

## Chapter 1

### The focus on evaluation and assessment

*The OECD undertook a major international study of evaluation and assessment policies in school systems: the OECD Review on Evaluation and Assessment Frameworks for Improving School Outcomes. Drawing on the experiences of 25 countries around the world, and extensive data and research, the OECD Review analysed the key factors involved in effective evaluation and assessment policies, and developed policy options for countries to consider.*

*Over at least the last 30 years, evaluation and assessment have become an increasingly significant feature of the educational landscape in countries across the world. Their nature and purpose remain varied, reflecting national traditions, infrastructure and practices, broader educational policy and political agreements. This chapter discusses why evaluation and assessment policies are high on national agendas, describes the methodology used in the Review, and outlines the organisation of this report.*

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The statistical data for Israel are supplied by and under the responsibility of the relevant Israeli authorities. The use of such data by the OECD is without prejudice to the status of the Golan Heights, East Jerusalem and Israeli settlements in the West Bank under the terms of international law.

## The growing importance of evaluation and assessment

There is widespread recognition that evaluation and assessment arrangements are key to both improvement and accountability in school systems. This is reflected in their increasing importance in national education agendas (see Chapter 2). As countries strive to transform their educational systems to prepare all young people with the knowledge and skills needed to function in rapidly changing societies, some common policy trends can be observed in one form or another in most OECD countries, including decentralisation, school autonomy, greater accountability for outcomes and a greater knowledge management capacity. Decentralisation and school autonomy are creating a greater need for the evaluation of schools and school agents while greater IT capacity allows for the development and analysis of large-scale student assessments as well as individualised assessment approaches. Results from evaluation and assessment are becoming critical to knowing whether the school system is delivering good performance and to providing feedback for further development. Evaluation and assessment are instrumental in defining strategies for improving school practices with the ultimate goal of enhancing student outcomes. These developments are having a strong influence in the way in which policy makers monitor system, school, school leader, teacher and student performance.

Countries increasingly use a range of approaches to the evaluation and assessment of students, teachers, school leaders, schools and education systems. These are used as tools for understanding better how well students are learning, for providing information to parents and society at large about educational performance and for improving school, school leadership and teaching practices. Strong emphasis is being placed on better equipping and encouraging teachers to carry out self-appraisal and student formative assessment, on providing the incentives and means for school self-evaluation, on encouraging “value-added” evaluation and on more regular standardised testing of students and national monitoring of the overall system. However, countries often face difficulties in implementing evaluation and assessment procedures. These may arise as a result of poor policy design, lack of analysis of unintended consequences, little capacity for educational agents to put procedures into practice, lack of an evaluation culture, or deficient use of evaluation results.

Against this background, the OECD Education Policy Committee launched the OECD Review on Evaluation and Assessment Frameworks for Improving School Outcomes in late 2009 to provide analysis and policy advice to countries on how evaluation and assessment arrangements can be embedded within a consistent framework to bring about real gains in performance across the school system.

### Methodology

This report is concerned with evaluation and assessment policies in school systems that can help countries achieve their educational goals and student learning objectives. It draws on a major study, the OECD Review on Evaluation and Assessment Frameworks for Improving School Outcomes, conducted in collaboration with OECD countries and under the guidance of the OECD’s Group of National Experts on Evaluation and Assessment.

The Review was based on volunteer countries working collaboratively with each other and with the OECD Secretariat. It was designed to respond to the strong interest in evaluation and assessment issues evident at national and international levels. The Review looked at the various components of evaluation and assessment frameworks that countries

use with the objective of improving student outcomes. These include student assessment, teacher appraisal, school evaluation, school leader appraisal and system evaluation. The Review focused on primary and secondary education.<sup>1</sup> It involved examining country-specific issues and policy responses in strengthening the contribution of evaluation and assessment frameworks to the improvement of student outcomes to generate insights and findings relevant to OECD countries as a whole.<sup>2</sup>

The overall purpose of the Review was to explore how evaluation and assessment frameworks can be used to improve the quality, equity and efficiency of school education. The overarching policy question was “How can assessment and evaluation policies work together more effectively to improve student outcomes in primary and secondary schools?” The Review further concentrated on five key issues for analysis: *(i)* designing a systemic framework for evaluation and assessment; *(ii)* ensuring the effectiveness of evaluation and assessment procedures; *(iii)* developing competencies for evaluation and for using feedback; *(iv)* making the best use of evaluation results; and *(v)* implementing evaluation and assessment policies.

The project was overseen by the Group of National Experts on Evaluation and Assessment, which was established as a subsidiary body of the OECD Education Policy Committee in order to guide the methods, timing and principles of the Review.

Twenty-five countries were actively engaged in the Review. The fact that so many countries took part indicates that evaluation and assessment issues are a priority for public policy, and likely to become even more so in future years. Participating countries covered a wide range of economic and social contexts, and among them they illustrated quite different approaches to evaluation and assessment in school systems. This allowed a comparative perspective on key policy issues. These countries prepared a detailed background report, following a standard set of guidelines. Fifteen countries also opted for a detailed Review, undertaken by a team consisting of members of the OECD Secretariat and external experts. This resulted in the preparation of 15 Country Review Reports containing an analysis of evaluation and assessment policies and policy recommendations in the concerned countries.<sup>3</sup> The countries actively engaged in the Review were:<sup>4</sup>

- Preparation of a Country Background Report (25 countries, involving 26 reports): Australia, Austria, Belgium (Flemish Community), Belgium (French Community), Canada,<sup>5</sup> Chile, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Korea, Luxembourg, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Sweden and the United Kingdom (Northern Ireland).
- Country Review countries (15 countries): Australia, Belgium (Flemish Community), Chile, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Italy, Luxembourg, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, the Slovak Republic, Sweden and the United Kingdom (Northern Ireland).

There are some striking differences among countries in regard to their evaluation and assessment frameworks, as illustrated by:

- Student assessment: In primary education, students are not awarded marks in Denmark, Iceland, New Zealand, Norway and Sweden whereas Hungary, Italy, Mexico, the Netherlands, Poland and the Slovak Republic rely primarily on numerical marks for formal reporting.

- **Teacher appraisal:** In Australia, Chile, Korea, Portugal and the United Kingdom, teachers undergo formal processes of appraisal as part of their performance management whereas in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden feedback on teacher performance is provided in more informal settings at the school level.
- **School evaluation:** While in systems such as Australia, the Flemish Community of Belgium, the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Portugal, the Slovak Republic, Sweden and the United Kingdom there is a tradition of external school evaluation (inspections or reviews), in countries such as Chile, Mexico and the United States school evaluation is mostly based on comparable performance measures.
- **School leader appraisal:** In Austria, Estonia, Iceland, Ireland, Italy and Luxembourg no requirements exist for school leader appraisal in contrast to the mandatory periodic appraisal systems in countries such as France, Israel, Korea, New Zealand, Portugal and Slovenia.
- **System evaluation:** While in systems such as Australia, Austria, the Flemish Community of Belgium, Chile, Iceland, New Zealand and Norway the use of stakeholder surveys for system evaluation is common, other systems such as the Czech Republic, France, Korea, Luxembourg and Mexico do not rely on them.

By documenting such differences among countries, and trying to understand their causes and consequences, comparative analysis can help to raise questions about long-established practices and help accumulate evidence on the impact of different policy approaches. Annex A details the processes involved in the OECD Review, the country reports and other documents produced, and the large number of organisations and people who contributed to the Review and to the preparation of this report.

### Organisation of the report

This report is intended to add value to the wide range of materials produced through the Review (listed in Annex A) by drawing out its key findings and policy messages. This report seeks to:

- provide an international comparative analysis of evaluation and assessment policies in school systems
- provide a stock-take of current policies and practices in countries
- draw attention to effective and innovative policy initiatives in countries
- develop a comprehensive framework to guide the development of evaluation and assessment policies
- propose evidence-based policy options for the development of evaluation and assessment policies.

The contexts within which evaluation and assessment policy making operates can vary markedly across countries depending upon their historical traditions, educational cultures and economic conditions. Policy initiatives that work well in one national context are not necessarily transferable. The Review has attempted to be sensitive to this through an approach that analyses evaluation and assessment policies in relation to the values,

vision and organisation of school systems in different countries as well as the broader economic, social and political contexts in which they operate.

The report has seven further chapters. Chapter 2 provides an overview of context and trends in evaluation and assessment. Chapters 3-8 are concerned with the key substantive issues driving the project: the evaluation and assessment framework, including policy implementation (Chapter 3); student assessment (Chapter 4); teacher appraisal (Chapter 5); school evaluation (Chapter 6); the appraisal of school leaders (Chapter 7); and education system evaluation (Chapter 8). Each of these chapters discusses country practices, the main factors involved and their impact, and examples of innovative policy responses, as well as identifying policy options for countries to consider. Annex A details the process by which the Review was conducted, and the range of outputs in addition to this report. Annex B lists the main policy recommendations.

The report provides analysis on:

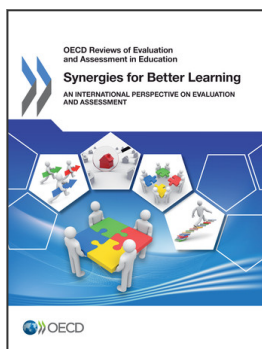
- how to develop a coherent evaluation and assessment framework within which different components serve their purpose well and together successfully combine development and accountability to improve student outcomes
- how to strengthen the use of evaluation and assessment results to enhance school and classroom practices so student outcomes are improved
- how to facilitate the implementation of evaluation and assessment policies.

It provides a description of design, implementation and use of evaluation and assessment procedures in countries, analyses strengths and weaknesses of different approaches, and offers recommendations for improvement including how results should be incorporated into policy and practice. In doing so, it synthesises research-based evidence on the impact of evaluation and assessment strategies.

The following chapters provide many examples of country initiatives in evaluation and assessment. A number of particularly innovative and promising initiatives are highlighted in self-contained boxes that provide more detail on the reforms. Nevertheless, due to space constraints, it has not been possible to provide all of the necessary detail, and readers are encouraged to consult the relevant Country Background Reports, Country Review Reports and research studies. All the documents produced through the project are available from [www.oecd.org/edu/evaluationpolicy](http://www.oecd.org/edu/evaluationpolicy). It should be noted that country-specific information given in this report with no associated source or reference is taken from Country Background Reports and Country Review Reports produced through the Review.

## Notes

1. The scope of the Review did not include early childhood education and care, apprenticeships within vocational education and training, and adult education.
2. The project's purposes, analytical framework and methodology are detailed in the OECD (2009) document entitled "OECD Review on Evaluation and Assessment Frameworks for Improving School Outcomes: Design and Implementation Plan for the Review" available at [www.oecd.org/edu/evaluationpolicy](http://www.oecd.org/edu/evaluationpolicy).
3. The Country Review Reports were released as the publication series *OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education*.
4. However, to the extent they are covered by the OECD Education Database and by the academic and policy literatures, OECD countries less actively engaged in the Review are still considered in the analysis and feature in some of the report's figures and tables.
5. The Country Background Report for Canada focuses on policies and practices of the Atlantic provinces: Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and New Brunswick.



**From:**

## **Synergies for Better Learning**

An International Perspective on Evaluation and Assessment

**Access the complete publication at:**

<https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264190658-en>

### **Please cite this chapter as:**

OECD (2013), “The focus on evaluation and assessment”, in *Synergies for Better Learning: An International Perspective on Evaluation and Assessment*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264190658-4-en>

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