# OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education

# SLOVAK REPUBLIC

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OECD

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# *Foreword*

This report for the Slovak Republic forms part of the OECD Review on Evaluation and Assessment Frameworks for Improving School Outcomes (see Annex A for further details). The purpose of the Review is to explore how systems of evaluation and assessment can be used to improve the quality, equity and efficiency of school education. The Review looks at the various components of assessment and evaluation frameworks that countries use with the objective of improving student outcomes. These include student assessment, teacher appraisal, school evaluation and system evaluation.

The Slovak Republic was one of the countries that opted to participate in the country review strand and host a visit by an external review team. The review visit to the Slovak Republic took place on 27 March – 3 April 2012. The itinerary is provided in Annex B. The visit was designed by the OECD in collaboration with Slovak authorities. Members of the OECD review team were Claire Shewbridge (OECD Secretariat), co-ordinator of the Review; Johan van Bruggen (Education Consultant, formerly with the Dutch Inspectorate of Education; Netherlands); Deborah Nusche (OECD Secretariat); and Paul Wright (Independent Education Advisor; formerly with the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency; United Kingdom). The biographies of the members of the OECD Review Team are provided in Annex C.

This publication is the report from the OECD review team. It provides, from an international perspective, an independent analysis of major issues facing the evaluation and assessment framework in the Slovak Republic, current policy initiatives, and possible future approaches. The report serves three purposes: *(i)* provide insights and advice to Slovak education authorities; *(ii)* help other OECD countries understand the Slovak approach; and *(iii)* provide input for the final comparative report of the project.

The Slovak Republic's involvement in the OECD Review was initially co-ordinated by Andrej Mentel, formerly with the National Institute for Certified Educational Measurements (NÚCEM) and also by Mr. Martin Pokorný (NÚCEM).

An important part of the Slovak Republic's involvement was the preparation of a Country Background Report (CBR) on evaluation and assessment policy. The OECD Review Team is very grateful to authors of the CBR (Viera Hajdúková, Zuzana Juščáková, Romana Kanovská, Tibor Lukács, Andrej Mentel, Martin Pokorný, Mária Šnídlová and Adriana Vykydalová) for providing a useful information base for the OECD review team and for the wider international community. The CBR is an important output from the OECD project. Unless indicated otherwise, the data for this report are taken from the Slovak Republic's Country Background Report. The CBR follows guidelines prepared by the OECD Secretariat and provides extensive information, analysis and discussion in regard to the national context, the organisation of the education system, the main features of the evaluation and assessment framework and the views of key stakeholders. In this sense, the CBR and this report complement each other and, for a

more comprehensive view of evaluation and assessment in the Slovak Republic, should be read in conjunction.

During the Review visit, the team held discussions with a wide range of stakeholders; education officials; relevant agencies that deal with evaluation and assessment issues; teacher representatives; parents' organisations; representatives of schools; teacher educators; civil society organisations; and researchers with an interest in evaluation and assessment issues. The team also visited a range of schools, interacting with school management, teachers and students in the Bratislava and its surrounds, Prešov and Banská Bystrica. The intention was to provide a broad cross-section of information and opinions on evaluation and assessment policies and how their effectiveness can be improved.

The OECD review team wishes to record its grateful appreciation to the many people who gave time from their busy schedules to inform the OECD review team of their views, experiences and knowledge. The meetings were open and provided a wealth of insights. Special words of appreciation are due to colleagues at the National Institute for Certified Educational Measurements (NÚCEM), in particular to Martin Pokorný for very effectively and ever pleasantly responding to the questions and needs of the OECD Review Team. This gratitude extends to Romana Kanovská for providing support and professional insight to the OECD review team, as well as to Daniel Szadvári for clear and patient translation services throughout the review visit. We are also grateful to Andrej Mentel, initial National Co-ordinator, for the preparatory work in the Slovak Republic's participation in the OECD Review. The courtesy and hospitality extended to us throughout our stay in the Slovak Republic made our task as a Review Team as pleasant and enjoyable as it was stimulating and challenging.

The OECD review team is also grateful to colleagues at the OECD, especially to Heike-Daniela Herzog for administrative support during the review and to Liz Zachary for editorial support.

This report is organised in six chapters. Chapter 1 provides the national context, with information on the Slovak Republic's school system, main trends and concerns, and recent developments. Chapter 2 looks at the overall evaluation and assessment framework and analyses how the different components of the framework play together and can be made more coherent to effectively improve student learning. Chapters 3 to 6 present each of the components of the evaluation and assessment framework – student assessment, teacher appraisal, school evaluation and system evaluation – in more depth, presenting strengths, challenges and policy recommendations.

The policy recommendations attempt to build on and strengthen reforms that are already underway in the Slovak Republic, and the strong commitment to further improvement that was evident among those we met. The suggestions should take into account the difficulties that face any visiting group, no matter how well briefed, in grasping the complexity of the Slovak Republic and fully understanding all the issues.

Of course, this report is the responsibility of the OECD review team. While we benefited greatly from the Slovak Republic CBR and other documents, as well as the many discussions with a wide range of stakeholders, any errors or misinterpretations in this report are our responsibility.

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# Acronyms and abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| **APP** | Assessing Pupils' Progress |
| **CBR** | Country Background Report |
| **CIDREE** | Consortium of Institutions for Development and Research in Education in Europe |
| **CVTI SR** | Centre of Scientific and Technical Information of the Slovak Republic |
| **EU** | European Union |
| **IEA** | International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement |
| **ISCED** | International Standard Classification of Education |
| **INEKO** | Institute for Economic and Social Reforms |
| **MPC** | Methodology and Pedagogy Centre |
| **MŠVVaŠ SR** | Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of Slovak Republic |
| **NEMP** | National Education Monitoring Project |
| **NEP** | National Education Programmes |
| **NGO** | Non-Governmental Organisation |
| **NIE** | National Institute for Education |
| **NSN** | National Student Number |
| **NÚCEM** | National Institute for Certified Educational Measurements |
| **OECD** | Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development |
| **PIRLS** | Progress in International Reading Literacy Study |
| **PISA** | OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment |
| **QCDA** | Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency |
| **SEIS** | *Selbst Evaluation in Schulen* |
| **SEP** | School's Education Programme |
| **SICI** | Standing International Conference of Inspectorates of Education |
| **SLO** | Dutch National Institute for Curriculum Development |
| **ŠPÚ** | National Institute for Education |
| **ŠŠI** | Slovak State Schools Inspectorate |
| **T9** | *Testovanie 9* |
| **TALIS** | OECD's Teaching and Learning International Survey |
| **TIMSS** | Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study |
| **ÚIPŠ** | Institute for Information and Prognoses of Education |
| **UNESCO** | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation |
| **ÚPSVaR** | Central Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family |

# Executive summary

*Most children are in public schools and all sit central examinations, but the school system is highly inequitable*

Children must complete ten years of schooling and the majority attend public schools, but may be enrolled in different school types according to their interests and ability, with academic selection possible at ages 11, 14 and 15. National examinations at the end of upper secondary schooling (*Maturita*) certify student achievement with a view to higher education access. Since 2009, there is a full-cohort national summative assessment in Year 9 (*Testovanie* 9) in the Slovak language and literature, as well as, where applicable, in the major language of instruction (Hungarian or Ukrainian), and in mathematics. A new national summative assessment in Year 5 is expected to be introduced in 2014/15.

Compared internationally, students in the Slovak Republic show average performance at the primary level (basic schools) and below average performance at the secondary level (academic "*gymnázium*" and vocational schools). There are entrenched inequities in the Slovak school system. Compared to the OECD average, differences in student performance at age 15 are more strongly associated with their schools' socio-economic intake. Regional disparities are more pronounced in the Slovak Republic than in any other OECD country, with a particularly high concentration of poor households in the Eastern regions. Educational differences between rural areas and cities are significant and educational outcomes for the Roma minority are particularly poor on average. There is strong incentive for students to complete upper secondary education: the reduced risk of unemployment for Slovak men and women with upper secondary education is particularly strong in international comparison.

*A competency-based curriculum and greater pedagogical freedom have consequences for central evaluation and assessment capacity*

A series of reforms have sought to give more pedagogical autonomy to schools, while at the same time strengthening the role of evaluation and assessment activities. Since 2008, national education programmes define the core content to be taught, specifying competencies and "cognitive competencies" in different content areas, and each school develops a school education programme that should align to these. At the same time, the Slovak State Schools Inspectorate (ŠŠI) has conducted inspections on the school education programme. However, there are concerns that this and other new responsibilities have compromised its capacity to deliver the regular cycle of complex school inspections.

The National Institute for Certified Educational Measurement (NÚCEM) was established as an independent agency in 2009 to significantly increase capacity to ensure reliable student examinations and generate information for system monitoring. Since

then, the *Maturita* and the *Testovanie* 9 have progressively adapted to better assess competencies listed in the national education programmes. However, there is inadequate analytical and research capacity centrally to fully exploit the results from evaluation and assessment.

Since 2009, teachers are free to choose pedagogical methods and teaching approaches and benefit from a salary and bonus system linked to teachers' qualifications and professional development activities. A clear strength in the traditional Slovak approach is the support to build capacity of beginning teachers. Typically, the Methodology and Pedagogy Centre (MPC) co-ordinates with schools to support these induction programmes and also offers professional development for school leaders and deputy leaders. However, several stakeholders identified the need to increase the MPC's capacity to provide professional development, both in terms of the quantity and quality offered.

*Strengthen strategic oversight of evaluation and assessment activities and stakeholder engagement*

There is a need to clarify and/or set long-term goals for schooling in the Slovak Republic as this would help to integrate the different elements into a coherent evaluation and assessment framework. A central strategy or framework document mapping out existing evaluation and assessment activities and identifying duplication of procedures would help generate synergies among different activities and prevent inconsistency of objectives. Clear and commonly understood evaluation criteria can help strengthen coherence: a consolidated set of teaching standards will bring together different aspects of appraisal; and an authoritative role for the ŠŠI inspection framework would bring greater coherence between external and internal school evaluation. Engaging key stakeholder groups will also strengthen coherence by: helping embed evaluation and assessment as an ongoing and essential part of professionalism; clarifying different responsibilities; and allowing for better networking and connections among stakeholders. At the same time, it is important to collate evidence on the progress of implementation and the impact of assessment and evaluation innovations on the quality of teaching and learning, as it will: provide helpful feedback on how to refine existing activities; help set priorities for future changes; build credibility of these activities among stakeholders. All further refinements or innovations should be carefully phased in, including adequate stakeholder engagement in developing the refinements and the use of piloting in selected schools.

*Evaluation and assessment must have adequate focus on improvement*

The framework document should unambiguously communicate that the major purpose of evaluation and assessment is to improve student learning and outcomes. The dominant purpose of evaluation and assessment activities appears to be compliance, not improvement. Students need better, formative feedback on *how* they can improve their learning – assessment criteria aligned to the standards in the national education programmes would help clarify individual learning goals and progress toward these. Formal, external appraisal within the certification procedure must pay attention to the quality of teaching, including classroom observation. The ŠŠI school inspections must go beyond a check of school compliance with legal standards and provide useful feedback to teachers and schools for improvement. School boards can strengthen their evaluative role and help promote the use of annual school reporting for school development and

improvement. Regional and local authorities can support peer evaluation and collaboration among schools. The NÚCEM and the ŠŠI can go further in reporting and promoting the use of results at the central, regional, local and school levels.

*Prioritise capacity building in schools and centrally*

An essential part of any implementation strategy is to ensure an adequate provision of guidelines, tools and specific training. While evaluation and assessment can identify areas for improvement, they are only instrumental in achieving improvement if their results are used by stakeholders. A priority plan for capacity building would ensure the maximum benefit is gained from evaluation and assessment activities. The clear demand from schools for professional development and the limited capacity of the MPC requires a rethinking of the professional development offer. There is a need to ensure adequate professional development provision so that teachers and school leaders learn from the results of evaluation and assessment and make changes that lead to improvement in student learning and outcomes. There is a need to supply high-quality training to: *(i)* teachers on using a wider range of assessment tools and methods and involving learners in the assessment process; and *(ii)* school leaders in conducting classroom observation as part of both regular teacher appraisal and school self-evaluation activities. At the national level, there is a need to build analytical and research capacity so that the results of evaluation and assessment feed into policies for school system improvement.

*Monitoring and reporting systems must pay adequate attention to equity*

There are no explicit equity goals for the school system in the Slovak Republic. While there are initiatives to ensure that the design and administration of national student examinations is more equitable, central monitoring does not pay sufficient attention to equity. There are important information gaps regarding measures of student and school socio-economic context. At the same time the NÚCEM publishes school average results on national tests and ranks schools on these results, but there is a need for reporting to reflect the structural feature of academic selection and the school's socio-economic intake to allow better interpretation of school results. School inspectors would benefit from clear guidelines on how to take account of school context in forming a judgement on its quality. Reporting systems could pay more attention to the outcomes of different student groups.

# *Chapter 1*

# School education in the Slovak Republic

*The majority of children in the Slovak Republic attend public schools, although they may be enrolled in different school types according to their interests and ability, with academic selection at ages 11, 14 or 15. There is not a high degree of grade repetition, but there is a well-established culture of transferring students to different schools due to their low academic performance. International and national student assessments reveal a large proportion of underperforming students and a highly inequitable school system. In 2001 the "Millennium" plan for educational reform set out a vision for reforming schooling in the Slovak Republic over a 15-20 year period. Since then, a series of legal reforms have sought to introduce more freedom throughout the school system.*

This chapter provides an overview of the key features of schooling in the Slovak Republic for readers who are not familiar with the system, with an aim to better contextualise the approaches to assessment and evaluation.

## Economic context

The Slovak economy has shown signs of recovery following the impact of the global financial crisis (OECD, 2012). However, levels of long term and youth unemployment are worryingly high and pose a significant challenge to future productivity and growth. The unemployment rate in the Slovak Republic is 13.8%, and around 60% of the total unemployed population has a low level of education. There are, therefore, major economic incentives for individuals to pursue education. An international comparison shows that the reduced risk of unemployment for Slovak men and women with upper secondary education is particularly strong, and there are considerable benefits to attaining upper secondary education. The net present value for a man with upper secondary education is USD 16 3387 compared to USD 10 0277 on average in the OECD. For a woman it is USD 13 7078 compared to an OECD average of USD 69 124 (Chart A7.2, OECD, 2013a). There is also evidence that Slovak children in homes with an unemployed parent are at far greater educational risk than on average in the OECD. Just over 14% of the Slovak students participating in PISA 2012 reported that their fathers were not in full or part time paid employment and their average performance disadvantage in mathematics was 62 points (this compares to a performance disadvantage of 24 points on average in the OECD for students whose fathers are not in paid employment) (OECD, 2013b, Table II.3.2).

While there is a greater degree of income equality in the Slovak Republic compared to in the majority of OECD countries, there are concerns about regional disparities, with a particularly high concentration of poor households in the Eastern regions (OECD, 2012). In the Prešov Region, visited by the OECD Review team, the unemployment rate is 17%, with a high of 22% in the Kežmarok district. The level of regional disparities (as measured by the Gini index of household disposable income, after taxes and transfers) is more pronounced in the Slovak Republic than in other OECD countries (OECD, 2012). In the PISA 2012 mathematics assessment, Slovak students in rural areas were significantly outperformed by their peers in towns and cities, although much of this was explained by socio-economic differences (OECD, 2013b, Table II.3.3a). Even when taking into account these socio-economic differences, the performance disadvantage for students in rural areas is significantly more pronounced than on average in the OECD.

## Main features of the school system

In the Slovak Republic, although the majority of children attend public schools, they may be enrolled in different school types according to their interests and academic ability. While there is not a high degree of grade repetition, there is a well-established culture of transferring students to different schools due to their low academic performance. This section presents details.

### *Compulsory schooling typically from age 6*

Compulsory schooling lasts ten years, typically starting at 6 years old (although a younger child may start schooling after approval) and ending at 16 (although in specific cases this may be extended to 17 or 18 years old). In 2011, 85% of the population aged 15

to 19 was enrolled in education (OECD, 2013a). Children may attend different levels of education in a variety of different school types:

- **Primary education** (ISCED 1) comprises Years 1 to 4 and is offered in basic schools, as well as in specialised schools: primary art schools and language schools.

- **Lower secondary education** (ISCED 2) comprises Years 5 to 9 and is offered in basic schools, *gymnázium* (academic secondary schools), secondary vocational schools, as well as in specialised schools: conservatories (artistic education), primary art schools and language schools.

- **Upper secondary education** (ISCED 3) starts at Year 10 and goes until Year 13 in *gymnázium* and until Year 11, 12 or 13 in secondary vocational schools. This is also offered in specialised schools: conservatories and language schools.

### *A high degree of academic selection within the school system*

Children may transfer to an academically selective school (*gymnázium*) at the start of Year 6 (age 11), Year 9 (age 14) or Year 10 (age 15). Considering this early age of academic selection, the number of different school types (see above) and the percentage of students in academically selective schools, the Slovak Republic is classified as one of four OECD systems with a high horizontal differentiation at the system level – the others being Austria, the Czech Republic and Hungary (OECD, 2010).

Data from OECD's PISA 2012 assessment indicate that 50% of 15-year-olds were in schools where the principal reported that student academic performance records were always considered in decisions to admit students, in comparison to 39% on average in the OECD (OECD, 2013c, Table IV.2.7). This is the dominant practice at the upper secondary level (83% of students, compared to 52% on average in the OECD), but less common than on average in the OECD at the lower secondary level (8% of students studying at ISCED 2 level, compared to 27% on average in the OECD) (OECD, 2013c, Table IV.2.8). Furthermore, at the upper secondary level there appears to be an established culture in many schools to transfer students to a different school due to either their low academic performance, behavioural problems or special learning needs: 37% of Slovak students at the upper secondary level were in schools where the principal reported this would be very likely, in comparison to 16% on average in the OECD (OECD, 2013c, Table IV.2.10).

Although grade repetition is not common practice in the Slovak Republic, there are indications that this may be becoming more frequent. Between PISA 2003 and 2012, there was a notable increase in the rate of grade repetition reported by students in the Slovak Republic, from 2.5% to 7.6% (OECD, 2013c, Figure IV.2.10). This contrasts with an overall drop in grade repetition among OECD countries over the same period.

### *Majority public provision, but around 6 per cent of students are in privately managed basic schools*

All school types in the Slovak Republic receive public funding, but their management varies (Table 1.1). There are five categories of "school founders" in the Slovak Republic, broadly split across:

- **Public schools:** schools' founders can be a municipality (an independent rural settlement with its own council or a town/city), a region or a regional school authority.
- **Church schools:** founded by a state-approved church or religious community.
- **Private schools:** founded by an approved legal entity or person.

**Table 1.1 Number and proportion of students enrolled by major school types (2012/13)**

|  | Public (State) | Church | Private |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Basic schools** | | | |
| Years 0 - 4 | 189 109 | 10 620 | 2 566 |
| Years 5 - 9 | 214 331 | 11 731 | 1 782 |
| Total basic school | 403 440 | 22 351 | 4 348 |
| Percentage of students | 93.8% | 5.2% | 1.0% |
| **Secondary schools** | | | |
| Academic (*gymnázium*) | 63 603 | 12 904 | 3 839 |
| Percentage of students | 79.2% | 16.1% | 4.8% |
| Vocational (excluding external study) | 139 151 | 3 775 | 15 030 |
| Percentage of students | 88.1% | 2.4% | 9.5% |

*Note:* Children may attend different levels of education in a variety of school types. For example, it is possible for children to follow ISCED 2 schooling in all the major school types listed in the table. For full enrolment data in special schools, conservatories, primary art schools and language schools, see Annex 1 of NÚCEM, 2012.

*Source:* NÚCEM (National Institute for Certified Educational Measurements) (2012), *OECD Review on Evaluation and Assessment Frameworks for Improving School Outcomes: Country Background Report for the Slovak Republic*, NÚCEM, Bratislava.

All schools in the Slovak Republic receive public funding. International comparison shows that the Slovak Republic has an above average proportion of students in public schools, that is, schools that are publicly managed. At the primary and lower secondary levels (ISCED 1 and 2), 94% of students are enrolled in public schools. Fourteen per cent of students at the upper secondary level (ISCED 3) are in privately managed schools (Table 1.2).

**Table 1.2 Proportion of students enrolled by level of education and school management (2011)**

|  | Public schools | Government-dependent private school | Independent private schools |
|---|---|---|---|
| **ISCED 1** | | | |
| Slovak Republic | 94 | 6 | 0 |
| OECD average | 89 | 8 | 3 |
| **ISCED 2** | | | |
| Slovak Republic | 94 | 6 | 0 |
| OECD average | 86 | 11 | 3 |
| **ISCED 3** | | | |
| Slovak Republic | 86 | 14 | 0 |
| OECD average | 81 | 14 | 5 |

*Note:* Government-dependent private schools receive at least 50% of their funding from public sources.

*Source:* OECD (2013a), *Education at a Glance 2013: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2013-en

*Responsibilities*

While the National Institute for Certified Educational Measurements (NÚCEM) (2012) describes the Slovak school system as still rather centralised, there are three separate levels of public administration with elected representatives and administrative staff: *(i)* central (State); *(ii)* regional; and *(iii)* local (municipal). Furthermore, regional and municipal authorities exert a direct influence over public schools as their organising bodies ("school founders") and schools have direct responsibilities for staffing and curriculum. The major responsibilities are as follows:

- **Central authorities** (the Ministry of Education): set the framework for schooling, including educational laws and national education programmes (content and performance standards); manage the school network, including adding new schools to the network or removing existing schools from the network – schools on the network are approved to deliver upbringing and educational services and to obtain public funding; allocate financial resources via state administration regional authorities[1] for basic, secondary and special school founders for capital and operational expenses (including staff salaries); monitor school compliancy with regulations and appropriateness of school education programme (conducted by the Slovak State School Inspectorate); and monitor student performance (national and international assessments conducted by NÚCEM).

- **Regional authorities**[2]: directly manage public upper secondary schools (students aged 15 and older) as the school founders; monitor school use of funding and school budgets; may provide direct funding to public schools from regional budgets.

- **Municipal authorities**: directly manage public schools offering primary and lower secondary education (students up to age 15) as the school founders; monitor school use of funding and school budgets; may provide direct funding to public schools from municipal budgets.

- **School founders**: conduct school leader appraisal; must approve the school annual report (report on the school's educational activities, results and conditions); in addition to regional and municipal authorities, other school founders include state-approved church or religious community (Church schools) and an approved legal entity or person(s) (private schools).

- **School leaders**: each school is a legal entity and the employer of teachers and other staff. The school leader is responsible for: ensuring that the school complies with legal regulations (including that the school education programme aligns with the national education programmes); the school budget and effective use of resources and management of school facilities; establishing and implementing a plan for further education and training for school staff, as well as their annual appraisal.

## Main trends and concerns

### *Performance improving in primary education, but significant challenges in secondary*

In international comparison, the Slovak Republic has a mixed set of outcomes. Performance in international assessments indicates some improvement in reading at the primary level, but some significant and growing challenges at the secondary level.

At the primary level, international evidence from the IEA's PIRLS and TIMSS indicates that Slovak pupils (average age 10.4 years) perform above the international average in reading and science assessments, but only around the international average level in mathematics (Mullis et al., 2012; Martin et al., 2012; Mullis et al., 2012b). The relatively poorer average performance in mathematics appears to be related in part to the fact that topics included in the international assessment were not included in the Slovak curriculum through Grade 4 (among the 35 TIMSS mathematics topics, 21 were not included in the Slovak curriculum; the average for participating countries in TIMSS was 12 topics not included) (Mullis et al., 2012b). Positive messages from these international results include: evidence of improvement in Slovak students' reading performance between 2001 and 2009, in particular in assessing "reading for literary purposes" and "interpreting, integrating and evaluating" (Mullis et al., 2012a); and 11% of Slovak students performing at the advanced international benchmark in science (performing the most demanding tasks on the test) in comparison to 7% internationally (this was also a strength in the TIMSS 2007 science test) (Martin et al., 2012). Although students reported similar positive attitudes to mathematics and science learning compared to students internationally, their school principals were less positive about general aspects of the school climate (4% were strongly positive, compared to 22% on average internationally) (Mullis et al., 2012b; Martin et al., 2012).

At the secondary level, international evidence on student performance from the OECD's PISA 2012 results/report indicates that Slovak students perform below the international average in mathematics, reading and science (OECD, 2014). In mathematics, this represents deterioration in performance compared to PISA 2009, when Slovak students performed around the OECD average. In fact, since PISA 2003, Slovak student performance in mathematics has deteriorated both in absolute terms and relative to other countries. Among the eight countries with similar mathematics performance in 2003, students in Austria, Germany, Ireland and Poland performed at a higher level relative to Slovak students in 2012 (performance remained similar to students in Hungary, Luxembourg, Norway and Sweden). At the same time, in six countries that had a lower mathematics performance in 2003 relative to Slovak students, student performance improved and was similar to Slovak students in 2012 (United States, Latvia, Spain, Portugal, Russian Federation and Italy). This meant that the Slovak Republic ranked from 23 to 29 of the 33 OECD countries in PISA 2012 mathematics (OECD 2014, Figure I.2.14).

### *A significant proportion of students underperform in secondary education*

A significant challenge in the Slovak Republic is the high proportion of low performing students. In PISA 2009, 22.3% of students demonstrated low levels of reading proficiency compared to 18.8% on average in the OECD. In PISA 2012, 27.5% of students demonstrated low levels of mathematics proficiency compared to 23.1% on average in the OECD. In fact, a significant increase in the proportion of low performing

students in mathematics has driven the deterioration in mathematics performance since 2003 (7.5 percentage points increase of students performing below mathematics proficiency Level 2) (OECD, 2014, Figure I.2.23). It is the same case for science performance (OECD, 2014, Figure I.5.11). Tackling such underperformance is of clear economic importance: in the Slovak Republic, the estimated public benefits for educating a man to upper secondary level are four times the estimated public costs - and for women the benefits are 2.5 times more than costs (Tables A7.2a and A7.2b, OECD, 2013a).

The Slovak Republic is among the ten PISA participants with the widest spread in mathematics scores (score point difference between the top and bottom 10% of students) (OECD, 2014, Figure I.2.24). However, the observed gender difference in mathematics performance has reduced between 2003 and 2012 and is now around the OECD average (OECD, 2014, Figure I.2.27).

### *A concern to develop students' critical thinking and ability to apply their knowledge and skills*

The Slovak State Schools Inspectorate (ŠŠI) has indicated quality concerns among teachers in their professional ability to develop students' higher-order thinking skills (ŠŠI, 2011). There is some evidence from international assessments to support this. PISA 2012 distinguished between different processes that students go through in solving a mathematical problem: formulating situations mathematically; employing mathematical concepts, facts, procedures and reasoning; and interpreting, applying and evaluating mathematical outcomes. Slovak students found it relatively more difficult to interpret mathematical outcomes. For example, evaluating their results in relation to the original problem or to show how the mathematical information obtained relates to the contextual elements of the problem (Figure 1.1).

**Figure 1.1 Relative strengths and weaknesses on the PISA 2012 mathematics assessment**
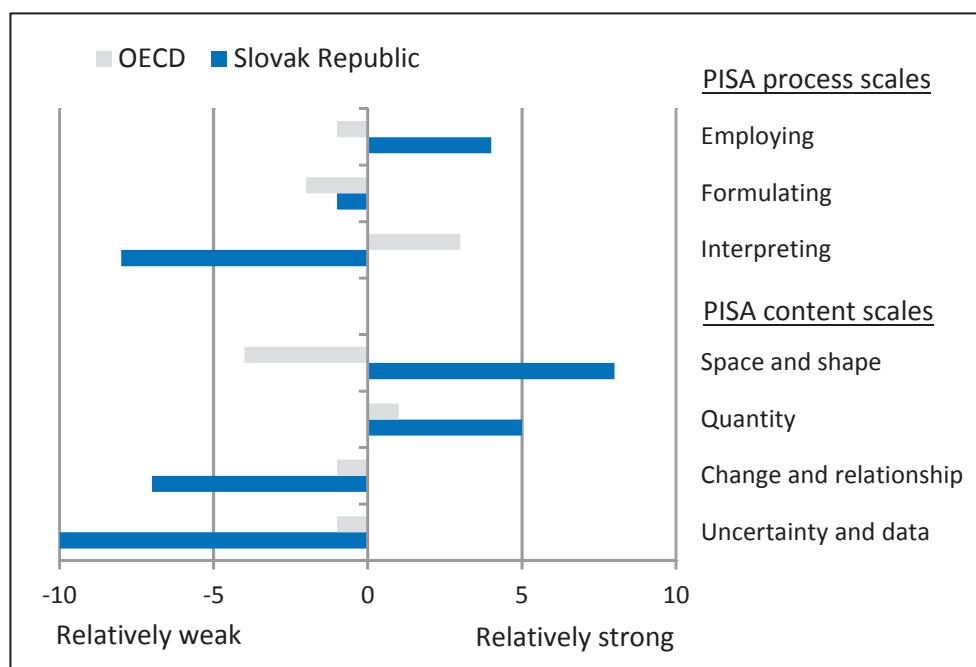


*Source:* OECD (2014), *PISA 2012 Results: What Students Know and Can Do (Volume I, Revised edition, February 2014): Student Performance in Mathematics, Reading and Science*, Figures 1.2.37 and 1.2.52, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264208780-en.

The relative weakness in the PISA 2009 reading test for Slovak students was on tasks assessing student ability to "reflect and evaluate" (OECD, 2010). Such tasks require students to relate their own knowledge or experience to the text (reflect), and to consider the text objectively and make a judgement on its quality and appropriateness (evaluate). Slovak students performed around the OECD average on tasks assessing their ability to "access and retrieve". At the primary level, international evidence on reading performance indicates that students had made some improvement in "interpreting, integrating and evaluating" between 2001 and 2009 (Mullis et al., 2012a), but shows difficulty for Slovak students in performing "reasoning tasks" in science. Reasoning tasks go beyond the solution of routine problems to encompass unfamiliar situations, complex contexts and multi-step problems (Martin et al., 2012).

Quality concerns have also been flagged in the teaching of foreign languages and the quality of ICT education (ŠŠI, 2011). Regarding mathematical content in PISA 2012, Slovak students found questions on uncertainty and data, which includes content on probability and statistics, more challenging (ranking between 28 and 30 out of 33 OECD countries) and performed relatively better on questions on space and shape, which includes content on geometry, spatial relationships and measurement (ranking between 14 and 22 of 33 OECD countries) (see Figure 1.1).

### *International evidence indicates significant concerns for equity in the Slovak school system*

As in all OECD countries, there is an established relationship between student socio-economic background and their performance in the Slovak Republic. The range of different socio-economic backgrounds among Slovak students is similar to the OECD average (Figure II.2.6, OECD, 2013b). However, compared to on average in the OECD, Slovak students' socio-economic background is more strongly related to their mathematics performance in PISA 2012 (socio-economic background explains 14.6% of variance in mathematics performance in the OECD and 24.6% in the Slovak Republic), and the performance differences across socio-economic groups are greater (Table II.A, OECD, 2013b). As noted above, educational differences between rural areas and cities are significant.

Peer effects seem to be a growing concern in the Slovak Republic. At the primary level, school principal perceptions of school climate were strongly correlated with student average performance in mathematics and science (and more so than on average internationally) (Mullis et al., 2012b; Martin et al., 2012). Similarly, compared to OECD countries on average, school performance in PISA 2012 mathematics varies more in the Slovak Republic, and these performance differences are explained to a greater extent by student and school socio-economic characteristics (Table II.2.9a, OECD, 2013b).

Another challenge to equity is the high concentration of Roma children in schools providing special education, which impairs their integration (World Bank, 2012). Educational outcomes of the Roma minority are particularly poor: more than 70% of the Roma population has not attained upper secondary education and Roma do not attain tertiary education (OECD, 2012). Although only a small proportion of Slovak students reported not having attended early childhood education or care, these students were at considerable risk of low performance in PISA 2012 mathematics (Figure II.4.12, OECD, 2013b). There have been several measures to encourage parents with less advantaged socio-economic status to enrol their children in early childhood education, but the participation of Roma children remains low (Šiškovič, 2012 in OECD, 2012).

## Main policy developments

In 2001 the "Millennium" plan for educational reform set out a vision for reforming schooling in the Slovak Republic over a 15-20 year period. Since then, a series of legal reforms have sought to introduce more freedom throughout the school system.

The initial step in 2003 was the introduction of Act No. 596/2003, on decentralisation and funding reform. This set roles and responsibilities for the state, regions and municipalities, and introduced a system of mainly normative funding to schools. The normative budget for each school is dependent on the number of students at the school, the school type and other parameters defined by the law. Normative funding covers expenditures for teachers' salaries and in 2004, 2007 and 2010, it made up 98%, 97% and 96% of total school funding respectively (NÚCEM, 2012, Table 1). Non-normative funding may include, for example, expenditures on student transportation or on emergency repairs to school facilities.

The School Act (2008) represents a major reform to schooling. Most notably, it sets the framework conditions for the content of education, but introduces a degree of autonomy at the school level to develop specific educational programmes within this framework. It also establishes more rights for children, including access to a free year of preschool immediately before primary education starts, free choice of schooling in a public, Church or private school, and a ban on the use of corporal punishment in schools.

The Act on Pedagogical Employees and Specialist Employees (2009) guarantees teachers the freedom to choose pedagogical methods and teaching approaches.

### Introduction of national assessments

Full-cohort national assessments in Year 9 (*Testovanie* 9) have been conducted since 2009. Prior to this, there was a national sample based assessment. Students are assessed in the Slovak language and literature, as well as, where applicable, in the major language of instruction (Hungarian or Ukrainian) and in mathematics. The NÚCEM is currently developing national assessments for Year 5 and aims to implement these for the school year 2014/15. For more details see Chapters 3 and 6.

### Promoting a competency-based learning approach

The School Act (2008) introduces a two level approach to curriculum. The national education programmes define the core content to be taught and each school develops a school education programme. The national education programmes specify competencies and "cognitive competencies" in different content areas. For example, "Language and communication" within the subject "Slovak language and literature" includes the competency "Distinguishing sentences and texts". The associated cognitive competencies are "Reproduction", "Application", "Analysis", "Synthesis", "Generalisation", "Evaluation" and "Self-assessment" (NÚCEM, 2012, Annex 4). Accordingly, the final examinations at ISCED 3 (*Maturita*) and the national assessments in Year 9 (*Testovanie 9*) have progressively adapted to better assess competencies listed in the national education programmes.

### Creating a salary and bonus system for teachers

The Act on Pedagogical Employees and Specialist Employees (2009) specifies qualification requirements for school staff and their rights to professional development. The Act creates a salary system based on teachers' level of qualification (their academic qualification and career level and responsibilities), as well as a system of bonuses (based on performance or credits gained from attending professional development training).

# **Notes**

1. These represent central authorities, but are located in each of the eight regions. At the time of the OECD review such Regional State Administration authorities were part of the Ministry of Education. However, from 1 January 2013 these are part of the state administration regional authorities under the Ministry of Interior.

2. These are autonomous regions and do not represent central authorities.

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# *Chapter 2*

# The evaluation and assessment framework

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

## Context and features

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

### *Governance*

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

- The Slovak State Schools Inspectorate (ŠŠI) conducts individual school evaluations to monitor school compliancy with regulations and other specified matters of policy interest.

- The National Institute for Certified Educational Measurements (NÚCEM) develops and administers national student assessments to monitor student performance and certify student achievement and administers international student assessments to monitor school system performance.

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

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

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

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

### *Main components*

The evaluation and assessment framework in the Slovak Republic comprises the following main components:

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

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

- **School evaluation**: The Slovak State Schools Inspectorate (ŠŠI) conducts external evaluation of all Slovak schools using a quality indicator framework / which was made publicly available in 2011. It also monitors the competency of school leaders and teachers. The official cycle is for each school to have a comprehensive inspection once every five years, which involves a visit from a team of inspectors over 3-7 days and results in a specific evaluation report with recommendations for the school (this is not published). The ŠŠI also conducts information inspections, typically in a single day, e.g. to check whether the school education programme complies with the national education programmes. The ŠŠI

may also conduct a "thematic inspection" in a selection of schools on a particular topic. There is a system to follow up schools in which inspectors have identified concerns. Upon re-inspection, if adequate improvement has not been made there may be sanctions for the school leader, funding or even closure, although these are very rare. Since 2003, primary and secondary school leaders are obliged to submit an annual report on the school's educational activities, results and conditions to the school founder for approval and to the school board for comment. Legal requirements on the content of these reports were introduced in 2006 and include a school development plan for the following two year period. School founders are responsible for school leader appointment, appraisal and dismissal and also monitor the management of school funds and other compliance issues not inspected by the ŠŠI. Student results in tests administered by the NÚCEM are aggregated to the school level and published on line, without any information on the school's socio-economic context or intake.

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

## Strengths

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

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

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

The OECD review team notes that there is, in general, a legal framework in place to underpin evaluation and assessment activities. Educational laws over recent years have aimed to create a good balance of power, responsibility, ownership and accountability and are designed to engage different stakeholders. While the implementation of evaluation and assessment activities varies throughout the system, the OECD review team gained the impression that the legal framework had succeeded in engaging several new responsibilities to both conduct assessment and evaluation and also use evaluation results.

In the general context of strengthening aspects of a civil society, this reflects great success over a relatively short period of time. The ability to engage stakeholders in evaluation and assessment activities is also an important strength to further develop school quality in the Slovak Republic.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The OECD review team notes that, over recent years, , there have been several efforts to build capacity for evaluation and assessment at both the national and school levels. The Ministry can draw on the specialised capacity of four major bodies, the National Institute for Certified Educational Measurements (NÚCEM), the Slovak State Schools Inspectorate (ŠŠI), Institute for Information and Prognoses of Education (ÚIPŠ) and the Methodology and Pedagogy Centre (MPC) to support evaluation and assessment activities in the school system. The creation of a national testing agency (NÚCEM) in

2008 has led to significant developments and reforms in student assessment. New assessments have been developed to better promote a competency based curriculum and the range of qualifications offered to students is being broadened (Chapter 3). Importantly, the introduction of an external element of assessment to the *Maturita* has made this high-stakes examination more objective. Also, the NÚCEM collaborates with the ÚIPŠ to use technology to introduce innovative ways of delivering qualifications. The ÚIPŠ is responsible for collecting and compiling regular information on the school system and this information underpins monitoring and evaluation activities (Chapter 6).

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

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

## Challenges

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

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

### *Implementation concerns regarding the competency-based curriculum*

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

better align to the competency-based curriculum (Chapter 3). Student results on these tests indicate that the implementation of the new curriculum has been challenging.

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

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

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

*Duplication of efforts and confusion of objectives*

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

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

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

The increased level of autonomy over curriculum and assessment at the school level brings increased demands for teacher capacity to conduct formative and summative

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

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

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

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

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

Internal teacher appraisal has a clear focus on improvement with classroom observation, feedback, an evaluation dialogue and a link to teachers' professional development (Chapter 4). This is a clear strength in the Slovak approach. However, this

regular formative feedback is completely disconnected from the formal, external appraisal within the certification procedure. Teacher progression is, therefore, dependent on increased qualifications but does not take into account observed performance and improvements in classroom teaching.

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

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

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

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

There is still rather limited representation of stakeholders in the development and implementation of evaluation and assessment activities. Not all important stakeholders have official bodies to represent them at the national level and those that do have limited representation or role. While the emergence of student councils is a growing strength, these are relatively new in the Slovak Republic and therefore are not yet very wide spread, as such the secondary school student body at the national level is not yet representative. There is room to promote student councils further and to strengthen their voice in the School Board. There is no group representing parents at the national or regional levels. Parent representatives are typically consulted at the school level, but there is no mechanism in place to channel feedback on the development and implementation of central policies. At the same time, there is room to strengthen the role for existing groups representing teachers in the development of policies related to the teaching profession, e.g. the development of professional teaching standards (Chapter 4).

The Slovak Republic is one of eight OECD systems that does not administer stakeholder surveys to collect qualitative feedback on the school system (OECD, 2013). This means there is an absence of a simple mechanism to receive regular feedback from students, teachers and parents on the teaching and learning environment and on their overall satisfaction. Such feedback can be particularly insightful at the time of introducing innovations to the school system, for example, the shift to the competency-based curriculum and the development of school education programmes. As it stands, schools miss important information to feed into their self-evaluation activities.

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

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

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

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

Such information gaps in the monitoring of equity also add complexity to the professional judgement that school inspectors need to make on the quality of a given school (Chapter 5). At the time of the OECD review, there did not appear to be clear guidelines for school inspectors on how to take account of school socio-economic context and other important contextual characteristics in forming a judgement on the quality of

the school. This could influence the reliability of an important evaluation mechanism that can help to monitor more closely and on a broader set of outcomes the differences in quality among schools.

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

## Policy recommendations

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

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

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

- Build consensus on the national learning objectives and align assessment activities to these.

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

- Draw up a strategic plan for future development/refinements to evaluation and assessment activities.

- Prioritise capacity building to ensure successful implementation and use of results.

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

- Raise the focus on equity within the evaluation and assessment framework.

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

The full potential of evaluation and assessment will not be realised until the framework is fully integrated and is perceived as a coherent whole. This requires a holistic approach to building a complete evaluation and assessment framework in view of generating synergies between its components, avoiding duplication of procedures and preventing inconsistency of objectives (OECD, 2013). As noted in the above analysis, the OECD review team identified significant challenges in this area. There were disjointed

initiatives to stimulate self-evaluation activities in schools and without reference to an authoritative, common framework document, there is a real risk of duplication of procedures and also sending inconsistent signals to educators of the major purpose of self-evaluation. A similar concern was noted about the existence of several different sets of criteria for teacher appraisal. These are clear examples of how a common framework can help guide more effective procedures and maximise synergies for the different actors involved.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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> **Box 2.1 Key principles to effectively implement evaluation and assessment (OECD, 2013)** *(continued)*
>
> **A structure to integrate accountability and development**: The overall evaluation and assessment framework should include elements to accomplish both the accountability and developmental functions at all levels of the system (e.g. formative vs. summative assessment for students; professional development for teachers vs. career advancement decisions following teacher appraisal; data reporting vs. improvement action plans for schools) and provide a structure which can potentially integrate these two functions.
>
> **Commitment to transparency**: The overall evaluation and assessment framework can be strengthened by a high level of transparency in monitoring and publishing results.
>
> *Source:* OECD (2013), Synergies for Better Learning: An International Perspective on Evaluation and Assessment, OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264190658-en

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

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

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

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

secondary schooling; and the pedagogical materials and training developed by the MPC are critical in aiding the implementation of the competency-based curriculum in the daily and weekly instructional activities.

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

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

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

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

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

### *Draw up a strategic plan for future development/refinements to evaluation and assessment activities*

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

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

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

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

### *Prioritise capacity building to ensure successful implementation and use of results*

An essential part of any implementation strategy is to ensure an adequate provision of guidelines, tools and specific training. This should happen in parallel with the engagement of stakeholders and the use of piloting (see recommendation above). The OECD review team has identified the need for the National Institute for Education to develop, in collaboration with teachers, useful assessment guidelines and sample tasks. Based on their review of literature on accountability and classroom instruction, Ballard and Bates (2008) underscore the importance of communication among teachers and those who write learning objectives, develop large-scale assessments, and set out guidelines for school evaluations.

While evaluation and assessment can identify areas for improvement, they are only instrumental in achieving improvement if their results are used by stakeholders. There is a need to ensure adequate professional development provision so that teachers and school leaders learn from the results of evaluation and assessment and make changes that lead to improvement in student learning and outcomes. For example, there is a need to supply high quality training to teachers on student assessment and school self-evaluation activities (Chapters 3 and 5). At the national level, there is a need to build analytical and research capacity to fully exploit the results of evaluation and assessment, so that these feed into policies for school system improvement (Chapter 6).

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

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

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

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

*Raise the focus on equity within the evaluation and assessment framework*

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

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**Box 2.2 Examples of equity and inclusion in central educational goals**

**Australia**

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

**Flemish Community of Belgium**

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

**Northern Ireland, United Kingdom**

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

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> **Box 2.2 Examples of equity and inclusion in central educational goals** *(continued)*
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> *Sources*:
> DEEWR (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations) (2010), OECD Review on Evaluation and Assessment Frameworks for Improving School Outcomes: Country Background Report for Australia, Canberra, www.oecd.org/edu/evaluationpolicy.
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## *Chapter 3*

## **Student assessment**

*There is a strong focus on summative student assessment in the Slovak Republic. The reliability of final examinations at the upper secondary level (Maturita) has been strengthened with the introduction of an external written component. National assessments are administered at the end of lower secondary schooling and mainly serve the purpose to certify student achievement and help inform selection of upper secondary school. A competency-based curriculum has been introduced since 2008 and implementation has been problematic due to a lack of clarity on the minimum content standards and a lack of guidance, tools and training for educators. In this context, there is room to give more support to teachers, to develop models to assess skills and competencies and to phase in student assessment criteria linked to the standards in the national education programmes.*

This chapter focuses on approaches to student assessment within the overall evaluation and assessment framework in the Slovak Republic. Student assessment refers to processes in which evidence of learning is collected in a planned and systematic way in order to make a judgement about student learning (Harlen and Deakin Crick, 2002). This chapter looks at both summative assessment (assessment *of* learning) and formative assessment (assessment *for* learning) of students.

## Context and features

This section sets out the major features and developments in the approach to student assessment in Slovak schools. Overall, while there is a strong commitment among teachers to regular assessment, the methods remain markedly traditional with a predominantly summative rather than formative purpose. There are often significant variations in standards across institutions.

### *The impact of educational reform on student assessment*

The School Act (2008) was the most far-reaching attempt to reform the education system since the Slovak Republic became independent in 1993. It has had significant consequences for the curriculum, assessment and organisation of education that many schools and teachers are still getting used to.

One of the most significant changes in the Slovak assessment landscape was the foundation of the National Institute for Certified Educational Measurements (NÚCEM) by the Slovak Ministry of Education. The NÚCEM's main role is to develop, administer and oversee all national tests and assessments, including tests in basic schools (currently the *Testovanie 9*) and the examinations at the end of secondary schooling (the *Maturita*) – specifically the external examination and the written elements of internal assessment. In addition, the NÚCEM has responsibility for liaising with international assessment programmes such as the OECD's PISA, research and development of methods of measuring and evaluating the quality of education, and ensuring standards and monitoring outcomes.

### *The development of national performance standards for student learning*

Student assessment is based on age related educational performance standards for each degree of education that form part of the statutory national education programmes. These standards specify both the minimum content that students should be taught and the minimum standard of performance they are expected to reach in competencies related to knowledge, skills and abilities. Since their introduction in 2008, the National Institute for Education (NIE) has continually revised the standards in response to criticism that the initial standards were vague, unhelpful and did not relate to any established taxonomies of learning (NÚCEM, 2012, p. 85).

### *On-going teacher assessment in basic schools*

During the primary phase, on-going teacher assessment combines the formal marking of work, regular oral or written tests, and oral assessment (all marked to a five point scale). The latter is supplemented by verbal feedback to the student and is most common in the early years of basic schools. Formal summative reporting of assessment happens at the end of the first and second semesters during the school year, and results in a certificate for individual subjects. Students are graded for both academic achievement (to

a five point scale) and behaviour (to a four point scale). Additional certificates are also issued on the successful completion of the primary (ages 6-10) and lower secondary (ages 10-15) phases in basic schooling. The school education programme specifies which subjects are marked and how.

A student needs to pass the end of each grade to progress to the next phase of education. If a student fails in a compulsory subject, they have the opportunity to be re-examined during the summer holiday. If the re-sit is failed they then must repeat the grade, though data from PISA suggests this is relatively rare. In 2009, 3.8% of 15-year-old students in the Slovak Republic reported that they had repeated a grade at some stage during primary or secondary schooling, in comparison with the OECD average of 13% (OECD, 2010).

### *The introduction of national tests in lower secondary education (Testovanie 9)*

Since 2003, the Slovak Republic has participated in the PISA international comparative tests. In all three cycles, Slovak students performed significantly below the average for OECD countries in reading literacy, with results for mathematics fluctuating between average and below average (see Chapter 1). Partly in response to these results, national external assessments in mathematics and the language of instruction (Slovak, Hungarian or Ukrainian) – known as *Testovanie* 9 or T9 – were introduced in 2009 at the end of lower secondary education (ISCED 2). These replaced the previous *Monitor* 9 tests that were administered from 2004/05, which in turn had replaced a national sample-based test.

The *Testovanie* 9 tests are summative in purpose as they provide a measure of student performance at the end of one phase of their education and inform the choice of secondary school, notably whether the student would go to an academic "*gymnázium*" or vocational secondary school. The tests are norm referenced and students receive a percentage mark and a figure showing where their performance sits in the national performance distribution. *Testovanie* 9 is seen as a way of raising the profile of the types of skills and competencies students need to address the shortcomings revealed in PISA. The implementation of these tests was supported by sample materials and marking schemes and regional seminars for teachers, school leaders, university professors and policy makers.

While individual student results are not published, aggregate *Testovanie* 9 results are published online in regional tables containing the percentage of marks correct for Slovak language and literature and mathematics over the past three years and where each school sits in the national performance distribution (a national percentile for each school). Information is also provided showing how far a school's performance relates to the national average.

In addition, the NÚCEM publishes an annual report summarising key findings from the T9 results including: statistical information; comparative data; an analysis of common errors made by students; and recommendations for teaching and learning.

### *On-going teacher assessment in secondary schools*

On-going teacher assessment in secondary schools follows a similar pattern to in basic schooling, consisting of formal marking and regular oral and written tests graded on a five point scale. Based on these grades, students are issued with certificates to confirm that they have successfully completed the course at the end of first and second semester

(mid-year and end of year). Again, students can re-sit examinations, but have to repeat the grade if they fail a second time. Assessment is often heavily influenced by text books, many of which contain tests. This has recently become problematic in that new text books focused on competencies have not been well received, leading some teachers to continue to use text books – and consequently tests – up to ten years old that do not reflect the new curriculum.

### The Maturita and curriculum reform

The compulsory *Maturita* examinations mark the end of upper secondary schooling (ISCED 3) and act as a means of determining university entrance. There are compulsory examinations in Slovak language and literature and a foreign language, and these consist of an internal and an external component. Students are also examined in two elective subjects via an oral examination within the school. Since 2011, the *Maturita* has only one level, with the exception of foreign languages, which has two levels linked to the Common European Framework for languages.

Examinations in the language of instruction (Slovak, Hungarian or Ukrainian) and foreign languages include an internal component that is split into an oral examination and a written examination. The oral examination is set by the school and can take a number of forms such as presenting a complex task, a performance, the defence of a project or a combination of these. This part is assessed by an examination panel including a member of the subject commission from another school with the chair appointed by the regional school authority. The written part of the internal component is based on a topic set by the NÚCEM. This is then internally marked by two teachers using a common marking scheme. This scheme aims to create transparency by providing teachers with clear criteria for marking student work. The NÚCEM has received feedback from many teachers that the marking scheme does not reflect all the necessary aspects to be assessed. As such, the NÚCEM has made attempts to review the common marking schemes for all foreign languages, as well as for the languages of instruction. In the case that the two teachers marking the internal component cannot agree on the student marks, an arbitrator must help them decide, this person is typically the Head of the subject at the school. Teachers may also contact the NÚCEM directly to request advice on aligning their marking to the common scheme. There are no further processes for ensuring that marks or grades are awarded appropriately and consistently.

The external component takes the form of a written test that is devised and administered by the NÚCEM. Over time the external component of the *Maturita* has gradually increased in significance, reflecting the fact that in the Slovak Republic and other countries in Eastern Europe there has not been a tradition of external assessment at the end of secondary schooling.

From 2011 the *Maturita* examination was reformed to better reflect the revised curriculum by focusing more on developing skills and competencies. However, hurried implementation led to many students complaining of a mismatch between what their teachers had prepared them for and what appeared in the examination. This however appears to have been an issue specific to that year and the OECD review team formed the impression that curriculum and examinations were now once more synchronised.

### Internal school structures for student assessment

Other than the compulsory national tests and examinations at the end of basic schooling (ISCED 2) and upper secondary schooling (ISCED 3), schools determine their

own approaches to student assessment based on Ministry guidelines. The School Act stipulates that school leaders are responsible for determining the method of assessment in individual subjects after negotiation with the school pedagogical board, one of the internal advisory structures available to school leaders. The pedagogical board evaluates the overall summative student assessment procedures in place in the school. Subject commissions, groups of teachers collaborating on specific subjects, e.g. mathematics, can also be used for this purpose. Individual teachers are responsible for the continual assessment of students. While these varying methods can lead to a wide range of different approaches to assessment across schools, there is some evidence of greater consistency of practice being developed through the co-operation of subject commissions across schools (see below).

### *Developing future national assessments*

Building on the current national testing model, the NÚCEM is preparing new tests for the end of primary schooling (ISCED 1) to measure pupil attainment at the end of this phase of education and provide additional information to schools (see below). These new tests are referred to as *Testovanie* 5.

## Strengths

### *Establishing the NÚCEM has led to reforms and innovation in student assessment*

Since its founding in 2008, the NÚCEM has played an important role in developing and reforming assessment in the Slovak Republic. For example, at the time of the OECD review, the structure of the *Maturita* qualification was imbalanced in relation to the weighting of both the written and oral components of the internal assessment and the internal and external assessments as a whole. This had led to questions about the validity and reliability of the qualification. Specifically, in the *Maturita* internal examination, a student needed only to obtain a grade 4 (one grade above a fail) to pass the oral examination. However, if the student exceeded this and scored a grade 3 or higher in the oral examination, they would pass the internal component regardless of the grade they achieved in the written examination. Subsequent to the OECD review visit, the NÚCEM addressed this anomaly by increasing the weighting of the written component within the internal examination so that a student would have to succeed in both elements in order to pass the examination overall. Furthermore, as of September 2012, students who fail to get 33% or higher on the external component will not be able to pass the *Maturita*.

The NÚCEM has also brought an international perspective to student assessment and has introduced changes to the *Maturita* such as including reading comprehension questions based on the PISA model, for example, to bring it more into line with other European assessments and better address aspects of the revised curriculum.

In addition to reforming existing assessments, the NÚCEM has had an impact in developing new qualifications that have the potential to develop assessment practice in the Slovak Republic; for example, *Maturita* examinations in new subjects are currently being piloted. During the OECD review, schools appeared to view this development positively, seeing it as a way of increasing the status of these subjects and bringing greater objectivity to grading. The new *Testovanie* 5 assessments currently being prepared by the NÚCEM will also enable value added measures to be introduced by comparing student performance at the end of ISCED 1 with the T9 results at the end of

ISCED 2. Again, there were strong indications that teachers welcomed this and felt it would give a fairer and more realistic picture of student progression.

As well as developing the content and structure of qualifications, the NÚCEM, working closely with other organisations such as the Institute for Information and Prognoses of Education (ÚIPŠ), is using technology to introduce innovative new ways of delivering qualifications. The *Maturita* online project is currently trialling the use of electronic testing as a way of increasing the objectivity of external assessments and improving feedback to teachers. Early responses have been extremely favourable with 86% of students involved in the trial saying they would recommend it to their classmates and 85% of co-ordinators and administrators expressing a preference for online delivery over a paper-based equivalent.[1]

The NÚCEM has also utilised online delivery to provide feedback to schools. Analyses of tests administered by the NÚCEM, including score distribution and differences according to the school type, region and gender, are published on the NÚCEM website. The ranking of schools is also provided in the form of an interactive map. More detailed reports providing an analysis of test items or curriculum areas that students found difficult are sent directly to school leaders in order to inform decisions about curriculum development and areas requiring greater coverage (NÚCEM, 2012, p. 90).

### *Improvement in supervision for external testing*

From 2011 the NÚCEM has introduced more rigorous administration procedures to improve the reliability of internal assessment and address continuing concerns about the potential for malpractice. A teacher from a different school is now present as an observer during T9 tests and a parallel procedure has been introduced in secondary schools where the chair of the subject commission from a different school is part of the panel for the internal component of the *Maturita* to ensure objectivity. They have the authority to stop an assessment if they have any doubts about the way it is being conducted. There is evidence that in 2011, the number of schools investigated for malpractice decreased significantly as a result (Polgáryová, Kurajová Stopková, and Kubiš, 2011, p. 4).

The NÚCEM also works closely with the Slovak State Schools Inspectorate (ŠŠI) to identify and discourage malpractice in high stakes assessment, i.e. assessment with important consequences for students, in both basic and secondary schools. Inspectors observe the conduct of the internal component of the *Maturita* in approximately forty schools nationally. While this is a relatively small percentage, the visits are targeted at schools where there are suspicions of irregularities. A similar process happens for T9 testing, although in this case about 150 schools are chosen at random and visited unannounced.

### *Examples of emerging good practice in internal teacher assessment*

While contextual issues, such as the lack of national criteria to inform on-going teacher judgements, have to some extent impeded the development of reliable models for on-going assessment, the OECD review team found emerging evidence of good assessment practice in many of the schools visited.

In several cases schools provided opportunities for subject teachers to meet with other colleagues in the region to discuss best practice in assessment, and although these meetings often focused mainly on sharing tests they had devised, in the longer term it

provides an excellent model for schools to collaborate on developing shared criteria and standards. An important starting point in developing teachers' confidence and expertise in assessment is to allow time for them to meet, discuss judgements they have made on student's work, and develop a shared understanding of what evidence of attainment at a particular level looks like.

There was good evidence of schools exploring ways to develop consistency in their assessment practice. Many schools visited reported using their subject commissions to set or validate tests, which provided a degree of internal comparability and coherence in their assessment activities. Evidence of using subject commissions to improve the consistency of assessment judgements through internal standardisation processes was present, but less common. Positively however, all relevant teachers have received training in this area, and this is seen as a long term process that will require continuing development.

A consistent feature of the OECD review was that both students and parents were extremely positive about the way in which assessment outcomes are shared with them. Parents especially felt that teachers were accessible and willing to discuss progress if they had any concerns, with many schools operating an "open door" policy. Parents also formally meet with class teachers twice a semester where they can discuss attendance, behaviour, grades progress and receive advice on how their children could improve.

### *Emerging recognition of the potential that technology can bring to student assessment*

There appears to be an emerging interest among schools in the use of technology to support student assessment. The OECD review team saw evidence of a commercial, web-based assessment tool, the basic version of which has been distributed free to schools, being used to share assessment data online with parents. The tool allows teachers to input marks and grades from on-going assessments and use these to record and track student progress. The tool also has the capacity to be used diagnostically, producing graphics that provide analysis and comparisons. Though this functionality seemed to be less widely used, it has the potential to give valuable feedback on students' strengths and weaknesses that could be used formatively, as well as to inform planning.

During the OECD review, the Institute for Information and Prognoses of Education (ÚIPŠ) presented its plans to develop a new information system to record student information electronically. The aim is to reduce bureaucracy by allowing all relevant bodies and organisations to access the same database that includes assessment information for each semester.

## Challenges

### *Assessment is not sufficiently formative in purpose*

Although formative assessment "does not have a tightly defined and widely accepted meaning" (Black and Wiliam, 1998a, introduction), it can broadly be defined as on-going assessment whose main purpose is to recognise and respond to student learning while it is happening to give feedback that will help the student learn and improve (Cowie and Bell, 1999, p. 101–116.) In contrast, summative assessment seeks to grade or define the level of attainment a student has achieved at a particular point more formally (most often at the end of a unit of work, school year or phase of education). In short, summative can be characterised as assessment *of* learning, whereas formative represents assessment *for* learning.

The OECD review team formed the impression that the idea of formative assessment was not well understood by teachers, students and parents. While schools clearly recognise the importance of regularly assessing their students, with several using "input and output tests" at the start and end of a unit of work or topic to measure student progress, it did not seem clear that the results of these tests were being used in a formative way. The predominant culture appeared rather to be the use of regular and frequent summative assessment (such as weekly quizzes followed by more formal tests at the end of a topic) with the main purpose to provide evidence towards students' grades at the end of each semester. This frequent testing of small discrete areas of knowledge can lead to a fragmented picture of a student's overall progress and give neither the student nor teacher a clear sense of their overall progress. Interviews with students indicated that feedback was mainly limited to marks, brief comments, or a discussion of which questions they got wrong, focusing more on *what* the student needed to improve rather than *how* they could achieve this improvement. However, such feedback "is not formative unless the interaction is designed to help students to learn…marks, levels, judgemental comments or the setting of targets cannot, on their own, be formative" (Mansell and James, 2009, p.10). Further, there were some concerns raised by older students that teacher feedback could be based on the teacher's perception of the student's preparation and effort as any meaningful analysis of what their next steps should be to progress. Internal evaluations of national assessment results in mathematics and grades assigned to students in mathematics have certainly highlighted a marked degree of subjectivity in teacher assessment (NÚCEM, 2012, p. 89).

### *Tension between the shift to skills and competencies in curriculum and an assessment model that is better suited to testing knowledge*

When there are significant shifts in the curriculum, assessment and pedagogy also need to be refocused so that the reform is "joined up". In this context, the dominance of testing in the Slovak system is particularly problematic as the revised curriculum emphasises competencies such as tolerance and independence, which are difficult, if not impossible, to assess using traditional testing methods. Implementation in schools has lagged behind the vision of the new curriculum, with many schools and teacher organisations mentioning the rapid pace of reform and a lack of guidance on how to assess competencies as a considerable barrier to being able to implement the changes effectively.

### *An overemphasis on testing as an assessment strategy*

While the OECD review revealed examples of schools using different forms and methods of internal assessment, including oral assessment and marking of on-going work, testing as an assessment tool, whether oral or written, predominates. In many cases, assessment was seen as being synonymous with testing.

The Assessment Reform Group (2002a) found strong evidence of the negative impact of testing on students' motivation, partly due to the reduction in self-esteem of those who did not do well. In particular, they found that, unsurprisingly, students who tended to already be successful in the tests enjoyed them and were able to use appropriate test taking strategies to improve their results, whereas low achievers "become overwhelmed by assessments and demotivated by constant evidence of their low achievement" (ARG, 2002a, p. 4). In turn, this increases the gap between high and low achieving students. Further, "when tests pervade the ethos of the classroom, test performance is more valued than what is being learned." This leads to a focus on performance outcomes (such as

scores or grades) rather than on learning processes (ARG, 2002a). This further undermines any formative purpose that might help students improve. The focus becomes on improving their grades or results rather than developing deeper understanding or identifying next steps and how to take them successfully (Butler, 1988, p. 1-14).

Equally, an assessment model predominantly focused on testing is better suited to traditional approaches to teaching and learning based on transmission of a fixed body of knowledge rather than encouraging students to develop their own ideas and interpretations independently. During the OECD review, several groups of students interviewed said the tests were mainly limited to closed or short response questions. This does not give students the opportunity to develop explanation, analysis or their own interpretations and therefore does not support or encourage higher order thinking (Paris et al., 1991, p. 12-20). This is particularly significant in relation to the Ministry for Education's aim to address poor performance in relation to higher order reading comprehension skills in the PISA tests.

While testing clearly has an important role to play in teachers' on-going assessment of students, it should be used mainly for what it is best suited to measuring; in most cases the transmission of knowledge. Students should have the opportunity to demonstrate their ability in different assessment contexts. For example, a student may be able to show conceptual understanding in a discussion with a teacher or peer that they would not necessarily be able to reproduce in a test setting. Typically, the current assessment system in many Slovak schools does not provide a variety of ways for students to demonstrate their competencies. A classic test assessment system disadvantages students who prefer more active and creative learning experiences and favours students who are able to master information sequentially (ARG, 2002a, p. 6).

The OECD review team found examples in some schools visited of other types of on-going assessment evidence being gathered, including practical assignments, presentations, oral assessments and reading diaries, although this was more common in basic schools. However, even where oral assessment was used, the potential for providing a different type of deeper evidence of students' understanding was rarely realised. For example, oral assessment tasks would focus on recall (learning and reciting a poem for example) rather than dialogic discussion to demonstrate understanding and interpretation of the poem itself.

While some teachers were aware of a distinction between using tests primarily to assess knowledge and assessing application of skills through, for example, projects; they also recognised that the lack of any national assessment criteria beyond the minimum standards included in national education programmes meant that it was often difficult to have a shared sense of what was being assessed and what progression looked like. This was echoed by some students who, despite feeling that being assessed through their on-going work gave them greater freedom to show what they can do, were often unclear whether or how this was being taken account of in their grades.

### *The predominant normative assessment model in Slovak schools limits feedback to students*

The normative focus of both internal and external assessment in the Slovak Republic, in which students are ranked in relation to others in the class, school year or nationally in percentiles, is problematic. While normative assessment is effective in establishing which students are better than others, it provides little evidence of why, and so has limited use in providing feedback to students on how to improve. In relation to national testing, there is

also a lack of clarity as to the relationship between the relative results and outcomes based on a normative model and those related to the National Standards for education, which imply measurement against objective levels of achievement. The relative nature of this assessment model also means that it is not appropriate for determining the effectiveness of schools, as it cannot effectively track the progress over time of the school population as a whole (see Chapters 5 and 6).

Norm referencing relies on the questionable assumption that the ability of a cohort remains unchanged from year to year. This can produce unreliable comparisons as attaining a high grade is as dependent on the performance of other students being assessed as a student's own ability. Put simply, a student working at a particular standard could receive significantly different grades if they were assessed as part of an able or relatively weak cohort.

### *Limitations and potentially negative impact on student motivation of age related standards in national education programmes*

Although the introduction of revised standards in national education programmes linked to Bloom's taxonomy at the end of each phase of schooling is a positive step in unifying assessment practice, significant inconsistencies remain across subjects. For example, the standards for Slovak language and literature in the second stage of basic schools comprise two performance levels (minimal and optimal), whereas other subjects, including mathematics, only outline a minimum or do not specify a performance standard at all. Furthermore, using these standards to judge whether a student has met the minimum requirement for further study can lead to problems of student motivation as more able students will be able to achieve the minimum standard with little effort, leaving them little incentive to exceed this (Wiliam, 2001).

The use of age related national standards also makes it very difficult to measure progress meaningfully. For example, a student may achieve the "optimal" level of performance at the end of the first phase of their education, the minimal requirement at the end of the second phase and below minimal for the next phase; giving the impression that they are regressing, despite making steady progress in absolute terms (National Curriculum Task Group on Assessment and Testing, 1988, p. 31). Similarly, while the school's interpretation of a student meeting the minimal requirement at different reporting points would be that they are making satisfactory progress, the student may feel demotivated by the fact that, despite making significant improvements over time, their grade has not changed (National Curriculum Task Group on Assessment and Testing, 1988).

Other research has found that in order to improve, learners need to believe that ability is "incremental", i.e. that they can get better at something through practice and engagement, regardless of whether they feel they are "good" at it (Dweck, 1986, p. 1040-1048). This stands in contrast to the perception that their ability is "fixed", which is when they believe that they are naturally good or bad at something and this is how they will stay. As in the example above, if students achieve the same grade over time, this potentially re-enforces the belief that their ability in that particular subject is fixed, while if the assessment system encourages students to see ability as incremental: "Rather than thinking of themselves as a "level x" person, they would think of themselves as someone who has so far reached level x, but, with more work, would be able to progress to "level x+1" (Wiliam, 2001, p. 7).

### *Concerns about how the outcomes of high stakes assessment are used*

The outcomes from high stakes student assessments at the end of ISCED 2 (*Testovanie 9*) and ISCED 3 (the external part of the *Maturita*) are used in a range of ways including ranking students in relation to their performance, providing feedback to schools to inform teacher planning, and as "entrance examinations" for the next phase of education (NÚCEM, 2012, p. 90). In addition, there appears to be an intention to use the results to compare school performance as a way of driving improvement (see Chapter 6 for further information). However, the OECD review team questions whether some of these uses are fit for purpose. As noted above, the normative testing model is not best suited to providing a reliable summative picture of a student's attainment because it is linked to relative, rather than absolute, performance.

Currently, there is also inconsistency in how the results of external testing are used by gymnasia and universities as a proxy for entrance examinations in selecting the most able students for entry to their institutions. Notably there appears to be great variation in how universities use the *Maturita* results: some allocate places based solely on *Maturita* results; others where there is a high demand for places (such as medicine) take account of *Maturita* results, but also set their own entrance examinations; other universities are inclined to take students regardless of their *Maturita* results. During the OECD review, interviews with schools and regional governments suggested that the latter is a consequence of the introduction of per capita funding in 2002, which has driven universities to maximise their funding by increasing the number of students they admit. This has had the unintended effect of lowering entry standards and consequently undermining one of the main purposes of the *Maturita*. This situation is echoed with the *Testovanie* 9 tests, which interviews suggested was no longer being used consistently as a performance discriminator to inform entry as schools, particularly gymnasia, also seek to expand student numbers to increase income.

### *Lack of consistency in internal student assessment judgements within and across schools*

Currently, students are graded for their on-going work by teachers according to a five-point scale (where grade 1 is very good and grade 5 is unsatisfactory or fail). However, there appeared to be wide variation in how these are applied, leading to significant inconsistencies within and across schools. Evaluation by the NÚCEM found large variations between grading across schools: "students who are regularly marked with grade 1 would be marked grade 3 if they studied at another school" (NÚCEM, 2012). During the OECD review, these findings were backed up by interviews with parents who shared a lack of confidence in the reliability of assessment, feeling that different schools graded more harshly or leniently. Given this context, it is unsurprising that the subjectivity of on-going teacher assessment is acknowledged to be a significant weakness in the Slovak system (NÚCEM, 2012, p. 89).

The OECD review team formed the impression that while some schools may develop internal criteria to judge the grading of student work, there was no guarantee that these judgements would be linked in a meaningful way to the National Standards for Education. In general, if there is no clear sense of what students are being graded in relation to, teacher judgements can be viewed as subjective and unreliable. This subjectivity also raises issues of student transfer, where the assessment information provided by one school may not match the standards of another school. Where assessment is not linked to external criteria, teacher judgements of students become more

open to the "halo effect", that is, when awarding a grade to students, teachers are influenced by how they perceive students' level of effort or behaviour. For example, a student who the teacher felt had tried hard, might be awarded a grade higher than the performance merited to encourage them. Further, the OECD review team formed the impression that teachers rarely shared criteria or learning objectives explicitly with students. This means that it is not possible to provide clear formative outcomes for the student as there is nothing specific to define what they have to do to reach the next stage of performance.

### *Lack of effective use of assessment data at transition points*

As well as providing a summary of achievement at the end of a particular phase of education, one of the key uses of national summative assessment is to provide information that influences and informs future provision. When the information passed on is timely and sufficiently detailed, it supports transition by allowing schools and teachers in the next phase to adapt their approaches and curriculum planning to better suit the needs of the learners, as well as eliminating the need for re-testing on entry (Bew, 2001, p. 68-69).

The OECD review revealed that while student assessment information is passed on at transition points between basic and secondary schools, staff in both types of school feel that this could be done and used more effectively. Typically, secondary schools receive a simple certificate confirming that the student has satisfactorily completed basic education. Other examples of information passed on from basic schools may include the student's grade average from Years 7 to 9 and/or the student's percentile ranking in *Testovanie* 9, which provide limited information for secondary schools on how to plan differentiated provision for students, e.g. for gifted students or those with special needs. At the same time there appeared to be an established perception among teachers in basic schools that secondary schools were only interested in student performance information as a basis for selecting or rejecting a student for entrance into their schools.

### *Use of tests provided by private companies may not support the revised curriculum*

A number of Slovak schools use commercially produced test-based assessments to inform their judgement of student attainment (NÚCEM, 2012; also confirmed during the OECD review). Further, certain commercial tests enjoy direct support from some municipal authorities and consequently allow the feedback to schools of comparative data, as students in schools throughout the municipality use these tests. These tests aim to provide summative data of the students' level of knowledge in different subjects. Schools receive feedback of results that provide information on areas for individual students to improve and allow the comparison of student results to students in other similar schools. The use of additional externally developed tests can provide schools with useful information as part of their wider student assessment systems. However, during the OECD review a number of concerns came to light. The commercial tests most widely used by schools appeared to contain mainly closed response style questions, which are best suited to assessment of knowledge-based elements of the curriculum. It was not clear to the OECD review how well these tests reflect the revised curriculum with its focus on skills and competencies. Related to this point, the OECD review team understood that a major motivation of schools to buy and use such commercial tests is to better prepare their students for the *Testovanie* 9 tests. This reinforces both the impression that student assessment is heavily associated with testing (see above), and the importance of

establishing how useful commercial tests are in providing feedback on student progress against the national education programmes.

### *Over-reliance on testing may narrow the curriculum*

In general, there is a risk that an over-reliance on testing as a form of assessment may narrow the curriculum. The potential risk may be exacerbated when the results of tests are used for accountability or performance measurement for either individual teachers or a school as a whole (see above and Chapter 5). This can create pressure to improve results at the expense of curriculum coverage, development of overall knowledge, skills and understanding, and student engagement. The curriculum can become narrowed as teachers focus only on what is assessed and a disproportionate amount of curriculum time is spent on practice tests or examinations. Consequently, teaching and learning becomes focused on "learning to pass the test" rather than on helping students to demonstrate what they can understand, do and apply independently. The OECD review team found some evidence of this "teaching to the test" in relation to both the external part of the *Maturita* and *Testovanie* 9. In the worst case, this means that, as well as an impoverished curriculum experience for students, improvement in school results over time may be as much due to students becoming more familiar with the test model as improvements in their attainment.

## Policy recommendations

Although the OECD review team has identified a number of challenges, there are also several good initiatives that the following policy recommendations aim to build on:

- Phase in assessment criteria linked to standards in national education programmes.

- Integrate formative assessment into teaching and learning.

- Develop models to assess skills and competencies.

- Provide greater support for teachers in implementing curriculum and assessment change.

- Clarify the purpose and use of different types of student assessments.

### *Phase in assessment criteria linked to standards in national education programmes*

For any assessment system to be reliable and comparable, students should be measured against the same, clearly defined, standards or criteria. The OECD review team recommends the introduction of assessment criteria that would show progression towards and be integrated with the National Educational Standards, and ultimately replace the 1 to 5 grade scale currently used. These criteria would describe the stages of progression leading up to the current standards in national education programmes and would show how students are working towards them. For example, a student assessed at level X will have met the criteria for level X and will be working towards level Y. A more detailed explanation of how this model would work in practice can be found in the report by the English National Curriculum Task Group on Assessment and Testing (National Curriculum Task Group on Assessment and Testing, 1988, p. 91-173).

Adopting this approach would provide a foundation to begin to address a number of the challenges identified earlier in this chapter and would support:

- Tracking of progression for individuals and cohorts.

- Greater consistency and reliability within and across schools in grading.

- Providing parents and students with a clear, fair and transparent understanding of how well they are achieving in relation to age related expectations.

- Formative assessment outcomes as the criteria will provide clear learning goals for students.

- Evaluation of impact for educational or pedagogical projects. For example, if a school introduces a programme to address the needs of particular student groups (e.g. students excelling academically, students of Roma background, students needing support in a particular academic area), assessment criteria would provide a tool to monitor how far the targeted students had improved.

In the first instance, we recommend that the introduction of assessment criteria should be focused on supporting on-going internal assessment in Slovak language and literature and mathematics in order to make the implementation more manageable for teachers. In the longer term, it could support a shift to criterion based national testing.

This would involve co-operation between the NÚCEM, the National Institute for Education and the Ministry of Education to produce assessment criteria that match the new curriculum, are compatible with the existing standards in national education programmes, and provide sufficient detail to be clear and unambiguous without being unwieldy to implement and use. The OECD review team recommends that the criteria are fully trialled with pilot schools before they are implemented and that teachers and educational researchers are involved in their development to ensure they are fit for purpose and appropriately set. The introduction of these assessment criteria should be supplemented by guidance and training to show best practice in how the assessment criteria could be used, and annotated examples of student work at different levels to establish a shared standard and support teachers' professional judgements.

It is important that the work on the new curriculum standards by the National Institute for Education is accompanied by the development of not only curriculum examples for schools to be used in their development of the School Education Program, but also sample student test items. These test items will provide teachers examples of how to assess student progress against the national standards. For example, Germany (*Bildungsstandards*) and the Netherlands (with the national project on student reference standards in mathematics and language teaching "*referentieniveaus"*) provide examples of the development of national standards with accompanying curriculum and testing materials for all levels and school types. Members of the Consortium of Institutes for Development and Research in Education in Europe are well placed to refer to recent international experience in these areas (see www.cidree.org).

### *Integrate formative assessment into teaching and learning*

Valid and reliable on-going assessment is vital for students to know how their learning is progressing and what they need to do to improve; and for teachers to know whether their students have understood what they have been taught, what level of attainment they have achieved and how planning can be improved. To meet both aspects a balance of summative and formative assessment is needed.

The meta-analysis of a wide range of research has shown that formative feedback, especially when from both teacher to student and student to teacher, is one of the most powerful and effective tools to improve student progress and the quality of teaching and learning (Hattie, 2008). In addition, a review of 20 studies of classroom assessment found that "innovations which include strengthening the practice of formative assessment produce significant, and often substantial, learning gains" (Black and Wiliam, 1998b). As such, supporting teachers in understanding and implementing formative assessment could be a key way of developing assessment expertise in schools and improving student achievement and independence.

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**Box 3.1 Principles for effective formative assessment**

The Assessment Reform Group identified ten principles that could form the basis for introducing formative assessment practice into Slovakian schools, arguing that it should:

1. be part of effective planning

2. focus on how students learn

3. be central to classroom practice

4. be a key professional skill

5. be sensitive and constructive

6. foster motivation

7. promote understanding of goals and criteria

8. help learners know how to improve

9. develop the capacity for self-assessment

10. recognise all educational achievement.

*Source:* Assessment Reform Group (2002), Assessment for Learning: 10 Principles, Assessment Reform Group, Cambridge.

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Box 3.1 presents a set of principles that could be used for the basis of introducing formative assessment into Slovak schools. Implementing these principles effectively will involve a substantial shift in the teaching culture as a whole that will require a strong, long-term commitment from the Slovak government. The shift in emphasis from summative to formative assessment "may challenge [teachers] to change what they do, how they think about learning and teaching, and the way they relate to their students" (Mansell and James, 2009, p. 9). The professional development of teachers therefore, needs to go beyond simply delivering training on formative assessment, and address creating cohesion and coherence between curriculum planning, pedagogy and assessment practice.

In formative assessment for example, the tasks and questions planned need to be "fashioned in the light of their potential to engage students in making contributions that can reveal key strengths and weaknesses in their understanding" (Mansell and James, 2009). In other words, to have an effective formative outcome, teachers need to consider what they are teaching and how they teach it, in order to find out what they want. This approach also needs to give students the opportunity to take more responsibility for their own learning and develop their skills in "learning to learn".

A large scale study of Portuguese primary schools shows the impact of introducing formative "learning to learn" practices in the classroom. Teachers in the study who trained their students to use self-assessment strategies found that their attainment showed a 50% improvement in comparison with the control group (Fontana and Fernandes, 1994, p. 407-417). A further study showed that students able to use self-assessment techniques became "less inclined to attribute outcomes to *luck*, and are better able to identify the real causes of the academic events that happen around them" (Fernandes and Fontana, 1996, p. 309).

It is possible to use testing formatively if teachers discuss students' responses with them in a way that develops their knowledge and understanding of how to improve. However, teachers should be encouraged to use a wider range of assessment tools and methods, such as dialogic questioning (Alexander, 2008), observation of student interaction, and peer and self-assessment. This will involve learners in the assessment process and provide a richer source of evidence that gives a more rounded picture of the student's knowledge, skills and understanding when providing feedback.

### *Develop models to assess skills and competencies*

During the OECD review, regional directors and employer's associations acknowledged that the Slovak economy needs a highly skilled workforce that meets the needs of the modern labour market. The revised Slovak curriculum aims to address this by developing competencies that can help young people to cope with social, economic and technological change, and succeed in school and the world beyond. However, if these competencies are to be recognised, valued and developed, they need to be assessed using appropriate tools.

While many countries and jurisdictions, most notably various Australian States and New Zealand, have moved towards a greater focus on wider skills in their curriculum (Lucas and Claxton, 2009), there are different opinions on how best to assess them. It is agreed, however, that there is a need to develop assessment tools and methods that are suited to recognising skills and competencies, and to capture evidence from a wider range of sources (see Box 3.2). Without this there is the risk of a significant mismatch between curriculum content and assessment, which means the latter is not fit for purpose.

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**Box 3.2 Assessing broader skills and competencies**

The assessment of personal skills and competencies should (Futurelab, 2007):

- be integrated into the learning process
- be sensitive to context and complexity
- promote self-worth and development
- be meaningful to and owned by learners
- act as a bridge and currency between learners and diverse communities
- enable multiple comparisons and lenses
- recognise collaboration.

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> **Box 3.2 Assessing broader skills and competencies** *(continued)*
>
> Suggested methods to support the assessment of broader skills and competencies include (Lucas and Claxton, 2009):
>
> - self-report questionnaires of various kinds
>
> - evaluation of students' learning portfolios or diaries, or other written reflections
>
> - structured teacher observation in terms of various quasi-objective "ladders of progression" for each of the wider skills
>
> - "learning stories": short vignettes and digital photos or videos that capture a series of increasingly accomplished "leading edge moments" in individual students' learning careers
>
> - periodic 360-degree assessments of student progress drawing on testimony from parents, friends, teachers and coaches, as well as documentary evidence of various kinds.
>
> *Sources:*
> Futurelab (2007), *Developing and Accrediting Personal Skills and Competencies: Report and Ways Forward*, Futurelab, Bristol.
>
> Lucas, B. and C. Claxton (2009), Wider Skills for Learning: What are they, how can they be Cultivated, how could they be Measured and why are they Important for Innovation?, NESTA, London.

Any assessment model developed needs to recognise what is distinctive about assessment in the context of skills and competencies, Box 3.2 sets out some principles for this. Significantly, these principles have implications not only for assessment practice, but also for pedagogy and student behaviour. This requires a broader change in school culture that will take time and require an investment in training, guidance and monitoring (see also below).

In recognising and gathering the often more ephemeral evidence of wider skills, teachers in basic schools and beyond may have much to learn from their kindergarten colleagues. Here, as the curriculum is predominantly play-based, assessment and evaluation is primarily observational, with the dual purpose of establishing the child's level of development in key competencies, and diagnostically influencing teacher planning. Rather than relying on testing or written evidence, the teacher uses their own notes from observation and dialogue with the student to inform their assessment judgements (Eurydice, 2009, p. 15).

### *Provide greater support for teachers in implementing curriculum and assessment change*

Changes as radical as those introduced in the School Act (2008) will inevitably take time to implement and will require a significant shift in culture within schools. For example, the change in focus of the T9 test to better reflect the revised curriculum has led to greater emphasis on higher level reading comprehension skills and more contextualised tasks in mathematics. In both cases the questions are intended to move away from the more traditional style of testing that mainly requires students to remember and reproduce information.

However, there is evidence in the overview of the 2011 T9 results that many students, and by implication teachers, found this shift problematic. For example the NÚCEM's overview of *Testovanie* 9 results for 2011 found that while students were able to apply learned formula to calculate the volume and surface areas of solids in mathematics, they found questions that involved selecting and applying a relevant strategy or linking knowledge from different areas much more challenging (NÚCEM, 2012). Similarly, in the Slovak language and literature test, students were confident on questions that required them to identify, select and retrieve relevant information from texts, but found higher level comprehension skills including interpretation, contextual awareness and questions requiring responses in their own words considerably more difficult (NÚCEM, 2012, p. 88). This is further evidence that not all schools have been able to successfully meet the challenge of the new curriculum. Indeed, the OECD review team formed the impression that in general, teachers were not prepared or sufficiently supported in the move towards greater autonomy, as school leaders, teachers and students have been used to a more traditional "top down" organisation.

Here, the Methodology and Pedagogy Centre (MPC) has an important role to play and at the time of the OECD review was in the process of revising the professional standards for teachers. Recognising that student evaluation was a weakness, as teacher training had traditionally focused more on content and knowledge than pedagogy and assessment practice, diagnosis of students will be one of the three dimensions in the revised standards. This is an excellent opportunity to ensure that the principles and practice of formative and skills assessment are included in this dimension (see also Boxes 3.1 and 3.2).

In parallel with this, the MPC should also provide training and guidance for existing teachers, both nationally and through its regional offices, to develop teachers' practice in line with the revised professional standards. There is also the potential to make greater use of NGOs to facilitate networking, peer support and sharing of best practice in assessment.

## *Clarify the purpose and use of different types of student assessments*

In common with other countries such as the United Kingdom, the OECD review team notes that the national assessments in the Slovak Republic are being used for numerous purposes. These include providing an objective and comparable measure of students' performance at the end of a particular phase of education; giving schools information that can be used to inform teaching and learning and curriculum planning; assessing student readiness for the next phase of education; and as a means of measuring school performance.

However, the more purposes a particular assessment has, the less effectively it is able to achieve them and the greater the risk of unintended negative consequences. For example, if a national test aims to produce an objective and comparable measure of performance, its scope will tend to be restricted to what can be marked reliably. This in turn limits the range of what can be assessed and therefore the diagnostic potential of the outcomes. Further, as mentioned previously, a strong emphasis on the results as a means of ranking or evaluating the effectiveness of teachers and schools can have a distorting effect on the curriculum, where drilling students to pass the test takes precedence over providing a rounded curriculum that enables students to apply their knowledge and skills independently.

In this context, the OECD review team recommends that the NÚCEM review national assessments to ensure that they offer the most effective means of measuring a particular outcome or providing a particular type of information. For example, on-going formative teacher assessment may deliver a more responsive and effective means of informing and adjusting curriculum planning than an assessment that happens at the end of a phase of education which, by definition, can only provide information retrospectively when it is too late to have an impact on that cohort of students. Similarly, while performance in national assessments may provide one indicator of the effectiveness of a teacher or school, in order to avoid an over emphasis on a narrow range of assessment outcomes at the expense of a broad and balanced curriculum, other measures and information should be taken into account. This latter point is also considered in more detail in the policy recommendations for Chapter 5 on school evaluation.

Finally, better use should be made of both test results and teacher assessment information to ensure improved transition between phases of education. Rather than merely supplying grade averages, other forms of more qualitative information could be provided that outline, for example, student background, interests and aptitudes and include examples of work. Representatives from secondary schools reported that such information would be very helpful and may help them see transition information as a means of ensuring challenge and curriculum progression for students rather than primarily as a means of selection.

# Note

1.     NÚCEM presentation: Electronic School Leaving Exams in Slovakia, ITAPA conference Bratislava 9-10th November 2010.

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# *Chapter 4*

# Teacher appraisal

*The Slovak Republic has a clearly defined career structure for teachers with the following career steps: beginning teacher, independent teacher, teacher with first certification level, and teacher with second certification level. Currently, about 40% of teachers have reached the second certification level. A clear strength of the Slovak approach is that school-based regular teacher appraisal includes the observation of classroom practices. However, external teacher appraisal is disconnected from classroom teaching and is based on professional development credits and qualifications. There is room to improve the status of the teaching profession and the quality and quantity of the professional development offer. The development of a single, authoritative set of teaching standards is expected to promote a shared understanding of accomplished teaching.*

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

This chapter looks at approaches to teacher appraisal within the Slovak evaluation and assessment framework. Teacher appraisal refers to the evaluation of individual teachers to make a judgement about their performance. Teacher appraisal typically has two major purposes. First, it seeks to improve teachers' own practice by identifying strengths and weaknesses for further professional development – the improvement function. Second, it is aimed at ensuring that teachers perform at their best to enhance student learning – the accountability function (Santiago and Benavides, 2009). The analysis of teacher appraisal has to be seen within the particular national context. For an overview of key features of the teaching profession in the Slovak Republic, see Box 4.1.

## Context and features

### *Teaching career*

The Slovak Republic has a clearly defined career structure for teachers with the following career steps: beginning teacher, independent teacher, teacher with first certification level, and teacher with second certification level. Beginning teachers pass an adaptation and mentoring period during the first two years of employment. The progression from "beginning teacher" to "independent teacher" is realised by a compulsory appraisal within the school at the end of the first two years of employment or earlier. Progress to the first and second certification levels is realised externally by an expert certification committee. Currently, about 40% of teachers have reached the second certification level.

### *Appraisal procedures*

#### *Appraisal at the end of induction*

Beginning teachers are required to complete an adaptation education programme within the first two years of employment. This adaptation education is organised by the employer in line with the framework programme for adaptation education issued by the Ministry. The adaptation education programme typically lasts for one year and involves a mentor periodically observing the beginning teacher's teaching and providing help and consultation. Following legislation (in particular the Directive of the Ministry of Education No. 19/2009) the school leader determines the beginning teacher's completion of the programme. To complete the programme, beginning teachers are observed in class by a three-member examination board appointed by the school leader (the school leader acts as chairman of the board) and this is followed by an evaluation dialogue. The teacher's competencies are evaluated in relation to what they have learned in the adaptation education programme. Upon successful completion of the adaptation programme, a beginning teacher receives official notification from the school leader and moves to the next step of the teacher career (independent teacher). If a beginning teacher does not complete the adaptation education within the first two years of employment, his or her contract is terminated by the employer (Eurypedia, 2012).

#### *Regular appraisal for performance management*

According to the 2008 School Act, school leaders are required to regularly appraise their pedagogical staff. The Act prescribes that teacher appraisal should be undertaken once a year, at the end of the academic year. The school leader is responsible for regular internal appraisal, but may delegate this authority to lower positions in the school, such as the deputy school leader. However, the legislation does not prescribe the procedures to be

used for teacher appraisal and schools have a high degree of autonomy regarding the way they implement regular teacher appraisal for performance management. School leaders are expected to specify the aims, criteria and methods of appraisal in the internal school regulations, while accounting for the school's specific context, educational programme and priorities. At the end of the year, school leaders write an evaluation report regarding the performance of each teacher, which is stored within the teacher's file but not forwarded to any other level of the education system.

The primary aim of this internal teacher appraisal process is formative, i.e. the appraisal should provide feedback on the teacher's performance and inform teachers' competency development. School leaders are required to establish continuing education plans for the following academic year, which should reflect the appraisal results of their teaching staff. At the same time, appraisal results may also influence teachers' salary levels through a personal bonus attributed based on extra tasks and performance. However, school leaders appear to have little room for manoeuvre in awarding such bonus payments due to resource constraints at the school level (more on this below).

### External appraisal for career advancement

Career and salary advancement are not linked to the internal appraisal of teachers by their school leaders. They are instead determined based on indicators of teachers' learning and professional growth. There are three different ways for teachers to have their competencies validated and advance on the career/salary scale.

### The credit system

First of all, teachers' career advancement is linked to their accumulation of credits through the completion of continuous professional development. The terms for obtaining credits are determined through the 2009 Act on Pedagogical Employees and Specialist Employees. According to the Act, teachers may obtain credits for: completing an accredited programme of continuous education; having their professional competencies (acquired through self-study or pedagogical practice) verified by an examination committee; passing a doctoral examination, a national foreign language examination or broadening their teaching scope (e.g. adding another subject); undertaking measurable creative activities related to pedagogical practice; and/or authoring or co-authoring teaching tools, textbooks or methodological materials.

Accumulating credits is a pre-condition for teachers to progress in their career. In order to sign up for certification, teachers need to either acquire 60 credits or 30 credits and complete a pre-certification educational programme. The Act on Pedagogical Employees and Specialist Employees established a direct link between the accumulation of credits and teachers' salary advancement. The system of credit evaluation determines that for each 30 credits obtained, teachers receive a 6% salary rise. Until recently, school leaders were legally obliged to provide this financial compensation to all teachers having obtained the required amount of credits. From 2012 onwards, however, this link is no longer automatic and school leaders are given a degree of discretion in this regard. All schools must create an internal school regulation specifying the conditions under which the school leader approves the credit salary rise. For example, if the training is not considered relevant for school development, then these credits may not be considered in decisions on possible salary rises.

The certification system

Once teachers have accumulated the required amount of credits, they can apply for certification. For teachers to move up on the career ladder towards the first and second certification level (see above), they need to pass an external appraisal, which includes the defence of a thesis (also referred to as a 'certification examination') before a certification committee made up of organisations responsible for continuous teacher education. These organisations are set up by the Ministry of Education.

The specialisation system

Teachers may also specialise in different types of positions such as class teacher, educational advisor or prevention co-ordinator. Generally, there is no special appraisal procedure for this, but school leaders decide on whether or not teachers obtain specialisation. In some cases, teachers may qualify for specialisation by taking particular professional development courses. The appraisal format is dependent on specific conditions defined by the accreditation of the particular educational programme. The 2009 Act on Pedagogical Employees and Specialist Employees created an obligatory bonus system and determined that teachers taking on specialised functions, such as mentor teacher, receive a bonus pay.

### *Other forms of feedback to teachers*

Once a year, a national teacher's day is organised in the Slovak Republic. On this day, outstanding teachers are celebrated and rewarded. This day can be an opportunity to provide a moral award for high performing teachers. Slovak State Schools Inspectorate, and teachers typically receive feedback from the Inspectors as part of these visits. The Inspectorate has developed an observation form with a list of indicators that are used by all inspectors in their classroom visits. After the observed lesson, teachers are invited to undertake a self-evaluation. Based on both the inspectors' observation and the teacher's self-evaluation, inspectors typically provide individual feedback to teachers in the presence of the school leader. However, the purpose of classroom observations by the inspectorate is to evaluate teaching quality of the school as a whole rather than to appraise individual teachers. The inspection reports, therefore, provide information about the overall quality of teaching in each school and do not mention individuals.

### *Competencies to undertake teacher appraisal*

Internal teacher appraisal is typically the responsibility of school leaders, but as mentioned above, it may be delegated to another senior staff member, such as the deputy. Other individuals, including the chairs of subject committees and methodology associations, may also participate in the process, depending on the size and organisational structure of the school. In smaller schools, the school leader is often the only evaluator, whereas in larger schools it is more common to share this responsibility among several senior staff in the school. Students and parents are only occasionally involved in the process through questionnaires.

To be eligible for school leadership, teachers must have at least five years of teaching experience. They also have to fulfil the qualification requirements of education for the relevant type of school facility, meet specified personality and moral preconditions, have good command of the Slovak language and, after appointment to the function, show good results in professional and methodological work.

There are mandatory courses to prepare school leaders and deputy leaders for their management tasks, which includes teacher appraisal. School leaders and their deputies are required to complete a "functional education" course within their first three years on the job. This education is provided in 160 to 200 lessons delivered over no more than 24 months. It comprises 40 lessons on the management of school personnel, 20 of them dedicated to teacher competency profiles and creating teacher appraisal and reward systems. After successful completion of the functional education course, every member of the school leadership team is obliged to pass a "functional innovative education" course every seven years. The innovative education course is delivered in 60 lessons. It is built around the experience of participants and emphasises innovation in the management of the school staff.

## *Using appraisal results*

Internal school-based teacher appraisal is part of the school's performance management process and has both formative and summative functions. According to the education authorities, the predominant function should be formative, i.e. the appraisal should provide feedback to teachers and influence their professional learning and development. In addition, school leaders have some autonomy to use the appraisal results to provide bonus payments to outstanding teachers.

Sanctions are only applied in rare cases. If teachers underperform on the internal appraisal, school leaders are more likely to provide recommendations for improvement measures and give time to the teacher to develop and show improvement. In cases of serious underperformance or violation of legal regulations, it is possible for the school leader to dismiss teachers.

External appraisal for certification has a summative career-advancement function. Teachers' results in the certification examination are used to determine career advancement towards the first and second certification levels. Such advancement on the career scale is linked to higher salary levels.

### Box 4.1 The teaching profession in the Slovak Republic – Main features

**Employment status and salary structure**

Teachers in the Slovak Republic are public servants. Conditions of service are set out in the Labour Code and the 2009 Act on Pedagogical Employees and Specialist Employees, where teachers were ranked as protected persons. The majority of teachers have tenure (indefinite length of position) but there are also teachers on fixed-term contracts, mainly as substitutes for teachers who are absent for a long time.

There are four career grades and two career positions. The four career grades are beginning teacher, independent teacher, teacher with the first certification level and teacher with the second certification level. The two career positions are pedagogic employee and chief pedagogic employee. Career advancement is based on demonstrable acquisition of professional competencies of teachers based on formal and informal learning for which they can gain credits. Teachers' advancement on the career scale goes in line with salary advancement.

Teacher salary scales are based on the Law Code on employees performing work in public interest. The salary scale consists of 14 salary grades for the entire education system from kindergarten to university, where each grade has 12 salary stages. Salary advancement is determined primarily by length of service. Salary stages are divided initially into two years of practice, but a more speedy advancement is allowed after the first two years. The abovementioned Act also makes it possible to provide personal bonuses to teachers for the fulfilment of exceptional and especially important tasks.

**Prerequisites to become a teacher**

To be admitted to higher education institutions providing teacher education, students must have passed the secondary school-leaving examination and provide an application including their curriculum vitae, health certificate and an explanation why they have chosen the particular study branch. Some study programmes mostly in the areas of physical education, music and arts also organise entrance examinations ("talent examinations"). After completing initial teacher education, teachers are hired into schools through an open recruitment procedure led by the school leader. The prerequisites to access the professional status of teacher are outlined in the Act on Pedagogical Employees and Specialist Employees. They include professional and teaching qualifications, civil irreproachability and moral maturity.

**Initial teacher education**

Initial teacher education for primary and secondary school teachers takes place at the universities. Upon completing the school-leaving examination at secondary schools, there are three different ways for students to obtain a teaching qualification: (1) Students may enrol at teacher education faculties, where they can complete Bachelor and Master level teacher education – the length of study is five years. After the defence of a thesis and completion of the State final examination they receive a pedagogical qualification, (2) students may enrol in a different study field and concurrently complete supplementary pedagogical study. Upon completion of both programmes, they may obtain a professional qualification and a pedagogical qualification, (3) students may complete supplementary pedagogical studies after completing a professional qualification in another field.

**Box 4.1. The teaching profession in the Slovak Republic – Main features**
*(continued)*

**Teacher professional development**

School leaders are responsible for the professional development of teaching staff. They prepare a professional development plan for the school pedagogic employees, which they have to submit to the school founder. The plan should include key priorities, a time schedule and a budget proposal for professional development activities in the coming year. Teachers typically apply for professional development they would like to undertake through the school leader. The school leader is in charge of prioritising teachers' training requests in line with the educational and pedagogical needs and conditions of the school. Based on this judgement, the school leader submits requests for teachers' admission into professional development programmes.

Professional development is provided by a range of different institutions including higher education institutions and educational organisations of the Ministry of Education (the National Institute for Education, the Methodology and Pedagogy Centre and the State Vocational Institute). The largest provider of professional development is the Methodology and Pedagogy Centre (MPC). The Centre has about 150 pedagogical employees and is organised in one head office plus three regional offices. The main role of MPC is to develop and provide in-service education and training to teachers, but it also has other responsibilities such as developing support materials for teachers, developing the national teaching standards and conducting a project on school self-evaluation. Traditionally, the training provided has been mostly individual, but since 2011 there has been a shift towards more focus on group training.

*Sources:*
Eurypedia (2012), *European Encyclopedia on National Education Systems:* Slovakia, https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Slovakia:Overview.

NÚCEM (National Institute for Certified Educational Measurements) (2012), *OECD Review on Evaluation and Assessment Frameworks for Improving School Outcomes: Country Background Report for the Slovak Republic*, NÚCEM, Bratislava, www.oecd.org/edu/evaluationpolicy.

## Strengths

### *The idea that teachers should be evaluated is widely accepted*

The principle that teachers should be appraised appeared widely accepted in the Slovak Republic. Teachers interviewed by the OECD review team reported that they found classroom observations and feedback on their work valuable to develop their own professionalism. Across the system, there appeared to be a positive and motivational connotation to teacher appraisal. Several interviewees spoke about the national teacher appreciation days and moral appraisal as important opportunities to recognise and celebrate excellent teaching.

Teacher perceptions of the appraisal process, as measured in 2007-08 (before the current regulations were introduced), appeared to be overall positive. In the OECD's Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS)[1], 81% of the Slovak teachers agreed or strongly agreed that their appraisal/feedback was a fair assessment of their work as a teacher in the school (against a TALIS average of 83%), and 78% agreed or strongly agreed that their appraisal/feedback was helpful in the development of their work as a teacher in the school (against a TALIS average of 79%) (OECD, 2009).

Representatives of the teacher union reported that while there is room to make teacher appraisal more objective, the principle that teachers are evaluated is valued and accepted. Union representatives also appreciated the possibility for teachers to receive additional bonuses and salary increases based on evaluation results, although they expressed concerns about the possible subjectivity of the school leader's decisions in this regard (more on this below).

There are also indications that school leaders consider teacher appraisal important for their work. A 2006 project conducted for the optimisation of school leadership education mapped the opinions of school managers regarding the importance of different parts of their work. The school leaders who participated in the study considered teacher appraisal as the most important aspect of their work, and, together with school evaluation, one of the leading factors of school quality. At the same time, however, it should be noted that school leaders considered classroom observation as the least important part of their work, which might be linked to a relatively formal approach to classroom observation (more on this below) (NÚCEM, 2012).

### *There are initiatives to develop teaching standards*

As part of the project *Professional and Career Progress of Pedagogic Employees*, the Methodology and Pedagogy Centre (MPC) is developing professional standards for teachers. A first version of the standards was published in 2006 with the intention of guiding teachers' professional development and included competencies for different categories (teachers, vocational teachers, after-school co-ordinators etc.) and stages (beginning teacher, independent teacher, teacher with first / second certification) of the teaching career. The standards were focused on key competencies for good teaching. However, the use of this first version of standards for teacher appraisal processes has not been widespread.

At the request of the Ministry of Education in collaboration with the MPC, a new version of the standards is currently being developed at Bratislava University in collaboration with experts in the Czech Republic and the Netherlands. In total, there will be 34 standards along with new measures for key competencies. These standards will be professionally evaluated and complemented with tools that teachers can use to evaluate themselves in relation to the standards. They are scheduled to be piloted in 2013 in selected schools and will be discussed at expert conferences and stakeholder seminars throughout 2014.

The new professional standards are differentiated for the three different career stages of independent teacher, teacher with first certification and teacher with second certification. Very broadly, the competencies expected of teachers at these different career levels are defined as follows:

- **Independent teachers** handle common educational situations independently and properly.

- **Teacher with the first certification** apply innovations in their pedagogical and professional activity.

- **Teachers with the second certification** achieve expert competences in their pedagogical activity and provide guidance and counselling to pedagogical staff at their school and other pedagogical institutions.

Simultaneously, the MPC is aiming to differentiate external appraisal for career advancement according to these definitions. Appraisal for the first certification shall consider the teachers' innovation skills, creativity and self-reflection, whereas appraisal for the second certification shall be focused on research carried out by the teachers themselves and their work with other pedagogical staff, for example to become a mentor for other teachers.

The draft standards are further structured in three dimensions: *(i) the student dimension*: covers teacher professional competencies focussed on understanding of students' knowledge, characteristics and conditions for development, *(ii) the educational process dimension*: covers professional competencies focussed on processes leading to student learning and development, *(iii) pedagogic employee dimension*: covers competencies focussed on teachers' own development as representatives of the teaching profession and as school employees. The standards describe key competencies for each of these three dimensions and for each level of the teacher career.

According to the Ministry of Education, the intention is to develop an intertwined system for the internal and external evaluation of teachers. The teaching standards would be applied in both processes and the standards would also be used for school self-evaluation and school inspections.

### *The observation and improvement of classroom practices is at the heart of regular teacher appraisal*

One of the strengths of the Slovak approach to internal teacher appraisal is its focus on the observation of classroom practice. While school directors vary in their approaches to teacher appraisal, it appears that they typically operate an approach whereby they observe the classroom practice of each of their teachers at least once a year. There are three general steps to this observation: *(i)* in the *preparation phase*, the teacher sets the educational goal to be achieved in the observed lesson, *(ii)* in the *classroom observation phase*, the observer evaluates the teacher's practice in relation to set criteria, and *(iii)* in the *evaluation dialogue* after the observation, the evaluator provides feedback for improvement and the teacher has an opportunity for self-evaluation. Some schools apply descriptive ratings for teachers based on the observation. The appraisal is then formalised in an observation report which is stored in the teacher's file. Besides the annual observation of each teacher, observations may also be conducted more informally throughout the year by the school director, a deputy, or the head of a subject commission. The process is strongly school-based and school-level professionals have ownership of methods and criteria.

During the OECD review visit, classroom observations were described by both teachers and school leaders as common practice and none of the interviewees questioned their utility. Results from the OECD's TALIS show that in 2013, 62% of lower secondary school principals reported that they often or very often observe instruction in the classroom, compared to an international average of 49% (Table 3.2, OECD, 2014). While annual internal appraisal was made mandatory in 2008, it is based on a long-standing tradition of classroom observations within schools. Results from the equivalent survey in 2007-08 indicate that teachers in the Slovak Republic already benefitted from very regular feedback from their school leaders (OECD, 2009).[2] The 2013 international data indicate that formal appraisal is an established practice in Slovak schools and that formal appraisal is more frequent and established compared to in other OECD systems (Figure 4.1).

**Figure 4.1 Formal appraisal for lower secondary teachers**

Frequency and source of formal teacher appraisal reported by school principals (TALIS 2013)
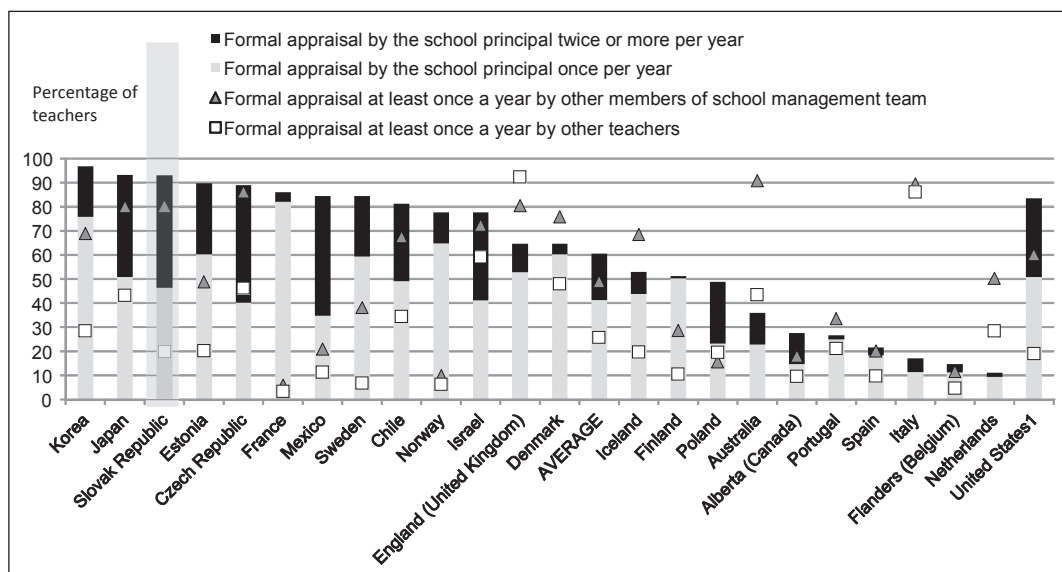


*Note:* Countries are ranked in descending order of percentage of teachers whose principal reported he/she formally appraised teachers at least once per year. Average is for the systems presented in the figure.

1. Response rate too low to ensure comparability.

*Source:* OECD (2014), *TALIS 2013 Results: An International Perspective on Teaching and Learning*, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264196261-en

According to NÚCEM (2012), feedback should be primarily motivational for the teacher. Teachers interviewed by the OECD review team typically described appraisal through classroom observations as non-threatening and non-competitive. The role of financial rewards connected to such appraisal appeared to be limited. School leaders reported that they tried to provide a financial bonus for excellent teachers, but that they were restrained by the limited availability of funding. As a result, internal appraisal was often referred to as "moral appraisal", i.e. as having mainly a feedback function, helping to recognise a teacher's strengths and suggesting ways to address identified weaknesses.

The improvement focus of internal appraisal is reflected by its close connection to professional development planning. Typically, the end-of-year appraisals by the school leader feed into a professional development plan for the school. Schools are required to submit these professional development plans to their founders at the beginning of the following school year. Based on an analysis of needs reported by schools; MPC and other professional development providers are expected to create professional development programmes that aim to develop the competencies required by schools.

### *A traditional focus on observing, coaching and mentoring beginning teachers*

The traditional focus on particularly observing and supporting beginning teachers is a strength of the Slovak approach. According to Eurypedia (2012), beginning teachers undergo an induction programme organised within the school, typically in co-operation with the Methodology and Pedagogy Centre or other central education agencies. As part of induction, they are assigned a more experienced colleague as a mentor. The role of

mentor teacher is compensated with additional pay during the mentoring period. The mentor can observe the teachers' classroom interactions, model effective teaching approaches, and provide advice on matters such as pedagogy, assessment and administration.

In OECD TALIS 2013, 83% of Slovak lower secondary teachers were reportedly in schools with a formal induction programme for new teachers, compared to the international average of 66%; and 82% reportedly were in schools with informal induction activities, compared to 77% internationally (Table 4.1, OECD, 2014). Sixty per cent of teachers reported that they had taken part in a formal induction programme, compared to 49% internationally. However, according to reports by Slovak school principals, since results in OECD TALIS 2007-08, there appears to be greater emphasis for formal induction only for teachers new to teaching and less so for established teachers newly recruited to a school. In 2013, 47% of teachers were in schools that reportedly only offered formal induction to teachers new to teaching and 36% where formal induction was offered to all new teachers to the school (Table 4.1, OECD, 2014). In 2007-08, 62% of teachers were reportedly in schools where all new teachers to the school undertook a formal induction process (against a TALIS average of 45%) (OECD, 2009).

Mentoring is well established in Slovak schools. In 2013, 82% of teachers were in schools where the principal reported there was a mentoring system for teachers, compared to 74% internationally; and such mentors most of the time taught the same subject as the teachers being mentored (Table 4.3, OECD, 2014).[3] Also, 40% of lower secondary teachers reported that they had undertaken mentoring and/or peer observation and coaching as part of a formal school arrangement over the past 12 months, compared to 30% internationally (Table 4.9, OECD, 2014).

The schools visited by the OECD review team had different approaches to mentoring for beginning teachers. It typically involved observations and support by a specific mentor teacher or supervisor responsible for a new teacher during the first year on the job, and in some cases also the second year. Some schools also reported that mentoring took place during the school holidays. In addition, school directors reported that they more often undertook classroom observations for younger teachers.

### *School-based regular appraisal is complemented with external appraisal of teachers*

Teacher appraisal that is mostly internal to the school has the advantage of giving the school ownership of the process and ensures that the school context is taken into account. However, for more summative teacher appraisal processes that have an impact on the teacher's career or salary advancement, there is a case for using national framework and standard procedures as well as an external component to validate the process and ensure objectivity and fairness (Santiago and Benavides, 2009). In this context, the existence of an external process to appraise teachers to reach the first and second certification levels is a positive aspect of the Slovak approach to teacher appraisal. The existence of a career structure for teachers together with an appraisal and certification process provides teachers with opportunities for promotion and for diversification. It allows teachers to benefit from meaningful career opportunities and may contribute to recognising and rewarding strong performance. At the same time, there are concerns about the fact that the certification process is disconnected from classroom practice and does not include observation of actual teaching (more on this below).

*There are links between teacher appraisal and school evaluation*

As school evaluation and teacher appraisal both aim to maintain high standards and improve teaching and learning, there are likely to be great benefits from synergies between the two processes. In the Slovak Republic, the inspectorate has a strong focus on classroom observations. There is a unified classroom observation sheet applied by inspectors across the country with a focus on teachers' key competencies. Even though the purpose is not to evaluate individual teachers, feedback is provided to each teacher after the classroom observation. The inspectorate also provides an external check of whether school leaders implement teacher appraisal approaches as required by the legislation. It is part of the inspectorate's role to evaluate whether schools have established criteria for teacher appraisal and can provide evidence that teachers are being appraised regularly. At the same time, there is no evidence that the inspectorate actually looks deeply into school leaders' appraisal practices rather than just checking that administrative requirements are met (see Chapter 4).

## Challenges

*A multitude of teaching standards and criteria for appraisal may send conflicting messages*

Currently in the Slovak Republic there is no commonly agreed understanding of what constitutes good teaching practice. The national teaching standards that have been developed by MPC in 2006 are not widely used and the existence of these standards has not been well communicated.

There exist several different approaches to appraising teachers' competencies: the internal evaluations conducted by school leaders, the certification examinations, the credit system and the system of specialisation for particular roles. In addition, there are also classroom observations by the inspectorate. However, these different approaches are not unified by the use of a consistent set of standards of good teaching practice.

In practice, while the MPC's 2006 standards may or may not be used to inform specific appraisal processes, different actors have developed a multitude of different standards and criteria for the different appraisal purposes. For teacher appraisal at the end of the induction period, there are specifically defined criteria determined in a document called *Starting Plan of Beginner Teachers*. For regular school-based appraisal for performance management, the Ministry of Education provides appraisal forms that are available in educational literature and the website of the Ministry of Education. Schools may use the criteria as they are, modify them to suit the school's specific context, or create their own criteria. There is no obligation for schools to use these forms and as a result of schools' autonomy in developing their own systems, little is known nationally regarding the actual aspects appraised and criteria used across schools for teacher appraisal. There are likely to be large variations in the way appraisal is implemented across schools.

For external appraisal for certification, there are no particular national standards available to guide the process and help teachers understand what is expected of them. Finally, for appraisal for specialisation (allowing teachers to specialise for specific types of positions), the criteria are set by education providers who appraise teachers upon completion of a professional development programme. The situation is further

complicated by the fact that the inspectorate has developed its own set of criteria for classroom observations, which is not publicly available.

The existence of a multitude of different standards and criteria risks sending conflicting messages about what is considered good teaching in the Slovak Republic. As a result, the different appraisal processes are likely to be perceived as disconnected processes teachers have to undergo which do not align to form a coherent whole. There also appeared to be a lack of involvement and leadership of the teaching profession itself in defining teaching standards. In the interviews with the OECD review team, both the teacher unions and the Chamber of Teachers deplored the absence of national professional standards and criteria for teaching, but neither of these groups considered it their role to actively develop such standards or other professional support for teachers.

### Concerns about the appraisal competencies of school leaders

While the current system makes it compulsory for school leaders to appraise their teachers on a written basis, there appear to be wide variations in the quality and rigour of judgements made by school leaders about teacher performance. Some teachers voiced concerns that in the absence of widely used teaching standards, there is a risk of potential bias or arbitrariness of teacher appraisal implemented by school directors, especially where the focus is not only on the teachers' performance but also on their personality.

The OECD review team formed the impression that there was not yet a culture of school leaders being perceived as "pedagogical leaders" who are involved in shaping and guiding the actual teaching and learning processes in the school. In teacher appraisal, there appeared to be concern to document the appraisal process and create the mandatory professional development plans, but there is a risk that the focus is more on the administrative and bureaucratic aspect of the process than on the core aim of improving teaching and learning, and ultimately, student outcomes. One of the reasons why school leaders may not engage in pedagogical leadership is a lack of time due to other pressing budgetary, administrative and human resource management tasks that they are responsible for.

Some stakeholders also mentioned concerns about the quality of professional development for school directors, which remains focussed more on administration than on the pedagogical aspects of their work. According to the Country Background Report prepared for this review, the programmes provided by MPC do not sufficiently address the educational needs of school leaders as evaluators. While teacher appraisal is covered in the overall functional education programme for school leaders, there are no specialised educational programmes that deal with teacher appraisal in more depth. The topic of teacher appraisal is also marginal in the programmes of other providers (universities, private providers) (NÚCEM, 2012).

### External teacher appraisal appears disconnected from actual classroom teaching

One of the main concerns around external teacher appraisal in the Slovak Republic is that it appears disconnected from teachers' actual practice and performance in the classroom. While external appraisal takes place through the credit system, the certification process and the specialisation for specific positions, none of these external processes involve an observation and evaluation of teachers' performance in the classroom.

The career advancement system is built on the obligation for teachers to accumulate credits through proof of professional learning and development. This credit system hence focuses on rewarding professional growth more than excellence and improvements in teachers' actual work. While this approach has the advantage of emphasising the importance of continuous professional development, teachers receive a pay rise for merely attending these courses rather than for proving that they are changing their practice accordingly. One unintended effect of this system is the phenomenon of "credit chasing": there were concerns that teachers try and enrol in any courses they can rather than in courses that are interesting and relevant for them and their school. Given their low salaries, teachers have strong incentives to enrol in professional development to receive a salary increase.

The certification system is focused on the preparation and defence of a theoretical piece of work (a so-called thesis) rather than evidence of actual teaching performance. This raises concern because it is difficult to tell from a written thesis whether teachers know how to apply what is outlined in the thesis and have acquired effective pedagogical skills to support the learning of their students. The appraisal for specialisation for specific positions is also disconnected from teachers' daily work as it is done by educational providers at the end of particular professional development programmes.

Overall, while classroom observations play an important part in internal appraisal, these do not inform the external appraisal of teachers or their career and salary advancement. This considerably limits teachers' opportunities to receive feedback on their work from external sources and have their achievements validated.

### *Concern about the availability of adequate professional development for teachers*

While career advancement is predominantly based on the completion of professional development programmes, there were concerns that such programmes were not necessarily available in all the important areas of teaching expertise. Most plans and programmes are developed centrally by the MPC. These courses are automatically accredited, whereas other training providers need to apply and wait for accreditation of their programmes. According to one training provider interviewed by the OECD review team, this accreditation process can take a considerable amount of time and reduce the ability of independent providers to respond adequately to teachers' demands.

Compared to teachers in other OECD systems, Slovak lower secondary teachers in 2013 reported the lowest levels of participation (39%) in recent professional development courses or workshops – participation rates are generally quite common in other OECD systems (Figure 4.10, OECD, 2014). Teachers can participate in the MPC's courses free of charge, whereas they have to pay for courses offered by other providers. Schools do not have their own budget to choose the professional development provider and type of courses most suited for their needs.

Methodological centres only offer a set amount of training places. The teacher union reported that it is typically the school directors who choose which teachers will participate in professional development. Hence, not all teachers interested will be able to participate, which raises concerns about the fairness of the link between the credit system and career / salary advancement. With teachers having strong incentives to undertake professional development and accumulate credits, there is a risk that the MPC may not have the resources to meet these demands. Some stakeholders raised concerns about the varying levels of quality and relevance of some of the existing MPC courses.

### *The socio-economic status of teachers causes concern*

Many of the stakeholders interviewed by the OECD review team commented on the difficult socio-economic situation of teachers in the Slovak Republic. As shown in Figure 4.2 below for the lower secondary level, the salaries of teachers (converted using Purchasing Power Parities, PPPs) in the Slovak Republic are lower than in all other OECD countries. According to stakeholders interviewed by the OECD review team, the starting salary of teachers appears too low to be able to support a family and the top of the salary scale is typically reached when teachers are around 57 years of age (with a retirement age of 62). The salaries and social status of teachers are also perceived to be particularly low compared to other professions in the Slovak Republic. Hence, there are difficulties in attracting young people to the teaching profession and in keeping those already on the job motivated. Teacher training bodies reported difficulties in energising the profession and preventing teacher burn-out. This difficult financial situation of teachers is likely to contribute to undermining the motivation of teachers and the potential impact of teacher appraisal. Internationally, teacher reports on how society values the teaching profession are the most pessimistic in the Slovak Republic: only 4% of lower secondary teachers reported that they agree or strongly agree that teaching profession is valued in society, compared to 31% internationally (Table 7.2, OECD, 2014). However, 90% of Slovak teachers in lower secondary education reported that they enjoyed working in their school (Table 7.2, OECD, 2014).

**Figure 4.2 Teacher salaries in lower secondary education across OECD countries**

Annual statutory teachers' salaries for teachers with 15 years of experience and minimum training, in public institutions (2011)



Equivalent US Dollar converted using Purchasing Power Parities
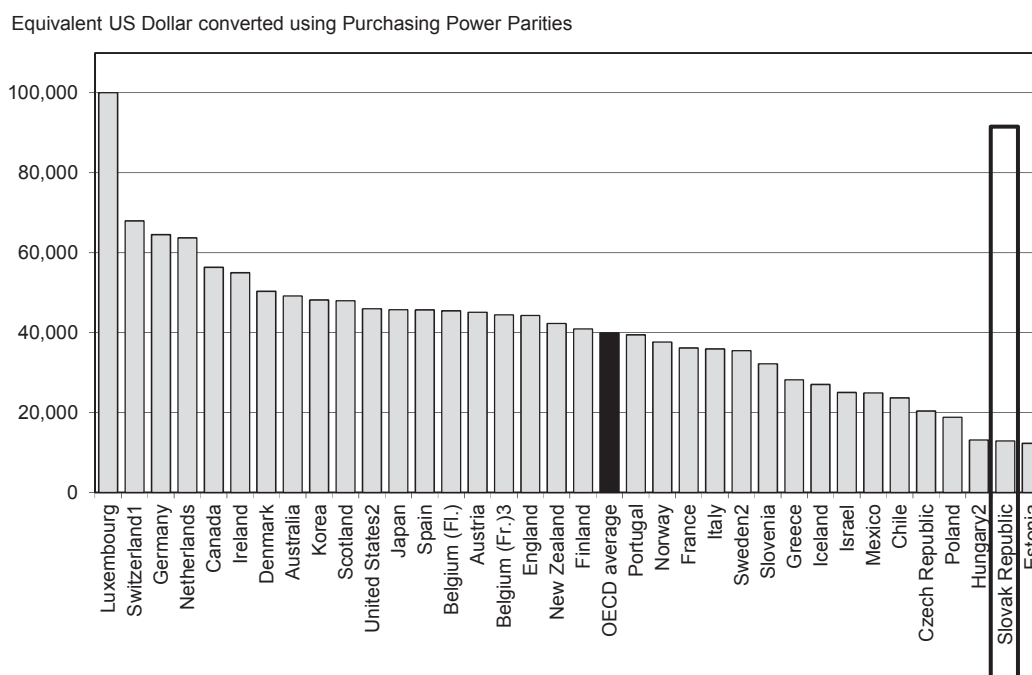
1. Salaries after 11 years of experience.
2. Actual base salaries.
3. Salaries of teachers with typical qualification instead of minimum.

*Source:* Chart D3.1, OECD (2013a), *Education at a Glance 2013: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2013-en

Financial restrictions also impact on the teacher appraisal system itself. Due to the normative funding system (see Chapter 1), if there is an insufficient number of students enrolled in a school, school directors will not have a budget to provide bonuses to teachers. In this case, teacher salaries are simply paid according to basic criteria such as the teachers' years of experience and prior education, and teacher appraisal loses its incentive function. The school leaders interviewed by the OECD review team reported that resources to reward high performing teachers were very scarce. Representatives of school founders also voiced concerns that there was little interest among teachers in specialised positions such as class teacher because the increase in workload is considerable compared to a rather small financial reward.

## Policy recommendations

In light of the analysis of strengths and challenges presented above, the OECD review team recommends the following priorities in further consolidating teacher appraisal in Slovak schools:

- Consolidate a single set of teaching standards to guide appraisal processes.
- Conduct a thematic review of teacher appraisal criteria and methodologies used in schools.
- Further strengthen internal appraisal for professional development.
- Revise the career advancement system.
- Raise the status of the teaching profession.

### *Consolidate a single set of teaching standards to guide appraisal processes*

A framework of teaching standards is an essential reference point to guide any fair and effective system of teacher appraisal. While teacher appraisal is conducted in a variety of forms, for these processes to be effective across the system it would be important that all actors have a shared understanding of high quality teaching and the level of performance that can be achieved by the most effective teachers.

The current co-existence of the MPC's national standards, the Ministry's appraisal forms and the Inspectorate's criteria for classroom observation would benefit from being consolidated into a single set of standards so that there is a clear understanding of what is considered accomplished teaching. The current revision of the national standards is an important opportunity to bring together work that has been done at different levels to develop evidence-based criteria for teacher appraisal. It is important that the new standards build on the strengths of already existing appraisal forms and criteria developed by the MPC, the Ministry, the Inspectorate and teacher education providers in order to provide consistency between these elements rather than adding yet another set of criteria to the system.

The new standards, if they are clear, well-structured and widely supported, can become a powerful mechanism for aligning the various elements involved in developing teachers' knowledge and skills. They should provide a common basis for initial teacher education, appraisal of beginning teachers, regular teacher appraisal for performance management, teacher certification, professional development and career advancement. This would provide coherence for the teaching profession and achieve better alignment between teaching standards, teacher education and teacher appraisal.

The teaching standards should be consistent with overall objectives for schooling. Teachers' work and the key competencies that they need to develop should reflect the learning objectives of the education system. The consolidated national standards should have a key focus on teacher competencies to improve learning outcomes for all students, particularly for groups where there is evidence of underperformance, such as Roma students. Teaching standards need to be informed by research and express the sophistication and complexity of what effective teachers are expected to know and be able to do.

For the teaching profession to feel ownership of the standards and for them to be relevant, it is essential that teachers are involved and encouraged to take responsibility for their development. In the Slovak context, there are different options for how the national agencies can support such involvement, for example through the organisation of stakeholder conferences, web-based consultation with teachers, and collection of examples of teacher quality criteria that are currently used in some schools. A collegiate body of key social and academic actors could establish a process to monitor implementation of the standards beyond initial agreed versions. In Portugal, for example, the Ministry of Education set up a Scientific Council for Teacher Evaluation as a consultative body to supervise and monitor the implementation of teacher appraisal (Santiago et al., 2012). It is also important to establish appropriate feedback mechanisms and periodically review and revise the national standards to ensure their continued relevance to promoting teacher professionalism (OECD, 2011).

It is important that the standards are clear and make sense to teachers. Extensive socialisation of the standards should happen at several stages of a teacher's career: during initial teacher education so that they have a clear understanding of what is expected from them; in induction and mentoring to ease the transition between initial education and school practice; and through professional development that specifically regards the use of standards and their implications for classroom practice (NBRC, 2010; OECD, 2010).

### *Conduct a thematic review of teacher appraisal criteria and methodologies used in schools*

In the development of national standards, a great deal can be learnt from practice-based expertise and the various sets of criteria and methodologies for teacher appraisal that have been developed across schools. One way of taking this forward in the Slovak context would be for the Inspectorate in collaboration with MPC to conduct a thematic review on teacher appraisal in a national sample of schools. Through such a programme of reviews, MPC, together with the Inspectorate and possibly university researchers, could design, trial and refine the national teaching standards while also building capacity for more rigorous teacher appraisal within the schools involved.

While the main aim would be to learn from schools about the types of criteria and methodologies for appraisal that have worked well and provide some external quality assurance for these, an important focus should also be on building capacity to strengthen teacher appraisal and school self-evaluation across the country. Such a thematic review, involving co-operation between the Inspectorate and MPC, would be an excellent way to create synergies between teacher appraisal and school evaluation by connecting the evaluation of classroom teaching to the evaluation of overall school quality.

### *Further strengthen internal appraisal for professional development*

The well-embedded tradition for classroom observation by the school leadership team is a key strength of the Slovak approach to teacher appraisal. It can help teachers develop their competencies by recognising the strengths on which they can build and identifying weaknesses that can be addressed by suitable professional development. The current system for internal appraisal benefits from a non-threatening evaluation context, individual objective-setting, simple evaluation instruments and formal links to professional and school development. This emphasis on regular classroom observations should be maintained and strengthened. Some elements should be further enhanced to ensure that internal appraisal leads to improvement.

### *Enhance school leaders' appraisal and evaluation competencies*

The effectiveness of internal teacher appraisal depends to a large extent on the way school leadership is established in schools. School leaders are well placed to play the key role in internal teacher appraisal, given their familiarity with the context in which teachers work, their awareness of school needs, and their ability to provide rapid feedback to the teacher. The availability of "functional education" for school leaders is a positive element of school management in the Slovak Republic. However, there are concerns that the existing leadership training is insufficient to prepare school leaders adequately for pedagogical leadership, including effective appraisal of teachers.

From the interviews, the OECD review team formed the impression that functional education was focused mostly on formal elements such as developing and checking criteria, and less on providing constructive feedback on different aspects of pedagogy. There is a need to build the credibility and authority of school leaders as educational leaders so that they can operate effective observation, feedback and coaching for their teachers and lead whole-school evaluation processes. This can be done by:

- Disseminating resources and training for the direct evaluation of pedagogical practice to school leaders.

- Supporting regional leadership programmes run by the regional school authorities, drawing on the approaches and expertise developed through the national programme. These could also provide opportunities for networking and peer learning between school leaders from the same region.

- Ensuring that school leaders themselves receive adequate appraisal and feedback by building the capacity of their employers and inspectors to undertake effective performance reviews and identify those school leaders who would benefit from additional targeted support. Allow greater access for school leaders to participate in external reviews and development work with other schools in their areas or elsewhere.

- Further distributing leadership within schools among middle and senior leaders. This could include building capacity in teacher appraisal and evaluation methods by preparing not only school directors and deputies but also other members of school leadership and accomplished teachers to undertake specific appraisal and evaluation functions in the school. In this context, the provision of training opportunities regarding appraisal and evaluation could be scaled up for a wider group of school staff, including middle leaders.

*Review the offer of professional development to ensure it responds to school needs*

The OECD review team formed the view that although the current emphasis on teacher appraisal informing professional development plans is commendable and should be maintained, there is also room to further strengthen the link between internal teacher appraisal and teacher professional learning, and further develop professional development opportunities for individual teachers and schools.

Given that there is a significant degree of dissatisfaction with the current centralised system for teacher professional development, it would be helpful to review the framework for funding and provision. To diversify the offer of programmes, the decentralisation of its funding could be considered. This could be done, for example, by attributing earmarked funding training vouchers to schools so that they can freely choose the training and provider most suitable for their needs. In this context, it would be particularly important to also review the quality of the accreditation system for training providers. If the system becomes more decentralised, it will become even more essential to have a reliable system of quality evaluations in place.

### Revise the career advancement system

The career advancement function that is currently being achieved through appraisal processes at the end of induction, credit evaluation, certification processes and appraisal for specialisation, could be brought together in a single process of teacher appraisal for career progression. This process should be associated with the existing career structure, allowing for progression within the career path as well as providing access to different specialisations and positions. Bringing together these different appraisal processes would formalise the principle of advancement based on merit, and bring together the system for both horizontal and vertical promotions.

The certification process should mainly focus on: providing public assurance with regard to teachers' standards of practice, determining advancement in the career, and providing input into the teacher's professional development plan. Access to career levels beyond "independent teacher" could be through a voluntary application process, and teachers not applying for such promotion should be required to maintain their basic certification status as independent teacher. This would involve each permanent teacher periodically (e.g. every four years) being subject to a formal appraisal for certification, or re-certification. The purpose would be to confirm the teachers as fit for the profession. The results of the certification process should influence the speed of career and salary progression (e.g. if excellent, the teacher would progress by two salary steps; if regular, the teacher would progress by one salary step; and if poor the teacher would remain in the same salary step). The certification appraisal should also constitute an opportunity to identify underperformance. For example, if a teacher performs poorly on the appraisal, a mandatory professional development plan could be established with a new appraisal required one year later. The appraisal should also open up possibilities to move on consistently underperforming teachers who have not responded to professional development opportunities (Jensen and Reichl, 2011).

The appraisal system associated with the certification process should be founded on the national framework of teaching standards. As certification is summative in nature, it should have a strong component that is external to the school to ensure comparability and fairness in the process. This element of externality could be introduced via an accredited external evaluator, who would typically be a teacher from another school with expertise in the same area as the teacher being appraised. It is important that external evaluators

receive specific training for this function, in particular in standards-based methods for appraising evidence of teacher performance and in providing constructive feedback. Teachers also need to be provided with support to understand the appraisal procedures and benefit from appraisal results. At the same time, it is important that teacher appraisal for certification takes account of the school context, including the views of the school leadership team.

For the appraisal results to reflect the teacher's overall performance, it is important to diversify the instruments used and give greater prominence to those tools that can capture the quality of teachers' practices in the classroom. Given the high stakes of appraisal for certification, decisions must draw on several types of evidence, rely on multiple evaluators and encompass the full scope of the teacher's work. Importantly, appraisal for certification should be firmly rooted in classroom observation as most key aspects of teaching are displayed when teachers interact with their students in the classroom. Other evidence of teaching approaches (such as planning documents) are also relevant to teachers' practice, but they do not hold the same central position as classroom observation. The appraisal should also involve an opportunity for teachers to express their own views about their performance and reflect on the personal, organisational and contextual factors that impacted on their teaching.

Representatives from the MPC informed the OECD review team that there are plans to radically change the approach to teacher certification. The intention is to create a complex model for teacher appraisal that would assess the three dimensions of teacher quality covered in the professional standards. The OECD review team understands that the new model would be based on a portfolio by teachers' that provides different types of evidence on their performance. The OECD review team supports this intention as a portfolio would allow teachers to mention specific ways in which they consider their professional practices are promoting student learning. It could include elements such as: lesson plans and teaching materials, samples of student work and comments on student assessment examples, teachers' self-reported questionnaires and reflection sheets (Isoré, 2009). It is important that the requirements of a portfolio are closely related to teachers' day-to-day work and the elements required should be a "natural harvest" of teachers' real work, rather than something produced in addition to their regular work. In the United States, for example, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards offers recognition to teachers who satisfy requirements for a portfolio submission. It is a demanding process for teachers, but those who participate find it to be a rewarding experience because the natural harvest makes the process less burdensome (Santiago et al., 2013).

### *Raise the status of the teaching profession*

In order to ensure high quality teaching in every classroom, it is important to attract high performing individuals to the profession and help them to stay motivated for continuous improvement throughout their career. Therefore, in addition to revising specific elements of the teacher appraisal system, the Slovak Republic should continue its efforts to attract good candidates to teaching and provide the working conditions that support teachers in staying on the job and continuing to perform at a high level. In general terms, adequate working conditions, a professional environment and professional services from the authorities and teacher professional bodies as well as adequate salaries are essential to increase the attractiveness and raise the status of the teaching profession (OECD, 2005).

# Notes

1. The OECD's Teaching and Learning International Survey was implemented in 2007-08, covering lower secondary education and with the participation of 23 countries (OECD, 2009) and most recently in 2013, covering 34 countries or economies, maintaining the focus on lower secondary education, but with some countries opting to administer the survey also in primary or upper secondary education (OECD, 2014). The Slovak Republic chose only to administer the survey in lower secondary education. The results derived from TALIS are based on self-reports from teachers and principals and therefore represent their opinions, perceptions, beliefs and their accounts of their activities. Further information is available at www.oecd.org/edu/talis.

2. Across the schools participating in TALIS 2008, 71% of Slovak teachers indicated receiving appraisal / feedback from their leaders at least twice per year (highest figure across all countries, against a TALIS average of 41%) and 73% of teachers indicated receiving appraisal / feedback from other teachers or members of the school management team at least twice per year (compared to a TALIS average of 49%) (OECD, 2009).

3. In OECD TALIS 2007-08, 26% of Slovak teachers reported that there was a mentoring programme or policy by which all new teachers worked with an experienced teacher who acted as their mentor (against a TALIS average of 37%), and 71% reported that such programmes or policies existed but were restricted to those in their first teaching position (against a TALIS average of 38%) (OECD, 2009).

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# *Chapter 5*

# School evaluation

*There are requirements for both external and self-evaluation for all Slovak schools. External evaluation is conducted by the Slovak State Schools Inspectorate (Štátna školská inšpekcia, ŠŠI) against a standard quality indicator framework. Schools must also complete an annual school reporting exercise, including a two-year development plan. There are also efforts to feedback information to schools on how their students perform in comparison to students in other schools. Feedback from complex school inspections appears to be valued by schools. However, other, more bureaucratic types of inspection are perceived as burdensome with little value. The chapter presents options to make external school evaluation more relevant for school improvement and to further stimulate school self-evaluation that engages stakeholders and uses a broad range of evidence.*

This chapter analyses approaches to school evaluation within the Slovak evaluation and assessment framework. School evaluation refers to the evaluation of individual schools as organisations. This chapter covers internal school evaluation (school self-evaluation) and external school evaluation.

## Context and features

Similar to experiences in other OECD countries, the topic of evaluating schools is becoming increasingly important in the Slovak Republic, particularly in response to perceived poor or declining performance in international assessments (see Chapter 1). In the past 15 years there has been renewed focus all over Europe on external school evaluation, in response to demands from citizens and politicians to hold schools accountable for their results and for improving student performance. This is further accentuated by policies to strengthen school autonomy in the context of the broader political imperative to build a civil society where citizens take responsibility for their own and others' wellbeing.[1] Development and improvement of schools is seen as a joint responsibility of the school leader, the school staff, but also of representatives of the school founder (a municipality, a region or a regional school authority for public schools; a state-approved church or religious community for church schools; or other approved legal entities or individuals for private schools) and of parents and other stakeholders in the school board (*Rada školy*).

This section presents the major aspects of school evaluation in the Slovak Republic: external evaluation by the Slovak Schools Inspectorate; school self-evaluation; the roles in school evaluation played by school boards, school founders and the local and regional school authorities; and the availability of school performance information.

### *External evaluation of schools by the Štátna školská inšpekcia (Slovak State Schools Inspectorate)*

#### *Governance and remit*

The Slovak State Schools Inspectorate (*Štátna školská inšpekcia*, ŠŠI) is a central control and evaluating body which is part of the state administration, but independent in its methodology, actions and reporting. Its operations and legitimacy are laid down in the laws of 2000, 2003, 2005 (Act 137/2005 on school inspection) and 2008 (see also Chapter 1).[2] The ŠŠI is established as a state administration institution in education, with its headquarters in Bratislava and executive branches in eight regional centres. Although funded by the Slovak Ministry of Education (MŠVVaŠ SR), the ŠŠI is independent in its work and acts in accordance with laws and other generally valid legal norms, acts and decrees. The ŠŠI's main authority is the Senior Chief Inspector, who is appointed on a five-year contract by the Minister of Education. School inspections are conducted by school inspectors (there are currently around 180 inspectors). There are demanding requirements to become a school inspector (both in terms of qualification level and experience in and around school education) and a bureaucratic appointment procedure.

The ŠŠI is responsible for inspecting all Slovak schools and school facilities (note that the OECD review focuses on schools), it scrutinises the conditions schools set for education and results, the quality of management, the efficiency of funding use and their compliance with binding regulations. Its remit includes assessing how educational goals are met, the monitoring of innovation in delivering education programmes, and the assessment of the provisions for the professional development of teachers. ŠŠI also seeks

to monitor the level of competence of school leaders and teachers, their qualifications and options for career growth and professional development. It also has to deal with complaints from parents or teachers if these have not been solved by the school itself or by the school founder or regional authority.

*Quality indicators in the Slovak inspection framework*

The ŠŠI uses a quality indicator framework that reflects the school factors identified in research as having the strongest association with high quality and effective schools (for example, Scheerens et al., 2003). Table 5.1 presents the quality indicators used in the Slovak inspection framework. Comparative analysis of 18 European inspectorates revealed no important differences in the sets of quality indicators and standards used; the differences are more a matter of terminology, grouping in domains or areas, and in the level of specification (Bruggen van, 2010a). Indeed, the quality issues in the Slovak inspection framework are comparable with that of the Czech Republic, the Netherlands and other countries.

**Table 5.1 Quality indicators in the Slovak inspection framework (2009)[3]**

| The quality of teaching and learning process, with as key aspects: |
|---|
| • quality of the teaching process and provision of the curriculum |
| • conditions for teaching, created by the teacher |
| • effectiveness of teaching |
| • quality of students´ learning |
| • education standards achievement (the level of students´ knowledge) |
| • students´ results |
| • personal and social development of students |
| • support for students |
| • school activities with significant impact on educational school performance |
| • preventive and multidisciplinary activities |

| The conditions of education: |
|---|
| • teachers' qualification |
| • school area facilities, conditions, school buildings |
| • material and technical equipment (including didactic tools) |
| • psycho-hygienic conditions |
| • health protection and safety in school |
| • security at school |

| Management and leadership: |
|---|
| • the development plan, the structure of the curriculum or school programme |
| • the main goals (aims) of education |
| • courses in the school programmes |
| • planning |
| • effectiveness of leadership |
| • control; the monitoring system |
| • information system |
| • pedagogical and school documentation |
| • school legislature and adherence to the norms and regulations |
| • school discipline and complaining procedures |
| • progress of achieving the targets and aims in the teaching plans and school programmes |
| • the quality of the teaching process and the applied methodology |
| • professional and pedagogical guidance |
| • qualification of a school leader required for the position and further professional development or in service training of teachers |

*Source:* SICI (2009), *Profile of the State School Inspectorate of the Slovak Republic*, the Standing International Conference of Inspectorates, Brussels, www.sici-inspectorates.eu/Members/Inspection-Profiles/Slovak-Republic

The inspection framework and quality indicators were published on the ŠŠI's website in 2011, following some pressure from the public and the teacher union, with the aim to stimulate schools to use this in their self-evaluation activities.

### Judgements about schools

All schools (public, private and church schools) are inspected in the same way against the same quality indicator framework. The ŠŠI uses a five-grade judgement scale and notes quality judgements for each quality indicator, for each quality domain and also for the school as a whole. To give an indication of the distribution of the ŠŠI judgements on this five-grade scale: overall 8% of schools were judged to be "very good"; 56% were "good"; 35.5% were "average"; 0.5% were "less satisfactory"; and 0.0% were "unsatisfactory" (SICI, 2009). (Although, these figures should be read with caution as they are averaged over different school sectors and the number of schools inspected differs per sector). The Annual Inspection Report (see below) presents the distribution of quality judgments for different school types and provides a comparison with earlier years.

### Inspectorate-developed student tests

The ŠŠI has the legal possibility to design its own student tests and to administer these to samples of students in schools. In international comparison, this is a rather extraordinary right (there are no other inspectorates that have this right or, if they still have it, use it). In 2010/11, a small number of tests were administered to younger students on their knowledge in some topics of Biology and Physics. However, the number of inspectorate-developed student tests has diminished over recent years and the ŠŠI informed the OECD review team that in fact no new tests are being developed.

### Different types of inspections conducted by the ŠŠI

The ŠŠI's annual report lists three different types of inspections that have been conducted in the given year (see Table 5.2). The fourth type of inspection is the follow-up inspection that can be conducted in schools where the inspectors have identified deficiencies during one of the other types of inspection. However, the OECD review revealed some confusion among schools on the different types of inspections conducted by the ŠŠI. In particular, schools do not perceive a big difference between informative and thematic inspections, particularly when these are coupled to a complex inspection. It seems that in practice there is not a clear distinction between the three types of inspections.

#### Table 5.2 Different types of inspection conducted in 2010/11

|  | Complex inspections | Information inspections | Thematic inspections |
|---|---|---|---|
| Basic schools | 176 | 160 | 279 |
| Academic (*Gymnázium*) | 27 | 0 | 128 |
| Other secondary schools | 23 | | |

*Source:* ŠŠI (*Štátna školská inšpekcia*) (2011), *Správa o stave a úrovni výchovy a vzdelávania v školách a školských zariadeniach v Slovenskej republike v školskom roku* 2010-2011 (Report on the status and level of upbringing and education in schools and educational facilities in the academic year 2010-2011), ŠŠI, www.ssiba.sk/admin/fckeditor/editor/userfiles/file/Dokumenty/sprava_2011.pdf.

## Complex inspections

The general inspections that should be conducted in each school once every five years are known as complex or comprehensive inspections. In terms of their design, methodology, reporting and function, these are comparable with "whole" or "full" inspections in many European countries. They are typically conducted over a period of three to seven days by a group of two to seven inspectors, depending on the size of the school and are generally respected and appreciated by schools (NÚCEM, 2012; confirmed by OECD review interviews). In 2010/11, 464 complex inspections were conducted in: 176 basic schools (of which: 156 public schools, 6 private schools and 14 church schools); 27 *Gymnázium*; 23 other secondary schools and 42 other schools (mostly special education schools); plus in 196 preschools. In 2011/12, 369 complex inspections were conducted (ŠŠI, 2012). Each complex inspection results in a report (delivered to the school and founder within 21 days) with an evaluation of the quality of the school and with recommendations for improvement. The report is not published, only a summary is provided on the Inspectorate's website. The law stipulates that the school can choose whether or not to publish the report; many seem reluctant to do so.

## Information inspections

"Information inspections" are essentially compliancy checks and are typically conducted in a single day. The Ministry orders the inspection of schools' compliancy with certain laws and regulations. The head of ŠŠI proposes such information inspections in the annual inspection plan which is approved by the Ministry. The 2008 law introduced a new task for ŠŠI to check and evaluate the school's education programme (SEP) against the published national education programmes (NEP). The law states that ŠŠI has to check whether there is enough coherence between the SEP and the NEP and in particular whether the curricula of the school for the subjects and grades respect adequately and sufficiently the educational standards set out in the respective sub-programme within the NEP. It is also clearly stated that the ŠŠI is the only agency that has the authority and power to state whether this is the case, which means that the ŠŠI has to deliver a license *ex-ante* on the school's execution of its SEP. Other examples of information inspections include a recent inspection of schools' policies for educating students against racism. Further, the 2010/11 Annual Inspection Report notes that two information inspections were conducted within the complex inspection procedure: schools' delivery of civic education in accordance with new decrees (e.g. the prescription that in all rooms a copy of the first article of the constitution about human rights for all people has to be fixed visibly for all students on a wall); and schools' delivery of Information and Communication Technology education.

## Thematic inspections

In "thematic inspections", a sample of schools is inspected for only a specific topic or theme. These are typically conducted over a period of two to four days. Examples of different themes inspected include: the implementation of reading literacy skills in the educational process in school activities; the professionalism of teaching and teachers; classroom atmosphere; the use of teaching aids and methods; the prevention of drug addictions as part of the educational process; and the development of ICT competences of teachers. Some themes may be of high priority and be included also within the complex inspection procedure.

Follow-up inspections

In all types of inspection, inspectors may identify shortcomings, for example, the violation of a particular regulation, or poor quality on a particular quality indicator. Upon completion of the inspection, the ŠŠI may impose one of the following measures: recommendations; warnings; the requirement for the school to adopt certain measures within a given time-period; orders for the school to immediately conduct specific tasks in order to eliminate serious mistakes and failures (see NÚCEM, 2012, Chapter 4 for a list of possible actions that the ŠŠI can take). The ŠŠI conducts follow-up inspections to monitor a school's success in repairing or improving the identified shortcoming. These are typically conducted over a period of one to three days. If the follow-up inspection identifies that serious problems persist, the ŠŠI can pursue one of three possible and far-reaching measures: *(i)* issue a binding recommendation to the school founder to postpone the re-appointment of the school leader after the term of five years, or even to dismiss the leader; *(ii)* in case of serious quality problems, school inspection findings can result (especially with private schools) in financial budget restrictions; *(iii)* for public schools with very serious negative findings (significant failings in the process of management and leadership, in the process of teaching, etc.) and lack of improvement during the assigned time, the chief inspector (after negotiations with the school founder) submits the proposal to the MŠVVaŠ SR (the Ministry of Education) to close the school and exclude it from the national school network. These three measures are very rarely used.

*Annual Inspection Report*

The ŠŠI delivers an Annual Inspection Report with the analysis of all its inspection work (e.g. ŠŠI, 2011). The report gives a summary evaluation for the education system as a whole based on inspection analysis about all schools that have been inspected and evidence from other sources (see Chapter 6). The report lists the names and addresses of all schools that have been inspected and presents summary information on all quality indicators for each type of school (preschool, basic school, *gymnázium* and other secondary school types). These summaries can be used by schools as a benchmark for their own self-evaluation.

### *School self-evaluation*

School self-evaluation has received increased policy focus over recent years, including the introduction of reporting requirements for schools, initiatives to support self-evaluation activities and training requirements and accountability measures for school leaders.

*Reporting requirements*

Since 2003, primary and secondary school leaders are obliged to submit a report on the school's educational activities, results and conditions (hereafter referred to as the annual school report) to the school founder for approval and to the school board for comment. In 2006 a decree further specified the structure and content of these annual school reports, and the Ministry published related guidelines that schools should follow in drawing them up. The guidelines specified that the report should include information on "the areas in which the school achieves good results; and the areas in which the school fails and where the level of its education must be improved, including the proposal of measures" (Eurypedia, 2012). School leaders also have to describe a "conceptual intention of school development elaborated at least for the period of the following two

years and its annual evaluation" (NÚCEM, 2012). This clearly implies that schools should have a cyclical self-evaluation and self-development process in place. The school leader must finish the report before 31 December of each year and publish it on the school's website with a physical copy accessible in a convenient place at the school.

*Support for school self-evaluation*

In April 2012 when the OECD review team visited the Slovak Republic, there were several new or planned initiatives to support school self-evaluation activities. The Ministry had set up a working group to refine the content requirements in annual school reports, by defining a more specific set of quality criteria on a more specific set of content items. The Ministry also intended to publish a new set of related guidelines and to create a set of benchmarks for schools in order to stimulate their use in self-evaluation activities (NÚCEM, 2012). Further, three agencies had secured European Social Funds for projects to improve self-evaluation activities in Slovak schools (about one million Euros for each project): the ŠŠI; the national Methodological Pedagogical Centre (MPC) with a pilot with 150 schools (this project was stopped by the new Minister later in Spring 2012); and the Bratislava Autonomous Region. However, there is no clear national programme of innovation or dissemination into which these projects fit and there are no clear signs of co-operation or co-ordination.

The ŠŠI project is developing a framework for schools for their self-evaluation processes and draws on international experience in other inspectorates (members of SICI). Progress on this development can be followed via the ŠŠI's website (www.ssiba.sk/projektyESF), e.g. research reports drawing on European inspection models and suggested sets of indicators. In March 2012 a conference was held with scientists and partners from other institutes about the making of a framework for SSE in connection with external inspections and the definition of a set of standards for "good self-evaluation". Reports from SICI's Effective School Self Evaluation project were also presented. The ŠŠI project aims to develop processes, frameworks and models of and for self-evaluation that are in line with methods of external school evaluation. The MPC had announced that it wanted to develop "good practice inspiring examples" of school self-evaluation approaches and use these in their courses for in-service training.

*Training requirements and accountability for school leaders*

The Acts of 2003 and 2009 detail the rights and duties for school leaders (see also Chapter 4). School leaders are awarded five-year contracts and are appointed by the school founder. The school board functions as the selection committee for applicants and since recently the ŠŠI has also had a voice in that selection. The chief inspector can issue a written note to the school founder to remove the school leader if serious deficiencies are found in inspection and have not been rectified after two follow-up inspections. However, this very rarely happens. School founders are responsible for the regular evaluation of school leaders and typically make heavy use of the annual school reports in undertaking this task.

School leaders must have acquired a higher education degree and have at least five years of experience as a teacher. They are required to take specialised training courses (160 to 200 hours to be taken within a period of two years) on school management within the first three years of their appointment. These courses are offered by the MPC or by university faculties. Every seven years, established school leaders must take in-service

training of some 60 lessons with a focus on managing the improvement of teachers' competences.

### The role of school boards in school evaluation

The school acts of 2003 and later specify roles for the school boards in school evaluation. First, they act as the selection committee when founders are hiring new school leaders. This process is also an opportunity to define priorities for school development against an assessment of the current status of the school. Second, school boards have a role in establishing the school education programme. Although only an advisory role, this is an opportunity to express opinions based on evaluation, and the school board's advice can give direction to the further development of the school. Third and most explicitly, the school board must provide written comment on the annual school report and the school development plans that are submitted to the school founder for approval.

### The role of school founders in school evaluation

As a complement to the ŠŠI inspections, school founders are responsible for monitoring: school compliance with legal regulations that are not monitored by the ŠŠI; the quality of food in school canteens, the management of school funds, and use of physical resources. In addition, school founders deal with complaints from parents and others that do not fall under the responsibility of the ŠŠI. School founders must approve the school's financial report (submitted in an annex to its annual school report) and submit it via a web application as part of a summary for all the schools they have founded. However, the school founders are also responsible for the regular evaluation, appointment and dismissal of school leaders (see above) and must approve the annual school report and the school development plan (for at least a two-year period).

### The role of local and regional authorities in school evaluation

In general, the assessment and evaluation function of local and regional authorities is very limited, and they focus mainly on the administration of the regional part of the national school network, and the correct use of the school's budget. However, if the ŠŠI signals very serious problems in a school or the need to dismiss a school leader, the regional authority must act. Chapter 6 explores the role of local and regional authorities in system evaluation.

### Availability of school performance information

Schools receive a full inspection report following an inspection and school founders may request a copy of this report. The public can read a summary (not the full report) of an inspection report for a given school on the ŠŠI's and school's websites, where they should also be able to access the annual school report. In addition, some information on school average results in major national tests and examinations are published on line. The National Institute of Certified Educational Measurement (NÚCEM) publishes the *Testovanie 9* results on its website in regional tables containing the percentage of correct marks for Slovak language and literature and mathematics over the past three years, and the placement in the national percentile for each school. Information is also provided showing how a school's performance relates to the national average. These results are also sent directly to schools six weeks after students have been tested. None of the results are adjusted for the school's socio-economic context or intake.

In addition, results and ranking for the top ten schools in the Slovak language and literature tests in *Testovanie 9* were published and promoted in the media in 2010/11. Similarly, the NÚCEM publishes an annual report on the results of the external part of the *Maturita* examination and individual subject results for individual schools in each subject, as well as the aggregate results by the type of school, region, gender etc. Information on student application and enrolment in university studies for individual secondary schools is not available, although aggregate information is posted on the website of the Institute for Information and Prognoses of Education (UIPŠ).

A sign that there is emerging demand for more information about school performance in the public domain is that the Institute for Economic and Social Reform (INEKO), a non-governmental organisation, launched an internet portal in March 2011 with school results in *Testovanie 9* and *Maturita* examinations**.** The portal also includes information on the ŠŠI's inspection judgements for each school (although not the ŠŠI inspection summary report). This enables parents and others (including regional or local authorities and school boards) to use this information in their assessment and evaluation activities. INEKO's website also includes information on a school's socio-economic context, which allows users to better estimate the school's quality based on these results and its context, which is not provided by the ŠŠI or the NÚCEM. INEKO reported that the portal had been consulted more than 10000 times over the three months preceding the OECD review. The UIPŠ plans to develop a more comprehensive and statistically reliable link between students' performance and the social, cultural and economic context of the schools they attend by connecting the database of the UPSVaR (Central Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family) with its own databases.

## Strengths

### *A well elaborated system of external school evaluation, notably the complex inspections*

There is a well elaborated system of complex inspections, with an adequate quality framework for evaluating the various kinds of schools. The inspection framework includes different areas of school quality and related sets of indicators and these are in line with the internationally recognised quality aspects associated with effective schools. Although when compared internationally the inspection framework for school use was published rather late (in 2011), it is accessible and can be used by schools in their self-evaluation activities. There are adequate procedures and methods for evaluation, including paperwork in advance, meetings, classroom visits, feedback meetings and reports. The OECD review team formed the impression that schools and other stakeholders seem to be satisfied with these complex inspections and their usefulness for the further development of the school, in addition to their accountability purpose in keeping schools up to standards.

The ŠŠI's work meets international standards on validity, objectivity and reliability. The ŠŠI inspection reports on individual schools are published in summary form on its website, so parents and other stakeholders can access the main messages and recommendations from the school inspection. The ŠŠI has a system in place to deal with complaints from students, parents and teachers and has responded to growing concerns over the objectivity of teachers' administration and grading in high stakes student assessment by conducting unannounced visits in a sample of 150 schools, mainly schools where concerns have been raised. In principle, there is also the opportunity for school leaders to give feedback on the school inspection process by completing a questionnaire

at the end of the inspection. However, the last review and analysis of these questionnaires seems to be for the school year 2007/08.

The ŠŠI's Annual Inspection Report summarises the evidence on school quality collected via school inspections to provide information on the quality of the overall school system in the Slovak Republic and provides comparisons with previous years, which allows the identification of how various aspects of quality have progressed or declined in schools. It is a valuable starting point for further evaluative activities and for focused actions by schools, the MPC, pedagogical higher education institutes and the ministry. It also provides data on the number of complex inspections and thematic inspections etc.

The ŠŠI has systems in place to improve its own service and capacity, and works towards the further and continued professional development of inspectors as an essential aspect of ensuring reliable and professional inspection judgements. Further, the ŠŠI has a good international outlook and some good international co-operation, for example, it is active in the international association SICI (Standing International Conference of Inspectorates of Education).

### *A system to follow up the results of external school evaluation is in place*

The inspectorate has a system of follow up inspections, depending on how a school has been judged. For example, schools may be required to immediately correct any non-compliance with regulations, or may be given a short period of time to address unsatisfactory quality issues. The ŠŠI will return for a follow up inspection to check that the necessary improvements have been made.

Schools are able to ask for help in their improvement work. However, not many agencies offer schools support and for many schools there is no faculty or guidance institute or methodological pedagogical centre (one of the three branches of the MPC) in the area.

### *Complex and thematic inspections include classroom visits and feedback to teachers*

In complex and thematic inspections, inspectors conduct classroom observations using a stable analytical observation and judgment instrument. These instruments and procedures are comparable with other European inspectorates. The OECD review team formed the impression that teachers see these classroom visits not as a threat, but rather as an opportunity for their work with students to be recognised (see Chapter 4), and that having an expert in their classroom was appreciated, providing that the expert demonstrated teaching expertise by giving feedback and entering discussions. Inspectors also provoke a self-evaluation exercise, by asking teachers to give their own account on the observed lesson, before giving feedback to teachers.

In Slovak schools there is a long tradition that school leaders and other management conduct classroom visits, and inspectors can build on that tradition. Inspections are a good opportunity to give direct feedback to teachers and to link inspection to guidance and to discussions on school development. However, this depends on the frequency and intensity of classroom visits, and on the availability of inspectors for feedback.

*The importance of school self-evaluation is recognised and has some legal underpinning*

There is a general understanding that school self-evaluation helps schools to identify their own strengths and weaknesses so that they can focus on issues that will improve quality. This is recognised in education policy and has been formulated in governmental papers, laws and measures and elaborated in national guidance and school support schemes. The OECD review revealed that self-evaluation is widely supported by agencies such as the ŠŠI, the Teacher Unions and Associations, as well as teachers and leaders within schools.

There are regulations in place to help stimulate school self-evaluation. Notably, all schools must write an annual school report that includes school results, along with other relevant information. The School Board (with representatives from the parents, teachers and the founder) must comment on this report, the process of which helps empower teachers, parents and other stakeholders of the school to understand and form opinions on school issues. This binds the school and its work more closely to society in a "small" (local) and "large" (national, regional) sense.

Schools must also develop a specific school education programme in line with the National Framework for the Curriculum (in the future also with the new curriculum standards under development), which is checked by the ŠŠI. This again empowers those connected to the school and allows the school to set its own profile, priorities and pedagogical focuses. This encourages an annual school self-evaluation cycle in the style of the well-known Deming Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle (see Tague, 2004 and for an overview of self-evaluation, Burkard and Eikenbusch, 2006). Other measures supporting school self-evaluation are the regulations around teacher appraisal and the appraisal of school leaders (see Chapter 4).

*The culture of classroom visits by school leadership allows opportunity for school improvement*

There is an accepted culture and practice of classroom visits executed by head teachers or heads of subject departments (see also Chapter 4). These classroom visits are focused on professional feedback for teachers, which is a major aspect of school quality. This established culture may give Slovak schools a major advantage in building good self-evaluation practices and encouraging school improvement (compared with schools in other countries) if classroom visits by school leadership are coupled with school self-evaluation processes in a smart way. These visits and feedback may also be linked to a more general framework of indicators for good teaching and learning as one dimension of the school quality, and by this contribute considerably to school self-evaluation and a culture of permanent assessment (where are we?), evaluation (is that good enough?) and planning and improvement (what can you do and what are we going to do together?). The involvement of school heads as pedagogical leaders in direct work with teachers and their students is a vital factor for school improvement (e.g. Sammons et al., 2011). However, the OECD review team noted the need to further strengthen pedagogical leadership (see Chapter 4).

*Emerging practices of teacher peer evaluation among schools*

There seem to be developments towards more peer-evaluation among teachers; by classroom visits in their own school and by discussions in teams within schools about the

planning of lessons and projects and the assessment of students. The OECD review team learned of emerging practice among subject groups of teachers across several schools in one town or region, or among teachers within a school founder network. Peer evaluation is a very valuable asset for further building school self-evaluation and school improvement processes. Seeking external ideas and support from other schools is a feature of effective professional learning communities (Bolam et al., 2005). There is considerable evidence, for example from England, Finland and Sweden in the United Kingdom, that school-school partnerships, clusters and networks can provide mechanisms for sharing effective leadership as well as effective practice in a way that contributes to raising the performance of the member schools (Pont et al., 2008).

### Three major projects to support the further development of school self-evaluation

The large school self-evaluation projects (co-ordinated by the ŠŠI, the NÚCEM and the Bratislava Regional Authority) funded by the European Social Fund are in various stages of development and provide financial and capacity building potential for broad and powerful further development of school self-evaluation in the Slovak Republic. The OECD review team did not learn specifically about the NÚCEM and Bratislava projects, but the ŠŠI obtained a grant of almost one million euros for a project aimed at linking school self-evaluation to external evaluation. The project started in 2009 with a preparation phase, and now is in the phase of designing models and frameworks for action. This project is in line with a priority of the government: strengthening school self-evaluation in and around schools. A major strength of the ŠŠI's approach is its strong international outlook from the outset, including a large conference in early 2012. The ŠŠI has analysed efforts and approaches in other inspectorates (in the network of SICI) and therefore avoids "reinventing the wheel". Following a critical analysis and careful reflection about how to adapt to the specific circumstances in the Slovak Republic, the ŠŠI adapts frameworks and approaches from countries such as Scotland, the Netherlands, and draws on SICI's Effective School Self-Evaluation project.

### Availability for schools of objective and comparative data about student assessment

Results from national assessments are fed back to schools with information allowing them to compare their overall student performance with national benchmarks. Schools receive their school results digitally within three weeks of the *Testovanie* 9, and a few days later in print. They also receive a comparison of the school's ranking per region and nationally. It is possible for schools to analyse their development on these measures over the past three years (since the start of the *Testovanie 9*) for a deeper analysis in alignment with their SEP, teacher appraisal results and specific school self-evaluation actions. *Gymnázium* and secondary vocational schools have a similar possibility to compare their performance nationally using the *Maturita* results. Further, the OECD review revealed the wide use of student assessments developed by private companies that are purchased from schools' lump sum budget. Schools reported appreciation of the availability of assessments in different subjects and grades to complement the *Testovanie 9*, and the feedback of results allowing a comparison of their performance with other schools.

## Challenges

### *A perception that there is a reduced focus on complex inspections poses risks to the ŠŠI's credibility*

The OECD review team formed the impression that the volume of thematic and information inspections puts the regular 5-year cycle of complex inspections at risk. Interviews with schools and other stakeholders identified examples of schools that had not had a complex inspection carried out in over seven years. Further, schools and other stakeholders reported that the thematic and/or information inspections (as explained above there seems to be some lack of clarity in terminology among schools and some officials) had been experienced as bureaucratic exercises placing demands on school time, but not providing useful feedback for the school. In particular, the OECD review team heard examples of recent ŠŠI visits to check whether the SEP is in line with the NEP and whether the school has an anti-racism policy. Reportedly, the ŠŠI is only checking documentation and is not inspecting classrooms to check whether the documented issues are put into practice. Schools experience this as a shift "backwards" towards a more bureaucratic inspectorate. In stark contrast, all stakeholders during the OECD review expressed strong support for complex inspections and many expressed concern about the perceived shift away from these.

The OECD review team notes that this perception that the ŠŠI is moving towards a more bureaucratic style of inspection, coupled with the concern that school inspections lack concrete connection with school improvement (see below), poses serious risks to the ŠŠI's reputation and image. The need to keep, or in some cases regain, its positive image by restoring the 5-year cycle of complex inspections is a real strategic problem for the ŠŠI's management. To keep validity and credibility for the ŠŠI's accountability function (i.e. reporting to the public on the quality of Slovak schools), the complex inspections need to be executed with a good level of intensity and coverage of the school as a whole. But complex inspections also need to stimulate improvements in the inspected schools. Increased demands on the ŠŠI to conduct other types of inspections, but without additional resources, necessarily reduces the ŠŠI's capacity to conduct complex inspections. The ŠŠI's management would need to build political recognition and support to intensify and restore a solid system of complex inspections.

### *School inspections have too little significance for school improvement*

The OECD review team has noted that the complex inspections could have a great deal of impact on real school improvement. However, for this to be the case, there would need to be a full system of follow-up inspections for all schools, expanded feedback to teachers after classroom visits, and the inspection outcomes would need to be connected more firmly with external support and improvement work of school leaders. Currently, this potential impact is not fully realised.

### *Limited follow up after school inspections*

Follow-up inspections are only conducted in schools where the ŠŠI has identified that minimum legal standards have not been met. Importantly, these follow-up inspections do not primarily focus on strategies for promoting improvements in the quality of teaching and learning and better outcomes for students, but rather on compliance. Currently, there is no special supervision over schools where student results are poor and/or deteriorating, and this leads to a further deterioration in their quality (NÚCEM, 2012). Further, the

OECD review team notes a lack of clarity on the procedures and function of the follow-up inspections. For example: deciding which schools require a follow-up inspection, the nature of recommendations in complex and other inspections and whether these are mandatory, the time period between a complex inspection and a follow-up inspection, and in which situation and how often the potential sanctions are imposed on schools. The OECD review team formed the impression that follow-up inspections are not very sharp or functional and that in most cases inspectors give rather general recommendations. Emerging evidence from international research on the impact of school inspections indicates that only specific and pinpointed recommendations have influence (e.g. Luginbuhl et al., 2009; Ehren, 2010).[4] There is, therefore, a challenge for the ŠŠI to improve its impact by the better use of follow-up inspections, and sharper and more specific feedback to schools.

*Support systems for school improvement are inadequate and not sufficiently connected to inspection results*

There is no problem for follow-up inspections to focus on aspects of school compliance (this is the case in some other inspectorates in Europe), however, this needs to be accompanied by a system of help, advice and guidance for all schools in drawing up a plan for improvement after inspection (also for schools without major quality concerns). This requires an extensive support system with local or regional centres for school guidance and an adequate and targeted offer of in-service training. However, the OECD review team formed the impression that in-service training is currently not "client driven" and is based on what experts identify as important and not on the real problems faced in schools. Following an inspection, if a school is motivated to start the improvement process, it cannot easily find enough targeted support. Also, the OECD review team formed the opinion that pedagogical leadership was not yet sufficiently developed in many Slovak schools and that there is little pressure or incentive for schools with identified concerns to work on improvement.

There is limited information from school inspections available to schools about other schools, and the inspection framework appears to remain quite remote. Although the Ministry of Education informed the OECD review team of a new publication promoting practices in selected schools, this was not known to schools visited during the OECD review. However, during the OECD review, interviews with teachers indicated a demand for information on successful practices for school improvement. Individual teachers may research independently, but there is no major resource that they can refer to. Similarly, the OECD review team formed the impression that there was limited communication among local schools.

*Forming judgements and giving feedback on the quality of teaching and learning*

During the OECD review, discussions with different stakeholders revealed concerns about the indicators used by inspectors to judge the quality of teaching and learning in classrooms. The general impression was that these were too vague. Further, it was not clear whether teachers really receive some substantive form of feedback from inspectors. This is a sensitive issue in most European inspectorates (Bruggen van, 2010). It is always important that teachers feel that their teaching is judged objectively and fairly and with a good pedagogical competence. The OECD review team was unable to investigate this thoroughly, but gained the impression that some teachers may question the expertise of inspectors in this area.

*A lack of research into the impact of the ŠŠI's inspections*

While the OECD review team gained a strong impression that the complex inspections are appreciated by schools and have some impact on school improvement and change, no explicit research was found about the impact of the ŠŠI's work in schools on teachers, on local or regional authorities, on the MPC's work and the pedagogical faculties, or on the ministry. During the OECD review, schools typically gave only limited examples of how they had used conclusions and recommendations from an inspection, and local or regional authorities did not appear to make extensive use of thematic inspection reports or an analysis of inspection reports for schools in their area. The impact of the ŠŠI's work does not seem to be the subject of research.

### School performance data do not allow for the school's context

There are no national data about the socio-economic intake of students in schools. The NÚCEM publishes school average results on national assessments and ranks schools on these results in static tables on its website. The publication of such "raw scores" of school performance without any adjustment for the school's context and socio-economic and educational intake can lead to users of the information making unfair comparisons and judgements on school quality. For this reason, any attempt to use the results of *Testovanie* 9 and the *Maturita* to rank schools as an indication of the quality of the education they provide should be approached with extreme caution. Rather than simply being objective measures of school effectiveness, students' performance in these assessments is affected by factors that are beyond the control of the school, such as prior attainment and social background. While these should not be seen as excuses for having low expectations of disadvantaged students, it would be quite possible for a school with relatively poor results at the end of a phase to be providing a better education for their students given the factors it can control, than one that superficially performs much better. Furthermore, another important contextual factor in comparing *Testovanie 9* results is the academic selection of students. There is a clear inequity in attempting to compare *Testovanie 9* results, as in some primary schools many of the best students leave for Gymnasia in Year 6, with other more academic students going to bi-lingual schools in Year 8. This leaves only the relatively less academic students in that school to be tested in Year 9.

The lack of contextual information on schools also has consequences for the ŠŠI. Inspectors are not able to connect, in a nationally standardised and fair way, the findings about student outcomes with key facts on the school's intake, in order to form a fair judgment about the real contribution the school has made to the observed student outcomes. It is not clear to what extent inspectors analyse the *Testovanie 9* results and whether they attempt to gather contextual information about the school in order to form a more balanced judgment on school quality. In the absence of national data and central guidelines from the ŠŠI, each inspector's interpretation of these results as an indicator of school performance is highly subjective.

### Lack of clarity on inspection procedures to evaluate teacher appraisal systems as part of school quality

The law specifies that the ŠŠI should check whether the school has a system for teacher appraisal and whether this system works adequately. In undertaking this task, it is not clear whether the ŠŠI also connects the state of teacher competencies and teacher quality with the inspection of the teaching. This is a sensitive issue in almost all

inspectorates as for whole-school evaluations it is stated that the inspectors "only" evaluate the teaching in general, and not the individual teacher with potential consequences for his/her salary or career. However, the teacher appraisal system in the Slovak Republic has been developed based on the deeply-rooted knowledge that a school's quality is firmly linked to the quality of its individual teachers (see Chapter 4). Schools know that the inspectors use a list of "teacher competencies" or "elements of good teaching", but during the OECD review, school leaders and teachers expressed the perception that this was a "secret list" and that they were not certain whether it was systematically used. The OECD review also revealed sensitivity from teachers over concerns that inspectors may communicate to school leaders their appraisal of individual teachers, or even that school leaders may show individual teacher appraisal information to inspectors.

### Building a culture in schools of ongoing self-evaluation and improvement

While the OECD review team notes that there are good initiatives to stimulate a culture of self-evaluation in schools, self-evaluation practices are just starting to be introduced and are not yet well connected to the overall framework of assessment and evaluation in the Slovak Republic. A general acceptance of the principle of school self-evaluation is not sufficient to implement a culture of the "planning-development-check-act" cycle to ensure the evaluation and planning of new measures or actions, the execution of plans, and the evaluation of their impact. This is a significant challenge that the OECD has seen in several review countries. While the Slovak Republic has secured funding for national and regional level projects to help further stimulate a culture of self-evaluation in schools, these are not linked to a national strategic plan and lack co-ordination. This runs the risk of compromising efforts in terms of energy and money invested in the individual projects against their potential impact, and importantly, may damage the willingness of schools to participate in these efforts if they perceive conflicting messages and approaches being promoted by the different projects.

### An urgent need to introduce more harmony and direction in schools' approach to self-evaluation

More unity in the approaches of Slovak schools to self-evaluation is required as soon as possible. There is still a lack of general acceptance of the ŠŠI's framework for assessing school quality, which could also be used as a general framework for school self-evaluation, as well as for teacher appraisal and the external school evaluation by other stakeholders. This lack of standing for the ŠŠI's school evaluation framework results in misunderstandings and too much time invested in terminological or epistemological discussions, and hampers a broader discussion about the quality of schools by society.

While the three major self-evaluation projects funded by the European Social Fund provide an opportunity to develop national support to self-evaluation, it appears that these are not linked in a co-ordinated way. The challenge for the Ministry is to avoid a confusing number of different approaches and frameworks being developed for school self-evaluation. During the OECD review, discussions in schools revealed some concerns that three different self-evaluation frameworks with quality indicators would be developed and published for general use. This could lead to confusion in schools and to an investment of the scarce energy and resources in more theoretical discussions about "better frameworks", as was the case in other countries such as the Netherlands and England during the 1990s. Although there is no generally accepted theory about a school self-evaluation framework and approach, and academic discussion is natural, it is

important to avoid too much focus on academic discussion that may hinder school self-evaluation development in schools.

Discussions during the OECD review revealed a challenge to develop more unity in a framework for teacher appraisal (see Chapter 4). Currently, there are several different ideas and indicators used to evaluate "good teaching". The MPC is revising the existing national teaching standards, but will need to conduct this work both quickly and in a way that ensures adequate national and regional discussion. The OECD review team noted much uncertainty and many stakeholders lacking knowledge about this work.

### *Annual school reports do not sufficiently address the quality of teaching and learning*

The OECD review revealed that schools perceive the production of an annual school report as a bureaucratic exercise that does not have value for school development or improvement. Most annual school reports seem to be restricted to only financial, statistical and administrative issues and do not report about students' educational results and outcomes – except rather generally about national examination (*Maturita*) or assessment (*Testovanie* 9) results (without detailed analysis and without a link to the school's educational planning). Typically, schools do not report results from planned developments and innovations of teaching and learning and school organisation. The challenge is for schools to produce their annual school report with a broader view on reporting and accountability about quality. The OECD review team learned that the national culture promoted during the former communist period meant that schools still struggle with the idea of openly publishing a list of their strengths and weaknesses in an annual school report. The former government aimed to address this cultural resistance by allowing schools to keep the more analytical part of their annual school report for internal purposes only. It is not clear to the OECD review team how this issue has developed.

### *A need to strengthen school use of data in self-evaluation*

It is not very clear whether schools have the capacity to use the results of tests (*Testovanie 9*, *Maturita* and private tests) in an adequate way for analysis and as a basis for well focused improvement work. During the OECD review, several stakeholders expressed doubts regarding school leadership and teacher capacity to interpret data results. The OECD review also revealed a strong demand from schools for more training and that the MPC did not have an adequate offer to meet this demand (see also Chapter 4).

### *A need to strengthen the role of school leaders as pedagogical leaders*

The Slovak Republic has clear professional development rights and requirements for school leaders. However, the OECD review revealed both concerns about the quality of some of the professional development offered and a need to improve school leaders' competencies in conducting teacher appraisal (Chapter 4) and other evaluative tasks. The dominance of general management, administrative and financial matters appears to overshadow the pedagogical leadership role. The ŠŠI has noted a lack of pedagogical leadership, inadequate teacher appraisal and subsequent follow up with improvement plans and in-service training (ŠŠI, 2011, p. 18).

*A need to strengthen the evaluative role and function of the school boards*

The OECD review team gained the impression that in general school boards do not yet capitalise on the legal framework to fully contribute to school evaluation and improvement, but rather only act where there are major concerns or on superficial issues. Notably, there is room to strengthen the role of the school boards in their discussions about the draft of the annual school report that is presented to them for comment. This process of discussion and review can help schools to be more aware of main points in their development and is important for strengthening the idea of a civil society that expresses itself about important school issues.

*A need to rethink the role of inspections in light of an emerging culture of self-evaluation in schools*

The OECD review team gained the impression that as yet there is no clear strategic thinking on how to relate the emerging culture of school self-evaluation (that is hoped to expand in numbers and thoroughness in coming years) with the external inspections conducted by the ŠŠI. The ŠŠI's focus on strengthening the capacity of schools to undertake self-evaluations fits well into the general political lines of self-governance and schools taking more responsibility while being held accountable. It is hoped that this focus will lead to improved school self-evaluation capacity and this would require a re-examination of the inspection approach, so as not to duplicate evaluation activities.

## Policy recommendations

On the basis of the analysis of strengths and challenges in this chapter, the OECD review team proposes the following general directions for policy development for consideration by the Slovak experts:

- Prioritise complex inspections and reinforce their impact on the quality of teaching and learning.

- Increase transparency of school inspection results and follow up.

- Develop a strategy for the future integration of school inspection with school self-evaluation.

- Ensure that adequate attention is paid to the school's context in school evaluation.

- Broaden the range of data used to evaluate schools.

- Drive forward the development of self-evaluation in schools and strengthen support.

- Further stimulate evaluative responsibilities for school boards.

*Prioritise complex inspections and reinforce their impact on the quality of teaching and learning*

Schools perceive complex inspections as useful in indicating points for action and improvement, not only in legal aspects or administrative regulations, but also in matters of pedagogy and teaching. In this context, the OECD review team has noted the significant challenge that the perceived diminished frequency and status of complex inspections poses to both the ŠŠI's reputation and potential impact on school improvement. We recommend a serious reflection on how to heighten the relevance of

the external school evaluation system for school improvement. In particular, we strongly recommend keeping the system of complex inspections in place for the coming five to eight years, because it is clear that it will take a substantial period of time for schools to develop effective systems of self-evaluation. At the same time, the ŠŠI should develop a strategy to change the inspection approach once school self-evaluation practices are well established (see below). The system of complex inspections allows for a healthy external pressure on schools, an objective evaluation by experts, and it could even be discussed whether the frequency of complex inspections could be increased from five to three years.

The real value to school improvement that complex inspections offer is their feedback on a number of teaching and learning issues that could be improved, and not necessarily or predominantly a list of issues of non-compliance to be addressed by schools. With such inspections, the ŠŠI can communicate that an "acceptable" or "sufficient" level of teaching and learning is not enough and that all Slovak schools should strive for improvement, not just those with serious deficiencies. Robust and informed objective feedback from inspectors on areas for improvement and possible actions can help schools move towards excellence. Inspectors are not in a position to become school advisors, but they can indicate where there are possibilities for improvement and this is reportedly appreciated by Slovak schools.

There is a need, therefore, to ensure that inspectors have the capacity to provide objective feedback at a general level on teaching. One way to improve the ŠŠI's capacity here is to compile examples of how teaching practice has been improved at a general level from different school inspections. Such a resource can be used by inspectors in their meetings to give general feedback to teachers after a complex inspection. This and other creative ways to pool the collective expertise of inspectors will help inspectors to reinforce their role as "connoisseurs" of good teaching (the term comes from Elliott Eisner – Eisner, 1985), so that teachers' receive feedback that is helpful and sheds light on ways to work with students.

If the ŠŠI needs to integrate either a thematic or information inspection within a complex inspection in order to ensure implementation of complex inspections on a five-year cycle, there may be a need to limit the complex inspection to part of the school (e.g. in selected school years or in selected school subjects). In this case, it would be important for inspectors to stimulate schools to complete the complex inspection themselves in other parts of the school. For example, by promoting the inspection framework, by holding a conference during or shortly after the inspection, and by stimulating peer reviews among schools.

### Increase transparency of school inspection results and follow up

The OECD review team recommends that the ŠŠI publishes on its website all inspection reports (with the exception of those of a confidential nature), so that they are easily accessible to the public. There is also more room for transparency in how the findings and/or recommendations in the inspection reports will be followed up. First, the ministry could stimulate school accountability and the involvement of parents and other stakeholders by requiring schools to publish a written comment on how they will act on the analysis and conclusions within the inspection report. It could also be specified that such written comment should be published in an accessible manner within a given time period, e.g. within six weeks after the inspection report is published. Second, a year after the complex inspection, a school would be expected to report on what it has done to address issues raised by the inspectors and the school's self-evaluation of how well it has

progressed in each area. The ŠŠI could use these school follow-up reports in tandem with the annual school reports to analyse school improvement and quality. Such analysis would determine the need for further follow-up inspections and would form an important part of a risk-based inspection approach. It could also be useful for the ŠŠI to implement a more restricted system of unannounced follow-up inspections in a random sample of the schools inspected in the previous year. Third, based on analysis in this follow-up inspection approach, the ŠŠI would collect and compile good practice examples of schools that have implemented successful development plans and improvement strategies following a complex inspection. These good practices can be published and shared with all schools.

### *Develop a strategy for the future integration of school inspection with school self-evaluation*

The OECD review team recommends that the Ministry of Education and the ŠŠI develop a strategy for the evolution of school inspection in light of the positive development of an emerging culture of self-evaluation in Slovak schools. In particular, strategic reflection is required on how the complex inspection procedure will be adjusted and integrated with effective school self-evaluation. This discussion about the relation between external and internal school evaluation is important in many inspectorates (see the analysis of Bruggen van, 2010a and some SICI–workshops on www.sici-inspectorates.eu). For example, SICI's Effective School Self-Evaluation project examined the use of "proportional" external inspections. A "proportional approach" would mean that the ŠŠI would abandon the idea of conducting complete complex inspections, but rather check the validity and reliability of school self-evaluation by conducting small sample inspections in classrooms and verifying documentation. A second possibility would be for the ŠŠI to adopt a "risk-based approach" to complex inspections. In this case, the ŠŠI would only conduct complex inspections in schools in which weak or deteriorating student performance results (on the *Testovanie 9* or on the external part of the *Maturita*) are identified and/or other factors that raise concerns about the school's quality (e.g. a sharp drop in student intake or a number of parental complaints). Such signals of quality concerns in a school could lead to a quick or even unannounced complex inspection, such as the risk-based inspection that has been developed in the Netherlands and, to some extent, in other countries. A third possibility would be for the ŠŠI to develop a combination of both the proportional and risk-based approaches, such as the "differentiated system of inspection" that has been developed in the Flemish Community of Belgium (see Shewbridge et al. 2011). Further information on this can be found in presentations about possible combinations of external and internal school evaluation from a SICI workshop in Portugal (Grenho, 2009) and also the coupling of internal and external school reviews in New Zealand (see Nusche et al., 2012).

In the short term, the ŠŠI, as part of its complex inspections, can inspect the school's systems for self-evaluation and assess what can be done to expand and improve those systems. This would form part of the professional evaluation of the school's management and development systems and is not a type of proportional inspection where the external inspection is done in a more complex or deeper way in proportion with the outcomes of the internal evaluations (see above). In this way, the ŠŠI can build up evidence on the evolution of the self-evaluation culture in Slovak schools, which can feed into strategic decisions on how to better integrate inspection with school self-evaluation in the future.

### *Ensure that adequate attention is paid to the school's context in school evaluation*

The OECD review team notes the importance of providing adequate contextual information on schools in order to ensure better interpretation of school performance information, notably the publication of school average results in *Testovanie 9* and *Maturita*. In this context, it will be important to adequately support and prioritise the Institute for Information and Prognoses of Education (UIPŠ) work on developing information on school socio-economic context. In the short term the UIPŠ plans to link school performance information with student background data included in social security databases. This will be an important step forward, but should be followed by a review of the coverage and quality of that data and, if necessary, strategic planning as to how it can be improved (see Chapter 6).

This contextual information will be an important information source for the ŠŠI. In the short term, inspectors can ensure that they collect facts on schools' socio-economic context and intake and investigate these as part of the inspection process. The ŠŠI can compile this information and use it to compare schools in the local area. This should considerably raise the fairness of inspection judgements and therefore also raise the impact of these judgements on school improvement. Working within these important contextual parameters will allow inspectors and schools to more accurately evaluate a school's achievements and where it needs to improve.

### *Broaden the range of data used to evaluate schools*

While results from external testing can provide useful, objective information for evaluating school performance and driving improvement, there is strong international evidence, particularly from the United States, to suggest that where the results of high stakes external assessment (such as *Testovanie 9* and *Maturita*) are the main means of evaluating school effectiveness, there can be significant negative effects (Au, 2007, p. 258-267). Chapter 4 discusses the potential risk that this poses to student learning and curriculum coverage. To mitigate these risks, the OECD review team recommends that a wider range of information also be taken into account to build a more fully rounded picture of the education provided by a school. For example, in addition to comparative data based on external testing, the state of New York measures school performance in a "report card" that includes a range of information including:

- numbers of student on roll

- average class size

- demographic factors such as the number of students receiving free school meals

- attendance and suspension information

- teacher qualification information (for example, percentage with a master's degree).

(https://reportcards.nysed.gov/)

Where relevant, information is included for the previous two years to show trends, for example if the number of students suspended is increasing or decreasing over time. While school performance in external assessment still forms a significant part of the report, this model has the advantage of providing contextual information to inform the analysis of

results and judgement of the quality of education the school provides. Other indicators that could be considered for the Slovak Republic might include:

- "value added" scores for basic schools showing student progress between the T5 and T9 tests once the former has been introduced

- information on what percentage of gymnasia students graduate from university

- the results of satisfaction questionnaires taken by students and parents.

The NGO INEKO has provided a possible model for this system, having recently launched a website comparing schools by a range of different measures with a view to helping parents compare and choose schools.

### *Drive forward the development of self-evaluation in schools and strengthen support*

The Ministry of Education has already undertaken initiatives to stimulate and support the development of an effective self-evaluation culture in Slovak schools, for example with the requirements for schools to publish an annual school report; the legal possibilities for school boards to comment on these and for school founders to approve these; the MPC's supply of in-service training courses, conferences and publications; the recognition of the key role that the school leader plays in this and tougher accountability arrangements. The education community has also promoted self-evaluation activities. However, experience in other countries indicates that the development of an effective self-evaluation system is a difficult task for schools and that it takes time and energy before the majority of schools have good systems of self-evaluation in place. As such, it is essential to communicate a strong, clear policy message on the importance of an effective self-evaluation system to school improvement. This message can be disseminated by the Minister and other officials at all levels of policy making and across different national bodies. There is also a need for a cocktail of different measures. As noted above, the OECD review team recommends that the ŠŠI inspect a school's self-evaluation system as part of the complex inspection. Other suggestions are provided below.

### *Ensure coherence in the development of self-evaluation approaches*

Along with a clear policy message on school self-evaluation, the OECD review team recommends that there is more coherence among the major self-evaluation projects and initiatives in the Slovak Republic. The Ministry should do everything possible to avoid a situation where schools are confronted with a confusing mixture of self-evaluation frameworks and approaches. Notably, the Ministry should ensure co-ordination and co-operation among the major European Social Funding projects on school self-evaluation.

An obvious way to bring more coherence to self-evaluation development is for the ŠŠI to improve the standing and acceptance of its inspection framework. First, the ŠŠI should regularly review its framework to ensure that it adequately reflects emerging research and evidence on school improvement and effectiveness, plus continue to collaborate internationally with other inspectorates to ensure that it is on top of cutting-edge research in these areas. Second, the ŠŠI should to promote its framework. A first step was the publication of this on the ŠŠI's website, but the ŠŠI needs to more actively connect this to schools' realities, for example, via a series of small publications or videos

with clear explanations of why certain aspects are included in the inspection framework and how they are linked to school improvement (citing research evidence and – increasingly – concrete examples from Slovak schools). An example of this is seen from the national inspectorate in England (Ofsted) that published a report highlighting case studies of twelve outstanding schools that had demonstrated school improvement within the inspection process (Matthews, 2009).[5] Schools could also benefit from learning more about the scoring instruments that inspectors use to evaluate a school against the inspection framework. The ŠŠI could even publish some sample observation scales for schools to use in their self-evaluation.

Similarly, the Ministry should engage the ŠŠI, the MPC, and parent and school representatives in a quick joint commission to develop some sample self-evaluation instruments for schools. This could result in the provision of on line questionnaires for schools to use to collect feedback from students and parents on their level of satisfaction with the school and, for secondary schools, feedback from employers and further education institutions (e.g. vocational schools and universities). The commission can benefit from existing work, including the ŠŠI's scoring instruments in these areas, plus several instruments that have been developed in other European countries. For example, the Bertelsmann Foundation's international project that developed the self-evaluation lists used in the *Selbst Evaluation in Schulen* (SEIS) project in a number of German states (see www.seis-deutschland.de and Stern et al., 2006).

### *Identify and promote examples of Slovak schools with effective school self-evaluation processes*

The OECD review team recommends the publication and promotion of good practice examples of school self-evaluation systems. These can take the form of small brochures or even internet posts, but could also form a specific thematic report from the ŠŠI. In addition to the ŠŠI's identification of good examples of self-evaluation systems during complex inspections (see above), the Ministry, in collaboration with other stakeholders, could organise an open contest in which schools submit examples of their self-evaluation systems and are selected to promote their experience in national or regional conferences. The Ministry could even specify a small reward for selected schools as a stimulus. Such an approach would be a quick way to capitalise on the energy and enthusiasm at the school level. Published descriptions of good practice should be accompanied by the ŠŠI's analysis of the underlying success factors and how these relate to its inspection framework and school improvement. These descriptions and accompanying analysis can be taken up by the MPC and other training providers as part of their in-service courses. Schools can directly consult these examples and reflect on how these could improve their own self-evaluation systems. Further, schools could contact other schools to arrange peer reviews as part of their self-evaluation process. Finally, these publications could be used in regional or local courses and conferences in schools, as part of a national campaign.

### *Build school leadership and teacher capacity to undertake evidence-based self-evaluation*

Self-evaluation should be firmly linked to improving the quality of teaching and learning. In turn, evaluations should be based on evidence that is collected, for example, via the use of standardised tests and observation tools (both school developed and national). This requires capacity at the school level to both design and develop suitable self-evaluation instruments and, importantly, to be able to analyse and interpret the results

collected. The OECD review team recommends that in all schools, one of the leadership team or a designated member of staff has clear responsibility for the development and implementation of a plan for designing and developing self-evaluation instruments. The availability of more information about student learning and progress will allow teachers to better differentiate their teaching to different students in their classes. At the national level, support can be provided by the development of self-evaluation instruments (see above) and the timely and clear feedback of results from both school inspections and national assessments. The use of, where possible, standardised tests and observation instruments for specific groups of students (e.g. in a given school year or subject) combined with focused teaching arrangements and using the best practical and theoretical knowledge has proven effective in many schools and school systems (e.g. Fullan, 2012; Hattie, 2009).

It is critical to develop teacher and leadership capacity to collect, analyse, interpret and act on evidence. Examples of schools making good use of evidence in their self-evaluation processes, as well as targeted in-service training, will help to promote the correct use of evidence in the cycles of school-assessment and school improvement. School leadership, staff with specific evaluation responsibilities, and teachers require the analytical skills to use the information from student assessments to inform the improvement of teaching and learning.

## *Further develop school leader capacity for pedagogical leadership*

A clear strength when comparing Slovak schools internationally is the tradition of classroom visits by school leaders or other members of staff with evaluation responsibilities. This is an important element in a culture of permanent professional assessment and evaluation in schools and the feedback that is given in these classroom visits is an important instrument in pedagogical leadership. The OECD review team sees ways to further strengthen the impact that pedagogical leadership has on school improvement. First, classroom observations should be based on a consolidated set of teaching standards, which should be refined and further developed through a thematic inspection by the ŠŠI of a sample of schools' teacher appraisal criteria and methodologies (see Chapter 4). Second, targeted in-service training for school leaders and leadership teams should focus on the priority topic of how pedagogical leadership can stimulate effective self-evaluation processes to improve teaching and learning. Third, there is room to stimulate peer learning among school leadership in different schools to promote the further development of pedagogical leadership competencies, for example via peer observation, reflection and feedback on pedagogical leadership practices. These and other techniques are listed in resources on school leadership competencies (e.g. Buchen and Rolff, 2007; Fullan, 2012 for a recent overview).

## *Clarify the expectation that annual school reports should focus on the quality of teaching and learning*

The OECD review team has noted that annual school reports currently have limited use for school improvement as they are "statistical in nature" and perceived by many schools to be simply a bureaucratic process (NÚCEM, 2012). In this context, the challenge is to help schools improve the relevance of the annual school report in a way that aids their further development, without strengthening their perception that it is simply a bureaucratic exercise. The MPC plans to elaborate a list of suggested content for the annual school reports and this could be of significant help to schools if it: speaks significantly to the teaching and learning process (and not simply the easily reported

financial and summative assessment aspects); is open enough for schools to elaborate and develop these aspects autonomously to best fit their development needs and strategy; and, critically, is connected to a clear concept and framework for self-evaluation (see above). The OECD review team suggests that the ŠŠI's inspection framework could serve as a strong basis for this self-evaluation framework, which can be strengthened by input from the MPC and other teacher education providers, regional authorities, and schools that have been identified as having developed effective self-evaluation systems (see above).

### *Further stimulate evaluative responsibility for school boards*

Discussions during the OECD review with a number of representatives of school boards indicated a strong commitment to their evaluative roles. Various ideas for further developing their responsibilities in evaluation and assessment included: discussions with the school leader about the annual school report and the school education programme, exchanging ideas on the content of different subjects and how to motivate children to learn, and involving parents and others in extra-curricular activities. As such, the OECD review team formed the impression that many school boards seem ready to take more responsibility for the assessment and evaluation of their school and for expressing sharper opinions about what could be done for improvement or change. In this context, consideration could be given to promoting (or perhaps introducing a requirement) for school boards to publish a written statement about the annual school report on the school's website or on paper. In such a statement the school board can outline its own priorities for the school's further development, independent from priorities stated by the school leadership. In future reports, the school board can reflect on how and to what extent the school leadership has addressed its stated priorities for school development.

# Notes

1.  For information on: the political and ideological background of the growing importance of internal and external school evaluation see Bruggen van (2010) and Brockmann (2007); the history of modern school inspectorates see Bruggen van (2012) and sources mentioned there.

2.  For further details, see: SICI (Standing International Conference of Inspectorates of Education in Europe) profile of the Slovak School Inspectorate at www.sici-inspectorates.eu/en/members/inspection_profiles; and the Eurydice site https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Slovakia.

3.  The grouping of these indicators and some of the terminology is slightly different from what is published in the Country Background Report. But the content is the same.

4.  Some papers, presentations and the final report of a SICI workshop about impact of inspection in November 2011 in Stockholm may be found on www.sici-inspectorates.eu/activities/workshops.

5.  Although not connected to inspection processes, there is a competition in Germany for the best schools (*Deutscher Schulpreis*) and publications analyse and present the successful factors in the winning schools (see Fauser et al., 2010 and www.schulpreis.bosch-stiftung.de). There is also an online "School Development Academy" connected to the work promoting conferences, workshops, chats and network building.

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## *Chapter 6*

## Education system evaluation

*The Ministry of Education, Science and Sport holds overall responsibility for ensuring the quality of the education system, although it delegates the evaluation of different aspects of the education system to the Slovak State Schools Inspectorate (ŠŠI) and the National Institute for Certified Educational Measurements (NÚCEM). This chapter details the information base and reporting systems and notes considerable efforts to compile a broad set of evidence on the education system. However, it also identifies some important information gaps, in particular for monitoring equity, and sees room to build analytical and research capacity to make better use of existing information for policy development.*

## Context and features

### *Responsibilities for education system evaluation*

#### *Major bodies responsible for conducting education system evaluation*

The Ministry of Education, Science and Sport holds overall responsibility for ensuring the quality of the education system, although it delegates the evaluation of the overall performance of the education system to the Slovak State Schools Inspectorate (ŠŠI) and the National Institute for Certified Educational Measurements (NÚCEM). The latter was established in 2008 and marks a move to strengthen national capacity in monitoring student performance. The NÚCEM is responsible for developing and conducting national examinations (the *Maturita* at the end of ISCED 3) and national summative assessments (*Testovanie* 9 in ISCED 2 and the proposed new equivalent assessment at Year 5 in ISCED 1, *Testovanie* 5), as well as international assessments. The ŠŠI (in addition to a verification of the actual educational outcomes in schools) monitors processes, management and conditions at the school level (NÚCEM, 2012a). The ŠŠI's monitoring of school compliance with legally binding regulations is highlighted as one of the most important reasons for conducting education system evaluation (NÚCEM, 2012a). Further, the ŠŠI has played an important role in establishing confidence in the reliability of national assessments, with random inspections of how individual schools administer these.

#### *Compiling information on the education system*

At the time of the OECD review visit, a specific body had responsibility for compiling information on the education system (the Institute for Information and Prognoses of Education, ÚIPŠ). In early 2014, the ÚIPŠ was merged with the Centre of Scientific and Technical Information of the Slovak Republic (CVTI SR), which deals with a broader set of public sector statistical information. Such bodies indirectly participate in the evaluation of overall performance of the Slovak school system (NÚCEM, 2012a). The ÚIPŠ managed a significant part of the information collected on the education system and was "the core information centre of the Ministry of Education" (NÚCEM, 2012a), working on methodological aspects of information collection and co-ordinating the national information system on the education system, including the connection to other national databases and school information systems. The ÚIPŠ was paying increasing attention to implementing more efficient and electronic systems for information collection and compliancy reporting.

#### *Regional evaluation*

There are eight regional education sub-systems in the Slovak Republic. The role of regional authorities is restricted to a check of school administrative and financial requirements. The ŠŠI is the only body with the authority to check school processes, and the general view communicated by representatives of regional authorities during the OECD review was that there is limited room for the ŠŠI to engage in evaluation activities, in terms of human and financial resources and established culture. However, the 2009 Act on Vocational Education and Training gives regional authorities more influence in vocational education and training. Regional authorities, as well as regional labour offices, employers and professional organisations, are able to participate in the co-ordination of vocational education and training to meet regional labour market needs. The

OECD review team learned of initiatives in some regions that reflected the region's self-assessment of educational priorities, for example the co-organisation of educational activities with schools or the promotion of sponsorship from particular industries or employers in the region. This indicates the possibility for regions to be more actively involved in system evaluation.

A new approach to reporting external school evaluation results by the ŠŠI holds potential to further stimulate system evaluation at the regional level. Since 2009/10, the ŠŠI annual inspection report includes a presentation of major findings for each region.

### *Goals for the education system*

In 2001, the Slovak government approved a long-term programme for educational reform. The "Millennium" plan specifies reform priorities over a 15-20 year period. The plan contains many procedural aspects, such as establishing a quality assurance management system, but it also sets expectations that the content of education will fit the needs of a knowledge society. The 2008 School Act aimed to concretise the aspiration on content by specifying a competency-based national education programmes that cover content and performance standards. This sets both minimal and optimal performance standards for different competencies within each subject taught in Slovak schools.[1]

### *Major tools to monitor the performance of the education system*

#### *Participation in international student assessment surveys*

The Slovak Republic participates in several international surveys that provide benchmarking information against other education systems internationally. In 1995, the Slovak Republic participated in the International Association for the Study of Educational Achievement's (IEA) Trends in Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and tested students in Grade 8 (but did not choose to test students in Grade 4). This testing of Grade 8 students was repeated in TIMSS 1999 and 2003. A decision to participate in IEA's Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) in 2001 and 2006 provided international benchmark information at Grade 4 for the first time. This was reinforced by the decision to test students in Grade 4 for the first time in the TIMSS 2007 study, but not to test students in Grade 8. At the same time, the Slovak Republic decided to participate in the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) from 2003 onwards (it did not participate in first PISA survey in 2000). This provides international benchmark measures of student performance in reading, mathematics and science at age 15.

The Slovak Republic is also participating in the IEA's International Computer and Information Literacy Study (ICILS 2013), which is a computer-based assessment using software simulations of generic applications and requiring students to use "live" computer software applications. For the PISA 2012 survey, the Slovak Republic also chose the option of a computer-based assessment of problem solving, reading and mathematical literacy, as well as an additional survey on student financial literacy. Finally, 1200 schools in the Slovak Republic will participate in the European Commission's European Survey of Schools: ICT in Education.

#### *National tests of student performance*

There are no specific assessments to monitor the performance of the education system. However, there are tests in Year 9 (*Testovanie* 9) and at the end of upper

secondary education (*Maturita*) that are summative in nature and are used to inform students' future educational or labour market pathway. The *Maturita* includes an externally tested component and along with teacher assessments on an internal component, this contributes to student certification. The testing papers used each year are published on NÚCEM's website.

*Testovanie* 9 has been conducted annually since 2008. The format of the test has evolved gradually. For example, in 2008 and 2009 the testing time was 45 minutes each for mathematics and the Slovak language and literature. However, in 2012 the testing time for mathematics was 70 minutes and for Slovak language and literature was 60 minutes. The mathematics test has always included 20 questions, of which 10 are multiple choice and 10 require closed-format short calculation answers. 2010 saw the inclusion of more contextualised questions in the mathematics test and tests from 2011 include a short page giving an overview of basic units used in calculations and mathematical relationship rules. All questions in the Slovak language and literature test are multiple choice. From 2008 to 2011 there were 20 questions in total, but this was increased to 25 questions in 2012. More recent tests see the inclusion of different types of texts such as informational tables, and not only poems or short literary paragraphs.

At the time of the OECD review, NÚCEM was working on developing an additional test at an earlier stage of schooling (in Year 5). An initial pilot was carried out in October and November 2012. 1 887 Year 5 students in 49 different basic schools participated (36 schools with instruction in the Slovak language; 13 schools with instruction in Hungarian). This gave feedback on the technical reliability of the tests and found high reliability for testing tasks in mathematics and the Hungarian language, and acceptable to good reliability for testing tasks in the Slovak language. NÚCEM plans to further pilot *Testovanie* 5 in November 2014, with regular testing expected to start in 2015.[2]

### Statistics on student progression through schooling and basic information on schools

At the time of the OECD review, basic school compliancy reporting was undertaken using paper questionnaires. This includes information on student enrolment (but not on their socio-economic background) and teaching staff. Schools complete the information sheets, send them to regional offices and these are then sent to the central body (ÚIPŠ at the time of the review). The reporting of information is already aggregated at the school level. Therefore, there are no statistics on the progression of individual students through schooling.

However, during the OECD review the ÚIPŠ reported that 95% of schools use electronic databases. As such, the ÚIPŠ envisaged the possibility of introducing an electronic system for school compliancy reporting, seeing potential in reporting data at the individual student level and in introducing a student identification number. However, this would require legislation to support the collection of individual student data.

### Information from external school evaluations

The Slovak State Schools Inspectorate (ŠŠI) conducts different types of inspections each year. The information gathered from these inspections provides valuable evidence for system evaluation. In addition to complex inspections of individual school quality, the ŠŠI conducts "thematic inspections" which are specifically designed to collect evidence on identified policy priorities within the school system. Inspections will focus on specific topics or themes in a sample of schools, such as: the implementation of reading literacy

skills in the educational process in school activities; the professionalism of teaching and teachers; classroom atmosphere; the use of teaching aids and methods; the prevention of drug addictions as part of the educational process; and the development of ICT competencies of teachers. Such thematic inspections represented a significant proportion of the total inspections conducted in 2010/11: 45% in basic schools and 82% in gymnasia (see Table 5.2 in Chapter 5). In addition, in basic schools many "information inspections" or compliancy checks have been conducted. These have been dominated in recent years by a check on schools' implementation of the new curriculum, i.e. checking that the school education programme complies with the national education programmes.

### National research

Since the 1990s, the Slovak Republic does not have a specialised research institute for pedagogical sciences (NÚCEM, 2012a). There are ad hoc research projects conducted by employees in the Ministry of education or other major bodies, but there is no established mechanism for systematic research on the quality of the education system as a whole (NÚCEM, 2012a). Although, part of the mandate of the National Institute for Education is to conduct applied educational research, this is very rarely undertaken (NÚCEM, 2012a). There is a specialised team in the NÚCEM that prepares international student assessment data for use by educational researchers.

### Reporting results of system evaluation

There is not a central data portal presenting education system evaluation results or related information (NÚCEM, 2012a). However, the various bodies with responsibility for system evaluation publish specific reports on their websites (and the Ministry provides links to all these sites). Examples of major reporting from the ŠŠI, the NÚCEM and the ÚIPŠ are given below.

The ŠŠI delivers an annual inspection report with the analysis of all its inspection work (e.g. ŠŠI, 2011). The report gives a summary evaluation for the education system as a whole based on inspection analysis about all schools that have been inspected and evidence from other sources. The report presents information in a series of tables and graphs showing how schools have developed in certain quality domains over a few years and aggregates information by school type (e.g. basic schools, *gymnázium*, etc.). The 2010/2011 annual inspection report contains the results of the thematic inspections about the quality of citizenship education and the use of information and communication technology in schools. There is also a paragraph about the thematic inspection concerning the teaching of foreign languages.

The reporting of results from national assessments takes several different formats. Via NÚCEM's website, the public can consult:

- Tables of student results (in either *Testovanie* 9 or *Maturita*) aggregated to the school level. The user is presented with a map of the Slovak Republic and can filter results and select a particular region, type of school, language of instruction and subject tested. If a user selects a specific region, there is then a further possibility to select results for a particular district within the selected region. However, no aggregate information is given on results for a particular region or district – simply a list of aggregate results for each school within that region or district. In addition, for *Testovanie* 9 results, there is a list of the top eight performing Slovak-language schools and the top eight performing Hungarian-language schools (the number of students tested and the school's percentile

ranking in mathematics and Slovak language and literature). There is basic information on what the columns of each table contain to help the user read the results (http://dataportal.nucem.sk/vysledky/vysvetlivkymaturita.php).

- Annual summary reports of the aggregate results for all subjects tested in the *Maturita*. One report on the administration of the *Maturita*, plus a written summary of major results in each subject; and a second report presenting tables and graphs with major results. There is also an accompanying presentation highlighting the major results. This includes a presentation of aggregate results for each region, by school founder and by school type (including a breakdown for four year and eight year gymnasia and vocational schools).[3]

- An analytical report on the development and perspectives of the *Maturita* (www.nucem.sk/documents//25/subory_mimo_dokumentacnej_casti/V%C3%BD voj_a_perspekt%C3%ADvy_MS.pdf).

- Specific reports on student performance in each subject tested in the *Maturita*. Such reports present aggregate student results for each region, by school founder (public, private, church) and by school type (academic "*Gymnázium*" and secondary schools). There is also deeper analysis on student responses to the test items. For example, the mathematics report from the *Maturita* 2012 includes aggregate results in different major topics tested within the subject and the average percentage of students providing a given answer on the item, with comment on the type of competencies tested and typical errors committed.

- Overview of results from the *Testovanie* 9, for example presentation of major results in 2013 (www.nucem.sk/documents//26/testovanie_9_2013/vysledky/Vysledky_T9-2013_F.pdf).

- Results from recent EU-funded work to develop national assessments of numeracy and reading literacy. One report presents ten sample items from the numeracy assessments and 10 sample items from the literacy assessment, with answers provided and then an analytical section on what the task involves. This report aims to be a useful resource for teachers and to further promote the development of students' numeracy and reading literacy (foreword of NÚCEM, 2012b).

The NÚCEM also publishes reports highlighting the results for students in the Slovak Republic from their participation in international assessments.

The CVTI SR website provides statistical reports on compliancy information collected from schools, plus other reports on specific issues, for example, employment and unemployment reports for graduates. Since the OECD review, the former ÚIPŠ developed a school reporting portal, called the "regional education map" (mapaskol.iedu.sk/). This new feature on the CVTI SR website aims to allow the public to more easily find any centrally available information for a particular school. The public can consult an overview of information for a selected school and the information includes, for example, school average results in the relevant national assessment, as well as links to the NÚCEM website. The site also presents basic demographic information on student enrolment (including number of disadvantaged students) and number of teaching staff, as well as school funding information.

## Strengths

### *Investment in specialised bodies to establish capacity for education system evaluation*

The Ministry can draw on the specialised capacity of three major bodies, NÚCEM, ŠŠI and ÚIPŠ, to conduct and implement system evaluation. Notably, by establishing the NÚCEM as an independent agency, the Slovak Republic significantly increased its capacity to provide key student outcome measures that can feed into system monitoring.

Policy makers have increasingly drawn on the potential of the ŠŠI to provide more qualitative information on the school system. In addition to an annual overview of the quality of schools inspected that year, the ŠŠI provides evidence on priority thematic areas. The existence of the ŠŠI is a mechanism for providing complementary information to the results from standardised assessments on a broader set of outcomes and in priority areas. This potential and body of competent professionals is a clear strength. Although, there may be some tension in reducing the ŠŠI's overall capacity to conduct its core work: evaluating the quality of individual schools in the "complex inspections" (see Chapter 5).

The former ÚIPŠ was an institution dedicated to the collection and compilation of education system information that underpins its evaluation. The ÚIPŠ – and now the CVTI SR - has the potential to further simplify a regular and systematic collection of key information from schools and also to efficiently compile existing information from other sectors. The OECD review team strongly supports the ambition to move to an electronic system to collect regular compliancy information from schools.

### *Information available on outcomes at different points of schooling*

The Slovak Republic has access to an increasingly rich set of measures of student outcomes at different stages of schooling. This reflects the heightened recognition of the need for regular monitoring of key outcomes in the education system as a way of underpinning policy making. Currently, the Slovak Republic can draw on three major sources for evidence on education system performance: international assessments; national assessments and examinations; and evidence from school inspections (see below).

The strategic decision to participate in the IEA's international assessments conducted at Grade 4 provides international benchmarks for Slovak students in basic education. At the same time, the Slovak Republic's participation in the OECD's PISA provides international benchmarks on outcomes at age 15 nearing the end of compulsory schooling (which is typically at age 16). With this approach, the Slovak Republic has internationally comparable measures on system performance at two key stages of compulsory education.

Further, there are centrally collected national measures of student performance in compulsory schooling. These include the *Testovanie 9* national summative assessments and the *Maturita* examination results. While the major purpose of national outcome measures is to provide a summative measure of individual student performance, the annual results provide information on average performance for the system and allow the potential to compare performance across different sub-national groups, including regions and schools. As point in time measures, they can offer insight to average quality in measured areas, as well as the equity of outcomes. The potential of these measures has increased due to the heightened confidence in the reliability of the results.

*Efforts to provide a broader set of measures on the education system*

As noted above, the ŠŠI collects much valuable evidence on an annual basis as part of its work inspecting individual schools. This provides broader measures on key aspects of schooling as defined in the school inspection framework, plus a more in-depth examination of specific priority themes. Having a mechanism for external school evaluation provides the potential to gather rich evidence on the quality of teaching and learning – to the extent that school inspections go beyond a focus on compliancy. Further, the Slovak Republic actively participates in many international surveys that go beyond a measure of student performance in basic skills. These provide internationally comparative measures on various aspects such as student computing and financial literacy, and teacher and school evaluation. Participation in the current OECD review is also an example of a commitment to gathering qualitative information on the school system. The CVTI SR also compiles and reports information on graduate employment or unemployment. This aims to better inform students on their choice of studies.

*Transparency in reporting key results of education system evaluation and attempts to promote their use*

In the Slovak Republic there is a clear commitment to reporting the major results from national assessments and school evaluations at the system level. The regular reporting schedule, for example, the release of the ŠŠI annual report every November, also adds credibility to the reporting of system level results. NÚCEM has a commitment to transparency and all results are systematically reported and made available to the public on NÚCEM's website. NÚCEM's reporting approach is linked to specific assessments, and specific reports are available both for the annual results from the *Maturita* and the *Testovanie 9* assessments. The reporting seeks to optimise the value of the results for teachers and schools. There is a series of in-depth reports for each subject examined in the *Maturita*, with full information on how students responded to different tasks and an accompanying analysis. Such information can be a rich resource to help teachers better understanding common miscomprehensions by students on certain tasks, and how to better address these in future. The EU-funded project has also resulted in similar reports presenting useful analysis of tasks developed to assess numeracy and reading literacy. These can be important tools to further promote the competency-based curriculum.

The ŠŠI annual report provides valuable information on a system-wide basis that can inform national and regional policy makers about specific aspects of schools' work. It can be used to examine trends over time in specific features as information from several years is reported. It summarises the state of all quality indicators in the types of schools (preschool, basic school, *gymnázium* and other secondary school types). It also sheds light on identified priority areas within the school system and can form a basis for the development or refinement of policy to address these priorities. The ŠŠI also publishes specific reports on the results of thematic inspections conducted in a sample of schools throughout the system. All reports are available on the ŠŠI website under distinct sections for basic schools, secondary schools etc.

There are efforts to stimulate the use of national assessment and school evaluation results for evaluation at the regional level. NÚCEM has held conferences and workshops in different regions to promote the use and relevance of results at the regional level, and since 2009/2010 the ŠŠI has started to organise conferences on a regional basis to present the key findings in the annual report. The conferences allow the opportunity to focus on

results for a particular region in comparison to others. This holds potential to inform regional authorities and larger school founders on necessary improvement and development actions. Such activities to promote results for use at the regional level hold promise to further stimulate and develop a culture of evaluation at the regional level.

### Growing support to strengthen evaluation role at the regional level

The OECD review team formed the impression that there is a growing support for strengthening the role of regional actors in the evaluation of school systems, to complement the work of the ŠŠI. The regular evaluation of sub-systems of schools could cover specific quality aspects that reflect regional needs and priorities. While some local officials are content with the current division of responsibilities and would not like to interfere with evaluative tasks that are in the hands of school leaders, school founders, the national government and the ŠŠI, others support the idea that schools belong to the local or regional structure and that it is good for local people to take more responsibility for their quality. The OECD review team perceived that while officials from self-governing regions, regional state authorities, local authorities and other larger school founders accepted that their current evaluative responsibilities were restricted to financial, technical and maintenance issues, a wish to take more responsibility was also expressed. For example, the OECD review team learned about a couple of examples where regional authorities or self-governing regions had used their restricted powers and "soft influence" to ensure the replacement of school leaders, although responsibility for this task lies with school founders.

## Challenges

### Lack of clear goals for schooling in the Slovak Republic

The OECD review team identified that an important strategic challenge to education system evaluation is to ensure some stability of long-term policy aims for the school system, as well as to specify clearer goals. Although the "Millennium plan" set broad strategic policy lines on priorities for educational reform over the past ten years, there is a need to renew and strengthen commitment to longer term reform programmes. Such a longer term vision for schooling is extremely important given the short political cycles in the Slovak government. There is also a need to clarify concrete goals for the school system in terms of both quality and equity as there is currently a lack of clarity in overall priorities for schooling. As in many other countries, there are a set of different measures that feed into evaluating the performance of the Slovak school system (e.g. *Maturita*, *Testovanie* 9, evaluations conducted by the ŠŠI, compliancy checks by regional authorities), but "no recognised national understanding of the 'quality' of education" (NÚCEM, 2012a). This results in an array of evaluation and assessment activities at the national and regional levels, and the aims of these activities may not be mutually compatible (NÚCEM, 2012a).

### Need to address basic information needs for education system monitoring

The OECD review revealed that there are some concerns on the quality of the available statistics on the education system in terms of reliability and coverage, as well as some important information gaps.

In part, concerns about the quality of available statistics are related to the data collection process. The major example is the reporting of aggregated information at the

school level as part of the annual school compliance reporting procedure. The collection of individual student data would address these reliability concerns. Also, the initial results from national assessments and the external part of the *Maturita* were not reliable as there were concerns with the administration of the assessments/examinations by schools. Although such basic concerns have been largely addressed by ad hoc and targeted inspections by the ŠŠI, there appears to be a need to continue to monitor assessment/examination administration in some schools. Therefore, the challenge to ensure reliability of the core data used in system monitoring is significant.

In other ways, the quality of available statistics is limited due to insufficient levels of detail or breakdown. Typically, a major added value of system evaluation, in contrast to other elements of the evaluation and assessment framework, is the attention to monitoring equity throughout the system, but currently, there is limited information available to adequately do this. For example, there is a lack of reliable data on student and school socio-economic background, including a concern on the definition of "learning disadvantage". Similarly, national statistics on student destination after leaving school and entrance to the labour market do not provide sufficient breakdown by school type. Specifically, technical and vocational streams are grouped together in youth unemployment statistics.

As yet, education system evaluation does not pay sufficient attention to the monitoring of the effectiveness and eligibility of spending within the school system (NÚCEM, 2012a). There is even room to collect qualitative data from stakeholders, for example, there is no coherent or systematic monitoring of parental satisfaction with the quality of schooling in the Slovak Republic (NÚCEM, 2012a). The Slovak Republic is one of eight OECD systems not administering any stakeholder surveys (OECD, 2013, Table 8.6). In 21 OECD systems, student surveys are used, and the use of parent and teacher surveys is also increasing.

## *Conceptualisation of national assessments does not allow tracking of improvement at the system or school levels*

As in other school systems, the Slovak Republic sees the information from student certification at the end of schooling (the *Maturita* examinations and final grades) as key input to the system evaluation. Student examinations, however, have the primary aim of providing summative assessment for students, leading to a certification of their academic achievement. The content of such examinations changes every year as the full examination paper is typically published. This does not provide a stable measure of changes over time as the difficulty of the content of the *Maturita* may vary from year to year. National assessments, however, typically aim to provide measures to compare school and system performance. However, in the Slovak Republic the entire content of the *Testovanie 9* assessment is published each year, so there is no way to compare student performance over time on a stable proportion of test content. Further, the *Testovanie* 9 assessment is normative rather than being set against particular standards. This also poses a challenge to measuring improvement. For example, it is not possible to say that in Year X 50% of students were able to perform at a certain standard, but in Year Y this was 52% of students (see also Chapter 3). The OECD review team understood that there would be a similar approach in developing the new *Testovanie* 5.

## *Limited research on schooling and limited analysis of existing evidence*

The lack of systematic research on the quality of the education system as a whole is a weakness in the current approach to system evaluation. During the OECD review, the review team learned that a lack of sufficient support to academic research was in part linked to the frequent political changes in the Slovak Republic. The Slovak Republic is one of eight OECD systems that does not ensure the collection of longitudinal information, whether that is research programmes or monitoring the progression of students or student cohorts through the school system and beyond (OECD, 2013).

As stated above, there is also a concern about the quality of available education statistics. The access to basic information for researchers is also a concern, although the former ÚIPŠ informed the OECD review team of ambitions to introduce a new information system with student-level data, which could provide a special research database with the student identification number removed. Current research activities are typically limited to the analysis of data from international surveys. However, there is room for much more exploitation and secondary analysis of these results.

Official bodies may have a mandate to conduct research, but their capacity to do so is limited due to other demands on their resources. For example, the Methodological and Pedagogical Centre only has around 10% of its resources available for research. There was a very limited analytical role for the former ÚIPŠ as its resources were almost entirely devoted to data collection and processing activities.

## *Fragmented reporting of key system-level results*

Although there is a clear commitment to transparency and a regular reporting of key results from the two major pillars of system level information (national assessments and school inspections), it is difficult for the public to navigate through the different sets of results. It is also unclear how policy makers can get a balanced and authoritative overview of what available information on the system identifies as areas for improvement. The Ministry provides website links to where the public can find all key information, however, there is no attempt to summarise the information or to give a sense of the overall priorities for schooling in the Slovak Republic. The ŠŠI annual report is probably the most authoritative summary document, bringing together a wide set of evidence on the quality of schooling as gathered via school inspections conducted in that year. However, this report puts major emphasis on presenting results by different school types (e.g. basic schools, secondary schools). Other reporting of school inspection activities is also presented on the ŠŠI website by type of school.

It is not possible for policy makers or the general public to gain an immediate sense of the relative priorities in schooling based on the evidence collected via national assessments and examinations, as well as international assessments. The reporting is very fragmented and does not allow an overall sense of progress, strengths and areas for development. This may be in part due to the necessity to focus on increasing the objectivity and reliability of results in the *Maturita* and *Testovanie 9*, which has rightly taken priority. However, as the reliability of information improves (therefore allowing more confidence in comparing results among different regions and schools) there is room to make the information more useful for defining policy priorities.

### Concerns about the reporting of system-level results as school performance measures

At the time of the OECD review, the review team noted several concerns with the reporting of national assessment results at the school level. On the NÚCEM website, school average results in national assessments are presented in static tables, with limited accompanying information to aid the interpretation of such results and no contextual information offered on the school or the participating students. The reporting format remains of a statistical nature and is not very accessible to a non-statistical public. The non-governmental organisation INEKO has developed an independent website and reported to the OECD review team that this would meet needs for school information that it had identified from many parents (see Chapter 5). There is a sense that national bodies are now in a reactive position in order to catch up with such unofficial initiatives. Indeed, one example of this was the development of a school reporting portal by the former ÚIPŠ (see above). This includes links to the INEKO website.

### Raising the impact of the ŠŠI's reports on policy making

There is a clear challenge to raise the impact of the ŠŠI's annual, thematic and information reports on policy making. The OECD review team finds that the 2010/11 annual report contains much valuable information for politicians and civil servants in the national ministry and in the regional or local authorities; and also for school leaders. A major challenge for the ŠŠI is to improve its own impact by stimulating and helping all these "clients" to effectively use this information. Such reports can identify examples of good practice and promote improvement throughout the system. The recent introduction of regional presentations of the annual report is a good example of raising the impact of the ŠŠI's work. Furthering the use of results at the regional level is also one of the stated goals for the ŠŠI in the 2012/13 school year. However, the OECD review team gained the impression that more dissemination activities are needed. During the OECD review, school staff and authority officials were often not very familiar with the ŠŠI annual report, indicating that it has limited impact in some cases. Further, it was hard to assess the impact that the annual inspection report has on policy making at the Ministry.

### Strengthening evaluation activities at the regional and local levels

Evaluation activities at regional and local levels are limited to a monitoring and checking of school administrative and funding requirements. Within a regular cycle of school inspection, schools would only be subject to an external evaluation of their quality every 5 years. While regional authorities monitor schools more regularly, the fact that the focus is purely on financial and compliancy-related aspects fails to promote that evaluation activities should be concerned with the quality of educational processes and teaching and learning. The challenge is to respect the carefully designed structure and balance of authority and power, while building on the willingness of regional or local authorities and other stakeholders to engage in evaluative discussions and decisions about their school(s).

## Policy recommendations

Over recent years there has been significant investment in building capacity to conduct evaluation activities as a way of providing information for system evaluation. Notably, there have been moves to collect national measures of student performance and

recent attention to reporting information in a more accessible way. However, education system evaluation remains an underdeveloped component within the Slovak evaluation and assessment framework. Drawing on the analysis in this chapter, the OECD review team recommends the following approach to further strengthen the evaluation of the education system:

- Establish a framework for education system evaluation.

- Determine information needs and prioritise strengthening the national information system.

- Develop a strategy to monitor outcomes at the national level over time.

- Build analytical and research capacity.

- Further develop reporting systems to better mobilise evidence for policy making.

- Promote a greater role for municipal and regional authorities in system evaluation.

### *Establish a framework for education system evaluation*

A first step in strengthening the current approach to the evaluation of the education system is to establish a framework for education system evaluation. This would start with a Ministry led exercise to better clarify the major objectives for the education system and, as far as possible, to develop these into specific goals. Such goals should be linked to the student learning objectives, as specified in the national education programmes. The value of such a framework is that it signals to all stakeholders the breadth of system evaluation and shows how education system evaluation draws on a varied set of components such as information systems with basic demographic, contextual and administrative information, as well as quantitative and qualitative measures of system performance, research and analysis. The Ministry can then conduct an exercise to map out existing information against the specified objectives and goals for the education system. Once established, this national framework can serve as a model for use at the regional level. It can also be complemented by specific goals and priorities at the regional and local levels. Importantly, it can promote an alignment of objectives in different national, regional and local evaluation and assessment activities.

### *Determine information needs and prioritise strengthening the national information system*

Establishing a framework for education system evaluation will also allow a systematic mapping out of available information. In each case, any technical caveats or quality concerns with the data, research results or statistics can be noted down. This will make more transparent to policy makers the current concerns in terms of key information gaps and quality of information. In turn, such mapping will be a solid basis to underpin decisions to prioritise the collection of further evidence for education system evaluation.

### *Prioritise the improvement of the information base to monitor equity*

The OECD review team identifies the improvement of measures on student and school socio-economic context as a priority, given the recent developments in reporting system-level information at the school level. For example, policy makers, the CVTI SR, the ŠŠI and the NÚCEM can use the framework for education system evaluation to determine the information needs for monitoring equity in the Slovak school system. A clear mapping of the availability, coverage and quality of different measures on student

socio-economic background can inform decisions on whether and how to improve existing measures and, if necessary, the most efficient way to collect more reliable measures.

*Improve school compliancy reporting processes*

The OECD review team also strongly supports the development of an electronic data collection system for annual school compliancy reporting. This is expected to generate efficiencies at the central collection level, the regional validation level, as well as to reduce the bureaucratic burden in reporting for schools. A more timely and accurate collection of key information will significantly strengthen the information base for policy making at a system level, notably in the core area of funding allocation. Many OECD systems have been capitalising on technology to improve the efficiency of school compliance reporting (OECD, 2013). In Northern Ireland, an electronic school reporting system is well established. To complement this and to make the information more useful to schools, analytical software has been developed to support the analysis of these and other data entered by the schools. In this way, the school compliancy reporting forms a part of core school self-evaluation activities (Shewbridge et al., 2014).

## Develop a strategy to monitor outcomes at the national level over time

As noted above, the Slovak Republic has built up national capacity in student assessment and has adopted a policy to continue to strengthen this. There is, for example, the ongoing piloting of a national assessment in Year 5, as well as the focus on developing tasks to assess numeracy and literacy. However, as yet there has been little thinking on the development of more longitudinal measures or research programmes. During the OECD review, the former ÚIPŠ had voiced an ambition to introduce a unique student identifier in the data collection system. This holds strong potential for research and for informing policies, for example the allocation of funding. Among the OECD review countries, New Zealand demonstrates an example of how a student identifier can be implemented, while respecting student privacy (see Box 6.1).

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**Box 6.1 Approaches to longitudinal research in New Zealand**

**Unique student identifier**

Since 1996, New Zealand uses a unique student identifier (the National Student Number, NSN) for longitudinal research studies. However, student privacy must be respected. This unique identifier facilitates the management and sharing of information about students across the education sector in a way that protects their privacy (Nusche et al., 2012). At the level of the Ministry of Education, almost all data collection from schools is set up in a way as to enable longitudinal analysis, using the NSN as a link. The existence of a widely applied unique identifier covering both schooling and the tertiary sector is a key strength of system monitoring in New Zealand. The NSN can be used by authorised users for the following five purposes:

- monitoring and ensuring a student's enrolment and attendance
- ensuring education providers and students receive appropriate resourcing
- statistical purposes
- research purposes
- ensuring that students' educational records are accurately maintained.

Among other things, the NSN is applied for reporting purposes by education agencies, analysis of student assessment data over time, moving data between software applications, and issuing documentation students need to present to other schools or education providers.

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**Box 6.1 Approaches to longitudinal research in New Zealand** *(continued)*

**Specific research on competencies**

The "Competent Children, Competent Learners" longitudinal research programme specifically analyses the development of different competencies (knowledge, skills and attitudes) across a student cohort and identifies factors associated with this with the aim to identify promising directions for improving children's competency levels. See: www.nzcer.org.nz/research/competent-children-competent-learners

**Regular monitoring of a broad set of student outcomes**

Since 1993, the National Education Monitoring Project (NEMP) assesses students in primary education in two different year groups (Years 4 and 8) and follows a set four-year survey cycle. In this way the NEMP is conducted each year, but assesses a different set of disciplines. For example, in the second year of the survey cycle, music, technology, reading and speaking are assessed, and in the fourth year of the survey cycle, listening and viewing, health and physical education, and writing are assessed. These disciplines, therefore, will only be tested every four years. This allows monitoring of a broad coverage of the national curriculum. According to the NEMP website, the purpose of monitoring samples of students at successive points in time is to identify and report trends in educational performance, to provide good information for policy makers, curriculum specialists and educators for planning purposes and to inform the public on trends in educational achievement. See: http://nemp.otago.ac.nz.

*Sources:*
Nusche, D., D. Laveault, J. MacBeath, P. Santiago (2012), OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: New Zealand 2011, OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264116917-en

OECD (2013), *Synergies for Better Learning: An International Perspective on Evaluation and Assessment*, OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264190658-en

## *Further develop reporting systems to better mobilise evidence for policy making*

The OECD review team identifies a need for the Slovak Republic to further develop its reporting systems and to better promote the responsible use of results to inform improvements in policy making, as well as in school evaluation activities, by schools internally, by the ŠŠI and also by parents and the general public. In communicating education system evaluation results, it is of fundamental importance to ensure the accuracy of the data. As noted above, national agencies continue to pay attention to increasing the quality of national data: the former ÚIPŠ in its efforts to improve the timeliness of reporting, as well as the coverage of national statistics; the NÚCEM, aided by inspection activities of the ŠŠI, in giving priority attention to increasing the reliability of national assessments and examinations. Ensuring accuracy of data is the first, critical step in making sure the results are useful for policy making and other evaluation efforts. The next step to improve reporting is to ensure the "fitness of use" of the data in terms of user needs. Based on international best practice, the OECD promotes statistical quality by ensuring data are accurate and also (OECD, 2012):

- Relevant: This relates to the identification of user groups and their needs. User groups may change over time and their needs for data may evolve. This highlights the importance of having processes in place to determine the views of users and the uses they make of the data.

- Credible: This refers to trust in the objectivity of the data. This implies that data are perceived to be produced professionally in accordance with appropriate statistical standards with transparent policies and practices for their reporting and release, e.g. the release is not timed in response to political pressure.

- Timely: This refers to the length of time between the availability of data and the event or phenomenon they describe, but also to the punctuality and clarity of reporting schedules.

- Accessible: This includes the suitability of the form in which the data are available, the media of dissemination and the availability of metadata.

- Interpretable: This reflects the ease with which the user may understand and properly use and analyse data. This relates to definitions of concepts, terminology and information describing the limitations of the data.

These facets of statistical reporting quality help to promote the greater use of system results and to generate greater demand for the use of evidence in policy making and in public debates. The OECD review team underlines the need to continue to support existing efforts by national agencies to improve the credibility and timeliness of national statistics. Importantly, the facets of statistical quality outlined above also imply a strengthened analytical role for statistical and assessment bodies. The OECD review in Northern Ireland presents an example of how a more strategic approach to reporting is increasing the relevance of data (Box 6.2).

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**Box 6.2 Clear data reporting and efforts to increase the relevance of results: Northern Ireland**

**Clear data reporting**

The United Kingdom Statistics Authority Code of Practice specifies a number of reporting guidelines. To be published as official statistics, statistical releases must:

- meet identified user needs

- be well explained and readily accessible

- be produced according to sound methods

- be managed impartially and objectively in the public interest.

The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) publishes a number of statistical press releases, many of which follow a clear annual cycle. Each statistical release by NISRA includes sufficient commentary to enable users to meaningfully interpret the information. These usually take the form of a few introductory lines, major bullet points of key results and graphics showing trends. Importantly, these also include information on any caveats the reader much consider when interpreting the information. In addition, each statistical release includes the full set of results in tables. See for example: www.deni.gov.uk/year _12_and_year_14__examination_performance_at_post-primary_schools_in_northern_ireland_ 2012-13.pdf.

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> **Box 6.2 Clear data reporting and efforts to increase the relevance of results:**
> **Northern Ireland** *(continued)*
>
> **Mechanisms to increase the relevance of system information and promote its use**
>
> NISRA has progressively organised its structure and services around different major users and demands for education statistics. For example to ensure that official data are most effectively used in school inspection activities, NISRA includes a specific section that lends support to the Education and Training Inspectorate. NISRA provides regular focused briefings for policy makers. NISRA also identifies developing trends in data to highlight these in a timely way to policy makers, thus playing a more strategic role. This strategic approach to statistical reporting has heightened the relevance of data to policy making and there is sustained demand from policy makers for evidence when developing and monitoring policies. NISRA also provides a more tailored reporting service to people external to the Department of Education and answers requests for data from researchers, members of the public, the media and the Northern Ireland Assembly.
>
> *Source:*
>
> Shewbridge, C., M. Hulshof, D. Nusche, L. Stenius Staehr (2014),*OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: Northern Ireland, United Kingdom*, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264207707-en

The OECD review team recommends that the Ministry considers introducing a summative reporting mechanism to provide a periodic assessment of the education system performance against the education system evaluation framework. Among the 29 OECD systems in the OECD review of evaluation and assessment, 20 have an annual statistical publication and 19 produce an annual analytical report (OECD, 2013, Table 8.9). In fact the latter may be annual, biennial or triennial, but is an authoritative summary report on the school system. The periodicity should reflect the needs of the Ministry and other stakeholders. Such a report would draw on all available evidence on performance of the education system, e.g. from school inspections, national assessments and examinations, specific evaluations in priority areas and different research programmes. This would allow the tracking of progress against key system goals. Norway presents an interesting example in the way that it uses a common set of key system goals and reporting structure in both a physical annual summative publication on the school system and a web-based school portal. This allows a coherent national reporting aligned to the major goals and promotes those goals more effectively. For example, see Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2012.

### *Build analytical and research capacity*

There is considerable scope to expand the analytical role of national bodies. The former ÚIPŠ, the National Institute for Education and the Methodology and Pedagogical Centre all have an analytical mandate, but have limited resources dedicated to this analytical function. As outlined above, increasing analytical capacity in national bodies is expected to bring considerable benefits by: promoting a strong use of evidence throughout the system; better feeding existing results into other regional and school level evaluation efforts; ensuring a more systematic use of evidence in policy making (see Box 6.2).

However, it is equally important to plan to complement the use of existing system performance measures with more qualitative information on the school system. The

Slovak Republic can benefit considerably from the existing mechanism for school inspections to collect evidence on a broader set of outcomes within the school system – and also to more flexibly respond to emerging policy concerns. But this demands sufficient resources within the ŠŠI so as not to compromise its regular evaluation of individual schools (i.e. the complex inspection cycle). As such, the OECD review team sees benefit in developing a national research strategy. This would have a two-fold approach to both open up existing information to the research community, as well as to ensure that additional qualitative research is commissioned in priority areas. A strategic approach is important given the existing concerns with ensuring quality of national statistics and data collection in general. It will be prudent to plan future research programmes on a manageable scale, while also continuing to validate existing data collection.

### *Promote a greater role for municipal and regional authorities in system evaluation*

The OECD review team noted some motivation for regional and municipal authorities to play a more substantive role in supporting school improvement. However, there is a need to clarify their possibility to do so within the current legal framework. The OECD review team sees room for an open discussion among key stakeholders to see how to promote a broader and more collaborative approach to the evaluation of educational quality. There may be ways to mobilise existing resources and experienced personnel at the regional and municipal levels to foster peer evaluation and collaboration among schools. This can be an important means of professional development for educators and managers within schools and also help to promote local and regional goals. Such initiatives to promote networking amongst schools can help develop and spread good practice.

Regional and municipal authorities can play a key role in providing opportunities to bring professionals together, for example for a day of collegial learning. All professionals are busy and it is difficult to organise such professional networks without some external stimulus. This could even be a mechanism to more concretely use the results from school inspections, by analysing results for schools at the municipal or regional levels and identifying common areas for improvement.

# Notes

1.   For example, in lower secondary education (ISCED 2) reading comprehension within the subject "Slovak language and literature" includes the competency "Distinguishing sentences and texts". Students at a minimum – with the help of teachers – are expected to list ways to introduce coherence to a text (e.g. interpunction and personal pronouns) and to judge the correct use of verb tenses according to the concept of time. However, the optimal performance standards require students to do these things independently, as well as to identify words or groups of words to establish a coherent text and to judge the appropriateness of these for different types and styles of text. Full content and performance standards can be found at www.statpedu.sk

2.   For further details, see: www.nucem.sk/documents/46/tlacova_sprava_t5_2012/Spr%C3%A1va_z_pilotn%C3%A9hoTestovania_5-2012.pdf.

3.   For example, see presentation of 2011/2012 *Maturita* results: www.nucem.sk/documents//25/maturita_2012/vysledky_analyzy/prezentacia_MS_2012_final.pdf.

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# Conclusions and recommendations

## School system context

*A highly selective and predominantly public school system with established examinations*

Children in the Slovak Republic must complete 10 years of schooling and the majority attend public schools, but they may be enrolled in different school types according to their interests and academic ability. Regional and municipal authorities exert a direct influence over public schools as their organising bodies ("school founders"). Children may transfer to an academically selective school (a *gymnázium*) at the start of Year 6 (age 11), Year 9 (age 14) or Year 10 (age 15). National examinations at the end of upper secondary schooling (*Maturita*) certify student achievement with a view to higher education access. Since 2009, there is a full-cohort national summative assessment in Year 9 (*Testovanie* 9) in the Slovak language and literature, as well as, where applicable, in the major language of instruction (Hungarian or Ukrainian), and in mathematics. A new national summative assessment in Year 5 is expected to be introduced in 2014/15.

*Academic success is strongly associated with future economic success, but a large proportion of children underperform*

There are major economic incentives for individuals to pursue education. In international comparison, the reduced risk of unemployment for Slovak men and women with upper secondary education is particularly strong, and there are considerable benefits to attaining upper secondary education. Student performance in international assessments indicates some improvement in reading at the primary level, but some significant and growing challenges at the secondary level. In PISA 2012, 27.5% of 15-year-old students demonstrated low levels of mathematics proficiency compared to 23.1% on average in the OECD. In fact, a significant increase in the proportion of low performing students in mathematics has driven the deterioration in mathematics performance since PISA 2003. The Slovak State Schools Inspectorate (ŠŠI) has indicated quality concerns among teachers in their professional ability to develop students' higher-order thinking skills and there is some evidence from international assessments to support this.

*The Slovak school system is highly inequitable*

There are considerable equity challenges in the Slovak school system: student performance differences across socio-economic groups are greater than on average in the OECD; school performance differences are greater than on average in the OECD and are explained to a greater extent by student and school socio-economic characteristics; educational differences between rural areas and cities are significant; educational outcomes of the Roma minority are particularly poor and a high concentration of these

children are in schools providing special education. Regional disparities are more pronounced in the Slovak Republic than in other OECD countries, with a particularly high concentration of poor households in the Eastern regions.

*A major reform to curriculum content, greater pedagogical freedom and a teacher salary system*

In a major reform, the School Act (2008) set the framework conditions for the content of education, but introduced greater pedagogical autonomy with schools responsible for staffing and curriculum. It also established more rights for children, including access to a free year of preschool immediately before primary education starts, free choice of schooling in a public, Church or private school, and a ban on the use of corporal punishment in schools. The national education programmes define the core content to be taught, specifying competencies and "cognitive competencies" in different content areas, and each school develops a school education programme – the ŠŠI has inspected these in many schools. The *Maturita* and the *Testovanie* 9 have progressively adapted to better assess competencies listed in the national education programmes. The Act on Pedagogical Employees and Specialist Employees (2009) guarantees teachers the freedom to choose pedagogical methods and teaching approaches, and has created a salary system based on teachers' qualifications, plus a bonus system based on performance or credits gained from attending professional development training.

## Strengths and challenges

*Evaluation and assessment enjoys broad political support, but lacks strategic oversight*

Since 2001, there has been a commitment to implementing a series of reforms that follow the basic strategic points outlined in the long term education strategy "Millennium". Such commitment reflects the support from all political parties for the important role of evaluation and assessment activities in schooling. In particular, since 2008 the Slovak Republic has introduced serious innovations in the intended curriculum, central assessment activities and the level of autonomy for teachers and schools in pedagogy and assessment activities. However, there are concerns with the implementation of the competency-based curriculum, from the specification and refinement of content and minimum performance standards, to the alignment of national examinations and the daily instructional activities against these. The OECD review team noted concerns with a lack of consensus or clarity in the national education programmes, and a lack of central tools and guidelines for schools to support the development of the school education programme and its effective implementation in regular teaching activities. The duplication of efforts to promote evaluation and assessment activities also poses a challenge. The OECD review team noted concerns with the existence of different standards and criteria for teacher appraisal that had been developed at different times by different bodies. Also, there is no clear national programme of innovation or dissemination for the promotion of school self-evaluation, but rather several different and apparently disjointed initiatives. This runs the risk of compromising efforts in terms of energy and money invested in the individual projects against their potential impact and, importantly, may damage the willingness of schools to participate in these efforts if they perceive conflicting messages and approaches being promoted by the different projects.

*There are some efforts to build capacity for evaluation and assessment, but these need to be sustained and strengthened*

At the time of the OECD review, the Ministry could draw on the specialised capacity of four major bodies, the National Institute for Certified Educational Measurement (NÚCEM), the Slovak State Schools Inspectorate (ŠŠI), the Methodology and Pedagogy Centre (MPC) and the Institute for Information and Prognoses of Education (ÚIPŠ) to support evaluation and assessment activities in the school system. Since early 2014, the ÚIPŠ has been merged with the Centre of Scientific and Technical Information of the Slovak Republic (CVTI SR). The existence of specialised national bodies signals the importance of robust and objective evaluation and assessment activities. Notably, by establishing the NÚCEM as an independent agency, the Slovak Republic significantly increased its capacity to ensure reliable student examinations and generate information for system monitoring. The ŠŠI has systems in place to improve its own service and capacity (including good international cooperation), but new responsibilities have compromised its capacity to deliver the regular cycle of complex school inspections. There is as yet inadequate analytical and research capacity centrally to fully exploit the results from evaluation and assessment. A clear strength in the traditional Slovak approach is the support to build capacity of beginning teachers. Typically, the MPC coordinates with schools to support these induction programmes and also offers professional development for school leaders and deputy leaders. However, several stakeholders identified the need to increase the MPC's capacity to provide professional development, both in terms of the quantity and quality offered.

*A legal framework underpins evaluation and assessment activities, but the dominant purpose of these is compliance, not improvement*

Educational laws over recent years have aimed to create a good balance of power, responsibility, ownership and accountability, and are designed to engage different stakeholders. While the implementation of evaluation and assessment activities varies throughout the system, the OECD review team gained the impression that the legal framework has succeeded in engaging several new responsibilities to both conduct assessment and evaluation and also use evaluation results. In the general context of strengthening aspects of a civil society, this reflects great success over a relatively short period of time. The ability to engage stakeholders in evaluation and assessment activities is also an important strength to further develop school quality in the Slovak Republic. However, existing evaluation and assessment activities do not sufficiently promote improvement. The OECD review team formed the impression that there is a greater need for feedback to students on how they can improve their learning. Although the national education programmes include standards, in many subjects these only specify a minimum performance requirement and do not allow the measuring of student progress along a continuum. And although there is regular formative feedback to teachers, this is completely disconnected from the formal, external appraisal within the certification procedure. The focus of external school evaluation conducted by the ŠŠI is increasingly on school compliance with legal standards, with less feedback to teachers and schools for improvement. Although schools are required to produce an annual school report, many do not yet use these for school development and improvement, but rather see it as

bureaucratic exercise. The existing information on the school system could be better exploited to inform policies for system improvement.

*Evaluation and assessment activities appear to pay little attention to equity*

There are no explicit equity goals for the school system in the Slovak Republic. While there are initiatives to ensure that student assessment is more equitable, e.g. adaptations to the national tests for blind and deaf students and the introduction of an external component to the *Maturita*, the monitoring system *per se* does not pay sufficient attention to the equity of outcomes and how differences in school quality impact the educational opportunities for different students. There are some important information gaps regarding measures of student and school socio-economic context, which are central to monitoring equity. Although the NÚCEM has started to report test results aggregated at the regional level, there is room for further reflection on how to set realistic goals for improvement and how best to monitor these. The particular structural feature of academic selection in the Slovak Republic's school system is not reflected in the reporting of national test results, which has consequences for both the interpretation of particular school results and the monitoring of equity across the school system. There also appears to be limited attention in reporting systems to the outcomes for different student groups.

*The National Institute for Certified Educational Measurement (NÚCEM ) has introduced innovations, but assessing competencies remains a challenge*

Since its founding in 2008, the NÚCEM has played an important role in developing and reforming student assessment in the Slovak Republic. For example, it reformed the content of the *Maturita* qualification to bring it more into line with other European assessments and better address aspects of the revised curriculum. The NÚCEM is also developing and piloting *Maturita* examinations in new subjects, as well as developing a new national test for Year 5. The NÚCEM also works on innovative ways to deliver qualifications using technology. Further, the NÚCEM sends detailed reports with an analysis of test items or curriculum areas that students found difficult directly to school leaders in order to inform decisions about curriculum development and areas requiring greater coverage. However, the assessment of skills and competencies in schools lags behind the vision of the new curriculum, with schools and teachers lacking guidance on how to assess competencies. An assessment model predominantly focused on testing is better suited to traditional approaches to teaching and learning based on transmission of a fixed body of knowledge, rather than encouraging students to develop their own ideas and interpretations independently. The lack of any national assessment criteria beyond the minimum performance standards in the national education programmes means that it is difficult for teachers and students to have a shared sense of what is being assessed and what progression looks like.

*There is improvement in supervision for external testing, but internal student assessment remains inconsistent across schools*

From 2011, the NÚCEM introduced more rigorous administration procedures to improve the reliability of high stakes student testing and to address continuing concerns about the potential for malpractice. Most importantly, the following changes have been introduced to increase the objectivity of *Maturita* tests: within the internal examination the written component now carries more weight, so that a student would have to succeed in both the written and oral elements in order to pass the examination overall; the chair of the subject commission from a different school is part of the panel for the internal component; and inspectors from the ŠŠI observe the administration of the internal component in schools with identified or suspected malpractice (approximately 40 schools). Similar procedures have been introduced for the *Testovanie* 9, where a teacher from a different school must observe administration of the tests and the ŠŠI visits a random selection of 150 schools. However, there remain concerns with the reliability of on-going teacher assessment. While the OECD review revealed examples of schools implementing procedures to improve internal assessment, (e.g. with professional development, working with other schools and using subject commissions), an evaluation in 2012 by the NÚCEM found large variations between grading across schools. During the OECD review, parents expressed the perception that different schools graded more harshly or leniently. In the absence of clear criteria for teacher assessment, their judgements can be viewed as subjective and unreliable. This raises issues for student transfer, where the assessment information provided by one school may not match the standards of another school.

*Good feedback to parents on student progress, but feedback to students would improve with more formative assessment*

The OECD review team noted a culture of periodic feedback from teachers to parents on how their child is doing at school. Parents formally meet with class teachers twice a semester. This gives an opportunity to discuss their child's attendance, behaviour and performance and receive advice on how their child could improve. There are also examples of schools operating an "open door" policy, where parents can meet with teachers to discuss any concerns they may have about their child's schooling. While there is an established culture of regular summative assessment for students (e.g. they receive a grade or achievement level at a particular point or results on regular tests), the OECD review team formed the impression that the idea of formative assessment was not well understood by teachers, students and parents. While schools may use "input and output tests" at the start and end of a unit of work or topic to measure student progress, it did not seem clear that the results of these tests were being used in a formative way. Interviews with students indicated that feedback was mainly limited to *what* the student needed to improve rather than *how* they could achieve this improvement.

*Teacher evaluation with observation of classroom practices is established, but there is an inadequate professional development offer*

The principle that teachers should be appraised appeared widely accepted in the Slovak Republic. One of the strengths of the Slovak approach to internal teacher appraisal is its focus on the observation of classroom practice. While the frequency and approach to classroom observation may vary among school leaders, they typically observe the classroom practice of each of their teachers at least once a year. Compared to other OECD countries, a higher proportion of Slovak lower secondary school principals reported in 2013 that they often or very often observe instruction in the classroom. Teachers interviewed by the OECD review team reported that they found classroom observations and feedback on their work valuable to develop their own professionalism. The national teacher appreciation days and moral appraisal are important opportunities to recognise and celebrate excellent teaching. The improvement focus of internal appraisal is reflected by its close connection to professional development planning. However, there are concerns about the supply of professional development programmes. Most are developed centrally by the MPC and teachers can participate in these free of charge. While MPC courses are automatically accredited, other training providers need to apply and wait for accreditation. Schools do not have their own budget to choose the professional development provider and type of courses most suited for their needs. Although career advancement is predominantly based on the completion of professional development programmes, these may not necessarily be available in all the important areas of teaching expertise and it is school leaders who choose which teachers can participate in them.

*External teacher appraisal complements school-based regular appraisal, but is disconnected from classroom teaching*

The OECD Reviews on Evaluation and Assessment in Education recommend that teacher appraisal that has an impact on the teacher's career or salary advancement is made more objective with a national framework, standard procedures and an external component to validate the process. In this context, the existence of an external process to appraise teachers to reach the first and second certification levels is a positive aspect of the Slovak approach. The existence of a career structure for teachers together with an appraisal and certification process provides teachers with opportunities for promotion and for diversification. It allows teachers to benefit from meaningful career opportunities and may contribute to recognising and rewarding strong performance. At the same time, there are concerns about the fact that the certification process and career advancement system are disconnected from classroom practice and do not include observation of actual teaching. The career advancement system is built on the obligation for teachers to accumulate credits through proof of professional learning and development. This credit system rewards teachers with a pay rise for attending courses rather than for proving that they are changing their practice accordingly. Equally, the certification system is focused on the preparation and defence of a theoretical piece of work (a so-called thesis) rather than evidence of actual teaching performance. The appraisal for specialisation for specific positions is also disconnected from teachers' daily work as it is done by educational providers at the end of particular professional development programmes. This

considerably limits teachers' opportunities to receive feedback on their work from external sources and have their achievements validated.

*Initiatives to develop teaching standards, as the existence of different sets of standards may send conflicting messages about good teaching*

At the time of the OECD review, the Methodology and Pedagogy Centre (MPC), Bratislava University and international experts were developing professional standards for teachers as an update to the 2006 standards that had not been widely used. The intention was to professionally evaluate the standards and to complement them with tools that teachers could use for self-evaluation, and to pilot and refine these through 2013-14. The new professional standards were expected to specify for each of the three major career stages, three broad competency groupings: understanding students' knowledge, characteristics and conditions for development; processes leading to student learning and development; and teachers' own development as representatives of the teaching profession and as school employees. Importantly, the intention was for the new standards to underpin both internal and external teacher appraisal processes and also school self-evaluation and school inspections. Many different standards and criteria are in use for teacher appraisal: criteria to appraise beginning teachers at the end of the induction period; sample appraisal forms for regular school-based appraisal; criteria specified by different education providers for specialisation appraisal; and specific criteria for classroom observations conducted by school inspectors. As a result, the different appraisal processes are likely to be perceived as disconnected processes teachers have to undergo that do not align to form a coherent whole.

*Complex school inspections include classroom visits and feedback to teachers, but there is a perception that these are receiving less focus*

There is a well elaborated system of complex school inspections on a five year cycle, with an adequate quality framework for evaluating the various kinds of schools. In complex inspections, inspectors conduct classroom observations using a stable analytical observation and judgement instrument. These instruments and procedures are comparable with other European inspectorates. The OECD review team formed the impression that schools and other stakeholders seem to be satisfied with these complex inspections and their usefulness for the further development of the school, in addition to their accountability purpose. School inspections are a good opportunity to give direct feedback to teachers and to link inspection to guidance and to discussions on school development. However, this depends on the frequency and intensity of classroom visits, and on the availability of inspectors for feedback. Increased demands on the ŠŠI to conduct other types of inspections, but without additional resources, necessarily reduces the ŠŠI's capacity to conduct complex inspections on a five year cycle. Interviews with schools and other stakeholders identified examples of schools that had not had a complex inspection carried out in over seven years. In addition, other types of inspections had been experienced as bureaucratic exercises placing demands on school time, but not providing useful feedback for the school. Schools experience this as a shift "backwards" towards a more bureaucratic inspectorate.

*The importance of school self-evaluation is
recognised, but schools must build a culture
of ongoing self-assessment and improvement*

The OECD review revealed widespread support for self-evaluation, and education policy recognises how this can contribute to school improvement. There are regulations in place to help stimulate school self-evaluation: all schools must write an annual school report that includes school results, along with other relevant information; the School Board (with representatives from the parents, teachers and the founder) must comment on this report; and schools must develop a specific school education programme in line with the national education programmes, which is checked by the ŠŠI. These regulations aim to empower those connected to the school and allow the school to set its own profile, priorities and pedagogical focus. However, self-evaluation practices are just starting to be introduced and are not yet well connected to the overall framework of assessment and evaluation in the Slovak Republic. The ŠŠI's framework for assessing school quality is not generally accepted or understood, but could serve as a general framework for school self-evaluation. Typically, annual school reports seem to be restricted to financial, statistical and administrative issues and do not include detailed analysis of students' educational results and outcomes, nor link this to the school's educational planning. There is a need to strengthen school use of data in self-evaluation (e.g. results from *Testovanie* 9, *Maturita* and private tests). The dominance of general management, administrative and financial matters appears to overshadow the pedagogical leadership role for school leaders. The OECD review team gained the impression that in general, school boards do not yet capitalise on the legal framework to fully contribute to school evaluation and improvement, but rather only act where there are major concerns or on superficial issues. Notably, there is room for many school boards to strengthen their evaluative role in discussions of the annual school report.

*Objective data are available for schools, but
school performance data do not allow for
school context and can be misleading*

Results from national assessments are fed back to schools with information allowing them to compare their overall student performance with national benchmarks. Schools receive their school results digitally within three weeks of the *Testovanie* 9, and a few days later in print, including the school's ranking regionally and nationally. *Gymnázium* and secondary vocational schools have a similar possibility to compare their performance nationally using the *Maturita* results. Further, the OECD review revealed the wide use of student assessments developed by private companies that are available in different subjects and grades to complement the *Testovanie* 9. The NÚCEM publishes school average results on national assessments in tables ranking schools by their average performance. The publication of such "raw scores" of school performance without any adjustment for the school's context and socio-economic and educational intake can lead to users making unfair comparisons and judgements on school quality. Students' performance in these assessments is affected by factors that are beyond the control of the school, such as prior attainment and social background. An important contextual factor in comparing *Testovanie 9* results is the academic selection of students. In some primary schools many of the best students leave for Gymnasia in Year 6, with other students going to bilingual schools in Year 8, leaving only the relatively less academic students in that school to be tested in Year 9.

*There is transparency in reporting key results
of system evaluation, but limited research and
analysis*

In the Slovak Republic there is a clear commitment to reporting the major results from national assessments and school evaluations at the system level. The regular reporting schedule, for example, the release of the ŠŠI annual report every November, also adds credibility to the reporting of system level results. NÚCEM has a commitment to transparency and all results are systematically reported and made available to the public on its website. NÚCEM's reporting seeks to optimise the value of the results for teachers and schools, e.g. with a series of in-depth reports for each subject examined in the *Maturita*, including full information on how students responded to different tasks and an accompanying analysis. The ŠŠI annual report summarises the state of all quality indicators in different school types (preschool, basic school, *gymnázium* and other secondary school types), sheds light on identified priority areas within the school system, and can form a basis for the development or refinement of policy to address these priorities. There are also efforts to stimulate the use of national assessment and school evaluation results for evaluation at the regional level, for example: since 2009/2010 the ŠŠI has started to organise conferences on a regional basis to present the key findings in the annual report, and NÚCEM holds conferences and workshops in different regions to promote the use and relevance of results at the regional level. However, the lack of systematic research on the quality of the education system as a whole is a weakness in the current approach to system evaluation. The Slovak Republic is one of eight OECD systems that does not ensure the collection of longitudinal information, whether that is research programmes or monitoring the progression of students or student cohorts through the school system and beyond. Official bodies may have a mandate to conduct research, but their capacity to do so is limited due to other demands on their resources.

*Increasingly reliable evidence on outcomes,
but lack of basic information for system
evaluation, in particular to monitor equity*

Currently, the Slovak Republic can draw on three major sources for evidence on education system performance: international assessments; national assessments and examinations; and evidence from school inspections. While the major purpose of national assessments and examinations is to provide a summative measure of individual student performance, the annual results provide information on average performance for the system and allow the potential to compare how these results vary among regions and schools. The potential of these measures has increased due to the heightened confidence in the reliability of the results. The initial results were not reliable due to concerns with the administration of examinations and assessments by schools. Ad hoc and targeted inspections by the ŠŠI have largely addressed this, but there appears to be a need to continue to monitor assessment/examination administration in some schools. Coverage is also a concern with some important information gaps. Schools report aggregate data as part of the annual school compliance reporting procedure. Typically, a major added value of system evaluation, in contrast to other elements of the evaluation and assessment framework, is the attention to monitoring equity throughout the system, but currently, there is limited information available to adequately do this. For example, there is a lack of reliable data on student and school socio-economic background, including a concern on the definition of "learning disadvantage".

*More regular external supervision of schools at the local and regional levels is limited to compliancy*

Evaluation activities at regional and local levels are limited to a monitoring and checking of school administrative and funding requirements. Within a regular cycle of complex school inspections, schools would only be subject to an external evaluation of their quality every five years. While regional authorities monitor schools more regularly, the fact that the focus is purely on financial and compliancy-related aspects fails to promote that evaluation activities should be concerned with the quality of educational processes and teaching and learning. The challenge is to respect the carefully designed structure and balance of authority and power, while building on the willingness of regional or local authorities and other stakeholders to engage in evaluative discussions and decisions about their school(s).

## Policy recommendations

*Develop a framework document to promote greater coherence in evaluation and assessment and a strategic plan for further development*

The Ministry should oversee the development of a strategy or framework document that conceptualises a complete evaluation and assessment framework for schooling in the Slovak Republic. This will help generate synergies among different evaluation and assessment activities, avoid duplication of procedures, and prevent inconsistency of objectives. A first step is to clarify and/or set the major goals for schooling in the Slovak Republic. The overarching long-term goals set in the "Millennium" strategy were a clear strength in establishing initial activities. Equally, a set of long-term goals will help to integrate the different elements into a coherent evaluation and assessment framework. A second step is to map out all existing evaluation and assessment activities and scrutinise whether and how these fit together and to identify any duplication. It is crucial that the Ministry engages key stakeholder groups when developing the framework. This will help embed evaluation and assessment as an ongoing and essential part of professionalism within the school system, clarify different responsibilities and allow for better networking and connections among stakeholders.

The 2008 School Act introduced significant innovations to the Slovak school system. The OECD review team recommends that the Ministry collates evidence on the progress of implementation and the impact of these innovations on the quality of teaching and learning. This will provide helpful feedback on how to refine existing activities. Such evidence on implementation and impact will also help set priorities for future changes. The OECD review team notes the on-going review of national education programmes and also suggests developing assessment criteria against these for on-going student assessment. However, all further refinements or innovations should be carefully phased in, including adequate stakeholder engagement in developing the refinements and the use of piloting in selected schools.

*Prioritise capacity building to ensure
successful implementation and use of results*

An essential part of any implementation strategy is to ensure an adequate provision of guidelines, tools and specific training. While evaluation and assessment can identify areas for improvement, they are only instrumental in achieving improvement if their results are used by stakeholders. Within available resources, the OECD review team recommends that the Ministry sets up a priority plan for capacity building to ensure the maximum benefit is gained from evaluation and assessment activities. The clear demand from schools for professional development and the limited capacity of the MPC requires a rethinking of the professional development offer. There is a need to ensure adequate professional development provision so that teachers and school leaders learn from the results of evaluation and assessment and make changes that lead to improvement in student learning and outcomes. For example, there is a need to supply high quality training to teachers on student assessment and school self-evaluation activities. At the national level, there is a need to build analytical and research capacity to fully exploit the results of evaluation and assessment, so that these feed into policies for school system improvement.

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

The framework document should unambiguously communicate that the major purpose of evaluation and assessment is to improve student learning and outcomes. This is best achieved through a balance of activities designed for accountability or development. In the context of greater freedom and responsibility at the local level, it is clear that there is a need for sufficient accountability mechanisms in the Slovak school system. The introduction of an external examination component in the high stakes student examinations (*Maturita*) is a strength. The accountability role of the ŠŠI could be strengthened with the publication of individual school inspection reports. Importantly, the Ministry needs to ensure sufficient emphasis on *student learning progress* and improvement in education. Here it is most impactful to promote a culture of formative assessment and assessment for learning in schools. This can be promoted with the development of student assessment criteria to support on-going internal assessment, initially in Slovak language and literature and mathematics in order to make the implementation more manageable for teachers. In the longer term, it could support a shift to criterion based national testing. At the same time, an important support will be national guidelines with concrete examples of student work against these assessment criteria. There is room for the Ministry to promote a focus on learning progress through school system evaluation with the development of more longitudinal measures or research programmes.

*Raise the focus on equity within the
evaluation and assessment framework*

A major challenge for schooling in the Slovak Republic is the observed disparities in educational quality and outcomes within the system. Evaluation and assessment can contribute significantly to both monitoring and promoting equity, and a greater focus on equity is strongly recommended. The OECD reviews of evaluation and assessment in

education have identified several systems that have set explicit goals to improve equity in the school system. This a clear signal of the importance of success in schooling for all children. These may involve specific improvement targets on objective outcome measures and may focus on different student groups, school communities or regions.

*Give more support to teachers to implement curriculum and assessment, and develop models to assess skills and competencies*

Changes as radical as those introduced in the School Act (2008) will inevitably take time to implement and will require a significant shift in culture within schools. For example, the change in focus of the *Testovanie 9* test to better reflect the revised curriculum has led to a greater emphasis on higher level reading comprehension skills and more contextualised tasks in mathematics. The revised Slovak curriculum aims to develop competencies that can help young people to cope with social, economic and technological change, and succeed in school and the world beyond. However, if these competencies are to be recognised, valued and developed, they need to be assessed using appropriate tools. While many countries and jurisdictions have moved towards a greater focus on wider skills in their curriculum*,* there are different opinions on how best to assess them. It is agreed, however, that there is a need to develop assessment tools and methods that are suited to recognising skills and competencies, and to capture evidence from a wider range of sources, e.g. self-evaluation reports, portfolios, structured teacher observation or periodic 360 degrees assessment drawing on feedback from parents, friends and other teachers or coaches. Here, the Methodology and Pedagogy centre (MPC) has an important role to play and should provide training and guidance for existing teachers, both nationally and through its regional offices, to develop teachers' pedagogical practice in diagnosing student learning needs. There is also the potential to make greater use of NGOs to facilitate networking, peer support and sharing of best practice in assessment.

*Phase in student assessment criteria linked to the standards specified in national education programmes*

The OECD review team recommends the Ministry of Education, the NÚCEM and the National Institute for Education and teacher representatives collaboratively develop assessment criteria that would show progression towards and be integrated with the standards in the national education programmes, and ultimately replace the 1 to 5 grade scale currently used. Assessment criteria should match the curriculum, be compatible with the existing national education programmes, and provide sufficient detail to be clear and unambiguous without being unwieldy for teachers to implement and use. Adopting this approach would provide a foundation to support: tracking of progression for individuals and cohorts; greater consistency and reliability within and across schools in grading; and formative assessment, as the criteria will provide clear learning goals for students. To make implementation more manageable for teachers, assessment criteria should initially be developed for Slovak language and literature and mathematics. The criteria should be fully trialled with pilot schools before they are implemented, and teachers and educational researchers should be involved in their development to ensure they are fit for purpose and appropriately set. The introduction of these assessment criteria should be supplemented by guidance and training to show best practice in how the

assessment criteria could be used, and annotated examples of student work at different levels to establish a shared standard and support teachers' professional judgements.

*Integrate formative assessment into teaching and learning*

Valid and reliable on-going assessment is vital for students to know how their learning is progressing and what they need to do to improve; and for teachers to know whether their students have understood what they have been taught, what level of attainment they have achieved and how planning can be improved. To meet both aspects, a balance of summative and formative assessment is needed. Research has identified formative assessment as an effective tool to improve student learning progress. To have an effective formative outcome, teachers need to consider what they are teaching and how they teach it, in order to find out what they want. This approach also needs to give students the opportunity to take more responsibility for their own learning and develop their skills in "learning to learn". It is possible to use testing formatively if teachers discuss students' responses with them in a way that develops their knowledge and understanding of how to improve. However, teachers should be encouraged to use a wider range of assessment tools and methods and to involve learners in the assessment process. The effective implementation of formative assessment into Slovak schools will involve a substantial shift in the teaching culture as a whole that will require a strong, long-term commitment from the Slovak government.

*Further strengthen internal appraisal for professional development*

The emphasis on regular classroom observations by the school leadership team is a clear strength in the Slovak approach and should be maintained and strengthened. Various measures can be introduced to enhance school leaders' appraisal and evaluation competencies: disseminating resources and training for the direct evaluation of pedagogical practice; stimulating peer learning among school leadership in different schools; supporting regional leadership programmes run by the regional school authorities; building the capacity of employers and school inspectors to undertake effective performance reviews of school leaders; and further distributing leadership within schools among middle and senior leaders. In this context, the provision of training opportunities regarding appraisal and evaluation could be scaled up for a wider group of school staff, including middle leaders. There is also room to review the framework for funding and provision of professional development to ensure it responds to school needs. To diversify the offer of programmes, the decentralisation of its funding could be considered. This could be done, for example, by attributing earmarked funding training vouchers to schools so that they can freely choose the training and provider most suitable for their needs. In this context, it would be particularly important to also review the quality of the accreditation system for training providers.

*Revise the career advancement system and raise the status of the teaching profession*

The career advancement function that is currently being achieved through appraisal processes at the end of induction, credit evaluation, certification processes and appraisal for specialisation, could be brought together in a single process of teacher appraisal for

career progression. Teachers would apply to access career levels beyond "independent teacher" and teachers not applying for such promotion would be required to maintain their basic certification status as independent teacher. The associated appraisal system should be based on the national framework of teaching standards and have a strong component that is external to the school, e.g. an accredited external evaluator, who would typically be a teacher from another school with expertise in the same area as the teacher being appraised. Decisions must draw on several types of evidence, including classroom observation, as most key aspects of teaching are displayed when teachers interact with their students in the classroom. The OECD review team supports the use of a portfolio that is closely related to teachers' daily work, including elements such as: lesson plans and teaching materials, samples of student work and comments on student assessment examples, teachers' self-reported questionnaires and reflection sheets. It is important to attract high performing individuals to the profession and help them to stay motivated for continuous improvement throughout their career, e.g. with adequate working conditions, a professional environment, professional services from the authorities and teacher professional bodies and adequate salaries.

*Consolidate a single set of teaching standards*
*to guide appraisal processes*

It is important to consolidate a single and authoritative set of teaching standards that build on the strengths of already existing appraisal forms and criteria developed by the MPC, the Ministry, the Inspectorate and teacher education providers, so that there is a clear understanding of what is considered accomplished teaching. They should provide a common basis for initial teacher education, appraisal of beginning teachers, regular teacher appraisal for performance management, teacher certification, professional development, and career advancement. This would provide coherence for the teaching profession and achieve better alignment between teaching standards, teacher education and teacher appraisal. Teaching standards need to be informed by research and express the sophistication and complexity of what effective teachers are expected to know and be able to do. For the teaching profession to feel ownership of the standards and for them to be relevant, it is essential that teachers are involved and encouraged to take responsibility for their development. In the Slovak context, there are different options for how the national agencies can support such involvement, for example through the organisation of stakeholder conferences, web-based consultation with teachers, and the collection of examples of teacher quality criteria that are currently used in some schools. A collegiate body of key social and academic actors could establish a process to monitor implementation of the standards beyond initial agreed versions.

*Prioritise complex school inspections and*
*reinforce their impact on the quality of*
*teaching and learning*

The OECD review team recommends a serious reflection on how to heighten the relevance of the external school evaluation system for school improvement. In particular, by keeping the system of complex inspections in place for the coming five to eight years, because it is clear that it will take a substantial period of time for schools to develop effective systems of self-evaluation. The system of complex inspections allows for a healthy external pressure on schools. The real value to school improvement that complex inspections offer is their feedback on a number of teaching and learning issues that could

be improved, rather than a list of issues of non-compliance to be addressed by schools. With such inspections, the ŠŠI can communicate that an "acceptable" or "sufficient" level of teaching and learning is not enough and that all Slovak schools should strive for improvement, not just those with serious deficiencies. Robust and informed objective feedback from inspectors on areas for improvement and possible actions can help schools move towards excellence. There is a need, therefore, to ensure that inspectors have the capacity to provide objective feedback at a general level on teaching. One way to improve the ŠŠI's capacity here is to compile examples identified through school inspections of how teaching practice has been improved. To ensure implementation of complex inspections on a five-year cycle, the ŠŠI may need to limit their focus to part of the school (e.g. in selected school years or in selected school subjects). In this case, it would be important for inspectors to stimulate schools to complete the complex inspection in other parts of the school. For example, by promoting the inspection framework, by holding a conference during or shortly after the inspection, and by stimulating peer reviews among schools.

*Drive forward the development of self-evaluation in schools, strengthen support and stimulate evaluative responsibilities for school boards*

Experience in other countries indicates that the development of an effective self-evaluation system is a difficult task for schools. It is essential to communicate a strong, clear policy message on the importance of an effective self-evaluation system to school improvement. The Ministry should promote a more coherent approach to self-evaluation by: improving the visibility and status of the ŠŠI inspection framework; having the ŠŠI inspect a school's self-evaluation system as part of the complex inspection; setting up a joint commission of key stakeholders to develop some sample self-evaluation tools for schools, e.g. parent and student surveys; and publishing and promoting good self-evaluation practices that the ŠŠI has identified in Slovak schools and using these to illustrate points in the inspection framework more concretely. The ŠŠI inspection framework should be regularly reviewed to ensure that it adequately reflects emerging research and evidence on school improvement and effectiveness. Similarly, a more elaborate list of suggested content for the annual school reports could be of help to schools, if it: speaks significantly to the teaching and learning process; is open enough for schools to elaborate and develop these aspects autonomously; and, critically, is connected to a clear concept and framework for self-evaluation. In other OECD countries, schools have benefitted from having a member of the school team with clear responsibility for self-evaluation activities. Equally, school boards can strengthen their evaluative role by publishing a written statement about the annual school report. This would outline the school board's priorities for further development and future statements could reflect on how school leaders have addressed these.

*Broaden the range of data used in school evaluation and pay adequate attention to the school's context*

The OECD review team notes the importance of providing adequate contextual information on schools in order to ensure better interpretation of school performance information, notably the publication of school average results in *Testovanie 9* and

*Maturita*. It is important to adequately support and prioritise work to improve the coverage and quality of information on school socio-economic context. This will be an important information source for the ŠŠI, but in the short term, inspectors can collect facts on schools' socio-economic context and investigate these during inspections. The OECD review team recommends that a wider range of information be taken into account when reporting on school performance to build a more fully rounded picture of the education provided by a school. The full report from a school's complex inspection provides a robust, comprehensive evaluation of the school at a given point in time and should be published. The publication of other basic information could include school enrolment, average class size, attendance and suspension information, demographic factors, teacher qualification information. Where relevant, information could be included for previous years to show trends, for example if the number of students suspended is increasing or decreasing over time. As school self-evaluation activities become more established, other complementary information could be published, e.g. the results of satisfaction questionnaires taken by students and parents.

*Build analytical and research capacity and*
*better mobilise evidence for policy making*

The OECD review team underlines the need to continue to support efforts by national agencies to improve the credibility and timeliness of national statistics, and suggests greater attention is paid to the interpretation of statistical reporting, e.g. with clear definitions and information describing data limitations. This will help to promote the greater use of system results and to generate greater demand for the use of evidence in policy making and in public debates. Importantly, while several national bodies have an analytical mandate, limited resources are dedicated to this. Increasing analytical capacity in national bodies is expected to bring considerable benefits by: promoting a strong use of evidence throughout the system; better feeding existing results into other regional and school level evaluation efforts; and ensuring a more systematic use of evidence in policy making. A national research strategy would both open up existing information to the research community and ensure that additional qualitative research is commissioned in priority areas. A strategic approach is important to plan future research programmes on a manageable scale, while also continuing to validate existing data collection. The Ministry could introduce a summative reporting mechanism to provide a periodic assessment of the education system performance against the education system evaluation framework. Such a report would draw on all available evidence on education system performance, e.g. from school inspections, national assessments and examinations, specific evaluations in priority areas and different research programmes. This would allow the tracking of progress against key system goals.

*Determine information needs and prioritise*
*strengthening the national information system*

Establishing a framework for education system evaluation will allow a systematic mapping out of available information. In each case, any technical caveats or quality concerns with the data, research results or statistics can be noted down. This will make the current concerns in terms of key information gaps and quality of information more transparent to policy makers. In turn, such mapping will be a solid basis to underpin decisions to prioritise the collection of further evidence for education system evaluation. The OECD review team identifies the improvement of measures on student and school

socio-economic context as a priority, given the recent developments in reporting system-level information at the school level. For example, policy makers, the CVTI SR, the ŠŠI and the NÚCEM can use the framework for education system evaluation to determine the information needs for monitoring equity in the Slovak school system. A clear mapping of the availability, coverage and quality of different measures on student socio-economic background can inform decisions on whether and how to improve existing measures and, if necessary, the most efficient way to collect more reliable measures. The OECD review team also strongly supports the development of an electronic data collection system for annual school compliancy reporting. This is expected to generate efficiencies at the central collection level, the regional validation level, as well as to reduce the bureaucratic burden in reporting for schools. A more timely and accurate collection of key information will significantly strengthen the information base for policy making at a system level, notably in the core area of funding allocation.

*Promote a greater evaluative role for*
*municipal and regional authorities*

The OECD review team noted some motivation for regional and municipal authorities to play a more substantive role in supporting school improvement. However, there is a need to clarify their possibility to do so within the current legal framework. The OECD review team sees room for an open discussion among key stakeholders to see how to promote a broader and more collaborative approach to the evaluation of educational quality. There may be ways to mobilise existing resources and experienced personnel at the regional and municipal levels to foster peer evaluation and collaboration among schools. This can be an important means of professional development for educators and managers within schools, and also help to promote local and regional goals. Such initiatives to promote networking amongst schools can help develop and spread good practice. Regional and municipal authorities can play a key role in providing opportunities to bring professionals together, for example for a day of collegial learning. All professionals are busy and it is difficult to organise such professional networks without some external stimulus. This could even be a mechanism to more concretely use the results from school inspections, by analysing results for schools at the municipal or regional levels and identifying common areas for improvement.

# Annex A. The OECD Review on Evaluation and Assessment Frameworks for Improving School Outcomes

The OECD Review on Evaluation and Assessment Frameworks for Improving School Outcomes is designed to respond to the strong interest in evaluation and assessment issues evident at national and international levels. It provides a description of design, implementation and use of assessment and evaluation procedures in countries; analyses strengths and weaknesses of different approaches; and provides recommendations for improvement. The Review looks at the various components of assessment and evaluation frameworks that countries use with the objective of improving student outcomes. These include student assessment, teacher evaluation, school evaluation and system evaluation. The Review focuses on primary and secondary education.[1]

The overall purpose is to explore how systems of evaluation and assessment can be used to improve the quality, equity and efficiency of school education.[2] The overarching policy question is "How can assessment and evaluation policies work together more effectively to improve student outcomes in primary and secondary schools?" The Review further concentrates on five key issues for analysis: *(i)* designing a systemic framework for evaluation and assessment; *(ii)* ensuring the effectiveness of evaluation and assessment procedures; *(iii)* developing competencies for evaluation and for using feedback; *(iv)* making the best use of evaluation results; and *(v)* implementing evaluation and assessment policies.

Twenty-five countries are actively engaged in the Review. These cover a wide range of economic and social contexts, and among them they illustrate quite different approaches to evaluation and assessment in school systems. This will allow a comparative perspective on key policy issues. These countries prepare a detailed background report, following a standard set of guidelines. Countries can also opt for a detailed Review, undertaken by a team consisting of members of the OECD Secretariat and external experts. Fourteen OECD countries have opted for a Country Review. The final comparative report from the OECD Review, bringing together lessons from all countries, was completed in 2013.

The project is overseen by the Group of National Experts on Evaluation and Assessment, which was established as a subsidiary body of the OECD Education Policy Committee in order to guide the methods, timing and principles of the Review. More details are available from the website dedicated to the Review: www.oecd.org/edu/evaluationpolicy.

# Notes

1. The scope of the Review does not include early childhood education and care, apprenticeships within vocational education and training, and adult education.

2. The project's purposes and scope are detailed in the OECD (2009) document entitled "OECD Review on Evaluation and Assessment Frameworks for Improving School Outcomes: Design and Implementation Plan for the Review", which is available from the project website www.oecd.org/edu/evaluationpolicy.

# Annex B. Visit programme

| Monday, 26 March 2012, Bratislava | |
|---|---|
| 16:00 – 18:00 | Meeting with officials of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport:<br>– Mr. Miroslav Repovský, General Director of the Regional Education Division<br>– Mr. Zdenko Krajčír, leading expert advisor in primary and secondary education |

| Tuesday, 27 March 2012, Bratislava | |
|---|---|
| 09:00 – 09:50 | National Institute for Certified Educational Measurements (NÚCEM)<br>– Ms. Romana Kanovská, Director of NÚCEM |
| 10:00 – 10:50 | Methodology and Pedagogy Centre (MPC) |
| 11:00 – 11:50 | National Institute of Vocational Education |
| 12:00 – 12:50 | Teacher educators and NGOs |
| 14:00 – 15:20 | The Slovak State School Inspectorate |
| 15:30 – 16:20 | Representatives of school founders |
| 16:30 – 17:20 | Representatives of parents |

| Wednesday, 28 March 2012, Bratislava | |
|---|---|
| 09:00 – 09:50 | Associations of State Gymnasia and Basic schools |
| 10:00 – 10:50 | National Institute for Education |
| 11:00 – 11:50 | Trade Union in Education |
| 12:00 – 12:50 | State administration school authorities |
| 14:00 – 16:30 | School visit 1: Vocational school, Bratislava |

| Thursday, 29 March 2012, Prešov | |
|---|---|
| 08:45 – 11:00 | School visit 2: Basic school, surrounding of Prešov (including Roma classes) |
| 12:30 – 15:00 | School visit 3: St. Monica *Gymnázium*, Prešov centre |
| 15:10 – 17:00 | Prešov Municipal and regional education authority, including Regional School Board |

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|---|---|
| **Friday, 30 March 2012, Banská Bystrica** | |
| 08:00 – 10:20 | School visit 4: Basic school, Banská Bystrica centre |
| 10:30 – 11:30 | Banská Bystrica Municipal education authority |
| 15:10 – 16:00 | Slovak Chamber of Teachers |
| 16:10 – 17:15 | Secondary school student union |
| **Monday, 2 April 2012, Bratislava** | |
| 09:30 – 12:00 | School visit 5: 2 joint Gymnasia, suburbs of Bratislava (both Slovak and Hungarian educational languages) |
| 14:00 – 14:50 | Researchers in education |
| 15:00 – 15:50 | Special schools – psychologists |
| 16:30 – 17:30 | Bratislava educational authority (regional and municipal) |
| **Tuesday, 3 April 2012, Bratislava** | |
| 08:30 – 10:50 | School visit 6: Basic school, Bratislava Petržalka district |
| 11:00 – 11:50 | Employers association |
| 12:00 – 12:50 | Institute of information and prognosis (national statistics) |
| 14:00 – 15:00 | Delivery of review team's preliminary conclusions |

# Annex C. Composition of the review team

*Johan van Bruggen*, a Dutch national, has dedicated his professional life to the improvement of school learning. In the 60s, he trained as a primary school teacher, worked as a secondary school teacher and also taught at a teacher training institute. In the mid-70s, he was appointed as Curriculum Director of the Dutch National Institute for Curriculum Development (SLO). In the early 90s, he joined the national inspectorate of schools and education, first as an inspector for higher education, then as chief inspector for higher, further and adult education. He worked on policy development in the Dutch Inspectorate and co-ordinated its international co-operation. Indeed, Johan was heavily involved in the establishment of two international associations: a consortium of institutes for curriculum development and educational research CIDREE (www.cidree.org/) and an association of educational inspectorates SICI (www.sici-inspectorates.eu/). For both associations he served as the first general secretary.

*Deborah Nusche,* a German national, is a Policy Analyst in the OECD Directorate for Education. She is currently working on the OECD Review on Evaluation and Assessment Frameworks for Improving School Outcomes. At the OECD, she previously worked on the Thematic Review of Migrant Education and the Improving School Leadership study. She has led country review visits on migrant education and participated in case study visits on school leadership in several countries. She also co-authored the OECD reports "Closing the Gap for Immigrant Students" (2010) and "Improving School Leadership" (2008). She has previous experience with UNESCO and the World Bank and holds an M.A. in International Affairs from Sciences Po Paris.

*Claire Shewbridge*, a British national, is an Analyst in the OECD Directorate for Education, and is currently working for the OECD Review on Evaluation and Assessment Frameworks for Improving School Outcomes. She most recently worked on the OECD Review on Migrant Education working on country-specific analysis for the Netherlands, Austria and Norway and co-authored the OECD report "Closing the Gap for Immigrant Students" (2010). For five years, Claire co-ordinated the PISA thematic report series, including reports on student use of computers, success and challenges for immigrant students, student competencies in general problem solving and mathematics and a focus on excellent students. She also led analysis of student attitudes towards science learning and the environment in the PISA 2006 survey. Her earlier statistical work with the OECD included indicators in Education at a Glance, the OECD Employment Outlook and the OECD's Development Assistance Committee Annual Report. She co-ordinates the review and will act as *Rapporteur* for the Review Team.

*Paul Wright*, a British national, is committed to supporting teaching and learning that will inspire and challenge all learners and prepare them for the future. In the 90s, Paul worked as a teacher of English, media and drama and took the lead on curriculum development in his school's English Department. From 2002-2010, he worked at the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QCDA) on assessment policy and curriculum development. His work with QCDA included the 2008 review of the

secondary national curriculum and the development of new qualification criteria in student summative assessment in English and media studies. Also, he played a key role in writing, trialling and disseminating the innovative Assessing Pupils' Progress (APP) materials to support teacher assessment practice in English reading and writing. Paul currently works as an independent consultant for the Testing and Standards Agency in England, the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment in Northern Ireland and as a Chief examiner in English literature for the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance.

# ORGANISATION FOR ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT

The OECD is a unique forum where governments work together to address the economic, social and environmental challenges of globalisation. The OECD is also at the forefront of efforts to understand and to help governments respond to new developments and concerns, such as corporate governance, the information economy and the challenges of an ageing population. The Organisation provides a setting where governments can compare policy experiences, seek answers to common problems, identify good practice and work to co-ordinate domestic and international policies.

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OECD Publishing disseminates widely the results of the Organisation's statistics gathering and research on economic, social and environmental issues, as well as the conventions, guidelines and standards agreed by its members.

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# SLOVAK REPUBLIC

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*www.oecd.org/edu/evaluationpolicy*