

Chapter 2

The evaluation and assessment framework

This chapter presents a succinct overview of the major components of evaluation and assessment in Luxembourg (student assessment, teacher appraisal, school evaluation and education system evaluation) and examines to what extent these form part of a coherent framework and how these different components work together. It presents an analysis of the current strengths and challenges and a set of recommendations to build on and consolidate current efforts in designing and completing a coherent evaluation and assessment framework.

Context and features

This chapter examines the overall framework for evaluation and assessment in Luxembourg, *i.e.* the major components of student assessment, teacher appraisal, school evaluation and education system evaluation, how these work together and the coherence of the whole framework. Following this overview, Chapters 3 to 7 will examine issues relevant to each of the major components in depth.

Governance

In general, Luxembourg has a centralised and highly stratified education system and this – in turn with the small scale of the education system – leads to a centralised approach to evaluation and assessment, although over recent years there has been a stronger role for schools in implementing evaluation and assessment policies, notably with the increased emphasis placed on school self-evaluation. Indeed, the Ministry of National Education and Vocational Training (MENFP) is committed to working with all school partners in designing evaluation and assessment policies (ADQS, 2011), but ultimately holds decision-making power. However, teacher appraisal stands out as a component of the evaluation and assessment framework without any national guidelines beyond an official appraisal for new teachers following their probationary period. The majority of schools are publicly funded and managed. The MENFP is responsible for the planning and administration of all teaching in public schools (ADQS, 2011).

Public secondary schools are directly managed by the MENFP, via the direct appointment of a school leader (*directeur*) and the setting of a detailed legal framework, including general objectives, curriculum, student assessment, school time-tables, etc. and more recently a requirement to establish a School Development Unit. The *directeur* is responsible for administrative, technical and financial matters, as well as the implementation of national curriculum and pedagogical projects, and is assisted by one or more deputies and a management team. The *directeur* is expected to evaluate the school and report directly to the MENFP.

Up to 2009, the MENFP and the districts were jointly responsible for public fundamental schools, but in addition to its responsibility for school staff salaries, the MENFP now appoints teachers and assigns them to the districts. Each fundamental school is under the authority of a local education authority *inspecteur* who acts as an intermediary between fundamental schools and the MENFP and for example conducts official teacher evaluation activities. The *inspecteur* also monitors school compliance to laws and regulations and reports back to the MENFP. Therefore, district administrators have no responsibility in evaluation and assessment matters, although they remain responsible for school organisation (assigning teachers to schools within the district and children to classes) and the funding of school infrastructure. There is a certain degree of autonomy in fundamental schools regarding the organisation of learning, which is reflected in student assessment activities and school development planning. Although, student assessment activities are highly prescribed in terms of criteria and methods of reporting on student progress, teachers play a central role in student summative assessment.

Main components

In a nutshell, the evaluation and assessment framework in Luxembourg comprises the following main components:

- **Student assessment:** Approaches to student assessment are very centralised in Luxembourg, but teachers' professional judgement plays the major role in student progression and summative assessment. Traditionally, student assessment comprises largely student tests developed by teachers, but in fundamental education may include alternative approaches such as portfolios and observation, and more recently includes standardised national assessments. In secondary education, student performance on teacher-developed tests is documented in summary grades at the end of each trimester according to a centralised scoring approach. Each student receives an annual score drawing together student performance across subjects in each trimester. In 2009, the introduction of centrally defined minimum competency levels for student learning aimed to introduce a more qualitative assessment of student learning. In fundamental education, there has been a gradual introduction of two new methods to document student learning progress (initially in Cycles 1 and 2). These are formative reports at the end of each trimester (*bilan intermédiaire*) and summative reports at the end of each two-year learning cycle (*bilan de fin de cycle*). The latter summarise student performance and determine their eligibility for promotion to the next learning cycle. More qualitative feedback has also been introduced in secondary education where students receive an additional feedback sheet on their competency levels to complement their scores in each academic subject (*complément au bulletin*). National standardised assessments are used in German, French and mathematics at two different points during students' compulsory education. In addition, at the end of Cycle 4, student results in nationally developed and locally administered and scored tests in German, French and mathematics are considered in making the decision of their orientation to either general or technical secondary education. Non-standardised tests in French and German (developed by students' teachers) are administered nationally during the third year of secondary education and contribute to the students' trimester average score. Student performance in German, French and mathematics is the major determinant of their orientation at the end of fundamental education and at the end of the third year of technical secondary or the fourth year of general secondary education.
- **Teacher appraisal:** Teacher appraisal is not regulated by law and no formal procedures exist to evaluate the performance of permanent teachers. The only existing requirement relates to the 24-month probationary period for new entrants to the teaching profession. In fundamental education, appraisal at the end of this probationary period is undertaken by the local authority inspector (*inspecteurs*) as there are no school leaders (*directeurs*) in fundamental schools. In secondary education, teachers sit an examination at the end of the probationary period. The only other time that official appraisal is undertaken by the *inspecteurs* is upon the request of a teacher in a fundamental school to move to a teaching post in a different school. The *inspecteurs* and *directeurs* are responsible for teacher performance in fundamental and secondary education, respectively, but often do not undertake regular appraisal of individual teachers. At the secondary level, the *directeurs* are supposed to hold regular interviews with teachers to promote dialogue, establish common objectives and monitor work achievements.

However, no central guidance on how to evaluate teacher performance, nor shared appraisal criteria are offered. Beyond the appraisal at the end of the probationary period, teacher appraisal has no impact on teachers' career progression or influence on their pay levels. Only in extreme cases, do *inspecteurs* initiate disciplinary procedures. Similarly, *directeurs* have few mechanisms to identify objectively and to address potential underperformance and cannot mandate professional development activities for teachers.

- **School evaluation:** In Luxembourg the focus of school evaluation lies on school self-evaluation, but strong national requirements and supports have been put in place over recent years that drive these internal evaluations. The major requirements are in fundamental schools and include the drawing up of school development plans in which schools set and evaluate goals every four years, and establishing new structures for collaboration and school development. These structures are important in the absence of a school leader and include a school committee which is responsible for drawing up the school development plan and for daily school management (comprising three to nine members, of which at least two-thirds are teachers, and one president elected by the school teachers for a 5-year period), as well as co-ordinators and pedagogical teams for each of the four pedagogical cycles. The *inspecteur* must approve the school development plan and should assist the school's pedagogical team in its annual evaluation of school progress against this plan. Further, the *inspecteur* provides the school with feedback on the quality of teaching and learning and conducts formal teacher appraisal (see above). In a similar vein, it is recommended for secondary schools to set goals and action plans (most are starting to do so) and since late 2011 secondary schools are required to establish a school development unit (typically including school management and teachers with an advisory or co-ordinating role). Other centrally designed elements to aid school self-evaluation comprise the new student learning objectives and feedback of results from national standardised assessments. In order to stimulate school evaluation capacity, the Agency for School Quality Development (ADQS) within the Ministry of National Education and Vocational Training (MENFP) was established in 2009 and provides tailored support to schools in establishing and following up their development plans. There is no external evaluation of schools in Luxembourg beyond compliancy checking via the submission of mandatory annual audit reports (*contingent*) by *directeurs* of secondary schools to the MENFP and via the direct monitoring of the implementation of rules and regulations by *inspecteurs* in fundamental schools.
- **Education system evaluation:** Responsibilities for education system evaluation lie firmly within the Ministry of National Education and Vocational Training (MENFP). The Department for the Co-ordination of Research in Pedagogical and Technological Innovation (SCRIPT) plays a major role in providing evidence for policy making at the system and school levels. The Innovation Division conducts and oversees pilot studies for potential school reforms and the Agency for School Quality Development (ADQS) both supports schools in their internal evaluation and use of results from the national monitoring system and provides information for education system monitoring, including the *ad hoc* monitoring of national initiatives. The Statistics and Analysis Department collects, compiles and reports core data on the education system. The monitoring system comprises statistics on student progression through schooling and school leaving qualifications, plus outcome information coming from participation in international assessments and

the administration of both non-standardised and standardised national assessments. The recent development of standardised national assessments (outsourced to the University of Luxembourg, but overseen by the SCRIPT) has strengthened the national monitoring system. The national student learning objectives provide goals against which to evaluate the education system, as do specific targets within the European Union's 2020 programme. Further, the MENFP should monitor progress against specific school improvement objectives specified in the 5-year government programme.

Strengths

A change of paradigm in educational policy making shifting to a focus on outputs and equity

There has been a clear change of paradigm in educational policy making. This largely corresponds to government policy introduced five years ago with the objective to improve school quality in Luxembourg. A policy document in 2007 set out the idea of steering the education system in Luxembourg with a tighter, more coherent evaluation and assessment framework (MENFP-SCRIPT, 2007). The central idea is to use outcome information to better monitor student progress throughout their schooling and overall outcomes at the system level. To this end, the document serves as a basis to develop evaluation instruments to strengthen the focus on student performance and progress in classrooms, schools and at the policy-making level within the MENFP. It outlines the MENFP's intention to adapt teaching and learning to a competency approach, to define standards, to introduce a degree of autonomy to schools and to reform initial teacher education (ADQS, 2011).

Importantly, evaluation instruments are seen to play a key role in monitoring and shedding light on the reasons behind the large impact that student socio-economic and migrant background has on their school performance. This strengthened focus on equity is stimulated largely by analysis of outcomes in the PISA assessments (MENFP-SCRIPT and Université du Luxembourg, 2007; see also Chapter 1). Policy for addressing equity rests on the monitoring of key outcomes for different student groups via national assessments and the use of school self-evaluation to identify and address significant factors behind school failure (ADQS, 2011).

The introduction of a competency approach to learning in schools

The OECD review team commends the MENFP's decision to introduce a competency approach to learning in schools. Such an approach using standard-defined competencies to be attained by students at different ages can be a powerful tool to improve teaching and address students' learning needs. The implementation strategy has been to gradually introduce standards, first in 2007 at the secondary level in basic subjects (languages and mathematics), followed by the introduction of standards in four major pedagogical cycles in fundamental schools in 2009 and the ongoing development of standards in other secondary school subjects. The centrally defined minimum competency levels for student learning are intended to strengthen teachers' focus on student learning progress with an aim to improving their outcomes. As an illustration, guidance offered to teachers in fundamental schools includes the description of the main competency levels to be attained by students at the end of each pedagogical cycle, plus performance descriptors to illustrate these and recommended learning content.

At the same time, there has been the gradual introduction of new reporting requirements for teachers to document student learning progress against these competencies. Within fundamental schools, implementation of such reporting has followed the student cohort through each pedagogical cycle (see Chapter 3). The MENFP also has actively sought feedback on these new reporting tools from teachers and parents at the early stage of implementation. First results of questionnaires administered in early 2010 indicated support for the new tools from both teachers and parents, with parents expressing strongly positive feedback, but teachers noting the increased workload (ADQS, 2011).¹

In parallel to the reforms in the content of learning and the expected impact this has on the teaching approach in fundamental schools, there is commitment to raise the profile of teaching in fundamental schools with the reform of initial education for teachers at this level to ensure that they obtain university-level qualification (ADQS, 2011).

The strong potential for the Ministry of National Education and Vocational Training to steer evaluation and assessment activities

Despite recent moves to introduce a degree of autonomy to schools in respect of their choice of teaching materials and lesson scheduling, the school system in Luxembourg remains largely centralised. In general, this means that the MENFP has a considerable steering ability in regards setting the framework conditions for schooling. Specifically, the MENFP wields substantial authority in the area of evaluation: “All decisions related to implementing evaluation strategies fall under the responsibility of either the MENFP or the Parliament if the strategy is embedded in a legal framework” (ADQS, 2011). This provides ideal conditions to draw up and establish a coherent evaluation and assessment framework. Beyond the legal framework in place that specifies among other things detailed student assessment criteria and tools to be used in schools (see Chapter 3) and school bodies and requirements for school development and planning activities (see Chapter 5), the MENFP also develops tools and guidelines to support schools in evaluation and assessment activities.

Launching and evaluation of initiatives to generate innovation within the system

There have been several initiatives supported by the MENFP to generate innovation within the school system. There is strong political support for the need to diversify the public school offer in Luxembourg given the increasingly heterogeneous student population. Notably, a law in 2005 paved the way to create a pilot secondary school with the mission to explore alternative pedagogical approaches. The pilot secondary school (the *Neie Lycée*) opened in September 2005 and combined innovative teaching, assessment and organisational approaches. As part of the law, the MENFP commissioned an evaluation after five years of different aspects of these innovative approaches. This reflects a strategic aim to share information for possible further innovations across the school system. Two other “new schools” were opened in 2007 (Jean Jaurès) and 2008 (Eis Schoul). In 2011, results of several evaluations of different aspects of the *Neie Lycée* were published by the MENFP on its website (see Université du Luxembourg, 2011; Koenig, 2011; Jurdant, 2011). In general, these were judged successful, particularly in terms of parental satisfaction, but also students reported relatively higher motivation compared to in other secondary schools. Student performance in national standardised tests and in PISA 2009 was average once the students’ relatively less advantaged background was accounted for. However, the MENFP noted that most of these innovative

approaches were not easily transferable throughout the school system, but rather that other schools could draw lessons from some of the approaches. The MENFP uses results of such evaluations as a springboard to debate different areas of potential innovation throughout the school system, for example, the possible introduction of a general lesson on values and ethics and the reduction of school failure rates.

Further, there has been an initiative since 2003 with six technical secondary schools to use innovative teaching and learning approaches in lower technical secondary education (the PROCI initiative). This initiative was launched in response to concerns raised over technical secondary school outcomes in PISA 2000. The major innovations include a higher level of school autonomy, no use of grade repetition during the lower secondary technical cycle, and a stable pedagogical team following students through the cycle using a competency-based approach to learning and teaching. In PISA 2009, students in PROCI outperformed their counterparts in other technical schools by 20 score points (MENFP-SCRIPT and Université du Luxembourg, 2010).

Finally, the latest educational reform was tested out in pilot schools (*i.e. écoles en mouvement*) in 2008 (see Chapter 3).

Regular communication between the Ministry and schools

During the OECD review, the team formed the impression that there were close ties between the various stakeholder groups and the MENFP. The relatively small scale of the Luxembourg school system (154 fundamental schools and 35 secondary schools) is obviously capitalised on to foster regular communication between the MENFP and schools. Indeed, such regular communication is noted as “key to facilitate the implementation and feasibility of reforms, and to address the difficulties encountered in the schools” (ADQS, 2011). This regular communication is a considerable strength and takes place via both formal and informal channels. For example, the MENFP runs a website providing much detailed information about the reform in fundamental schools and the proposed reform in secondary education (see Chapter 3). The current policy approach is conceived as collaborative and while the MENFP has authority for decisions, it is committed to listening to the views of representatives from schools. Further, since the OECD review visit, the small ADQS division within the MENFP’s SCRIPT department has met with nearly all fundamental school presidents in Luxembourg to discuss, review and support the development of school plans.

There are also structures in place to ensure formal communication between the MENFP and key stakeholders.

- For fundamental schools: officially, *inspecteurs* act as the intermediary between schools and the MENFP, plus there are regular meetings (every two weeks) of all *inspecteurs* to discuss among other things national reforms and policies; and the National School Commission which is a body that brings together representatives from local authorities, teachers, parents, teacher unions and the MENFP and is a major vehicle to ensure partnership among the key stakeholders in fundamental schooling. For example, in addition to organisational and budget matters, the National School Commission follows up on the content of the school curriculum.
- For secondary schools: each secondary school *directeur* is considered as a direct representative of the MENFP, plus there are regular meetings of all *directeurs* and their deputies at which the MENFP is represented to exchange and consult on national policies; each secondary school is represented on the National

Commissions for Curriculum (one commission per secondary school subject) which develops proposals on the school curriculum and teaching materials that are subject to validation by the MENFP; and the Higher Council for National Education which is an advisory board to the MENFP comprising representatives from the MENFP and other ministries (Sports, Health, Family), *inspecteurs*, *directeurs*, teacher unions, parents, students, professional chambers, private schools, clergy and cultural associations.

Efforts to build evaluation and assessment capacity within Luxembourg

Following a heightened political awareness of the need for a solid evidence base in decision making, there has been a concerted effort to introduce and build capacity in the area of evaluation and assessment. Notably, there is strong collaboration between the MENFP and the University of Luxembourg in the development of standardised assessments. Within the University, standardised test development is undertaken by the Educational Measurement and Applied Cognitive Science (EMACS) unit. The EMACS unit is also responsible for the administration of international assessments and – as in other countries – this has been a key factor in building national assessment capacity (see for example Goldstein and Thomas, 2008 and Tamassia and Adams, 2009). However, other units within the University are also actively engaged with the MENFP in efforts to improve school quality, including the Integrative Research Unit on Social and Individual Development, the Language, Culture, Media and Identities Unit and the Identities, Politics, Societies and Spaces Unit. These units were created from 2003 on and signal a strengthening of national research capacity that can play an important role in evaluation and assessment efforts.

Further, the OECD review team learned of a collaborative approach in developing the competency-based reform drawing on curriculum, assessment and evaluation expertise from Germany, Austria and Switzerland. The review team understood that the choice of expertise was largely driven by practical concerns (cultural and language factors). This ongoing regular exchange of information and expertise remains largely on a technical and functional level and has been an important input to the development process.

Challenges

Lack of evaluation and assessment framework and no common understanding of school quality

Similar to the situation in many other OECD countries, Luxembourg does not have a coherent framework for evaluation and assessment. Despite the production of a policy document in 2007, this does not yet concretely underpin evaluation and assessment activities and the OECD review team formed the opinion that many of these activities were developed in parallel and do not yet work together well (see also ADQS, 2011).

Some key components are missing or underdeveloped

Notably, some key components of an evaluation and assessment framework are missing. There is no legal framework for teacher appraisal and no formal and standardised procedures exist to evaluate the performance of permanent teachers (see Chapter 4) and there is no external evaluation of schools (the “*inspecteurs*” in fundamental schooling, although external to the school, have a managerial as well as evaluative role, see Chapter 5). Further, other elements within the evaluation and assessment framework are underdeveloped:

- The appraisal of secondary school leaders (the *directeurs* and their deputies) is not well developed, despite an implicit evaluation in the case of *directeurs* due to the fact that, as is the case for all public service managers, appointments are set for a maximum of seven years, but are renewable (ADQS, 2011).
- The OECD review revealed little evidence of the systematic use of formative assessment (see Chapter 3). Despite the overall positive policy move to promote the importance of formative assessment (via a legal definition, the shift to a competency approach to learning and the introduction of regular formative feedback reports in fundamental schools), the intended formative function of these initiatives was not fully understood or effectively implemented at the school level at that early stage of implementation. Further, at the time of the OECD review, there was a significant delay in feedback to schools of student results in standardised assessments and these did not include results for individual students, thus significantly hindering their formative use.
- There is a lack of processes in place to ensure the validity of teacher grading as part of student summative assessment. The absence of adequate moderation procedures implies a significant challenge to the equity of final outcomes for students (see Chapter 3).

No common understanding of school quality

The OECD review team found a culture in schools where statements about the quality and functioning of the school are primarily based on informal exchange of information and observation instead of on formal criteria and the collection of evaluative information. In general, there is no overall conception and shared understanding of “quality”. The *inspecteurs* in fundamental education do not have a common framework of indicators for school quality and interviews during the OECD review revealed that there are notable conceptual differences (see Chapter 5). Similarly, there is no profession-wide agreement on what counts as accomplished teaching – a key factor of school quality. There are no teaching standards, or clear professional profiles of what teachers are expected to know and be able to do (see Chapter 4). The common information that must be reported by secondary schools (*contingent*) is compliancy-oriented and does not speak to the quality of teaching and learning (see Chapter 5). Notably, at the time of the OECD review there was a varied implementation across schools of the competency-based student learning objectives leading to very different criteria and goals being used in school self-evaluation (see Chapter 5). The OECD review team notes that since the review the ADQS has been working on the development of a framework for school quality to serve as a common basis for school self-evaluation activities (MENFP, 2012a).

Some articulations among the different evaluation and assessment components are not sufficiently developed

There are missing links between teacher appraisal, professional development and school development (see Chapters 4 and 5). Teachers are free to choose which courses they follow as part of their eight hours of annual required professional development and in general do not consult with the *directeur* or, in fundamental schools, the president of the school committee. Therefore, individual professional development is not adequately aligned with school development needs, as documented in the school development plan.

For school self-evaluation, there are different mechanisms in place to evaluate school quality (e.g. the school development plan and output indicators), but these are not appropriately linked. At the time of the OECD review, the national standardised tests were not aligned to the implemented curriculum in classrooms and the feedback reports sent to *inspecteurs* and *directeurs* included only a general level of information that was not optimal for use in school evaluation activities (see Chapters 3 and 5). To the extent that schools have not yet adequately implemented the new competency-based student learning objectives, the results from national standardised tests are largely redundant for school improvement as schools are unable to relate the information to their own curriculum and teaching methods.

The reporting at the system level of school results in Luxembourg remains focused on the stratification of the school system and not on student learning objectives (i.e. the competency-based approach) (see Chapter 6).

The student is not at the centre of school evaluation and assessment policies

The underlying rigid structure of the school system in Luxembourg makes it hard to take actions based on evaluation results. In general, the student has to fit into the school system in Luxembourg. Despite recent progress with attempts to address this structural issue and place students at the centre of the evaluation and assessment framework (notably with the introduction of the competency approach and pedagogical cycles in fundamental schooling), the OECD review team noted that students have no say in their orientation or progress at key stages of schooling, little say in their learning and that there is limited account taken of the additional difficulties that the strong emphasis on student proficiency in *Lëtzebuergesch*, German and French poses for students with an immigrant background.

High incidence of grade repetition is not compatible with a student-centred school system

The high incidence of grade repetition in Luxembourg's school system is an obvious indicator that students are not at the centre of the assessment and evaluation framework. National data indicate that grade repetition is common practice in both fundamental and secondary schooling (see Chapter 1). Even at early stages of their learning, significant proportions of students are judged not to fit into the school system and are held back until they are judged ready to progress to the next step in the system. According to PISA 2009 data, grade repetition in Luxembourg is among the highest in OECD countries: 37% of 15-year-old students reported that they had repeated one or more grades during their schooling (second highest figure among the 34 OECD countries, against an OECD average of 13%, see Annex D). Reports from *directeurs* in PISA 2009 indicate that grade repetition is a prominent practice also in secondary schools and twice as high as on average in OECD countries (8% of lower secondary school students had repeated a grade in 2008, compared to an OECD average of 3%; 11% of upper secondary school students had repeated a grade in 2008, compared to an OECD average of 5%). Further, all *directeurs* reported that that student assessments were used to make decisions about students' retention or promotion (see Annex D).

There is wide recognition in educational research that grade repetition is an ineffective intervention for low achievement while it poses risks for equity in terms of bias based on social background (Field *et al.*, 2007). Reviews of the research literature by Brophy (2006) and Xia and Kirby (2009) concluded the following about school-imposed grade repetition:

- it improves academic achievement temporarily, but over time, grade repeaters fall further and further behind other low achievers who were promoted;
- it is stressful to students and associated with reduced self-esteem, impairs peer relationships, increases alienation from school, and sharply increases likelihood of eventual dropout;
- it makes classes larger and harder to manage for teachers and creates budgetary and equity problems for schools and school systems.

Research in both the United States and France suggests that social background, independent of school attainment, is an important determinant of repeating. This may be due to behavioural difficulties associated with social background, or because educated parents are in a stronger position to oppose a repetition proposed by the school. Therefore grade repetition may also pose risks for equity in terms of bias based on social background (Field *et al.*, 2007). Also, the costs of repetition for the education budget are substantial given the extra expenditure incurred in the repeated year and the opportunity costs of one year of the student's time. This is exacerbated by the fact that schools have very few incentives to take these large costs into account. In summary, grade repetition is ineffective and costly; this has both efficiency and equity implications (Field *et al.*, 2007).

Lack of flexibility in the process to determine students' future educational pathway

The orientation process at the end of Cycle 4 in fundamental education is high stakes for students. Overall, the documentation during the OECD review conveyed the impression that this is a holistic approach involving multiple parties and sources of input. This is positive overall. However, interviews during the OECD review indicated that the actual process seemed to lack transparency and, in reality, was guided primarily by students' performance in French, German and mathematics, with little input from parents. For example, although parents are able to request the opinion of an independent psychologist, this professional opinion carries no official weight in the decision-making process (see Chapter 3). This high emphasis on performance, primarily in languages, results in unequal access rates by social and cultural groups.

Further, interviews during the OECD review gave the impression that the communication regarding a student's orientation is very much top-down, where the school informs parents of its final decision. Although parents are allowed to appeal, there is limited flexibility because any revised decisions are based on additional testing in the same domains of French, German and mathematics. Additionally, the system allows no opportunity for students to change their educational plans as it allows little flexibility for students to switch between types of education (*e.g.* from technical secondary to general secondary), which may have an impact on late-maturing children or students with an immigrant background. Also unclear is the extent to which parents fully understand the consequences of the orientation process or if a relationship between their level of understanding and their educational and social status exists.

Policy makers in Luxembourg are aware of these significant challenges. Clearly, the introduction of the competency-based approach in fundamental education, coupled with requirements for teachers to regularly report on student progress (during each cycle, as well as at the end of each cycle) aims to ensure that parents are in general better informed of their child's progress. Indeed, subsequent to the OECD review a decree will see the better alignment of these elements in the orientation decision-making process as of 2012/13 (see Chapter 3).

Ability of the system to accommodate students with various linguistic backgrounds

Students whose mother tongue is different from the three national/teaching languages now represent 49.8% of the students enrolled in school, of which more than half are Portuguese speakers (25% of all students enrolled) (MENFP, 2012b). The system does offer general information and documentation for students and families whose mother tongue is different from the three national languages. But the system also needs to address these students' needs inside the classroom and provide opportunities that will support their integration into the system. Results from PISA 2009 indicate a significant performance difference in particular for students whose families originate from Portugal, the former Yugoslavia and Italy (see Chapter 1). During the OECD review, interviews with teachers and students from schools with a large majority of students with an immigrant background indicated that they face difficulties in adapting their teaching styles due to a lack of supporting materials and training, particularly for students of younger ages. Although children with an immigrant background may have the required cognitive ability in a language other than one of the three teaching languages in Luxembourg, statistics indicate these students are being denied opportunity to benefit from fundamental school, with the vast majority going towards technical education.

Confusion over the purpose of and responsibilities for evaluation and assessment

Defensive culture among educators regarding evaluation

In general, the OECD review team perceived a defensive culture among Luxembourgish teachers in which external interventions are seen as a threat and an attempt to control rather than a tool for quality development (see Chapter 4). During the OECD review, teachers and *directeurs* often expressed a perception that external evaluation only has an accountability function and does not contribute to school improvement (see Chapter 5). This is despite the MENFP's strategy to emphasise the improvement function of evaluation and assessment activities, notably via the ADQS capacity building support to schools in development planning and self-evaluation. However, educators' misgivings can be justified to a certain degree given the insufficient feedback of results from the national monitoring system to the school level (see below).

Lack of clarity on roles and responsibilities for evaluation and assessment

This may also result from a lack of clarity on the different roles and responsibilities within the evaluation and assessment framework. There may be in some cases an unwillingness to assume evaluation responsibilities, for example, although *directeurs* have the right and mission to observe and evaluate their teaching staff, they do not always exercise this. However, this may be due to the limited room for *directeurs* to act on the results of their staff evaluations, due to their lack of autonomy in this area (see Chapters 4 and 5). At the national level, the ADQS within the MENFP plays a key role in school quality improvement, but has fought to build credibility in this area, as schools are aware of its role in monitoring the school system (see Chapter 6). Further, there is room to clarify and strengthen the oversight of standardised assessment development by the MENFP (see Chapter 6).

Little use of evaluation and assessment results and weak link to classroom practice

The OECD review highlighted a significant underuse of the results available from the national monitoring system. While the major use of evaluation and assessment results appeared to be at the national policy level, there was insufficient analysis of results from national assessments for policy making (see Chapter 6). This is in contrast to significant analysis and policy development sparked off by results from international assessments (see above). At the same time, the reporting back of key results to decision makers at the school level (*directeurs*, teachers, *inspecteurs*) missed opportunities to provide valuable information for further evaluation and analysis at the school, class and student levels (see Chapters 3 and 4). There are no external incentives for schools to make use of evaluation findings and *inspecteurs* and *directeurs* lack authority to follow up on evaluation findings with staff at their schools (see Chapter 4). At the same time, much effort is invested at the national level to collect results from the non-standardised national tests (*épreuves communes*), but these are not reported at the system level or used for moderation of teacher grading of student work (see Chapter 6).

The OECD review revealed that the current evaluation and assessment activities have generally weak links to classroom practice. Notably, schools and teachers were not benefiting from the administration of national standardised tests, as they received results for their students only at a general level and after a significant time lag. The MENFP has gathered evidence in this area that indicates that the reporting of results to schools needs to be clearer and more easily understandable in order to be helpful to schools (ADQS, 2011). Importantly, the shift in student learning objectives with the new competency-based approach did not appear to have impacted the other major forms of student assessments, including regular classroom assessment and the non-standardised national tests (*épreuves communes*). At the early stage of implementation, there was also a need to strengthen school capacity to formulate and follow up their school development plans. This capacity building role has so far been undertaken by the small quality development agency (ADQS) within the MENFP. This approach of course can provide a major vehicle to strengthen the implementation and assessment of the new student learning objectives. However, “no mechanism is formally stated in the framework for evaluation and assessment as to ensure that the ensuing results do indeed improve school and classroom practice” (ADQS, 2011).

Implementing the reform of competency-based learning

While the OECD review team commends the reform to introduce competency-based student learning objectives, it notes that the implementation has not been conducted in a systematic way. Interviews during the OECD review revealed a lack of coherence among key players leading to alignment problems of key aspects of the reform. A first point relates to the development of student standardised assessments to measure standards before the student learning objectives had been developed or clearly defined. Regarding the development of the competency-based student learning objectives, there lacked an overall strategic guidance. The development process was undertaken by different groups simultaneously and did not pay adequate attention to the alignment of competencies across different levels and age groups. A major example is the lack of coherence in the competencies for a given subject between the general and technical streams of secondary education. Further, although some teachers had been engaged in working groups for competency development, this process appeared rather *ad hoc* and it was not clear to what extent this process ensured appropriate representation of key stakeholders. Without this, of course there is the risk that some stakeholders may not feel ownership of the new student learning objectives. Indeed, a prominent example of this is the fact that interviews

during the OECD review indicated that the teacher-developed national non-standardised student tests (*épreuves communes*) were not aligned to the new student learning objectives in French and German (although there are no national mechanisms in place to check on such alignment concerns) (see Chapter 3).

Policy recommendations

The OECD review team recognises that there have been concerted efforts over the past eight years to conceptualise a pivotal role for evaluation and assessment in improving school outcomes in Luxembourg. In light of the analysis of strengths and challenges, the OECD review team recommends the following to build on and consolidate these efforts:

- establish a coherent framework for evaluation and assessment with the student at its centre
- clarify roles and responsibilities for evaluation and assessment
- raise the focus on equity within the evaluation and assessment framework
- implement mechanisms to promote school use of evaluation and assessment results for improvement
- evaluate the implementation of the competency-based student learning objectives
- build evaluation and assessment capacity throughout the school system

Establish a coherent framework for evaluation and assessment with the student at its centre

Ensure that student learning objectives underpin all evaluation and assessment activities

Building on the MENFP's potential to steer evaluation and assessment activities, the OECD review team recommends that at this critical stage of implementation the MENFP devise a strategic plan to complete the evaluation and assessment framework. Of critical importance, the MENFP needs to clearly communicate to all stakeholders that the purpose of the evaluation and assessment framework is to improve student learning outcomes. There should be clear expectations that the results of evaluation and assessment activities are used to inform the improvement of teaching and learning.

An important first step in making the framework more coherent will be to adequately align the various aspects that are currently in place or being introduced. Notably, the new student learning objectives (the *socles de compétences*) should be at the heart of evaluation and assessment activities. Similarly, the OECD suggests that the MENFP develop in collaboration with key stakeholders a common definition of school quality which should also underpin all evaluation and assessment activities (see below).

- It is critical that regular formative assessment activities with students, as well as national assessments are aligned with the student learning objectives. This will entail greater collaboration among teacher representatives, test developers (EMACS and teacher groups) and the curriculum competency development teams within the MENFP. Importantly, there should be greater strategic oversight by the MENFP to ensure coherence in the development of and any necessary refinements to these key elements of the student assessment framework (see Chapter 3).

- School development plans need to adequately address the national student learning objectives, as well as other specific internal school goals (see Chapter 5).
- The national monitoring and reporting system needs to be aligned to report on progress of outcomes measured against the new student learning objectives (see Chapter 6).

Similarly, in further developing and completing the evaluation and assessment framework, the OECD review team recommends:

- developing a set of teaching standards and importantly ensuring that these are aligned with the student learning objectives (see Chapter 4)
- developing a common understanding of school quality in Luxembourg (see below)
- introducing an external review of schools to monitor the quality of teaching and learning and validate processes in place to organise developmental teacher appraisal (see Chapters 4 and 5)

Ensure greater linkages among different evaluation and assessment activities

A coherent evaluation and assessment framework would also allow the more explicit detailing of how evaluation and assessment activities at the student, teacher, school and school system level link together to ensure that these are complementary. This can include how non-standardised and standardised national tests 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. The OECD review team commends the announcement that the formative and end-of-cycle summative reports in fundamental schooling will explicitly feed into high-stakes decisions on student orientation at the end of fundamental schooling. Such decisions should be informed by as much evidence as possible and draw on results from both national standardised and non-standardised tests in addition to documentation of teachers' ongoing assessment of the student.

There should be an explicit link or influence of school evaluation over teacher appraisal (OECD, 2009). As such, the evaluation and assessment framework should specify that school self-evaluation activities devote a central role to the appraisal of teaching quality and of individual teachers. There is room to strengthen the links between teacher appraisal, professional development and school development, including for example professional development plans in the school development plan (see Chapters 4 and 5). Further, if Luxembourg develops a career structure with key stages for teachers, then teacher appraisal should ensure links between developmental evaluation and career progression evaluation, *i.e.* appraisal for certification should take into account qualitative assessments produced through developmental appraisal.

Clarify roles and responsibilities for evaluation and assessment

In completing the evaluation and assessment framework, it will be of key importance to clarify the roles played by different stakeholders. This includes a more active role for students in assessing their own learning progress against the student learning objectives and heightened responsibility for teachers to this end in ensuring regular formative feedback to students and their parents on student learning progress (see Chapter 3).

The OECD review team strongly recommends that the MENFP recognise the important role that pedagogical leadership plays in effectively translating assessment and evaluation results to improved student learning. To this end, it is necessary to clarify the role that *directeurs* and their leadership teams in secondary schools play as pedagogical leaders. Serious reflection will be required around this issue to establish the correct balance of autonomy and responsibility for pedagogical leadership. One notable issue is the *directeurs*' current lack of ability to select and appoint teachers to match their school ethos and development requirements (see Chapter 5). Further, consideration of the OECD recommendation on establishing a mechanism for the external evaluation of schools also has serious consequences for the role that the *inspecteurs* play in fundamental schools. If an external evaluation mechanism is established, this could see a considerably strengthened role for the *inspecteurs* as providing pedagogical leadership.

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. This would entail a clear planning of different roles and responsibilities in the evaluation and assessment framework among the Department for Fundamental Education, the Department for General and Technical Secondary Education, the School Psychology and Orientation Service and the different divisions within the Department for the Co-ordination of Research in Pedagogical and Technological Innovation (SCRIPT). Such planning should pay careful consideration to current capacity and assess the need to build and develop evaluation and assessment competencies where necessary (see below). It is particularly important to clarify responsibility for oversight of the development of national standardised and non-standardised tests and to ensure that these are aligned to the student learning objectives (see Chapter 6). The MENFP could also benefit from a reflection over the distribution of responsibilities for the monitoring system, including which units are responsible for collection of evaluation information, which are responsible for conducting evaluations of policy implementation and which are responsible for analysis of the results of evaluation and assessment.

Raise the focus on equity within the evaluation and assessment framework

While the need to monitor equity is one of the stated drivers behind the initial conceptualisation of an evaluation and assessment framework in Luxembourg, the OECD review team sees a need to further raise the focus on equity within the evaluation and assessment framework. This is highlighted of course by the results of student assessments that indicate clear discrepancies in outcomes for particular student groups, notably with a strong impact of socio-economic background on student outcomes (Chapter 1).

However, it is also highlighted by the different access and pathways within the school system for different student groups. Assessment and evaluation play a key role here and it is critical to ensure that the procedures in place pay adequate attention to equity concerns. In particular, the OECD review team recommends a thorough review of the procedures in place for the orientation of students at age 11 into different types of secondary education. National and international data clearly demonstrate that the current procedures disproportionately impact certain student groups. There has been political recognition of the important role that early education plays in promoting social equity and educational access opportunities. Indeed, in 2010/11, 43.2% of children in the optional preschool year (*cycle I – précoce*) were non-Luxembourgish (of which 21.6% were of Portuguese background) (MENFP, 2012b). Early school programmes can help children with an immigrant background to acquire the appropriate language skills and to help them benefit from the multilingual schooling context in Luxembourg. Further evaluation and review of

how to maximise the benefits from these programmes could provide key information for policy makers. This is an area where the innovative piloting approach taken by the MENFP may also be useful to examine the benefits to complementing the traditional *Lëtzebuergesch* instruction in Cycle 1 with instruction in German and French for certain children.

Further, there is a lack of moderation of teacher grading in high-stakes student assessment (see above). Here, there is room for the MENFP to make better use of the results of both non-standardised and standardised national assessment results.

Finally, a review of the competency-based student learning objectives (see below) 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.

Implement mechanisms to promote school use of evaluation and assessment results for improvement

The results of evaluation and assessment activities must be effectively linked to classroom practice, if not their ability to inform improvement is severely limited. As stated above, there should be clear expectations that the results of evaluation and assessment activities are used by schools to inform the improvement of teaching and learning. Obvious ways of improving links to the classroom in Luxembourg include better reporting on results at the national and school levels and ensuring that evaluation and assessment activities are underpinned by a commonly understood definition of the multiple factors that feed into building, sustaining and improving school quality.

Strengthen reporting on results of evaluation and assessment to promote better links to classroom practice and school improvement plans

The OECD review team commends the decision to provide more detailed feedback reports to schools from the standardised national assessments. The MENFP should seek feedback from *directeurs* and *inspecteurs* on how the reporting of results from both non-standardised and standardised national assessments could be optimised for use in school self-evaluation activities (e.g. via the formal communication channels or a quick survey). Such feedback should adequately reflect the views of teachers in their respective schools. The school development plans provide strong potential to allow the regular self-evaluation of schools of their progress toward implementing national policies and ensuring students achieve the student learning objectives and also specific school goals. Schools should be required to add a section to their school development plan in which they describe how well 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. Regarding the student learning objectives, school reporting against the school development plan provides the ideal platform for schools to report on student progress against these and to place their progress in the context of the school's student population, ethos and development plans. Such reporting should form the basis of each school's analysis of how to further develop the quality of its teaching and learning in the future and to evaluate its progress towards these development goals.

Develop and promote a common understanding of high quality and effective schools

The OECD review team strongly supports the development of a common understanding of high quality and effective schools in Luxembourg. Since the OECD review, the ADQS has invested efforts in developing a framework for school self-evaluation and consulting with stakeholders over this (MENFP, 2012). Indeed, the OECD review team would see a central role for key stakeholders in developing and ensuring a nationally agreed model of high quality and effective schools. This would be similar to national inspection or self-evaluation frameworks that have been developed in many European countries in as much as it would draw on international research and provide common criteria for all schools. However, it should fundamentally reflect the specific context and needs of the school system in Luxembourg, for example paying adequate attention to the key role of multilingualism. This would form the basis for all school self-evaluation activities and would clarify the central importance of assessing student learning progress against the national student learning objectives. This would also serve as a solid foundation for any external school evaluation activities.

The different aspects that contribute to school quality in Luxembourg can be drawn from analysis of national research and assessment results, professional insight from educators and pedagogical support networks, as well as the vast international literature on school effectiveness and improvement. The characteristics for effective schools are well understood (Sammons, Hillman and Mortimore, 1995) and are broadly common to many national systems and school cultures. They relate to the quality of teaching and learning – which has much to do with the calibre of teachers (Barber and Mourshed, 2007); the way teachers are developed and helped to become more effective throughout their careers (e.g. Barber and Mourshed, 2007; Robinson *et al.*, 2008); the quality of instructional leadership in schools (Leithwood *et al.*, 2006) as well as factors concerning the curriculum, vision and expectations, assessment for learning, the rate of progress of students and their educational outcomes. Factors such as these are generally associated with the quality and standards of schools.

The development of a national model for high quality and effective schools would benefit from the parallel development of professional teaching standards and the two sets of quality criteria (for teachers and for schools) should be explicitly linked.

Evaluate the implementation of the competency-based student learning objectives

The OECD review team commends the planned review of the implementation of the competency-based student learning objectives. As part of this process, it will be important to review evidence from various stakeholders (students, teachers and parents, notably). In further refining these, the OECD review team would recommend a more formal and systematic approach to the development and implementation of student learning objectives. To ensure greater engagement of teachers it would be important to ensure that teachers feel that they are partners in this process. This means that they have a representative voice and actively work toward the development of student learning objectives and related assessment tools. As part of the review, it will be important to assess the degree to which there is demand from teachers for tailored training in working with the new competency-based approach and to reflect on how the SCRIPT can meet this need. The review should also critically examine how the lack of incentive structure for schools and teachers to implement the competency-based learning objectives has impacted implementation.

Build evaluation and assessment capacity throughout the school system

The development of a coherent and effective evaluation and assessment framework necessitates considerable investment to develop evaluation and assessment capacity at the class, school and school system levels. This is particularly important in a school system such as Luxembourg where the introduction of evaluation initiatives is relatively recent and often associated with international assessments and thus perceived as “externally imposed”. There have been considerable developments in evaluation and assessment activities over recent years in Luxembourg. Notably in the area of student assessment with the introduction of new formative and summative assessment tools for teachers to document student progress and the introduction of national standardised assessments to complement international assessments and national non-standardised assessments. These initiatives alone have generated ample information for teachers, parents and schools. However, the generation of information and results is not of use if these cannot be analysed, interpreted and used to improve the learning situation for students. 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, the OECD review team commends the priority accorded to building school capacity for developing their strategic improvement plans and self-evaluating. Since the OECD review, the ADQS has supported every fundamental school in Luxembourg with its school development plan. This is important work and is expected to have a positive impact on the implementation of these new school self-evaluation requirements. Further, the requirements for schools to implement structures internally for school development would appear a positive signal of the high political priority given to school self-evaluation for improvement. It will be important to monitor the success of these structures and 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.

The OECD review team underlines the importance of pedagogical leadership (see above). A core component of this would be ensuring that *directeurs* and their management teams and *inspecteurs* have the evaluative training to conduct regular observation of classroom teaching and learning and to provide useful feedback to teachers to build on and further improve the quality of their teaching. There is room here also for the MENFP to monitor and evaluate the capacity of *directeurs* and *inspecteurs* to conduct their evaluation responsibilities.

Finally, a clear signal of the importance of evaluation and assessment activities is the creation of national capacity in these areas. The OECD review team has recommended that the MENFP consider establishing an external school evaluation mechanism. In any case, 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. 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.

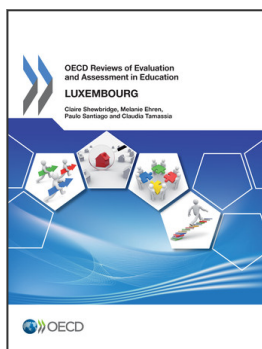
Notes

1. 53% of parents and 21% of teachers responded. See “*Les cycles d’apprentissage et l’évaluation*” at <http://fondamental.men.lu>.

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