Chapter 3

Teacher appraisal in Romania: Ensuring appraisal supports teachers’ professional development

This chapter looks at how Romania evaluates teaching practice and supports teachers to improve through its teacher appraisal system. Romania uses a combination of appraisal types but their developmental function is limited, reducing support for teacher growth. Developing professional teacher standards would help to ensure that all teachers are appraised according to common criteria for effective teaching. Teachers’ development would be better supported if their regular appraisals carried reduced stakes for their career and pay, and included more formative practices such as open discussion and feedback. To ensure that only motivated candidates with the right attributes enter the teaching profession, the appraisals to complete probation should enforce a minimum threshold for entry, while providing new teachers with the support they need to grow professionally. Finally, reviewing the system of linking appraisals to salary bonuses and creating differentiated career paths for teachers which fairly reward those taking on new roles and responsibilities will help to encourage teachers to develop their skills throughout their career.
Introduction

This chapter looks at how Romania’s existing appraisal system could be reformed to strengthen its positive impact on teaching and learning and align better with the country’s curriculum goals. Teacher appraisal refers to how teachers are assessed and given feedback on their performance and competencies (OECD, 2013c). Well-designed appraisal supports teachers in their professional development and holds them to account for their practice, helping to improve teaching, and in turn, raise student achievement.

Romania uses a number of different appraisal practices, including regular annual appraisals and appraisals to determine whether teachers should be fully certified, advance to a higher qualification level or receive a salary bonus. Romania does not, however, use teacher appraisal as a developmental tool. Appraisal processes are summative rather than formative, and have high-stakes consequences for teachers’ remuneration and careers. This limits the potential of the appraisals to positively influence teaching practices and enhance student outcomes.

If teaching practice in Romania is to become more student-focused and adapted to different learner needs, teachers will need a more developmental regular appraisal process, involving constructive feedback and encouraging them to participate in professional learning opportunities that encourage new approaches. This is particularly important for new teachers, who require more support in their first year of employment and currently receive limited initial preparation in areas essential for activating student learning, such as formative assessment. At the same time, Romania’s summative appraisals of teachers, which provide a level of quality assurance on entry to the profession and for career progression, should be revised to encourage and reward the development of important pedagogical and professional competencies. Common professional teaching standards would give teachers, and all actors involved in their certification, appraisal, initial education and ongoing learning a clear, consistent model of good teaching to drive improvement in practice and outcomes.

Context and main features of teacher appraisal in Romania

The teaching profession

Initial teacher education

As in most OECD countries, in Romania, the minimum academic qualification to become a primary teacher is a bachelor’s degree and the minimum qualification to become an upper secondary teacher is a master’s degree (OECD, 2014a). However, initial teacher education in Romania provides considerably less preparation in the core aspects of teaching than in other countries. Teachers in Romania undertake the following initial training education, followed by a one-year probation period, to obtain permanent teacher certification:

- for primary teachers: a bachelor’s degree in education (three years)
- for lower secondary teachers: a one-semester module of initial teacher education while obtaining a bachelor’s degree in a subject other than education
- for upper secondary teachers: two modules of initial teacher education lasting one academic year while obtaining a bachelor’s degree and a master’s degree (two years) in a subject other than education (MNESR, 2012a).

The majority of Romania’s universities (83) offer some form of initial teacher education. There is considerable variation in the quality of programmes across institutions.
All providers and their programmes must be accredited by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS), which is intended to ensure that minimum standards are met. However, the accreditation standards are broad and do not specify what is needed for a high-quality teacher preparation programme (MNESR, 2006).

There are concerns in Romania, as in many other European countries, that low entry requirements combined with low salaries have made teaching a less attractive profession. The admission criteria for bachelor’s education programmes for future primary teachers are the same as those for other bachelor’s degree programmes and there are no minimum admission requirements for the initial teacher education modules for future secondary teachers. Candidates are interviewed for entry, but all those who apply tend to be admitted (Velea and Istrate, 2011). This has resulted in a surplus of students training to teach as a second-choice career.

Initial teacher education modules offer less preparation than programmes in other European countries, especially in practical domains. Future primary and lower secondary teachers receive just one semester of professional coursework in didactics and pedagogy, which is roughly half of what candidate teachers receive on average across Europe (MNESR, 2012b; European Commission, 2015b). They also have less teaching practice, (78 hours), than in all but one other European country, and significantly less than in countries such as the United Kingdom where teachers have up to 1065 hours and Lithuania where teachers receive up to 800 hours (European Commission, 2013). Future upper secondary teachers receive an academic year of professional coursework, similar to many other European countries, but still only have a limited amount of teaching practice: 120 hours compared with up to 1 065 hours in other European countries as indicated above (European Commission, 2013). Evidence suggests that the modules are theory-focused, offer limited preparation in modern teaching and assessment techniques, and do not adequately cover important topics like teaching at-risk students and integrating Roma children and students with special education needs (Stark and Zoller, 2014; European Commission, 2015a).

Romania has recognised that its initial teacher education is in need of reform. The Teaching Staff Statute that formed part of the 2011 Education Law upgraded the qualifications required to become a teacher to a new two-year Master of Arts programme in teaching. However, this has not yet been put in place for a number of reasons, including resistance among some universities, a lack of readiness to implement the programme and disagreement over whether the programme should be at the post-graduate level. The government plans to introduce the programme by 2020 (Government of Romania, 2016).

Professional development

Continuing professional development is both a right and an obligation for teachers in Romania. Teachers must accumulate 90 continuing professional development credits (approximately 240 hours) every 5 years (Petrovici, 2009). A 15-member commission within the Ministry of National Education and Scientific Research (MNESR) accredits continuing professional development providers for four-year periods. The Teachers’ Training Houses affiliated to the County School Inspectorates (CSIs) deliver the majority of courses. Other providers include universities, which provide courses to teachers seeking career advancement, central government bodies like the Institute of Educational Sciences (IES), and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).
On average, Romania’s lower secondary teachers undertake more days of continuing professional development (24) and are exposed to more topics (7) than the European average (10 days and 5 topics) (OECD 2014c in European Commission, 2015b). However, teachers bear the cost of most of their continuing professional development, and they have more incentive to participate in the accredited courses that allow them to accumulate credits for career progression and job security than those that might meet their own professional learning needs (Zoller, 2015). Their appraisals are not used to identify professional development to address areas where growth is needed. Teacher peer networks exist within and across schools, but these are reportedly competitive rather than supportive learning environments.

Romania’s plan to provide mentors to all beginning teachers and the government’s announcement of a virtual library for teachers are positive developments. However, a shortage of national funds and dependence on external financing from the European Union (EU) and NGOs have made it difficult to develop a systematic approach to continuing professional development, offering both formal and informal, job-embedded learning opportunities.

**Teacher remuneration**

As discussed in Chapter 1, teachers in Romania have one of the lowest minimum starting salaries as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) per capita across Europe (European Commission, 2015b). Teachers’ salary scales are set nationally; teaching position, initial training level, professional degree and seniority all affect remuneration (UNESCO, 2011). Salaries have been increasing: by 5% in March and September of 2015, and by 15% in December of the same year (Eurydice, 2015, 2016), and a 15% increase for the education sector came into effect in January 2017 (SeeNews, 2016). However, the starting salary remains too low to be competitive and progression along the scale is slow (see Chapter 1).

Since 1997, Romania has had a “merit grade” salary bonus scheme for teachers (Eurydice, 2007). Under the current scheme, up to 16% of teachers, principals and CSI inspectors in each county who have at least four years of experience and successfully pass a merit grade assessment receive a five-year bonus of 25% on top of their basic salary (MNESR, 2011b). Romania also offers financial allowances to teachers for working in remote areas, working with students with special education needs, and for acting as form teachers or tutors (Eurydice, 2016).

**Teachers’ career structures**

Romania has a long-standing three-stage teacher career path based on seniority and the passing of formal assessments (Figure 3.1). The stages are:

- the beginning teacher role, which generally lasts one year and ends with the exam for permanent teacher certification (the definitivat)
- the Didactical Qualification Level II, for which teachers can apply four years after passing their definitivat exam (or three years, if they received high marks on their appraisal for completion of probation)
- the Didactical Qualification Level I, for which teachers can apply four years after obtaining Level II (or three years, if they received high marks on their Level II appraisal).
Teachers can reach the highest didactical qualification level in less than 10 years of employment. The majority of teachers attempt to reach these levels, which result in a higher salary for the same teaching position (Stark and Zoller, 2014). This is intended to recognise good teaching, but it may be viewed more as an essential salary supplement to compensate low remuneration, particularly since higher levels on the career path are not associated with additional responsibilities requiring greater levels of competence.

Teachers can compete for “professor emeritus” status 15 years after earning their last didactic degree. This status grants teachers certain benefits, including an annual salary bonus and priority in job competitions and transfers to other schools (MNESR, 2011a). The ministry limits the number of teachers who can obtain this level, and it is not generally considered a part of the career path (MNESR, 2011a). Teachers may also hold positions within the school such as class master or the head of a subject area or department. Beyond the classroom, teachers with Level II qualifications can compete for positions as a school principal or inspector with the CSI or the MNESR (the specific prerequisites for these roles are described in Chapter 4). Teachers self-select to compete for these positions. While leadership appears to be distributed across different teacher commissions in schools, there is no succession planning-process to identify potential candidates for leadership roles.

Private tutoring and academic competitions

Romania’s education system is highly competitive, which affects teachers’ work. Students compete to enter upper secondary high schools and tertiary institutions. This puts pressure on teachers to “teach to the test” – to focus on preparing students for the high-stakes Grade 8 and Grade 12 baccalaureate examinations that will determine their academic future. Tutoring is prevalent, especially at the secondary level. This “parallel schooling” has its roots in the 1970s and 1980s when there was a push for increasingly high academic attainment levels combined with a reduction in enrolment quotas at the upper secondary and tertiary levels, and very low teacher salaries (Eurydice, 2007). With teachers’ salaries still low, tutoring is a source of supplementary income for many.

The success of teachers and schools is determined, to a large extent, by the achievements of high performers. One reason cited for the turnover of teachers in rural schools is that “a self-respecting teacher wants to work with children who can achieve good results – to send them to Olympiads” (Duminică and Ivasiuc, 2010). The merit grade salary bonus scheme rewards teachers, among other things, for preparing students for, and winning academic Olympiads (MNESR, 2016b). A criterion for the annual teacher appraisal is “promoting the school’s image in the community through students’
performance in contests and competitions” (MNESR, 2011b). This narrow focus on top performers creates a risk that lower performing students will receive less attention.

Teachers’ unions

Romania established teachers’ unions in 1991 (OECD, 2003). Today, the three primary unions are the Free Trade Union Federation in Education, the National Federation “Alma Mater” and the Federation of Unions in Education “Spiru Haret”. The former is the largest trade union in Romania, representing 178 000 members or 63% of staff in Romania’s schools (FSLI, 2016). The unions consult with the government on financial and human resource policies, broader education reform policies and draft legislation. They reportedly have significant influence given the size of their membership.

The unions are not involved in the direct appraisal of teachers, but provide input on appraisal policies. The ministry must consult with unions on the methodology and criteria for the merit grade salary bonus, according to the 2011 Education Law. Union representatives in each school’s Commission on Quality Assurance and Evaluation, which is responsible for school self-evaluation, verify that the school is conducting regular staff evaluations as part of their responsibility (see Chapter 4). The unions are also involved in developing and providing professional development to teachers through a number of different EU-funded projects.

Teacher appraisal

Teacher appraisal in Romania is characterised by a significant number of summative assessments and tests. Across the OECD and its partner countries, only one other country has as many types of legislated teacher appraisal as Romania (Figure 3.2).

![Figure 3.2. Teacher and school leader appraisals covered by policy frameworks](Source: Adapted from OECD (2015), Education at a Glance 2015: OECD Indicators, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2015-en.)
In Romania, there are four major teacher appraisal processes (Table 3.1):
- appraisal for completion of probation and registration
- appraisal for career advancement
- appraisal for rewards
- regular performance appraisal.

The majority of these appraisals involve external evaluators and affect teachers’ certification status, salary and career progression. Teachers must also pass exams in order to find permanent teaching jobs and progress on their career path.

Table 3.1. Teacher appraisal in Romania

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appraisers</th>
<th>Appraisees</th>
<th>Procedures</th>
<th>Consequences</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CSI inspectors</td>
<td>Beginning teachers in 1st year of employment</td>
<td>Stage I: two specialty inspections by CSI inspector; review of teacher’s portfolio. Stage II: definitivat written exam (subject knowledge, applied didactic [pedagogy]) held by the ministry once a year. Beginning teachers must also receive a “good” mark in their regular annual appraisal.</td>
<td>Teachers with 8/10 average on each part obtain permanent teacher certification. Teachers who fail the exam can take it twice more and must complete one more year of probation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSI inspectors; university faculty members</td>
<td>Teachers who passed the definitivat exam four years before (three years if their marks were high)</td>
<td>For Didactic Qualification Level II: Specialty inspection by CSI inspector preceded by at least two inspections in the last four years. Written text on the teacher’s subject and subject methodology, and an oral test on pedagogy. Test follows participation in a 90-credit continuing professional development course.</td>
<td>Teachers who obtain at least 8/10 on each element attain levels II or I. Levels result in salary increase, greater job security and eligibility to compete for a position as a principal or CSI inspector. Teachers who do not pass the exam may retake it within two years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSI inspectors; teachers’ council; and CSI inspectors</td>
<td>Teachers who obtained their Level II qualification four years before (three years if their marks were high)</td>
<td>For Didactic Qualification Level I: Specialty inspection by CSI inspector preceded by at least two inspections in the last four years. Preliminary exam on teacher’s subject Dissertation, supervised by a university mentor, and defence of dissertation.</td>
<td>The CSI awards 16% of eligible teachers, principals and CSI inspectors in each county a five-year bonus of 25% above their basic salary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers (self-assessment); the Teachers’ Council; and CSI inspectors</td>
<td>All teachers with at least four years of experience</td>
<td>Teacher compiles file with annual appraisal results, self-assessment, activity report and supporting documentation. The school’s teachers’ council reviews the file and provides an assessment. A CSI inspector assesses the file, ranks applicants and grants awards.</td>
<td>The CSI awards the best 10% on each part of the examination.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers (self-assessment); methodical commissions and the school board</td>
<td>All teachers</td>
<td>Teacher compiles self-evaluation based on set criteria and their job description. Develops report supporting self-evaluation. The school’s methodical commissions review the self-evaluation and score the teacher. The school board reviews the self-evaluation and provides a score and a final grade.</td>
<td>Teachers receive marks: very good, good, satisfactory or unsatisfactory. High marks mean teachers are eligible to compete for salary bonus and career advancement.</td>
</tr>
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The regular appraisal of teachers in Romania is not as developmental as in many other countries (OECD, 2015). This appraisal has high-stakes consequences, determining teachers’ eligibility for career advancement and salary bonuses, and does not inform their professional development activities. Student results on national examinations, standardised assessments and academic competitions are also factored into teacher appraisals. This is a contentious practice internationally that can reinforce inequities by disadvantaging teachers who work in challenging school contexts.

National framework and reference standards

The 2011 Teaching Staff Statute sets out the appraisal process and minister’s orders describe their methodologies. However, Romania does not have professional teaching standards describing what teachers should know and be able to do to provide a common basis for teacher appraisal. Each teacher appraisal process uses different evaluation criteria, and other assessment material like job descriptions and tests. By contrast, 75% OECD member and partner countries use standards to guide their appraisal processes (OECD, 2015). Standards are key to helping teachers, appraisers and all those involved in the education system to understand the fundamental, multidimensional aspects of the teaching role. Their absence in Romania is a significant gap.

Mandatory appraisal for completion of probation and registration

Romania has a two-stage assessment process for permanent teacher certification that culminates in the definitivat exam. Teachers in Romania who receive just below a passing grade on the definitivat exam (five to seven) can be employed in schools as substitute teachers without permanent certification under temporary one-year contracts. Romania had a larger share of lower secondary teachers employed on contracts of one year or less (25%) than in any other country taking part in the 2013 Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS), against an average of 11.9% (OECD, 2014c). This raises questions about how effectively the exam is serving as a quality assurance measure to regulate entry to the profession.

The appraisals for the completion of probation and registration are summative assessments. There is no formative assessment specifically to support new teachers’ development during their probation period. Beginning teachers are assessed as part of the regular school-based appraisal process, which is mandatory for all teachers and is not used to identify professional learning opportunities that would support teachers’ professional growth.

Once teachers receive permanent teacher certification, they are required to take another exam – the titularizare or tenure exam – in order to obtain a permanent position in a school. This exam is developed by NCAE and administered by the CSIs, which hire all new teachers into schools. Teachers must receive a score of at least five out of ten for positions of four years or less and seven out of ten for positions of more than four years. They may also be subject to an inspection by a CSI inspector if some time has elapsed since they were appraised for permanent teacher certification. Passing the titularizare exam grants teachers priority status to fill vacancies at other schools, and ensures that their home positions are reserved for them if they transfer or take on leadership positions on a temporary basis.
Appraisal for career advancement

Universities are heavily involved in Romania’s voluntary appraisal for career advancement. They deliver the 90-credit continuing professional development course teachers are required to complete, write the tests for teachers based on topics approved by the MNESR, mark these tests and assess teachers’ defence of their dissertations.

This kind of testing for career advancement is uncommon internationally. Of the 11 OECD and partner countries with appraisal for promotion, only Mexico and Colombia use tests. Mexico’s test accounts for a very small portion (5%) of the overall appraisal (Santiago et al., 2012a; OECD, 2015). It is much more common for OECD countries to base their decisions about promotion on assessments relating to teachers’ work in the classroom, including classroom observations, assessments of teachers’ portfolios, self-appraisals and interviews or professional dialogue with teachers (OECD, 2015).

Appraisal for rewards

OECD research suggests that countries with low teacher remuneration, like Romania, may gain some benefit from implementing performance-based pay schemes for teachers (OECD, 2012). However, such schemes are very difficult to implement fairly and equitably. A system that rewards the highest-ranked individual teachers, such as Romania’s merit grade assessment process, can put teachers who work in challenging school contexts at a disadvantage, and may also encourage competition rather than collaboration among teachers (OECD, 2009).

In Romania, teachers are ranked based on assessment criteria that include inputs (e.g. developing innovative teaching material, participating in professional development or extracurricular activities) and outputs (e.g. student achievement on national examinations and academic competitions). A new minister’s order was issued in December 2016, which reflects a positive development by adding assessment criteria that relate to working with students from disadvantaged backgrounds, students with special education needs and students at risk of early school leaving. However it is not yet clear whether teachers will continue to gain the most points from having high-achieving students.

Of the few OECD and partner countries that conduct teacher appraisals for reward, only Turkey, Mexico and some parts of the United States use student outcomes to reward individual teachers (OECD, 2015). Using student results for teacher appraisal risks compensating or penalising teachers for factors beyond their control. It influences teaching practices, by encouraging teachers to focus narrowly on subjects covered in high-stakes assessments. The OECD recommends that countries take careful steps to mitigate the unintended effects of this practice (OECD, 2013a). In some states in the United States, for example, teachers and principals work together within their schools to establish student progress goals, instead of using raw examination results as part of the appraisal process (OECD, 2013a).

Regular appraisal

In the majority of OECD countries, regular teacher appraisal processes aim to give teachers an opportunity to receive feedback on their professional practice, consolidate their strengths and identify areas where growth is needed (OECD, 2015). In Romania, regular appraisal is not part of a formative process of feedback and reflection on professional practice, and the outcomes are not connected to continuing professional development in any systematic way. Instead, the results of the annual appraisal process
have high-stakes consequences for teachers’ salary and career opportunities. This reduces the likelihood that teachers will treat regular appraisal as a developmental opportunity. In addition, there is no standard remedial procedure to ensure that teachers in Romania who are underperforming participate in the professional development they need.

Other assessments of teachers

The CSIs conduct ongoing monitoring of schools in their region, and intervene to work with school staff if there are concerns about the quality of education at a school. These interventions seem to be influenced primarily by students’ results on national assessments and examinations, and the ministry’s related ranking of schools. These efforts may reinforce teachers’ focus on summative tests, and contribute to a perception of the CSIs as controlling rather than supportive bodies.

The CSIs and the Monitoring and School Inspection Directorate in the MNESR conduct brief, one-day thematic inspections of teaching activities in different schools on an annual basis, and evaluate the quality of teaching as part of their periodic general inspections of schools. Romania’s independent school evaluation body, the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education (ARACIP), also looks at teaching quality when conducting external evaluations of schools for accreditation or periodic evaluation once every five years (see Chapter 4).

Responsibilities for teacher appraisal

All of Romania’s teacher appraisal processes involve at least some evaluators who are external to the school. Regular teacher appraisal is conducted by methodical commissions within the school and the school board, whose members include parents and local council representatives. Involving external actors can inhibit the developmental function of appraisal, which relies on an open and honest assessment of teachers’ strengths, weaknesses and learning needs (OECD, 2013a). External evaluators are more appropriate for summative appraisals that require teachers to prove that they are competent.

Research recommends that appraisers receive appropriate training for their role, and that principals are responsible for the overall management of teacher appraisal and school development given the way they interconnect (OECD, 2013a). In Romania, CSI inspectors and principals are required to undertake pre-service educational management courses. These focus primarily on administration, while those topics relevant to teacher appraisal (e.g. professional development and career management, classroom management, and adult psycho-pedagogy) are only covered as optional content (Petrovici, 2009). This preparation aligns with principals’ main responsibilities within Romania’s schools, which are geared towards administration rather than pedagogical leadership, limiting the role they play in teacher appraisal and school development (see Chapter 4). Other evaluators who are internal to the school, and members of the school board, receive no training on teacher appraisal.

Policy issues

Romania is moving towards a more learner-centred, competency-focused school curriculum, and is making efforts to address the skill deficits and inequities in educational outcomes revealed by recent national and international student assessments (World Bank, 2014). Teacher appraisal could be used to support the changes to teaching practice that
this will require but, to be effective, appraisal will need to focus on developing teachers’
competencies rather than testing their knowledge.

This can be achieved first by developing professional teaching standards to provide a
common vision of what teachers should know and be able to do, as the basis for more
developmental appraisal. Standards can also support a teaching career structure that is
based on teaching excellence. Second, it will be important to make the regular appraisals
more developmental. The appraisals should be run entirely within the school, based on
observations of teachers’ interactions with students in the classroom, and connecting
teachers to professional learning opportunities that address areas of weakness. This type
of formative appraisal is particularly important for new teachers, who require close
monitoring and support during their probation year especially as in Romania they do not
have the benefit of intensive initial preparation.

A greater focus on development will also require a change in how these appraisals are
used to inform decisions about career progression. Instead of appraisal scores determining
teachers’ eligibility for advancement, it will be important for qualitative input from
principals and other in-school appraisers’ to be taken into consideration when these
decisions are being made. This will help to root appraisals for career advancement in the
actual work that teachers do, rather than their performance on tests or other academic
requirements. It would be best for these summative appraisals to be conducted by external
evaluators who have the training and support to conduct consistent and reliable
assessments of teachers’ competency across the country. Recent changes to the merit
grade appraisal are posi
tive, by acknowledging teachers’ work with struggling students
and in a range of different types of schools. However further revisions are important since
the process still risks distorting teachers’ professional practices, by rewarding teachers for
having students that achieve high marks in examinations.

Policy Issue 3.1: Developing common professional teaching standards

Clear professional standards for teachers are essential for effective appraisal. They
provide a national definition of what good teaching is so that all teachers are assessed
according to a common set of qualities. As Romania does not have such standards, the
default practice has been to rely on a narrow concept of effective teaching focused on
good examination results. Standards clarify what good teaching means, and help to orient
appraisal and all teaching policies towards the more student-led, individualised teaching
practices that are central to the new curriculum, and effective teaching practices more
generally.

Setting standards that reflect Romania’s learning goals

Professional teaching standards generally cover teachers’ knowledge, pedagogy and
values (Pont, 2013). Standards should be based on student learning objectives to help
teachers focus on the outcomes the education system is working to achieve (OECD,
2005). They also need to accurately reflect the different tasks expected of teachers inside
and outside the classroom, including their contribution to their schools, profession and
their own learning (OECD, 2005). Romania will need to ensure that its professional
teaching standards describe what teachers need to know and be able to do to support
students’ attainment of the learning objectives in the country’s new curriculum, and
address the different dimensions of a teacher’s role.
Romania will also need to ensure that the standards are sufficiently detailed and specific in stating what competencies are expected of teachers at different stages of their career to effectively guide a revised appraisal system and support new teaching career paths (see Policy Issue 3.3). Danielson provides a model that incorporates all of these features (OECD, 2013a; Box 3.1). It has been used to develop teaching standards and appraisal criteria in several US school districts, and in Canada, Chile, England (United Kingdom) and Quebec (Canada).

**Box 3.1. Danielson’s Framework for Teaching**

Danielson’s *Framework for Teaching* groups teaching into four domains and their related components:

- **Planning and preparation**: demonstrating knowledge of content, pedagogy, and students; selecting instructional goals; designing coherent instruction; assessing student learning.
- **The classroom environment**: creating an environment of respect and rapport; establishing a culture of learning; managing classroom procedures and student behaviour; organising physical space.
- **Instruction**: communicating clearly and accurately; using questioning and discussion techniques; engaging students in learning; providing feedback to students; demonstrating flexibility and responsiveness.
- **Professional responsibilities**: reflecting on teaching; maintaining accurate records; communicating with families; contributing to the school and district; growing and developing professionally; showing professionalism.

The components break down further into elements to be evaluated, which are accompanied by a brief description of what the performance of each element looks like according to a four-point scale that can be equated to different levels on a career path: unsatisfactory, basic, proficient and distinguished. For example component: creating an environment of respect and rapport, *element*: teacher interaction with students then this would be:

- **Unsatisfactory**: interaction with at least some students is negative or inappropriate to the age or culture of the students; students exhibit disrespect for the teacher.
- **Basic**: interaction is generally appropriate but may reflect inconsistencies, favouritism or disregard for students’ cultures; students exhibit minimal respect for the teacher.
- **Proficient**: interactions are friendly, demonstrating warmth, caring and respect, and appropriate to developmental and cultural norms; students exhibit respect for the teacher.
- **Distinguished**: the teacher demonstrates genuine caring and respect for individual students, and students respect the teacher as an individual.

Establishing a consultative forum to develop teaching standards and related reforms

In the early 2000s, Romania worked on a roadmap for the development of teaching standards with an advisor from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards in the United States (Gliga, 2002). Encouragingly, this process was informed by research and involved consultations with teachers. However, the contents of the standards were never finalised as the stakeholders could not reach agreement. To develop standards this time, it will be important for Romania to ensure that the process is well co-ordinated and more deeply consultative.

One way to do this would be for Romania to establish a consultative forum to develop the standards. This would be similar to the Education Partnership Table that Ontario, Canada established to develop major education policies (Box 3.2). This forum should clearly engage teachers across the country, teachers’ unions, and organisations responsible for teachers’ initial and continuing education. Stakeholders who appraise and support teachers and inspect teaching quality such as school leaders, CSIs and ARACIP, will also need to be involved. The ministry might consider involving a neutral facilitator to lead the consultations. Seeking high-level agreement, rather than on the specific language of the standards, may help to ensure progress.

Box 3.2. Stakeholder consultation on education policies in Ontario, Canada

In 2004, a new government in Ontario, Canada, established an Education Partnership Table as an ongoing forum to gather insight from stakeholders on the development of new policies to reform the province’s education system. Stakeholders were expected to solve problems, and to go beyond “simply stat[ing] predetermined positions…to explain underlying wants and needs behind positions and bring facts to bear that allow others to appreciate their viewpoint”. It began with the government releasing a discussion paper describing the purpose of the table and proposing commitments to which the Minister of Education and table members would be expected to adhere. For example:

- The Minister of Education committed to: bringing major policies forward for discussion early in the policy development process; and taking input into account and providing feedback when possible.
- Table members were asked to commit to: providing their own perspective and gathering views from their members; contributing to consensus building; and presenting problems as challenges for the table to examine and help solve.

Discussions at meetings were private and centred around brief draft papers on proposed policies developed by policy makers within the ministry; papers were only finalised after input was gathered from members. The Ministry and Table members were expected to work together between meetings to develop solutions. This led to the establishment of working tables dedicated to particular topics, including a working table on teacher development. Over the course of two years, discussions at this working table informed the development of a number of policies, including changes to teacher appraisal processes and continuing professional development practices.

Creating a national self-regulatory body to further professionalise the teaching role

The development of teaching standards is not only a means to align teachers’ certification, appraisal and initial and ongoing learning. It is also key to further professionalising the teaching role and boosting the prestige and attractiveness of the profession. Only 35% of teachers in Romania reported feeling that their profession is valued by society in the TALIS 2013 survey (OECD, 2014c). While this is just above the average of all the countries participating in TALIS, it is far below countries such as Finland, Korea and Singapore where students’ learning levels are high compared to their peers internationally (OECD, 2016). Well over the majority of teachers feel that their profession is valued by society in Singapore (68%), Korea (67%) and Finland (59%) (OECD, 2014c).

Several countries have professional self-regulatory bodies for teachers which are responsible for developing and maintaining teaching standards, and the requirements for teachers’ certification and training. Examples include New Zealand’s Education Council, and the General Teaching Councils in England and Scotland (United Kingdom). These bodies are also intended to ensure teachers’ autonomy and accountability, similar to organisations for professions like medicine or law (OECD, 2005). In some countries, they coexist alongside strong teachers’ unions. The unions provide a voice for teachers with respect to their working conditions and salaries, while the self-regulatory body manages certification, and promotes and maintains high standards of professionalism. In the medium to long term, Romania could consider establishing a similar national self-regulatory body for teachers to give a stronger professional identity to the teaching workforce, both internally and within Romanian society at large.

Policy Issue 3.2: Making the regular appraisal of teachers more developmental to support improvements to teaching

Romania’s regular teacher appraisal process is closely connected to high-stakes consequences, and provides little support for teachers’ ongoing professional development. The close connection between regular appraisals and salary bonuses and career progression puts pressure on teachers to demonstrate achievements rather than to treat appraisal as a learning opportunity. This also puts pressure on appraisers, who may be unwilling to negatively impact teachers by giving them anything other than the highest marks. It was indicated to the OECD Review Team during interviews that the majority of teachers in Romania receive high marks on their appraisals.

Changing the nature of regular appraisals so they can be a genuine learning opportunity for teachers will require revising the relationship between regular appraisals and their high-stakes consequences, the role of appraisers, and the appraisal methodology. To be most effective, appraisals should be conducted internally by school staff on a regular basis and focus on providing teachers with constructive feedback about their strengths and weaknesses, and identifying professional development opportunities that will support their continuous improvement (OECD, 2013b).

Revising the methodology of the regular appraisal process and building appraisers’ capacity

The close relationship between regular appraisal results and high-stakes consequences for teachers’ careers and pay prevents regular appraisals from effectively supporting teacher development in Romania. In addition, appraisers are not well placed to provide
constructive feedback to support teachers’ development. The lack of classroom observations and professional dialogue in the appraisal process means that appraisals are not grounded in evidence of teachers’ interactions with students and nor do they involve discussions to promote improvements to teaching practice. Proper guidance and support for appraisers on the latter elements will be essential.

Adjusting the relationship between regular appraisals and high-stakes consequences

Teachers in Romania need to gain particular marks in their regular appraisals to be eligible for assessments for salary bonuses or career progression and job competitions. For instance they require:

- very good (the highest mark) every year for four years to be eligible for a merit grade assessment for a salary bonus or to compete for a management position within the CSI
- good in the previous two years to be eligible to take the exam for the Level II qualification
- very good in the previous two years to be eligible to take the exam for the Level I qualification
- very good in the previous year to compete for a position as a school leader (MNESR 2011a, 2011c, 2016b; Eurydice, 2012).

This close connection to high-stakes consequences limits the ability of regular appraisals to act as a developmental tool because the effectiveness of this type of appraisal relies on teachers feeling comfortable sharing their weaknesses (Santiago and Benavides, 2009). This is less likely to occur if they are concerned about how the appraisals will affect their career opportunities or salary.

To create more space for constructive and honest feedback, it is important for Romania to change how regular appraisal results are used in decisions for teachers’ career progression. Instead of requiring teachers to obtain the highest marks on their regular appraisals to be eligible for career advancement, Romania could instead require that teachers meet a minimum threshold. This would create more space for feedback on areas for development and improvement, while still ensuring that those who obtain a low mark face appropriate consequences, including participating in appropriate professional development (see below).

In addition, rather than focusing exclusively on the marks resulting from the regular appraisal process, Romania could engage school-based appraisers more systematically in the appraisals for career progression. These appraisers are in a position to provide important information about a teacher’s performance, which needs to be captured through broader channels than the annual grade. In Estonia, for example, input from school-level appraisers is among the factors that may be taken into account in appraisals for career advancement (Santiago et al., 2016).

This report recommends that Romania revises and considers discontinuing its merit grade salary bonus in favour of establishing a differentiated career path for teachers, connected to higher remuneration (see Policy Issue 3.4). As a result, regular appraisal results would no longer be connected to salary bonuses.
Revising roles and responsibilities for appraisal

An effective, formative regular appraisal process needs to be conducted by appropriate appraisers. Internationally, individuals within the school generally conduct developmental appraisals because they are more familiar with the teacher and their school context, and are best placed to provide ongoing feedback (Santiago and Benavides, 2009). Romania will need to address the involvement of the school board as an appraising body, the lack of opportunities for one-on-one appraisals, and the limited role played by the principal if its regular appraisals are to become more developmental.

Currently, teachers in Romania receive a final appraisal mark from their school board. This is problematic because the school board is a partially external body, including parents and local community representatives. They lack the knowledge and expertise to play an appraisal role and may not be familiar with the teacher’s work (MNESR, 2016a). Teachers are expected to attend the school board meeting where their final evaluation grade is decided and argue in support of their self-evaluation results at the request of the board (MNESR, 2011b). This creates a situation in which teachers are more likely to try to demonstrate that they can perform well than use the appraisal process to honestly assess their growth needs. Instead of directly appraising teachers, a more appropriate role for the school board would be to ensure that school staff are complying with the legislated requirements of the appraisal system. They might also determine how to make the appraisal process more relevant to their school, for example by supplementing common professional teaching standards with other appraisal criteria that are particularly important to their context.

Romania’s regular appraisal process also means teachers are assessed by groups (the methodical commissions and the school board). This is not a good setting for open feedback. It is important for teachers to have opportunities to discuss their performance one-to-one with their appraisers. These appraisers could be the principal, other members of the senior management team or their supervisors on the methodical commissions.

The 2011 Education Law states that the school principal is responsible for the periodic assessment of staff, yet they do not currently have a prominent role in regular appraisals, other than contributing to the final evaluation of teachers as members of the school board. Reducing principals’ administrative burden would enable them to play more of a pedagogical leadership role and progressively assume important responsibilities such as directing the appraisals that are conducted in their schools and nurturing a collaborative learning environment in which feedback is welcomed (see Chapter 4).

Adding key appraisal elements

Romania’s regular appraisal has several positive elements. It features self-appraisal, which prompts teachers to reflect on their own practice and learn from their own experiences. There is also evidence that activities to support teachers’ development are happening in Romania’s schools on an ongoing basis. In the 2013 TALIS survey, just under 90% of Romanian teachers reported receiving feedback on their teaching from their principal, or other members of the senior management team (just under 60%), and at least 90% had received feedback following classroom observations (OECD, 2014c). However, classroom observations and professional dialogue are not built into the methodology of Romania’s regular appraisal process. Instead, it focuses on the completion of the standardised self-evaluation and evaluation form.
Classroom observations focus appraisals on teachers’ interactions with students, which are of central importance if they are to support improvements to teaching and learning. Such observations are the most important way of identifying teachers’ weaknesses (OECD, 2013a). Teachers also need feedback to ensure that those weaknesses are addressed. To incorporate these elements into regular appraisals, Romania could draw on the experience of other countries. For example, Northern Ireland (United Kingdom) has built in meetings between appraisers and teachers before and after classroom observations to ensure that this professional dialogue occurs, in the form of collaboration, reflection and feedback (Shewbridge et al., 2014).

It is common for countries to use an initial meeting as an opportunity to discuss the teacher’s performance objectives for the year and a meeting at the end of the review cycle to discuss what has been accomplished (OECD, 2013a). These meetings could also provide a means to assess the teacher’s impact on student learning by including a discussion of student learning objectives and then a review of whether those objectives have been met. This is one of a number of methods of taking student performance data into account in the appraisal of teachers without relying heavily on raw national examination or standardised assessment results. As mentioned previously in this chapter, focusing on these raw results is problematic because it ignores the factors affecting student learning that are beyond the teacher’s control and may encourage practices like “teaching to the test” and a narrowing of the curriculum.

Building appraisers’ capacity

In Romania, it will be essential for appraisers to receive preparation and support to ensure that they are able to reliably conduct classroom observations and provide constructive feedback to teachers (OECD, 2013a). Appraisal processes that involve classroom observations are associated with better student outcomes, but appraisers need appropriate guidance and instruments in order to conduct them effectively (OECD, 2013b). Since 2013, the Education Council of New Zealand, the professional body for teachers, has delivered a professional learning programme on appraisal practices to appraisers and teachers and has made a range of appraisal resources and guidelines available on its website (Education Council of New Zealand, 2016). Romania’s IES could play an important role in developing these types of programmes, resources and common classroom observation instruments to support the regular appraisal process.

Connecting regular appraisals with participation in continuing professional development

Without a strong connection to continuing professional development, appraisals will have limited impact on teaching and learning (OECD, 2013a). Romania’s regular appraisal process does not currently lead to the identification of teachers’ learning needs or the professional development that would address them. Instead, participation in professional development tends to be an individual pursuit. Teachers’ choices about which professional development to take are influenced by their need to accumulate continuing professional development credits for career advancement and job security (Zoller, 2015). To make real improvements to teaching and learning, Romania will need to ensure that professional learning opportunities address teachers’ actual development needs and that schools have the capacity to implement collaborative learning activities which are embedded into teachers’ jobs.
Integrating professional development objectives into the appraisal process

The OECD Review Team’s interviews with stakeholders indicated that appraisal results did not influence teachers’ decisions about which professional development to take. CSI inspectors may recommend that teachers participate in professional development when they conduct general school inspections or specialty inspections, but these inspections are only conducted intermittently and teachers need not follow up on the recommendations. As such, Romania lacks a standard, ongoing process in which teachers identify their learning needs based on observations of, and discussions about their teaching practice. A professional learning plan as a part of a regular appraisal process would support this.

Ontario offers one example of an education system where teachers develop professional learning plans in consultation with their supervisors in order to address their development needs (OECD, 2013c). These plans are annual and include teachers’ professional growth objectives, proposed actions and timelines (OECD, 2013c). The most effective schools improve teaching practices by encouraging their teachers to discuss their professional learning plans with each other so that they can support each other’s growth (Cole, 2012). Research recommends that these learning plans be specific, practical and tied to the classroom, outlining:

- a few teaching techniques or changes to practice to be employed in order to improve student engagement and learning outcomes within a relatively short period of time
- the professional learning activities that will help teachers make those changes, including informal, collaborative learning with colleagues (Cole, 2012).

Strengthening professional development within schools

The effectiveness of developmental appraisal rests on teachers having access to professional learning opportunities that address their needs. Professional learning is most effective at sustaining improvement to teachers’ competence when it is collaborative and embedded in their work, including activities such as classroom observations, group discussions, and collective preparation of instructional material, coaching and mentoring (Schleicher, 2011).

Romania’s schools do offer opportunities for professional development but these processes need strengthening. CSIs organise teachers’ pedagogical circles, which meet two to four times per year, and teachers work together in each school’s methodical commissions. However, it was reported to the OECD Review Team during interviews that the pedagogical circles tend to be formal and are mainly used to transmit information. Equally, teacher peer networks tend to be competitive rather than supportive and trusting learning environments. Teachers can also participate in training delivered outside the school but the content is determined centrally rather than being based on teacher needs (Zoller, 2015). While the CSIs and Teachers’ Training Houses do try to adjust their professional development to reflect local teachers’ needs, these courses are not always accredited and teachers may have to pay for them out of their own pockets (Zoller, 2015).
Research indicates that central government and district support is crucial to the success of schools’ efforts to build their collaborative learning cultures (Kools and Stoll, 2016). Romania’s CSIs should play a key role in supporting school-based improvement efforts, underpinned by central support and financial investment from the government (see Chapter 4). Professional development opportunities in schools could be supported by:

- **Strengthening peer groups and networks.** The MNESR could work with the IES to develop guidelines and effective practices to support CSIs and schools in strengthening the focus of their existing pedagogical circles and in-school groups on improving teaching and learning, and encouraging the provision of feedback and practices like self-reflection and modelling to improve teaching practice. International examples of similar professional learning communities include Finland’s problem-solving groups, which meet regularly to plan, act and reflect on teaching challenges (OECD, 2011).

- **Enveloped funding for schools’ staff development needs.** Professional development in Romania’s schools could be supported by providing dedicated funding to be used to meet staff development needs within the school. In Estonia, for example, 1% of the state budget for teachers’ salaries is provided to schools for their staff development needs. In Singapore each school has a fund used for continuing professional development, most of which is delivered on site (Kools and Stool, 2016; Santiago et al., 2016).

- **A competence-based teacher career path.** A new career path for teachers in Romania, with distinct roles focused on improving teaching across the school (e.g. mentor, coach), as recommended below, would support these efforts. This career path could be connected to professional development opportunities that allow teachers to develop the competencies they will need to progress in their careers (see Policy Issue 3.4).

Finally, the government’s previously announced plans to provide a virtual library of resources to teachers would also help to address teachers’ learning needs.

**Connecting regular appraisal with school development**

Romania’s schools are legally required to analyse the professional development needs of their staff to develop a school professional development plan (MNESR, 2011a). The OECD Review Team spoke with representatives of one school who stated that their teachers’ council conducts questionnaires of teachers for this purpose, but recent research suggests that this requirement is not being implemented on a wide scale (Stingu et al., 2016).

A process that connects regular appraisal results to the development of a school-wide professional development plan, like the one undertaken in Korea (Box 3.3), would support improvements to teaching. There are a number of other ways in which the regular formative appraisal of teachers and school development could be mutually reinforcing. For example, teachers could be encouraged to consider their school development plans when setting out the objectives in their individual professional learning plans, as teachers do in Estonia (Santiago et al., 2016).
Box 3.3. School planning for continuing professional development based on teacher appraisal results in Korea

In Korea, each school has an appraisal management committee that reviews the appraisal results and professional development plans of all teachers in order to draft a school-wide report for submission to the principal and vice-principal. The committee’s report includes:

- Information about appraisal results at an aggregate level (individual teachers are not identified), including the strengths and weaknesses of the teaching staff.
- Teachers’ training requests, the school’s professional development plans for the upcoming year and a budget estimate.
- Proposals and requests for the local education authority to develop new professional development programmes or to provide additional resources for the school’s or teachers’ own professional development.


Addressing underperformance

Romania does not have a standard, step-by-step process for dealing with teachers who receive an “unsatisfactory” result in the appraisal process. Identifying underperformance should not be the primary focus of a formative appraisal process, but because this type of appraisal is conducted regularly, it provides a means of quickly addressing weaknesses that could affect student learning (OECD, 2013a). Without a standard process to address underperformance, it is difficult for schools to compel teachers to improve. It was reported to the OECD Review Team during interviews that some schools in Romania may recommend that a teacher who does poorly on an appraisal should participate in professional development, but this participation is not considered a requirement. The school may also decide to no longer offer the teacher classroom hours as a way to remove them from the school, but in this case, the teacher would maintain their tenured status and could work in another school. The principal and the teachers’ council have the legal authority to propose the sanctioning of teachers for poor performance, and the school board may enact those sanctions, but this appears to be entirely separate from the appraisal process (MNESR, 2011a).

It will be important for the MNESR to work with representatives of Romania’s teachers’ unions, CSIs and schools to establish a common and fair response to “unsatisfactory” regular appraisal results. A standard process for dealing with underperformance in many countries involves the development of an improvement plan identifying professional development needs, followed by additional appraisals and, ultimately, the involvement of external bodies responsible for dismissing the teacher if their performance does not improve (OECD, 2015). Northern Ireland, for example, has developed a Procedure for Supporting Effective Teaching in Schools, which clearly sets out the responsibilities of different actors and the steps involved in addressing underperformance (Shewbridge et al., 2014).
Policy Issue 3.3: Improving the probation period and initial assessment of teachers

At the start of a teacher’s career, summative appraisals serve as an important gatekeeper to the profession, while formative appraisals ensure that the teacher has the feedback and guidance they need to develop in their first years on the job. Romania will need to make strategic changes to both types of appraisals to ensure they fulfill these goals. Changing Romania’s initial teacher education to provide the practical preparation in learner-centred teaching and formative assessment techniques that teachers need will help the next generation of teachers move forward with the country’s education reform.

**Making assessment for full qualification a more meaningful practical evaluation**

Appraisal for full teacher certification in Romania is a two-stage process. It begins with two inspections by CSI inspectors, who review beginning teachers’ planning material, didactic activities, use of the curriculum and differentiated teaching practices. These are followed by a written examination of their knowledge of their subject area, applied didactics and pedagogy. Teachers must pass the inspections to proceed to the written exam. Both elements carry the same weight. To make this process more meaningful, Romania needs to consider changes relating to who conducts the appraisals and what is appraised.

**Using experienced teachers for the probation evaluation**

Romania’s CSI inspectors are not well equipped to conduct the inspections of novice teachers. They do not receive training to ensure they have the knowledge and skills to reliably conduct classroom observations and provide feedback to teachers, which research identifies as essential (OECD, 2010). The CSIs also lack enough staff to conduct the inspections so some CSIs now use the services of experienced “methodical” teachers as temporary inspectors to help manage their workload. If CSI inspectors are to play a stronger role in supporting schools and their staff in improving teaching and learning, this will have implications for their specialty inspection responsibilities (see Chapter 4). A more supportive role does not align well with inspections that have high-stakes consequences for teachers’ careers.

Given that the CSIs have already begun to use the services of experienced teachers to conduct inspections, the country might consider formalising this arrangement by shifting the responsibility for specialty inspections to a cadre of experienced teachers. Portugal, for example, uses experienced teachers as external evaluators, providing them with training and accreditation to undertake their role (Santiago et al., 2012b; Box 3.4). This model leverages the expertise of accomplished teachers who have in-depth subject matter knowledge and a high level of competence in pedagogy (OECD, 2010). The MNESR could establish procedures to select and manage these teachers and work with the IES to develop training material for them. The teachers could be selected centrally or at the county level with the CSIs overseeing their work according to central procedures, and ensuring that they participate in the appropriate training. The procedures would include arrangements to ensure that evaluators are not assessing teachers with whom they are familiar.

The involvement of external appraisers in appraisals that have high-stakes consequences for a teacher’s career is important to ensure that these appraisals are consistent and fair (OECD, 2010). However, it will also be important for Romania to ensure that these summative appraisals draw on the input of the individuals who are
familiar with a teacher’s performance and conduct regular appraisals within the school (see below and Policy Issue 3.2).

**Box 3.4. Appraisers for completion of probation**

Of the 29 countries reviewed for the OECD study *Synergies for Better Learning* (OECD, 2013a), 15 appraise teachers to complete their probation. In seven of these countries, school-based evaluators (e.g. the principal, mentors or other members of the school management team) conduct the appraisal. This arrangement lacks an element of externality to ensure appraisals are fair and reliable. Six countries use a combination of school-based and external evaluators.

In 2011, Portugal adopted a new model of teacher appraisal in which experienced teachers serve as external evaluators. Fifty teachers with master’s degrees in evaluation were selected from across Portugal’s five education regions to form a pool of external evaluators. They participated in specialised training on teacher appraisal that focused on classroom observation and was delivered by a higher education institution under contract to the government. These external evaluators were then responsible for appraising teachers in their subject area who were at or below their level on the teacher career path. In addition to these external evaluators, appraisers within schools conduct some elements of the teacher appraisal process. In this way, both internal and external appraisers inform decisions about whether the teacher has successfully passed the appraisal.


**A well-designed performance-based assessment**

The proposed cadre of experienced teacher appraisers would be responsible for conducting a well-designed performance-based assessment. Although classroom observation is the most common and important assessment method for this purpose, other methods include interviews or dialogue with teachers, and a review of material developed by them, such as lesson plans (OECD, 2013a). These methods provide evidence of teachers’ performance in their actual work environment, including their interactions with students, as well as insights into what teachers are thinking and how they make decisions (Roelofs and Sanders, 2007). Romania already employs some of these methods. Using them to assess the core work of teaching against common professional teaching standards, once developed, including competencies appropriate to beginning teachers’ experience level, would strengthen this component of the appraisal for completing probation.

The OECD Review Team’s discussions with new teachers in Romania indicated that current inspections do not necessarily result in useful, constructive feedback. Internationally, performance-based assessments for completion of probation can serve a developmental function on top of their quality assurance one if they result in feedback to support teachers’ improvement and inform their participation in professional development activities. This is a common outcome of appraisals for the completion of probation in a range of different countries, and it would benefit teachers in Romania (OECD, 2013a).

The MNESR should work with teachers and other relevant stakeholders on these revisions and the development of:

- guidelines that set out how appraisals are to be conducted, and provide examples of constructive feedback and how competencies are demonstrated in practice
standardised appraisal forms that prompt appraisers to provide comments in relation to the competencies that are being evaluated.

This kind of material will be important to support the implementation of this and all other forms of teacher appraisal in Romania. It will increase the likelihood that appraisals will be consistently applied and that the process will be viewed as objective and fair.

Combining performance-based assessments by external appraisers with input from the in-school evaluators who conduct beginning teachers’ annual appraisals, and the results of the definitivat exam, once revised and carefully weighted (see below), means that the appraisal for completion of probation would be based on multiple sources of evidence of teachers’ competence. This is particularly important for high-stakes appraisals, which should be based on as much evidence as possible (OECD, 2013a).

Rethinking the definitivat exam

Romania appears to use the definitivat exam, as well as the exam for tenure, as the main method of screening candidates entering the teaching profession. This is evidenced by beginning teachers’ relatively low rates of success on the exams. In 2015, 51% of teachers failed the definitivat exam and 73% failed the tenure test (although the teachers who take this test are not all new to the profession) (SIIIR, 2016). Using such tests as the main method of screening potential teachers is much less efficient than having high standards for entry to initial teacher education programmes and comprehensive initial teacher preparation (Hobson et al., 2010). The fact that teachers who receive below passing marks (i.e. between five and seven) on the definitivat exam can still work in schools as teachers under fixed-term contracts also raises questions about the effectiveness of the exam as a quality-assurance measure. TALIS 2013 results indicate that a significant percentage of teachers in Romania fall into this category, having missed the definitivat passing grade by a couple of marks (OECD, 2014c).

The definitivat exam carries as much weight in the appraisal for probation and registration as the inspections. The exam, which is different for each school level and subject in the curriculum, includes multiple-choice and short answer or essay questions. Some questions ask candidates to demonstrate that they can apply their knowledge of pedagogy, e.g. “devise a reading activity” (SEI, 2015). This suggests that the test does more than assess candidates’ theory and content knowledge. However, this does not mean that it provides an authentic measure of on-the-job competence, which was a concern expressed by stakeholders in Romania.

It will be important for the ministry and key stakeholders, including NCAE, teachers and initial teacher education providers, to work together to explore how other countries assess teachers’ readiness for full certification to determine what changes may need to be made to the definitivat exam, including:

- **Ensuring that the definitivat exam is balanced by high-quality performance-based assessments.** In general, it is difficult for a written exam to meaningfully measure the complex competencies required for successful teaching (Hobson et al., 2010). There is limited research evidence to support their use. Most countries that do use them for entry to the teaching profession do not rely heavily on them (OECD, 2010). Instead, they tend to balance these tests with other methods of assessment. A well-designed performance-based assessment, conducted by trained evaluators and using methods such as those described above, provides a
more authentic measure of teachers’ competence than a written test, as they assess real teaching in a real classroom setting (Roelofs, 2007 in OECD, 2010).

As long as Romania continues to have relatively low entry requirements into initial teacher education programmes and programmes remain variable in quality, there is a rationale for maintaining the definitivat exam as an objective measure of knowledge and skills. However, once Romania further develops its performance-based assessment of teachers along the lines suggested above, the country should consider reducing the weight of the definitivat exam in the appraisal process. In the longer term, once the Master of Arts in teaching has been rolled out and its quality evaluated (see below), Romania might revisit whether it still needs to include a written exam at all.

- **Ensuring that the definitivat exam assesses the teaching competencies required by the new curriculum.** It was reported to the OECD Review Team in interviews with stakeholders that the contents of the definitivat exam were out of date and did not reflect the new learner-centred curriculum, which focuses on developing students’ competencies (see Chapter 2). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Romania should develop professional teaching standards that describe what teachers need to know and be able to do to effectively deliver this curriculum. These standards should also guide revisions to questions in the definitivat exam to ensure that it assesses the competencies teachers will need in the classroom and as professionals.

Romania may also consider other changes to the contents of the definitivat exam. For example, research recommends that exams for entry to the teaching profession contain a sufficient number of open-ended questions to provide a useful measure of teachers’ competencies (OECD, 2010). In the United States, one component of the process to obtain certification with the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards is a written assessment, which includes essay questions that ask teachers to demonstrate their subject matter and pedagogical knowledge and analyse teaching situations, evaluate curriculum material and develop lesson plans (OECD, 2014b). Romania might consider adding more practice-oriented, open-ended questions to the definitivat exam, and conducting a thorough piloting phase to refine them.

- **Reviewing the minimum standard to teach in Romania’s schools.** As part of the revision process, Romania will need to establish the minimum threshold for passing the revised definitivat exam. Currently, beginning teachers who receive a five to seven out of ten on the definitivat exam but do not obtain the higher grade required for permanent teacher certification, even after several attempts, can continue to work in schools under fixed-term contracts. This undermines the quality assurance function of this particular appraisal process, which should provide a signal to the public that a teacher has met the minimum standard for certification.

Romania should consider establishing a firm minimum standard to ensure that, wherever possible, those who teach in the country’s schools, other than beginning teachers in their probation year, are individuals who have obtained permanent teacher certification. Beginning teachers who fail the definitivat exam should be given the opportunity to develop competencies in areas where they have identified weaknesses, but if they are not able to meet the standard to gain permanent
teacher certification after a specified number of attempts, they should not continue to teach in the country’s schools as uncertified teachers.

Giving more voice to schools in the teacher hiring process

The MNESR and key stakeholders should also conduct a comparable review of the contents of the tests for tenure to ensure that it reflects the new professional teaching standards, including the competencies needed to deliver the updated pre-university curriculum. In the future, if Romania proceeds with decentralising responsibility for hiring teachers to schools, as was originally set out in the 2011 Education Law, it could consider replacing or supplementing the tenure test with teacher recruitment methods that are more responsive to schools’ needs. Common methods that are used internationally and would be more effective in assessing candidates’ competence and fit for a school, include interviews, portfolio assessments and observations of teaching (Hobson et al., 2010).

Providing mentorship, regular feedback and monitoring to support new teachers during their probation

Romania recognises the importance of mentoring new teachers. EU-funded mentorship projects have existed in Romania since the early 2000s, and the 2011 Teaching Staff Statute introduced the requirement that all beginning teachers be supervised by mentors during their probation period. The mentorship role appears to be a purely supportive one; mentors are not expected to directly appraise beginning teachers. This is a positive feature as it may increase the likelihood that teachers will seek help from their mentors to address their development needs (OECD, 2010).

Mentorship, however, is not yet a fully functional induction support. A number of new teachers who participated in interviews with the OECD Review Team either had not been assigned a mentor or had only been assigned one “in theory”. A policy setting out selection criteria and training for mentors has been released but not yet applied (Stingu et al., 2016). The Review Team found evidence that at least one CSI is conducting mentorship training, but this function has not been formally assigned to CSIs nationally. Overall, many questions remain about how mentorship is to be implemented in Romania.

Ensuring that the mentorship role is implemented in schools

Investing in mentoring beginning teachers is a powerful form of in-school professional development. If well designed, this type of induction support can increase new teachers’ competence and job satisfaction, and improve student achievement (OECD, 2014c). Induction is particularly important if, as in Romania, there are concerns about a lack of initial teacher preparation (OECD, 2010). As such, it will be important for the ministry to work with stakeholders to implement and fund mentorships, keeping in mind the features of effective induction programmes (Box 3.5).

Closely monitoring new teachers and providing regular feedback

The ministry could also work with stakeholders to consider how beginning teachers can be closely monitored and receive regular qualitative feedback, including advice about professional learning opportunities that will support their competency development. In England (United Kingdom), for example, new teachers are observed six times in their classroom and their practice outside the classroom is also monitored (OECD, 2010).
Beginning teachers in Romania will also benefit from stronger formative appraisal, as part of the regular developmental appraisal process (see Policy Issue 3.2).

**Box 3.5. Effective teacher induction**

Research identifies the following as elements of effective teacher induction:

- There are clear roles and responsibilities laid out for all actors involved in induction, including new teachers, mentors, school leaders, central and local authorities, and (if applicable) initial teacher education providers, and all share a common understanding of high-quality teaching.

- National authorities provide funding and a framework for the induction programme, and local authorities support schools with its implementation.

- School leaders oversee the implementation of induction, establish a culture of collaboration and learning in their school, give new teachers and mentors enough time to work together, and ensure that new teachers are not assigned the most challenging classes.

- Mentors are selected and trained for their roles and carefully matched with their new teacher, model exemplary practice, and provide on-the-job support that is relevant to the new teacher’s curriculum subject(s).

- New teachers have opportunities to observe and work with mentors and other experienced teachers, participate in professional development that addresses their needs, and reflect on their teaching practice (e.g. by compiling a portfolio of their work).


*Ensuring that in-school appraisers provide input to probation appraisal*

Out of 15 OECD countries with specific appraisal processes for new teachers, appraisals for the completion of probation generally involve in-school appraisers, either as the sole appraisers (in seven countries) or sharing responsibility with external evaluators (in six countries). These school-based appraisers are most often the school principal, followed by the teacher’s supervisor (OECD, 2013a). In Romania, input from school-based appraisers could inform the results of the summative appraisal for completing probation. As with the regular appraisal process, the MNESR or the IES could develop supports (such as online resources and information about effective practices that help appraisers to work with beginning teachers) as well as guidelines to help appraisers understand beginning teachers’ contexts and particular needs.

*Making sure the portfolio serves as a tool for self-reflection*

In Romania, beginning teachers are currently required to maintain a portfolio, which could be converted into a more useful formative tool. The existing portfolio is a compilation of 20 or 30 documents, including the teacher’s curriculum vitae (CV) and
information about their continuing professional development. It is sometimes but not always checked as part of the appraisal for completion of probation. The ministry could instead require that it be used as a formative tool, which beginning teachers could discuss with their principals and mentors. This would mean changing its contents to include a collection of documentary evidence of beginning teachers’ work with students, such as lesson plans or assessments of students’ progress (Hobson et al., 2010). This type of portfolio would encourage self-reflection.

**Proceeding with improvements to initial teacher education**

Teacher preparation is the first building block in teachers’ ongoing learning and development. It also provides a means to support system-wide education reform. Discussions with stakeholders and recent research indicate that Romania’s current initial teacher education modules do not sufficiently prepare teachers in the kinds of learner-centred and inclusive teaching and assessment methods that are key to the country’s education reform (European Commission, 2015a). A recent study found that secondary teachers and teacher educators in Romania felt that some aspects of student-centred methods were covered in initial teacher education modules (e.g. encouraging students to share opinions or using active teaching strategies) but that preparation was generally theoretical rather than practical (Domilescu, 2014).

**Aligning existing modules with the learner-centred curriculum**

In the short to medium term, it will be important for the MNESR to work with initial teacher education providers to revise the contents and practicum of the existing modules in order to address the above issues. Teacher candidates will benefit from programmes that provide up-to-date content on the new curriculum that incorporates competence, learner-centred teaching methods and formative assessment strategies and practicum opportunities that are structured to allow them to practise these techniques in the classroom (see Chapter 2).

The ministry will also need to work with providers to raise the bar for entry to initial teacher education programmes in order to limit candidates to those who are motivated to teach. In other countries, interviews are used, among other possible selection methods, to identify top candidates with strong interpersonal and communication skills, a willingness to learn and an interest in teaching (Barber and Mourshed, 2007).

**Designing and progressively implementing a new initial teacher education programme**

When proceeding with plans to implement the new Master of Arts in teaching programme, it will be important for the ministry, initial teacher education providers and other key stakeholders to work together to ensure that the programme’s contents cover the teaching and assessment methods that teachers will need to deliver the revised school curriculum. Once developed, professional teaching standards could act as a guide to the development of the programme’s contents, as well as specific accreditation criteria, which are currently lacking.

Based on current plans it seems that the new programme will offer considerably more practice teaching time than the current initial teacher education modules (187 hours compared to 78-120 hours) and include research tutorials culminating in the preparation of a dissertation (MNESR, 2012c). This is in keeping with international trends. Initial teacher education programmes should aim to provide practicums that offer a breadth of...
experience under the supervision of well-trained mentor teachers, and opportunities to conduct research devoted to instructional practice and the realities of the classroom (Darling-Hammond, 2006). This type of research encourages self-reflection, which is an important learning method for teachers and their students.

Romania will need to address the issues that prevented the past implementation of the Master of Arts in teaching programme. These reportedly included a lack of consultation with initial teacher education providers and differences in providers’ capacity to deliver the new programme. Going forward, the ministry will need to consult with providers and might consider adopting a flexible approach to implementation, recognising that not all institutions will be ready to provide the new programme at the outset. New Zealand provides an example of a government that is working with providers to pilot a new master’s programme to prepare teachers, beginning with the institutions that are ready for implementation (Box 3.6).

Box 3.6. Revising initial teacher education in New Zealand

The Government of New Zealand introduced a Quality Teaching Agenda in 2013 to strengthen the capacity of the country’s teachers and increase the status of the profession. As part of this agenda, the government plans to improve the quality of initial teacher education by introducing post-graduate programmes. In 2013 and 2015, the government invited initial teacher education providers to submit proposals for funding to pilot a small number of master’s programmes. Proposals were expected to:

- clearly describe the outcomes to be demonstrated by graduating teachers, including “cultural responsiveness and agency to achieve equitable outcomes for priority student groups” and how these would differ from current outcomes
- present a more integrated and collaborative approach to initial teacher education between providers and schools
- outline how the capacity of teacher educators, mentors and coaches would be developed to ensure initial teacher preparation is of high quality.

This process is based on the experiences of countries like Singapore, where new initiatives are piloted before being introduced across their education system. The pilot phase is intended to identify strengths and exemplary practices while building an evidence base to support the widespread expansion of the initial teacher education master’s programme. It will also reveal the level of demand among students. The universities of Auckland, Waikato and Otago were selected to begin piloting programmes in 2014; there has been high student demand.


Policy Issue 3.4: Rewarding and incentivising teachers’ development of higher competency levels

Romania needs to reconsider teachers’ career paths and the appraisal process for career progression to encourage teachers to continually improve their teaching practices and to recognise and reward teachers’ higher levels of competency. Competency-based teacher appraisal can support career paths that give teachers incentives to develop their knowledge and the skills they need to take on additional roles and responsibilities. This
opens up new job possibilities for classroom teachers, and allows schools to make better use of teachers’ full complement of skills to improve student learning.

**Revising teachers’ career paths to connect key stages with standards-based competencies and greater responsibilities**

Currently, as teachers progress along the three-level career path in Romania, they are rewarded with salary increases, but they are not encouraged to take on new roles and responsibilities commensurate with greater skills. Stakeholders expressed concern that the career path may not be motivating teachers, partly because the highest qualification level can be reached in less than 10 years. The current system therefore represents a missed opportunity to use the career path strategically to motivate teachers to improve their skills and to ensure more experienced and competent teachers share their expertise within and across schools.

**Creating differentiated career paths**

A number of countries have introduced career paths for teachers where different stages or positions are associated with new responsibilities (Box 3.7). The OECD has suggested that countries consider adopting a three-stage path with, for example, competent teacher, established teacher and expert teacher stages (OECD, 2013a). Research recommends that, within each career stage, teachers have the opportunity to progress up salary steps, so that those who wish to remain in the classroom and not take on additional responsibilities are still rewarded for their experience and efforts (Santiago et al., 2012a). Outside of this career path, teachers could still pursue leadership positions at the school or county level once they have reached a certain career stage and/or experience level.

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**Box 3.7. Examples of differentiated teacher career paths**

In 1996, Lithuania introduced a multi-stage teacher career path:

- junior teachers, at the initial stage on the career path
- teachers who have spent one year in the classroom and are fully qualified for the teaching role
- senior teachers with two years of experience, and who are responsible for coaching other teachers in their school
- methodists, who have at least five years of experience as a senior teacher, and coach teachers across the district
- experts, who have at least seven years of experience as methodists, coach teachers at the national level and contribute to the development of the national curriculum.

Singapore has different career tracks for teachers, including a teaching track for educators who wish to pursue excellence in teaching, a leadership track (e.g. for school administration), and a specialist track (e.g. for curriculum designers or researchers). Classroom teachers may progress up four levels on the teaching track, and take on the following responsibilities:

- senior teachers serve as mentors to younger colleagues within their school
- lead teachers take on key roles within a cluster of schools
- master and principal master teachers demonstrate good teaching practices and model lessons for a wider range of teachers (e.g. by leading Networked Learning Communities of teachers).
Box 3.7. Examples of differentiated teacher career paths (continued)

In 2013, Australia introduced four teacher career stages – graduate, proficient, highly accomplished and lead – and began a two-year pilot of the latter two stages in 2014-15. As teachers progress along these career stages, they are expected to show increasing knowledge, practice and professional engagement as described in professional teaching standards. Highly accomplished teachers are expected to contribute to their colleagues’ learning, acting as guides, advisers and leaders. Lead teachers are expected to lead processes that improve student outcomes (e.g. evaluating and revising programmes, and analysing student assessment data).


Aligning greater responsibilities with higher competency levels

As Romania develops a common set of professional teaching standards, it will be important for the MNESR, in consultation with the teachers’ unions and other key stakeholders, to revise the existing teaching career path to associate different stages of a teacher’s career with additional roles and responsibilities.

Standards would form the basis of a career path that rewards teachers for attaining higher competency levels (OECD, 2010). For example, each standard could be accompanied by a description of competencies and how teachers at different levels (e.g. from beginning teacher to expert teacher), would demonstrate them. In this way, teachers would be able to reach a higher stage on the career path when they demonstrate, through an appraisal process (see below), that they have reached competency levels equivalent to that stage. This process would help to identify individuals who have the potential to take on roles as school leaders or CSI inspectors (see Chapter 4) but it would also reward excellent teachers who wish to remain in a teaching role.

Romania currently identifies four areas of competencies for the Level II and I qualification: professional, psycho-pedagogical, psycho-social and classroom management. However, without unifying teaching standards, these currently represent another description of the teacher’s role that exists on its own, separate from teachers’ job descriptions and the criteria for the various appraisal processes. Creating one set of professional teaching standards, and competency levels for each standard and using them to appraise teachers for career advancement would ensure that the education system shares a common understanding of the teacher’s role and the competencies teachers need to develop in order to be promoted (Box 3.8).
Box 3.8. What is teacher competence and how should competencies be identified?

There are many different definitions of teacher competence. According to Roelofs and Sanders (2007), this term encompasses: teacher traits, teacher knowledge, teacher behaviour, teacher thinking, situation-specific decision making, and the impact teachers have on student learning.

Countries generally use the following processes to identify teacher competencies:

- analysing how teachers work
- consulting excellent teachers and other practicing professionals
- conducting research on factors that relate to higher learning performance among students.

For example, Singapore’s Ministry of Education contracted researchers to interview teachers to identify the competencies that distinguished successful educators to inform the development of a competency-based appraisal process that is used to promote teachers along a career track (senior teacher, lead teacher, master teacher and principal master teacher). Teachers are appraised in five areas: nurturing the whole child, cultivating knowledge, working with others, knowing self and others, and winning hearts and minds. An example of the competency levels for teacher and master teacher within “teaching creativity”, which falls under the “cultivating knowledge” area includes the following:

- All teachers use routine methods to teach, provide worksheets and notes, appeal to students’ interests by using specific techniques and approaches to teach concepts, and assess learning through simple questioning.
- Master teachers use a variety of approaches, use reflective questioning to assist student comprehension, teach a range of concepts simultaneously, exploit learning opportunities inside and outside the classroom, and inspire learning beyond the curriculum.

Countries have also used existing frameworks, like Danielson’s Framework for Teaching, as a guide to their development of competency-based appraisal processes.


Ensuring expertise in the system is recognised and used

In addition to identifying standards and related competencies, another essential component of this work would be a review of teachers’ existing roles and responsibilities to determine how they should relate to the different stages of a teacher’s career and whether new positions need to be developed. In OECD countries with diverse career paths, roles and responsibilities generally become increasingly complex as teachers advance (Schleicher, 2012). They may include responsibilities like mentoring new teachers or serving as external evaluators for summative appraisal processes (see Policy Issue 3.3), co-ordinating continuing professional development or school projects, as well as more common responsibilities like serving as a department head (OECD, 2013a). Many of these roles already exist in Romania, but they are not considered part of the teaching career path and they are not associated with higher salaries. Consolidating those roles that are dedicated to improving teaching and learning (such as coaching and mentoring) would be particularly beneficial in Romania.
Establishing salaries that support new teaching career paths

In developing new teaching career paths, the MNESR will need to work with the teachers’ unions and stakeholders to review the salary grid. Given that teachers’ salaries are low, efforts will need to be made to ensure that teachers are not penalised financially by the shift from a career path based on the didactical qualification levels to one in which career stages are associated with new roles and responsibilities that are dictated, in part, by actual vacancies. In Australia, for example, the highly accomplished teacher (HAT) and lead teacher (LT) levels have their own salary steps but salary increases do not automatically result from obtaining those levels. Instead, they are connected to the particular responsibilities the teacher takes on as an HAT or LT within a school, which may involve a job competition (AEU SA Branch, 2016).

Using appraisal for career progression to authentically measure higher levels of competency

A multi-stage teacher career path, where teachers take on greater responsibilities related to increased competency levels, requires a career advancement appraisal process that focuses on measuring teachers’ competencies and is rooted in the actual work that they do. Romania’s current appraisal processes for career progression – namely the examinations and CSI inspections that lead to the didactical qualifications – are not well adapted for this purpose. The weight they give to success in theoretical exams may also distract teachers from developing competencies that are more important to the quality of their teaching and student learning, while reinforcing the system’s over-reliance on tests to evaluate performance.

Romania’s didactical appraisals do not authentically measure teachers’ competencies

In Romania, the written and oral examinations and other academic requirements for career progression are detached from teachers’ role in the classroom and the school, which makes it difficult for them to authentically measure teachers’ competency. There are drawbacks to any examination of teachers’ practice that is not rooted in the classroom or the school (Hobson et al., 2010). Dissertations and oral presentations may demonstrate mastery of theoretical content, but fail to give any real indication of the quality of a teacher’s work in the context in which that work is conducted (Hobson et al., 2010). Stakeholders in Romania stated that this was indeed a significant concern with the didactical exams. Developed by universities, these exams, like the contents of Romania’s initial teacher education programmes, are considered to be theoretical and removed from the classroom.

The other element of Romania’s career advancement appraisals, the specialty inspection of teachers by CSI inspectors, is rooted in classroom observation. However, the number of teachers inspectors are required to observe – more than 1 800 over the course of a year in one county the OECD Review Team visited – hinders their capacity to meaningfully evaluate teachers’ practice (Bucharest County School Inspectorate, 2014). Moreover, although a minister’s order sets out competencies associated with the different didactical qualification levels, the inspections do not seem to measure whether teachers have attained those competencies.
Reviewing who conducts the appraisal for career advancement and what it is based on

In Romania, an appraisal process that focuses on the core work of teaching rather than the completion of academic requirements like examinations would offer a more authentic assessment of teachers’ higher competency levels for career progression. This would require a change in who conducts the appraisals, as well as the methods and sources of evidence used. Australia’s career advancement appraisal process includes elements Romania may wish to consider in moving forward with changes to its appraisal for career progression (Box 3.9). This would include:

- **Using a cadre of trained, experienced teachers to lead the appraisal.** Research recommends that well-trained external evaluators conduct at least some part of any appraisals for career advancement, assessing teachers against common professional teaching standards to ensure objectivity and fairness (Santiago et al., 2012a). In Romania, a cadre of carefully selected and trained experienced teachers, as proposed above for probation appraisals, would be well placed to serve as external evaluators. Moving this responsibility to trained experienced teachers would also help CSIs move towards a more supportive, rather than evaluative, role for schools (see Chapter 4), and reduce their workload.

- **Basing the assessment on teaching standards.** The role of the external evaluator would be to assess teachers’ practice in the classroom against competency levels connected to the new teaching standards. Common methods for this type of assessment include classroom observation, self-assessment, assessment of material developed by the teacher and interviews (Roelofs and Sanders, 2007; OECD, 2013a). Methods that examine broad evidence of teachers’ work in relation to student learning are the most valuable for appraising teachers’ competence for career advancement (Roelofs and Sanders, 2007).

- **Drawing on input from regular school-based appraisals.** In order to obtain a full picture of a teacher’s practice, research recommends that career advancement appraisals take into account input from those involved in the regular, school-based appraisal of teachers (OECD, 2013a). As suggested earlier in this chapter, Romania should consider adopting this practice. Gathering input from these appraisers would also reduce the need for multiple external inspections.

Changing the requirements for professional development

Romania might also consider rethinking the role that the accumulation of continuing professional development credits plays in career progression. In 2013, Estonia established a new teacher career structure and a competency-based process for appraising teachers for higher career stages, removing the requirement that teachers undertake 160 hours of professional development courses every 5 years in order to be eligible for a higher stage. Instead of this requirement, Estonia is introducing a system in which professional development is specifically targeted to support teachers’ development of the competencies they will need for higher career stages and new roles. Opportunities for career progression serve to incentivise teachers’ participation in the professional development (Santiago et al., 2016).
Box 3.9. Appraisals for highly accomplished teacher and lead teacher certification in Australia

In Australia, certifying authorities within each state follow a national framework to assess teachers for certification as highly accomplished teachers or lead teachers based on professional teaching standards developed by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL). Teachers must have received satisfactory results on at least two regular annual appraisals conducted by their principal/supervisor in order to be eligible for this assessment.

The assessment process is conducted by external assessors who complete a national training programme as preparation for their role. It consists of three stages:

1. Pre-assessment stage: the teacher determines their readiness for certification and conducts a mandatory professional discussion with their principal or supervisor.

2. Assessment stage 1: the teacher submits evidence against the teaching standards, including material documenting their teaching practice and two classroom observation reports, one of which must be completed by their principal/supervisor, and comments from referees.

3. Assessment stage 2: the teacher’s practice is assessed by an external assessor, which involves an observation, and discussions with the teacher’s principal or supervisor and the teacher.

Certifications are awarded for five years. Teachers must contact their certifying authority 12 months prior to their expiry date if they wish to renew their certification. This process involves submitting documentation demonstrating evidence against the standards for review by external assessors. A range of guidelines and reference documents are available on the AITSL website to support teachers with the certification and renewal process.


Considering a requirement for recertification in the future

In the long term, to strengthen quality assurance, Romania might also consider using an appraisal process similar to Estonia’s to periodically renew teachers’ certification. This could mean, for example, that all teachers would be required to apply for appraisal to renew their certificates after a certain period of time, while those seeking to progress in their careers would apply voluntarily (OECD, 2013a). This would provide some external quality assurance and accountability for those teachers who choose not to pursue career progression, since in this case their only regular appraisal would be internal, and primarily focused on their development. At the present time, the certifying body in Romania is the MNESR. To further professionalise the role of the teacher and to encourage teachers to feel ownership of their certification and standards, Romania might consider delegating the authority for certification to a teacher organisation, such as a self-regulatory body.
The merit grade assessment may distort teaching practices and unfairly reward teachers

In December 2016, Romania issued a minister’s order that added new criteria to assess teachers for a merit grade bonus (Box 3.10). This reflects a positive development that should help to ensure that teachers in all types of schools, including those who work in disadvantaged socio-economic contexts and who teach students of diverse ability levels will have a fair chance of being awarded the merit grade salary bonus. Previously, the assessment criteria emphasised teachers’ work with students who achieved exceptional results on examinations and competitions. For example, according to an assessment template used by the Bucharest School Inspectorate in the 2015/16 school year, teachers earned considerably more points per year for preparing academic Olympic teams or working with students who won prizes in academic competitions than for their work in other areas (Bucharest County School Inspectorate, 2016). While the new assessment criteria encourage teachers’ efforts to support struggling students, it is unclear how they will affect the assessment process in practice given that other criteria continue to reward teachers for having high-achieving students. This risks influencing teaching practices, encouraging a narrow focus on preparation for tests and academic competitions. This distortion is currently evident in Romania.

Box 3.10. Romania’s merit grade assessment criteria

Romania’s merit grade assessment evaluates teachers’ work against four main criteria, including:

Complex activities with instructive-educative value – 70 %:

- Exceptional results achieved in preparing students to reach objectives in the school curriculum, evidenced by students’ progress in class and on national tests and exams, and individual student or class results in specialty subjects in vocational education.
- Performance in preparing students for school Olympiads or other academic competitions, evidenced by obtaining the 1st, 2nd or 3rd prize, or special prizes at county/national/international level.
- Outstanding results achieved in preparing students from disadvantaged backgrounds or students with special educational needs and other learning difficulties.
- Designing and implementing innovative teaching methods; and innovative educational classes and projects to support the learning progress of each child, including those at risk of dropping out of school and children with special educational needs, and producing or using innovative curriculum drawn from educational research.

Outstanding performance in didactical/managerial innovation – 10 %

- Developing school curricula, methodological guides or textbooks; writing books and scientific papers in didactics and educational management; creating educational software; evaluating textbooks, acting as a mentor or trainer in lifelong learning programmes for teachers; working as methodologist teachers or as a member of a council or commission.
- Participating in professional development programmes on improving the learning outcomes of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, students with special education needs and other learning difficulties, or gifted students, and developing innovative professional development for teachers who work with students from disadvantaged backgrounds or vulnerable students.
An appraisal process that ranks teachers, like Romania’s merit grade assessment, where a certain percentage of the highest ranked individual teachers are granted a reward, may also promote competition among teachers rather than the collegial and collaborative relationships that are essential to high-quality teaching and learning (OECD, 2009).

In addition, unless teachers are ranked in a way that is relatively fair, for example, by comparing them with teachers who work in schools with similar demographics, teachers in challenging schools will be at a disadvantage (OECD, 2009). It was reported to the OECD Review Team during interviews that this is the case in Romania, where teachers in the country’s rural schools have not had the same opportunities to do well in the merit grade assessment as those in schools with students who excel academically or are more involved in extracurricular activities. When issuing performance rewards, it is an important general principle that all teachers, regardless of the subject they teach or their education level, should be eligible for them (OECD, 2013a). The new merit grade assessment does attempt to resolve this issue to some extent, by including specific criteria on educational progress among disadvantaged students, which will compare teachers working in similarly disadvantaged schools.

Finally, in Romania, teachers reportedly submit, and evaluators are required to review, a large amount of paperwork as part of this assessment process. This is due, in part, to a reported lack of clarity around how assessment criteria should be demonstrated.
The wording of the assessment criteria, which can be vague or repetitive, may contribute to this challenge.

Developing fairer and more equitable ways to recognise and reward teachers

This OECD review recommends that Romania consider ending its current merit grade salary bonus, and recognise and reward teachers in other ways instead, notably by developing a teacher career path where additional roles and responsibilities lead to higher remuneration. Using an appraisal process for career advancement in to new roles, such as the one outlined above, would be a fairer and more equitable way to give teachers incentives to build competencies in many different areas associated with effective teaching.

These new career paths will require changes to the salary grid so that teachers’ higher competency levels are rewarded with higher remuneration. Teachers in Romania reported to the OECD Review Team that the merit grade salary bonus is currently needed to supplement their low salaries. Policy makers should also consider instituting a general increase in teachers’ salaries, particularly for new teachers, so that top candidates are attracted to the profession.

If Romania decides to maintain the merit grade salary bonus, it will be important for it to revise the assessment process to address the issues outlined above, and to evaluate any revisions after they are implemented. The work to revise and evaluate the assessment process should involve stakeholders, including the teachers’ unions and teachers, and all changes should be clearly communicated to the education sector to increase the likelihood that the process will be accepted as valid and reliable. The assessment should be based on performance measures that teachers consider to be fair and accurate, which could include common professional teaching standards, and should provide incentives for behaviour that supports the overall goals of the education system (OECD, 2009).

Romania could also consider expanding the types of rewards available to teachers. For example, teachers in Romania reported to the Review Team that they would like to be rewarded with professional learning opportunities. The ministry also currently has the legislated authority to award teachers a range of decorations, orders, medals and titles, which could be used to publicly champion teachers’ efforts to increase the equity of the education system by supporting success for all students.

Conclusions and recommendations

Teaching quality is critical to student achievement, and as such, the appraisal of teachers is also critically important, for both development and quality assurance purposes. Improving appraisal processes to support teachers’ continuing professional learning and competency development, and providing teachers with greater opportunities to make use of their higher levels of knowledge and skills will benefit teachers, students, schools and the education system as a whole.

Stakeholder engagement is important to the success of the reforms discussed in this chapter. Above all, it is essential that teachers are involved in developing these reforms, not just because they can share valuable insights as educators, but also to ensure they feel a sense of ownership of the professional teaching standards, appraisal processes and career stages that will become integral parts of their profession.
Recommendations

3.1 Develop common professional teaching standards

3.1.1. Develop national teaching standards that define good teaching in Romania and guide appraisal criteria and processes and other aspects of teaching policy such as initial teacher education and professional development. The teaching standards should be aligned to the strengthened learning standards that set out national goals for student learning (see Recommendation 2.1.1 in Chapter 2), so that appraisals support teachers to develop the teaching competencies that will enable achievement of the national learning goals.

3.1.2. Establish a consultative forum that involves all relevant stakeholders to reach agreement on the development of the teaching standards. Forum discussions could be led by a neutral facilitator and focused on agreement at a high level, and would help to encourage a debate about the types of competencies and attributes Romanian teachers should focus on developing.

3.1.3. Consider establishing a professional self-regulatory body for teachers that is responsible for promoting and maintaining the teaching standards, and which would help to strengthen the professional identity of the teaching workforce. Over time, as it becomes more established, this body could play a more direct role in shaping teaching policy and certification requirements.

3.2. Make regular teacher appraisal more developmental to support improvements to teaching

3.2.1. End the high-stakes consequences of regular appraisal that hinder its developmental function. Regular appraisal results should not be used to determine salary bonuses, and eligibility for career advancement should be based on a minimum threshold rather than requiring teachers to obtain the highest marks on their regular appraisals. These changes should be made as part of a broader reform to the career advancement appraisal (see Recommendation 3.4.2). For those teachers who do not pursue career advancement, the regular developmental appraisal could be balanced by the externality of a periodic appraisal for recertification to provide adequate quality assurance and accountability.

3.2.2. Ensure that regular appraisals are conducted by appraisers familiar with a teachers’ classroom practice and who have the experience to be able to provide quality feedback. Principals and school-based appraisers should conduct the regular appraisals, as they are familiar with the teachers and their classroom practice. Appraisal should be focused on classroom observations and professional dialogue to identify and address teachers’ developmental needs.

3.2.3. Connect regular appraisal to teachers’ professional development. Add professional learning plans to the regular appraisal methodology to encourage teachers to identify their learning needs in consultation with their appraisers. The plans should outline a few techniques that teachers might employ in order to improve student engagement and learning, and the professional learning activities that will help them to make those changes. Providing greater opportunities for informal collaborative learning within schools and through peer networks will be important to support continuous professional development.
3.2.4. Develop a standard response for underperformance. The current lack of a standard process to address an unsatisfactory regular appraisal result means that weaknesses in teaching may not be addressed. Romania should set out a fair, step-by-step response to underperformance, which could include the development of an improvement plan, additional appraisals and ultimately dismissal if performance does not improve.

3.3. Improve the probation period and initial assessment of teachers

3.3.1. Establish a cadre of experienced teachers to conduct the inspection of beginning teachers for full certification and focus the inspection on classroom practice. Experienced teachers would bring significant teaching expertise and knowledge to provide new teachers with useful feedback that is essential to their early professional development. They would also bring an independence and consistency to the inspection which CSIs cannot provide, and help resolve the conflict in roles that CSI inspectors have, by allowing the latter to focus on school support as this review recommends (see Recommendation 4.4.4 in Chapter 4).

3.3.2. Revise the definitivat to assess the teaching competencies required by the new curriculum, and consider reducing its weight in the appraisal process. The new teacher standards (see Recommendation 3.1.1) should guide the revision of the definitivat exam to ensure that it assesses the competencies teachers need in the classroom. Romania might also consider adding more practice-oriented, open-ended questions to the exam so that it is a better measure of teachers’ competencies. In the future, Romania could reduce the weight of the exam in favour of a more authentic measure of teacher competencies, such as a performance-based inspection of new teachers in the classroom.

3.3.3. Ensure that new teachers receive more support to develop professionally. All new teachers should have a mentor, be closely monitored and receive regular feedback to develop their teaching competencies. The current teacher portfolio should be developed into a formative tool that includes evidence of new teachers’ work with students, to be discussed with their principals and mentors and to encourage self-reflection.

3.3.4. Improve initial teacher education so that new teachers are adequately prepared to teach. Raise the bar for entry to initial teacher education programmes by selecting candidates with the appropriate skills and strong motivation to teach. Ensure that programmes prepare teachers in the new learner-centred curriculum and provide them with sufficient practical preparation in instructional practice and assessment. Progressively introduce the new Masters of Arts in teaching programme, ensuring that institutions have the capacity to meet its quality requirements and that the impact on teacher preparedness is evaluated before it is made mandatory.

3.4 Reward and incentivise teachers’ development of higher competency levels

3.4.1. Revise the teaching career path so that teachers are motivated to develop competencies and take on new roles and responsibilities throughout their career. The new career path should be guided by teacher standards that relate to the different stages of a teacher’s career (e.g. from beginning teacher to expert teacher), with each stage associated with new responsibilities. New salary levels should also be defined to reflect the different stages and responsibilities of the career path.
3.4.2. Revise appraisal for career advancement to focus on authentic measures of teaching practice rather than examinations and academic requirements. Base the appraisal for career advancement on authentic measures of teacher competency, including classroom observations, and incorporate input from in-school appraisers who conduct the regular appraisal process. Use the same cadre of experienced teachers who will conduct new teachers’ appraisals to conduct career advancement appraisals.

3.4.3 Revise and consider ending the merit grade salary bonus which does not provide a fair and equitable measure of teaching. Instead, new teacher career paths should be developed to recognise and reward teachers as they develop professionally and take on new roles and responsibilities, which offer higher remuneration. Romania should also consider instituting a general increase to teachers’ salaries to attract top candidates to the profession and sufficiently remunerate teachers.
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CHAPTER 3. TEACHER APPRAISAL IN ROMANIA: ENSURING APPRAISAL SUPPORTS TEACHERS’ PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT – 163


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