Chapter 2

The evaluation and assessment framework

Since 2008 several laws aimed to stimulate evaluation and assessment have been introduced in the Slovak Republic. This chapter details the governance and major components of evaluation and assessment. It finds that the legal framework is largely in place, but that there is some duplication of efforts and inconsistencies. It proposes some policy options to further integrate the evaluation and assessment framework, including a stronger strategic oversight of evaluation and assessment and building capacity throughout the school system, among other ways, through a greater engagement of stakeholders.
Context and features

This chapter examines the overall framework for evaluation and assessment in the Slovak Republic, 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

The Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic (MŠVVaŠ SR) has overall responsibility for evaluation and assessment policy in the Slovak Republic. At the time of the OECD review visit, the Ministry had representatives in each of the eight Slovak regions, but these State administration regional authorities are now under the remit of the Ministry of Interior. The Ministry draws on the expertise of the following bodies to develop and conduct evaluation and assessment activities:

- The Slovak State Schools Inspectorate (ŠŠI) conducts individual school evaluations to monitor school compliance with regulations and other specified matters of policy interest.
- The National Institute for Certified Educational Measurements (NÚCEM) develops and administers national student assessments to monitor student performance and certify student achievement and administers international student assessments to monitor school system performance.

At the time of the OECD review visit, a specific body had responsibility for compiling information on the education system (the Institute for Information and Prognoses of Education, ÚIPŠ). In early 2014, the ÚIPŠ was merged with the Centre of Scientific and Technical Information of the Slovak Republic (CVTI SR), which deals with a broader set of public sector statistical information.

In addition, the National Institute for Education (NIE) develops the curriculum (national education programmes) including both content and minimum performance requirements and the central Methodology and Pedagogy Centre (MPC) offers professional development to educators.

Autonomous regional authorities directly manage public upper secondary schools and are responsible for monitoring school use of funding and school budgets. Municipal authorities directly manage public basic and lower secondary schools and are responsible for monitoring school use of funding and school budgets. In their role as school founder, autonomous regional authorities and municipal authorities are responsible for the recruitment, appraisal and dismissal of school leaders and must approve the annual school report. School founders of privately managed schools have the same responsibilities.

School leaders are responsible for ensuring that the school complies with legal regulations and the school budget. Specific evaluation responsibilities include teacher appraisal and related plans for staff professional development, plus the development of an annual school report.

Main components

The evaluation and assessment framework in the Slovak Republic comprises the following main components:
• **Student assessment**: While school leaders determine school assessment policies, with the advisory support of the School Pedagogical Board, the national education programmes contain both content and minimum performance standards to guide student assessment. Summative assessment plays a strong role in Slovak basic and secondary schools. Students receive formal assessment reports at the end of the first and second semesters of the school year, with grades for both academic achievement and behaviour. They also receive certificates upon successful completion of primary (age 10) and lower secondary (age 15) education. Students sit national tests at the end of lower secondary education (*Testovanie 9*) which help to inform the choice of secondary school they will attend. These are developed by the NÚCEM and were introduced in 2009. Ongoing summative assessment is often influenced by tests in text books, many which predate the 2008 curriculum. At the end of upper secondary schooling, students sit examinations (*Maturita*) in Slovak language and literature and a foreign language, plus in two elective subjects. The compulsory subjects include an external component (a written test) developed and administered by the NÚCEM. Since 2011, the external component focuses more on developing skills and competencies to better align with the curriculum. There is a moderation structure in place for the components assessed by teachers. The *Maturita* is designed to determine students’ entrance to higher education. The NÚCEM has been developing a new national test for the end of primary schooling (*Testovanie 5*).

• **Teacher appraisal**: There is a clearly defined career structure for teachers: beginning teacher, independent teacher, teacher with first certification level and teacher with second certification level. At the end of the first two years of employment, beginning teachers have a compulsory appraisal within the school. This includes periodic classroom observation and a final observation by an internal examination board. To progress to the first and second certification levels, teachers must first achieve sufficient credits in professional development and then apply for certification. This involves an external appraisal by a Ministry-appointed committee, but is not linked to internal, regular appraisal and does not include classroom observation. Certification leads to a salary increase. The 2008 School Act stipulates that school leaders must regularly appraise their pedagogical staff and write an annual appraisal report. Procedures and criteria for internal appraisal are set at the school level. Salaries are not influenced by internal appraisal, but rather by the accumulation of sufficient credits in professional development. Since 2012, school leaders have discretion on judging whether the acquired credits are pertinent for a salary increase. Within the first three years of duty, school leaders and deputies must complete specific professional development, including on teacher appraisal, and professional development must be refreshed every seven years.

• **School evaluation**: The Slovak State Schools Inspectorate (ŠŠI) conducts external evaluation of all Slovak schools using a quality indicator framework which was made publicly available in 2011. It also monitors the competency of school leaders and teachers. The official cycle is for each school to have a comprehensive inspection once every five years, which involves a visit from a team of inspectors over 3-7 days and results in a specific evaluation report with recommendations for the school (this is not published). The ŠŠI also conducts information inspections, typically in a single day, e.g. to check whether the school education programme complies with the national education programmes. The ŠŠI
may also conduct a “thematic inspection” in a selection of schools on a particular topic. There is a system to follow up schools in which inspectors have identified concerns. Upon re-inspection, if adequate improvement has not been made there may be sanctions for the school leader, funding or even closure, although these are very rare. Since 2003, primary and secondary school leaders are obliged to submit an annual report on the school’s educational activities, results and conditions to the school founder for approval and to the school board for comment. Legal requirements on the content of these reports were introduced in 2006 and include a school development plan for the following two year period. School founders are responsible for school leader appointment, appraisal and dismissal and also monitor the management of school funds and other compliance issues not inspected by the ŠŠI. Student results in tests administered by the NÚCEM are aggregated to the school level and published on line, without any information on the school’s socio-economic context or intake.

- **Education system evaluation**: The Ministry is responsible for evaluating the school system and draws on the evaluation work of the ŠŠI and results of national and international assessments. There is no specialised research institute and central agencies have limited analytical capacity. There is a central mechanism to compile annual information on the system, but this does not yet benefit from electronic reporting systems and data gaps impede the reporting on equity. The ŠŠI publishes an annual report including a summary evaluation for the education system as a whole based on inspection analysis and other evidence. The NÚCEM publishes reports on different aspects of student performance in national and international assessments. The eight regional authorities have a limited evaluation role, but check school administrative and financial requirements. Since 2009, regional authorities have more influence over vocational education and training. Since 2009/10, the ŠŠI reports major inspection findings for each region.

**Strengths**

**Evaluation and assessment activities have benefitted from broad political support**

Since 2001, there has been a commitment to implementing a series of reforms that follow the basic strategic points outlined in the long term education strategy “Millennium”. This has been a particularly useful strategic element in the context of a comparatively short-term political cycle in the Slovak Republic. Such commitment reflects the support from all political parties for the important role of evaluation and assessment activities in schooling.

**A legal framework defining responsibilities for evaluation and assessment activities is in place**

The OECD review team notes that there is, in general, a legal framework in place to underpin evaluation and assessment activities. Educational laws over recent years have aimed to create a good balance of power, responsibility, ownership and accountability and are designed to engage different stakeholders. While the implementation of evaluation and assessment activities varies throughout the system, the OECD review team gained the impression that the legal framework had succeeded in engaging several new responsibilities to both conduct assessment and evaluation and also use evaluation results.
In the general context of strengthening aspects of a civil society, this reflects great success over a relatively short period of time. The ability to engage stakeholders in evaluation and assessment activities is also an important strength to further develop school quality in the Slovak Republic.

There is an established legal framework for external school evaluation, including specific acts underpinning school inspection and requirements for school founders to monitor aspects not examined in school inspection, e.g. the annual school financial report (see Chapter 5). In particular, the legal framework is in place to help stimulate more responsibility for evaluation and assessment activities at the local level. There is, for example, a legal basis for schools to develop an annual school report, which is a mechanism to stimulate some self-evaluation activity within schools. Also, the school founder has the legal obligation to review the annual school report, which puts in place the necessary basis for a local, external challenge to schools. External challenge is an important element in promoting more effective self-evaluation activities at the school level (OECD, 2013).

Responsibilities are also established for school leader appraisal and teacher appraisal and this is an important legal basis in a system that aims to focus more on school autonomy, as it is important to engage local actors in quality assurance activities. The Slovak Republic is one of eighteen OECD countries with a framework for regular school-based appraisal and one of fifteen OECD countries with a framework for the completion of a probationary period (OECD, 2013).

**Consideration to balance new responsibilities at the local level with an accountability system**

At the same time as introducing a greater level of autonomy for schools over the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, there has been a shift to monitoring national outcomes. The gradual introduction of different elements of external student testing is a careful strategy and indicates the potential to achieve a good balance between accountability and responsibilities. The increased national testing capacity complements the established national mechanism for external school evaluation (school inspections) and provides more information that can feed into monitoring the school system.

Schools enjoy more autonomy in developing a school education programme, but are accountable to pay attention to requirements in the national education programmes, that is, the central framework. This means that schools follow a shared core of educational content (the national education programmes), but have the ability to adapt this to the needs of their particular student group (the school education programme). At the same time, school inspection has a legal basis to examine the school education programme and also has the possibility to observe the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom. The consideration to achieve this balance reflects good governance thinking.

**Some efforts to build capacity for evaluation and assessment**

The OECD review team notes that, over recent years, there have been several efforts to build capacity for evaluation and assessment at both the national and school levels. The Ministry can draw on the specialised capacity of four major bodies, the National Institute for Certified Educational Measurements (NÚCEM), the Slovak State Schools Inspectorate (ŠŠI), Institute for Information and Prognoses of Education (ÚIPŠ) and the Methodology and Pedagogy Centre (MPC) to support evaluation and assessment activities in the school system. The creation of a national testing agency (NÚCEM) in
2008 has led to significant developments and reforms in student assessment. New assessments have been developed to better promote a competency based curriculum and the range of qualifications offered to students is being broadened (Chapter 3). Importantly, the introduction of an external element of assessment to the Maturita has made this high-stakes examination more objective. Also, the NÚCEM collaborates with the ÚIPŠ to use technology to introduce innovative ways of delivering qualifications. The ÚIPŠ is responsible for collecting and compiling regular information on the school system and this information underpins monitoring and evaluation activities (Chapter 6).

The Slovak Republic has a system of mandatory professional development for school leaders and deputy leaders, which is offered by the MPC or by University faculties. A “functional education” course must be completed within the first three years of employment as a school leader or deputy and this includes courses on creating teacher appraisal and award systems (Chapter 4). There are also mandatory continued professional development requirements for school leadership every seven years and this has a focus on managing school staff. Typically, the MPC coordinates with schools to support the induction programmes for beginning teachers (Chapter 4) and there is a recognised and financially compensated role for teachers to mentor beginning teachers. This observation and support to help build capacity of beginning teachers is a particular strength of the Slovak approach.

The ŠŠI has systems in place to improve its own service and capacity (including good international cooperation), and works towards the further and continued professional development of inspectors as an essential aspect of ensuring reliable and professional inspection judgements (Chapter 5). At the time of the OECD review, the ŠŠI, the MPC and the Bratislava Region had secured European funding to develop projects in support of school self-evaluation activities (Chapter 5). The OECD review team gained the impression that there was a fairly widespread recognition of the need to build capacity in schools. Indeed, the professional development activities offered by the MPC were highly sought after.

Challenges

Need to strengthen the strategic overview of innovations to assessment and evaluation in schooling

Since 2008, the Slovak Republic has undertaken serious innovations in the intended curriculum, central assessment activities and the level of autonomy for teachers and schools in pedagogy and assessment activities. The OECD review team noted several comments regarding the pace of these reforms (Chapter 3).

Implementation concerns regarding the competency-based curriculum

Since the introduction of the national education programmes in 2008, defining both required content and minimum performance standards, the National Institute for Education (NIE) has continued to refine and further develop these as they were not sufficiently developed or clear for schools and educators (Chapter 3). As has been noted in other OECD systems, such significant reforms to the national curriculum do take time to effectively implement, and educators need support to develop instructional and assessment plans against these (e.g. Shewbridge et al., 2011) and it also takes time to adapt and implement central assessment policies against these (e.g. Shewbridge et al., 2014). The NÚCEM has been refining its tests and examinations over recent years to
better align to the competency-based curriculum (Chapter 3). Student results on these tests indicate that the implementation of the new curriculum has been challenging.

At the time of the OECD review, the OECD review team gained the impression that the national education programmes were still not clear enough for some educators and that there was room for the NIE and the NÚCEM to collaborate in better aligning central curriculum and assessment. To the extent that there remains a lack of consensus or clarity on the national education programmes, this will remain a barrier to the effective implementation of the intended curriculum.

At the same time, it is important to offer mechanisms to support schools in implementing the curriculum (see also the point below on capacity). However, the OECD review team noted a lack of central tools and guidelines for schools to support the development of the school education programme and its effective implementation in regular teaching activities. At the time of the OECD review, schools did not benefit from an adequate supply of new materials and, for example, were still likely to use old textbooks and lack examples of how to assess competencies, as specified in the curriculum. Although the OECD review team noted some promising assessment activities developed by schools (Chapter 3), to the extent to which schools rely on out-dated assessment activities in old text books or solely on tests, this will be a further and significant impediment to the effective implementation of the intended curriculum, as these are simply not fit for purpose.

Although there is a central mechanism to check the school education programme, the ŠŠI conducts this inspection via an overview of the school’s written school education programme, but does not further inspect the extent to which this is really being implemented within the school (Chapter 5).

**Duplication of efforts and confusion of objectives**

Different aspects of teacher appraisal are underpinned by a multitude of different standards and criteria that have been developed at different times by different bodies (Chapter 4). While there are professional standards for teachers developed by the MPC in 2006, these are not widely used. The ŠŠI has developed its own set of teaching standards that it uses in classroom observations during inspections; education providers develop their own criteria for the appraisal of teachers upon completion of a professional development programme; the Ministry provides appraisal forms for school leaders to use in regular teacher appraisal; and there are no particular standards available to guide the process of external appraisal for certification.

The OECD review team made similar observations in efforts to support school self-evaluation. There is no clear national programme of innovation or dissemination for the promotion of school self-evaluation, but rather several different and apparently disjointed initiatives (Chapter 5). The Ministry was working on refined guidelines for the development of annual school reports, while at the same time European Social Funding had started three different initiatives to help improve self-evaluation activities (the ŠŠI, the MPC and the Bratislava Autonomous Region).

**Need to further build capacity to both conduct assessment and evaluation and to use results**

The increased level of autonomy over curriculum and assessment at the school level brings increased demands for teacher capacity to conduct formative and summative
assessment. However, the OECD review team noted that in addition to inadequate guidance for teachers and schools, there was a need to improve the provision and timeliness of professional development. Several stakeholders raised the need to increase the Methodology and Pedagogy Centre’s (MPC) capacity to provide professional development, both in terms of the quantity and quality offered (Chapters 3 and 4). There is a concern about the capacity for school leaders to conduct teacher appraisal and the MPC’s offer of professional development for school leaders focuses more on administration than on pedagogical leadership (Chapter 4). There is a high demand for professional development from Slovak teachers, but a limited offer from the MPC, plus a heavy accreditation process coupled with a lack of school funding further limits the offer of professional development activities by independent providers (Chapter 4). There is no system of school-based professional development or pedagogical advisors to work with schools at the school level.

It is important to provide adequate professional development to evaluation experts when significant changes in their evaluation responsibilities are introduced (OECD, 2013). The new responsibilities for the ŠŠI to inspect how schools develop the school education programme may necessitate different competencies in evaluating the implementation of the national curriculum. At the same time, this and other new responsibilities such as the inspection of the how schools administer the NÚCEM tests bring new demands on the ŠŠI’s capacity in terms of its overall level of resources (Chapter 5). This has created a tension in capacity to deliver the regular cycle of complex inspections.

A clear signal to stakeholders for the importance of evaluation and assessment activities is to ensure adequate central capacity to develop these and to promote the effective use of the results of evaluation and assessment to improve student learning (OECD, 2013). The OECD review team noted that there is as yet inadequate analytical and research capacity centrally to exploit fully the results from evaluation and assessment (Chapter 6). Subsequent to the OECD review visit, in early 2014 the Institute for Information and Prognoses of Education (UIPS) has been merged with the Centre of Scientific and Technical Information of the Slovak Republic (CVTI SR), which deals with a broader set of public sector statistical information. This may give opportunities to link different data sets (e.g. from schooling and the labour market) and to undertake more sophisticated analyses. However, the key need is to go beyond the collection and reporting of data and to conduct secondary analyses to really learn from the results.

**Compliance seems to be the primary purpose of evaluation and assessment, not improvement**

The OECD review team formed the impression that regular student assessment is not sufficiently formative and that there is a greater need for feedback to students on how they can improve their learning (Chapter 3). In addition, the major summative assessment in the Slovak Republic is normative, that is, it provides feedback to students on how they rank in comparison to other students. Again, this is of limited use in providing feedback to students on how to improve. Also, although there are standards in national education programmes, in many subjects these only specify a minimum performance requirement and do not allow the measuring of student progress along a continuum.

Internal teacher appraisal has a clear focus on improvement with classroom observation, feedback, an evaluation dialogue and a link to teachers’ professional development (Chapter 4). This is a clear strength in the Slovak approach. However, this
regular formative feedback is completely disconnected from the formal, external appraisal within the certification procedure. Teacher progression is, therefore, dependent on increased qualifications but does not take into account observed performance and improvements in classroom teaching.

External school evaluation does not sufficiently promote school improvement and the improvement of student learning (Chapter 5). The focus of external school evaluation conducted by the ŠŠI is increasingly on school compliance with legal standards. While this is a core part of external evaluation, the major value that external school evaluation can bring is the observation of the quality of learning and teaching in the classroom and to give adequate feedback on this. The mechanism of “Complex inspection” involves classroom observation and provides opportunity for feedback to educators, but this is under pressure from other demands on the ŠŠI’s resources (for example, the ad hoc monitoring of the administration of national assessments in schools). Although there is a system to follow up schools where inspectors have noted concerns, the procedures are not fully clear and there does not appear to be adequate supervision of schools where student learning results are poor and/or deteriorating. The current support systems for school improvement are inadequate and are not sufficiently connected to the results and recommendations from inspections by the ŠŠI.

Along with several other OECD countries, the Slovak legal framework is in place to stimulate school self-evaluation with the requirement for schools to produce an annual school report. However, many schools do not yet use these for school development and improvement but rather see this as bureaucratic exercise (Chapter 5). Similarly, there is no explicit research on how schools follow up on the results and feedback from school inspections. This is a challenge that the Slovak Republic shares with other OECD countries: only a minority, albeit an increasing minority, conduct research into the impact of external school evaluation (OECD, 2013).

While the Slovak Republic participates in international student assessment surveys, it does not have any specific national tools to monitor student performance in the school system. The national assessments (Testovanie 9 and the proposed Testovanie 5) are designed as summative assessments and are not suitable for measuring improvement (Chapter 6). The existing information on the school system is not sufficiently analysed and could be better exploited to inform policies for system improvement.

**Stakeholder voice and representation in evaluation and assessment activities is limited**

There is still rather limited representation of stakeholders in the development and implementation of evaluation and assessment activities. Not all important stakeholders have official bodies to represent them at the national level and those that do have limited representation or role. While the emergence of student councils is a growing strength, these are relatively new in the Slovak Republic and therefore are not yet very wide spread, as such the secondary school student body at the national level is not yet representative. There is room to promote student councils further and to strengthen their voice in the School Board. There is no group representing parents at the national or regional levels. Parent representatives are typically consulted at the school level, but there is no mechanism in place to channel feedback on the development and implementation of central policies. At the same time, there is room to strengthen the role for existing groups representing teachers in the development of policies related to the teaching profession, e.g. the development of professional teaching standards (Chapter 4).
The Slovak Republic is one of eight OECD systems that does not administer stakeholder surveys to collect qualitative feedback on the school system (OECD, 2013). This means there is an absence of a simple mechanism to receive regular feedback from students, teachers and parents on the teaching and learning environment and on their overall satisfaction. Such feedback can be particularly insightful at the time of introducing innovations to the school system, for example, the shift to the competency-based curriculum and the development of school education programmes. As it stands, schools miss important information to feed into their self-evaluation activities.

**Lack of attention in evaluation and assessment activities appears to be paid to equity**

The OECD review team misses explicit equity goals for the school system in the Slovak Republic. While there are initiatives to ensure that student assessment is more equitable, e.g. adaptations to the national tests for blind and deaf students and the introduction of an external component to the *Maturita*, the monitoring system *per se* does not pay sufficient attention to the equity of outcomes and how differences in school quality impact the educational opportunities for different students.

There are some important information gaps regarding measures of student and school socio-economic context, which constitute core information to monitor equity (Chapter 6). Although the NÚCEM has started to report test results aggregated at the regional level, there is room for further reflection on how to set realistic goals for improvement and how best to monitor these. The level of regional disparities is more pronounced in the Slovak Republic than in other OECD countries (Chapter 1). Results from OECD’s PISA indicate that socio-economic disparities have a stronger impact on educational performance in the Slovak Republic than internationally, but that these do not fully explain student performance differences between urban and rural schools (Chapter 1). It would seem of key policy interest to have sufficient national data and research to more closely examine and monitor these apparent differences in educational quality.

At the time of the OECD review, there were no national data about the socio-economic intake of students in schools. The NÚCEM published school average results on national tests and ranked schools on their results. These results were not accompanied by any information on the socio-economic and other characteristics of the schools. This misses an important aspect of the monitoring of equity and also could lead to unfair and inaccurate comparisons of school quality (Chapter 5). The particular structural feature of academic selection in the Slovak Republic’s school system is not reflected in the reporting of national test results. This is an important aspect with consequences for both the interpretation of particular school results and the monitoring of equity across the school system. Analysis of international results indicates that a higher degree of academic selectivity is associated with a higher level of inequity within a school system (Chapter 1). Given the high level of inequity in performance identified in the Slovak Republic’s school system in international results, it would seem of key importance to monitor the different routes through the school system that students can take and how these are associated with both quality and overall equity in educational outcomes.

Such information gaps in the monitoring of equity also add complexity to the professional judgement that school inspectors need to make on the quality of a given school (Chapter 5). At the time of the OECD review, there did not appear to be clear guidelines for school inspectors on how to take account of school socio-economic context and other important contextual characteristics in forming a judgement on the quality of
the school. This could influence the reliability of an important evaluation mechanism that can help to monitor more closely and on a broader set of outcomes the differences in quality among schools.

There also appears to be limited attention in reporting systems to the outcomes for different student groups. One notable challenge to equity in the Slovak school system is the concentration of Roma children in schools providing special education (Chapter 1). Without clear monitoring of different student groups, it is not possible to follow their progress and to promote improvement goals. An important contribution of system evaluation is the raising of awareness of particular equity goals and this component of the evaluation and assessment framework generally appears to be underdeveloped in the Slovak Republic (Chapter 6).

**Policy recommendations**

The above analysis notes that the Slovak Republic has introduced serious reforms in schooling that have strengthened the role of evaluation and assessment since 2008. In going forward, the OECD review team notes that the major points are now to ensure coherence among these different elements and to ensure that the results of these activities are used for improvement of student learning.

To build on and consolidate the efforts to implement evaluation and assessment throughout the school system, the OECD review team recommends the following policy points to help build an integrated evaluation and assessment framework that more effectively promotes student learning improvement:

- Develop a framework document to promote greater coherence and synergies in evaluation and assessment.
- Build consensus on the national learning objectives and align assessment activities to these.
- Clarify the purpose of different evaluation and assessment activities and ensure adequate focus on improvement.
- Draw up a strategic plan for future development/refinements to evaluation and assessment activities.
- Prioritise capacity building to ensure successful implementation and use of results.
- Promote the role of students, teachers and parents in evaluation and assessment activities.
- Raise the focus on equity within the evaluation and assessment framework.

**Develop a framework document to promote greater coherence and synergies in evaluation and assessment**

The full potential of evaluation and assessment will not be realised until the framework is fully integrated and is perceived as a coherent whole. This requires a holistic approach to building a complete evaluation and assessment framework in view of generating synergies between its components, avoiding duplication of procedures and preventing inconsistency of objectives (OECD, 2013). As noted in the above analysis, the OECD review team identified significant challenges in this area. There were disjointed
initiatives to stimulate self-evaluation activities in schools and without reference to an authoritative, common framework document, there is a real risk of duplication of procedures and also sending inconsistent signals to educators of the major purpose of self-evaluation. A similar concern was noted about the existence of several different sets of criteria for teacher appraisal. These are clear examples of how a common framework can help guide more effective procedures and maximise synergies for the different actors involved.

The Ministry should oversee the development of a strategy or framework document that conceptualises a complete evaluation and assessment framework for schooling in the Slovak Republic. A first step is to clarify and/or set the major goals for schooling in the Slovak Republic. As noted in the above analysis, a strength in the initial introduction of different elements of evaluation and assessment in the Slovak school system has been the overarching long-term goals set in the “Millennium” strategy. Equally, a set of long-term goals will help to integrate the different elements into a coherent evaluation and assessment framework.

A major challenge for schooling in the Slovak Republic is the observed disparities in educational quality and outcomes within the system (Chapter 1). Evaluation and assessment can contribute significantly to both monitoring and promoting equity and a greater focus on equity is strongly recommended (see specific recommendation below). A focus on equity is one of the key design principles identified in the OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment (see Box 2.1).

**Box 2.1 Key principles to effectively implement evaluation and assessment (OECD, 2013)**

The strategy to develop an effective evaluation and assessment framework should build on some key principles, including:

**The centrality of teaching and learning:** It is critical to ensure that the evaluation of teaching and learning quality is central to the evaluation framework. Classroom observation should be a key element of teacher appraisal as well as an important instrument in external school evaluation. Similarly, the observation of teaching and feedback to individual teachers should be part of school self-evaluation processes. The effectiveness of the evaluation and assessment framework will depend to a great extent on the ability to cultivate a culture of sharing classroom practice, professional feedback and peer learning.

**The importance of school leadership:** The effective operation of evaluation and assessment will depend to a great extent on the way the concept and practice of school leadership gains ground within the education system. It is difficult to envisage either effective teacher appraisal or productive school self-evaluation without strong leadership capacity. It is essential that school principals take direct responsibility for exerting instructional leadership and for assuming the quality of education in their schools. Hence, the recruitment, appraisal, development and support for school leaders is of key importance in creating and sustaining effective evaluation and assessment cultures within schools.

**Equity as a key dimension in the evaluation and assessment framework:** It is essential that evaluation and assessment contribute to advancing the equity goals of education systems. At the system level, it is imperative to identify educational disadvantage and understand its impact on student performance. Developing equity measures should be a priority in all countries. It is also important to ensure that evaluation and assessment procedures are fair to given groups such as cultural minorities and students with special needs.
Box 2.1 Key principles to effectively implement evaluation and assessment (OECD, 2013) (continued)

A structure to integrate accountability and development: The overall evaluation and assessment framework should include elements to accomplish both the accountability and developmental functions at all levels of the system (e.g. formative vs. summative assessment for students; professional development for teachers vs. career advancement decisions following teacher appraisal; data reporting vs. improvement action plans for schools) and provide a structure which can potentially integrate these two functions.

Commitment to transparency: The overall evaluation and assessment framework can be strengthened by a high level of transparency in monitoring and publishing results.


A second step is for the Ministry to map out all existing evaluation and assessment activities and scrutinise whether, and how, these fit together. This will involve serious reflection on how each type of evaluation or assessment produces results that are useful for classroom practice. The aim is to develop a common framework document that should be referred to by all actors in the school system. As such, it is crucial that the Ministry engages key stakeholder groups when developing the framework. This is an important initial point to help embed evaluation and assessment as an ongoing and essential part of the professionalism of actors in the school system. Also, this will maximise the framework’s responsiveness to broader social and economic needs. The engagement of key stakeholder groups also signals the important objective that the framework should clarify their different responsibilities and allow for better networking and connections among stakeholders. This will promote greater collaboration among national bodies with specific responsibilities for evaluation and assessment (see below).

In developing the evaluation and assessment framework document, a central objective is to signal the expectation that evaluation and assessment activities promote the improvement of student learning and outcomes. This requires the alignment of evaluation and assessment activities to student learning objectives and a clear understanding of the purpose of different activities (see following two points).

Build consensus on core student learning objectives and align assessment activities to these

An important underpinning for effective assessment is the development of clear and widely supported student learning objectives. These are essential to achieve the alignment of processes and school agents’ contributions within the evaluation and assessment framework (OECD, 2013). In the ambitious shift to a competency-based curriculum, national bodies have been working to review and refine core student learning objectives (standards in national education programmes). The national education programmes set both content and minimum performance requirements. This work has been led by the National Institute for Education, but two other national bodies have an important role in promoting greater implementation of the competency-based curriculum: the development of national assessments and examinations by the NÚCEM plays a key role in signalling the expected content and standards for student learning at the end of lower and upper.
secondary schooling; and the pedagogical materials and training developed by the MPC are critical in aiding the implementation of the competency-based curriculum in the daily and weekly instructional activities.

The OECD review team recommends that the Ministry ensures there is continued and heightened collaboration between the National Institute for Education (NIE), the NÚCEM and the MPC. This will ensure, to a maximum, coherence among the centrally developed tools for teachers and will aid a more effective implementation of assessment of student learning against the competency-based curriculum. A strong collaboration between these bodies is essential in further developing assessment criteria to support on-going student assessment (see below).

**Clarify the purpose of different evaluation and assessment activities and ensure adequate focus on improvement**

The framework document should unambiguously communicate that the major purpose of evaluation and assessment is to improve student learning and outcomes. As such, it is expected that school agents actively use the results of evaluation and assessment activities to develop improvement or action plans at all levels (OECD, 2013). This is best achieved through a balance of activities designed for accountability or development. As such, it is important to clarify the major purpose of the different evaluation and assessment activities in the Slovak school system. Which activities are best suited for compliancy? Which activities are best suited to promoting development?

As the analysis above notes, the dominant purpose of existing evaluation and assessment activities appears to be compliance. In the context of greater freedom and responsibility at the local level, it is clear that there is a need for sufficient accountability mechanisms in the Slovak school system. An established mechanism for external school evaluation (the ŠŠI) is a clear strength in the Slovak school system, although the accountability role could be strengthened via a greater level of transparency with the publication of individual school inspection reports. The introduction of an external examination component in the high stakes student examinations (*Maturita*) is also a strength in increasing reliability and, by extension, equity of student outcomes at this important stage.

However, there is inadequate attention to the development purpose of evaluation and assessment. The OECD review team recommends that the Ministry ensures an emphasis on *student learning progress* and improvement in education – and that this includes adequate attention to the progress of different groups of students. Here it is most impactful to promote a culture of formative assessment and assessment for learning in schools (Chapter 3). This can be promoted with the development of student assessment criteria to support on-going internal assessment, initially in Slovak language and literature and mathematics, in order to make the implementation more manageable for teachers (Chapter 3). In the longer term, it could support a shift to criterion based national testing. At the same time, an important support will be national guidelines with concrete examples of student work against these assessment criteria. There is also a role for system evaluation to promote a focus on learning progress. The OECD review team recommends that the Ministry develop a strategy to monitor outcomes at the national level over time (Chapter 6), including the development of more longitudinal measures or research programmes.
Draw up a strategic plan for future development/refinements to evaluation and assessment activities

The 2008 School Act introduced significant innovations to the Slovak school system. It is not surprising that the OECD review team noted some concerns with the implementation of the competency-based curriculum. These pertained to both clarity of objectives for teachers to implement instructional activities and sufficient alignment of student assessment against these. The OECD review team recommends that the Ministry collates evidence on: the implementation progress; and the impact of these innovations on the quality of teaching and learning. Where necessary, there may be need for further evaluations. This will provide helpful feedback on how to refine existing activities.

Such evidence on implementation and impact will also help set priorities for future changes. The OECD review team notes the on-going review of national education programmes and also suggests developing assessment criteria against these for on-going student assessment. However, all further refinements or innovations should be carefully phased in, including adequate stakeholder engagement in developing the refinements and the use of piloting in selected schools.

- **Stakeholder engagement**: Regular interactions contribute to building trust among different stakeholders and raising awareness for the major concerns of others, thereby enhancing the inclination of the different parties for compromise (OECD, 2013). As such, it is wise to engage school leaders and teachers in the design, management and analysis of evaluation and assessment policies. Consensus building among stakeholders is all the more important since local actors may be in the best position to foresee unintended consequences and judge what is feasible in practice.

- **Using pilots and initial feedback from educators**: Policy experimentation and the use of pilots may prove effective strategies to overcome blockages dictated by disagreements among stakeholders and to assess the effectiveness of policy innovations before generalising them (OECD, 2013). It is essential to build in mechanisms to review and refine evaluation and assessment policies. The careful phasing in of innovations via a pilot process allows selected education practitioners opportunities to express their views and concerns on given evaluation and assessment initiatives as these are implemented, e.g. through interviews and surveys. Is the process clear? Are the results useful? Is the feedback of good quality? Are the standards and criteria fair? Is the process too bureaucratic and time consuming?

Prioritise capacity building to ensure successful implementation and use of results

An essential part of any implementation strategy is to ensure an adequate provision of guidelines, tools and specific training. This should happen in parallel with the engagement of stakeholders and the use of piloting (see recommendation above). The OECD review team has identified the need for the National Institute for Education to develop, in collaboration with teachers, useful assessment guidelines and sample tasks. Based on their review of literature on accountability and classroom instruction, Ballard and Bates (2008) underscore the importance of communication among teachers and those who write learning objectives, develop large-scale assessments, and set out guidelines for school evaluations.
While evaluation and assessment can identify areas for improvement, they are only instrumental in achieving improvement if their results are used by stakeholders. There is a need to ensure adequate professional development provision so that teachers and school leaders learn from the results of evaluation and assessment and make changes that lead to improvement in student learning and outcomes. For example, there is a need to supply high quality training to teachers on student assessment and school self-evaluation activities (Chapters 3 and 5). At the national level, there is a need to build analytical and research capacity to fully exploit the results of evaluation and assessment, so that these feed into policies for school system improvement (Chapter 6).

Within available resources, the OECD review team recommends that the Ministry set up a priority plan for capacity building to ensure the maximum benefit is gained from evaluation and assessment activities. The clear demand from schools for professional development and the limited capacity of the MPC requires a rethinking of the professional development offer. How to stimulate offers from other providers? Could the accreditation process be reviewed? Is there room to promote greater collaboration among schools for peer learning as an important form of professional development? How can educators be most effectively engaged in central consultations and development of evaluation and assessment policies, so as to maximise dissemination and feedback throughout the school system? Is there a way to more systematically highlight good practices and learn from school professional development approaches? How can the teachers’ professional representative body play a stronger role in identifying and disseminating effective practices in different contexts?

**Promote the role of students, teachers and parents in evaluation and assessment activities**

The importance of engaging stakeholders in the design and initial implementation of evaluation and assessment activities has been noted. For more systematic feedback on Ministry policy development and implementation, the Ministry could explore the feasibility of establishing representative bodies for parents at the regional and national levels. Providing more feedback to parents on individual school inspections will also play an important role in engaging parents more actively in evaluation activities.

To ensure that school annual report development does not remain a bureaucratic exercise, it is important that this is a vehicle to engage discussion and feedback from students, teachers and parents. The legal provision is in place for the School Board to comment on the school annual report. However, there may be ways to help schools more actively promote feedback from students, teachers and parents. Many OECD systems develop example surveys that can be used by schools in their self-evaluation activities. Norway even administers a national pupil survey on an annual basis (Nusche et al., 2011). These results are collated and reported on in an annual report on the school system, thus giving prominence to feedback from students on the quality of teaching and learning they experience. In the Flemish Community of Belgium, students developed their own set of surveys for teachers to use in seeking feedback from their students on classroom activities (Shewbridge et al., 2011). The Ministry has room to further support the emerging development of student councils in Slovak schools. This could be via the support of the development of specific evaluation tools. But the most important support is that there is a clear communication of the important contribution student councils can make to ongoing school self-evaluation activities as part of the School Board. This can be done by identifying schools with effective student councils and showcasing these in national reporting and guidelines for self-evaluation.
Raise the focus on equity within the evaluation and assessment framework

In most countries there is an emergent focus on equity and inclusion among educational goals (OECD, 2013). As noted in Box 2.1, this is one of the key principles in designing the evaluation and assessment framework. Among the OECD systems reviewed over the period 2010 to 2013, Australia, the Flemish Community of Belgium and Northern Ireland in the United Kingdom provide helpful examples of explicit policy goals to tackle equity concerns within the school system (Box 2.2). Australia has the challenge of wide regional disparities and also the need to improve the engagement of some student communities in the school system. In Northern Ireland, a significant proportion of children are selected into schools at the age of 11 based on their academic performance and this is strongly associated with level of socio-economic advantage. In this context, there are attempts to signal the importance of success in schooling for all children.

Box 2.2 Examples of equity and inclusion in central educational goals

Australia

Equity is at the core of the national goals for education, and national reporting on education pays careful attention to different measures of equity, including gender, Indigenous groups, geographic location, students with a language background other than English and socio-economic status (based on parental education and parental occupation). Equity has been given more prominence in general government reporting since 2004 when it was put on the same level as “efficiency” and “effectiveness” in the Report on Government Services’ general performance indicator framework, with indicators on equity of access (output) and equity of outcomes (DEEWR, 2010).

Flemish Community of Belgium

There is strong political focus on the need to increase the equity of educational opportunities. Policy on Equal Educational Opportunities has played a prominent role since the adoption of the 2002 Decree of Equity of Educational Opportunities. The 2002 Decree provides for: the right for each child to enrol in the school of choice, with very strict rules on refusal or referral of students; the creation of local consultation platforms to ensure co-operation in implementing local equal educational opportunities policies; and extra support for schools providing additional educational support as part of this policy (Flemish Ministry of Education and Training and the University of Antwerp Edubron Research Group, 2010).

Northern Ireland, United Kingdom

One of two overarching goals for the Department of Education is “Closing the performance gap, increasing equity and equality” (Shewbridge et al., 2014). The Minister with support from the Department of Education has set specific targets to increase the proportion of disadvantaged pupils (measured as those entitled to free school meals) successfully achieving five General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) qualifications or equivalent with grades A* to C (including GCSEs in mathematics and English). The Minister wishes to communicate, via the target setting exercise, clear expectations for improvement in the educational outcomes of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. The Department of Education has also run a publicity campaign about the value of education. This aims to reach and engage parents in supporting the importance of schooling and to tackle the “poverty of aspiration” that national evidence has shown in some communities. National evidence also reveals a problem of underachievement for boys and the Department of Education has run an advertising campaign to attract more men into the teaching profession.
Box 2.2 Examples of equity and inclusion in central educational goals (continued)

Sources:


References


