an emphasis on continuous improvement, with the overall objective of improving all children's and young people's learning and wellbeing.

The Group focused its work on exploring **how policy makers can support school self-evaluation as a key mechanism for school development**. Meaningful school self-evaluation can lead to improved school quality and to the identification of priorities for school development; it can also encourage collaborative professional learning among teachers, and lead to improved academic and non-academic outcomes for students.

This report sets out **key considerations to guide policy making at national and regional levels** in relation to how to support school self-evaluation and development. The key considerations seek to be relevant to and adaptable by all education systems whilst recognising that each system is different and complex. The report also includes recent **research findings** and **country examples** of policy development, provided by the Working Group Schools Members, which offer inspiration for how these key considerations can be realised in practice.

Key considerations for policy makers:

What conditions need to be in place to promote and sustain meaningful school self-evaluation and development?

- Meaningful school self-evaluation requires a **broadly shared long-term vision of the aims for education** and a well-designed policy framework supporting a **coherent approach to evaluation and** ensuring **coherence with broader education policies**.
- School self-evaluation needs to be evidence-led. The **motivation and capacity of all actors** to gather, analyse, interpret and use a range of qualitative and quantitative data to create a holistic picture of school and student performance and develop clear strategies for school development are vital. Awareness of the importance of school self-evaluation for improvement can be raised through continuing professional development, co-operation with other schools through networks, evaluation of teachers and school leaders, external evaluation, and recognition and awards. **School leaders** have a key role to play in raising awareness, motivating and involving all staff as well as parents and students in the school self-evaluation process.
- Supporting **broad stakeholder engagement** in quality assurance processes is crucial. Broad stakeholder engagement can promote **transparency, trust, shared responsibility and ongoing reflection** on how to achieve improvement. Stakeholder engagement will only contribute to a high trust environment and holistic school development when there are clearly defined roles and responsibilities and a structure for participatory decision-making. Representativeness of stakeholders needs to be ensured and all voices, including those of disadvantaged groups, need to be heard.
- Policy makers should promote **collaboration within and between schools**. Schools may also build bridges **with wider communities** including researchers to support school-level learning, to develop their capacity to work systematically with quantitative and qualitative data, and strategies for school development.

- Policy makers can also provide various **tools, guidelines and approaches**, which may be adapted to local contexts and needs, to support schools in their self-evaluation and development.
- Policy makers and school leaders (in countries where they have the capacity) need to allocate **sufficient human and financial resources and time** to conduct effective school self-evaluation.

How can school self-evaluation and development be supported through external evaluation, system-level stakeholder surveys, and student assessments?

- Ideally, both internal and **external evaluation** are part of a coherent approach in which they reinforce each other. Inspectorates and other national and local agencies may support school self-evaluation by providing guidance and tools, developing dialogue-based approaches, making evaluation of school self-evaluation and improvement an important feature of inspection, promoting collaboration in schools and networks, and sharing good practices. Policy makers may support other forms of evaluation conducted by third parties, such as by school heads and teachers from other schools, representatives of local authorities, or researchers.
- In addition to external evaluation, schools may also draw on the results of **system-level stakeholder surveys** to gather a range of perspectives in areas such as school climate and student well-being, ensuring that evaluation of learning and school development goes beyond academic performance. Countries may create national awareness-raising campaigns to explain the importance of participation by students, parents, teachers and other stakeholders in the surveys. Survey results should be made easily accessible to individual schools so that they can reflect on them in their local contexts and use them for improvement.
- **National student assessments** are an important source of valid and reliable data on student learning. High-stakes that may inhibit school development can be lowered by avoiding publication of school-level results in ranking formats and 'league tables', assessing representative samples of students (rather than every student) to track national trends, and using national assessment data in conjunction with evidence from other sources. Policy makers may invest in research and development of digital tools to support administration of assessments, broadening of competences assessed, and provision of data to schools in easy to understand formats.
- **International student assessments** are macro-level monitoring instruments that provide information to policy makers and other stakeholders on how students in their country compare, in terms of academic achievement, to students in other countries. The results may be used to motivate and shape national policies to improve system-level outcomes. However, policy makers need to be cautious that such assessments do not lead to a narrowing of national education goals.

Ultimately, improvements in student learning and well-being happen at the school level. National and regional **policy makers can empower bottom-up change by helping schools to develop a culture of self-reflection and self-evaluation** which are fundamental for improving all children's and young people's learning and wellbeing. On how to accomplish this, policy makers can find **guidance and inspiration in this report**.

1. Introduction

1.1 Building a European Education Area

Education plays a fundamental role in promoting social inclusion, active citizenship and personal development, and contributing to employability, innovation and competitiveness of societies.[1] European Union leaders are working together to build a **European Education Area**. An Education Area where every person can benefit, from early childhood and school education to older age, from high-quality, inclusive, future-oriented education and has an opportunity to study in another EU country.[2] The European Commission is committed to supporting EU Member States in making the European Education Area a reality by 2025[3].

Achieving the ambitious objective of setting up the European Education Area by 2025 and making Europe the leading learning society in the world will be facilitated through **mutual learning and exchange of best practices**.[4] The **Education and Training 2020 Working Group Schools** is a prime example of working together across Europe to identify solutions to shared challenges.

Under its 2018-20 mandate, the Working Group Schools explored the governance of school education systems to support high quality inclusive education across a European Education Area. The work focused on two interlinked topics, namely quality assurance and teacher and school leader careers.

Quality assurance plays a key role in systematically gathering and deploying evidence in order to generate further improvement. Appropriate quality assurance policies are therefore vital to providing high-quality inclusive education in Europe. They are also important for enhancing transparency and trust between countries. They can contribute to creating the conditions for an increase in student mobility across Europe, in particular through facilitating the transparency and trust necessary for mutual recognition of upper secondary education qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad.[5]

The Working Group focused on the overarching question of **how quality assurance policies and practices can support school- and teacher-led culture of quality enhancement.**

A **culture of quality enhancement in school education** places an emphasis on continuous improvement, with the overall objective of improving all children's and young people's learning and wellbeing. It is a collaborative culture based on trust and a sense of ownership, with all relevant stakeholders engaged. A culture of quality enhancement operates at all levels of the school education system. It highlights the

[1] Council Resolution on further developing the European Education Area to support future-oriented education and training systems, December 2019, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32019G1118(01).

[2] European Council Conclusions of 14 December 2017: https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/32204/14-final-conclusions-rev1-en.pdf

[3] European Commission's Communication 'Building a stronger Europe: the role of youth, education and culture policies' of 22 May 2018; https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1528464166472&uri=CELEX:52018DC0268; Council conclusions on moving towards a vision of a European Education Area, May 2018, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52018XG0607(01)&rid=4.

[4] Council Resolution on further developing the European Education Area to support future-oriented education and training systems, December 2019; https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32019G1118(01)

[5] Council conclusions on moving towards a vision of a European Education Area of May 2018 (https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52018XG0607(01)&rid=4); European Commission's Communication 'Building a stronger Europe: the role of youth, education and culture policies' of May 2018 (https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1528464166472&uri=CELEX:52018DC0268); Council Recommendation of 26 November 2018 on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad; https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1568891859235&uri=CELEX:32018H1210(01)

importance of appropriate transparency while avoiding the counter-productive pressures of high-stakes accountability approaches. There is an openness to new ideas, including from outside the school education system. In a culture of quality enhancement, all stakeholders have a responsibility to contribute to achieving a shared vision and objectives for young people's learning and wellbeing.

Within this overarching question, the Group analysed **how policy makers at national or regional level can support school self-evaluation as a key mechanism for school development.** The Group explored what conditions need to be in place at policy and school levels to promote and sustain meaningful school self-evaluation and development. It then focused on how school self-evaluation and development can be supported through external evaluation, system-level stakeholder surveys, and national and international student assessments.

1.2 Evidence on the impact of school self-evaluation

School self-evaluation has emerged **as a key mechanism to support school development**. With an increased decentralisation and autonomy in the majority of European countries over recent years, schools have greater responsibility for student outcomes, and more latitude to tailor responses appropriate for the school's own context.[6] School self-evaluation is an approach to diagnosis of school needs, insight and understanding followed by action for improvement and review[7].

Improvements resulting from school self-evaluation can typically be found in the following areas[8]:

- **Reflection on school quality and intentions to improve**: School self-evaluation can lead to greater sensitivity about areas in need of improvement [9,10,11]. It is found to lead to more frequent and open consultation about the quality of education and more classroom visits by the school leader. The process of school self-evaluation allows teachers to develop a perspective beyond their own classroom, particularly when they are involved in decision-making [12].
- **Effect on school improvement where schools implement a range of improvement strategies based on priorities identified through school self-evaluation:** While the specific effects vary according to priorities in a given school, examples include increased professional learning, revised content or organisation of the curriculum, and targeted support for groups of pupils[13].
- **Effect on instructional practices**: Approaches such as schools as learning organisations, professional learning communities, lesson and learning study, joint practice development, classroom-based action research, data-informed instruction and data teams, or peer review where teachers

[6] ET2020 Working Group Schools (2018), European ideas for better learning: the governance of school education systems, Brussels.

[7] Chapman, C., & Sammons, P. (2013). *School Self-Evaluation for School Improvement: What Works and Why?* CfBT Education Trust. 60 Queens Road, Reading, RG1 4BS, England.

[8] Nelson, R., Ehren, M., & Godfrey, D. (2015). Literature review on internal evaluation. *London: Institute of Education*.

[9] Nevo, D. (2001). School evaluation: internal or external? *Studies in Educational Evaluation, 27*, 95-106.

[10] Schildkamp, K., Ehren, M.C.M. & Lai, M.K. (2012). Editorial article for the special issue on data-driven decision making around the world: From policy to practice to results. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement* 23(2),123-131

[11] Simons, H. (2013). Enhancing the quality of education through school self- evaluation In M. K. Lai & S. Kushner (Eds.), A Developmental and Negotiated Approach to School Self-evaluation. Advances in Program Evaluation Volume 14. Bingley, UK: Emerald Group Publishing.

[12] Davidsdottir, S., & Lisi, P. (2007). Effects of Deliberative Democracy on School Self- Evaluation. *Evaluation, 13*(3), 371-386.

[13] Nelson, R., Ehren, M., & Godfrey, D. (2015). Literature review on internal evaluation. *London: Institute of Education*.

analyse and discuss student achievement data systematically and/or observe each other's lessons, may lead to changes in teachers' instructional practices and pedagogic content knowledge. [14].

- **Effect on student achievement**: School self-evaluation supports school improvement and planning activities, which may in turn support improved student achievement and improved planning [15,16,17,18].
- **Effect on non-academic outcomes**: Improvement in areas such as safe learning environments that benefit students' social-emotional learning and well-being. A connected approach, where cooperation between the classroom, the student's home, the school, and sometimes the entire district provides students with ample structured and unstructured opportunities to learn and apply competences to promote their social, emotional, and academic success[19].

Various studies have also indicated no or unintended effects from school self-evaluation[20]:

- **No effect:** in contexts in which internal evaluation is not established or formally supported, as in Cyprus[21] and Uruguay[22]. Little change resulted either from the informal approaches to school self-evaluation, as reported by Ah Teck and Starr[23], or following the use of an optional tool by Vazquez and Gairin[24]. In Karagiorgi's (2012)[25] report on a project in Cyprus, teachers in a small primary school liked the collaborative approach taken to the introduction of school self-evaluation and found it easy to identify a priority for improvement. However, in the absence of any formal requirements, the planned intervention was not implemented, as teachers claimed to lack the time and resources to make changes.
- **Unintended effects:** common side effects from school self-evaluation are measurement fixation, heavy workload together with high levels of stress and anxiety among teachers. These are often associated with school self-evaluation results being used in external inspections, but may also arise without such inspections. MacBeath (2008)[26] comments that workload and stress can be managed by school leaders, who can emphasise the learning opportunity that is offered by the process, and allocate time for teachers to engage in school self-evaluation and offer supportive materials. For

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[14] Chapman, C. (2000). Improvement, Inspection and Self-Review. *Improving Schools, 3*(2), 57-63.

[15] Caputo, A., & Rastelli, V. (2014). School improvement plans and student achievement: Preliminary evidence from the Quality and Merit Project in Italy. *Improving Schools, 17*(1), 72-98.

[16] Cosner, S. (2011). Teacher Learning, Instructional Considerations and Principal Communication: Lessons from a Longitudinal Study of Collaborative Data Use by Teachers. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 39*(5), 568-589.

[17] Gallimore, R., Ermeling, R. M., Saunders, W. M., & Goldenberg, C. N. (2009). Moving the learning of teaching closer to practice: Teacher education implications of school-based inquiry teams. *Elementary School Journal, 537-553*(5), 133-157.

[18] Marsh, J., McCombs, J. S., & Martorell, F. (2010). How instructional coaches support data- driven decision making: Policy implementation and effects in Florida middle schools. *Educational Policy, 24*(6), 872–907.

[19] Elbertson, N. A., Brackett, M. A., & Weissberg, R. P. (2010). School-based social and emotional learning (SEL) programming: Current perspectives. In *Second international handbook of educational change* (pp. 1017-1032). Springer, Dordrecht.

[20] Nelson, R., Ehren, M., & Godfrey, D. (2015). Op cit.

[21] Karagiorgi, Y. (2012). Peer observation of teaching: Perceptions and experiences of teachers in a primary school in Cyprus. *Teacher Development*, *16*(4), 443-461.

[22] Va□zquez, M. I., & Gairi□n, J. (2014). Institutional self-evaluation and change in educational centres. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, *17*(3), 327-352.Verhaeghe (2010)

[23] Ah-Teck, J. C., & Starr, K. C. (2014). Total Quality Management in Mauritian education and principals' decision-making for school improvement. Journal of Educational Administration, 52(6), 833-849.

[24] Vazquez, M.I. and Gairin, J. (2014), op cit.

[25] Karagiorgi, Y. (2012), op cit.

[26] MacBeath, J. (2008). Leading learning in the self-evaluating school. *School leadership and management*, *28*(4), 385-399.

school self-evaluation to have positive effects, schools need capacity and support to analyse, interpret and use various types of information (see section 2 for a further discussion of the required support and capacity).

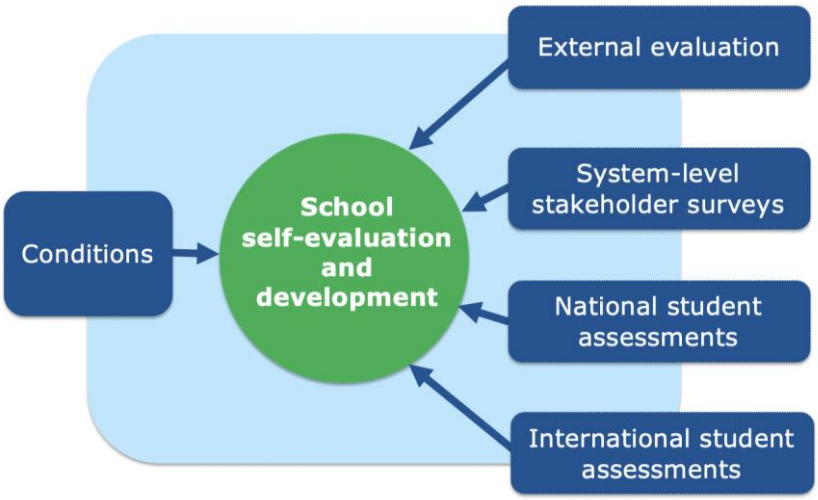
Despite the possibility of negative effects, research shows that there are many positive reasons for integrating school self-evaluation into quality assurance.

1.3 Supporting school self-evaluation and development

Supporting school self-evaluation and development can be understood and developed from two angles:

- the conditions that need to be in place at policy and school levels to promote and sustain meaningful school self-evaluation and development; and
- how school self-evaluation and development can be supported through quality assurance policies and practices, notably external evaluation, system-level stakeholder surveys, and using data from national and international student assessments.

Figure 1: Supporting school self-evaluation and development through quality assurance policies – focus of this report



Source: 2018-20 Working Group Schools

1.4 About this report

This report sets out **key considerations to guide policy making at national and regional level** on how to support school self-evaluation and development. The key considerations seek to be relevant to and adaptable by all education systems whilst recognising that each of them are different and complex. The report also includes recent **research findings as well as country examples** of policy development, provided by the ET2020 Working Group Schools members, which offer inspiration for how these key considerations can be realised in practice.

The report is structured as follows:

Section 1 provides an introduction to the report including definitions of key terms used (sub-section 1.3) and evidence on the impact of school-self-evaluation (sub-section 1.4).

Section 2 provides an analysis of what conditions need to be in place for meaningful school self-evaluation (sub-section 2.1). It then examines how policy makers can support school self-evaluation and development through external evaluation, system-level stakeholder surveys, and national and international student assessments (sub-sections 2.2-2.5).

These key considerations were developed by the **Education and Training 2020 Working Group Schools,** which is composed of representatives of education ministries of the EU Member States, EFTA and candidate countries, and European stakeholder organisations. They were developed in a series of full group meetings and two thematic seminars in Brussels (May and October 2019), and a peer learning activity in Zagreb, Croatia (February 2019). The seminars and the peer learning activity brought together, alongside Working Group Schools members, external experts including representatives of students, parents, teachers, school heads, local authorities, inspectorates, academic researchers, and non-governmental organisations.

The key considerations build on the outputs of the Working Group Schools under its previous cycle 2016-18[27] including the guiding principles on quality assurance for school development. These guiding principles underlined the importance of coherence across different quality assurance mechanisms, professional learning communities, trust and shared accountability, support for innovation, shared understanding and dialogue, networks between schools and with local and wider communities, capacity building, and the use of a range of qualitative and quantitative data for a balanced view of school performance.

1.5 Definitions of key terms

This section sets out definitions for key terms used throughout the report. These definitions have also formed the basis of a shared understanding among Working Group members.

- A **culture of quality enhancement** in school education places an emphasis on continuous improvement, with the overall objective of improving all children's and young people's learning and wellbeing. It is a collaborative culture based on trust and a sense of ownership, with all relevant stakeholders engaged. A culture of quality enhancement operates at all levels of the school education system. It highlights the importance of appropriate transparency while avoiding the counter-productive pressures of high-stakes accountability approaches. There is an openness to new ideas, including from outside the school education system. In a culture of quality enhancement, all stakeholders have a responsibility to contribute to achieving a shared vision and objectives for young people's learning and wellbeing.
- **Critical friends** are external partners, such as school heads and teachers from other schools, representatives of local authorities, researchers, or stakeholders who provide an external viewpoint and advice.

[27] ET2020 Working Group Schools (2018), European ideas for better learning: the governance of school education systems, Brussels.

- **External evaluation** is conducted by evaluators 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 aspects of the leadership and management of the school. This definition includes not only evaluations conducted by a national or regional inspectorate but also other forms of evaluation conducted by external partners such as teachers or school heads from other schools, representatives of a local authority, or researchers who provide external advice.
- **National student assessments** refer to standardised national assessments of student learning that are used to monitor the quality of education at system and school levels. A majority of European countries administer annual external student assessments of literacy and numeracy for students in primary and lower secondary schools (typically targeting students toward the end of primary and secondary school levels).
- **International student assessments** refer to assessments such as PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment), TIMSS (**Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study)** and PIRLS (**Progress in International Reading Literacy Study).**
- **Quality assurance policies and practices** may include school self-evaluation, external evaluation including inspection, system-level stakeholder surveys, national and international student assessments, and evaluation of teachers and school leaders.
- **School self-evaluation** is 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). It typically covers school activities such as teaching and learning and aspects of the leadership and management of the school, school environment, well-being etc.
- **Schools as learning organisations** is a concept which encourages and enables teachers and school leaders to improve both their pedagogical and organisational practices as well as their content knowledge and skills concurrently through local collaborative research, networking and continued professional development. This concept explicitly perceives one school as part of a network with other schools – so enabling co-construction of educational progress, as well as nesting individual schools within a supportive framework of governance, higher education institutions, parents and guardians and the local community.
- **Stakeholders** are individuals, groups, or formal organisations that have an interest in and/or responsibility towards improving school education. They include students, parents, teachers, school heads, local authorities, social partners, employer organisations, researchers, non-governmental organisations, and others.
- **Teachers and school leaders:** In this report we refer to both teachers and school leaders. We assume a broad understanding of the role of the teacher as extending beyond the pedagogical practice of the classroom. Whilst teachers may take on minor or temporary leadership roles – as project managers, or pedagogical specialists – we also use the term 'school leader' to refer to those who hold a formal position of responsibility for the management of the school. However, school leaders are also teachers, as they are also still involved in learner development, both in and out of the classroom.
- **School heads:** Along teachers and school leaders, this report refers also to school heads. The term "school head" refers to the most senior school leadership position - the person with overall responsibility for the pedagogical and administrative management of the school or cluster of schools. A school head can also be included in the broad definition of 'school leader'.

2. Policies to support school self-evaluation and development

Reflections of the Working Group members are at the heart of this report. This section sets out the results of their discussions, which were based on an exploration of research and on their own experiences of working with school evaluation. The section starts by analysing what conditions need to be in place for meaningful school self-evaluation, and more broadly, use of a range of qualitative and quantitative data to identify strengths and areas for improvement. It then examines how policy makers can support schools' self-evaluation and development through external evaluation, system-level stakeholder surveys, and national and international student assessments. Each area discussed presents **key considerations for policy makers at national and regional level**.

2.1 What conditions need to be in place for meaningful school self-evaluation?

Meaningful school self-evaluation requires a broadly shared vision on aims for education, a well-designed policy framework, and broad engagement of stakeholders. School self-evaluation needs to be evidence-led. The motivation and capacity of all main actors to gather, analyse, interpret and use a range of qualitative and quantitative data to develop clear strategies for school development are vital. These main actors include local administrators, school heads, teachers, and other school stakeholders. This section sets out the key considerations important for national and regional policy makers in creating conditions for schools to evaluate their quality and take action towards improvement. They address the importance of **trust, transparency, dialogue, shared responsibility and ongoing reflection at individual and collective level**. At the same time, they highlight the crucial role of **school leaders** in building and sustaining a culture of improvement.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

i. Define, together with all key stakeholders, a long-term future-oriented vision of education

ii. Ensure coherence of quality assurance policies, as well as coherence of quality assurance policies with broader education policies

iii. Raise awareness and motivation of the school community about the role of school self-evaluation and the importance of using evidence for improvement

iv. Invest in capacity building for evaluation of all key actors at every level of the school education system Support broad stakeholder engagement in quality assurance processes and ensure clarity of expectations, roles and responsibilities

v. Promote collaboration in schools, school networks, and cooperation with wider communities including researchers

vi. Provide tools, guidelines and approaches for school self-evaluation

vii. Allocate sufficient resources to support school self-evaluation

i. Define, together with all key stakeholders, a long-term future-oriented vision of education

At the national level, **education leaders and all key stakeholders can set a vision for student learning and well-being.** This may be in the form of an overall future-oriented mission statement for the education system or broad national objectives to support every child to develop his/her full potential as lifelong learners, informed and active citizens, and as stewards of the environment. Co-creation with all key stakeholders develops trust and engagement in external evaluation and school self-evaluation and development. **A widely shared vision may orient priorities for quality assurance throughout the education system.**

For example, in **Estonia** the Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020 was developed together with a broad range of stakeholders. The Strategy sets out a shared vision for education: 'Learning is a lifestyle. Development opportunities are identified and smart solutions are pursued.' The general objective is to provide all people in Estonia with learning opportunities that are tailored to their needs and capabilities throughout their whole lifespan, in order for them to maximise opportunities for dignified self-actualisation within society, in their work, as well as in their family life. To pursue the vision and the general objective, 5 strategic goals were established: i) a change in the approach to learning, ii) competent and motivated teachers and school leadership, iii) the concordance of lifelong learning opportunities with the needs of the labour market, iv) a digital focus in lifelong learning, and v) equal opportunities and increased participation in lifelong learning.[28] The new Education Strategy 2035 is now under development, and is to be based on the input and shared visions of experts and stakeholder groups.

ii. Ensure coherence of quality assurance policies, as well as coherence of quality assurance with broader education policies

Approaches to school and external evaluations, stakeholder surveys and student assessments should be part of an overall coherent framework for evaluation. As education systems emphasise broad aims for students' academic, personal and social development, evaluation methods will need to include a range of qualitative and quantitative data to create a meaningful picture of how well schools are meeting these aims. Discussion on ensuring coherence between school self-evaluation and external evaluation is further developed in sub-section 2.2.

The overall quality assurance framework also needs **to be aligned with broader education policies**, such as policies related to the teaching profession, curriculum design, or funding policies.

iii. Raise awareness and motivation of the school community about the role of school self-evaluation and the importance of using evidence for improvement

All members of the school community need to understand the purpose of school self-evaluation and its importance in achieving improvement. **Trust, transparency, and good communication** within the school and throughout the wider education system play an important role. **Motivation and ownership** of all key actors (local administrators, school heads, teachers, and other school stakeholders) are crucial. School self-evaluation should be the responsibility of all members of the community, and all actors should be empowered to act upon the decisions taken.

Awareness of the importance of school self-evaluation for improvement can be raised through **structured consultations with stakeholders**, **initial teacher education and continuing professional**

[28] More information is available at https://www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/estonian_lifelong_strategy.pdf.

development, co-operation with other schools through networks, evaluation of teachers and school heads, external evaluation, and recognition and awards. School heads have a key role to play in raising awareness, motivating and involving all staff as well as parents and students in the school self-evaluation process.

In **Belgium (French Community)**, the Inspectorate organises a working group to design individual external school evaluations (non-certifying). Working groups typically include teachers and pedagogical advisors from school networks, inspectors, representatives of the Ministry and a university research team. Once the actual inspection is completed, schools are required to develop an action plan setting out specific objectives based on the diagnosis of needs. They should include strategies for teacher professional development aligned with the objectives (teacher appraisals are conducted by an inspector). The Inspectorate, or an independent educational advisor, may organise training days to support individual schools or a group of schools in this process, and to encourage them to take ownership of the results.

In **Italy**, the management of the internal self-evaluation process is entrusted to the school head, who, as the legal representative of the school, is responsible for the content of the school self-evaluation report. He/she is supported by an internal evaluation team that consists of teachers selected by the full teaching staff. During the school self-evaluation process, the school head and the internal team encourage and support the direct involvement of the entire school community, including opportunities for internal reflection about the entire self-evaluation process.

In **Latvia**, improvements to school accreditation and school self-evaluation processes are ongoing. Schools are now required to involve all stakeholder groups (educators, learners, parents, founder, support staff etc.) in their annual school self-evaluation. To raise awareness of planned changes, the State Education Quality Service held regional seminars and also addressed the new requirements in continuous professional development courses in early 2020. The seminars and courses underscored that school self-evaluation is to be done annually and to involve all stakeholder groups (educators, learners, parents, founder, support staff etc.).

In countries where decision-making about some or most areas of the school sector have been devolved to the local or school level, 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, and engagement with school self-evaluation[29]. Awareness of and broad consensus about the importance of school self-evaluation is required to ensure school actors engage in a continuous and structured cycle of improvement.

Such awareness and consensus may require a **shift of teachers' and school heads' mindsets.** Change of ingrained habits often only comes about after a long process of transformation, spurred by support, consensus-building, negotiation and persuasion.

iv. Invest in capacity building for evaluation of all key actors at every level of the school education system

Opportunities to develop and deepen school evaluation literacy are relevant for school-level staff and other school stakeholders as well as policy makers at national and regional/local levels. Particularly at regional/local level, policy makers may develop their capacity to follow performance trends in order to identify resources needed, as well as to share effective practices more widely.

A focus on competences needed for evaluation and continuous improvement in **initial teacher education** can set the foundation for new teachers to engage in these processes when they begin their careers. Policy

[29] European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2015). Assuring Quality in Education: Policies and Approaches to School Evaluation in Europe. Eurydice Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

makers at the system level can support schools through support for **continuing professional development** of school heads, teachers and other school staff to strengthen their competences for evaluation and school development. These include support for **schools to develop as learning organisations** and to **co-operate with other schools through networks**.

In **Malta**, there are ten Colleges responsible for state Primary and Secondary Schools. These are governed by Heads of College Network whose role includes ensuring that schools within the respective Colleges collaborate in order to develop as learning organisations. Schools within the Colleges are given the opportunity to improve through participating in what is referred to as the Community of Professional Educators. Moreover, the Institute for Education provides continuous professional development modules vis-à-vis the internal review process.

Additionally, following the whole week external review, the Quality Assurance Department within the Ministry for Education and Employment embarks on a professional dialogue with the educational institution to provide guidance. The educational institution prepares an action plan template on how it will be addressing the recommendations. The Quality Assurance Department performs an unannounced follow-up visit the following school year so as to monitor progress.

School leaders' capacity to guide and support school self-evaluation is of particular importance. School leaders may support internal evaluation, for example, by modelling data use or in leading collaborative discussions, or by ensuring that resources are provided and that a culture is developed which is improvement-oriented and enabling of critical reflection and which challenges existing practices[30]. Although the school leader's role is considered as essential for successful school self-evaluation, ownership of the process through distribution of leadership among school staff is equally important [31, 32].

In **Italy**, Regional Education Offices organise training activities for new school heads during their induction period. They learn to develop and revise strategic documents, including the triennial school development plan, the school self-evaluation report, the improvement plan, and reporting to school stakeholders. The training lasts a minimum of 50 hours and is tailored to the profile of the school head. During their career, their performance is regularly evaluated, and the evaluations include a focus on how effectively they facilitate school self-evaluation, external evaluation and social reporting. Evaluators review their contribution to improvements in organisational processes, classroom teaching and learning, and student attainment.[33]

External evaluators, as well, may benefit from continuing professional development, particularly as approaches to external evaluation and school self-evaluation evolve in countries. These different stakeholders also may be involved in defining their own training needs.

In **Malta**, external evaluators need to have at least ten years' teaching experience and a minimum of four years' experience in a school management role. They are also required to update their knowledge through monthly **professional development** sessions organised by the Quality Assurance Department within the Ministry for Education and Employment and based on training needs that will help them keep up to date with policy changes. They are also continuously encouraged to seek opportunities for training especially within the Ministry focusing on learning and teaching.

The Ministry also takes part in **Structural Reform Support Programme (SRSP)** organised in partnership with the European Commission. This programme is aimed at seeking expert advice from inspectorates in other

[30] Nelson et al. (2015) op cit.

[31] Leung, C. K. L. (2005). *Accountability Versus School Development: Self-Evaluation in an International School in Hong Kong.* (M Ed M Ed), The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong. Retrieved from http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=20h&AN=16757471&site=ehost- live Available from EBSCOhost 20h database.

[32] Vanhoof, J., & Van Petegem, P. (2011). Designing and evaluating the process of school self- evaluations. *Improving Schools, 14*(2), 200-212.

[33] https://www.miur.gov.it/web/guest/-/dirigenti-scolastici-neo-assunti-criteri-e-modalita-per-la-valutazione-e-la-documentazione-del-periodo-di-formazione-di-prova- (in Italian)

European countries on the current national Quality Assurance framework and mechanisms used during external reviews. The programme makes use of the findings of the European Commission report "*Better Learning for Europe's young people - developing coherent quality assurance strategies for school education*"[34]. The programme also focuses on developing further the evaluative skills adopted during external reviews by external evaluators. All this is carried out through the organisation of various workshops in Malta where external evaluators discuss their practice with experts in the field. External evaluators also participate in study visits where they can shadow and observe the practice of colleagues within diverse European inspectorates.

Along this, Malta is a member of the Standard International Conference of Inspectorates (SICI) which offers opportunities for training through workshops organised by different European inspectorates. During these workshops, evaluators are given the opportunity to discuss various areas of relevance among which school self-evaluation which has in recent years developed into a strong area of interest, especially in relation to external evaluation and accountability. The Quality Assurance Department is actively participating in an **Erasmus+ project 'Better Inspection for Better Social Inclusion'**, also stemming from SICI. The project's objective is the creation of a toolbox for the evaluation and stimulation of social inclusion in education[35].

Willingness and capacity to change are often interrelated: willingness to change comes with having the capacity to do so, while capacity will only be built when there is a willingness to change (Elmore, 2006). Capacity may be built through training or other forms of development, where changing beliefs and motivation often require a process of negotiation (Christie and Monyokolo, 2018). It is also important to understand incentives and disincentives for change, to develop effective communication about the value of new approaches, and to ensure that appropriate social and structural supports are provided (Looney, 2015).

Support for schools for self-evaluation, both through the leadership of the **school head and other school leaders** (e.g. subject department leaders), and **external support of critical friends** (such as school heads and teachers from other schools, representatives of local authorities, or researchers) **and inspectors**, is crucial.

If school self-evaluation is to contribute to improvements in the educational experience of students in the longer term, then **capacity must be built both within the school and across the system** to ensure that reflection, monitoring and improvement become an institutionalised way of working and schools become learning organisations[36,37, 38, 39]. For capacity building to occur it is important that self-evaluation is recognized as **developmental** not only judgment. This emphasis on school self-evaluation as **developmental** is important in building trust and encouraging all school stakeholders to engage in self-evaluation processes[40].

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[34] European Commission (2018). Better learning for Europe's young people: developing coherent quality assurance strategies for school education – final report from European Commission's expert assignment

[35] The project brings together inspectorates, quality assurance and evaluation departments from Cyprus, Estonia, Flanders, Malta and Wales, and also some stakeholders from Spain and France. More information about the project is available at https://www.sici-inspectorates.eu/Activities/Projects.

[36] Grek, S. and Ozga, J. (2010). Governing education through data: Scotland, England and the European education policy space. British Educational Research Journal, 36: 937–952. doi:10.1080/0141192090327

[37] Plowright, D. (2007). Self-evaluation and Ofsted Inspection. Developing an Integrative Model of School Improvement. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 35*(3), 373-393.

[38] Marsh, J. A., & Farrell, C. C. (2015). How leaders can support teachers with data-driven decision making: A framework for understanding capacity building. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 43*(2), 269-289.

[39] Simons, H. (2013). Enhancing the quality of education through school self- evaluation In M. K. Lai & S. Kushner (Eds.), A Developmental and Negotiated Approach to School Self-evaluation. Advances in Program Evaluation Volume 14. Bingley, UK: Emerald Group Publishing.

[40] Livingston, K. & McCall, J. (2005) Evaluation: judgemental or developmental?, European Journal of Teacher Education, 28:2, 165-178, https://doi.org/10.1080/02619760500093198.

In addition, schools need to have **sufficient autonomy** to capitalise on the benefits of school self-evaluation[41].

v. Support broad stakeholder engagement in quality assurance processes and ensure clarity of expectations, roles and responsibilities

Broad stakeholder engagement in quality assurance processes can promote transparency, trust and ownership. Engagement of stakeholders in the actual school self-evaluation is vital to meaningful school self-evaluation, as well as in the design of national policies which incentivise school self-evaluation. Stakeholders' involvement on both the national and school level can create a high trust environment which enables those involved to learn about weaknesses and areas for improvement and ensure holistic school development where views of all relevant actors are taken into account.

As an example, **Estonia** has had school self-evaluation as a focus of thematic inspections for the past two years. One of the sub-topics within the theme of self-evaluation has been on how schools engage stakeholders in school self-evaluation. Schools have a legal obligation to engage stakeholders, but are also encouraged to engage a broader range of stakeholders than required in order to promote transparency and ownership of the self-evaluation process. As part of the thematic review, inspectors have focused on school self-evaluation plans that school leaders submit to their boards of trustees for their input and approval, and which include specific plans for stakeholder engagement.

In **Malta**, the School Internal Review and Support Unit within the Directorate for Educational Service at the Ministry for Education and Employment supports schools in their ongoing cyclical reflective process, with the aim of improving educational outcomes for all learners. Schools identify priority targets and school action plans to support improvement. All schools are externally reviewed by the Quality Assurance Department. The aim is to evaluate the quality of planning and equity in achievement of required quality standards.

In **Italy**, both school self-evaluation and external evaluation share the same evaluative framework which allows for transparency and involvement of the whole school community. The framework is based on three dimensions: context, results and processes which in turn are specific areas for evaluation. The transversal guiding principles backing the whole process are equity, participation, quality and differentiation. Equity relates to the necessity to guarantee the achievement of key competences for all students. Participation is related to assuring that all students have the same learning opportunities regardless of their social background. Quality relates to the degree to which activities and processes assure all students' learning and well-being. Differentiation concerns the flexibility to adapt processes and activities to meet students' needs.

Stakeholders should be engaged throughout the various phases of the evaluation cycle. During the first phase, schools complete their self-evaluation report. They may involve students, families, teachers, administrative and ancillary staff, as well as local bodies and network representatives in this process. In cases schools do not have an open consultation, different stakeholders' interests nevertheless are taken into account. School external evaluation involves interviews with students, parents, teachers, administrative and ancillary staff in order to get their point of view on the different areas covered. Finally, the school reports to all stakeholders and explains and justifies the results.

In **Slovenia**, all schools and pre-schools have been required to conduct an annual self-evaluation since 2008 (as set out in amendments to the Organisation and Financing of Education Act). Schools are to use the self-evaluation process to review student achievement and progress toward the school's development plan, and to set out strategies for quality enhancement. Schools also track their students' performance relative to national and international student assessments. Within the school, all teachers, school counsellors and other staff, parents and participants in the education process participate in whole-school review and the work plan development. At the end of the school year, the teaching staff and the school council (i.e. representatives of

[41] European Union (2015). *Comparative Study on Quality Assurance in EU School Education Systems – Policies, procedures and practices*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 201

the founder, employees and parents) examine the school's self-evaluation report, paying attention to the outcomes and impact of the teaching programme and of school policies. They then provide their feedback and propose changes. The findings from the school self-evaluation are reflected in the school's development programme and the new annual work plan at the beginning of the next school year.

The engagement of stakeholders in internal and external school evaluation at the school level needs to **be actively supported** to ensure they can and do make a constructive contribution to holistic school development. Some stakeholders, such as students and parents, may need support to ensure their involvement. School leaders need to exercise inclusive leadership to ensure parents and students feel welcome and teachers are confident to engage with them[42].

In **Ireland,** the importance of student voice is articulated in the Quality Framework for primary and post-primary schools which was published by the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills in 2016. That Quality Framework, which is called 'Looking at Our Schools', is designed to support the efforts of teachers and school leaders, as well as the school system more generally, to strive for excellence in schools. The Quality Framework places an emphasis on valuing the views of students, on recognising students as stakeholders, and on supporting students in taking leadership roles in the life of the school. At the level of the classroom, the Quality Framework highlights the importance of enabling students to contribute their opinions and experiences to class discussion as well as the importance of listening to and respecting the opinions and experiences of others.

Stakeholder engagement in quality assurance processes will only contribute to a high trust environment and holistic school development when there are **clearly defined roles and responsibilities and a structure for participatory decision-making** which includes these stakeholders, where the involvement is not a tokenistic activity but stakeholders have an actual voice and are integral to the school improvement process and policy development and have a sense of shared responsibility [43,44]. Such involvement can be promoted at the school level by giving stakeholders an active role in school evaluation, discussing outcomes of external evaluation and assessment with them, and giving them a formal role in school participatory decision-making (e.g. establishing school-based parent/student councils, implementing home-school community liaison schemes, parental representation on school boards)[45]. Stakeholders who participate in formal consultations should receive information on how their feedback was used.

Representativeness of stakeholder engagement needs to be ensured and **all voices, including those of disadvantaged groups, need to be heard**. Guidelines on selection of and engagement with stakeholder representatives can support transparency of processes. Efforts should be made to ensure that disadvantaged groups are included and that they are supported to fully participate. It is important to use different methods for gathering stakeholder input such as consultations, which allow for in-depth discussions of issues, and large-scale surveys, which allow for more voices to be heard.[46]

At the school level, informal and non-formal methods of engaging stakeholders (e.g. through community activities, opportunities for parents to support classroom learning, and so on) may also support relationship-building and trust that are needed for open dialogue and discussion in formal consultations. Informal and non-formal methods can provide the opportunity for meaningful engagement with children and young people and ensure that their voices are heard.

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[42] Brown, M., McNamara, G., O'Hara, J. O'Brien, S. and Skerritt, C. (2018) The limitations, practical realities and conditions necessary for stakeholder voice in school self-evaluation (Working Paper No.5). Retrieved from Erasmus+ Distributed Evaluation and Planning in Schools (DEAPS)

[43] ET2020 Working Group Schools (2019), Interim Report 'Stakeholder Engagement in Quality Assurance Processes', Brussels.

[44] Brown, M., McNamara, G., O'Hara, J. O'Brien, S. and Skerritt, C. (2017) Country Background Report on Distributed Evaluation and Planning in Irish Schools (Working Paper No.1). Retrieved from Erasmus+ Distributed Evaluation and Planning in Schools (DEAPS) website: http://www.nber.org/papers/w15291

[45] Ibid.

[46] Idem.

Government representatives at national and local levels as well as school leaders need to develop the capacities to facilitate effective stakeholder engagement, to gather and respond to input, and to manage differences constructively. Stakeholder representatives may also need to develop capacities and processes to ensure they are sharing the viewpoints of the broad membership of their groups.

In **Croatia**, for example, a recent pilot project *External evaluation of primary and secondary schools* is in the first phase of implementation. It has been conducted in 20 primary and 10 secondary schools by the National Centre for External Evaluation of Education (NCEE) in accordance with the *Strategy for Education, Science and Technology.* The aim of this pilot is to analyse and evaluate an experimental model of external evaluation, to prepare and launch a nationwide external evaluation programme, to strengthen internal capacities for school self-evaluation, and to provide an external support network for school self-evaluation. The participating schools are working with the NCEE project team, critical friends and external evaluators. Each school appoints a school quality team and its coordinator. Critical friends have several significant roles: create feedback about the applicability of the suggested model for external evaluation, support schools during the preparatory process for external evaluation (concept, aim and process of external evaluation), support self-evaluation of schools, build capacity for long-term school development. The suggested model encompasses school management, work environment, teachers' professional development, cooperation with parents and local community, international cooperation, school curriculum, quality of teaching and learning, evaluation of learning outcomes and students' wellbeing.

In **Finland**, education providers (in many cases municipalities) are encouraged to make a local development plan either by themselves or together with other education providers in their area. The making of this strategic plan is supported for example by arranging government-funded training programmes. Some programmes require that each education provider sends a whole team to the training, including an education leader of the municipality, a chair of the education board, or the whole management team. The goal is to increase the knowledge of the strategic process and add common understanding of all members involved.

Engagement in the design phase of the policies to support school self-evaluation and development enhances co-creation and ownership. In **Belgium (Flemish Community)**, the reference framework for Quality in Education sets out expectations for good quality that education providers can agree on and which respects the autonomy of each school. The core of the reference framework consists of quality expectations. These are divided into four categories: 'results and effects', 'development of learners', 'quality development' and 'policy'. The reference framework is the result of a partnership between the Catholic Education Flanders, GO! Education in the Flemish Community, Provincial Education Flanders (POV), the Education Umbrella Organisation of Towns and Municipalities (OVSG), Consultative Body of Small Education Providers (OKO) and the Schools Inspectorate. The Framework was developed in a process of co-creation involving many stakeholders including pupils, parents, teachers, teaching supervisors, school inspectors, other education experts, researchers, trade unions etc. The **Flemish Steiner schools** made an active contribution to the development of the Framework.[47]

In **Latvia,** stakeholders are involved in the school accreditation process as experts in the quality evaluation of educational institutions and the implementation of educational programmes. These experts include school heads, representatives of higher education institutions, NGO's, education boards in municipalities. Involved experts need to participate in special courses on evaluation of education quality, which are organised on a regular basis by the State Education Quality Service. By strengthening co-operation to ensure a qualitative education process, a representative of the Latvian Trade Union of Education and Science Employees and the Latvian National Cultural Centre may participate in the accreditation as observers and provide conclusions to the head of the expert commission on the findings of the accreditation process.

In addition, feedback on how policies are working – 'quality assurance of policies' – is essential for further improvement. **Policies should be reviewed and refined with stakeholders**.

[47] ET2020 Working Group Schools (2019), Interim Report 'Stakeholder Engagement in Quality Assurance Processes', Brussels. Further information is available at http://mijnschoolisok.be/professionals; https://www.oko.be.

vi. Promote collaboration in schools, school networks, and cooperation with wider communities including researchers

National policies may promote and support collaboration within and between schools, for example by **encouraging schools to become learning organisations, to create professional learning communities, to develop joint practice, or to participate in school networks.** Having mutual support among schools has a long precedent within educational policy and practice, and the benefits of doing so are well documented within the research literature.

'Schools as learning organisations' encourage and enable teachers and school leaders to improve both their pedagogical and organisational practices concurrently through local collaborative research, networking and continued professional development. [48] The concept of the 'School as a learning organisation explicitly perceives one school as part of a network with other schools – so enabling co-construction of educational progress, as well as nesting individual schools within a supportive framework of governance, higher education institutions, parents and guardians and the local community.[49] Similarly, '**professional learning communities'** view individual school heads and teachers as part of a broader network of professionals with shared concerns. **'Joint practice development'** refers to co-creation, where partners agree on the nature of a given task, set priorities, co-design action plans, and then treat their implementation as a co-production.[50] Schools may also build bridges with **wider communities** including researchers to support school-level learning, to develop their capacity to work systematically with quantitative and qualitative data, and strategies for school development and improvement.

Networks are alliances working towards a particular common or shared goal(s). Therefore they may seek to change the status quo, including the performance or quality of other actors (e.g. supporting schools facing particular challenges). The goals may be redefined after some time as the network provides a way for synergies to develop and new ideas and innovative practices to emerge. Effective networking for quality and improvement in school education requires a deep understanding by policy-makers of their purpose and nature in order to adequately support their development and often be part of the network activity themselves.[51]

The effectiveness of these different approaches needs also to be evaluated in order to support their ongoing development. For example, at the national level, policy makers may encourage schools to monitor the effectiveness of collaborative models they are using, define key indicators and decide how and by whom they will be measured. Appropriate data generated by these different collaborative approaches should be taken into account at local and national levels of decision-making[52].

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[48] ET2020 Working Group Schools (2018), European ideas for better learning: the governance of school education systems, Brussels.

[49] OECD/UNICEF (2016) What makes a school a learning organisation? A guide for policy makers, school leaders and teachers

[50] Hargreaves, D. H. (2010). Creating a self-improving school system. Nottingham: National College for School Leadership

[51] ET2020 Working Group Schools (2018), European ideas for better learning: the governance of school education systems, Brussels.

[52] ET2020 Working Group Schools (2018). Networks for learning and development across school education Guiding principles for policy development on the use of networks in school education systems (2nd Edition). Brussels. European Commission.

vii. Provide tools, guidelines and approaches for school self-evaluation

Policy makers at national and local level can also provide various tools, guidelines and approaches, which may be **adapted for local contexts and needs**, to support schools in their self-evaluation and development. Tools may include new technologies and provide opportunities to collect and manage large sets of data – both quantitative and qualitative.

Various IT-tools and internet-based interactive platforms providing statistical data processing (e.g. performance of students aggregated by subject, grade or school phase) are used in several countries. **National frameworks with quality standards and guidelines on school self-evaluation**, as well as **databases with data on various indicators** (e.g. drop-out rates, satisfaction of students/parents) are other examples of tools used. **'Balanced score cards'**, which include multiple measures to provide a more complete picture of school context and performance, may be used to support reflection of school-level stakeholders. Tools should have filters so that different stakeholders can easily obtain data that is relevant for them.

In **the Netherlands**, for example, the Council for Primary and Secondary Schools has launched an initiative to provide **parental/student and other surveys** that schools can use. The results may be presented in an **online dashboard**, which allows comparison with other schools. This approach helps schools to sift through large data sets to identify what data are most pertinent to their specific concerns. Dashboards need to be designed in such a way as to best support the needs of the target group.

Serbia has different tools to support school self-evaluation. One of these tools is a **quality framework setting out standards and indicators**. The tool was developed with significant stakeholder input, and is now used nationally. A research project was developed to track how the tool was being used (sample-based research) as well as user satisfaction linked to the improvement of the quality framework. Serbia has also developed a **school report card** providing longitudinal data on school progress.

In **Estonia,** there is an annual **competition for 'school of the year'**. The aim is to give schools an opportunity to emphasise other aspects than just the results of national tests. For example, great environment for studying, good teachers, active students and other things that the school considers important. Schools develop **video portraits** of their work (both students and teachers co-create the video).

Some countries also use **tools offering evidence of effective interventions**. Examples are 'what works' centres[53], which synthesise research evidence and make it accessible for various stakeholders across the system.

Depending on the country approach, **school self-evaluation may be based on centrally-developed quality indicators or indicators may be developed by individual schools.** The European Commission (2015)[54] and the OECD (2013)[55] explain how one implication of significant levels of devolution of responsibilities for evaluation and assessment are regional/local variations in the implementation of national policies. This has advantages as well as drawbacks. The diversity of approaches to evaluation and assessment allows for local innovation and for schools to gather meaningful data to address local concerns and priorities. Giving regions, municipalities and schools a large degree of autonomy may generate trust, commitment and professionalism. It might also encourage collaborative work within schools on the adaptation of evaluation and assessment procedures at the local level.

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[53] https: www.nesta.org.uk/blog/why-the-what-works-centres-are-working/

[54] European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2015). Assuring Quality in Education: Policies and Approaches to School Evaluation in Europe. Eurydice Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

[55] OECD (2013). *Synergies for Better Learning: An International Perspective on Evaluation and Assessment*, OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education, OECD Publishing.
doi: 10.1787/9789264190658-en

A major challenge lies in determining the appropriate balance between national-level measures for school evaluation, which help to ensure consistency of measurement across the system, and school-level measures, which allow for measurement of innovations and initiatives developed to meet local needs[56] (OECD, 2013). Bunt and Harris (2010)[57] argue that governments need an approach which combines local action and national guidance. Instead of assuming that the best solutions need to be determined, prescribed, driven or communities to develop and deliver their own solutions and to learn from each other. Indeed, schools will need sufficient autonomy to address areas covered in the school self-evaluation to realise the full benefits.

The discussion on digital tools is further developed and additional country examples are provided in sub-section 2.4 on national student assessments.

viii. Allocate sufficient resources to support school self-evaluation

Policy makers and school leaders need to allocate **sufficient human and financial resources** to conduct effective school self-evaluation as well as sufficient **time**. Human resources are the staff, their time and knowledge and skills (i.e. evaluation literacy) to engage in and act on school self-evaluation. Financial resources are needed in particular for the training and/or for the purchase or development of data collection tools to enable school self-evaluation. Time for developing and embedding evaluation literacy is frequently mentioned as a condition for successful school self-evaluation[58]. Time is also required for implementing improvements which have been planned as a result of internal evaluation.

In **Hungary**, for example, a new system of teacher career management and advancement was introduced in 2013. In this system, teachers can be promoted from "Novice Teacher" to "Teacher I", "Teacher II", "Master Teacher" or "Researcher Teacher". Master Teachers operate as experts, working on the quality assurance of schools and advising teacher colleagues, in close collaboration with the Educational Authority of Hungary. There are also school leaders who work as Master Teachers mentoring and advising their peers. Master Teachers cover educators and leaders working with students at ISCED levels 0-3[59]. Master teachers are provided with training to prepare them for working as advisors and supervisors. They also receive a higher wage. The time they regularly spend on expert activity is built into their working hours. Moreover, they are regularly involved on expert boards revising or formulating teacher competences or other school-related assessment criteria.

Figure 2 below describes the need to support schools in turning raw data (input, processes, outputs and outcomes) into information (context, implications for school development), and to turn information into knowledge (identification of good practices to address needs), and knowledge into action (concrete strategies). This transformation from data to information, to knowledge and to action is best achieved through dialogue and collective reflection within schools, and between external evaluators and school stakeholders. This is particularly important for developing a shared understanding of context and implications for school development. School stakeholders may then discuss among themselves, and with external evaluators, what might be done to build on strengths and address challenges for school improvement.

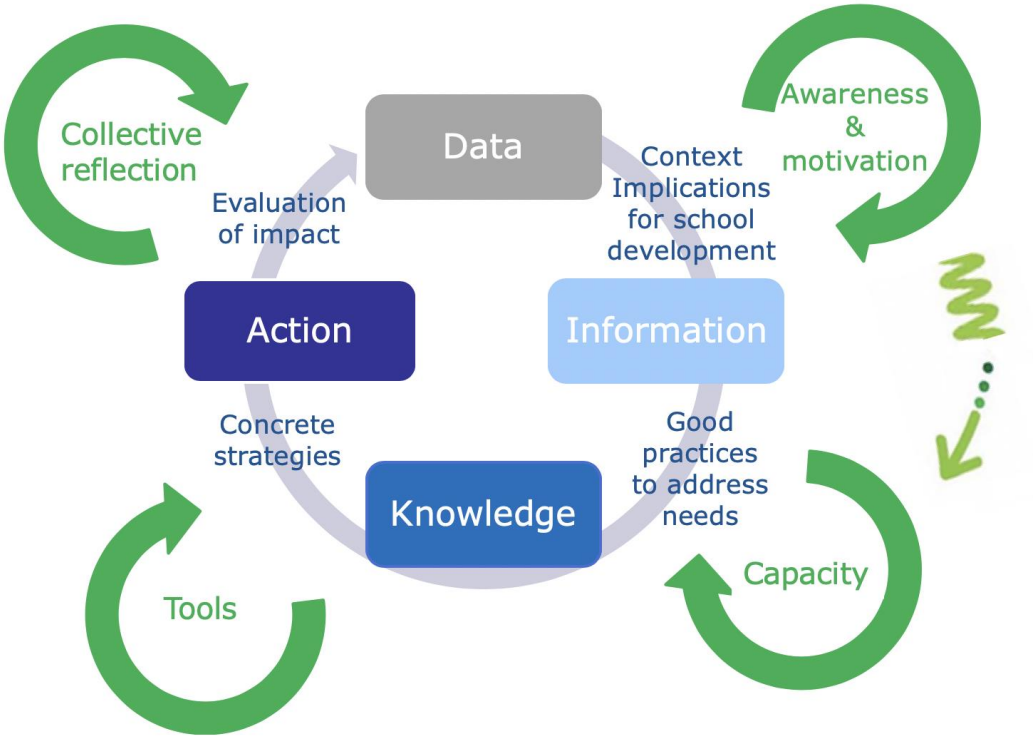
[56] Ibid.

[57] Bunt, L & Harris, M. (2010). Mass Localism, London, National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (NESTA)

[58] Nelson, R., Ehren, M., & Godfrey, D. (2015). Literature review on internal evaluation. *London: Institute of Education.*

[59] International Standard Classification of Education (2011)

Figure 2: Supporting schools to use data for improvement



Source: *Adapted from Schratz et al. (2019)*[60]

The figure highlights that awareness by all key actors and stakeholders of the importance of school self-evaluation and motivation to work collectively are the foundation for meaningful processes for improvement. Awareness and motivation are necessary if key actors, particularly school leaders and teachers, are to invest time and effort to develop their capacities for effective school self-evaluation, to use tools and develop concrete strategies for school development, and to reflect together and with external stakeholders on the impact of development plans and priorities for future work.

[60] Schratz, M. (2019), Presentation to the ET2020 Working Group seminar on policies to support school self-evaluation and development, 3-4 October, Brussels.

2.2 How can external evaluation support school self-evaluation and development?

Key considerations for ways in which external evaluation can support school self-evaluation and development are outlined in this section. The emphasis is on promoting coherence between external evaluation and school self-evaluation, and the support of inspectorates and/or 'critical friends' for effective school self-evaluation. Policy makers at both national and regional levels may also actively support stakeholder engagement in the development of evaluation policy.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

i. Policy makers can promote greater coherence between external evaluation and school self-evaluation

ii. Inspectorates or other national or local agencies can support school self-evaluation by providing guidance and tools, developing dialogue-based approaches, making evaluation of school self-evaluation and improvement an important feature of inspection, promoting collaboration in schools and networks, and sharing good practices

iii. Policy makers may also support other forms of evaluation conducted by third parties, such as 'critical friends'

iv. Policy makers can support broad stakeholder engagement in external evaluation

i. Policy makers can promote greater coherence between external evaluation and school self-evaluation

There is a **need for coherence and synergy in quality assurance** – that is, the effective interplay between **internal and external mechanisms** – in order to ensure that they best serve school development and innovation and allow schools to adapt to the changing needs of learners. These mechanisms have different but complementary purposes. Ideally, both internal and external evaluation are part of a coherent, integrated approach in which they support and reinforce each other [61] and duplication of efforts is minimised[62, 63]. When there is no coherence between external and internal school evaluation, findings may be

[61] ET2020 Working Group Schools (2018), European ideas for better learning: the governance of school education systems, Brussels.

[62] European Commission (2017). Quality Assurance for School Development: Guiding principles for policy development on quality assurance in education. Report of the ET2020 Working Group Schools 2016-18, Brussels.

[63] OECD (2013) op cit.

ignored and/or create conflicting messages for change[64]. Tight alignment, on the other hand, should also be discouraged as it may lead to a narrow focus on a small set of indicators[65].

A recent study by Ehren et al. (2013)[66] concludes that school inspections (through, the standards used to assess school performance, the feedback provided during visits and inspection reports) can have a direct immediate effect on the quality and responsiveness of a school's self-evaluation processes, and therefore school effectiveness. In order for school inspections to have such an effect, they need to provide valid and reliable data on school quality and performance, ensure that inspections are fair to all schools, and that inspection standards and feedback are actively communicated to schools and their stakeholders. Inspectors, or external evaluators in the broader sense, can also promote school self-evaluation by drawing on, and validating the outcomes of school self-evaluation, or by evaluating the robustness of the school's self-evaluation in their visits [67].

Some systems have sought to build bridges between external evaluators and schools in order to **create trust** as well as to **build evaluation capacity among school leaders and teachers.** For example, in **Lower Saxony** in Germany, changes in inspection procedures (in 2013 and again in 2018)[68] have led to greater involvement of teachers and school leaders in inspections. Piezunka[69] explains how inspectors have aimed to make inspections more acceptable to schools and more supportive of school improvement by changing the presentation of their data (more descriptive, less evaluative), by giving school representatives a greater say in formulating expectations about school quality, and having a dialogue during the visit about what constitutes evidence for school improvement and how to interpret it [70].

Beginning with the introduction of the new inspection system in January 2012, Ofsted in **England** has been including practitioners (serving head teachers of schools identified by Ofsted as outstanding) in inspection teams. They are trained in the inspection framework and deployed on inspection teams to assess peer schools. The aim of this change was to fulfil four functions: the creation of an inspection workforce that has current experience and up-to-date understanding of the way in which today's schools function; enhanced credibility with teachers, largely due to their perceived ability to relate and communicate with practising teachers and head teachers and, finally, due to their standing as teachers and head teachers in good or outstanding schools, the ability to share good practices with the schools that they inspect. The move has been welcomed by some head teachers who see it as a good way to ensure that they have 'Ofsted experts' on their staff and have the opportunity to see the most effective practice and to take it back into their particular institutions[71].

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[64] European Union (2015) op cit.

[65] Looney, J. (2011), "Alignment in Complex Education Systems: Achieving Balance and Coherence", *OECD Education Working Papers*, No. 64, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/5kg3vg5lx8r8-en.

[66] Ehren, M. C., Altrichter, H., McNamara, G., & O'Hara, J. (2013). Impact of school inspections on improvement of schools - describing assumptions on causal mechanisms in six European countries. *Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability*, *25*(1), 3-43.

[67] https://education.gov.scot/improvement/self-evaluation

[68] Sowada, M.G. & Dedering, K. (2016). Die Reform der Reform. In Arbeitsgruppe Schulinspektion (eds.), *Schulinspektion als Steuerungsimpuls?* (pp. 169-199). Wiesbaden: Springer VS

[69] Piezunka, A. (2019). Struggle for Acceptance – Maintaining External School Evaluation as an Institution in Germany. *Historical Social Research,* Vol. 44, No. 2, 270-287.

[70] Altrichter, H., & Kemethofer, D. (2014). Does Accountability Pressure through School Inspections Promote School Improvement? *School Effectiveness and School Improvement* (accepted for publication), 25 pages. DOI:10.1080/09243453.2014.927369

[71] Baxter, J.A. (2013) Professional inspector or inspecting professional? Teachers as inspectors in a new regulatory regime for education in England, Cambridge Journal of Education, 43:4, 467-485, DOI: 10.1080/0305764X.2013.819069

ii. Inspectorates or other national or local agencies can support school self-evaluation by providing guidance and tools, developing dialogue-based approaches, making evaluation of school self-evaluation and improvement an important feature of inspection, promoting collaboration in schools and networks, and sharing good practices

Inspectorates or other national or local agencies can facilitate and support school self-evaluation and help schools to make it more meaningful in a number of ways. For example, they may **provide guidelines and tools such as frameworks** with quality indicators to be used in school self-evaluation, **or toolkits and guidance documents** (these will ideally include the same indicators used by inspectors). Resources developed through a process of high-level engagement with front-line practitioners and that provide **sufficient flexibility for schools to adapt them to their own context** are likely to be more user-friendly and relevant.

Inspectors may also **share effective practices** based on their broad view of schools working in a range of contexts. They may **share their own insights and professional judgment** on elements of effective practice which are relevant for a particular school, and how these may be tailored to the school's own context. They may also **bring additional viewpoints in relation to school climate, the quality of development strategies, and teacher performance**.

Dialogue-based approaches to working with schools can build trust, engagement and ownership of all stakeholders. These discussions provide opportunities for external evaluators to share professional judgments while avoiding school rating, provide informative feedback, and model effective collaborative working. This approach, when effectively done, can also help strengthen the motivation and capacity of school staff and stakeholders to conduct an effective school self-evaluation process.

Education Scotland[72] has created an online 'national improvement hub' with self- evaluation guides and approaches to whole school evaluation. Resource packs are provided for different sectors (schools/colleges) on different subject areas and topics of interest which go beyond the standards in the external inspection framework. Topics vary from family learning, apprenticeship job training, raising awareness of disability hate crimes, and elements related to the national curriculum and transitioning to secondary education. As inspectors visit a range of schools, they also have the unique opportunity to share ideas on effective practice among schools.

In **Denmark**, school inspection is primarily risk-based. Risks are assessed based on school performance relative to national average examination results, the share of students continuing to tertiary education, the dropout rate, and the school's teaching effect –that is its ability to lift average students' grades compensated for students' socioeconomic background. In addition, inspectors may conduct thematic inspections (with themes identified at the national level) in a group of schools.

Inspection is dialogue-based; ministerial learning consultants assist schools to identify their challenges and to develop a focused action plan. In addition, subject inspectors regularly meet with teachers locally or in annual 'FIP-courses' (subject development in practice) for continuing professional development at regional level. Such FIP-courses are organised for teachers of a given subject for example to provide clarifications following the introduction of new curriculum or reform regulations, and for the Ministry to gather feedback on the implementation of new reforms. Nearly half of all upper secondary teachers participate in a 'FIP course' every year.

In **Sweden**, the Schools Inspectorate started regular quality review of the elementary and upper secondary schools in 2018. The aim of this review is to obtain a broad picture of the state of the Swedish education system as well as to provide a nuanced feedback to schools. When inspectors visit schools as part of the review, they investigate both what is working well and where improvement is needed. The review focuses on four key areas: (1) leadership, (2) teaching, (3) school climate, and (4) student assessment and grading. If

[72] https://education.gov.scot/improvement/self-evaluation

areas for development are identified, these are thoroughly described in a written document and include recommendations on how the school can continue to work to improve its quality. The school needs to report back to the Inspectorate and describe how they have worked within the identified areas to improve quality. During 2018 and 2019, the Inspectorate examined almost 400 primary and secondary schools.

Malta supports school self-evaluation by providing guidance and tools, developing dialogue- based approaches, making evaluation and school self-evaluation and improvement an important feature of inspection, promoting collaboration in schools and networks, and sharing good practices through the Ministry for Education and Employment's External Review models.

Focusing on school self-evaluation and improvement as key features of inspections and inspection reports may also incentivise schools to fully engage in the self-evaluation process.

In **Estonia**, for the past two school years the focus of thematic inspections has been on the quality of school self-evaluation processes. This focus on process – rather than the results of school self-evaluation – is intended to ensure that schools do not see self-evaluation as a high-stakes exercise. For example, a school that has identified a number of areas for improvement, may receive a very positive inspection report stating that it has the necessary procedures in place to ensure that the strengths and weaknesses of the school have been detected and are being adequately addressed. One of the reasons for having school self-evaluation as the focus for thematic inspection has been to promote its importance and to encourage school leaders and teachers to build their evaluation capacity.

Inspectors may also promote **collaborative work within schools and school networks** as an additional way to support dialogue and joint reflection among front-line practitioners on the range of data collected (including the results of national student assessments), school self-evaluation and improvement processes. School-level professional learning communities and school networks may support sharing of effective practices (e.g. for evaluation process as well as school improvement).

In **Northern Ireland**, in 2009 the Education and Training Inspectorate implemented area inspections of learning-networked communities which aimed to improve education across different stages in a geographical area. Throughout the process, the district inspector supported the community in setting targets for area-specific concerns and for the collection and interpretation of data to understand progress towards the targets. At the end of the area-based inspection, oral feedback was provided and discussed in a public forum with all stakeholders and interested individuals. Judgements on the quality of educational provision were provided by the individual organisation, and in composite area inspection reports which outlined both the strengths and weaknesses of each organisation, as well as overall inspection findings relating to the themes. A detailed description on the specific roles and responsibilities of each member to reach the identified targets for improvement was included in the composite report [73, 74].

In **Bulgaria**, the Inspectorate of Education in Sofia participated in a network of 10 schools where they collaboratively developed a framework for school self-evaluation, peer review and school inspections to evaluate the involvement of parents in school policy-making and evaluation. The outcomes of the various evaluations (including a thematic inspection report, describing parental involvement across these schools) resulted in a shift in mind-set where parents are increasingly seen as internal stakeholders and partners in school policy and evaluation, rather than external recipients.

[73] Ehren, M. C. M., Janssens, F. J. G., Brown, M., McNamara, G., O'Hara, J., & Shevlin, P. (2017). Evaluation and decentralised governance: Examples of inspections in polycentric education systems. *Journal of Educational Change*, Vol.18, No. 3, 365-38.

[74] Brown, M., McNamara, G., & O'Hara, J. (2015). School inspection in a polycentric context: The case of Northern Ireland. *Dublin:(EQI) Centre for Evaluation, Quality and Inspection*.

iii. Policy makers may also support other forms of evaluation conducted by third parties, such as 'critical friends'

Teachers and school leaders can strengthen their capacity for evaluation and improvement also through working with **'critical friends'**. Critical friends are external partners such as school heads and teachers from other schools, representatives of local authorities, or researchers who provide external advice, such as through **peer review**. Critical friends' input is highlighted as a very valuable practice to support school self-evaluation and development, especially if critical friends are able to bring practical expertise to the school development plan.

The following **elements can help to make peer reviews effective**:

- Well-trained lead reviewers with experience in evaluation methodology, and who are accompanied by a high quality reviewing team[75].
- A developmental approach to reviews, and a climate of trust between partners[76]. This includes openness and honesty regarding the school's weaknesses and strengths[77].
- Provision of resources, including validated data collection tools and time for analysis[78].
- Support for evaluation literacy and enquiry-oriented cultures for school staff[79].
- Ensuring that visits are well-timed to support school self-evaluation. Carrying out follow up visits focused on specific areas for improvement[80].
- Readiness to adapt to schools' needs and priorities is also important[81].

In **Portugal**, external school evaluation aims to encourage school self-evaluation practices and to promote professional ethics, to foster participation in school life, and to improve public understanding and knowledge of the school performance. The external evaluation team includes two inspectors and an external expert (a professor or researcher). Following a review of school data (the school's self-evaluation report and planning, statistics, and results of questionnaires to students, parents and staff), the external team visits the school or school cluster for a period of three to five days to interview stakeholders (students, parents, local authorities, community organisations, and so on) and observe education and teaching practices, as well as the quality of facilities, equipment and the educational environment. Representatives of different stakeholder groups participate in group interviews. The school/school cluster is classified according to performance in different domains on a five level scale: excellent, very good, good, sufficient and insufficient, and a report is given to the school for discussion about improvement measures. Schools have the opportunity to comment on the report. Schools are required to submit their improvement plan within two months of the external evaluation. The external report is made available on the Inspectorate website, and the school plan also needs to be made public (e.g. on the school website). Schools are also asked to complete a questionnaire about their experience of the external evaluation[82],[83].

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[75] Matthews, P. and Headon, M. (2015). *Multiple Gains: An independent evaluation of Challenge Partners' peer reviews of schools*, Institute of Education, Univeristy-College London, UK.

[76] Godfrey, D. (2016). Leadership of schools as research-led organisations in the English educational environment: Cultivating a research-engaged school culture. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, *44*(2), 301-321.

[77] Matthews and Headon (2015) op cit.

[78] Godfrey, D. (forthcoming), op cit.

[79] Ibid.

[80] Matthews and Headon (2015) op cit.

[81] Ibid.

[82] https://ad7557e9-66b4-425e-a8c0-c9091660b5c9.filesusr.com/ugd/f7be4b_ca3bff998fcb4ab2aed74ae7f74fc851.pdf

Different **European-level projects** have piloted international peer review/critical friend evaluation to strengthen evaluation competences, including for specific themes and concerns. For example, the ***e-evalinfo*** project[84] is an **Erasmus+ project** which promotes school-level peer mentoring on reducing early school leaving among migrant students. A primary aim has been to develop an ICT framework for evaluating, managing and developing activities that support learning in intercultural contexts. The website includes a collection of instruments to use in the peer review (e.g. reflection activities, interview questions etc.).

An ongoing Erasmus+ project (September 2017 – August 2020) ***Distributed Evaluation and Planning in Schools***[85] (; https://www.deaps.net/), focuses on enhancing social inclusion and combatting issues such as early school leaving. The aim is to support schools to develop inclusive quality assurance, with mechanisms that allow groups in danger of exclusion to have a voice. In Portugal, this model includes external critical friends from local area services or institutions (e.g. schools/colleges) who are able to identify weaknesses or validate existing good practices[86].

iv. Policy makers can support broad stakeholder engagement in external evaluation

Broad stakeholder engagement in external evaluation can promote transparency, trust and ownership. In various countries (e.g. **the Netherlands, Portugal, Ireland or the United Kingdom/England**) parents and students are interviewed during inspection visits and/or their views on school quality are surveyed prior to the visit. Ofsted has developed a tool - 'Parentview'[87] - for this purpose which allows parents to give their views of the school at any point in time. It also offers schools a toolkit to help them raise awareness of parents and their use of the tool[88]. Ofsted also publishes summaries of inspection reports in lay language to make these more accessible to parents and pupils. Furthermore, in England and the Netherlands, social media and reporting of complaints are analysed for potential risks of low quality in schools.

Stakeholders may also be engaged in the development of evaluation policy. For example, the **Dutch Inspectorate of Education** organises quarterly 'round tables' with all stakeholder groups (e.g. unions, councils for primary and secondary education, teacher representatives, parents and students) to discuss ongoing issues and changes to the inspection framework and to hear their views. The engagement of these stakeholder groups is also promoted through the annual inspection report which reports on the quality of each sector (primary, secondary and further education) and of specific thematic areas (e.g. quality of teachers) [89]. Some of the stakeholder groups (e.g. Ouders & Onderwijs, representing parents) also publish their own annual report on the inspection website[90] and in doing so give a voice to the groups they represent. The annual inspection report is published and discussed in an annual public conference which is co-organised with these stakeholder groups[91] The reports and discussions allow the various stakeholder groups in the Dutch education system to be actively involved in informing national policy.

In **Portugal,** an External School Working Group was created in 2016, with the remit to analyse the existing external school evaluation programme and to propose a new model. The Working Group includes representatives from the Ministry of Education and Science, the Education Inspectorate, the General

[83] Briga, E. Personal Communication, 6 January 2020.
[84] https://eavlinto.eu/
[85] https://www.deaps.net
[86] Figueiredo, M., Ramalho, H. and Rocha, J. (2017) Country Background Report on Distributed Evaluation And Planning in Portuguese Schools (Working Paper No.3).
[87] https://parentview.ofsted.gov.uk/
[88] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/parent-view-toolkit-for-schools
[89] https://www.onderwijsinspectie.nl/over-ons/samenwerkingen/overleg-met-het-onderwijsveld
[90] https://www.onderwijsinspectie.nl/actueel/nieuws/2019/04/10/onderwijsveld-komt-met-eigen-versies-van-'de-staat-van-...'
[91] https://www.onderwijsinspectie.nl/over-ons/samenwerkingen/overleg-met-het-onderwijsveld

Department of Education Statistics, the public and private school sectors, the VET school sector and three education science scholars. Once this work was completed, the third cycle of external evaluation (initiated in 2006 and following a five year-cycle) began in 2019[92]. In this third cycle, schools that do not agree with the external evaluation report they have received may appeal the results. School submit their appeal to a review commission, which is comprised of one academic, two representatives of public and private schools, and two representatives of the educational administration[93].

In **Belgium (French Community)**, the Platform for Educational Resources (PREN) is an initiative of the Digital Strategy for Education approved in October 2018. It aims to provide the entire educational community of the French Community with an interactive platform for consultation, and ultimately for sharing, validated resources that can be used to identify existing resources or design new learning activities, as well as to enrich knowledge or practices. A first version of the Platform was put online in 2019 and included various resource data: publications, tools and research produced or coordinated by the General Administration of Education, resources identified and evaluated by the scientific community, contextualised audio-visual content. A second enriched version of the Platform is planned for 2021 will be constructed in a collaboratively with shared contents by and for the educational community. Finally, in 2022, e-learning modules for teachers will be included in the Platform. Stakeholders are also actively involved in propose or further developing tools throughout this process.

2.3 How can system-level stakeholder surveys support school self-evaluation and development?

As set out in this section, system-level stakeholder surveys can highlight different perspectives on a range of topics. Stakeholders themselves may identify important topics to be included in the surveys. The results may be used at both policy and school levels to support improvement.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

i. Consider making use of system-level stakeholder surveys to get data on a broad range of issues

ii. Engage stakeholders in survey design

iii. Encourage students, parents, teachers and others to participate in the survey, for example through awareness-raising campaigns

iv. Analyse surveys at system level to inform policy

v. Make survey results easily accessible to schools so that they can reflect on them in their local contexts and use them for improvement

[92] http://www.ige.min-edu.pt/content_01.asp?BtreeID=03/01&treeID=03/01/03/00&auxID=

[93] https://www.igec.mec.pt/upload/AEE3_2018/AEE_3_Metodologia_I.pdf

Effective school evaluation requires **multiple perspectives**, including those of students, parents, teachers, and school heads. System-level surveys help to gain such diverse perspectives. Furthermore, they may cover a **broad range of topics, including views on areas that are difficult to measure through traditional assessment methods**, such as school climate and student well-being. Survey results may help to identify areas where policy interventions may be appropriate. School-level survey results may also be fed back to the individual schools to support their development [94].

Some countries undertake **systematic regular surveys of parents' and pupils' views** of the education they are receiving. The results of these surveys are then analysed nationally and used to inform overall monitoring and improvement planning for the system, interpreted alongside other evidence from statistical sources and inspection activity.

In **Estonia**, for example, a national survey of stakeholder satisfaction (for parents, students and teachers) was piloted and then fully implemented in 2018. An awareness-raising campaign helped to explain the importance of participation in the survey, and helped to ensure a good response rate. The survey, which is administered by the Ministry of Education and Research and the Innove foundation, is to be repeated, and will be designed to ensure that results are comparable over time and between schools and different regions[95].The results are sent to schools and school owners and they are encouraged to discuss them with a wide range of stakeholders. Schools are also expected to use the results as an input to their school self-evaluation. A portion of the survey results is made public[96]. The aim is to give stakeholders easy access to information about schools.

In **Norway,** there is an annual survey of school students in years 7 and 10, focused primarily on teaching practices. There are also voluntary surveys for teachers and parents, although these are more controversial and less used (partly because questions are sometimes difficult to answer and the link with the student system is not clear). Finally, there is tri-annual national survey of local administration and school leaders, which every school and municipality returns[97].

In **Finland**, the School Health Promotion Survey (SHP), designed by the Finnish National Institute of Health and Welfare, is administered with 4th and 5th graders and 8th and 9th graders, and 1st and 2nd graders in upper secondary education to monitor their well-being, health and school work. The survey, which takes approximately 45 minutes to complete, is administered during the school day to ensure a better response rate. The Finnish student organisation develops policy recommendations based on the outcomes of this survey, and in addition, has developed its own youth barometer (respondents 15–29 years of age) to capture elements not covered in the national survey [98].

Sweden surveys parents, students and teachers nationally. The focus is on safety and discipline. Inspectors use the results to identify which schools to visit. Results are also published online to inform parent choice. In the **Netherlands**, schools may use standardised surveys. The results of these should lead to dialogue for example with parents and students, so both quantitative and qualitative data are used.[99]

[94] European Commission (2018), op cit.
[95] https://www.hm.ee/en/satisfaction-education.
[96] https://www.haridusilm.ee
[97] As presented by the Norwegian member at the June 2019 meeting of the ET2020 Working Group Schools.
[98] https://thl.fi/en/web/thlfi-en/research-and-expertwork/population-studies/school-health-promotion-study https://thl.fi/en/web/thlfi-en/research-and-expertwork/population-studies/school-health-promotion-study
[99] June 2019 meeting of the ET2020 Working Group Schools.

2.4 How can national student assessments support school self-evaluation and development?

Key considerations for ways in which national student assessments can support school self-evaluation and development are outlined in this section. The emphasis is on avoiding high-stakes and engaging stakeholders in assessment design. Research and development on the use of digital assessment tools to support administration of assessments and on the provision of data to schools are also discussed.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

i. Build a system-wide culture of trust and transparency;

ii. Lower high-stakes that may inhibit school development by:

- avoiding publication of school-level results in ranking formats and 'league tables';
- using sample-based approaches to national assessment;
- using data from national assessments in conjunction with evidence from other sources.

iii. Engage the school community and other stakeholders in assessment design

iv. Invest in research and development of digital tools to support administration of assessments, broadening of assessed competences and provision of data to schools

i. Build a system-wide culture of trust and transparency

Education systems that aim to promote a more holistic and long-term approach to sustainable school improvement emphasise a culture of mutual trust and transparency in the use of assessment data. These systems prevent any high stakes national student assessments where poor performance may lead to school shut-down, or low public rankings. In countries where there are concerns that **high stakes** may inhibit development and innovation and demotivate staff, **countries have taken a variety of approaches to moderate their impact and to place greater emphasis on improvement.** For example, a number of countries highlight the importance of moving away from quality assurance as 'control' to more open and 'trust-based' approaches[100].

In low/medium stakes systems, school staff have an incentive to improve, but will be able to do so **through long-term planning**, addressing the needs of their entire student population rather than feeling pressured to develop strategic responses which lead to quick change. A **developmental approach** allows the development of a **system-wide culture of mutual trust and transparency** where schools actively engage in **discussing rich feedback** from inspection and testing, reflect on how this could inform their school development planning and engage the local community in these discussions.

[100] ET2020 Working Group Schools (2018), op cit.

ii. Lower high-stakes that may inhibit school development in particular by:

- avoiding publication of school-level results in ranking formats and 'league tables'

Most European systems **avoid publishing school-level results in ranking formats** and some European systems have even sought to **prevent media publication of school-level results in 'league tables'**. **Ireland**, for example, has passed legislation to ban such publication. Other systems have accepted a role for the transparent publication of school-level results but have taken steps to mitigate the risk of a crude 'high stakes league table' culture developing. One such approach involves arranging for schools' results to be published individually on their own school websites, perhaps with their results benchmarked against relevant 'national averages'. This makes it harder for the media to assemble school rankings, although they may still do so to some extent[101].

- using sample-based approaches to national assessment

Some countries use sample-based approaches to national assessment of a representative sample of students. Because schools are randomly sampled, **the aim is not to hold schools accountable for results, but rather to track trends in student achievement across the full curriculum.** This approach avoids high stakes, as the aim is to measure overall understanding of the curriculum, rather than individual student progress in specific high-priority areas. **Finland and Estonia**, for example, administer sample-based assessments, and provide information at the national level. **Portugal** also sought to promote 'fairer' comparison of schools' results, by using **'value-added' analyses** or identification of **'similar school groups'**[102].

- using data from national assessments in conjunction with evidence from other sources

Data from national standardised tests alone cannot be used as the basis of judgements about effectiveness. Most countries **use these data in conjunction with evidence from school inspections, school self-evaluation, and teacher and learner surveys** to triangulate and provide a more nuanced understanding of the functioning of the system[103]. Data-driven evaluation and data-based decision-making include the analysis of external test data, but often also draw on other sources of evidence to inform collaborative discussion about ways to improve teaching and learning, such as attendance and demographic data[104].

National assessments of student learning outcomes and standards are typically criterion-referenced. Because they measure student progress toward specific learning goals, they may be used to guide some instructional decisions. At the same time, it should also be noted that criterion-referenced assessments may also mask significant heterogeneity in the causes of poor performance, so additional assessments are needed to develop appropriate instructional interventions to meet diverse student needs [105,106].

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[101] European Commission (2018), op cit.

[102] The approach of identifying 'similar school groups' can ensure an individual school's results are benchmarked against the distribution of results of a group of peers who are serving pupils with a similar socio-economic profile. This can be done by assembling a comparator group from the school's 'nearest neighbours' or, more crudely, by simply dividing all the schools into 'bands' based on their socio-economic profile. In at least one case, the system has developed a method for creating a 'virtual comparator school' which is constituted from the national pool of pupils, to exactly match the school's socio-economic profile.

[103] ET2020 Working Group Schools (2018), op cit.

[104] Schildkamp, K., & Visscher, A. (2010). The Utilisation of a School Self-Evaluation Instrument. *Educational Studies, 36*(4), 371-389.

[105] Buly, M.R. and S.W. Valencia (2002), "Below the Bar: Profiles of Students Who Fail State Assessments", *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, Vol. 24, pp. 219-239.

iii. Engage the school community and other stakeholders in assessment design

The risks associated with narrowly focused analysis of assessment results can be mitigated by **involving students, parents, teachers and school heads, employers and the wider community in defining the learning outcomes and assessment methods** to be captured through assessments to ensure they are relevant to modern needs[107].

iv. Invest in research and development of digital tools to support administration of assessments, broadening of competences assessed, and provision of data to schools

Digital technologies provide automatic feedback on the results of large-scale student assessments to schools, with data aggregated at school and class level. These assessments support schools' self-evaluation and development. Digital assessments allow **more timely and pertinent feedback on student assessment with school and class level aggregate results**[108].

In Italy, national standardised tests are computer-based. The first advantage of ICT-based assessment is the capacity to administer different but equivalent tests in order to prevent collaboration among students. A second advantage is the automatic correction process [109], which translates into a lower workload for the teachers. Both the diversity of the tests and the automatic correction contribute to reducing cheating and obtaining valid and reliable results. The results are then returned to schools, setting out levels of student (cognitive) attainment in a descriptive scale. These more detailed descriptions support dialogue and collaboration between teachers in different subject areas on how they can support their students and improve overall school performance.

Some countries are investing in research and development of digital assessments which have the potential to assess students' 'higher order' skills. Many advances have been made in digital assessments, including innovative item formats, the automation of various assessment processes and efforts to improve the measurement of constructs[110]. Longer-term goals for digital assessment are to base content and format on competency models and on principles of cognition and the development of expertise[111]. Assessments would thus be aligned with "21st century" curricula and teaching methods that encourage situated problem solving. Such **digital assessments could be designed to support both formative and summative purposes and broaden the range of competencies** and constructs that can be assessed at scale. At this point, however, research and development for these very ambitious long-term goals is only in the early stages [112].

Some countries have developed sophisticated digital resources for schools which, alongside data from national assessments, also have the potential to **include comparative data on other statistics** which may be collected nationally, such as school attendance rates or disciplinary exclusion rates. Systems that have invested in creating these sorts of digital tools for schools also need to invest in programmes of training for staff, to help ensure they are used effectively [113].

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[106] Rupp, A.A. and N.K. Lesaux (2006), "Meeting Expectations?: An Empirical Investigation of a Standards- based Assessment of Reading Comprehension", *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, Vol. 28, No. 4, pp. 315-333

[107] European Commission (2018), op cit

[108] OECD (2013), op cit.

[109] With 'automatic correction', the student chooses an answer from those proposed responses or matches items or fills in a *cloze*. These are coded automatically by the system. As to open-ended questions, they are centrally checked by experts with correction grids based on the possible answers given by students during the pre-test phase.

[110] O'Leary, M. Scully, D., Karakolidis, A., Pitsia, V. (2018). "The State of the Art in Digital Technology-Based Assessment", *European Journal of Education*, Vol. 52, No. 2, pp. 160 – 175.

[111] Bennett, R. E. (2015). The changing nature of educational assessment. Review of Research in Education, 39(1), 370–407.

[112] O'Leary et al. (2018). Op cit.

[113] European Commission (2018), op cit.

In **Portugal**, the General Department of Education and Science Statistics has developed an online tool, 'infoescolas' ('schoolinfo'). This tool provides demographic information for each school, as well as a dashboard with a wide range of indicators on the school's results. The dashboard allows comparison over time and relative to other schools with similar demographic characteristics. The tool contains filters to help users find the most relevant data [114].

In England, Ofsted's data dashboard[115], which is accessible to schools and their governors, provides a summary of results over a three-year period, along with comparisons to other schools or providers. The data are expected to be used by governors to generate key questions to support and challenge the leadership team, and by the leadership team to evaluate and develop the school's quality. The dashboard highlights where performance in specific subjects is below, at or above the national average.

In Estonia a public visual educational statistics database HaridusSilm[116] (the Eye of Education) is used. It presents statistical data about education, research and development, language policy and youth field. What is more, key information on all schools in Estonia is published there and anyone, including all stakeholders, can use it to find out more about educational institutions.

2.5 How can international student assessments support school self-evaluation and development?

International student assessments are important for benchmarking overall education system performance. Policy makers may use them to motivate reform and to identify effective policy strategies. However, policy makers need to be cautious that such assessments do not lead to a narrowing of national education goals.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

i. Consider using international student assessments to identify effective policy strategies

ii. Ensure that international student assessments do not lead to a narrowing of national education goals

i. Consider using international student assessments to identify effective policy strategies

International student assessments, such as PISA, PIRLS and TIMSS, are **macro-level monitoring instruments** and provide information to policy makers and other stakeholders on how students in their country compare, in terms of academic achievement, to students in other countries[117].

The OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) tests reading, mathematics and science performance of 15 year-olds, takes place every three years and is the largest international competence test for school pupils. In an EU perspective, PISA results are particularly important because they

[114] http://infoescolas.mec.pt/

[115] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/777184/Inspection_data_summary_report_anonymised_2018_further_education_report_070219.pdf

[117] Pereyra, M. A., Kotthoff, H. G., & Cowen, R. (2011). PISA under examination: Changing knowledge, changing tests, and changing schools. In *PISA Under Examination* (pp. 1-14). Brill Sense.

feed into the strategic cooperation framework 'Education and Training 2020' (ET2020). They are the basis for one of the ET 2020 benchmarks: the rate of underachievers in reading, mathematics or science among 15 year-olds in the EU should be less than 15% by 2020. Underachievers in PISA are those pupils who fail to reach the minimum proficiency level necessary to participate successfully in society. PISA also makes it possible to analyse national performance by gender, socio-economic status and immigrant background, and contains other contextual information on the school environment and pupils' attitudes, such as their plans for further education, their assessment of their own exposure to bullying and sense of belonging at school. [118]

The **Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS)**, organised by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), provides internationally comparative data on how well children read and offers policy-relevant information for improving learning and teaching. The study is administered at a key transition stage in children's reading development: the change from learning to read to reading to learn. Assessing reading achievement at this crucial stage provides educators and policy makers with key insights into the effectiveness of their education system and helps to identify areas for improvement.[119]

The IEA's **Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS)** is an international assessment of student achievement in mathematics and science at fourth and eighth grades. Countries that participate in multiple cycles of TIMSS can monitor trends in student achievement while assessing changes that have occurred in curriculum, instruction, and other aspects of education that affect learning.[120]

In addition to PISA, PIRLS and TIMSS, there are also international surveys to measure digital, civic and citizenship competences. The **International Computer and Information Literacy Study (ICILS)** was carried out in 2013 and 2018, allowing participating countries to monitor changes over time in their students' computer and information literacy achievement and its teaching and learning contexts.[121]

The **International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS)** investigates the ways in which young people are prepared to undertake their roles as citizens in a world where contexts of democracy and civic participation continue to change. The study was first implemented in 2009, with a follow up cycle in 2016. ICCS reports on students' knowledge and understanding of concepts and issues related to civics and citizenship, as well as their beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours with respect to this domain. In addition, ICCS collects rich contextual data on the organisation and content of civic and citizenship education in the curriculum, teacher qualifications and experiences, teaching practices, school environment and climate, and home and community support.[122]

International assessments **impact the classroom through the national policies that are developed in response to their outcomes.** It has been observed that PISA has informed the global debate about which countries have high performing systems, informing policy makers about potential policies that are assumed to be effective to ensure high learning outcomes (so called 'policy borrowing') or legitimising policy problems and agendas[123]. In addition, PISA has created public pressure for countries to improve their education systems[124]. An example is Germany which, in 2000 experienced a 'tsunami' of political and media responses to what it considered a deplorable position in the league tables. This led, according to Gruber (2006)[125], to a

[118] European Commission (2019). PISA 2018 and the EU – Striving for social fairness through education; https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/document-library-docs/pisa-2018-eu_1.pdf

[119] https://www.iea.nl/studies/iea/pirls

[120] https://www.iea.nl/studies/iea/timss

[121] https://www.iea.nl/studies/iea/icils

[122] https://www.iea.nl/studies/iea/iccs/2016

[123] Carvalho, L. M., & Costa, E. (2015). Seeing education with one's own eyes and through PISA lenses: Considerations of the reception of PISA in European countries. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, *36*(5), 638-646.

[124] Breakspear, S. (2014, November). How does PISA shape education policy making? Why how we measure learning determines what counts in education. In *Centre for Strategic Education Seminar Series Paper* (Vol. 40).

[125] Gruber, K. H. (2006, May). The German 'PISA-Shock': some aspects of the extraordinary impact of the OECD's PISA study on the German education system. In *Cross-national attraction in Education accounts from England and Germany. Oxford: Symposium Books*.

host of in-service teacher training, improvement of language teaching in pre-school, special support for immigrant children, measures to improve the diagnostic and methodological competence of teachers and programmes to modify school buildings for whole day use.

The outcomes of international student assessments have also been used for research purposes to understand why some systems are performing better than others[126,127], and they may promote learning and exchange between countries. For example, PISA has provided in-depth analyses of countries that are able to achieve both quality and equity of student outcomes. Findings on the relationship of school autonomy, school capacity and student outcomes have also informed education policy decisions on governance arrangements.

ii. Ensure that international student assessments do not lead to a narrowing of national education goals

Some scholars argue that PISA has limited countries in their view of what matters educationally (restricting reforms to focus on academic outcomes), evaluating these reforms on the basis of PISA benchmarks and relative rankings to other countries, or developing benchmarks for schools which are compared against those in international assessments[128].

The decision to ensure that international assessments do not lead to a narrowing of education policies is ultimately political. As Michel (2017)[129] notes that inventories of education reforms across Europe show a diversity of approaches, and that country policies are ultimately grounded in their historical, socio-demographic and cultural contexts.

Due to their methodological design (administration at three-year intervals, targeting to specific age groups, sampling on the national level and disconnection from national school curricula, and lack of school stakeholder engagement), **international assessments have limited direct relevance at individual school level** [130].

Many countries have invested into developing national student assessments and have also well-developed approaches to external evaluation. These may be better suited to support school self-evaluation and development, also as they can better take into account local contexts and needs.

There are also some efforts to make the international data 'actionable' at school level. For example, the recently-introduced PISA for Schools aims at introducing competence-based assessments, and benchmarking performance at an international level. The accumulation of data from participating schools over time may also allow a more finely-grained analysis of school-level practices and student outcomes.

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