

## Executive summary

A central drive of recent educational policy making in Luxembourg has been to develop evaluation instruments to strengthen the focus on student performance and progress in classrooms, schools and at the policy-making level within the Ministry of National Education and Vocational Training (MENFP). This has come alongside an increased degree of autonomy for schools, although the school system remains highly centralised with the MENFP responsible for the planning and administration of all teaching in public schools. The MENFP directly appoints a school leader (*directeur*) in public secondary schools, but each fundamental school is under the authority of a local education authority *inspecteur*, who in the absence of a permanent school leader, monitors fundamental school compliance to laws and regulations and reports back to the MENFP. Typically at age 11, children are assessed primarily on their ability in German, French and mathematics and selected to attend either general secondary education (ES) or technical education (EST).

Both national and international evidence point to some worrying inequities within the Luxembourg school system: grade repetition is a common practice that contributes to a high age-grade discrepancy; and international comparisons of student performance at age 15 reveal a larger than average group of low performing students and a major performance disadvantage for students with an immigrant background. In response, 2009/10 saw the reorganisation of the first nine years of schooling into four pedagogical cycles, each with a defined set of competency-based learning objectives (*socles de compétences*) that students must master by the end of the cycle in order to progress to the next pedagogical cycle. Students who have not achieved all learning objectives by the end of the cycle, can follow a special third year programme. Competency-based learning objectives have been introduced in French, German and mathematics in lower secondary education, but there is an ongoing discussion with key stakeholders to extend this throughout secondary education. Further, new student assessment initiatives have been introduced, including: requirements for teachers in fundamental schools to document student learning progress; new standardised national assessments to monitor student outcomes against the learning objectives in French, German and mathematics in fundamental school (start of Cycle 3) and in lower secondary education (Grade 5ES and 9EST); and a national test with uniform content at the end of Cycle 4 of fundamental school (*épreuves standardisées*). There has also been a drive to strengthen school self-evaluation, with requirements for schools to produce development plans and national support offered to schools by the Agency for the Development of Quality in Schools (ADQS). At the same time, the MENFP has commissioned and evaluates several pilot studies in different schools to encourage innovative approaches to teaching and learning. In this dynamic and fast-evolving context, the OECD review team identified the following priorities for the further development of evaluation and assessment policies in Luxembourg.

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***Pull together the different evaluation and assessment initiatives into a coherent framework***

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Many of the recently introduced evaluation and assessment initiatives have been developed in parallel and do not yet work together well. Continued support and capacity building in schools is of key importance (see below), but there is also a need to bring the different initiatives into a coherent evaluation and assessment framework. An important first step will be to adequately align the various aspects that are currently in place or being introduced. Notably, the new competency-based learning objectives should be at the heart of evaluation and assessment activities, including regular formative assessment activities with students, national assessments, school development plans and the national monitoring and reporting system. Stakeholders will benefit from a more explicit detailing of how evaluation and assessment activities at the student, teacher, school and school system level link together. For example, how non-standardised national tests (*épreuves communes*), national tests with uniform content (*épreuves standardisées*) and standardised national assessments complement each other, as well as the regular classroom assessment activities set by teachers to inform on student learning progress, and how the results from all these student assessment activities fit into school self-evaluation activities. A second step will be to further develop and complete the evaluation and assessment framework, for example: develop a set of teaching standards and a common understanding of school quality in Luxembourg; validate processes in place to organise developmental teacher appraisal; and consider introducing an external school evaluation mechanism to confront schools with a common, external perspective and information on their quality. External school evaluations can bring greater depth and breadth to internal evaluations in schools by providing useful observations and evidence from other schools, challenging the school's development plan and self-evaluation criteria, and evaluating the school's capacity for self-evaluation.

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***Continue to prioritise efforts to build evaluation and assessment capacity throughout the school system***

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The implementation of the evaluation and assessment framework is at a critical stage and the continued prioritisation of capacity building at the school and national levels is more important than ever to ensure that the results of evaluation and assessment lead to improvements in student learning. New initiatives in student assessment and school self-evaluation have generated ample information for teachers, parents and schools, but these must be analysed, interpreted and used to improve student learning. It is, therefore, extremely important that continued and adequate attention is paid to training teachers, *directeurs* and *inspecteurs* in how to work most effectively with the results of evaluation and assessment. In this context, continued support by the ADQS is expected to have a positive impact on school capacity to implement self-evaluation and strategic improvement activities. Further, the implementation of new internal school structures for school development should be monitored to determine the type of training and capacity building support they require. This will be a good investment to build evaluation capacity internally within schools on a more sustainable basis. At the same time, the MENFP should recognise the importance of pedagogical leadership in implementing effective school self-evaluation activities and rethink the role of both *directeurs* and *inspecteurs* in this light. Finally, within the MENFP, it would be helpful to clarify different responsibilities and to ensure greater coherence in the development of evaluation and

assessment policies and tools for schools. Such planning should pay careful consideration to current capacity and assess the need to build and develop evaluation and assessment competencies where necessary. It is clear that the current responsibilities that fall within the ADQS need to be either redistributed within the MENFP or that the ADQS be given increased capacity.

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***Strengthen reporting against the competency-based learning objectives and analysis and discussion of results***

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The MENFP must ensure the statistical, analytical and research competencies to fully exploit existing information on the education system for policy development. The adequate analysis, interpretation and reporting of key results in a way that makes them accessible to all stakeholders will build support for education system evaluation and also promote the discussion of such results throughout the system. The publication of a regular overview report on the state of the education system is strongly recommended. The clear and comprehensive reporting in system-level publications against the competency-based learning objectives will play a vital role in promoting the acceptance and implementation of these in schools throughout Luxembourg. Further, there is room to actively promote discussion among key stakeholders of the major results from all national student assessments. This would offer an opportunity to promote deeper understanding of the competency-based learning objectives and timely feedback to the MENFP and the test developers. There is also room to improve the alignment of national targets for school improvement to school development plans by: ensuring the full and timely feedback to schools of student results in the standardised tests; introducing reporting requirements for schools, *e.g.* adding a section to their school development plan in which they describe how they will implement national reforms such as the competency-based student learning objectives, how they will align their curricula and teaching to these and how they will evaluate their implementation. These reporting requirements will increase awareness in schools of national reforms and student learning objectives and will demand that schools strategise and be transparent about how to implement these.

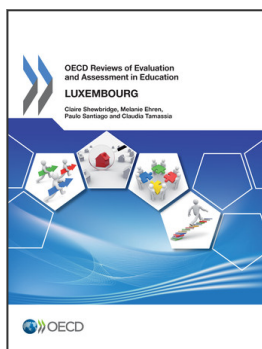
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***Raise the focus on equity within the evaluation and assessment framework and engage teachers in further refining the competency-based learning objectives***

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While the need to monitor equity is one of the stated drivers behind the initial conceptualisation of an evaluation and assessment framework in Luxembourg, there is room to raise the focus on this. In particular, a thorough review of the procedures in place to select students into different types of secondary education is recommended. National and international data clearly demonstrate that the current procedures disproportionately impact certain student groups. The standardised tests should be evaluated to ensure they deliver: valid measures against discrete areas of the national competency-based learning objectives; high reliability of results for comparison throughout the system; and stable core content to allow comparability of results across years. There should also be clear documentation and understanding of the suitability of these tests for students with different developmental needs. There is room for the MENFP to make better use of the results of all national assessment results to moderate teacher grading in high-stakes student assessment. Finally, the planned review of the implementation of the competency-

based learning objectives should examine to what extent these can be better harmonised across general and technical streams of secondary education. As it stands, the risk is that these simply follow the existing structure of the school system and miss the opportunity to promote greater flexibility for student transition among the different streams. As part of this process, it will be important to review evidence from various stakeholders (students, teachers and parents, notably). Teachers should be systematically engaged as partners in actively working toward the further refinement and development of the competency-based learning objectives and related assessment tools.



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