European Education Area Strategic Framework

Working Group on Schools, sub-group Pathways to School Success

Assessing learners' competences: policies and practices to support successful and inclusive education

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Working Group on Schools,
subgroup 'Pathways to School Success'**

*Assessing learners' competences: policies
and practices to support successful and
inclusive education*

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2023

LEGAL NOTICE

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Under its 2021-25 mandate, the Working Group on Schools, subgroup Pathways to School Success[1] supports the implementation and follow-up of the Council Recommendation on Pathways to School Success[2], which aims to reduce underachievement and early leaving from education and training, as well as promoting well-being at school.

The Working Group contributes to high quality, inclusive education across the European Education Area through its analysis of how **more inclusive, culturally responsive and participatory assessment practices** can be supported, with the overall objective of improving learning and well-being for all children and young people.

The Group focused its work on exploring the overarching question of how effective alignment of formative and summative assessments (sometimes described, respectively, as "assessment *for* learning" and "assessment *of* learning") of learners' key competences can be ensured, supported and more effectively integrated into teaching and learning.

Key themes which emerged during Working Group discussions were on the need to:

- ensure a balanced and coherent approach to assessing student competences;

- ensure that approaches to student assessment are 'fit for purpose'; and

- develop a long-term strategy to integrate new approaches to assessment across systems

While education systems vary, they also face a number of **common challenges** to ensuring effective and inclusive assessment of learners' key competences. These include:

- *Parental resistance to changes in assessment methods.*

- *Teacher resistance to new assessment policies and practices, based on practical challenges*

- *Challenges in ensuring that new assessment approaches are consistently implemented across systems.*

- *Lack of attention to supporting social-emotional learning and development, as well as to tools to assess them.*

- *Few opportunities for learners and other stakeholders to share their experience and views on assessment at policymaking or school and classroom levels.*

The report sets out key messages to guide policymaking at national and regional levels on how to support effective classroom-based formative and summative assessment. The key messages aim to

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[1] The Working Group comprises representatives from all Member States, EFTA countries and EU candidate countries, international organisations and stakeholder organisations.

[2] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32022H1209(01)

be relevant to and adaptable by all Member States – while also recognising that each education system has its own context, culture, and history.

The report also includes country and stakeholder examples of policy development, provided by the members of the Working Group on Schools. These may offer inspiration for how these key messages can be developed in different contexts.

KEY MESSAGES FOR NATIONAL AND REGIONAL POLICYMAKERS

1) ENSURE A BALANCED AND COHERENT APPROACH TO ASSESSING STUDENT COMPETENCES

- **Develop a clear, shared vision and aims for student learning, personal development and well-being, through a collective process involving a broad set of internal and external school stakeholders**. This can provide a powerful foundation for change in schools, including the development of innovative learning environments and effective approaches to assessing student competences.

- **Ensure coherence across the overall vision, curriculum, learning standards and assessment (external and classroom-based, formative and summative).** If these aspects are not coherent, it is impossible to have a clear view of student learning or develop effective strategies for learning and school improvement. New approaches to assessment may be needed as school systems introduce competence-based curricula. Keeping curriculum and assessment approaches consistent between primary and secondary education, as well as between secondary and university levels, can facilitate learner transitions.

- **Embed the core principles of inclusion, equity and participation in the design and implementation of assessment of student competences.** At classroom, school and policymaking levels, taking meaningful account of learners' opinions of assessment practices is essential.

- **Establish effective vertical communication channels and develop a shared vocabulary between and among policymakers and school leaders, teachers, parents and students (top-down/bottom-up).**

- **Encourage and facilitate horizontal communication and dialogue, across networks and in schools (school networks and teacher professional networks, teacher educator and other education stakeholder groups), and between educators, learners and their parents – to help implement new curricula and assessment methods, as well as innovation.**

2) ENSURE THAT STUDENT ASSESSMENT APPROACHES ARE "FIT FOR PURPOSE"

- **Keep the focus on the process of student learning, development, and well-being, rather than solely on academic results.** Attention to helping all learners to develop and improve can support greater equity and inclusion.

- **Disseminate high-quality research and proven good practice in classroom-based assessment that support equity and inclusion and put learners at the centre of the assessment process, and which may inspire broader take-up across school systems.**

- **Develop assessment as an integrated part of teaching and learning processes**[3]. Development should begin in initial teacher education programmes, which should address assessment of competences to be developed in various subject areas, as well as cross-cutting competences. Support for ongoing professional learning communities and other networks, as well as continuing professional development (CPD) programmes to support teachers, is also essential.

- **Encourage teachers to use a combination of assessment approaches, including standardised and alternative assessments, administered over time to support a more well-rounded view of student progress**. Assessments that capture learners' cross-cutting competences, including for personal and social development, and for learning to learn, are an important part of the mix.

- **Support teachers as professionals.** Trust in teachers' professionalism is essential to acceptance of alternative, non-standardised assessments of learner competences. Scoring rubrics with criteria and training to support a shared understanding of educational levels can make alternative assessments more reliable and support teachers' professional development.

- **Invest in further research on effective formative assessment practices and how to adapt the next steps in classroom learning processes**. Controlled studies can provide information on the impact of various approaches and support evidence-based practice. Qualitative research with learners may also provide further insight into how different learners experience formative assessment, and this can support inclusion. Classroom-based formative assessment can be used to identify different learners' needs and tailor the next steps in teaching and learning.

- **Invest in further research into new and more effective ways to report learners' progress, and maintain trust-based relationships with parents and learners.**

3) DEVELOP A LONG-TERM STRATEGY TO INTEGRATE NEW APPROACHES TO ASSESSMENT ACROSS SYSTEMS

- **Ensure that long-term change strategies follow the overall vision for education (key message 1) and draw up a clear plan for implementing and evaluating change processes and their impact.** Change strategies need to build on existing national and regional education contexts and cultures.

- **Take a gradual, strategic approach to introducing changes over time and piloting and refining new assessment approaches in selected schools and school networks, before introducing system-wide change.** Changes may also be introduced for a certain primary school cohort and developed in later grades as they progress through school.

- **Support school leaders (school heads, department heads and other leaders) to steer whole-school change, involving all school staff, learners, parents, and other stakeholders in the introduction of new approaches to assessing learners' competences.** Leadership of collaborative school evaluation (internal and external) and school development plans is essential to effective change processes.

- **Guarantee teachers autonomy in integrating new approaches to assessment and provide access to relevant professional learning opportunities as well as to practical guidelines, tools and examples of good practice.** Teachers' involvement in change processes and confidence in their ability to integrate new methods are essential to long-term change.

- **Ensure that teacher certification examinations, professional standards, teacher appraisal and school evaluations all require teachers to demonstrate competences related to classroom-based summative and formative assessment of learner competences**. Consistent emphasis on the need for teachers to develop their capacity to assess learner competences will also provide incentives for teacher educators (both in ITE and in CPD) to include assessment as a significant area for study and as part of their own teaching and learning approaches.

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